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## **Mirrors of Mechanized Man: Capitalism and Intertextuality as Represented in the Works of Herman Melville, Franz Kafka and Don Delillo**

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MIRRORS OF MECHANIZED MAN: CAPITALISM AND INTERTEXTUALITY  
AS REPRESENTED IN THE WORKS OF HERMAN MELVILLE,  
FRANZ KAFKA AND DON DELILLO

A Thesis

by

SAMANTHA J. AMBERSON-DOMINGUEZ

Submitted to the Graduate School of  
The University of Texas-Pan American  
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MIRRORS OF MECHANIZED MAN: AND INTERTEXTUALITY  
AS REPRESENTED IN THE WORKS OF HERMAN MELVILLE,  
FRANZ KAFKA AND DON DELILLO

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August 2014



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## ABSTRACT

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It is contended that literature, as a product of the socioeconomic conditions in which it was generated, can be used to explore the relationship between individuals and technological advancement, as existing within specific stages of capitalism's development. Using Marxist analysis to examine texts generated during the cultural eras of realism, modernism, and postmodernism, it is argued that physical, mental, and emotional state of characters, as represented within works written by Herman Melville, Franz Kafka, and Don DeLillo, respectively, reflect the increasing levels of human alienation as experienced by individuals under the constraining forces of market capitalism, imperialism, and late capitalism.





## DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving husband, Michael Dominguez, without whom the completion of my master studies would not have been possible. It was your unwavering faith and confidence in my abilities that remained my source of strength throughout the pursuit of this degree.

Also, to my mother, Marie A. Gillette, father, Patrick Gillette, sister, Olivia Gillette, and mother-in-law, Delia Dominguez, for the love and patience so kindly demonstrated. To all those who extended their support, thank you for your love and encouragement.



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## INTRODUCTION

“Industrialization was the most fundamental force in world history in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it continues powerfully to shape the twenty-first”

-- Peter N. Sterns

*The Industrial Revolution in World History*

Since its establishment as the dominant mode of production, capitalism has transformed society in a manner unlike anything experienced in human history. For over one hundred and fifty years, the logic of this system has proceeded to redefine and re-shape those socioeconomic arrangements that, for millennia, governed the relations of human society. The result of these changes has been an overwhelming increase in human alienation, as effected by capitalism’s estrangement of man from his ability to dominate the material world. However, the proliferation of the capitalist system has not been without a heavy, if not absolute, reliance on technology. Each revolution in the instruments of production has subsequently effected a new stage in capitalism’s development, every phase subsequently typified by the strengthening of such constituents as labor division and the mass fabrication of goods. Thus, technology has served as the principal motive force behind a system that, for almost two centuries, has increasingly alienated individuals from their products, their labor, their species, and themselves. However, as capitalism has proceeded to repeatedly alter man’s<sup>1</sup> connection to both his material environment and himself, there remains an archival record of these events. Literary works, having been

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<sup>1</sup> The terms “man” and “men” as they are used in this text and in the works of Marx, refers to human beings in their totality and remains non-gender specific. Thus, readers are to interpret any use of the terms *man* or *men* to mean *man as a collective*, or all members of the human species, as in *mankind*.



produced within the unique ethos of the societies in which they were written, succeed in reflecting the state of the individual as relating to the development of the capitalist system. Thus, the examination of literature, as generated during specific segments of industrial development, can be used to explore the relationship between capitalism's evolution and its effects on the individual, as reflected in the mental, emotional, and spiritual state of their characters.

Prior to any analysis of socioeconomic forces, and the degree to which texts reflect their effects on the individual, it is vital to explore the connection between materialism and social ideology, best accomplished via the lens of theoretical Marxism. For, it is only once the association between physical transformation and conceptual fabrication has been identified that the relationship between societal conditions and literary production can be established. In his work regarding material existence and social development, socio-political theorist, Karl Marx, contends, the “production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men” (*Ideology* 655). Rather, it is man's relation to his existing material conditions that remains the determinant for those ideological superstructures which define his society. However, to gain the full maxim of this understanding it is first important to consider man outside of society and to internalize him in true reality as he actually exists – as an organic being, confined in a material existence, subsisting in an ongoing association with his tangible environment.

An organic inhabitant of a physical sphere, the human being, as a natural creature, both interprets and defines himself, the world, and his individual relation to the world, through the interactions that occur between himself and the matter that surrounds him. For first, it is from the natural environment that humans, as living organisms, procure those resources necessary for survival, and thus, develop an immediate relationship to the material as it exists in reality.

Second, it is through the manipulation and objectification of the physical environment that man – as an organic, living being – distinguishes himself as a species distinctive from other living beings, and likewise, perceives of his existence as a conscious living entity. Thus, man creates; man is aware; man recognizes he is man. However, just as the human being interprets his individual existence in relation to the physical, so too does the individual define the relationship between themselves and other members of their species as they engage in material interplay within their physical domain. For, it is the relation of men to “material life-processes” that determines and shapes the ideological concepts which govern society (K. Marx, *Ideology* 656). As humans manipulate and create that outside of what is needed for survival, an association develops between those who produce and those who consume. Historically, man as a collective has developed various socioeconomic arrangements in the endeavor to delineate and organize the producer-consumer relationship, i.e. slave society, feudalism, capitalism. Always resulting is a hierarchical system that equates each individual’s standing in relation to the processes of production. However, just as humanity creates the physical, it is also forced to fabricate the metaphysical in the effort to define, justify, and enforce the order of economically necessitated arrangements. Subsequently, ideological conceptions, such as class, religion, race, and law,<sup>2</sup> are established between the members of society in the effort to define the connections as arising out of social production. It is these processes that have proceeded to shape, influence, and define the cultural production of various societies, as manifest in such artistic expressions as literature. For, as the individual is shaped by society, and society is shaped by individual interactions with the material world, then literature, as the tangible organization of any individual’s *ideas*,<sup>3</sup> is also reflective of man’s reactions to material activity. Thus, in “developing their material production

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<sup>2</sup> Marx defines these aspects as making up the superstructure of human society, to be discussed at a later time; refer to Appendix, Figure 1: Karl Marx’s Theory of Human Society.

<sup>3</sup> All emphases my own unless otherwise indicated.

and their material intercourse, [humans] alter along with this their real life existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking” (K. Marx, *Ideology* 656).

It is the Marxist understanding of material interaction and its influence on the production of ideas that drove Fredric Jameson’s political theories regarding capitalism and the cultural periodization of art, one of the primary platforms for the present analysis. In his book, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Jameson states, the “cultural periodization of the stages of realism, modernism, and postmodernism is both inspired and confirmed by Mandel’s tripartite<sup>4</sup> scheme” (36). This “scheme,” as referred to by Jameson, make reference to the political economist, Ernest Mandel, and his classification of capitalism into a succession of several brief, yet, highly impactful stages. While there remains heavy contention with regards to the terminizing of these phases, the progression of the capitalist system has often been regarded as having occurred within three distinct periods.<sup>5</sup> Mandel, foremost proponent of the periodization hypothesis, classifies the sequence of these stages as market capitalism, imperialism, and late capitalism,<sup>6</sup> respectively. Each segment of this triad, including the present phase of late capitalism, is marked by a specific stage in technological evolution as it relates to the social forces of production, with “each new cycle of extended

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<sup>4</sup> Mandel originally typifies the history of capitalism as “a succession of longer periods... of which we have experienced four up until now.” However, it is important to note that the first segment of capitalism, ranging from “the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century up to... 1847,” is characterized by manual skill, i.e. “handicraft.” and exists as but a primitive, preliminary stage to industrial capitalism as it functions currently (acknowledging the historical presence of capitalistic exchange in prior forms of society, i.e. slave society, feudalism, etc.). Thus, is not included in our discussion of industrialized capitalism or Mandel’s tri-partite scheme (Mandel 120).

<sup>5</sup> Political theorist, Vladimir Lenin contends, what he terms imperialism, to be the highest stage of capitalism due its seeming opposition of free capitalist enterprise through the vertical and horizontal formation of globalized monopolies (hence, the alternate term “monopoly capitalism”). However, the later dissolution of monopolistic corporations, such as Standard Oil and Trust, (which in 1911 was disbanded by the US Supreme Court into thirty-three smaller companies), suggests a reversion from those international capitalist monopolies or financial oligarchies deemed necessary by Lenin to fulfill his criteria for the final stage of capitalistic development. Thus, this text proceeds with that terminology and periodization proposed by Ernest Mandel, holding imperialism as a median phase, rather than the final stage, of capitalism’s evolutionary process.

<sup>6</sup> Also referred to as “freely competitive or market economy,” “monopoly” and “multinational or consumer” capitalism, respectively. For our purposes, we will limit ourselves to the terms “market,” “imperialism” and “late,” as termed by Mandel and further utilized by Jameson.

reproduction begin[ning] with different machines than the previous one” (Mandel 110). It is the socioeconomic conditions typifying each of these periods that are reflected in the artistic production of their subsequent societies, what Jameson terms the “cultural dominant,” or the principle mode of cultural production, as generated under the ideological, economic, and political influence of its temporal conditions (*Cultural Logic* 5). Thus, the expressional forms of realism, modernism, and present day postmodernism can be viewed as reflecting the “systematic cultural norm” and “cultural politics” of market capitalism, imperialism, and late capitalism, respectively, with their products representative of the societies in which they were generated (*Cultural Logic* 5). As such, cultural products, such as literature, can be used to evaluate the conditions of society and their effects on its individual members, as represented in the nature of their texts.

This examination of human alienation as it relates to capitalism’s evolution can be accomplished through an analysis of texts written by Herman Melville, Franz Kafka, and Don DeLillo. Generated during specific phases of technological advancement, these works of realism, modernism, and postmodernism, respectively, reflect the relationship between intensifying capitalistic forces and increasing estrangement in the individual, as represented by the mental and emotional state of their characters. Written during an early phase of industrial development, Melville’s novel, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*, remains representative of persons as existing under the duress of market capitalism. As a product of the market capitalist era, it reflects a social period in which “revolution in the modes of production of industry and agriculture made necessary a revolution in the general conditions of the social process of production” (Mandel 118). As such, *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale* reveals the beginning stages of society’s transition to the capitalist mode of production, as brought on by such events as the

Industrial Revolution. Through the realistic portrayal of everyday life, as experienced by nineteenth-century whalers, it is in Melville's text that individuals first begin to exhibit the beginning symptoms of human alienation as they are forced to operate under the logic of a newly formed capitalist economy. Reflecting such features as labor division, mass production, and the commodification of both workers and their products, it will be shown that the desire of the protagonist, Ishmael, to journey out to sea stems from a conscious attempt to escape the effects of market capitalism, as brought on by rising industrialization. However, by entering into an environment geared for the purpose of industry, this decision only succeeds in placing Ishmael under the direct influence of capitalist ideology. As such, the impact of this system will serve to estrange Ishmael from his self-identity by compromising his relation to both labor and product. Thus, as analysis will indicate, Melville's protagonist proceeds to exhibit the beginning stages of alienation, as induced by the primary forces of capitalism's development.

Likewise, "The Metamorphosis," a short story originated during an intermediate phase of mechanization, is representative of humanity as under the constraining influence of imperialism. Generated during the second stage of capitalism's development, it reflects a society where the diversified fabrication and motile marketing of commodities, "the division of labor and... [a] money economy," resulted in an "international market" (Mandel 56). Subsequently, "The Metamorphosis" proceeds to denote the cemented establishment of capitalism as the principal mode of production, as effected from rapid revolutions in motive machines and transport. Breaking with former methods of artistic representation, it is through a modernist depiction of the absurd that Kafka's text proceeds to highlight the increased alienation of the early twentieth-century worker, as residing under the hegemony of accelerating industrial capitalism. Revealing an overall increase in labor division, commodification, and the mechanized production of goods,

it will be shown that the physical transformation of the protagonist, Gregor, exists as the outward manifestation of a distorted natural-species dichotomy induced by the heavy industrial forces of imperialist capitalism. Further, Gregor's obsession with conforming to the expectations of his employment, as well as the deterioration of his family relations, will be exposed as the consequence of the exploitative class conditioning perpetuated by the strengthened force of capitalism's ideological superstructure. Accordingly, Gregor's altered state will be proved to result from individual and species alienation, as arising from the surmounting inability to engage in the process of production. Thus, examination will confirm, Kafka's protagonist proceeds to evidence a heightened level of human alienation, as stemming from the increased force of capitalism's evolution.

Lastly, conceived under the present conditions of technological development, *Cosmopolis*, remains illustrative of individuals as existing under the current sway of late capitalism. Created during the present capitalist era, it reflects a period of social development where the "unprecedented fusion of science, technology and production" has resulted in a "world capitalist economy" (Mandel 215). As such, *Cosmopolis* reveals the paramount exertion of capitalism as the, now, globally-dominant mode of production, resulting from unceasing technological revolutions in both commercial and private sectors. A prime example of postmodern text, the fragmented pastiche of DeLillo's novel exemplifies the extreme alienation of present day individuals as they exist under the supremacy of an advanced capitalist economy. Reflecting the highest degree of labor specialization, mass production and commodification of both products and people, examination will show that the inability of the protagonist, Eric, to discern actual reality from the virtual, results from the unprecedented proliferation and

application of self-automated, industrial and information-communication<sup>7</sup> technology. Further, it shall be confirmed that the very nature of DeLillo's text itself stems from present society's rejection of the metanarrative as well as its failure to adhere to previously held definitions. As such, Eric's inability to identify with himself (either physically or mentally) as well as the other members of his species will be revealed to have arisen from a falsified relationship to abstracted labor and fictitious production. As investigation will confirm, DeLillo's protagonist proceeds to exemplify the extremity of human alienation as resulting from the current conditions of present industrial capitalism. Thus, these texts serving as an overarching macrocosm that denotes the impact of capitalism's maturity on the human species, the literary analysis of *Moby-Dick*, or, *The Whale*, "The Metamorphosis," and *Cosmopolis* reveals the progressing state of human alienation as it relates to industrial development and the advancement of the capitalist system, as captured, reflected, and expressed in literature.

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<sup>7</sup> I.e., computers, personal communication devices (such as cell-phones), the Internet, etc.

## CHAPTER I

### MELVILLE: MIRRORING THE MAN OF EARLY MECHANIZED SOCIETY

“... markets kept ever growing, the demand ever rising... Thereupon, steam and machinery revolutionized industrial products. The place of manufacture was taken by the giant, modern industry...”

- Karl Marx  
*Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Critics have often emphasized the relationship between Herman Melville’s personal history and the conceptual designs behind his enigmatic writings. A writer of turbulent success, Melville’s was the middle class sunk into the proletariat.<sup>8</sup> A native of New York City and its harbors, Melville was born of a well-established family in 1819, his father, Alan Melvill,<sup>9</sup> a successful merchant and importer of French goods. However, the Melville family was left penniless after a failed venture by Alan to expand his business, devastated only further by Allan’s death shortly thereafter in 1831. Although Melville continued to attend school, he and his seven siblings were forced to take several odd jobs, Melville himself having served briefly as a clerk, and later a farmhand, for his uncle. After several failed attempts by Melville’s older brother, Ganesvoort, to salvage his father’s business, the family re-located near the Hudson River, in Lansingburgh, where Melville took on a job in teaching. Leaving this position after

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<sup>8</sup> Karl Marx states, “the lower strata of the middle class –the small tradespeople, shopkeepers, and retired tradesman generally, the handicraftsmen and peasants – all these sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on” (*Manifesto* 217).

<sup>9</sup> Herman Melville’s mother, Maria Ganesvoort Melvill, added the “e” to their name after the death of Melville’s father, Alan.



only three months, Melville studied surveying with aspirations for employment on the Erie Canal project. Failing to obtain a position, he then contracted work as a cabin-boy aboard the *St. Lawrence*, a merchant ship bound from New York to Liverpool. Said to have been the source for the novel *Redburn: His First Voyage* (1849), his time upon the *St. Lawrence* would prove to spawn Melville's five year stint with the sea. Later, abandoning a term on the *Acushnet* whaling vessel after only eighteen months, Melville lived among the indigenous peoples of the Marquesas Islands for three weeks until boarding the Tahiti bound *Lucy Ann*. It was Melville's contact with the Typee natives that later served as inspiration for his first novel, *Typee: A Peep at Polynesian Life* (1846), and its sequel, *Omoo: A Narrative of Adventures in the South Seas* (1847). The widely acclaimed success of *Typee* thrust both Melville and the exotic sea novel onto the literary scene. Determined to sustain himself as a professional writer, Melville married Elizabeth Shaw (1847), daughter of a Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court Justice, before settling down in Pittsburgh. The author then went to pen *Mardi* (1849) and *White-Jacket* (1850)<sup>10</sup> until the publication of *Moby-Dick, or, The Whale*<sup>11</sup> in 1851. Inspired by a recently developed friendship with writer and neighbor, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Melville regarded *Moby-Dick* as his greatest literary achievement. However, his fame began to decline after *Moby-Dick's* heavy content met with less than favorable reviews. Struggling financially, Melville released the highly controversial *Pierre: or, The Ambiguities* in 1852. Straying completely from the exotic sea romances which had made his success, the semi-incestuous content of *Pierre* succeeded in generating a wave of negative criticism from which his career would never recover. After the rejection of his unpublished, and now lost, manuscript, *Isle of the Cross*, Melville obtained work as a lecturer until forced to take a job, via family connections, as a New York City customs

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<sup>10</sup> While *Redburn* and *White-Jacket* were well received, *Mardi's* allegorical departure from the sea novel proved disappointing to Melville's growing fan base.

<sup>11</sup> Henceforth referred to as simply *Moby-Dick*.

house inspector in 1866. A position he held for nineteen years, Melville took up poetry and short story writing after publishing his last novel, *The Confidence Man: His Masquerade*, in 1857.

Fading into obscurity, announcements of Melville's death in 1891 came as a shock to many, most people believing the author he had died several years before.<sup>12</sup>

It is the erratic conditions of Melville's life that are said to have shaped those writings which continue exert their mark on the world today. Reviewers, such as Richard Chase and Leo Marx, have interpreted Melville's works as figurative, if not allegorical, expositions concerning his authorial relationship with a less than merciful literary world. Seen as being semi-autobiographical, works such as "Bartleby the Scrivener,"<sup>13</sup> have often been interpreted as fiction riddled memoirs, "parable having to do with Melville's own fate as a writer" (L. Marx 603).

Others, like Lewis Mumford, Robert L. Gale, and John Stark, have asserted his texts reveal the heavy influence, for better or worse, of Melville's family and friends. The infamous portrait of the protagonist's father in *Pierre* is thought to be based on Melville's grandfather, Revolutionary War hero and Boston Tea Party participant, Major Thomas Melvill. Alternate works, such as "Bartleby" are said to have derived from incongruities on legal theory between Melville and father-in-law, Lemuel Shaw.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, the tone and structure of *Moby-Dick* is thought to have been impacted, if not completely restructured, after Melville's reading and review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses from an Old Manse*. Further analyses have suggested his works reflect the impact of transcendental ideology, evolving as part of a literary movement challenging its utopian principles, exploring the fallibility of the individual and humanity's disposition towards

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<sup>12</sup> Both Melville's name, and the names of several of his works, were reported to have been misspelled in some of his obituaries, suggesting the degree to which Melville's career had suffered after the publication of *Pierre*; for examples see, "Herman Melville's Obituary Notices." *The Life and Works of Herman Melville*. Multiverse, 25 July 2000. Web. <<http://www.melville.org/hmobit.htm>>.

<sup>13</sup> Published in 1853.

<sup>14</sup> Quoted by Stark as being "one of the best legal minds of the nineteenth century" (166).

sin and self-ruin. Still, others postulate that his works exist as romantic attempts to rectify Melville's obsessive preoccupation with the "problem of Being,"<sup>15</sup> a method in which he "generates [different] versions of the self" (Bryant 278, 279-80). In his book, *The Wake of the Gods, Melville's Mythology*, reputable Melville scholar, and former president of the Melville Society, H. Bruce Franklin, interprets the sailor's works to be the brilliant execution of sequentially dependent writings which confront the religious polemic of the nineteenth-century. According to Franklin, they exist as an overarching framework in which Melville uses mytho-Christian figurations to proffer his own mythology: "god is a man... religion is a myth which saves man from himself" (206). It is acknowledged that each of these studies has succeeded in broadening our insight into the life and works of a man whose literary fate once banished him to reputational obscurity. However, a survey of contemporary criticism has revealed a latent deficiency regarding the manner in which his writings have previously been interpreted. That is, arising out of a primary phase of industrial development, the physical and emotional isolation of Melville's characters reflect the degree of human alienation as experienced by individuals under the constraints of market capitalism.

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Lasting from 1847 until the onset of the 1890s, the first technological revolution, as signified by Mandel, is distinguished by the development of the "*machine-made steam engine*"<sup>16</sup> as the principle motive machine" (Mandel 120). First published in 1851, *Moby-Dick* makes several references which indicate the presence of steam powered technology despite the novel taking place aboard a wind and current driven ship. For example, as Melville's protagonist,

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<sup>15</sup> Note, "the problem of Being" defined here by Bryant as "the mystery of the origins and reality of consciousness" (309).

<sup>16</sup> Emphasis in the original.

Ishmael, relates the composition, storage, and function of the ship's hempen whale-line, he analogizes the peril an active line may pose to whale men: "when the line is darting out, to be seated then in the boat, is like being seated in the midst of the manifold whizzings of a steam-engine in full play, when every flying beam, and shaft, and wheel, is grazing you" (306). These images of "flying beam," "shaft" and "wheel" is descriptive of the pivoting beam, crankshaft, and flywheel design of almost any stationary or marine steam engine, as commercially utilized in factories and ships after the expiration of patents held by James Watt and Matthew Boulton.<sup>17</sup> This is further confirmed as Ishmael relates using "steam-engines... [to] cant over the sperm whale's head, so that it may lie bottom up" (362). Later, he describes the "weaver-god" as being "deafened" to "mortal voice" like those in "all material factories... [where] spoken words" remain "inaudible among the flying spindles" (490). Again, this alludes to the infiltration of technology into such economic sectors as textile production, which by the mid-nineteenth century, owing to the development of steam-power looms and the cotton gin, had shifted from home-based manufacture to large, mechanized factories. However, in a period where technological advancement succeeded in generating "the first modern factories operating with machines," there still heavily existed the simple hand-driven tools of the manufacture period, such as the "wheelbarrow" borrowed by Ishmael and his native friend, Queequeg, to transport their belongings to the "Nantucket packet schooner moored at the wharf" (13). Thus, these descriptions succeed in confirming Melville's text as having been generated within the first wave of Mandel's technological revolution, a time which saw "no large-scale capitalist industry in the world," but witnessed the "creation of... capitalist manufacturing enterprises" (Mandel 68).

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<sup>17</sup> Matthew Boulton, business partner and financial acquirer to James Watt, co-inventor to the Watt and Boulton steam-engine. James Watt, regarded as inventor of the modern steam engine after his modifications to earlier atmospheric designs allowed for the true steam propulsion of engine pistons. It was Watt's reservations regarding material resistance and boiler design reliability that drove Watt to utilize his patent (until its expiration in 1800) to halt the commercial development and use of high pressure steam engines.

For Jameson, this ascendance of industrial development and capitalism in Western society concurrently signals the cultural era of realism. A term he employs “for want of something better” (*Cultural Logic* 65), realism here is not intended by Jameson as a specific reference to the genre itself, but refers to a style of cultural production tied into the political and economic state of society. In the realist era, cultural modes of thinking and artistic production began to express “the desacralization of the world... the slow colonization of use value by exchange value, the realistic demystification of transcendent narratives in novels... the denaturalization of desire and its ultimate displacement by commodification” (*Cultural Logic* 410). It is these factors which are both captured and expressed in *Moby-Dick*, where its secularized characters and realistic events reveal the steady growth of the commercial market and the commodification of both products and people. Thus, in *Moby-Dick* readers sense the “shifting” of Queequeg’s wheelbarrow as he and Ishmael wind their way through busy streets of the commercial wharf, “wheeling it by turns” (64). As stated by John Bryant in his analysis on Melville’s use of romance, “any genre is a kind of writing, defined by certain conventions of plot, character and symbol that emerge in response to particular historical movements. And any writer’s performance of genre is accordingly the result of an interpenetration of that artist’s singular alienation and the dominant ideology of the culture” (Bryant 280). This distinction of realism as a cultural mode of production allows for *Moby-Dick* to exist as the realistic expression of social ideology during market capitalism despite its general designation as a sea narrative of the romantic genre. Thus, *Moby-Dick*, as a work of realism, seeks to reflect “the dawn of capitalism... a force whose logic is one of ruthless separation and disjunction, of specialization and rationalization” (*Cultural Logic* 96).

## Materialism, Mankind's White Whale

It was during a large-scale shift of economic and cultural values that Melville penned what was to become one of the most recognized works in American literature, *Moby-Dick*. Published in 1851, Melville's novel presented itself just when the mechanized forces ushered in by the Industrial Revolution<sup>18</sup> were beginning to sweep their effects across the Western world. At the forefront, *Moby-Dick* presents itself as story of obsessive self-destruction, an epic tale of a monomaniacal sea captain hell bent on vehement revenge against the ferocious savagery of an enigmatic, and somewhat, apotheosized white whale. However, it exists as more than a romanticized tale of human fixation and self-ruin. It is the realist reflection of a society and its culture amidst a serious influx of socioeconomic change. For as stated by Cesare Casarino in *Modernity in the Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis*, "the relation between the sea narrative and the wider field of literary production in the nineteenth century... between the political economy of the sea and [early] industrial capitalism in that century are structurally homologous" (4). Produced in accordance with nineteenth-century standards of the sea narrative, Melville's novel succeeds in delineating the technological and commercial conditions of aquatic enterprise as they existed during his time.

*Moby-Dick* begins with Ishmael, a nineteenth-century individual who ships out to sea in the wayward attempt to escape the capitalist forces which have begun to dominate his early industrial society. Evidence that suggests he is an individual suffering from the duress of market capitalism begins within the very first, and perhaps most recognized, line of Melville's leviathan

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<sup>18</sup>Historians continue to debate as to the rapidity and precise intervals of the Industrial Revolution, the incident itself conceptualized not as any "single event but many interrelated developments that culminated in the transformation of the Western world from a largely agricultural to an overwhelmingly industrial system" (Ritzer 5). Thus, we shall for our purposes emphasize 1850, this generally serving as the most recognized date for what has historically been recognized as a period of significant escalation in technological and economic development in both Britain and America, as well as the majority of the Westernized world.

novel – “Call me Ishmael” (3).<sup>19</sup> In directing the audience on how he is to be addressed, the narrator is quoted, not as saying *I am* Ishmael, but rather, “*Call me* Ishmael.” Indirectly, this implies that *Ishmael*, as he designates himself, is not the speaker’s given name, but that the sailor has chosen this title as a representative for his person. In his book, *Literature, Disaster, and the Enigma of Power: A Reading of Moby-Dick*, literature professor, Eyal Peretz, offers one potentiality behind the narrator’s decision to use this Biblical appellation:

Ishmael, the single survivor and sole witness to a horrendous disaster at sea... adopted the Biblical name Ishmael, thus indicating his abandonment and loss... This opening thus says... this is not my [Ishmael’s] given name... it is my symbolic name, carefully chosen, and in order to explain why I chose it I have to tell you my life’s story (36, 39)

As noted by Peretz, the term Ishmael is not the narrator’s “given name,” but a self-signifier, one that has been “carefully chosen” by the speaker. Ostensibly, this desire to create a persona appears to validate Ishmael’s recognition of the self, for as contended by Marx, “in creating...

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<sup>19</sup> A known symbol for Judaic-Christian tradition, this reference to the name Ishmael immediately suggests an attempt by the author to highlight the social controversies arising during the eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries from the upsurge of contemporary Christian dogma. Traditional values becoming less relevant to this secularized version of society, the name Ishmael was often used to indicate a cultural divergence from traditional Christianity. In *The Wake of the Gods*, Franklin attributes the use of mytho-religious symbolism in Melville’s texts as the author’s application of “language, the theories, the knowledge, and the techniques of both the Christian and the skeptical mythologists to explore the relations between man and his gods” (8). However, whether Melville purposefully structured his writings as a figurative palette for the debate of religious dogma remains inextricable. What is for certain, and perhaps more relevant to a reading of the text, is the socio-material conditions which lead to the inclusion of these religious figurations. New evolutions in industrial production, as brought on by advancements in science and technology, succeeded in altering the individual’s relation to material productivity. Forced to equate themselves in relation to these new developments in physical manufacturing, people were further compelled to reconsider, redefine and reestablish the ideological constructs which had formerly governed their socio-economic arrangements. Arising from these efforts was comparative mythology’s attempt to scientifically analyze, rationalize, and in part, de-mystify, the religious-based principles which had indoctrinated society prior to the Scientific and Industrial Revolution. The ideas generated from such analytical examination succeeded in gradually shifting Western philosophy, and subsequently, the literature it produced towards more analytical, rational, and secular minded modes of thinking. Franklin admits, these “theories themselves strongly influenced most of later Western thought, including Melville’s ideas” (3). Thus, it is important to acknowledge the connection between these symbols and the influence of those socio-economic forces which may have spawned their use in Melville’s texts.

man proves himself a conscious species being” (*Manuscripts 76-7*). As such, in electing to “adopt the Biblical name Ishmael,”<sup>20</sup> the sailor’s decision appears as confirmation of his species awareness and an affirmation of individual identity. However, it is important to consider that as a species being, it is only via one’s relationship to the “objective world”<sup>21</sup> that the individual is able to define his environment and, by extension, himself. Chronologically, the narrator’s desire to be called Ishmael comes as an afterword to the events in the novel, the enigma behind his forceful directive existing as a narrative hook so that the speaker may “tell you [his] life’s story.” The objective environment which serves to mold Ishmael’s conception of identity has already proceeded to exist, with the decision to be called Ishmael not so much an affirmation of conscious expression as it is a reflection of the external conditions which have already shaped the sailor’s world and ideas. Thus, the protagonist’s sense of “abandonment and loss” exist as a by-product of his socioeconomic conditioning, with Ishmael’s dwindling mental, emotional, and spiritual state reflecting the beginning stages of human alienation as experienced by nineteenth-century individuals under the constraints of market capitalism and early industrial society.

To best understand how Ishmael progresses to his final alienated state, it is important to consider the socio-material conditions of his environment, and his position within it, as detailed by the sailor himself. Before embarking on a whaling voyage, Ishmael describes himself as one surrounded by “commerce,” the inhabitants of his society “tied to counters, nailed to benches, clinched to desks” (4). As innovations in farming technology began to decrease the agricultural need for manual laborers, the guild and home-based workers of nineteenth-century society

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<sup>20</sup> Ishmael, biblical figure of the Old Testament and ancestor to the Ishmaelites (Arabs); purported to be the first born son of Abraham (Abram) and Hagar, maidservant to Abraham’s wife Sarah (Sarai), after Sarah could not conceive. Ishmael and Hagar were forced into exile after Sarah became angry with Ishmael for “mocking” or “playing” with Isaac, her son by Abraham; see Genesis 21:10-16.

<sup>21</sup> Note, “objective,” as referenced here, referring to the material environment by which objects can be produced.



increasingly found themselves forced to accommodate to the growing sphere of blue and white collar labor, as indicated by such terms as “counters” “benches” and “desks.” While the economic surplus afforded some by this transition allowed for the establishment of a middle class, the overall mental effect on the social relations of production resulted in the objectification of laboring individuals into “articles of commerce,” with the labor process itself having “lost all individual character and, consequently, all charm for the workman” (K. Marx, *Manifesto* 210, 216). Further, the stability afforded the middle class individual often proved capricious at best. As stated by Marx, “the lower strata of the middle class... sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice... partly because their specialized skill is rendered worthless by new methods of production” (*Manifesto* 217). This proves to be the case with Ishmael. He alludes to the forced urbanization of early industrial workers due to rural job scarcity and the reallocation of agricultural lands, as indicated by his status as a former “country schoolmaster” (6) now residing in the “good city of old Manhatto” (9), i.e. Manhattan. Further, he describes himself as one whose “hard, remorseless service” has rendered “the soles of [his] boots... in a most miserable plight” (10). Thus, as he proceeds through the city’s “blocks of blackness” (10), his economic circumstances have transformed him into a nineteenth-century “Lazarus... chatter[ing] his teeth against a curbstone for his pillow, and shaking off his tatters with his shivering” (12). As indicated by Ishmael’s descriptions, “instead of rising with the progress of industry,” the common individual of market capitalist society is one who “sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class” (*Manifesto* 221). Thus, it is these factors which inspire the professed “damp, drizzly November in [Ishmael’s] soul” (4). His journey seaward a self-admitted “substitute for pistol and ball,” (3)

Ishmael's pre-excursion feelings are but the earliest indication of the alienating effects capitalism's development will have on the human being.

### **Industry Afloat**

It is before the exhaustive forces of technology and capitalism induce Ishmael to his final alienated condition that he resolves to board the antiquated whaler, infamously known as the *Pequod*. This active decision to leave the business society of New York, i.e. "Manhatto," (9) is one which indicates Ishmael's heightened level of self-awareness prior to the heavy influence of market capitalism. As contended by political professor and Marxist theorist, Bertell Ollman, "as a conscious being, the individual is aware of what he is doing and possesses the faculty of being able to choose his plan" (152). Thus, at earlier stages of the novel, Ishmael is recognized as making a variety of conscious decisions regarding his future. He chooses to room with, befriend, and later, embark on this ship with the Marquesan savage, Queequeg. This decision is despite the primitive's tattooed appearance, pagan idolatry, and rumored cannibalism, all of which countered Ishmael's Presbyterian upbringing, as well as the social conventions of nineteenth-century society – "people stared; not at Queequeg so much... but at seeing him and me on such confidential terms" (64). He then decides to contract and sail out of Nantucket regardless of the knowledge that New Bedford was currently "monopolizing the business of whaling, and... poor old Nantucket is now much behind" (9). Likewise, the sailor selects the *Pequod* over two other ships. This is despite the whaler possessing a low level of technology and appearing to Ishmael as being "rather small... worn and wrinkled" (77). In each case, Ishmael demonstrates conscious purpose in directing his actions and, therefore, proves awareness of himself as the governor of his will and his life's activities. However, despite the sailor's attempt to flee the effects of

technology, and the ensuing forces of market capitalism, his choice to go to sea inadvertently positions him in an environment in which he will no option other than to adhere to capitalism's social paradigms.

Infused with repurposed whale components, the *Pequod* is not only a whaler, but for Ishmael, the physical embodiment of the cetacean mammal, and thus, nature itself:

her unpanelled, open bulwarks were garnished like one continuous jaw, with the long sharp teeth of the sperm whale, inserted there for pins, to fasten her old hempen thews and tendons to. Those thews... deftly travelled over sheaves of sea-ivory. Scorning a turnstile wheel at her reverend helm, she sported there a tiller... in one mass, curiously carved from the long narrow lower jaw of her hereditary foe (78)

Described by Ishmael, the ship is characterized as having open bulwarks designed to resemble “one continuous jaw.” Added to this artificial mandible are “the long sharp teeth of the sperm whale, inserted there for pins.” Her deck is the gaping, open mouth of the sperm whale, its crew, her brazen meal, wandering boldly on her tongue and in her belly, confident as they control her beastly actions through manipulation of muscle-like ropes, or “old hempen thews.” Her primitive “tiller,” as opposed to “turnstile wheel,”<sup>22</sup> is a makeshift fluke, “one mass, curiously carved from the long, narrow lower jaw of her hereditary foe.” Controlled masterfully by the members of her crew, the tiller succeeds as a reminder of man's dominion over nature for those

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<sup>22</sup> Even prior to the nineteenth-century, turnstile wheels had replaced the use of tillers on large ships in the effort to reduce the amount of force needed by the helmsman to control the ship's rudder, and subsequently, the direction of the ship. With the advancement of steam power during the nineteenth-century, the turnstile wheel itself was either omitted completely or connected hydraulically to the bridge's wheel, drastically reducing, if not completely eliminating, the labor functions of the helmsman. Thus, the use of a tiller on a ship as large as the *Pequod* would not only have been a primitive method of steering, but would likely have necessitated the joint physical labor of several individuals when contending with the force of opposing ocean currents.

seeking to destroy the ship's living counterpart. For Ishmael, the *Pequod* is a tangible synthesis of organic and inorganic, of nature in the raw and the physical expression of man's transformative powers. She exists as not only the physical manifestation of man's creative ability, the formation of a "thing in accordance with the laws of beauty," but the objectified realization of the human species' ability to conquer nature, a materialized expression of man's "advantage over [other] animals" (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 77). Just as nature supplies the means by which an individual sustains their physical existence, manipulation of nature through intellectually, creative labor allows the individual to prove, and thus, recognize, themselves as a conscious being distinct in their ability to transform the material world. For, as contended by Marx, "man's physical and spiritual life is linked to nature... for man is a part of nature" (*Manuscripts* 76). Ishmael's decision to contract aboard the antiquated *Pequod* is representative of the individual's effort to retain an identifying connection with both nature and species amidst those opportunities and vicissitudes brought on by industrialized advancement. However, in creating products, "man not only effects the change of form in the materials of nature; he also realizes his own purpose in those materials" (*Capital* 284). Thus, despite the natural essence which draws Ishmael to its deck, the *Pequod* proceeds to operate according to that purpose for which it was created, abiding as a floating, mobile sphere of capitalistic enterprise.

The contention that the *Pequod* exists as an example of early industry is first evidenced by the nature of its product. In providing details of the ship, Ishmael states, "but all these her old antiquities, were added new and marvelous features, pertaining to the wild *business* that for more than half a century she had followed" (77). This "business," as indicated by Ishmael, refers to that of whaling, one of the foremost prominent industries during the era of market capitalism. The resources derived from sperm whale expeditions, i.e. spermaceti and ambergris, succeeded

in establishing the whaling industry as a primary source of commodity production during the nineteenth-century. Whaling supplied “reservoirs of oil” and “spermaceti candles,”<sup>23</sup> the main source of light production in pre-electric society (37). Likewise, it contributed to the production of various domestic products, including “perfumery,... pastilles... hair-powders, and pomatum” (447).<sup>24</sup> With whale oils and waxes serving as lubricants to many early industrial machines, whale hunting vessels and their products not only existed as “important... article[s] of commerce” (447), but resided as one of the largest perpetrators of the Industrial Revolution. As contended by Casarino, “the world of the sea under [early] industrial capitalism... became, if anything more important than ever for the functioning of an international political economy that was now for the first time coming into being as a tendentially global capitalist system” (3).

The *Pequod* as an industry is further confirmed by the capitalist logic which structures its functions. This is best identified by examining the hierarchical relations of the crew in relation to social production. In distinguishing capitalism from previous modes of production, Marx states, “the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” however, only in capitalism “society as a whole is more and more splitting up into two great hostile camps... bourgeoisie and proletariat” (*Manuscripts* 210).<sup>25</sup> Historically, class conflict has always existed, every time the result of man’s relations to his material. For example, in feudalism there existed the property holding lords and the vassals who “rented” this property through an exchange of services, i.e. military service, crop partitioning, etc. However, as technological development succeeded in centralizing property solely in the hands of one class, the bourgeoisie, it has only

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<sup>23</sup> Other known sources of candle production included animal fat, vegetable fat, and beeswax. However, the rigid constitution of spermaceti candles during increased temperatures, as well as its even burning and lack of offensive odors, made spermaceti the main source of candle production during the nineteenth century.

<sup>24</sup> “Pomatum,” or pomade; an ointment, usually scented, applied to the hair or scalp for styling purposes; “pastiles,” or pastilles; a small dissolvable lozenge, or pellet, used for medicinal or deodorizing purposes.

<sup>25</sup> The bourgeoisie as defined by Marx, is “the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage labor;” the proletariat is “the class of modern wage laborers, who [have] no means of production of their own” (*Manifesto* 209).

been in capitalism that class divergence has resulted in a true property-less class, the proletariat.<sup>26</sup> Existing with neither property, nor a viable means to access it, (property in the Marxist sense, referring to that which can be excluded from others, i.e. land, resources, capital, etc.), the members of this class are forced to sell their labor in the effort to sustain themselves, in what is defined as *wage-labor*. While no individual on-board the *Pequod* can be typified as a member of the bourgeoisie, all existing as contracted wage-laborers, the ship is dominated by a social hierarchy which reveals the distortions caused by the abstraction of labor into wage-labor. For example, in Chapter 34, “The Cabin-Table,” Ishmael describes the order in which the whaler’s crew is required to take their meals. Ahab, the captain, denominated by Ishmael as “lord and master” as well as “sultan” (161), is the first to ascend the *Pequod*’s deck to the cabin-table for dinner. Following, in order of rank, are the administrative officers of the ship, Starbuck, “the first Emir” (161), Mr. Stubb, and Mr. Flask, with each man appropriated victuals and meal time in proportion to his perceived importance in relation to the ship’s activities. Required to exit in the same fashion, Mr. Flask, the lowest ranking individual, and thus, “the last person down to dinner,” is subsequently “the first man up,” the duration of his meals, i.e. “shinbones” or “drumsticks,” dependent upon the appetite of Stubb, who “but a peg higher than Flask... it [was] against unholy usage to [have] precede Flask to the deck” (163). This arrangement then proceeds to repeat itself with the ship’s harpooners, Ahab receiving yet another ration in accordance to his perceived status.

Examining the organization of these procedures in relation to each group’s activities reveals a distorted relationship between property and labor as caused by the logic of the capitalist system. Residing at a lower level, the harpooners’ labor included such functions as coiling “over

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<sup>26</sup> Although originally the vassals’ property was not their own, through an exchange of services they were allowed to utilize it as their own and thereby create more property (usually in the form of crops) by which to sustain their basic needs, i.e. shelter, food, clothing, etc.

two hundred fathoms [of whale line]... to free it from all possible wrinkles and twists” (304), remaining “on the whale till the whole flensing or stripping [of blubber] is concluded” (348), and the harpooning of the sperm whale itself. By comparison, the ship’s officers “commanded three of the Pequod’s boats as headsmen,” and lance, when necessary, the hunted whales with “their long keen whaling spears” (130). However, even the officer’s labor is exceeding in relation to Ahab, whose level of physical excursion amounts to “heavily walking the deck” (136) and studying a “large wrinkled roll of yellowish sea charts” (215). Thus, this scene reveals the capitalist inversion of property (in this case food and time) in relation to the individual’s participation in the process of production. For, as stated by Marx, when “the feudal relations of property, became no longer compatible with... develop[ing] productive forces... [there arose] free competition” (*Manifesto* 214).

It is this competition between the wage-laboring members of the proletarian class which allows for labor value to be abstracted from the process of labor itself. Subsequently, the worth of three, easily replaceable, indigenous harpooners, regardless of the amount of labor they perform, becomes less valuable than that of one, not-so easily replaceable, seasoned captain who possesses knowledge of navigational skills. This is the same ideology which governed the pay negotiations between Ishmael and the capitalist owners of the ship. In reflecting upon these circumstances, Ishmael states, “in the whaling business they paid no wages; but all... received certain shares of the profits called *lays*, and... these lays were proportioned to the degree of importance pertaining to the respective duties of the ship’s company” (84). As occurs in the scene, Ishmael’s level of compensation, or “*lay*,” is predetermined by the bourgeois owners based on his position within the divided labor force, i.e. a bowman, not on the merit of the labor activity he performs. Although Ishmael possesses the certifiable ability to “steer a ship, splice a

rope, and all that” (84), he receives the “three hundredth lay,” the owners ensuring they have not “too abundantly reward[ed] the labors of [the] young man,” and thus, encroach upon their own portion of the profits (86). Thus, despite Ishmael’s efforts to distance himself, the socio-political mechanics aboard the *Pequod*, as a capitalist industry, succeeds in operating under, and exerting the influence of, that system which Ishmael sought to avoid.

### Sea of Alienation

Operating within the restricted settings of a ship, the sea narratives of the nineteenth-century allowed for the representation of society on a small-scale. Removed from the fluctuating effects of the outside world, the characters of these novels were forced to interact in a confined environment defined by the socioeconomic conditions of larger society. As identified, the *Pequod* exists as a model of early industrial society in the miniature. Thus, it becomes a literary Petri dish in which to explore the effects of market capitalism on the individual, as brought on by the initial stages of industrial development. As Marx contends, it is only through useful productivity that humans distinguish themselves and their species as organisms unique from other animals. For, while every animal creates, all but humans are limited to producing that which is necessary to their intrinsic needs and that which is specific to their species. In creating outside of a basic animalized function, “nature appears *his*<sup>27</sup> [the individual’s] work and his reality” (*Manuscripts* 77). Thus develops recognition of the *self*, with man’s life-activity<sup>28</sup> now an “object of his will,” as opposed to need-based instinct (*Manuscripts* 76).

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<sup>27</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>28</sup> Marx distinguishes between “animal life-activity” and “conscious life-activity,” with *animal life-activity* being that labor necessary for an organism to survive versus conscious life-activity, in which humans labor and produce free from physical need; see Marx, Karl. “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844.” *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988. 19-168. Print.



It through the viable transformation of the material that one person is able to relate to another. For, if it is through conscious labor that the individual confronts themselves as a uniquely conscious being, then it is through this same labor that the individual confronts other individuals (in as much as their activity relates to the individual's activity) and recognizes them as also being unique conscious beings. It is through creative labor that man is aware of himself, and knows both that he is man and that his fellow being is also man. Therefore, it is when Ishmael is engaged in manual labor that he confronts the reader as truly aware of himself and those around him. This is best evidenced by examining Ishmael's reflections upon the collaborative task undertaken by crew members in Chapter 94. Having been assigned to manually break down the globular consistency of spermaceti prior to sending it to the try-works, Ishmael discloses:

I squeezed that sperm till a strange sort of insanity came over me; and I found myself unwittingly squeezing my co-laborers' hands in it, mistaking their hands for the gentle globules. Such an abounding, affectionate, friendly, loving feeling what did this avocation beget; that at last I was continually squeezing their hands, and looking up into their eyes sentimentally; as much as to say, —Oh! my dear fellow beings... Come; let us squeeze hands all round; nay, let us all squeeze ourselves into each other; let us squeeze ourselves universally... (456)

It is in physical, social labor that Ishmael is able to connect with both himself and the other members of the crew. It is through manually, productive labor, i.e. “squeezing... of the gentle globules” that Ishmael confirms his self-identity as a viable member of the human species. In

transforming the spermaceti from its original condition for purposes outside of an immediate, physical need, i.e. candles and oil, Ishmael confirms for himself, not only the awareness of his existence as a cognizant being, but awareness of himself as a species organism unique in the ability to liberally produce. The manipulation of the objective world allows Ishmael to “prove... himself to be a species being” (K. Marx, *Manuscripts 77*), to demonstrate those powers<sup>29</sup> which can only exist in his species, i.e. “abounding, affectionate, friendly loving feeling.” For, as contended by Marx, “man is... not only a social animal, but an animal that can be individualised only within society” (*Contribution 189*). Referring, not to companionability but cooperation (in the significance of purposeful, joint activity), it is in the form of society that man relies on other men to help him realize those unique abilities indicative of his species. It is through social production that Ishmael recognizes his fellow members, i.e. “my co-laborers,” and extends this awareness “to cover the whole human race” (Ollman 84), i.e. “my dear fellow beings... ourselves universally.”

In examining the relationship between society and labor, Marx states, “[capitalism] cannot exist without constantly revolutionizing the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society” (*Manifesto 212*).

Although the excessive use of machinery had not wholly permeated the industry of whale-hunting, the occupation itself “amount[ing] to a butchering sort of business” (118), technology had begun to *improve* on old methods of production. For example, in Chapter 96, Ishmael briefly discusses the ship’s try-works, located on the “most roomy part of the deck” in order to enhance productivity (461). An example of “the most solid masonry” (461), the try works existed as a set of cast-iron pots set into a brick furnace, which is kept from igniting the ship via

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<sup>29</sup> I.e. sensual species powers; see Marx, Karl. "Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844." *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 1988. 19-168. Print.

a sub-deck reservoir of water. Used by whale hunting vessels to boil and refine the blubber harvested from their whales, this technological improvement resulted in increased productivity and profitability by negating the needed for land based processing. It further increased the amount of whales that could be captured by reducing the amount of room needed for product storage. It is this instrument that comes into play in one of the largest displays of divided labor illustrated in *Moby-Dick*.

As primitive manufacture gave way to the capitalist mode of production, estrangement between the individual laborer and socialized production began to increase. Besides machines, production enhancing methodologies, such as specialized labor division, became commonplace in the effort to service the ever expanding commercial market. It is this profitable design that proceeds to structure the social production aboard the *Pequod*, as illustrated in the activity of its members after Mr. Stubb kills a whale. As the shipmates ready the animal's carcass for the try-works, one portion of the crew is in charge of "bailing [spermaceti out] of the Heidelberg Tun, or Case" of the whale.<sup>30</sup> Another set of individuals is "employed in dragging away the larger tubs, so soon as filled with the sperm" (455). Concurrently, Ishmael's group, as previously stated, manually manipulates the spermaceti "ere going to the try-works" (455), while nearby a "mincer... proceeds to cylindrically remove [the whale's] dark pelt... [before] mincing the horse-pieces of blubber for the pot" (459-60). Still further, the stewing blubber is attended to by "the whale-ship's stokers" who with "huge pronged poles [continually] pitched hissing masses of blubber into the scalding pots, or stirred up the fires beneath" (463). Thus, each group is engaged independent of the others, their labor, forming a disjointed segment in the overall production process. However, divided labor not only exerts its effects in the technical sense, i.e.

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<sup>30</sup> The case, or Heidelburgh Tun, is a large organ located in head of a sperm whale that contains spermaceti.

in the form of products and capital, but has ramifications on the psycho-emotional sphere of individuals as well. In creating only portions of a product, rather than something in its entirety, the final object that is produced exists as something external to the worker. Rather, it appears not as a something created by the laborer, a tangible expression of the individual's conscious, creative ability, but as an unreality, "*something alien, as a power independent of the producer*" (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 71).<sup>31</sup>

Through the apparent loss of an object, the labor process itself has no meaning, but becomes a form of bondage, "object-bondage," in which the individual is bound to both a product and a process which appears alien and outside of their control (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 71). This is illustrated in Chapter 72, "The Monkey-rope." Tethered to Queequeg in the divided effort to strip another whale, Ishmael describes:

Being the savage's bowman, that is, the person who pulled the bow-oar in his boat (the second one from forward), it was my... duty to attend upon him... upon the dead whale's back. You have seen Italian organ boys holding a dancing-ape by a long cord. Just so, from the ship's steep side, did I hold Queequeg... metaphysically did I conceive of my situation... I seemed distinctively to perceive that my own individuality was now merged in a joint-stock company of two: that my free will had received a mortal wound... I saw this situation of mine was the precise situation of every mortal that breathes (349)

In an analysis of Marx's conceptions of man, Ollman states, "engaging in totally unfulfilling labor destroys the mind and body [of the worker]; labor in which all choice is left to someone

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<sup>31</sup> All emphases in the original.

else who also controls the finished article, that is capitalist's labor" (148). This definition of capitalist labor and its subsequent effects on the individual is expressed as Ishmael reflects on his position in relation to his actions. He is "the savage's Bowman... the second one from forward." Thus, he delineates himself, not as one sentient of his individuality in human consciousness, but as another man's possession, i.e. "the savage's." Likewise, he has become an abstraction, the "second one from forward." While Ishmael may produce, the product is not for his inherent utility, but for the requirements of someone else, i.e. the consumer who will buy whale oil and spermaceti candles. Thus, his "free will had received a mortal wound" as both product and labor suggest themselves to be outside of his control. He is reduced to a level of animalized existence, i.e. "Italian organ boys... dancing-ape."

The relations between the *Pequod's* crew and the social forces of production reveal the declining mental and spiritual condition of the nineteenth-century worker under the siege of both industrial and capitalist advancement. As labor becomes increasingly divided in favor of efficiency, the layperson's activities present themselves as "unfree activity... performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion and the yoke of another man," as simulated through Ishmael's physical connection to his partner, Queequeg (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 80).<sup>32</sup> As soon as individual activity is no longer the result of unprompted, freely developed action, it is no longer self-affirming. Estranged from that which confirms their own identity, i.e. products and labor, the individuals become alienated from themselves as a conscious, free-willed being. Thus, the plight aboard the *Pequod* was "the precise situation of every mortal that breathes" (349), it

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<sup>32</sup> In an aside, Ishmael states that while "the monkey-rope is found in all whalers... it was only in the *Pequod* that the monkey and his holder were ever tied together" (350). This is so that if one member of the pairing fell into the ocean, the other would follow, and thus guarantee constant vigilance on the part of the workers toward their task. Thus, as Marx contends, "the unceasing improvement of machinery, ever more rapidly developing, makes their [the workers'] livelihood more and more precarious" (K. Marx, *Manifesto* 218).

ultimately the revealing the beginning stages of human alienation and its contributing factors during the industrialized development of early market capitalism.

### **Savage Visions of Civility**

Shark-toothed, riddled with purple-yellow tattoos, the pagan-god worshiper, Queequeg, confronts readers as perhaps one of the most iconic images of primitive man to have evolved out of American literature. As was the vogue with many antebellum authors, Melville was well known for his use of the savage in his works. His first two novels, which marked Melville's own adventures amongst the primitive peoples of the Polynesian Islands, succeeded in coining him the label, "the man who lived among the cannibals."<sup>33</sup> With descriptions of the "hideously marred... unearthly tattoo[ed]," flesh-eater turned harpooner, *Moby-Dick* was no exception (55). However, while many nineteenth-century texts used their primitive characters to highlight the advances of Western civilization, Queequeg came as the noble savage, not just literally,<sup>34</sup> but also in spirit – "a simple honest heart," one as yet untainted by the constraints of an increasingly mechanized, Western society (56).

Queequeg is the individual which market capitalism has not yet corrupted. As revolutions in the factory system of manufacturing succeeded in establishing the capitalist system as the dominant mode of production, centralized systems of credit arose as a viable means in which to conduct business. However, in the credit system, the medium of exchange is the individual, or more specifically, the amount of money and interest that the credited represents. While appearing to balance economic inequality between individuals, Marx contends

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<sup>33</sup> As quoted from Melville himself in a letter to Nathaniel Hawthorne, dated June 1851.

<sup>34</sup> Queequeg is reported to be the descendent of Rokovokian aristocracy, son of a High Chief, (or King), and nephew to the High Priest; Rokovoko; the fictional island of Queequeg's origin, alleged to be located "far away to the West and South"(61).

that credit results in alienation between the species as it greets the individual, “not as man, but rather as the existence of capital and interest” (*Notes* 270). It assumes to allow those less economically fortunate to rise in their wealth, but is designed to service those who are already economically advantaged. Thus, individuals who would benefit the most from credit are denied due to their lacking economic means. For, “in the credit system...[and] in banking... the element is no longer the commodity, metal or paper, but moral and social existence, the very inwardness of the human heart” (*Notes* 269). Credit breeds both mistrust of the individual and the devaluation of worth in the human being. However, Queequeg remains as one who has “never had had a creditor” (56). For him, man is the reality, money the abstraction, as exemplified by his willingness to part with money in response to a his new friendship –

[He] took out his enormous tobacco wallet... [and] drew out some thirty dollars in silver; then spreading them on the table, and mechanically dividing them into two equal portions, pushed one of them towards me [Ishmael], and said it was mine (58)

For Queequeg, money is not the criterion by which the individual is measured. Men are not measured by the “mechanically dividing” standards of capitalist economics, but through the “equal” standards of what it means to be human. He is valued according to what it is to be a member of a distinct species that knows only what man can know – that he is man. Thus, in *Moby-Dick*, Queequeg is the standard of what it is to be a human being confident in their humanity. As people during the nineteenth-century continued to be estranged from their labor processes, and subsequently, themselves, Melville’s novel presents the savage as a means by which to contrast the individual in this alienated state. For, “if contact with civilization [appeared to have] overwhelmed the primitive world with its image of materialistic wealth,” then

“contact with the primitive enabled some sensitive observers to become aware of the degradation of industrial society” (Heath 315).

The state of being civilized is defined as one in which the individual possesses human culture, a condition as pertaining to those who exist within the realm of social development. In *Moby-Dick*, it was the primitive man who existed as the ideal possessor of true sociality. Communal, companionate, developed in his self-awareness, he existed completely within human society as a being truly aware of his human essence, aware of his existence as conscious member of a unique species. It is Queequeg’s awareness of both himself and his species that first draws Ishmael to the aborigine:

I began to be sensible of strange feelings. I felt a melting in me.  
No more my splintered heart and maddened hand were turned  
against the wolfish world. This soothing savage had redeemed it.  
There he sat... speaking a nature in which there lurked no civilized  
hypocrisies and bland deceits. Wild he was... yet I began to feel  
myself mysteriously drawn towards him. And those same things  
that would have repelled most others, they were the very magnets  
that thus drew me (57)

Marx contends that man subsists in a state of duality, existing simultaneously as both a natural being and a species being. As a natural being, man is in harmony with inorganic nature and recognizes the natural, material world as the means by which he is able to manifest and satisfy those natural powers.<sup>35</sup> These powers exist as abiding within himself as much as in any living organism. However, as species being, man is aware of himself as a collective entity distinct

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<sup>35</sup> Natural powers, as referred to by Marx, occur as those animal functions such as eating, drinking, and procreating, all of which rely on the natural, material world for their fulfillment and gratification.



from other animals. He is conscious of his retention of several distinguishable species powers,<sup>36</sup> as well the ability to explore and gratify these capacities through the external manipulation of the objective world.

Queequeg is the exemplification of the both the species being and the natural being, i.e. “the human being as a living part of nature” (Ollman 79). He is the embodiment of active natural and species powers, human identifiers that Ishmael “mysteriously” senses as being extinguished within his person under the deluging forces of increasing industry and capitalism. The harpooner possesses a “seal-skin wallet with hair” and a “beaver hat,” boasting powerful legs, i.e. “the trunks of young palms,” upon which appeared to run “dark green frogs” (23-4). Thus, he is natural man, at one with his natural powers, the personification of nature in the raw. He is an organic creature in which the inorganic world resides in symbiosis as he exerts his natural powers, “appl[ying] his undivided attention to beefsteaks, done rare” (35). Likewise, he is species man, at one with his species powers, quietly contemplating in “Socratic wisdom,” and demonstrating his mastery over nature while “with a jack-knife gently whittling away at [the] nose” of his “little negro idol” (55). Thus, to his new friend, Queequeg is representative of the individual who remains in balance within the natural-species dichotomy as it should exist in men. Ishmael resides in the “wolfish world” of market capitalism, a world which has “maddened [his] hand” through its lack of meaningful activity. The “melting” in Ishmael’s “splintered heart” is the rescinding of the sailor’s alienation in the wake of mutual recognition. Through his relationship with the savage, Ishmael sees man as he should be and recognizes himself as a member of mankind. Thus, he re-identifies with his species, and likewise, himself. Yet, it is also through Queequeg – natural man, species man – that the rising inevitability of humanity’s

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<sup>36</sup> Species powers, as explained by Marx, occur as those sensuous actions as smelling, seeing, hearing, tasting, feeling, thinking, desiring, loving, laboring, and being aware.

future is expressed. Having been exposed to the capitalist ideology of the Westernized world, Queequeg himself admits the inability to return to his native conditions. As the savage reveals to Ishmael, he had been “made a harpooner,” transformed into a commoditized laborer (62). He had learned the proper function of a wheelbarrow,<sup>37</sup> and his “enormous tobacco wallet” contains “some thirty dollars in silver” (58). With a “barbed iron” harpoon in “lieu of a scepter,” the influential effects of modern civilization have affected him as such that he had been “unfitted... for ascending the pure and undefiled throne of thirty pagan Kings before him” (62).

Thus, as the *Pequod* reaches its conclusion, so too does the “marriage” between the sailor and his “bosom friend” harpooner (57). Swallowed up amongst the wreckages of industry, the loss of Ishmael’s savage is the loss of his connection with true civility. It is the absolution of his species identification, and thus, his humanity. Queequeg’s physical end, as brought on by the whaler, symbolizes the spiritual end of absolute man, as brought on by the socioeconomic conditions of market capitalism.

### **Birth of Early Industrial Man**

As *Moby-Dick* draws to a close, the reader is met with the brief “Epilogue.” No more than a paragraph, it simply describes what the audience already knows – that, Ishmael, the narrator, survived the tragedy that was the fated *Pequod*. Solemn in comparison to the forceful lines which conclude the previous chapter, these last sentences could be argued as being superfluous. However, the passage survives as more than an anemic attempt at a redundant second conclusion. Having fallen out of a whaleboat, Ishmael is left to witness the ship’s

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<sup>37</sup> In a story related by Queequeg to Ishmael, the native describes having put a heavy chest of items on a wheelbarrow and shouldering it up the wharf, oblivious to its function; see Chapter 65, “The Wheelbarrow.”

destruction from afar. Suddenly, he is seized by the pull created from the sinking of the massive ship:

when the half-spent suction of the sunk ship reached me, I was then, but slowly drawn towards the closing vortex... Round and round, then, and ever contracting towards the button-like black bubble at the axis of that slowly wheeling circle, like another Ixion I did revolve. Till, gaining that vital centre, the black bubble upward burst (625)

Metaphorically, Melville's text takes man through death and resurrection. It is through these closing descriptions that we glimpse a future vision of humanity.

The ship sinks, and for just a moment, Ishmael lingers on the "margin of the ensuing scene" (625). Floating adrift in the ocean, he is the sole survivor; he is physically alone. Ishmael is an individual. He is the symbolic representation of the individual man, the self, unadulterated in humanity, existing both within, and in, conjunction with the forces of nature. However, it is but a short while until the sailor is reached by the undulations generated from the ship. Ishmael's body is forced under by the imperceptible currents caused by the commercial whaler, representing the individual as he is forced to submit to the intangible effects of commerce and industry. Likewise, Ishmael is "slowly drawn" away from his air supply, driven downward into a "closing vortex." This is analogous to man's gradual withdraw from self-consciousness, from self identification, as he is distanced from nature and swallowed up by science, i.e. "closing vortex." Using several technical, mechanical and scientific descriptors, the scene continues to illustrate Ishmael as he is caught in the force of this spiral. There is "contracting" as he pushed towards a "button-like" bubble. The sailor rotates "round and

round,” akin to a sun and planet gear,<sup>38</sup> as he is made to physically “revolve” at the central “axis” of the “slowly wheeling circle” that is the whirlpool. The negative implications of the descriptions used are damning. Symbolically, they reveal the dehumanized condition of the individual under the constraints of technological advancement in industrial production. “The two central features of industrialization – revolutions in technology and in the organization of production – yielded one clear result: a great increase in the total output of goods and in individual worker output” (Sterns 8). Innovations like machine tools, interchangeable parts, and belt conveyors had revolutionized the production process. More frequently, workers were confronted by the “slowly wheeling circle[s]” of rotary steam engines and labor machines. However, “as soon as man [uses a machine], instead of working on the object of labour with a tool, [he] becomes merely the motive power of a machine” (K. Marx, *Capital* 497). Melville’s text perceives the dehumanizing effect such repetitive tasking had on the laborers of early industrial society. Recognizing that individuals were continually being reduced in their ability to engage in meaningful labor, Melville’s novel aligns itself with Marx, who states, “owing to the extensive use of machinery and division of labor, the work of the [worker] has lost all individual character... He becomes an appendage of the machine” (*Manuscripts* 216). This image of human mechanization is reinforced in the “Epilogue” as Ishmael’s body is depicted as physically merging with and simulating the parts of a machine. In this manner, Ishmael becomes like “Ixion,” damned by the gods, remaining forever bound to a flaming wheel, constrained in an abyss of torment and suffering. Likewise, the worker of market capitalism has become like “Ixion.” Damned by the gods of progress, he is forever bound to the fiery wheels of industry,

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<sup>38</sup> This description is similar to the configuration of the *sun and planet gear*, developed and utilized by James Watt in his rotating-beam steam engines to convert reciprocating (linear) motion into rotary (rotational) motion. In this type of gear a rod, or beam, is used to revolve a small circular gear, i.e. planet, around a larger gear, i.e. sun, which in turn is centrally located on a flywheel. In this description, Ishmael would be equivalent to the rotating sun gear located on the center axis (“button-like bubble”) of the flywheel (the whirlpool).

enslaved in an existence without meaning or self-consciousness. Together they are dragged down towards *Tartarus*, or death, where in this void knowledge of the self, dies.

It is shortly after his *death* in mechanization that man is *reborn* into a world dominated by the ideologies of market capitalism. Ascending from the abyss, Ishmael is propelled by the force of black bubble in an “upward burst” towards the atmosphere. Thus, as he advances towards life, via the metaphorical cogwheel, man is moved by the force of technology and resurrected into life in a new world defined by industry and commerce. As Ishmael resurfaces, he is met by Queequeg’s makeshift buoy:

And now, liberated by reason of its cunning spring, and owing to its great buoyancy, rising with great force, the coffin life-buoy shot lengthwise from the sea, fell over, and floated by my side. Buoyed up by that coffin... I floated (625)

Designed for death, not life, the aborigine’s casket was derived as a product of Queequeg, the *species man*. Crafted by the intellectual forces of manual labor, it was designed for his individual needs. However, the coffin re-surfaces modified, transformed by the technological tools of the ship. With scientific unnaturalness, it rises with “great buoyancy” and “force” to meet Ishmael in the water. As artificial life-buoy, it now serves as a product of industry, functioning in the capacity demanded of it by the commercial whaler.<sup>39</sup> Thus, as Ishmael and man ascend, they are confronted by the products of their labor, removed and distorted in their originality, by technology and industry.

However, Melville’s text remains ominous of these transformations. The coffin has been “liberated by reason of its cunning spring.” Primarily, this statement first describes the literal

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<sup>39</sup> In Chapter 126, “The Life-Buoy,” Queequeg’s coffin, was originally designed by himself and for himself during an illness. It was later modified into a life-buoy to replace the manufactured one lost in the attempt to save the first man to keep watch for the White Whale.

release of the coffin from the water by its transformed physical properties. Yet, it is also a realist allusion to the liberation of individuals from traditionalism by secular ideology, or “reason,” as arising in response to the rapid revolutions in technology and industry. The re-purposing of Queequeg’s coffin mirrors new society’s desire to challenge nature’s principles through reason. However, through a clever play on words, they are warned of the slippery, or “cunning,” logic with which many of these new ideologies were justified. As Ishmael survives “buoyed up on that coffin,” alive through the technological transformation of something meant for death, there is a sense of the falsehood and deception which underlies the reality of this progressive new world.

*Moby-Dick* last leaves Ishmael floating amongst “the unharmed sharks” until he is picked up by another whaler, the *Rachel* (625). In comparison to prior illustrations of the aqueous carnivores, the docile manner in which these creatures “glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths” remains at odds with the rest of the text (625). However, it is not unexpected that these creatures do not harm him. Ishmael has been transformed. He has been hit by the rising wave of technology. He has been pulled down into the depths by industrialization. He has been mechanized and dehumanized, stripped of his self-identification. He has resurfaced, new and estranged, literally clinging to the ideals of progress and industry. But he has resurfaced without spirit, as a “relationless void” (Ollman 85). Thus, he is left alone.<sup>40</sup>

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Early industrial society was witness to some of the most revolutionary ideas and advancements ever before experienced in human history. Developments in science and technology abolished the antiquated customs of old, giving rise to capitalism as the dominant

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<sup>40</sup> Very few sharks are carrion eaters. The majority eat live prey and that which has only recently deceased.

mode of production and exchange. It saw the beginning stages of globalization, establishing systems revolutionized by new methods of production. It birthed the era of cultural realism, leaving man, God, and nature to hang in the balance. It observed as the laborer was displaced from his home and fixed in a world giving birth to machines. It saw the spirit of man dwindle as society succumbed to the forceful voice of reason and progress.

Those who sought the pen reflected a period that would forever alter man's perception of his world and himself. Melville, and those realist authors like him, succeeded in reflecting the individual's struggle for definition amidst a series of marvelous improvements and frightening change. They mirrored man as he awoke to a world riddled with mechanized commercialism and they gave voice to his cries for individuality in a domain grown alien and strange. Yet, their time was only to be the beginning stages of humanity's death throes. For, within the unceasing solstice of technological development, their works were but the dawning silhouette of the long shadow yet to come.

## CHAPTER II

### KAFKA: IMAGE OF MAN IN IMPERIALIST SOCIETY

“The modern laborer, on the contrary, instead of rising with the progress of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of his own class”

- Karl Marx

*Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Regarded as one of the most critical authors of the twentieth-century, Franz Kafka's distinctive writing continues to ignite discussion and intrigue within the literary community. Born 1883 in Prague,<sup>41</sup> Franz Kafka, like Herman Melville, was the product of a middle class merchant family. The oldest of six children, he would outlive both of his younger brothers, who died as infants before Kafka was seven. Kafka is known to have had a difficult relationship with his both his parents, in particular, his domineering and emotionally-invective father, Hermann Kafka, as confirmed by Kafka himself in “Letter to His Father,” or “*Brief an den Vater*” (1953).<sup>42</sup> As biographer, Max Brod, reveals in his book, *Franz Kafka*, both of Kafka's parents were routinely occupied twelve hours a day or more with running their “wholesale warehouse” (8). Thus, Kafka and his three significantly younger sisters, all of whom would be killed in The Holocaust after Kafka's death, were often left in the care of governesses, one of

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<sup>41</sup> Prague is the both the largest and capital city of what is now the Czech Republic, formerly part of Czechoslovakia, which dissolved in January 1993 into both the Republic and Slovakia.

<sup>42</sup> Written by Kafka in 1919 in the hopeful attempt to resolve his issues with his father after Hermann disapproved of Kafka's engagement to chambermaid, Julie Wohryzek, because of her Zionist beliefs. Hermann never received the letter, which was “more than a hundred pages long” (Brod 15). Kafka's mother, Julie Löwy Kafka, to whom the letter was entrusted for delivery, refused to hand it over to her husband, returning it to Kafka instead. The letter was published post-humorously in 1954 after having been withheld by Brod out of respect for those mentioned.



whom is said to have inspired an “erotic awakening” (9) that would continue to influence Kafka in both his personal life and writing.<sup>43</sup> Interested in literary expression from a very young age, Kafka was known to author plays as an adolescent, which he would often have his sisters perform on their parents’ birthdays. As an adult, he enrolled in the Imperial and Royal Karl-Ferdinand German University of Prague,<sup>44</sup> where he would strike up a relationship with lifelong friend, literary executor, and eventual biographer, Max Brod. However, while both men found themselves “drawn only to creative art,” Kafka entered into the law program as a means by which to pacify his father’s stringent expectations as well as to secure a way to work in the future. Receiving his Doctorate of Jurisprudence in 1906, Kafka then entered into contract as a law clerk, performing a compulsory year of unpaid civil service as was required for lawyers intending take the bar exam. However, Max Brod admits, “Kafka never had any intention of following a legal career – he used this year only as a breathing space... in which to look for a properly paying job” (78). Believing that “breadwinning and the art of writing must be kept absolutely apart” (79), in 1907, Kafka, an avid socialist, took a job in an Italian commercial office known as *Assicurazioni Generali*, but quit after less than a year, his graveyard shift leaving little time to pursue his writing. Assuming a position with the Workers’ Accident Insurance Institute for the Kingdom of Bohemia in 1908, Kafka succeeded in acquiring the morning to midday hours he and Brod had often longed for. This led to “Contemplation,” (*Betrachtung*), a collection of eight short stories, published that same year in a literary journal

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<sup>43</sup> Kafka admitted in several of his letters, diaries, and personal admissions to have been inspired by erotic thoughts while constructing certain portions of his work. For example, Kafka revealed to have “had in mind a violent ejaculation” (Brod 129) when constructing the last sentence of his short story “The Judgment,” or “*Das Urteil*” (1913), as confessed to friend, Max Brod. The author is further known to have been a frequent patron of brothels and the owner of an extensive collection of pornographic material.

<sup>44</sup> Often quoted in many biographies as Charles University, (German: *Karl*), as the name exists today. However, during Kafka’s attendance, the university existed as two independent, but equal institutions, including the German Karl-Ferdinand University, (which Kafka, a dominant German speaker attended), and the Czech Karl-Ferdinand University, both of which shared common facilities, including scientific and medical institutes as well as the university library, botanical garden, and insignia.

known as *Hyperion*. However, despite his improved circumstances, Kafka still retained a desire to “get free of office work” (qtd. 16), his sixty-hour workweek continuing to make the balance between writing, family and employment difficult.<sup>45</sup> Suffering regularly from bouts of depression and somewhat of a hypochondriac, Kafka seriously contemplated suicide at least once, describing in a 1912 diary his wish to shock the toll collector of a nearby bridge by plunging out his third-floor bedroom window. However, it was also during this time that he published “The Judgment” (“*Das Urteil*”), which the author penned in a single night after meeting Felice Bauer – to whom the story was dedicated and Kafka was engaged to, twice.<sup>46</sup> While he made it a point to write on a daily basis, Kafka remained relatively anonymous, only publishing a handful of other works, including “The Metamorphosis” (“*Die Verwandlung*”) in 1915, and “In the Penal Colony” (“*In Der Strafkolonie*”) and “A Country Doctor,” (“*Ein Landarzt*”) in 1919. Having contracted tuberculosis in 1917, Kafka was forced to retire from work completely three years later, spending the remainder of his time in and out of sanatoriums until starving to death from disease related complications in 1924.<sup>47</sup> Kafka is known to have burned over ninety percent of his work, mostly with the help of his last lover, Dora Diamant (or Dymant) whom he met shortly after being diagnosed. What remained of his work he left to Brod and Diamant to destroy, a request both individuals ignored. All of his novels were published post-humorously, heavily edited by Max Brod, none of the works having been completed. Brod also went on to publish several short stories, letters and diary entries, while Diamant’s collection was confiscated by the Gestapo during a raid in 1933 and has never been recovered.

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<sup>45</sup> In 1911, Kafka joined brother-in-law Karl Hermann in collaborating in the establishment of an asbestos factory. While *Prager Asbestwerke Hermann and Co.* was established, the enterprise took up much of Kafka’s spare time. This was further exacerbated, when in 1912, his parents’ shop began to experience problems which required that assistance of Kafka there as well.

<sup>46</sup> Max Brod contended that both the names of the protagonist and his fiancé in the story, Georg Bendemann and Freida Brandenfeld, allude to that of Franz Kafka and Felice Bauer, as based on sound and spelling.

<sup>47</sup> This is said to have been the inspiration behind “The Hunger Artist,” a manuscript of four short stories which Kafka readied for publication but failed to have published before his death.

There have been numerous attempts by the literary community to decipher the complexity that is Kafka's writings. Aside from having left the majority of his work unfinished, editors and translators (not forgoing Brod himself) have been tasked with the attempt to truthfully arrange the plethora of unsorted chapters, incomplete sentences, and one lined aphorisms that Kafka left behind. To further complicate matters, the style and language in which the author expressed himself continues to raise concerns regarding the allegiance of each new translation to the meaning and vision of Kafka's originals.<sup>48</sup> However, the surreal uncanniness that pervades any version of Kafka's text has remained unparalleled, leaving critics, and readers alike, struggling to interpret that form so unique it can only be defined as *Kafkaesque*.<sup>49</sup> For decades, various critics have striven to ascertain the motivating force behind Kafka's enigmatic and perplexing tales. Literary biographer, Frederick Karl, suggests Kafka's works exist as "perfect examples of Freudian psychology," an expression of underlying Oedipal complexes, unresolved paternal issues, and other "repressed personal background coming to the foreground as breakdown and pathology" (463). Others, like critics Erich Heller, T.J. Reed and Michael P. Ryan, contend that Kafka's works reflect the heavy influence of German philosopher, Arthur Schopenhauer, whose works Kafka not only collected but read extensively. As Ryan states, Kafka, adhering to Schopenhauer's conception of transcending individual *will* through aesthetic reflection, not only "transcends his existence as merely the author... he dies within each story... [and] views himself

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<sup>48</sup> The flexibility of syntax and subordinate clauses afford by written Germanic expression allows for a variety of ways sentences can be arranged, punctuated and interpreted when translated into another language. Further, Kafka was known to employ a technique particular to German, but difficult to duplicate in other languages, in which the verb is positioned towards the end of a sentence, permitting for the forceful impact of its meaning. Kafka's writings are further complicated by his use of Praguean-German, a form of German heavily influenced by the Czech and Yiddish languages, as well as ambiguous idioms. Thus, phrases like *ungeheures Ungeziefer* from his short story "The Metamorphosis" ("*Die Vanderlung*") has had a variety of interpretations including vermin, bug, cockroach, beetle and insect, resulting from translators' efforts to decipher its indistinct meaning based on the surrounding descriptions provided by the text.

<sup>49</sup> *Webster's II New College Dictionary* defines *Kafkaesque* as being "marked by surreal distortions and usually by a sense of impeding danger (602); see "Kafkaesque." Def. 2. *Webster's II New College Dictionary*. 1995. Print.

reborn in another” (137). Perhaps more intriguing is Kraus’s observation of the connection between Kafka’s writings and his experience within the Workers’ Accident Insurance Institute. Contending that Kafka’s “fictions can best be understood as ironic refraction of his own experience...his work in that capacity directly concerned with employment regulation” (311), Kraus aligns himself with Brod who states, “Kafka derived a great amount of his knowledge of the world and life, as well as his skeptical pessimism, from his experiences in the office, from coming in contact with workmen suffering under injustice” (84).<sup>50</sup> In his book, *Illuminations*, renowned Kafka scholar, Walter Benjamin, contends that the author’s works must be taken as “parables,” ones which explore the “question of how life and work are organized in society” (122). However, he cautions that Kafka “took all conceivable precautions against the interpretation of his writings;” thus, to truly understand his meaning one must “keep in mind Kafka’s way of reading... his interpretation,” as first and foremost, these parables were created for himself (122). While it is recognized that each examination into Kafka’s works has succeeded in providing further illumination into what Kraus can only define as “inexplicable and menacing situations of absurd uncertainty” (309), that which remains of Kafka’s letters, diaries, and second-hand admissions leaves little room to argue that the author’s life experiences did not, in some manner, have a profound influence on the content and design of his work. As such, inspection into the contemporary analysis of Kafka’s texts has exposed an inherent need regarding the means in which his works have afore been appreciated. That is, owing to its delegation as a modernist work, the emotional and physical isolation of Kafka’s characters in “The Metamorphosis,” like those in Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, reveal the increasing levels of human alienation as experienced by individuals under the imperialist stage of capitalism’s development.

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<sup>50</sup> Kafka was known to be drafting a document regarding worker reformation shortly before his death; see Brod, Max. *Franz Kafka, a Biography*. New York: Schocken, 1963. 84-85. Print.

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Taking place between 1890 and World War II, the second technological revolution, as contended by Mandel, was “characterized by the generalized application of electric and combustion engines in all branches of industry” (120). Written as a novella in 1915, “The Metamorphosis” includes several allusions to the byproducts of these industrial innovations, indicating the commonality of their existence during Kafka’s time as well as its place as a modernist work. For example, shortly after Gregor’s transformation, there is a reference to the “electric lights in the street [which] cast a pale sheen here and there on the ceiling and the upper faces of the furniture” (88). Likewise, Gregor commutes to work via train, i.e. “I’d better get up, since my [Gregor’s] train goes at five” and “the next train went at seven o’clock” (69). These statements affirm the development of the electric motor and internal combustion engine, both of which were used in addition to the steam engine to operate evolving devices and various methods of transportation. This included the locomotive, which in mid-industrial society predominated as the method of public transport until the introduction of buses in the 1920s. Requiring less manpower than coal driven steam engines, electric and combustion engine trains allowed for the development of rapid transit train systems, as the one Gregor would have taken to work. Thus, this text confirms the level of industrial advancement present during the late nineteenth and early twentieth-century, placing it well within the imperialism phase of capitalism’s development.

Reflecting “a radical change in the relationship of class forces... radical increase in the intensity of labour... penetration of the most modern technology into spheres producing raw materials... [and] a sudden rise in the productivity of labour” (Mandel 116), Jameson terms the cultural mode of production, as indicative of this period of industrial and capitalistic

development, as modernism. Again, for Jameson, this expression serves as the connotative representative for a stylized type of cultural production tied into the eco-political state of imperialist society rather than a genre in the specific. While realism expressed society's attempts to rectify the conflicts generated between two antagonistic socioeconomic systems, modernism typified a society now largely aware "that a new age is beginning and that... nothing can ever be the same again" (*Cultural Logic* 310). Thus, in modernism, cultural modes of thought and artistic representation reflect, "the experience of real social change in industrialism," with these changes "now inspir[ing] serious doubts as to the stability of being" (*Cultural Logic* 210). Often reflecting an oppositional stance towards capitalism's effects and rising bourgeois culture, modernist works, like Kafka's "The Metamorphosis," "would seem to have something to do... with the producers and consumers, and how they feel either producing the products or living among them" (*Cultural Logic* 310).

### **The Stranger Within**

As indicative of Kafka's technique, "The Metamorphosis" begins abruptly and obscurely with Gregor Samsa having inexplicably awoken to find himself in a drastically altered physical state:

He was lying on his hard, as it were armor-plated back... he could see his dome-like brown belly divided into stiff arched segments... His numerous legs, which were pitifully thin compared to the rest of his bulk, waved helplessly before his eyes (67)

There have been numerous debates surrounding these descriptions in an effort to decipher what Gregor has become. Therefore, it is important to refrain from disputes of entomology and

consider the conditions of Gregor's life prior to his metamorphosis, to regard his story before his story begins. It is admitted that analysis of Gregor's circumstances prior to transformation will no more lead to an understanding of *what* he becomes than can be derived from the best imaginative attempts towards those few descriptions Kafka left for his readers. However, scrutiny with regards to his life pre-metamorphosis does give indication as to *why* Gregor's transformation occurs, why it fact it *need* take place at all. For, whatever he may have become, the salesman's condition is the physical manifestation of Gregor's, and thus, the early twentieth-century individual's, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual alienation under the duress of imperialist society.

Preceding his physical change, Gregor's existence is as hollow as the pitiful exoskeleton he eventually leaves behind. He is described as a "commercial traveler" (67), an individual who spends his time in "constant travelling... worrying about train connections, the bed and irregular meals" (68). He is the early twentieth-century man, the product of technology's second revolution, existing in a world of rapidly expanding cities, rising commodification, and heightened interconnectivity. Like Ishmael, Gregor suffers from an estrangement from both his product and the process of production. However, owing to the industrialized extent of his societal conditions, his alienation confronts him on a level far greater than the bowman's. Gregor's occupation requires the marketing of a larger, unseen product based on his exhibiting "a collection of cloth samples" (67). Thus, on a daily basis, the salesman conveys in the miniature the intangible *idea* of a product, one which he has had no part in producing. His goods retain no meaning with regards to confirming Gregor as a conscious being. Rather, his labor and his product, the product existing as a tangible objectification of labor, confront the salesman as external alien forces, ones that exist outside and independent of himself.

It is due to this inability to engage in effective labor that Gregor remains unable to validate his self-identity. For, as “labor is *external*<sup>51</sup> to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being... he does not affirm himself but denies himself” (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 74). This is expressed in the commercial traveler’s relations with other people, towards his relations with the other members of his species. In reflection of his previous life’s circumstances, he acknowledges those he has encountered at his place of work and through his travels as “casual acquaintances that are always new and never become intimate friends” (68). Likewise, he is described as one who “thinks about nothing but his work... [who] never goes out in the evenings... [but] stay[s] at home” (75-6). Without the ability to project himself onto his products, Gregor is unable to certify himself as an organism unique in its capacity to transform the material. He is incapable of confirming his active “species-life,”<sup>52</sup> as represented through an ability to create products (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 77). Without validation that he is, in fact, a member of the human species, the commercial traveler is unable to identify with other members of said collective, as indicated by his lack of intimate, personal relationships. For, “an immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the products of his labor, from his life-activity, from his species being, is the *estrangement of man from man*”<sup>53</sup> (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 77). Symbolically representative of the individual as he exists during the constraining forces of imperialism, the state of Gregor’s condition, pre-transformation, reveals “the devastating effect of capitalistic production on human beings, on their physical and mental states, and on the social process of which they are a part of” (Ollman 131).

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<sup>51</sup> Emphasis in the original.

<sup>52</sup> Marx defines the active species life as “production,” or “conscious life-activity,” with life-activity merely being the means by which all living organisms use nature to maintain their physical existence. Through transformative production of the material world, man is able to produce objects that, in their tangible nature, serve as validation of the human being’s unique ability to produce versus the ability of other animals. Thus, man is able to “duplicate himself not only in consciousness, intellectually but also actively, in reality” as he generates tangible products through his species-life activity and thus, confirms his distinct position as man (*Manuscripts* 76-7).

<sup>53</sup> Emphasis in the original.



Despite the abstraction from himself, Gregor is much like *Moby-Dick's* Ishmael. Although the conditions of imperialist society have removed his ability to generate products for himself and by himself, Gregor, as a human organism, still retains the desire to exercise his sensuous species-powers. Inwardly, he is driven to produce, to confirm his species individuality and distinctness as a human being via intellectually creative labor. This is indicated through the description of a self-crafted portrait and frame, the one and only picture known to reside in Gregor's room:

He had recently cut [the image] out of an illustrated magazine and put [it] into a pretty gilt frame. It showed a lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole, sitting upright and holding out to the spectator a huge fur muff into which the whole of her forearm had vanished! (67).

In his book, *Franz Kafka, Representative Man*, Frederick Karl suggests that this "lady, with a fur cap on and a fur stole" exists as Gregor's psychological substitution for the female relationship he emotionally hungers for. "She is some way, more than a 'pinup' for Gregor... filling in for the sweet-heart-wife mother he lacks... the woman he comes home to when he is not traveling" (Karl 466). It is this association which Karl credits as driving Gregor's desire to save this item as his mother and sister, Grete, attempt to clear his room shortly after his transformation:

[he] quickly crawled up to it and pressed himself to the glass... This picture at least, which was entirely hidden beneath him, was going to be removed by nobody... He clung to his picture and would not give it up. He would rather fly in Grete's face (105)

However, owing that all ideas and conceptions are tied to material properties and relations, this “lady” can only hold such a perception for Gregor if she first exists as a material object. For, it is only through her existence as a physical item that Gregor can conceptualize her as having any meaning, as all meaning for any individual is defined by the individual’s relation to the material. In reality, this feminine image is the corporeal product of commercialism, a commodity designed to perpetuate the consumption of other commodities. The woman exists as an advertisement from an “illustrated magazine,” designed by another with the intent to generate public, or “spectator,” interest in an unidentified good (possibly fur). As a commodity with no immediate use-value, produced by someone other than himself, the “lady” exists as a negative article for Gregor, an external and alien object that only further distances his relation with humanity. Thus, in her original form, the woman’s image cannot inspire a desire by Gregor to connect with a “sweet-heart-mother wife,” as her essence does not confirm, but denies, Gregor’s existence as a man. In its original form, the illustration only succeeds in absolving the traveler’s ability and desire to connect with other members of his species. However, through his skillful labor, Gregor has altered the image to subsist in a manner not consistent with its production. He has modified the picture from its original form, and in doing so demonstrates his mastery over the object and the material world. Having cut it from its source and placed in a “pretty gilt frame” (67), it has been designed by Gregor through manual “fretwork”<sup>54</sup> into something unique (75). Thus, the commercial illustration becomes an article of his creation, an externalization of his species-self through competent manipulation. In its new form, the image succeeds in reaffirming the salesman as a willful conscious being, aware of his species powers as well as his relation to other members of his species. Only then can Karl’s postulation come to actualization, as any spiritual or psychological connection Gregor has to this picture can only be derived as a relation

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<sup>54</sup> Fretwork is ornamental relief carving with handheld tools, usually on wood.

secondary to his primary association with it as an object of his own willful purpose. Thus, it is the first connection, not its function as a “part of a masturbatory fantasy, [or] some kind of replacement figure for the mother about to be lost” (Karl 470) which directs Gregor’s desire to keep the picture from “being removed by nobody.” The salesman’s essay to rescue and protect his product is his effort to maintain his last connection with his species self. Likewise, for Kafka, Gregor’s efforts are symbolic of the twentieth-century individual’s struggle to salvage the remnants of a humanity increasingly estranged by imperialism and its advancing modes of capitalist production.

### **The Stranger Without**

While Melville’s savage illustrates the quintessential junction of natural man to his species-self, Kafka’s Gregor is the inversion of man’s natural-species dichotomy, as resulting from human alienation. As the natural-being, man is instinctual in nature, with activity directed towards maintaining his physical existence through basic natural processes, i.e. consuming, sheltering, and reproducing. As the species-being, the individual is aware of, and exerts, his species-powers, or mental, sensuous action through willful, conscious activity. As stated by Ollman, “it is inconceivable... [for these] species powers to exist without natural powers, without the qualities man shares with all living things” (85). Without man’s visceral connection to nature, as a living organism, he physically ceases to exist. However, absent a relation to his species-powers, man ceases to be man, subsisting physically, but enduring mentally and spiritually as a deadened void. Thus, man as a man, must live in a balanced state of equilibrium between the two halves of this framework, with the first moiety supplying the means for his existence, and the second, the purpose.

As industry advanced during the late eighteenth and early twentieth-century, “almost every type of work could now, in a technological sense, be mechanized... Thus, hundreds of thousands of people, many of whom had already come to terms with the initial industrial revolution, had to adjust to further shifts in methods” (Sterns 168). Along with the rise of the corporation, and an increasing desire by big businesses for global expansion, came the quest for maximized worker productivity. Subsequently, labor tasks continued to be further systemized and subdivided, leading to such developments as scientific management and time-and-motion studies.<sup>55</sup> Designed to monitor individuals for maximum work output efficiency, as well as to maximize workflow, such factors succeeded in generating dehumanizing environments in which workers performed “in a routine, almost machinelike, fashion” (Sterns 66). Subsequently, as the early twentieth-century worker was subjected to “*forced labor*,”<sup>56</sup> forced labor referring to that production that resides as external to the laborer, this activity confronted the individual as “not the satisfaction of a need; [but] merely a means to satisfy needs external to it” (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 74). Thus, daily labor took on for the worker an alien quality, resulting in the loss of labor identification, and the individual self-actualization of man’s species powers. Kafka’s “The Metamorphosis” recognizes this level of increasing alienation in the individual as caused by imperialism. In his text, the author represents not only the fission, but the twisted distortion of man’s inherent duplicity as resulting from imperialism’s surging technological development.

Having been removed from the labor process through advanced industry and commodification, the worker “feels himself to be freely active in any but his animal functions...

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<sup>55</sup> A derivative of *scientific management*, or *Taylorism*. Developed between 1880-90, from the combined research of Frederick Winslow Taylor and Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, in the effort to improve work output efficiency. These studies were utilized by manufacturing companies until about 1930, using the timed observance of a particular task in the effort to calculate the minimum amount of time and movements needed to effectively complete it.

<sup>56</sup> Emphasis in the original.

and in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal” (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 74). Thus, through his transformation, Gregor resides as the embodiment of man in his animalized state. After years of dehumanizing and forced labor, Gregor is confronted by a physical manifestation of his natural-being as having been severed from his species-self.

Awakening to a find himself in an insect-like body, his transformation serves as an allegory for man’s alienated condition under the forces of capitalism. For, “capitalism is a structure... that erects barriers between an individual and the production process, the products of that process and other people... [and] divides the individual himself” (Ritzer 30). Thus, removed from his species-self, Gregor’s actions in his new form are instinctual, operating animalistically outside of his conscious will, i.e. “he had... numerous little legs which never stopped waving in all directions and which he could not control in the least” (71).

Like the early twentieth-century worker confronted by the new mechanized forces of production, Gregor is incapable of directing his own activity, for, through estranged labor, man “cannot reproduce nature or produce things of beauty; His actions are spontaneous rather than voluntary” (Ollman 80). The salesman’s efforts appear as mysterious forces, operating independently and outside of his command, much like the commodities which he had previously been forced to market. Absent the ability to identify with his labor, man is removed from that which defines him as a species and is left with only his natural-self. The worker “feels that he is acting freely only in his animal functions – eating, drinking, procreating... while in his human functions he feels only like an animal” (K. Marx, *Notes* 292). This inversion of man’s natural and species powers is best exemplified by the salesman’s desire to satisfy only basic, natural urges, like eating:

He had reached the door before he discovered what had really drawn him to it: the smell of food... he was now still hungrier than in the morning and he dipped his head almost over the eyes straight into the milk... he could only feed with the palpitating collaboration of his whole body...with repulsion he turned away from the basin and crawled back into the middle of the room (88)

Defined by Marx, “hunger is a natural need... [an] acknowledged need of [the] body for an object existing outside of it” (*Manuscripts* 154). Thus, eating is a natural power, a function inherent in all living organisms, driven by the primitive impulse to physically subsist. In his creature-like state, Gregor does not choose to eat, but rather is “drawn” instinctually “by the smell of food.” Likewise, he does not consume in human fashion, but rather, “feed[s] with the palpitating collaboration of his whole body” immersing his “head almost over the eyes.” The motivators which drive his actions are not the desire to dominate the material through self actualizing species powers, but his natural powers of discerning “what is edible and what is not” (Ollman 80). Likewise, he engages in a number of visceral, animalized habits, such as hiding under furniture from approaching visitors and “crawling crisscross over the walls and ceilings,” an activity that allows him to remain suspended in cataleptic reveries (100). The descriptors used by Kafka’s text to depict Gregor’s activities are not associated with human action, but with those functions which typify animal behavior, i.e. “feed,” “palpitating,” “crawling.” Existing in this mutated, visceral form, Gregor is symbolic of the worker described by Marx, as one whom amidst the “estrangement inherent in the nature of [capitalist] labor... [dwells] in deformity... idiocy, cretinism” (*Manuscripts* 73).

Gregor's acquiescence to his mutated state, illustrates the extent to which the members of imperialist society had been removed from their humanity, both in the physical and psychological sense. In less than a day since his conversion, the commercial traveler is more preoccupied with consuming than in understanding or rectifying his condition. As his vision goes dim, he laments no loss. Despite his initial efforts, the traveler makes no attempts to communicate nor does he express a desire to do so. The salesman's acceptance of his distorted, restrained, and absent physical conditions is palpable only because of the estranged spiritual conditions he had experienced as a human under the constraints of capitalism's progression. For, it is only through intellectually, creative labor that man establishes self-awareness. Likewise, it is the mutual recognition of oneself that man confronts the *Other*, that the individual extends his self-awareness to the rest of humanity as comprised of organisms like himself. Thus, Gregor's inability to see is equivalent to the lack of self-awareness experienced by the worker in his former human life. Likewise, his incapacity to communicate is symbolic of his failure to identify with other members of his species. As Gregor becomes estranged from his senses, he is removed from those "organs of his individual being... [whose] orientation to the object is the *manifestation of the human world*"<sup>57</sup> (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 106). Thus, Kafka's text aligns itself with Marx, for as the individual progresses into alienation, "the animalistic becomes the human and the human the animalistic" (*Notes* 292).

### **Gradation of Orders and Ranks**

In his treatise, *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx contends, "in earlier epochs of history we find almost everywhere a complicated arrangement of society into various orders, a manifold gradation of social rank" (*Manifesto* 209). This history of societal structuring and class struggle

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<sup>57</sup> Emphasis in the original.

is nothing unfamiliar to man's historical development. However, it has only been in the present state of capitalism that these antagonisms have succeeded in producing two classes, i.e. the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, which exist as being exceedingly disproportionate in their relation to both property and the social means of production.

As revolutions in manufacturing displaced the guild workers of the past, industrial production, commerce, and exchange developed at rapidity never before experienced in human history. Arising from these effects was the bourgeoisie, the owners of social production, themselves, "the product of a long course of development, of a series of revolutions in the modes of production and of exchange" (K. Marx, *Manifesto* 211). Conversely, there developed the proletariat, a property-less class who, void of a means in which to produce on their own, are forced to sell their labor as a commodity in the effort to live. As contended by Marx, "industry has converted the little workshop of the patriarchal master into the great factory of the capitalist;" thus, over time, the proletariat has become the "slaves of the bourgeois class" (*Manifesto* 216). This is a factor that Kafka's text makes aware, as through Gregor, it illustrates the extreme measures the workers of imperialism were forced to adopt in the efforts to simply survive. As property, both landed and industrial, became increasingly allocated into the hands of the bourgeoisie, the twentieth-century worker was forced to sell his labor wherever he could, for, through capitalism, "the lower strata of the middle class – the small tradespeople, shopkeepers... sink gradually into the proletariat, partly because their diminutive capital does not suffice for the scale on which modern industry is carried on" (*Manifesto* 217). "The Metamorphosis" expresses this phenomenon as Gregor reflects on having to take over the role of family wage-earner after the failure of his father's small business:



[he] was to do his utmost to help the family to forget as soon as possible the catastrophe which had overwhelmed the business and thrown them all into a state of complete despair. And so he had set to work... had become a commercial traveler instead of a little clerk, with of course much greater chances of earning money (95)

Due to the rise of big industry, and thus, increased competition, the small time capitalist, like Gregor's father, is forced to either "consume his capital, since he can no longer live on the interest... [or] sell his commodity cheaper" (*Manuscripts* 43). In either case, the small time business owner eventually ceases to be a capitalist and is plunged back into the pool of the proletariat, resuming his role as wage-laborer. While Gregor discovers that some money was known to have survived from his family's business, "this capital was by no means sufficient to let the family live on the interest of it" (96). For as Marx contends, "in an increasingly prosperous society, it is only the very richest people who can go on living on money interest" (*Manuscripts* 23). Therefore, in the "much greater chance of earning money," Gregor settles for becoming a "commercial traveler," as opposed to a "little clerk," to relieve the "complete despair" of his family's circumstances, as brought on by bourgeois dominance over the forces of production. Like many a wage-laborer of the early twentieth-century, the salesman was forced to "sell [himself] piecemeal... a commodity, like every other article of commerce" (*Manifesto* 216).

The helpless submissiveness to duty caused by this disproportionate separation of classes is best exemplified through Gregor's irrational reactions to his spontaneous insect-like state. In reflecting on his employment, Gregor admits "if I didn't have to hold my hand because of my parent's debts, I'd have given notice long ago" (68). However, it is because he has to "provide for [his] parents and [his] sister" (82) that the commercial traveler endures the unsatisfying

conditions of his job. Thus, upon discovering his metamorphosed body, the salesman becomes immediately concerned with getting to work on time. At first, Gregor's absurd preoccupation can be excused by his initial insistence that his form is the result of a dream-like state brought on by being overworked and a constant lack of sleep, i.e. "what an exhausting job I've picked on!... A man needs sleep" (68). However, once he attempts to get ready for his job, he proceeds as being oblivious to the gravity of his situation despite his awakened state. He logically calculates his movements in manners which compensate for the "arms and hands" he is lacking (71). He logically, but irrationally, theorizes how simple it would be to raise himself off the floor if only he had "two strong people... to thrust their arms under his convex back" (73). This level of reasoning expresses the degree to which the worker has been alienated from his individual being. Gregor's appraisal of his situation is shocking. His attention is more concerned with the current time and the day's train schedule, items given such importance that he obsesses over them eight times during his attempts to get up. Thus, as capitalism has removed any sense of autonomous control Gregor may feel over his own life, the level of self-estrangement the salesman experiences, both physically and mentally, exerts itself to such a degree that "the worker loses reality" and cannot come to terms the seriousness of his new condition (K. Marx, *Capital* 653).

While Gregor's loss of self may contribute to the inability to grasp the gravity of his situation, it is his fear of occupational reprimand that spurs his irrational desire to attend work in his disfigured state. This is exemplified as the salesman describes the intimidating manner in which his overseer relates to the laborers. His boss is described as "sitting on high at a desk and talking down to employees" (69), a position from which he can physically (and psychologically) assert his economic class superiority. As imperialist workers were "hourly enslaved by the machine, by the overlooker, and, above all, by the individual bourgeois manufacture himself" (K.

Marx, *Manifesto* 216), they were also conditioned to regard any derivation from this process as negative. For, “as soon as the division of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape... if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood” (K. Marx, *Ideology* 53). Thus, it is Gregor’s wish to avoid derogation and possible consequence which removes from him the idea of calling in sick. Although he had not done so in over five years, the traveler reasons that such an excuse would only warrant a visit by company employees who would only “reproach” Gregor for his “laziness”:

the chief himself would be sure to come with the sick-insurance doctor, would reproach his parents with their son’s laziness and would cut all excuses short by referring to the insurance doctor, who of course regarded all mankind as perfectly healthy malingers. And would he be so far wrong on this occasion?

As revealed by this scene, Gregor is the proletarian worker who has been conditioned to regard any human emotion not geared towards productivity as “laziness.” Capitalist “production does not simply produce man as a commodity, the commodity-man, man in the role of a commodity; it produces him in keeping with this role as a spiritually and physically dehumanized being” (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 86). Thus, in spite of his physical appearance Gregor goes on to question if his actions really are motivated by apathy, i.e. “would he be so far wrong on this occasion?”

With the extensive use of machinery and labor having succeeded in stripping him of all manifestations of individuality, including personal thought, Gregor’s question towards his own actions and decisions reflect the severity to which the worker has been dehumanized. As Marx contends, capitalism “oversteps... the time for growth, development, and healthy maintenance of

the body” (*Capital* 375). Thus, individuals like Gregor were conditioned to deny their own physical needs as the process of production and the accumulation of capital “takes no account of the health and the length of life of the worker” (*Capital* 381).

In his treatise, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses”, Louis Althusser discusses the reproduction of labor-power, as enforced by the social conditioning of individuals via the ideological state apparatuses,<sup>58</sup> or ISAs, i.e. “societal mechanisms for creating pliant, obedient citizens who practice dominant values” (1333). He states that wages are “indispensable to the reconstitution of labor power of the wage-earner... the wherewithal to pay for housing, food and clothing, in short to enable the wage-earner to present himself again at the factory gate the next day... [as well as] indispensable for raising and educating the children in whom the proletariat reproduces himself” (1336). Likewise, he credits the education system for enforcing the ideological constituents which structure society:

What do children learn at school?... they learn to read, to write, and to add – i.e. a number of techniques... which are directly useful in the different jobs in production (one instruction for manual works, another for technicians, another for engineers, a final one for higher management, etc.) (1337)

Kafka alludes to the bourgeoisie’s method of controlling the means of production, the resultant wealth, and their superior societal position through legal standing ISAs. As Grete and her mother attempt to take out the furniture from Gregor’s room, attention is brought to his writing desk:

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<sup>58</sup> “Ideological state apparatus;” a term used by Louis Althusser to describe legal standing institutions, i.e. church, school, political institutions, unions, media, art, etc.; see Althusser, Louis. “The German Ideology.” *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. By Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton &, 2010. 1332-1361. Print.

They were clearing his room out; taking away everything  
he loved... the desk at which he had done all his homework  
when he was at the commercial academy, at the grammar  
school before that, and yes, even at the primary school  
(104-5)

In is in Gregor's reflections concerning his desk that his having attended "the commercial academy" is revealed. This is suggestive of Althusser's contention that individuals are socially conditioned through the use of ISAs for specific fields of labor production, i.e. "manual works," or commercial traveling, and are thus, conditioned by the ideological superstructure<sup>59</sup> of capitalist society.

### **Relative Relations**

Marx contends that "by the action of modern industry, all family ties among the proletarians are torn asunder and their children transformed into simple articles of commerce and instruments of labor" (*Manifesto* 227). This distorted effect of capitalism on the state of the family unit is one that is illustrated through the Samsa's family relations both prior to, and after, Gregor's mutation. The salesman acknowledges the personal forfeiture of his life in the effort to fulfill his parent's debts. Yet, once Gregor becomes incapacitated, his father reveals their true financial situation as anything but "complete despair" (95). Despite the collapse of the family business, what amasses to a small portion of the company's assets had been retained. Further, money left over from Gregor's monthly check (money he had remained unaware of) had amounted to a small, but significant sum, an amount that could have "brought much nearer the day on which [Gregor] could [have] quit his job" (96). Thus, despite the fact that Gregor was the

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<sup>59</sup> Refer to Appendix, Figure 1: Karl Marx's Theory of Human Society.

sole provider for his household, he had retained the smallest portion of his check with his father privy to the knowledge that his son was making up for his failure as a member of the petite-bourgeoisie.<sup>60</sup> By forcing Gregor to work for his benefit, Mr. Samsa, grown “fat” and “sluggish” off his son’s labor, symbolically resumes his role of small time capitalist and directs himself according to this system’s exploitive ideology (97). This exploitation of children within the family unit is emphasized as Gregor’s parents take on their own methods of employment after their son becomes incapacitated. Led to believe that the conditions of their health prevented his parents from working, Gregor is stupefied by the change in their habits and appearance once he is unable to provide:

could this be his father? The man who used to lie wearily sunk in bed whenever Gregor set out on a business journey; who... shuffl[ed] laboriously forward with the help of his crook-handled stick which he set down most cautiously at every step... Now he was standing there in fine shape; dressed in a smart uniform... his black eyes dart[ing] fresh and penetrating glances (108)

As this passage reveals, Gregor’s father *miraculously* regains his health once the son is no longer able to provide. His incapacitating fatigue, i.e. “wearily sunk into bed,” subsides enough for the father to obtain a job as a bank messenger. At one time “shuffling laboriously” with the “help of [a] crook-handled stick” just in the effort to move “forward,” Gregor’s father now appears to have no problem in “standing,” striking his transformed son as “fresh” and “in fine shape.” Likewise, his “old mother... with her asthma, which troubled her even when she walked through the flat and kept her lying on the sofa every other day panting for breath” (97), is able to acquire

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<sup>60</sup> Petite-bourgeois; a term that refers to small-scale capitalists, such as small business owners, shopkeepers, and production overseers.

a home-based position “sewing for an underwear firm” (111). Thus, it appears that the extent of his parent’s physical and employment limitations subsisted only as long as Gregor was able to “set out on a business journey.” As individuals were removed from the process of labor in favor of productivity, their ability to distinguish themselves and others as viable members of humanity becomes compromised. Removed from the ability to transform, man regards himself as existing solely dependent on nature, subjective to its forces and external conditions. The incapability of Gregor to project himself as a reality onto products of his own making leaves him unable to verify his conscious. Thus, the individual now views himself, and others, not as masterful species beings, but as objects existing in nature, to be utilized like all the objects of nature, for physical subsistence and comfort. Thus, removed from their humanity by the constraints of capitalism, the patriarchal members of Gregor’s household exploit their son for their own physical comforts until his incapacity forces them to earn their own wages in the effort to survive.

The extent to which the Samsa parents are willing to exploit their offspring is further exemplified through Grete, who prior to Gregor’s change was “frequently scolded [by her parents] for being as they thought a somewhat useless daughter” (99). Though Grete secretly desires to study music at the “Conservatorium” (95), like her brother, her dream is abolished, so that she may serve as an objective means of producing capital. This is emphasized through the closing statements of the narrative:

[Gregor’s parents] became aware of their daughter’s increasing vivacity, that... she had bloomed into a pretty girl with a good figure. They grew quieter and half unconsciously exchanged

glances of complete agreement, having come to the conclusion that  
it would soon be time to find a good husband for her (132)

The parents' re-appraisal of their daughter is analogous to the assessment of a future investment by a banker. Grete is reduced from human being to a mere "medium of exchange;" the parents' "aware[ness]" of Grete is not the identification of her as an individual, as a co-member of the same collective species, but as an article of consumption, the tangible "existence of capital" (K. Marx, *Notes* 270). Subsequently, the daughter takes on the function of a commodity, "an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs whatever the kind" (K. Marx, *Capital* 123). Like any commodity, she is defined in terms of both her physical properties, i.e. "pretty" and "good figure," and the exchange value which these characteristics represent. The "increasing" in her "vivacity" is synonymous with the increase in wealth that she may derive from marriage to a "good husband." Thus, as capitalism leaves "no other nexus between men than naked self-interest," (K. Marx, *Manifesto* 211), the Samsa parents' usage of both siblings as a means to produce capital only serves to emphasize that "men making exchanges do not relate to one another as men" (K. Marx, *Notes* 267).

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The society which resided during the capitalist age of imperialism was one which lay in the wake of two worlds. Marked by a nostalgic awareness of the past, its members acknowledged a future which would forevermore circumvent history's retrieval. It was a society that witnessed the most radicalized developments in communication, transportation, and the process of production. It saw the advent of electricity and machines which would forever alter man's relations to his labor. It sprung to life the cultural era of modernism, thwarting traditional modes of representation in favor of ones which would capture the awestruck apprehensions of its



time. It observed, as machines produced products and while humans produced machines. It saw humanity lose its sense of self and species, with man now the commodity by which all commodities were to come forth.

Physically harmed, malnourished and isolated by his family, it was Gregor's conditions which represented those existing for the exploited members of imperialism's working class. As Gregor passively succumbs to death, it is revealed how capitalism's "unmeasured drive... shortens the life of the individual worker," physically and psychologically (K. Marx, *Capital* 377). Ultimately, both animal and human, Gregor represents the twofold spirit of man. His physical death, and unceremonious disposal, represents the destruction of the individual through glorified commerce and dissolved communication as brought on by technology and imperialism. Remaining restricted to a room with three exits, but no desire to leave, Gregor's plight only emphasized the alienated mental and spiritual conditions he experienced in human form. As represented by Kafka, and other modernist writers, the constraining forces of imperialism only succeeded in further distorting the fissures in man's natural-species dichotomy, as begun under the reign of market capitalism. Thus, reflecting those caught within the swelling dusk of imperialism's shadow, Gregor's example only serves to reveal that man, devoid of his species-self, is nothing more than an animal.

## CHAPTER III

### DELILLO: PORTRAITS OF POST-MODERN MAN

“In reality, late capitalism is not a completely organized society at all. It is merely a hybrid and bastardized combination of organization and anarchy”

- Ernest Mandel  
*Late Capitalism*

For almost half a century, critics and readers alike have turned towards the works of Don DeLillo to gauge the pulse of contemporary society. An author shaped real-time by the same conditions as his audience, his works have been considered both highly controversial and uncannily attuned to the times. Born, Donald Richard DeLillo in 1936, “Don” grew up in New York City, the resident of an Italian-American neighborhood in the Bronx. Like his predecessors, DeLillo was no stranger to a large family’s struggles in middle class society. The eldest of an eleven member household, both DeLillo’s mother and father immigrated to America from Molise, Italy as children. His grandfather a carpenter, his grandmother having never learned English, DeLillo’s father was considered a success when he eventually engaged a clerk position with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company of New York. As a boy, the author was raised a devout Roman Catholic, a belief system that would fade as an adult after concentrations into religion and philosophy. His youth spent playing sports with makeshift balls of wadded newspaper and tape, it would not be until late-adolescence that DeLillo would develop an affinity for reading, taking in the modernist works of such writers as Ernest Hemingway and

William Faulkner, while working as a summer parking attendant at the age of eighteen. As an average student with limited resources, DeLillo later enrolled in Fordham University, a local, but established institution, founded in the Jesuit tradition. Forced to walk to the university in order to attend class, DeLillo graduated in 1958, having earned a Bachelor of Communication Arts. However, unable to obtain a position in publishing, as originally desired, he accepted a job as a copywriter, producing image ads for Ogilvy & Mather, an international advertising agency based out of New York. It was during this time that DeLillo wrote “The River Jordan” (1960), a short story published in *Epoch*, an open forum literary journal founded by Cornell University. Despite having moved into a one room Manhattan apartment, one “so small that there was no stove, and the refrigerator sat in the bathroom” (Oakes n.pag), DeLillo quit his job in 1964, taking on work as a freelance writer in the effort to pay his rent. It wasn’t until two years later that he would begin work on his first novel, *Americana*, published in 1971, marking the beginning of what would prove to be DeLillo’s most productive decade. Ushering in such New Hollywood<sup>61</sup> film icons as Francis Ford Coppola, Stanley Kubrick, and Martin Scorsese, this period would also succeeded in directing DeLillo’s attention towards film, an appreciation he would later credit with influencing the visual nature of his writing. Shortly after penning *End Zone* (1972) and *Great Jones Street* (1973), DeLillo married Barbara Bennett, a bank financier who would later turn landscape architect. Married in 1975, the couple lived in Toronto, Canada, where Barbara worked at Citibank for a year. During that time the author produced the novel, *Ratner’s Star* (1976), which aside from impressing the literary community, would later be revealed to be DeLillo’s personal favorite. In 1978, shortly after the publication of *Players* (1977) and *Running*

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<sup>61</sup> A term coined to distinguish between the film production methodologies of “classical Hollywood” and those brought in by a new generation of moviemakers, i.e. Coppola, Kubrick, Scorsese, etc. Roughly lasting from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, this period witnessed a transition from independent film-making to studio system production, allowing for a heavier influence by film directors, as well as new developments in film content, marketing and production; also referred to as “American New Wave” or “post-classical Hollywood.”

*Dog* (1978), DeLillo was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship, the proceeds of which funded the couple's tour of the Middle East before settling down for a three year stint in Greece. Drawing on the luscious backdrop of the Greek peninsula, DeLillo produced *The Names* (1982), a fictional novel illuminating both native and foreign perceptions of American culture. It was also during this time that DeLillo wrote *Amazons* (1980), published under the pseudonym, Cleo Birdwell. Written in collaboration with Sue Buck, a former colleague, the novel was written as a fictitious autobiography authored by the first professional female hockey player, i.e. Cleo Birdwell. The only known work in which DeLillo used a pseudonym, the author later requested the novel's title be expunged from his lists of accomplishments. However, while DeLillo's works continued to gain credit in the literary community, it was not until the publication of his eighth novel, *White Noise* in 1985 that he truly gained authorial notoriety. Chronicling the influence of technology and consumerism over a modern middle class family, *White Noise*<sup>62</sup> would not only succeed in establishing DeLillo's reputation as a respected post-modern novelist but also earned him a large and loyal fan base. Further authoring *Libra* (1988)<sup>63</sup> and *Mao II* (1991),<sup>64</sup> the notoriety achieved by *White Noise* would only be superseded by DeLillo's eleventh novel *Underworld* (1997). A lengthy *Cold War* epic of more than one-hundred different characters, *Underworld*<sup>65</sup> is considered by most to be DeLillo's finest literary achievement, topping at number two on the New York Times Best Books of the Last 25 Years. However, later novels, including *The Body Artist* (2001), *Cosmopolis* (2003), *Falling Man*

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<sup>62</sup> He would also receive the National Book Award for Fiction.

<sup>63</sup> Generating both critical acclaim and heavy censure for its fictionalized account of the life of Lee Harvey Oswald, *Libra* would earn DeLillo the Irish Times Aers Lingus International Fiction Prize and a National Book Award for Fiction nomination.

<sup>64</sup> DeLillo received a PEN/Faulkner Award and Pulitzer Prize nomination for *Mao II*, which explored the role of both the novel and the novelist in a media society dominated by terrorist.

<sup>65</sup> DeLillo would also receive the American Book Award as well as another Pulitzer Prize for Fiction nomination (1998), the Jerusalem Prize (1999), the William Dean Howells Medal and the Riccardo Bacchelli International Award (2000).

(2007), and *Point Omega* (2010) would receive mixed to negative reviews, most said to be attributed to stylistic changes in DeLillo's writing.

Emphasizing such topics as media culture, technology, consumerism, and war, it is the current conditions of present day society that serve as the integral basis for Don DeLillo's work. However, the amorphous manner in which DeLillo styles his writing has left critics struggling to decipher the meaning behind that obscurity which typifies his texts. Literary critic, Jerry Varsava, has contended that DeLillo's works present themselves as a method by which to explore and critique the present conditions of rogue capitalism – the erratic behaviors expressed by the author's protagonists "inspir[ing] philosophical reflections and dialogues on history, futurity, [and] technology" (84). Other critics seek to stress the frictionless barriers between time and geography, as existing in many of the author's works. As postulated by Alison Shonkwiler, the lack of such boundaries is "not about failures of market regulation, for instance, or the growth of rogue capitalism... [but] a new cognition of the market" itself, one in which capital exists outside the previous methods of historical representation (254). Accentuating consumerism, Marc Schuster proffers that DeLillo means to "alter the ideological framework of society" (4) through literary art, using his texts to "reshape, if not entirely subvert, that [consumer] culture" which, according to Schuster, counters Jean Baudrillard's contentions for absolute through terror and eradication (7). Still, other theorist, such as David Porush, N. Katherine Hayles, and Randy Laist, seek to illuminate a connection between technology and the individual, offering that the relationship between DeLillo's characters and technology expresses society's desire for the "existential interface of individual and object" (Laist 13). It is credited that each of the previous analyses has succeeded in illuminating the significance of DeLillo's texts as they relate to specific aspects of society at present. However, an examination with

respect to current interpretations of the author's post-modern writings reveals in inadvertent deficiency with regards to how his works have previously been elucidated. That is, as a post-modern work generated during a pivotal moment of technological and commercial development, the physical and emotional isolation of DeLillo's characters in *Cosmopolis*, like those in *Moby-Dick* and "The Metamorphosis," achieve in reflecting the extreme severity of human alienation as experienced by individuals within our own consumerist society of late capitalism.

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Continuing from the 1940s until the present day, the last, or rather, most recent stage of technological development, as defined by Mandel, is characterized by the "generalized control of machines by means of electronic apparatuses (as well as by the gradual introduction of nuclear energy)" (121). Set three years prior to its publication in 2003, Don DeLillo's novel, *Cosmopolis*, contains multiple references to technologies which succeed in confirming its place within Mandel's "Third Machine Age" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 36). For example, the novel's protagonist, Eric Packer, is described as monitoring and conducting various company transactions on-board his high-tech stretch limousine. Outfitted with various electronic instruments, including "dashboard computer screen[s]... night-vision display... [and an] infrared camera situated in the grille" (11), these images resonate homologous to many of the devices now regarded as standard of many vehicles since the integration of onboard computer systems in 1969.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, the novel's characters are known to "talk most [electronic] systems into operation," a concept which articulates to an era of industrialization which has seen speech

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<sup>66</sup> Volkswagen's Type 3 E (*Einspritzung*) model, produced in 1969, was the first automobile to possess an onboard computer system (OBCS), used to scan and control the vehicle's electronic fuel injector; a universal OBCS, known as the On-Board Diagnostic (OBD-II) was later developed in 1980 by the Society of Automotive Engineers with the OBCS becoming mandatory in all new vehicles by 1996.

recognition and control evolve from Audrey's simplicity to Siri's<sup>67</sup> adaptability. However, while images of "cell phones," "voice-activated firearms" (18) and "nuclear bombs" (103) have succeed in designating DeLillo's text within the current phase of capitalism's development, these technologies seem other worldly in comparison to those instruments which inundated the spheres of *Moby-Dick* and "The Metamorphosis." This last stage is where the corporeality of Melville's wheelbarrow and the mechanical grandeur of Kafka's locomotive are formulated into the patterns and systems that pervade DeLillo's limousine. Rather, there exists an evolution in technology that is reflected in the nature of each text. The dominating physicality derived from the "wheeling" and "shifting" of Ishmael's simplistic wheelbarrow (Melville 65) recedes into the amenability produced by the motive force of Gregor's "train connections" (Kafka 68) and "railway timetables" (Kafka 76). This is only to contract further into detached passivity as experienced through the impalpable "wave" at the esoteric mechanism which automates Eric's "visual display units" and the metaphysical "pulsing" of its "polychrome numbers" (DeLillo 13). Thus, it is within the narrative of *Cosmopolis* that the most fundamental fissure between the individual and machine is expressed, one where "the omnipotence of technology elevate[s] it into a mechanism completely independent of all human objectives and decisions, [proceeding] independently of class structure and class rule in the automatic manner of natural law" (Mandel 503).

Concurrent to this tertiary wave of industrial evolution is an epoch of cultural production which Jameson terms, postmodernism. Again, as the literary critic and theorist denotes, this expression is "not just another word for the description of a particular style... [but] a periodizing

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<sup>67</sup> Siri, an intelligent personal assistant device introduced in 2010 by Apple, Inc., which utilizes natural speech recognition to perform actions via Internet-based services; Audrey, the first speech recognition system, designed and introduced in 1952 by Bell Laboratories, capable of recognizing numerical digits spoken by a single voice.

concept whose function is to correlate the emergence of new formal features in culture with the emergence of a new type of social life and a new economic order,” i.e. late capitalism<sup>68</sup> (*Consumer* 15). Generated in the flames of fire-hot industry, modernism revealed the individual’s struggle to discern their position within a faltering producer-product relationship. It expressed a people torn between eagerness and anxiety in the wake of rising capitalism with its products voicing the concerns of a society overwhelmed by the shadows of industrial giants. However, if modernism reflected humanity’s hesitation to clutch at the hem of change, postmodernism articulates a civilization well within the embrace of this industrial transition, one in which “all branches of the economy are industrialized for the first time” (Mandel 191). Issuing from an advanced state of capitalism’s development, postmodernism reflects a society confronted by unceasing technological transformation – a moment in which the producer’s alienation from their product has approached its zenith and where the individual remains void of “even a sympathetic participation... in [product] production” (*Cultural Logic* 317). At a moment when the very terms product and production retain a hazy definition at best, postmodern expressions, like *Cosmopolis*, exist as figurative speculums in which to explore the features of consumer society. Revealing “what happens to people when their relations to production are blocked, when they no longer have power over productive activity,” they succeed in illuminating the alienating effects of late capitalism on the postmodern individual (*Cultural Logic* 316).

### **Translations of Technoculture**

Staged within a bizarre conglomerate of seemingly parodic avant-gardism and techno-imagery, *Cosmopolis* begins with one, Eric Packer, a billionaire asset manager whose paramount

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<sup>68</sup>Also, referred to by Jameson as “multinational capitalism”; see Jameson, Frederic. “Postmodernism and Consumer Society.” *Postmodernism and Its Discontents: Theories, Practices*. By E. Ann. Kaplan. London: Verso, 1988. 13-29. Print.



wealth and overly superfluous lifestyle seemingly lead to a self-forged path of destruction and ruin. Rejecting the advice of his most trusted advisors, Eric proceeds, both literally and fiscally, to venture towards a long desired haircut – “He didn’t know what he wanted. Then he knew. He wanted to get a haircut” (7). The result of this day long quest is the financial devastation of Eric and his wife, the ravaging of his limousine, the death of his chief of security, and a fatal confrontation with an individual whose life Packer’s business ethics helped ruin. However, it is within the apparent superficiality and multi-form nature of DeLillo’s text that the “deeper logic of that particular social system,” i.e. late capitalism, is expressed (Jameson, *Consumer* 28). While Eric’s actions appear as nothing more than the capricious conduct of a “nihilist... capitalist pig” (Kakutani n.pag), they underscore the attempt of one seeking to rectify the emotional, spiritual, and mental estrangement brought on by the current conditions of postmodern society. Subsisting in a world inundated by a hyper-abundance of technology, Eric’s behavior is the symptomatic result of a civilization in which all facets of the human experience have been abstracted into a borrowed series of undefinable concepts. Thus, it through an examination of the mental and emotional state of Eric Packer, in relation to others as well as to his role within the late capitalist system, that the severity of human alienation, as existing in present day individuals, is revealed.

Having made his fortune decoding patterns, it is the financier’s struggle to interpret and define the fragmented parameters of postmodern civilization that spawns his anarchical attempt to reset the conditions of his existence within late capitalist society. Eric is the twenty-first century man, an asset manager, self-made, tech-savvy, and capable of spinning the system to his advantage. His is an environment in which information and communication equate to power – an era in which “people eat and sleep in the shadow of what [Eric and his associates] do” (14).

However, it is within the hi-tech circumvolutions of Eric's world that the greatest schism between the individual and the material is expressed, that the definitives regarding production, labor, and product have been entirely reconstituted.

Ironically, it is within the contracted space of Eric's limo that the means of labor<sup>69</sup> begin to express the limitless expansion indicative of the postmodern era. For example, when asked by his chief of technology why the day's events were to take place in Eric's limousine instead of their office, Eric replies, "how do you know we're in the car instead of the office?" as, according to the financier, "the word office [had become] outdated. It had zero saturation" (15). These statements stress the externalized reallocation of productive infrastructure as experienced within the late capitalist system. It is within *Cosmopolis* that the structural space of production is seen to have proceeded from that which confronts man directly, to indirectly, to not at all. Thus, the factorized configurations aboard *Moby-Dick's* ship, the *Pequod*, having metamorphosed into Gregor's externalized, yet, tangible commercial office, are now seen as having completed the full excises of agrarian<sup>70</sup> fetters. Passing into a form which possesses such fluidity as to render its definition to the point of abstraction, i.e. "zero saturation," the workspace of Eric's world now takes on the versatile locality of being "accessible nearly all the time... from the car, the plane, the office, and... apartment" (15). Likewise, the communications network of the third revolution has long since abandoned *Moby-Dick's* slow "year or two later" exchange of hand-written letters for the "latest whaling news" (Melville 262). Information now travels "live" and outside of time, with events dynamic "on one screen and prepared to die on another" (33). Thus, within the

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<sup>69</sup> Marx defines the *means of labor* as those tools, or instruments, needed to produce the product, as well as those infrastructures needed to carry out the production process, i.e. land, buildings, roads, communication networks, etc.

<sup>70</sup> Thus, the agrarian imagery which typifies Ishmael's world in *Moby-Dick*, i.e. "as morning mowers, who side by side slowly and seething advance their scythes through the long wet grass of marshy meads" (Melville 58), becomes the manufactures surfaces of Eric's world in *Cosmopolis*, i.e., "the tower gave him strength and depth. He...studied the mass and scale...an aura of texture and reflection" (DeLillo 9).

limousine's guise of spatial implosion, the once linear parameters of production disseminate unchecked within the web-like matrix that now dominates global society. However, as will be shown, it is the "increasingly abstract (and communicational) networks... of so-called multinational capitalism itself... which makes an older kind of existential positioning of [individuals] in Being... exceedingly problematical" (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 119).

It is within this latest industrial stage that conceptions of labor and its product are also redefined. As contended by Marx, true labor<sup>71</sup> only occurs when the "mental and physical capabilities existing in... the human being... produces a use-value of any kind" (*Capital* 270). It is by holding this definition as a standard that the deformation of labor and its product by the capitalist system can be assessed. For example, it is verifiable to say that through the commoditization and division of his activity, *Moby-Dick's* wage-laborer, Ishmael, existed as one estranged from both the goods which he produced as well as the full process of their manufacture, as resulting from such factors as division of labor. However, despite reassigning them to another, it cannot be denied that the result of his efforts was the tangible, viable spermaceti and ambergris used in "perfumery, in pastiles, precious candles, hair powders and pomatum" (Melville 446). Thus, in market capitalism, the notion of labor remains relatively unambiguous, with productive labor ultimately determined by the production of discernible, useful products. However, imperialism not only continues to see the continued warping of worker and product into commodities, but the distortion of labor itself. Although Gregor's job in "The Metamorphosis" succeeds in his "constant traveling" and "writing up orders" (68), the only materials he interacts with is "a collection of cloth samples" (67) which he neither produces nor

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<sup>71</sup> In later writings, Marx opts to use the term *labor power* over *labor*, distinguishing the latter term as the actual activity or effort utilized while creating the good, with labor power consisting both of the activity itself as well as the physical and mental capacity to carry out this process. However, as "labour itself...cannot be directly conceived... [without] labour-power" (K. Marx, ), the term labor is often used by Marxist critics in place of both.

transforms. Rather, his mental and physical capacities are utilized as only a segment of an overall production process, the result of which *is* a useful product, but one which is not the result of Gregor's direct activities, which by themselves are useless. Thus, by previous standards, his labor is unproductive, with Gregor demonstrating labor capacity but producing nothing useful directly. However, because the salesman's efforts "serve... exclusively the 'formal metamorphosis' of value, its realization, the ideal transfer of the right of ownership over [a] product from one person to another" (Rubin 271), his unproductive labor is validated. Thus, in imperialism, the verification of labor has been distorted to include both productive and unproductive activities as long as there is formed, either directly or indirectly, a useful product.

While the previous stages of capitalism may have disfigured society's relationship to its labor, it is within this era of late capitalism that both labor and product are perverted to the point of abstraction. As stated previously, Eric is a financial speculator. His job entails "interpreting the relationships between "ratios, indexes, [and] whole maps of information" (14). Thus, his *labor* derives from a prime ability to identify and manipulate the economic trends as existing within the numerical world of stocks and bonds, otherwise known as fictitious capital.<sup>72</sup> Rather, representing claims to capital that can only be generated from future production, fictitious capital is that capital which currently retains no material basis. Therefore, Eric's job relates not to the production of a good, but instead *speculates* on the future *generation* of a product, as it may or may not relate to the current processes of commodity exchange. Thus, the investment of the financier's capacities remains useless, as they can only produce the *idea* of a product and not a viable product itself. Eric's *labor*, which has already been abstracted once by existing as commoditized wage-labor, is, therefore, abstracted twice more – first, in that it relates to

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<sup>72</sup> As opposed to real capital, which is that capital invested in the physical means of production, such as workers, equipment, land, etc.

products which are useless as they do not exist, and second, as it attempts to exchange a product, i.e. his services, which in reality does not exist. Hence, if Gregor's labor confronted him as unproductive, Eric's labor can only be regarded as non-existent. For, if true labor is rendered useless by the lack of utility in its product, then lack of product can only indicate a lack of labor.<sup>73</sup> Thus, in late capitalism the abstraction of human labor power is complete, with non-products existing as products and non-labor existing as commodities. However, as will be shown, if the postmodern laborer's efforts can only confront him as an abstraction, then the individual's sense of both species and the self can only present itself as an abstraction as well.

### **The Other Half**

Until now, main emphasis has been placed on human alienation as experienced by those members of the working class, i.e. the proletariat. However, it is important to consider that capitalism's survival, as a dominant mode of production requires the reciprocal involvement of both bourgeois and proletarian, with each class responding to their given role accordingly. One division is needed to carry out the process of production, to function as a commodity through which to ensure the reproduction of other commodities. The other faction is needed to control the means of production, to serve as reinforcement of capitalist superstructure,<sup>74</sup> which through its governing ideologies, maintains capitalism's economic base. Yet, "if alienation is taken to be a set of relations between people and nature, both animate and inanimate, then many of the traits

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<sup>73</sup> Note, a product's intangibility does not necessarily indicate uselessness. Intangible items, such as music, can be used to stimulate the sensuous species powers of an individual. Thus, music retains use-value, simultaneously validating itself as a product and its producer's efforts as labor.

<sup>74</sup> As pertaining to Marx's base-superstructure theory of social arrangement, in which the economic base, as determined by the relations of production, supports and predominately defines the superstructure, or the "ideological forms" of society, i.e. "legal, political, religious, artistic, or philosophic" (K. Marx, Critique 21); see K. Marx. *Karl Marx: A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. Trans. S. W. Ryazanskaya. Moscow: Progress Pub., 1970. Print. Refer to Appendix, Karl Marx's Theory of Human Society.

observable in the proletariat can be found only slightly altered in other classes” (Ollman 154). Thus, the alienation that is bred in the worker through their association with this system must, by association with this same system, yield similar effects in the capitalist, whose functions are also appropriated by this structure. For, as contended by Marx, “everything which appears in the worker as an activity of alienation, of estrangement, appears in the non-worker as a state of alienation, of estrangement” (*Manuscripts* 84). Thus, it is by examining Eric as he relates to those elements which comprise his postmodern society that we can assess the heightened level of alienation as experienced by individuals within capitalism’s present developmental stage. As previously contended, it is only through the ability to transform the tangible world, to create (physically or intellectually<sup>75</sup>) through socially productive labor, that an individual achieves that actualization necessary for self and species identification. Rather, the formation of “the object [i.e. product], being the direct embodiment of [the individual’s] individuality, is simultaneously his own existence for the other man, the existence of the other man, and that existence for him” (*Manuscripts* 104). However, Eric’s attempts to establish self-identity through a fictitious product, i.e. his skill at predicting future commodities, can only result the appropriation of a fictitious version of himself.

As one who resides in the revolutionary world of late capitalism, Eric’s existence has become that “where what is animal becomes human and where what is human becomes animal” (K. Marx, *Manuscripts* 74). The advancement of automated technology, as well as the abstraction of products into commodities and capital into credit, has not only succeeded in distancing Eric from his ability to perform productive, meaningful labor, but has also obscured the standards by which labor itself is performed. Absent both his product and the ability to

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<sup>75</sup> As is the case with designers, musicians, artists, etc., who through their skill are capable of productive labor by producing that which stimulates the species powers, i.e. senses.

exercise his transformative capacities, Eric remains as one void of those unique identifiers which serve to distinguish the individual as a conscious, species being. Rather, he interprets himself, not as willful, organic entity – an organism singular over other organisms in his ability to exert sensuous powers – but, like Gregor, as one relegated back into a state of animal existence. This is best exemplified by observing the manners in which Eric reacts to his material world as well as to his own corporeal body. For example, there are multiple occasions in the novel where Eric displays a sudden urge to consume. Several times he is described with terms like “hungry and half starved” (64). He exists as one who desires “red meat... [with] grievous need” (14) and abandons those around him in search of “something thick and chewy” (17). Even the style in which Eric eats is bestial in its execution:

He ate quickly, inhaling his food. Then he ate [his wife’s] food. He thought he could feel the glucose entering his cells, fueling the body’s other appetites (18-9)

Eric’s primitive cravings to “eat all the time... [and] live in meat space” (64) are only outweighed by his constant desire to have sex, which he does - with his wife, his mistress, his bodyguard, and (by proxy), his chief of finance. This is all performed within a primitive array of “neural maneuver, of heartbeat and secretion, [and] some vast sexus of arousal” (48). However, while critics contend that such scenes succeed in confirming the “psycho-emotional gratification... [and] misconduct of the rogue capitalist” (Varsava 79), these descriptions serve to underlie the distortion of the financier from his species self, as exemplified by such animalistic terms as “starved,” “need,” “appetites,” and “arousal.” This concept of self estrangement is one that DeLillo’s text further explores using Eric’s body, for as Marx contends, one consequence of the individual’s alienation from their labor is that it “estranges man’s own body from him”

(*Manuscripts 78*). Equipped with a heart monitor and examination table, the businessman's limousine is a high-tech convertible clinic. In his vehicle, he can, and does, "see a doctor every day" (120). Through such innovations as electrocardiograms, he can sit "watching the computerized mapping of his heart" (44). However, Marx contends, "the object of labor is, therefore, the *objectification of man's species life*:<sup>76</sup> for he duplicates himself not only, as in consciousness, intellectually, but also actively, in reality, and therefore contemplates himself in a world he has created" (*Manuscripts 77*). In relating this conception to the financier, Eric, as was previously revealed, exists as one devoid of his product. Thus, he remains estranged from that object onto which he may project his species life, and by extension, his consciousness. Given the fact Eric creates no products, objects that through their physical reality subsist as tangible confirmations of Eric's existence – as first a species, as second a conscious being – then Eric can neither perceive a world that he has created, nor can he perceive actual reality. Thus, for Eric, viewing an image "only a foot away" has the flexibility to "assume... another context" (44). Knowingly, Eric's heart is a part of his body. In the anatomical sense, he is aware that his heart exists inside his chest, that "his life" is said to derive from that "beneath his breastbone" (44). However, unable to distinguish what he knows as true reality, technology allows for the conception of Eric's heart to appear as something which now exists outside his body as well. For Eric, this new perception of reality is one that's easier to internalize, as through his tools of *labor*, i.e. computer screen, data, etc., Eric has already come to interpret that which presents itself on a screen as *real*. The existence of his physical heart becomes the reality of an abstract picture, yet, it exists just as *real* to Eric as the "polychrome numbers pulsing" on his limo screens are *real* (13). Thus, as the financier stares at his heart on Dr. Ingram's monitor, the organ on the screen becomes the new reality, one that Eric confronts comfortably as "image forming units

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<sup>76</sup> Emphasis in the original.



hammering” on a monitor, the “throbbed” forcefulness of his heart not felt in his corporeal chest, but *felt* “forcefully on-screen” (44). This incapacity to define reality further accounts for Eric’s inability to come to terms with the asymmetry of his prostate. In reflecting upon his condition Eric states:

there was something about the idea of asymmetry. It was intriguing in the world outside the body... But when he removed the word from its cosmological register and applied it to the body of a male mammal, his body, he began to feel pale and spooked... A fear of, a distance from (52)

Again, having been alienated from his product, and likewise himself, this conception of asymmetry is one that conflicts with the only version of reality Eric can interpret. Deriving his living from distinguishing and interpreting visual, mathematical patterns, the conception of asymmetry, or that without pattern or form, is one that exists outside of Eric’s comprehension. It is a notion as removed from the financier as he is from the “cosmological register.” The businessman can only become uncomfortable when he is reminded of the asymmetry of his prostate, as this suggestion can only imply the existence of another reality outside the “image forming units” on a screen. If Eric accepts this reality of an asymmetrical prostate, then he must by turn reject the *reality* of his systematic world. Thus, suggestions of asymmetry as they relate to “his body” only succeed in inspiring an uncanny awareness, as indicated by Eric’s “feeling spooked” and “a fear of, a distance from” whenever this anomaly is mentioned.

It is through technology that Eric is able to discern just about everything, and yet, Eric reveals he can identify with nothing. He is *aware* his body consists of “neural maneuvers” and

“heartbeats” and “glucose entering... cells.” Yet, it is no more organic to the finance manager than are the terms which he uses to describe organic nature itself:

He looked... toward the stream of running numbers... figural diagrams that brought organic matter into play... data itself was soulful and glowing, a dynamic aspect of the life process... the zero-oneness of the world, the digital imperative that defined every breath of the planet’s living billions. Here was the heave of the biosphere (24)

These statements indicate the level of self-estrangement as experienced by individuals in postmodern society. Eric is not only unable to conceive of himself as a human individual, but to conceive of humanity at all. Rather, his reality is that which capitalism’s abstractions have created, or rather, an “aestheticizing of life” (Benjamin, *Art* 1070). Confronted daily by the commodities his society produces, Eric’s is a world in which “running numbers” and “data” give “life process” to his devices. It is an environment comprised of the “zero-oneness” that codifies his computers and displays. His biosphere is a technosphere and individual “consciousness” is regarded as that which can “live outside the given limits, in a chip, on a disk, as data” (206) – what Laist can only describe as “an existential interface of individual and object” (Laist 13). Thus, *Cosmopolis* reveals the severity to which technology has distanced the individual from his humanity by ultimately revealing that man has lost an understanding of what it means to be human at all.

As with Ishmael and Gregor, “an immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from... his species being is the *estrangement of man from man*”<sup>77</sup> (*Manuscripts* 78).

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<sup>77</sup> Emphasis in the original.

This is best indicated in the way the financier relates to both his employees and his family. For example, upon entering his limo and encountering Shiner, his chief of technology, Eric admits:

He did not look at Shiner anymore. He hadn't looked in three years. Once you'd looked there was nothing else to know. You'd know his bone marrow in a beaker (11-2)

This admission presents itself as shocking, especially in regards to an individual who had been with the financier “since the little bitty start-up” of their company (12). However, this is the same attitude Eric takes when he “look[s] past Chin,” his currency analyst, in favor of “numbers running in opposite directions” (24). Eric’s inability to associate with the members of his staff derives from both his position and experience within the base-superstructure of late capitalist society. As a member of the class that controls the hierarchal superstructure, i.e. bourgeoisie, Eric *naturally* views his employees as subordinate to him. Historically, the capitalist mode of production has always abstracted man-made products into commodities as a means of economic competition. Similarly, it has always replaced the use-value of these commodities with exchange value and converted human labor time into worker cost. However, it has only been since the advent of those technological forces as present within the era of late capitalism that the dominant mode of production has excelled to the degree that all products now present themselves as commodities. In the “frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 4), any trace of antiquated methods have given way only to be recycled in the hopes of looking fresh enough to turn a profit. The result of this commodity fetishism<sup>78</sup> is what Marx terms as reification, an objectification that ultimately succeeds in inverting the inherent characteristics of a subject with that socially defined economic

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<sup>78</sup> In reference to Marx’s notion of commodity fetishism, in which the desire for commodities as instilled by capitalism reigns so strong that this “fetishism...attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced [rendering them] as commodities, and is [now] therefore inseparable from the production” (*Capital* 165).

value which the subject appears to contain. Thus, in an era inundated with commodities, products are objectified into objects of value as opposed to objects of use, and individuals are reified into potential capital. As such, Eric, as a capitalist whose ideologies have been shaped and influenced by this socioeconomic environment, interprets his workers, not as fellow members of the human collective that is his species, but rather as objects of utility, ones which perform services in the effort to advance his capital. Thus, he does not “look at Shiner” because economically, everything Eric needs to “know” about Shiner is the sum total of what can be divined from examining his “marrow in a beaker” – Shiner exists; Shiner is capable; Shiner perpetuates Eric’s quest for capital. Thus, for Eric, and the society he represents, humanity is no longer an assemblage of the willful, unique members of a species, but the formation of capital, both future and present.

### **Simulacra of Society, Self and Species**

In postmodernism, cultural modes of thought and artistic representations articulate and express those elements which typify the late capitalist era.<sup>79</sup> Thus, having evolved within the spectrum of “late, consumer or multinational capitalism,” *Cosmopolis*, as a postmodern text, possesses those “formal features [which] in many ways express the deeper logic of that particular social system” (Jameson, *Consumer* 28). For example, though effects are minimized by the

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<sup>79</sup> As according to Jameson; the first element expresses itself as a lack of depth or presence of superficiality, where artistic production exists merely as *re-production*, or as simulacrum, in which the art exists as a copy of a copy, neither of which can be distinguished from the original. Second, “postmodernism is characterized by a waning of emotion or affect” (Ritzer 497), with the level of human alienation exists to such a degree that individuals become what Jameson refers to as *fragmented*, remaining “free-floating and impersonal” (ibid). Third, is a loss of historicity and an absence of historical development by society. Rather, artistic expressions merely reflect the disjointed conceptions of history as based on earlier forms of cultural production and those ideas/stereotypes which derive from such forms. Resulting is a “random cannibalization of all styles of the past” (Jameson, *Culture* 18), i.e. pastiche, as well as an unclear indication as to the passage of time. Fourth, is the dominance of *re-productive* technologies, as typified by electronic media such as television, which Jameson describes as that which “articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself” (qtd. in Ritzer 498).

longevity of its chapters and the brevity of its text, the temporally distortive technique used by DeLillo to structure his novel achieves several simultaneous effects. By disrupting the sequence of its chapters by preceding earlier events with later episodes, the text succeeds in both drawing out and minimizing the time spent by the reader in Packer's limo. As attention is shifted to chapters involving the later events of antagonist, Benno Levin, the audience is relieved from the monotony of a day-long limousine ride. However, having *stepped* momentarily out of the limo and into another chapter, the effect once the reader returns is that time has subsequently passed. Thus, the contention that Eric's journey takes a whole day becomes both believable, and palatable, for the novel's audience. However, as Jameson contends, the need to effect such distortions in temporality increases as the "postmodern period... eschews temporality for space and has generally grown skeptical about deep phenomenological experience in general" (*Cultural Logic* 134).

As a postmodern text, DeLillo's novel further lacks a standardized basis of stylistic comparison, expressing late capitalism's defunct baseline for what is normal and what is not. Rather, it exists as synthesized collections of various styles and forms – eclectic amalgamations of all artistic modes of production, with admission of anything and opposition to nothing. However, while these forms appear to extend their realist and modern roots into DeLillo's text, they refuse to come to fruition. For example, within DeLillo's novel there resides an element of *the hero* and *the quest*. In the form of a literary quest, the heroic protagonist usually assumes a long and arduously journey all in the effort to achieve an ardently sought after goal. *Cosmopolis* attempts to express this form as seen through Eric's novel length journey which maneuvers him through the cityscape of New York. Like the quest-hero, Eric purposely sets himself in the direction of one, lone goal – to get a haircut – "He didn't know what he wanted. Then he knew.

He wanted to get a haircut” (7). Before proceeding further, it is important to note that the term *haircut*, as it pertains to stocks and exchange, can be interpreted as slang for losing money. Thus, the goal which Eric seeks, i.e. a haircut, provides a duality to its interpretation, the term retaining the playful ambiguity in meaning, as indicative of postmodern text. As for any hero of a quest, Eric’s journey is long and winding, lasting the whole one “Day in April,” undergoing unexpected obstacles and detours extending the length and time of the hero’s travels (1). For example, at one point in his excursion, Eric is forced to “reroute” his limo, the President’s arrival in the city having unexpectedly resulted in “flood conditions in the streets ahead” (65). Thus, Eric is either forced to either abandon the most direct route to his goal, or pursue another path. Later, the financier’s limo is accosted and delayed by a group of anti-capitalist demonstrators, and then again by a lengthy funeral procession for the Sufi rapper, Brutha Fez. Proceeding through the “diamond district,” Eric encounters a street market resembling an old world bazaar (64). Confronted by Hasidim “in frock coats and tall felt hats” and “Yiddish blessings” (64) as well as “black men [wearing] signboards and [speaking] in African murmurs (65), like any good quest novel, *Cosmopolis* further attempts to deliver the cultural diversity required for the hero to encounter on his path, as principally suggested by the title of the text itself.<sup>80</sup> Yet, just as Eric reaches his destination, finding solace in the barber’s chair from his youth in which he begins to “escape... the long pall of wakefulness that had marked so many nights,” the quest fails (165). Had the purpose of Eric’s goal been to reconnect with his identity, his history, with society as he once knew it, his goal presenting itself in the form of an old fashion haircut given by a familiar family barber – then the quest fails. Eric flees with half a trim, never fulfilling the promise given to Anthony the barber that he, Eric, would “come back” (170). Likewise, if Eric’s goal was for a

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<sup>80</sup> *Cosmopolis* usually refers to an international city comprised of individuals from various cultures, ethnic backgrounds, etc.

*haircut*, that is, to distance himself from the sphere of revolving commodities and abstract definitions through self-induced financial ruin – then the quest fails. Eric is murdered, and his grieving wife is the princess the hero never gets. Alternately, *Cosmopolis* also contains thematic tones of *the romance*. Although the novel starts off with Eric in the singular expressing his desire for a quest, the surprise entrance of Elise into the text suggests an alternate shift in plot. Appearing throughout the text as contemporary star-crossed lovers, the multiple chance encounters of estranged husband and wife increasingly implies the optimistic ending indicative of romantic love. However, again, the novel is unsuccessful as it circumvents the optimistic and emotionally satisfying ending required of the romance when Eric is murdered. Thus, *Cosmopolis* not only seeks to demonstrate the constituent of postmodern pastiche, but also adheres to Lacan's rejection of the metanarrative by thwarting any attempt at an orthodox conclusion.

Sprung from a world which rejects any attempt at being defined, it is within *Cosmopolis* that word meaning undergoes the greatest degree of scrutiny as well. The language of the postmodern text now proceeds to mirror that fluidity and multiplicity which now defines the concepts of this new era. Providing a brief impression of the novel's protagonist, *Cosmopolis* begins:

Sleep failed him more often now, not one or twice a week but four times, five. What did he do when this happened? He did not take long walks into the scrolling sawn... Freud is finished. Einstein's next (5-6)

This passage serves as a revelatory expression of the individual's inner state, as conditioned by late capitalist society and represented by the character, Eric Packer. The businessman is

acknowledged as unable to sleep on a regular basis, i.e. “sleep failed him more often now.” Logically, this issue can be regarded as the negative effect of managing the financial assets of various entrepreneurs, for as stated by Marx, “the capitalist’s mania to get rich... can only [be] satisf[ied] by the sacrifice of his body and mind” (*Manuscripts* 23). However, when this account is taken in conjunction with the latter assertion that “Freud is finished,” Eric’s inability to sleep exists as more than a depiction of one suffering from the stresses associated with high risk investitures. In referencing the psychoanalyst in combination with sleep, or lack thereof, the novel seeks to suggest Freud’s theory of the unconscious. Postulating the individual’s ability to access their unconscious<sup>81</sup> mind in the dream state, Freud contended that dreaming allowed for the individual to acknowledge, and figuratively achieve, innate desires without fear of social repercussion. Thus, it is through dreams that an alienated individual, like Eric, would be able to identify with that portion of themselves as remaining untainted by the superstructure<sup>82</sup> of society. However, it is important to consider that the use of Freud’s name, as it is applied here, can be interpreted as referencing either the man himself or the history and principle of psychoanalysis as a whole. Thus, it can be conjectured that this statement alludes to both the theorist and the discipline, with Freud the man having *finished* his role with regards to the psychoanalytical theory of the unconscious. However, if Freud is finished, who comes after? The text provides multiple answers this question. Directly, it states that “Einstein is next.” However, indirectly it suggests his colleague and successor, Carl Jung, who further subdivided Freud’s concept of the unconscious into two distinct layers – the personal and the collective. With the personal

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<sup>81</sup> Freud recognizes the unconscious as that portion of the human psyche containing ideas and desires innate to the individual but unrecognized due to their antagonistic position in relation to socio-ideology.

<sup>82</sup> Refer to Appendix, Figure 1: Marx’s Theory of Human Society.



unconscious functioning in the same capacity designated by Freud,<sup>83</sup> the collective unconscious “has contents and modes of behavior that are more or less the same everywhere in all individuals... identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature” (Jung, *Archetypes* 4). Rather, it is comprised of all the inherited materials, or archetypes,<sup>84</sup> as specific to and shared amongst all members of the human species. Subsequently, given the fluidity of postmodern text, Eric’s inability to sleep may symbolize the protagonist’s inability to connect with the duality of his unconscious, and thus, that portion of himself which contain knowledge of both his individual and species identity. However, if assuming that the moniker Einstein, like Freud, can provide more than one interpretation, then this statement may reference the ascendancy of scientific theory over metanarrative human studies, or further, that the time of Freud and Einstein have past and a new era is ushering in, i.e. “Freud is finished. Einstein’s *next*.” Thus, postmodern texts, like *Cosmopolis*, suggest “that [society] cannot know the world and its totality in some abstract or ‘scientific’ way,” with the cultural products of postmodernism existing as signifiers for the dissolution of cultural and individual autonomy, as resulting from late capitalism (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 52).

### **Revolution Revolutions**

In his treatise, *The Communist Manifesto*, Marx contended that “in times when the class struggle nears the decisive hour... a small section of the ruling class cuts itself adrift and joins the revolutionary class” (219). Rather, some members of “the bourgeoisie goes over to the

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<sup>83</sup> Jung agreed in viewing the unconscious as containing information that has been repressed or forgotten, as well as a major determinant in individual personality. However, he did not assent to the premise of sexuality as the cognitive base of unconscious reasoning, as largely contended by Freud.

<sup>84</sup> Jung defines *archetypes* as “universal images that have existed since the remotest times... an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious and by being perceived,” adapting its meaning from the “individual consciousness in which it happens to appear” (Jung, *Archetypes* 5).

proletariat...hav[ing] raised themselves to the level of comprehending theoretically the historical movement as a whole” (219). Considered by many to be the highest, if not the last, stage of capitalism’s development, Eric Packer appears as one of the “ruling class that cuts itself adrift.” In calculated fashion, he purposely sets about losing all his wealth, as well as that of his bourgeois wife. For a moment Eric is the “revolutionary,” the privileged who decides to take up the proletarian banner. For one an instant he is “starting over broke,” exchanging his limo and “hailing a cab” (209). Then, abruptly, it all ends. Eric, the hero, “closes his eyes one more time,” and then he dies... but not before he says “maybe he didn’t want that life after all” (209).

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It is present society which continues to witness the unrelenting force of the technological revolution. It is one which the globalized vision of market capitalism and imperialism have been realized, with the expansion of communication, transportation, labor and production now making its way off the globe altogether. It is a time when the concept of time itself has become flexible, existing as *real* or *virtual*, and quantified by minutes, hours, zones, and hemispheres. It is a moment where face-to-face has evolved to include screen-to-screen, and where the loss of history extends to the ability to perform even the easiest task. It is a society that has given rise the cultural era of postmodernism, a form whose ideology is the “end of ideologies,” and where its lack of definition only succeeds in mirroring the lack of determinants in everyday existence (qtd. in Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 159). It is a society where the commodity has become the mediator and where labor and product, value and humanity, exist in abstraction like undefined dreams.

As a postmodern text, DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* provides much in the way of describing the individual’s condition under the technological and developmental forces of late capitalism.

Caught within a mazed world of indefinable abstractions, Eric is the late capitalist individual of present day society. He is bourgeois, but must sell his labor. He sells his labor, but produces nothing. Swayed by the demand of fictional commodities – he is human, he is animal, he is abstraction, and machine. Yet, he is also the postmodern man, struck by the indifference which now typifies this new age. It is man's ability to shape his environment that makes him master of his world. It is man's relation to himself that allows for his connection to other men. In the society's attempt to rediscover its humanity, it has fashioned its heroes to sally the way. Ishmael tried and he failed. Gregor tried and he died. Eric tried, and before he died, it seems he just gave up. Thus, as capitalism proceeds to alienate man from himself, man is left waiting for his humanity once more.

## CONCLUSION

“society...has conjured up such a gigantic means of production and exchange, it is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells”

- Karl Marx  
*Manifesto of the Communist Party*

Since its establishment as the dominant mode of production, capitalism has proceeded to alter and distort man’s relationship to both the material world and himself. Advanced labor division and the mass production of goods, as precipitated by unrelenting innovations in the instruments of production, has succeeded in estranging humanity from that which serves to identify its members as both individuals and a collective species. However, the mutualistic relationship between capitalism and technology has allowed for the continued perpetuation of this system’s self-serving methodology. Advanced and maintained by technological improvements, the capitalist system has increasingly produced individuals alienated in their own material existence while veiling this effect within the deified shadows of civilized progress. Yet, with wave of development there has proceeded a culture whose products capture the effects of capitalism on society. Generated during specific moments in this system’s development, i.e. market capitalism, imperialism, and late capitalism, the literary products proceeding from the cultural eras of realism, modernism, and postmodernism, respectively, reflect humanity’s progression into its current abstracted and alienated state, as confirmed by the preceding analyses of *Moby-Dick*, “The Metamorphosis,” and *Cosmopolis*.

Examination of the individuals and societies presented in the works of Herman Melville, Franz Kafka, and Don DeLillo has exposed the estranging influence of capitalism's forces on humanity, as existing within each stage of this system's development. However, consideration of these texts in relation to each other has further revealed an overall increase in the levels of human alienation as proceeding from market capitalism to imperialism to present socioeconomic conditions. Thus, it is via the intertextual examination of *Moby-Dick*, "The Metamorphosis," and *Cosmopolis* that the connection between escalating levels of human alienation and the continued development of industrialized capitalism emerges, a relationship which expresses itself not only throughout the body of each text – through the mental, emotional and spiritual conditions of their characters as they relate to their respective worlds and to themselves – but within the very notion of *the body* itself. For, it is within these works that the corporeality of each protagonist comes as a physicalized symbol of alienation, a representation of humanity's increasing abstraction from reality as resulting from the ongoing estrangement of man from that which defines his reality – labor.

It is within the beginning stages of capitalism, as experienced by the individuals of early industrial society, that *Moby-Dick*'s Ishmael exists as the being most physically present and physically connected to "fixed reality" (29). He is one whose tangible, palpable connection to labor and product is enough to preserve at least a partial bond between self and species, a fairish connection to individuality and will, as demonstrated by the active attempt to escape capitalism's rising influence by going "to sea as soon as [he] can" (1). Ishmael's body, as it relates and adjusts to its external environment, is representative of a society still in moderate connection to natural reality while confronted by those industrial forces that seek to alter the definition of reality. Thus, it is in Melville's realist text that the ostensive physicality of Ishmael, as he moves

through, interprets and attempts to consciously transform “the whole surrounding world of [his] everyday reality” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 34), that the lowest levels of human alienation are symbolized, with the grade of Ishmael’s and, likewise, humanity’s estrangement hindered only by the limited scope of industrialized progress as it existed within the era of market capitalism.

Subsequently, it is within the secondary phase of industrialized capitalism’s development that the immediate physicality of Ishmael gives way to the distorted vagueness that is Gregor’s presence in “The Metamorphosis.” Gregor is one where the deformed definition that is his body proceeds to mirror the warped definitions of labor and product, a distortion of that which affirms species and self, as brought on by advancements in mechanized production. The manifest form of his body is representative of a humanity caught within the “peculiar overlap of future and past” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 309). As such, the acquiesced condition of Gregor’s transformation remains figurative of a society which simultaneously recognizes the disfigurement of capitalism’s effects, but assents to the futility of trying to “restore all things to their real and normal condition” (73). Thus, it is within Kafka’s modernist text that the active physicality of realism’s body takes on a detached and limited presence of modernism’s figure, with Gregor’s isolated and distanced place in the world, serving to symbolize the escalating degree of human alienation as perpetuated by the industrialized forces of imperialist capitalism.

Lastly, it is within the current phase of capitalism’s development that the protagonist from DeLillo’s *Cosmopolis* comes as the individual most abstracted and most alienated in form – where the physical presence that is Ishmael, and the languishing essence that is Gregor, finally succumb to the surreal existence that is Eric as he resides in late capitalism’s “new and fluid reality” (83). Subsisting as one whose fabricated relationship to false labor and product have abstracted all dimensions of that which defines the world and existence, it is through Eric that

tangible delineations of the body in its authenticity are fully abstracted into undefined concepts of the body in unreality. His presence is the intangible notion of “image-forming units” (44) – a conception of “body isolated in space” (140) – which mirrors the totalized abstraction of man from species and self, as caused by the wayward proliferation of surging technology. As such, the virtuality of Eric’s body remains representative of a society which no longer recognizes “the *derealization*<sup>85</sup> of the whole surrounding world” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 34). Thus, the discomfort of Eric with his body’s asymmetry is reflective of humanity whenever it is reminded of the “anti-natural power of dead human labor stored up in our machinery – an alienated power... which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms” (Jameson, *Cultural Logic* 35). Subsequently, it is in DeLillo’s postmodern text that the levels of human alienation are revealed as having escalated to their highest degree, with the abstracted condition of Eric’s existence reflecting a humanity estranged by the unrelenting technology as present within late capitalist era. Thus, by taking each symbolization of the body in conjunction, these texts proceed to reveal the continued abstraction of man from his species and self, with each character standing as the social figurehead for collective humanity at various stages of its alienation.

The relational understanding between technological advancement and the features of cultural production have allowed for literature to reside as a means by which to examine the effects of capitalism’s development on society and the individual. However, it is important to note the limits of such introspection, as the relation of art to socioeconomic conditions can no more generate a perception of the future than can the individual’s best estimation of what happens after death. In his treatise, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility*, Walter Benjamin states, “Marx adopted an approach which gave his investigations prognostic value... he presented them in a way which showed what could be expected of capitalism in the

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<sup>85</sup> Emphasis in the original.

future... the creation of conditions which would make it possible for capitalism to abolish itself' (1051). However, as the nature of any form of art can only be understood once it has been generated, with the production of any form of art only proceeding from the present to the past, there can be no definitive understanding of the future. Those artistic forms of production that may fundamentally reveal the societal conditions of a futuristic phase have yet to come into existence. Thus, the understanding of society through art as a cultural reflector remains roughly limited to the present at best, with any affirmation of Marx's future vision of humanity through an examination of art remaining forever speculative. Whether the incoming modes of representation will succeed in giving witness to the absolution of capitalism as the dominant mode of production, this is a future that can only be revealed after the fact. For now, one can only be assured that when postmodernism makes way for another cultural dominant, a new era will be underway, and as always, its products will come in a form which will serve to further complete the puzzle that is humanity's chronicle.



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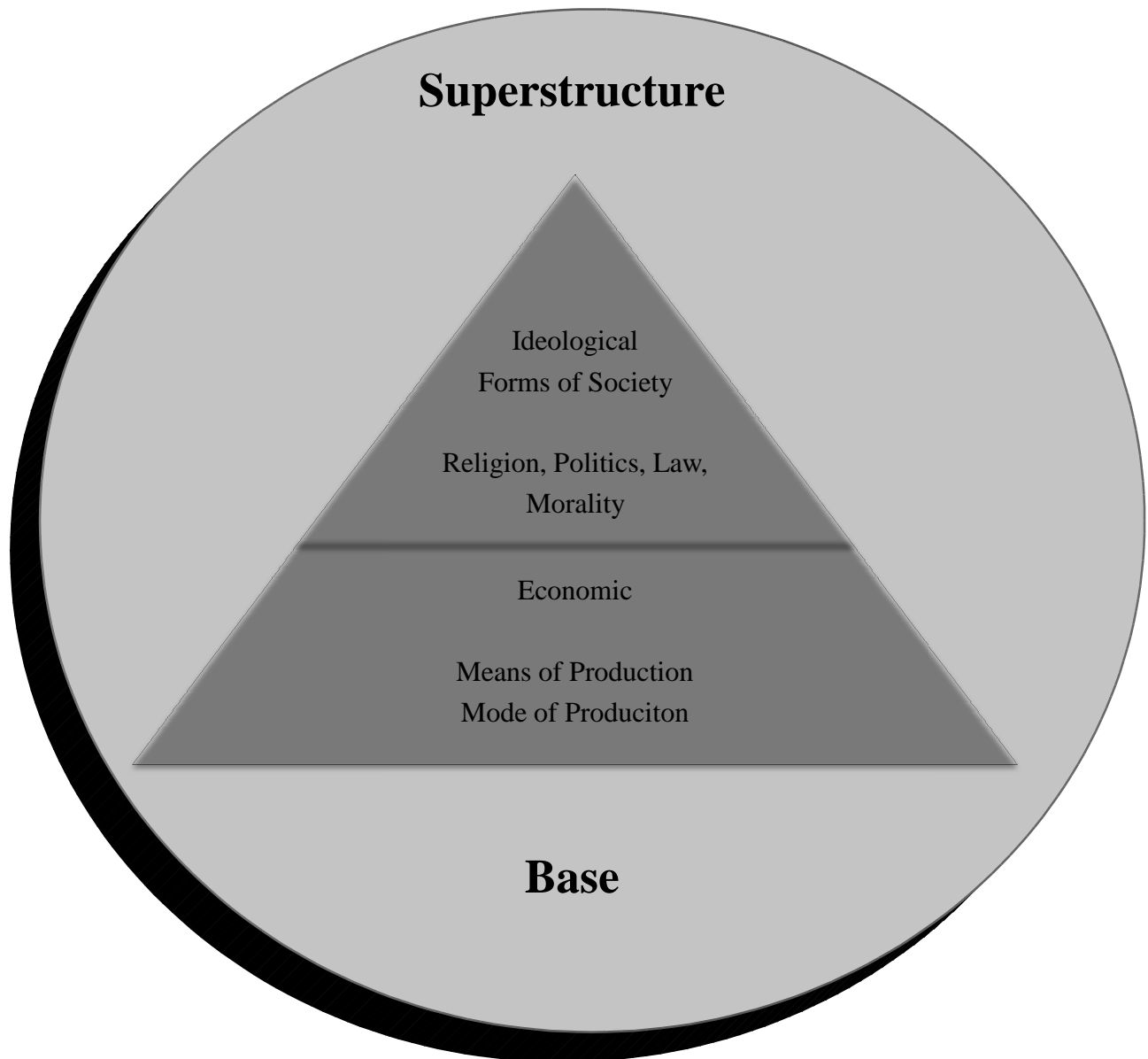
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## APPENDIX

APPENDIX

FIGURE 1: KARL MARX'S THEORY OF HUMAN SOCIETY



## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Samantha J. Amberson-Dominguez earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in English from The University of Texas Pan-American in 2005, with minors in Biology and Chemistry. In 2011, she joined the Masters Program and received her Masters of Arts degree in English in 2014 from The University of Texas Pan-American.

While pursuing her degree, Mrs. Amberson-Dominguez worked as science instructor at Dorothy Thompson Middle School for the Progreso Independent School District. During this time, she served in the capacity of Science Department Head for over five years and has actively held the position as a member of both campus and district, Site Based Decision Making Committees, since her employment in 2005. She currently maintains her positions within the district.

Mrs. Amberson-Dominguez's thesis, *Mirrors of Mechanized Man: Capitalism and Intertextuality as Represented in the Works of Herman Melville, Franz Kafka and Don DeLillo*, was supervised by Dr. Shawn Thomson.

In the future, Mrs. Dominguez plans to continue working with Progreso ISD while pursuing her doctorate.

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