

Capital's Division of Social Life - Postliterate - Medium

By Postliterate

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Capital — the accumulation of “dead labor” — in its first steps, had to create the category of “labor” altogether to generalize it across the global population. By cutting into social relations to enforce its all-encompassing value-form, it created the largest divide between economic and social life yet; from here, the study of political economy could proliferate freest.

Furthermore, by making this cut, it segregated life into two opposing sides: labor and leisure. Leisure, of course, existed long before capital, as did labor, but it is only under capitalism that labor became the utterly atomized object of daily life, split from the rest, and transforming what used to be leisure for its own sake into leisure for labor's sake (not only did life become built around quantified hours of labor, but labor itself became an abstracted, purely quantified activity — “time is money.”) In short, capital's great cut made a split in daily life which caused great harm to either side of the divide; this harm was caused not by the act of compartmentalizing these sides itself, but by cutting, ultimately, in service of the great process of value extraction.

It is from out of this split, too, that capital's traditional gender roles emerged: the masculine had to fulfill the compartmentalized labor category, and the feminine the leisure category. For the technology of the time, neither could be separated lest value-form extraction be endangered by human will. Moreover, the masculine would embody the cold, calculated hand of “progress” (pure rationality), and the feminine the warm, frivolous body of idleness; in short, the basis for sexism, misogyny, etc.

The point at which the latter category of capital — leisure — would too become understood as merely irrational and unnecessary (rather than supporting), was an inevitability only temporarily stunted by the technology of the time. It was only with the rise of neoliberalism, capital's newest stage of development, that in the first world, the factory could be replaced with the office and fashioned with comfortable chairs, streams of ash and machinery replaced with safe cubicles and a quiet environment, hands-on physical labor replaced with sedentary stillness. These offices, still miserable, could also be furnished with motivational speakers, bosses who try to be “friends,” employee wellness seminars, or even diversity training.

From here it was most feasible to transform the category of leisure again, thus turning all of the efforts towards shortening the work day to 8 hours effectively useless. Indeed, such a victory of reform was always in peril because it was unable to free itself from capital altogether. So the next day, when capital re-transforms itself, all previous reforms become obsolete.

The new transformation of leisure has been effectively the abolition of leisure. Work is treated by employers no longer as clock-punching but as contribution to a “family.” As I've stated before → <https://medium.com/@postliterate/notes-8-9-22-219706ddae12>, in the Fordist model, employers exercised control over the *body*, over one's labor-power; in the post-Fordist model, further extraction of value is found through control over the entire *soul* of the employee. They are encouraged to identify personally with their companies, to see themselves as “members of a family,” and can thus be edged to do more work overtime or even off the clock. Vacations, days offs, etc. can all be gradually scrapped as work becomes the sole identifier in one's self; to rest would imply one has some necessary life outside of work, whilst work would be all they are.

The death of this split has, as was implied, caused the current shift in gender roles — that is, away from the traditional and essentializing polarity between masculine and feminine (neoliberal titan corporations thus embrace it, even if only superficially.)

The way out of capital's crisis is out of the categories of labor and leisure altogether — particularly labor — which itself will likely precipitate the development of new gender roles as well. However, the current deterioration of this polarity in gender roles is a positive embryonic form for what will be a new freedom in this field of social life.