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Carson Kindred April 2, 2025

The Atomized Worker: A New Form of Labor After the Neoliberal Turn

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Abstract

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This project theorizes the existence of the Atomized Worker: a new kind of educated, non-managerial knowledge worker created after the rise of neoliberalism whose work is characterized by insecurity, and involves a unique investment of affect and selfhood. I argue that because of these characteristics, Atomized Workers engage in a distinct form of labor, but that these workers do not yet constitute a social class of their own. In Section One, I chart the origins neoliberalism, from Taylorism and scientific management to the collapse of Fordism, and argue that the changing managerial ideology of the late 20th century created the conditions from which the Atomized Worker could arise. In Section Two, I examine the new world of work created by the neoliberal era, and argue that while the experience of work has changed across the board, its effects are most pronounced on the positions occupied by Atomized Workers. In Section Three, I elaborate on the experience and uniqueness of the Atomized Worker, and argue that because of their individualized condition, they do not yet have the power or cohesion of a socioeconomic class. Finally, I conclude with a discussion of the social and political importance of the category of the Atomized Worker, and argue that despite their lack of direct organizational power, Atomized Workers have the potential for solidarity.

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I would like to thank my parents, who have taught me the joy of learning and instilled within me a passion for inquiry.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In a memo released in 1992 entitled "The Organization of the '90s," McKinsey and Company — now a notorious consulting firm that exemplifies the rise of finance capitalism — makes the claim that "something new is afoot."[1] As they observe, "Any recent survey of contemporary organizational thinking would reveal such terms as the borderless, networked, inverted, empowered, and non-hierarchical organization."[2] While this terminology might immediately seem devoid of content, the underlying message is clear: the Fordist era of rigidity and technological expertise in management has come to an end, and a new conceptualization of capitalism has taken over.

This new variant of capitalism, and its effect on workers, has been defined in several ways, but all seem to agree that this new paradigm has brought about a profound change in the world of work. Ulrich Beck characterizes the shift as the rise of a "network society."[3] Boltanski and Chiapello conceptualize the change as the emergence of a new spirit of capitalism, one that has affected nearly all aspects of social existence.[4] Central to the argument that there exists a new capitalism is the fact that the nature of work has changed significantly since the 1970s. As evidenced by McKinsey's 1992 memo, new capitalism has challenged existing frameworks for management, and prioritized the values of flexibility, adaptability, networks, and self-reliance. As Jorg Flecker notes, "Today, the shift to services and the tertiarisation of manufacturing in the so-called knowledge economy accelerate the spread of digital work and intensify the worldwide competition between educated workers, the global 'cybertariat.'"[5]

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[1] Steven F. Dichter, "The Organization of the '90s" (New York: McKinsey & Company, March 1992), 2.
[2] Ibid, 2.
[3] Beck, "The Rise of Network Society," 14.
[4] Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (London New York, NY: Verso, 2007), 120.
[5] Jörg Flecker, ed., *Space, Place and Global Digital Work* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 2, https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-48087-3.

Some scholars on work, most notably Kathi Weeks, have argued that in order to conceptualize a critique of work (in fact, to bring about "the end of work") we must place class on the sidelines and instead question the issues of work and labor more universally.[6] There are some on the left, such as Vivek Chibber, who have sought to address this issue of the backgrounding of class, and argue that by bringing class rhetoric back into the conversation we will be able to return to the materialist politics that characterized successful socialist campaigns of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.[7]

But we cannot bring class back into the conversation when it does not exist in the same way as it once did. As Weeks rightly observes, the contemporary divisions of labor are fuzzier than they were during the Fordist period, and Orthodox Marxists' attempt to fit all aspects of modern existence into the relation of the industrial proletariat and the bourgeoisie is of little use. However, abandoning the question of class prevents us from examining the nuances of the contemporary landscape of work. Simply because class lines are not neatly bifurcated does not mean that the experience of class and the importance of analyzing socioeconomic differences have gone away. Most importantly, we lack the language necessary to conceptualize a growing category of laborer: the educated, non-managerial knowledge worker who is underpaid, exists in a state of insecurity, and who has become fluent in the affective language of contemporary work. These workers do not conceive of themselves as members of a class — nor do they currently constitute one — because they are encouraged to live as "entrepreneurs," and have been fed a culture of individualism that distracts them from the fact that they represent a growing category of laborer across industries.

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[6] Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Duke University Press, 2011), 17, https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822394723.
[7] Vivek Chibber, *The Class Matrix: Social Theory after the Cultural Turn* (Harvard University Press, 2022), 21, https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674269835.

This paper is dedicated to understanding how this new category of labor, the one performed by the "Atomized Worker," came about. Specifically, it seeks to examine both the collective and systemic creation of this form of work — from the neoliberal deregulation of the 1970s to the contemporary language of organizational management — and the subjectivity Atomized Workers experience: precarity, isolation, obsession with work, and the aestheticization of labor.

The term Atomized Worker was chosen carefully, however it is still is in danger of being imprecise and misunderstood. To clarify my meaning, I use "worker" to emphasize that I am making a claim about a form of labor, not a distinct social or economic class. These workers exist across the economy, as the type of work they are engaging in exists in many industries, from marketing to health insurance to information technology. Physically, the majority of their work involves working at a desk, on a computer. They may meet with members of a team or project — though this is primarily done online — and engage in little travel to do their work. Content wise, their work involves a diverse number of skills and specializations, as many of them have been college educated with resumes tailored towards specific positions. Common among them, however, is the fact that they do not view their jobs as permanent, are subject to layoffs (or at least the threat of termination), do not hold a great deal of autonomy over their work lives, and engage in work that relies a great deal on their communicative and affective faculties. Affect, in this case, refers to the experience or sensation which underlies emotions, moods, and feelings, and which is not fully understood by the subject but it is felt and embodied. Affective investment into labor is a key component of the experience of the Atomized Worker, and refers to the emotive and psychological effort that they are conditioned to put into their work.

This aspect of their labor is what sets Atomized Workers apart from members of the professional and managerial classes, who hold greater autonomy, security, and the working classes, who engage in work that involves a lower degree of intellectual and affective investment, and who have greater potential to achieve a class identity through workplace organization and unionization.

Second, "atomized" refers to the fact that these workers increasingly experience work as an individualized experience. Atomization refers to the process of dividing a whole into disparate parts. Socially, it can be understood as the act of individualizing members of a collective. In this sense, Atomized Workers are a group of laborers who were created by the Post-Fordist shift undergone by capitalism and the new world of work it brought about. Entire strata of workers who, in years past, would have had a greater degree of security and means of advancement are now put into competition with one another, and encouraged to view themselves as "entrepreneurs." As Byung-Chul Han conceptualizes it, the neoliberal subject is forced into an "inner struggle against oneself" created by the new conditions of labor which enforce the "*solitude* of an entrepreneur who is isolated and self-combating."[8] The Atomized Worker may collaborate with a team, but they are judged individually, and are keenly aware that how they are individually perceived will make or break their potential for achieving a promotion.

Further exploration of the Atomized Worker, their experience of work, and their distinction from other types of laborers will be explored in Section 3. Before then, however, it is necessary to justify why Atomized Worker should exist as a category, and what distinguishes it from other contemporary attempts to describe the new landscape of work. The concept of class has been problematized by the neoliberal shift, and existing terminology that seeks to name the

[8] Byung-Chul Han, *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and New Technologies of Power*, trans. Erik Butler, Verso Futures (London New York: Verso, 2017), 17.

new class(es) of worker created by this development struggle to justify their existence as actual class categories. Most notably, Guy Standing's definition of the "precariat" and Ursula Huws' notion of the "cybertariat" have sought to frame the new dynamics and experiences of work in class terms. However, rather than actually naming a new socioeconomic class, the dynamics of work encapsulated by these categories cut across class lines.

Standing himself describes how the precariat is "far from being homogenous," but argues that they all "share a sense that their labour is instrumental (to live), opportunistic (taking what comes) and precarious (insecure)."[9] This categorizes members of the working class (hospitality workers working seasonal jobs, and servers being laid off from failing restaurants), as well as recent college graduates struggling to find a stable job with their degree. In other words, though they share similarities, they have a wide range of class identities and differing levels of social capital that makes analyzing them together unfruitful.

Rather than orienting our analysis of modern capitalism around the broad and varied experience of precarity, we should direct our attention to the new type of laborer created by the rise in new technologies, the emphasis on communication and flexibility, and the growth of non-materially productive industries. Atomized Workers are a worthy subject of analysis not simply because of the novelty of the form of work they engage in, but also because they represent a growing number of laborers with uncertain futures, an inability to define their lives outside of work, and relatively little potential for collective organization. The political and organizational prospects of the Atomized Worker will be explored in the conclusion. First, it is necessary to examine how the shift to neoliberalism created the conditions which gave rise to the Atomized Worker.

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[9] Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 14, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781849664554.

Section One: Origins of the New Paradigm

1.1 Taylorism and the Creation of Organized Labor

The new economic and cultural ideology that emerged in the 1970s was not simply a natural development of capitalist logic. To understand what distinguishes this era — both economically and what it means for our conceptions of class and work — I will lay out a brief history of capitalist development. Liberal capitalism, which describes the imperial capitalist project of the 19th century, was associated with free trade within and between nations.[10] This was the capitalism of Marx' era, and it saw the first wave of industrialization and the formation of the productive working class. Liberal capitalism also gave rise to scientific management, as capitalists sought to develop a methodology for organizing and controlling the newly created industrial workplace.

The most notable theorist of scientific management was Frederick Winslow Taylor, an American mechanical engineer. Taylor believed in the "original sin and stupidity of the worker," and believed that management was the only way to get workers to work efficiently.[11] As he argued, workers should ". . . do what they are told to do promptly and without asking questions or making suggestions."[12] Taylorist organization was characterized by the division of labor, the structure of control over workers' task performance, and the employment relationship between manager and laborer.[13] In order to realize his project of work organization, Taylor stressed the

[10]Jim McGuigan, *Neoliberal Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), 14, https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137466464.
[11]Craig R. Littler, "Understanding Taylorism," *The British Journal of Sociology* 29, no. 2 (1978): 188, https://doi.org/10.2307/589888.
[12] Taylor, qtd. in Littler, "Understanding Taylorism," 188.
[13] Ibid, 188.

minimization of skill requirements for workers — allowing new employees to learn quickly and to be easily replaced — and in order to maximize automation.[14]

The Taylorist vision applied to managers as well. He believed that the scope of a manager's responsibility should be limited to allow for effective control over a specified aspect of production. As he writes, "Functional management consists in so dividing the work of management that each man from the assistant superintendent down shall have as few functions as possible to perform. If practicable the work of each man in the management should be confined to the performance of a single leading function."[15] This narrow and atomized conception of how work should be performed marked a strong difference from pre-industrial society, where laborers and craftspeople had control over all aspects of the production process. Taylorist ideology sees productive and manual work as a purely mechanical behavior, one that should be able to be learned by anyone and replicated across industries. It created a form of social organization that sought to eliminate aspects of the working population's humanity, and made clear the alienation and lack of control to productive laborers, exemplifying the Marxian conception of exploitation.

Not only did Taylorism seek to exert control over workers by forcing them to perform specific duties and routine tasks, but it also created a powerful class of foremen and "gang-bosses."[16] These managers had specified roles themselves, with delineated jurisdictions on the shop floor and individual responsibilities. Thus, Taylorism sought to create an environment of control, but also one which could be replicated in different firms. By setting "scientific" standards for management and workplace organization, Taylor paved the way for new forms of control over work — ones that were less pronounced, but more perverse.

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[14] Ibid, 189.
[15] Ibid, 190.
[16] Ibid, 190.

Taylorism emphasized physical control over workers, not psychological control. It believed that workers must be directly coerced into performing their labor. In the forms of management that would be developed less than a century later, this belief was flipped on its head: instead of regulating all aspects of employee behavior, management sought to instill a desire and drive for the working activity within each employee, so that the control and regulation would be internal to the worker, rather than external. The development of the Fordist paradigm marked an important cultural and economic stepping stone which brought about this inversion of managerial ideology.

1.2 Fordism, Growth and Hegemony

The shift from Taylorism to Fordism — a mode of organization similar to Taylorism but which saw the worker as a consumer in his own right — occurred in the early 20th century. Fordism has been characterized as a regime of accumulation, as it entails a "virtuous circle of growth based on mass production and mass consumption."[17] From an organizational standpoint, Fordism borrows heavily from the Taylorist paradigm of the early industrial period: high levels of control over assembly-line workers, division within the workforce, a push towards automation.

However, what makes Fordism distinct is its emphasis on growth and markets, and its desire to scale its production. In order to achieve this growth, it must allow its workers enough of a share in the benefits of increased productivity in order to create new classes of consumers. This led to a cycle of production that propelled immense amounts of growth in the U.S. and began to

[17] Bob Jessop, "Fordism and Post-Fordism: A Critical Reformulation," in *Pathways to Industrialization and Regional Development*, ed. Allen J. Scott and Michael Storper, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 1992), 43.

foreshadow the globalization that would later take over the post-war world. As Jessop characterizes it, "On these assumptions Fordism's virtuous circle involves: rising productivity based on economies of scale in mass production, rising incomes linked to productivity, increased mass demand due to rising wages, increased profits based on full utilization of capacity, increased investment in improved mass production equipment and techniques, and a further rise in productivity."[18] Thus, Fordism can be seen as a culmination of the Taylorist project of control over the production process, while providing a modest distribution of the rewards of growth in order to fuel productivity.

Though primarily a productivist doctrine, Fordism could not sustain itself without support from the state. This coincides with McGuigan's conception of organized capitalism, which involves the intervention of nation-states to manage economies, either by nationalising certain industries or engaging in regulation of the private sphere.[19] State interference in the economy also provisioned standardized and collective goods to the people, meeting the base material needs of the general population and allowing them to invest their energy into work. The state's regulation of corporate affairs also involved strong protections for unions, and there existed a mutual recognition of workers' right to bargain collectively and of management's right to the labor process and of the mission and direction of the firm.[20] Public intervention on the behavior of private industries represented an important check on their power. Jessop characterizes the Fordist period as fundamentally Keynesian, which not only augmented the base level of welfare, but also ensured "adequate levels of demand through the transfer of incomes."[21] In this reading,

[18] Ibid, 44.
[19] McGuigan, "Neoliberal Culture," 14.
[20] Jessop, "Fordism and Post-Fordism," 44.
[21] Ibid, 45.

the welfare state not only succeeded in provisioning material support to the majority of the population, but it also fueled domestic demand, as more prosperity allowed for more production.

The emergence of Fordism also coincided, or caused, a certain degree of homogenization within culture, especially in America. Gramsci understood this very clearly, aptly observing in *Americanism and Fordism* how the hegemonic project of Fordism was brought about. As he conceptualizes the change,

> … [I]t was relatively easy to rationalise production and labour by a skillful combination of force (destruction of working-class trade unionism on a territorial basis) and persuasion (high wages, various social benefits, extremely subtle ideological and political propaganda) and thus succeed in making the whole life of the nation revolve around production. Hegemony here is born in the factory and requires for its exercise only a minute quantity of professional political and ideological intermediaries.[22]

In Gramsci's view, it was the subtlety of Fordism's ideological imposition that allowed for it to succeed in embedding itself into culture. In establishing the primacy of production, the Fordist paradigm conceived of everything else as external. This concept is expanded upon by Lukács, who's theory of the reification of the commodity exchange accurately predicted the cultural relation to production that would come to define the pre-neoliberal period. In *History and Class Consciousness*, Lukács describes how individual objects which we confront are distorted in their objectivity by the fact that they are commodities.[23] The growth of production and the sheer scale of consumer society prohibits us from perceiving the objects of production — "things" themselves — outside of their economic function as commodities. Further, the perceived necessity of commodities and consumption in modern life affect how we perceive social

[22]Antonio Gramsci, Quintin Hoare, and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, 1st ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1973), 285.
[23] György Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, Radical Reprints (Pattern Books, 2021), 93.

relations. In Gramscian terms, the reified mind begins to view social existence as a commodity in and of itself.[24]

The commodity fetishism born out of Fordism may appear to be a feature of the economic paradigm that is distinct from labor relations, yet the two are intimately linked. The perversity of Fordism is that it created the conditions for workers to be content with their exploitation: by raising the material prosperity of productive workers enough for them to exist as consumers, it distracts them from the fact that they are not benefitting from the profit generated by their labor. Though this exploitation was a feature of the capitalist wage relation before Fordism, earlier episodes of capitalism did not bestow enough security to the worker to make them feel content in their position. Though the precarity of the post-Fordist world may instill fond memories of the first half of the 20th century, as both Gramsci and Lukács observe, the culture of Fordist production created a deified image of capital that even the most exploited workers struggle to shake.

The cultural impact of Fordism extended beyond the sphere of production. It spurred the creation of suburbanization, with “Levittowns” and similar developments popping up outside of areas of production in order to provide an accessibility of the American dream to the working class. These developments also represented a codification of the nuclear family, and of domestic arrangements of labor which largely confined women to the home and subjected them to unpaid household labor — both physical and emotional. As Linda McDowell argues, “The capitalist-patriarchy model relies on the theoretical centrality of domestic labour — it is women's domestic labour that is appropriated by men and is also theorized as essential to the capitalist mode of production. Women in the home are the grist in the mill of the capitalist system.”[25] The

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[24] Ibid, 94.
[25] Linda McDowell, “Life without Father and Ford: The New Gender Order of Post-Fordism,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 16, no. 4 (1991): 407, https://doi.org/10.2307/623027.

expectation that women would be confined to the home in service of their husbands, with their time and productive energies dedicated to providing care, was exacerbated and codified by the Fordist model. As industrialization led to a routinization of labor, and of longer working hours for male workers, the domestic labor of women became "essential" for providing for the working class.

This exploitation of domestic labor persisted even as women began to enter the workforce. Rather than creating an equalizing balance in the home — with both husband and wife working as wage earners in addition to dedicating labor in the home — women were expected not only to work as professionals but to continue with their domestic labor. Arlie Hochschild characterizes this as the "second shift," when working women come home and dedicate more of their labor and time to the household.[26]

The world of work created by Fordism was regimented and accessible to many — meaning many Americans could find employment which provided them a sufficient wage to live comfortably — and this regimentation created a calcification of the American nuclear family. The economy experienced high levels of growth, but there maintained a high level of stability: government intervention created what Harvey calls "embedded liberalism," which tempered pure, capitalist spirit with the belief that some degree of welfare should be provided to the people. But this vision did not take long to collapse, and the deregulatory vision of free-market purists spurred the change in workplace organization that led to the creation of the Atomized Worker.

[26]Arlie Russell Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2012), 27.

1.3 The Neoliberal Shift: A New Capitalist Ideology

The recognition that change was underway in the world of work occurred alongside the changing nature and organization of the economy. In the years following World War II, the United States and other Western nations saw huge economic gains, spurred by the new infrastructure that was put in place during wartime development. While the majority of pre-war growth came from a rise in material production, the post-war boom marked the beginnings of what would later become finance capitalism, neoliberalism, neo-capitalism, or the myriad of other labels that theorists have given to the shift.[27] In fact, more than three-fourths of U.S. economic growth between 1948 and 1979 can be attributed to growth in capital and labor growth, and less than one-fourth to productivity growth.[28]

This change in economic composition can be partly explained by the rapid speed of mechanization and automation. In 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson was so concerned about the effects that automation would have on joblessness that he created a commission to address the problem that productivity might outpace the demand for labor.[29] The commission ultimately found that technological development would not bring about the end of employment, as the main driver of economic growth is consumer demand, which had continued to grow. The main conclusion of the commission was the following: "The basic fact is that technology eliminates jobs, not work."[30] It was clear even before the digital revolution that while some workers may be

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[27] Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 25. anniversary ed (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 165.
[28] Dale W. Jorgenson, "Productivity and Postwar U.S. Economic Growth," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 2, no. 4 (December 1988): 1, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.2.4.23.
[29] David H. Autor, "Why Are There Still So Many Jobs? The History and Future of Workplace Automation," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 29, no. 3 (September 2015): 1–2, https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.29.3.3.
[30] Ibid.

displaced or laid off, the world of work would evolve to ensure that there would always be laborers.

Technological progress has had its most profound impact on agriculture, as now less than 2% of the U.S. workforce is employed in farming, compared to 41% in 1900. This decline in the workforce did not coincide with a decline in productivity, however, as new technologies allowed for high levels of production. Similar trends occurred for most modes of material production: a decrease in the total number of laborers working in the sector, but an increase in the level of production.

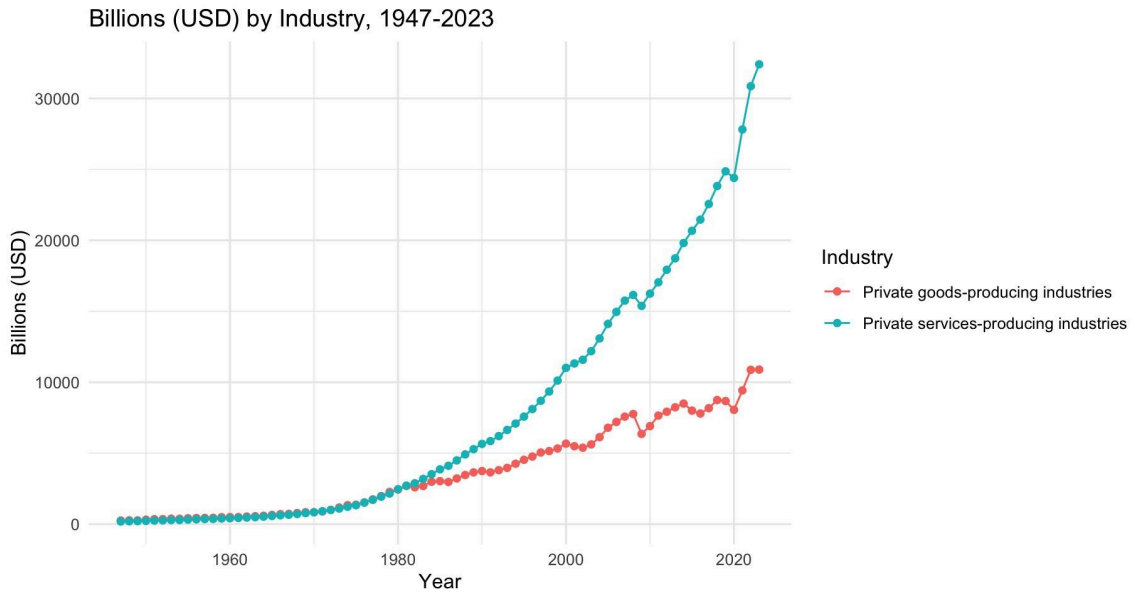

Figure 1: Chart showing the level of economic output by supersector, as defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics.[31]

Yet this is only part of the story. Beginning in the 1970s, U.S. corporate and political leaders began to see the benefits that could be had by moving productive forces (factories, mines, assembly lines) overseas where labor was cheaper and the level of regulation was lower. This push for a reterritorialization of productive labor to developing nations, combined with new technologies that allowed for easy inter-continental communication created not only a new

[31] "U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/.

global economy, but new organizational ideologies. Boltanski and Chiapello bring to light in *The New Spirit of Capitalism* the change in how organizations conceptualized the role of management and workers changed profoundly between 1960 and 1990, shifting from stability to flexibility.

Previous understandings of the best "correct" organization of the workplace and of the structure of work itself were rigid and placed an emphasis on rationality. The management discourse from the 1960s was focused on the role of the manager as the technical professional, an individual who had worked their way up the ladder to lead with their expertise.[32] Managers were engineers or technicians, and their role as manager was to make key decisions and to sustain the maintenance of the firm. The 60s also marked the beginning of the liberalization of the *cadre*, or the manager, as they pushed for more freedoms for professionals and against the rigid bureaucracy that defined large firms for much of the 20th century.[33]

[32] Boltanski and Chiapello, "The New Spirit of Capitalism," 212.
[33] Ibid, 214.

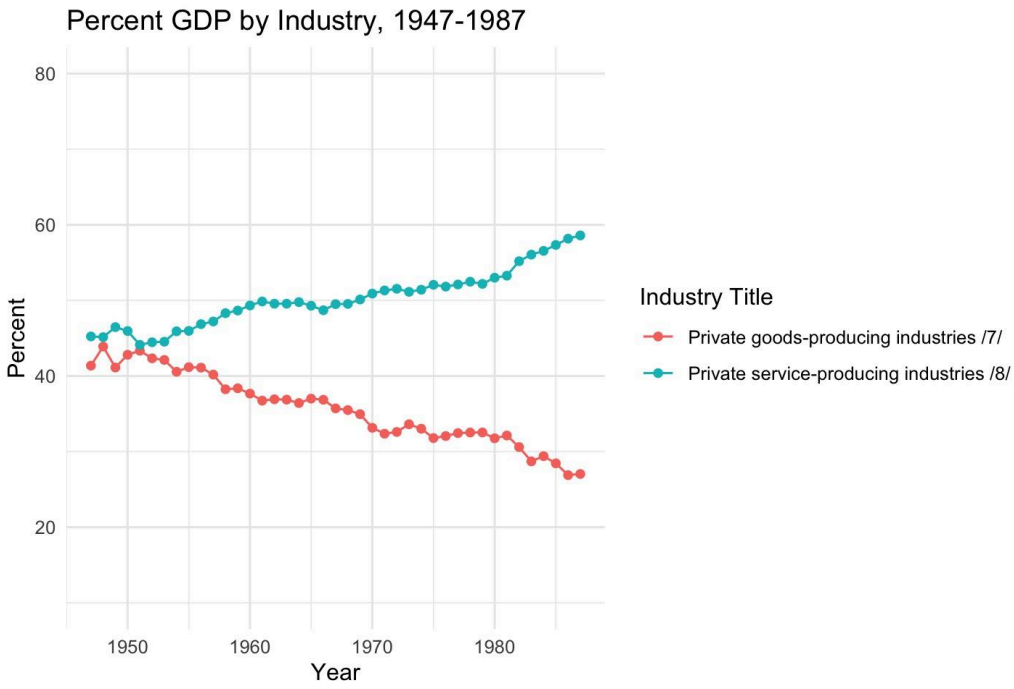

Figure 2: Chart showing the percent each supersector contributed to the U.S. economy between 1947 and 1987.[34]

The 1990s marked a profound shift in the management literature, away from the rigidity of the past and painted a new model of the firm as a "network" — largely in response to rapid globalization and speed of economic growth. This new approach represented a more direct attack on hierarchy, and the creation of Western corporations' obsession with adaptation and flexibility. These new fixations were a response to globalization which greatly increased the number of firms now in competition with one another, and which created more markets. Inspired by Toyota, these new firms emphasized leanness, a focus on vision, and the orientation of work around projects. This gave rise to the firm as a network, as employees were now capable of working in different parts of the world, and those working on a given project may belong to different firms or consulting agencies.

[34] "U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," Bureau of Labor Statistics, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.bls.gov/.

The changed economic and organizational structure of the new neoliberal order had profound effects on selfhood and the precarity of work — issues which exist in a heightened sense today. Boltanski and Chiapello point out that capitalism always needs to justify itself in order to survive, and with changes to its modalities of growth, new ways of convincing people to buy into the system are created. As a system that relies upon exploitation of the natural environment and human labor, capitalism cannot exist as both an economic paradigm and ideological force without convincing its subjects that its project is worthwhile.

One way in which the neoliberal order established itself was by creating the image that it was in the interest of freedom and autonomy. As McGuigan rightly notes, "Capitalism has been brilliant at responding to disaffection, criticism and opposition by stealing the enemy's clothes and flaunting them cynically on the catwalk as a means of refashioning an exploitative system."[35] By the "enemy's clothes" McGuigan is referring to the critiques that many had of the Fordist capitalist order. People began to be disaffected by the rigidity and hierarchical nature of the corporation, craving autonomy and more ability to dictate the terms of their daily work. Thus, the multinational and constantly adapting firms of the late 20th century responded to this push by emphasizing their focus on flexibility, their desire for people to feel like themselves at work.

This liberalization and de-structuralization of the workplace is the ultimate realization of the project of securing individual freedoms for the professional worker. Managers are no longer judged by their skills as engineers or by their technical skills, but instead by their "vision," their status as an "exceptional being" capable of motivating the growth of the firm.[36] This new language and orientation of the workplace changes the relation that workers have to their labor. Rather than a rigid separation between work time and leisure time, work became cultural and

[35] McGuigan, "Neoliberal Culture," 41.
[36] Boltanski and Chiapello, "The New Spirit of Capitalism," 225.

all-encompassing. This development of the role of culture in work solidified the shift away from Taylorist control and towards the blurring of boundaries between work and life.

The affective, cultural, and self-focused experience of work has come to define Post-Fordist paradigm, and has led to the creation of the category of the Atomized Worker. In the next section, I will defend this claim, and explore in detail what this new dynamic of labor looks like in reality, and how it fits into the broader dynamics of labor in the globalized world.

Section Two: The New World of Work

The history and conditions of the emergence of the neoliberal era being understood, I now turn to analyzing the nature of work itself under this new paradigm, with the specific aim of determining what is unique about the experience of the Atomized Worker. Before I do so in detail, however, it is necessary to direct attention to the international dynamics of work, which have altered labor relations across the world. Neoliberal capitalism and its globalizing project have created a new landscape of labor, and existing conceptualizations of work in the 21st century often fail to specify that they are really talking about shifts experienced by the developed, Western world, and not the countries whose labor environment is still primarily productivist. In the first part of this section, I will paint a global picture of the new world of work, arguing that we must keep in mind that material labor is still a necessary engine for capitalism's growth. Though immaterial labor and new experiences of work are beginning to emerge in all areas of the world, the material conditions and localized class positionality of these workers does not create the existence of a "global" class of knowledge workers with a shared identity.

2.1 The International Picture

The emergence of the multinational firm with offices in across the world, combined with the rise of computers and technological development, has changed the forms of work that many people engage in. Importantly, however, the rise of service sector employment and the decline of manufacturing and other traditionally working-class sectors across the industrialized world has not signaled the end of productive labor across the board. Rather, such labor was offshored and developed within the developing world, as corporations saw an opportunity in limited regulation and the ability to pay less for labor.

The reterritorialization of productive labor, to borrow a Deleuzian term, can be seen as building upon the neocolonial and imperial project of the mid 20th century. As Hardt and Negri posit in *Empire* — a work that is arguably the most wide-reaching culmination of the Italian autonomist movement — global capitalism created relations of subordination between nations that brought about and justified the continued exploitation of underdeveloped countries.[37] The technological development that brought about the rise of the informational economy, or the "network society," also created new geopolitical dynamics based upon international relations to production. As Hardt and Negri argue, "There is a new global organization of economic stages whereby the dominant countries are informational service economies, their first subordinates are industrial economies, and those further subordinated are agricultural."[38] Countries that lag behind major Western players are largely excluded from technological, service-based modernization, and relegated to a form of development that mirrors Fordist growth.

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[37] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 285, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.4159/9780674038325/html.
[38] Ibid, 287.

While this point may seem to be disconnected from a discussion on the "new" experience of work, and the challenges to class dynamics created by this change, it is important to recognize that the experience of the Atomized Worker is not experienced universally. Productive labor, from mining and manufacturing to fishing and agriculture, remains the primary engine of growth for much of the world. Thus, the new world of work being discussed — the new form work being performed by the Atomized Worker — is one that is primarily experienced in countries that benefit from this global relationship of domination, as Hardt and Negri make clear.[39] What is often left unsaid is that concepts like immaterial labor, cognitive capitalism, and the birth of the precariat pertain to countries in late-stage development. We must place emphasis on the fact that this shift could only occur with the rapid productivist growth in much of the developing world.

However, this does not mean that developing nations been left behind in technological and service-oriented growth altogether. Because the digitization of of many industries, companies are no longer bound to hiring those capable of working in a specific location. This means that the recruitment pool has become globalized, sourcing workers from countries around the world to minimize labor costs. Ursula Huws, in her work with the Estimation and Mapping of Employment Relocation in a Global Economy in the New Communications Environment (EMERGENCE) project, has found that many companies have outsourced jobs like data entry and customer service work to Sri Lanka, Madagascar, and the Dominican Republic, who have become major players in the "eEconomy."[40] The rise of jobs like these in former subjects of European colonial domination demonstrates the extent to which immaterial labor has come to define the contemporary economy. Using Madagascar as an example — a country with a high poverty rate and still a strong reliance on agriculture and other productive industries — the

[39] Ibid, 294.
[40] Ursula Huws, *Labor in the Global Digital Economy: The Cybertariat Comes of Age* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2014), 55.

service sector's share of employment rose from 15% to 27% in the last twenty years, while the agricultural employment rate fell from 77% to 64% in the same period.[41] Though this shift is not as extreme as the one in the U.S. and other Western countries, it demonstrates that even developing nations are exhibiting a trend towards immaterial labor.

This growing dependence and involvement of the developing world in the workforces of large, service-providing companies is important for several reasons. First, it shows how it is not just industrial and agricultural work that is outsourced to smaller economies, but also service-oriented and technically-skilled labor, demonstrating the increasing prevalence digital, deterritorialized, atomized, and desk-seated work. Second, the fact that the same job can be performed in many different parts of the world at the same time also means that the class positionality of these workers differs across contexts. As Huws puts it, this work can be understood as being footloose, "sliding without friction between teams across the globe that are linked by telecommunications networks and a common corporate culture but may nevertheless be physically located in strongly contrasting environments, and occupying very different social locations in the local class structure."[42] Even workers performing the same task for the same company for a similar wage still have their class positionality affected by their local environment, as the social capital and relative value of their wage can differ significantly. For example, a worker engaging in data entry in Madagascar has a significantly higher class position than her French counterpart, where the relative value of the job — both socially and economically — has different meaning. As data from the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development shows, "in 1994 the average annual salary of a software programmer in India

[41] "Madagascar Economic Outlook," African Development Bank Group, 2024, https://www.afdb.org/en/countries/southern-africa/madagascar/madagascar-economic-outlook.
[42] Huws, "Labor in the Global Digital Economy,"

was US $3,975, compared with $14,000 in Malaysia, $34,615 in Hong Kong, $31,247 in the UK, $45,552 in France, $46,600 in the USA and $54,075 in Germany."[43]

Though we will explore the class dynamics of this new world of work in a later section, it is important to recognize that the reterritorialization of labor creates distinct class positionality, problematizing the notion that there is a single "class" of cyberworkers, or that class lines can be neatly drawn based on the type of labor they are engaging in. Immaterial labor has come to define economic growth, but the social impact of this shift in the practice of work can hardly be described as universal or generalizable across all laborers.

2.2 The New Experience of Work

This global dynamic being understood, we now turn towards addressing the question of understanding what is new about modern work in the modernized world. The nature of this new form of work created in the late 20th century has been labeled many things, but underlying these conceptualizations is the phenomenon that many new jobs are no longer directly tied to material production. As was described above, the the rise of finance capitalism eliminated the connection between the direct production of goods and the growth of capital. In other words, growth has been tied to investment in the immaterial. This shift in capitalist development coincided with a change in the experience and nature of work. As Maurizio Lazzarato defines it, immaterial labor can be understood as that which "produces the informational and cultural content of the

[43] UNCTAD, qtd. in Ursula Huws, "The Making of a Cybertariat? Virtual Work in a Real World," *Socialist Register* 37 (2001): 17, https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5753.

commodity."[44] This dual meaning is important to Lazzarato as it defines distinct aspects of the phenomenon.

First, it is informational as the labor processes in the large companies that workers are a part of involve cybernetics and computer control, which allow for "horizontal and vertical communication."[45] Second, it is cultural as the work that such industries engage in deals with the "kinds of activities involved in defining and fixing cultural and artistic standards, fashions, tastes, consumer norms, and, more strategically, public opinion."[46] This cultural dimension of the work Lazzarato describes should not be read as only applying to those industries which deal directly with the production of language and public opinion — such as marketing, media, consulting, and other extensions of the apparatus of capital — but has come to exist in nearly all industries.

Lazzarato draws upon the Marxian conception of the general intellect, which describes the subsumption of intellectual expression and original ideation to capital, and claims that we have entered a domain of "mass intellectuality."[47] As he argues, "Manual labor is increasingly coming to involve procedures that could be defined as 'intellectual,' and the new communications technologies increasingly require subjectivities that are rich in knowledge."[48] Though he was writing in 1996, this claim has gained prescience today. According to a report by the National Skills Coalition, 92% of jobs require digital skills, and over one third of workers feel as though they have been under-trained to undertake the forms of labor required of them.[49]

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[44] Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 132.
[45] Ibid, 132.
[46] Ibid, 132.
[47] Ibid, 133.
[48] Ibid. 133.
[49] "New Report: 92% of Jobs Require Digital Skills, One-Third of Workers Have Low or No Digital Skills Due to Historic Underinvestment, Structural Inequities," National Skills Coalition, accessed March 27, 2025, https://nationalskillscoalition.org/news/press-releases/new-report-92-of-jobs-require-digital-skills-one-third-of-workers-have-low-or-no-digital-skills-due-to-historic-underinvestment-structural-inequities/.

Because of the changing demands of the worker and the reorganization of the factory, new methods of evaluation were created. Lazarrato argues that "what modern management techniques are looking for is for 'the worker's soul to become part of the factory.' The worker's personality and subjectivity have to be made susceptible to organization and command."[50] Instead of being forced to engage in production via a "simple command," workers are instead urged to be "active subjects," coordinating various aspects of production, and arriving at moment in which "a collective learning process becomes the heart of productivity."[51] This marks a profound shift, as the manual, productive laborer of the Fordist paradigm is now expected to act as an innovator, to react to new technologies by devising new solutions, new modes of communication.

The new subjectivity created by the immaterialization of productive labor could be read as having emancipatory power: while the worker of yesterday was confined to a rigid control, today's worker has autonomy, and is encouraged to have an active role in the workplace. But this is an idealistic vision, and one which ignores the new paradigm of control created by the shift. When workers are subjected to specified control — confined to performing delineated tasks, expected to work a certain number of hours, have a defined role within a top-down organization — they lack autonomy and means of control, but they are not required to have a cultural relationship to their work. The fact that they are selling their time and their labor for a wage is known both to the worker and the employer. In other words, the formal exploitation of the manual worker is made clear to both parties.

With the advent of new management practices in the late 1970s, a veil was cast over this relationship, obscured by the image of selfhood and authenticity. Rather than being means of

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[50] Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor,"133.
[51] Ibid, 134.

securing greater autonomy, or a way of securing a seat at the table, the notion of "participative management" instead became a tool for creating and controlling subjective processes.[52] In other words, it became "necessary for the subject's competence in the areas of management, communication, and creativity to be made compatible with the conditions of 'production for production's sake.'"[53] Simply because these new requirements for workplace behavior and metrics for evaluation draw upon human emotive faculties does not mean that they lead to the humanization of the worker. As Lazzarato makes clear, "We have here a discourse that is authoritarian: one *has to* express oneself, one *has to* speak, communicate, cooperate, and so forth. The 'tone' is that of the people who were in executive command under Taylorization; all that has changed is the content."[54] The appeal towards the worker's "intellect" is Taylorism by another name. This notion of selfhood and the emotional and cultural environment created by work has been explored by Eva Illouz, who argues that one of the most important aspects of the shift in the dynamics of capitalism has been the push towards workers' emotive faculties. Illouz highlights how the modern workplace's demand for "communication" — understood as the techniques and mechanisms for creating social recognition through techniques to "accept, validate, and recognize the feelings of others" — serves the dual function of shaping the conception of one's self at work. Additionally, communication has become a marketable skill, a priority in how managers are chosen, and many corporations' most sought after quality in a potential employee. The neoliberal era, with its decline of hard skills and a growing immaterial labor force, has captured the language of the communication and turned it into a resource. As Illouz argues, "[...] the ever-growing pace of new technologies and the consequent rapid obsolescence of skills made criteria for success changing and contradictory, and had the effect of

[52] Ibid, 134.
[53] Ibid, 134.
[54] Ibid, 134, emphasis in text.

overburdening the self with uncertainties, and of making it solely responsible for managing the uncertainties and tensions of the contemporary workplace."[55]

The neoliberal shift marked a profound change in the organization of the workplace, the valuation and measurement of the faculties of employees, and the practice of work itself. This is only one dimension of the concept of the immaterial turn, however. The fact that productive workers have been forced to adopt the same communicative faculties as their managers does not mean that their labor has become immaterial — rather, productive laborers have simply added a new dimension to their underlying work, which is that of the production of material goods. The immaterial turn has also created entire industries whose products are not physical, and created a world of work that is removed from our traditional notions of production altogether. Lazzarato urges us to abandon our "factoryist prejudices" and view immaterial labor as an object worthy of analysis, and as a distinct form of production. After all, what technological development has shown us is that the locus of capitalist growth is no longer in goods-producing sectors.

But what does this labor really look like, and who is engaging in it? First, similar to Boltanski and Chiapello's exploration of the language of teams and projects, Lazzarato speaks of the organization of workers into "productive units" within firms who are organized for only specific projects.[56] When the job is completed, "the cycle dissolves back into the networks and flows that make possible the reproduction and enrichment of its productive capacities."[57] The prevalence of project-based work and is ramifications on the experience of labor is not just theoretically argued, but empirically justified. As a French ethnographic study finds, there are "three sub-categories of pathologies linked to project-based working: actors given no alternative,

[55]Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2007), 27.
[56] Ibid, 136.
[57] Ibid, 136.

actors taking professional risks and actors suffering psychoaffective disorders.[58] They go on to describe how, because project-based work is incredibly goal-oriented, it "exacerbates the pressures because it simultaneously increases both the contacts between individuals and the need to perform."[59] This emphasis on contact between employees, and the psychological pressure to perform well, connects to Lazzarato and Illouz's conceptions of the affective and communicative investment that immaterial labor expects of workers.

This is only one manifestation of the prevalence of immateriality affect in the modern workplace. Peter Fleming, a contemporary scholar of work, argues that the push towards authenticity at work is in fact a subtle way that modern corporations exert more control over their workforce. When your office is home to your "family" and you are encouraged to "be yourself," the lines between work-life and home-life are blurred, creating the feeling that work consumes life. This emphasis on freedom is not one that is just read between the lines by those critical of contemporary organizations, but rather an explicit priority of many large companies. Call centers in Australia, IT firms in the United States, consultancy firms in the United Kingdom, and recognizable names like Google and Southwest Airlines have all publicly advertised their "just be yourself"campaigns in recent years. [60] While it would be hard to argue that work life is improved when workers do not feel comfortable acting as "themselves" — an already loaded conception whose meaning is nebulous — the managerial push towards authenticity creates an exaggerated version of selfhood that workers are then expected to market. As Fleming writes,

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[58]Alain Asquin, Gilles Garel, and Thierry Picq, "When Project-Based Management Causes Distress at Work," *International Journal of Project Management*, European Academy of Management (EURAM 2009) Conference, 28, no. 2 (February 1, 2010): 8, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2009.08.006.
[59] Ibid, 9.
[60] Peter Fleming, *Authenticity and the Cultural Politics of Work: New Forms of Informal Control* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24.

> Employees are invited or encouraged to display what is unique, different, and distinguishable about their identities. This is often done by attempting to evoke various gestures and aspects of self traditionally associated with the private, extra-employment sphere (including sexuality, leisure, consumption, and so forth). Corporatized authenticity thus paradoxically relies upon a kind of mimesis or simulation in order to have the desired effect under conditions traditionally devoid of individual difference.[61]

The mimesis that Fleming describes points to the fact that when authenticity is desired, not as an emancipatory call to be free but rather as a required aspect of existing within the workplace, individuals conjure up images of their identity that they expect others to find appealing or unique. The underlying image of the appeal to "being yourself" is that one must present themselves as fun, outgoing, entertaining and unique, erasing the division between the expected rigidity of workplace behavior and life outside the confines of the cubicle.

Fleming draws a connection between the modern politics of workplace selfhood and the culture of Fordist workplaces, which were "stringently circumscribed by the rhythms of work and rather draconian rules for how one ought to act and 'be.'"[62] He then argues that the change in how workplaces approached the regulation of employee behavior originated not in a benevolent desire for employees to experience greater freedom, but rather in the fact that market rationalism indicates that harsh management styles can have a counterproductive effect on productivity. The preferred managerial style, then, became one of passive control rather than explicit demonstrations of power.

This is revealed when we analyze who is in fact being subjected to the rhetoric of authenticity. As Fleming reveals, "Those who are most tightly controlled at work are more likely to be targeted by the 'just be yourself' discourse. This is so because it intimately connects with the perennial 'problem of control' that still persists even in ostensibly 'humanized'

[61] Ibid, 27.
[62] Ibid, 28.

workplaces."[63] It does not take much examination of corporate managerial practices to discover that the language and initiatives encouraging the open expression of the employee's unadulterated "self" are really the means of dictating how workers should interact and present themselves.

The novel management doctrines of the 1990s permeated all levels of large companies, requiring both low-level workers and managers themselves to change their relationship to their work. For example, Olly — a multi-million dollar company that sells a variety of wellness products — holds "Family lunches" for all of its employees where they can discuss company news, requiring workers to put invest a form of casual, emotional energy into their workplace.[64] Though this creates the potential for employees to feel more comfortable expressing themselves at work, it has the adverse effect of creating a equation of work with life — lunch with your "family" is turned into a discussion of corporate directives.

Fleming articulates how the demand for authenticity at work is an expression of managerial power, in which "more of the employees' selfhood is made available to the managerial gaze in order to enhance motivation, sell the firm to the customer, and push the responsibilities of collective production onto the worker and so forth."[65] In other words, the corporation wants more "life" inside of the firm, not only to create more buy-in from its employees, but also to claim a form of control that does not require additional, explicit expressions of managerial power. To demonstrate Fleming's argument, authenticity is often directly advocated for because of its ability to incentivize productivity. A report from the Society for Human Resource Management asserts that, in addition to higher resignations, "Work quality

[63] Ibid, 29
[64] Kristen Philipkoski, "CEO Paves The Way For Authenticity In The Workplace, Encouraging Employees To Bring Their True Selves To Work," Forbes, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.forbes.com/sites/kristenphilipkoski/2023/05/08/ceo-paves-the-way-for-authenticity-in-the-workplace-encouraging-employees-to-bring-their-true-selves-to-work/.
[65] Peter Fleming, "Authenticity," 46-47.

and quantity of output are also diminished in inauthentic workplaces," supporting their headline that "More-Authentic Workplaces Lead to Better Retention, Productivity."[66] Urging the worker to show their authentic self has become a tool for ensuring the growth of the firm.

Additionally, the decentralized form of management that is characteristic of team-based work requires each member of the team to engage not only in work that they are individually responsible for, but also to manage the behavior of others. Similar to the developments in the factory explored by Lazzarato, while this newfound autonomy and control over work life may appeal appealing — and marginally emancipatory — it has the adverse effect of causing immense psychological and intellectual labor to be invested into work, which is rarely compensated. This style of "matrix" management simply offloads the task of the manager onto the employee without additional recognition or pay. This is partly because the labor involved in projects is not easily quantified or demonstrable to management. As Asquin et al. find, "it is not always easy for individuals to express what they have actually learnt from their involvement in a project. In the absence of any personal evaluation methodology and specific support, they will find it difficult to formalise the new know-how they will undoubtedly have acquired."[67] The modern corporation has succeeded eliminating the need for direct control of its workers, instead creating an environment in which workers create that control and psychological investment themselves, without a mechanism for recognition.

[66] "More-Authentic Workplaces Lead to Better Retention, Productivity," accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/employee-relations/authentic-workplaces-lead-to-better-retention-productivity.
[67] Asquin et al., "When Project-Based Management Causes Distress at Work," 21.

Section Three: The Atomized Worker

In Section Two, I drew attention to the new conditions and experiences that the modern worker faces, exploring the differences across the global economy, and between socioeconomic classes. Contemporary managerial practices and the integration of new technologies into the workplace have created the expectation of authenticity and emotional investment, both in productivist and high-paying, professional office workers. But this call for the employee to bring their affectivity and their selfhood into their labor has had the most profound effect on Atomized Workers, who are required to engage in this new, immaterial form of work without the security and status of professional and managerial workers, and without the potential for collective identity that is held by the working class. Atomized Workers are thus isolated and in competition with one another, reaching for a promotion to pull them out of precarity, but often are left stuck in a condition of uncertainty.

In this section, I will first analyze several examples of "new" class analysis, which draw attention to the experience of Atomized Workers, but either do not consider them to be performing a unique form of labor, or mistakenly treat treat them as members of a single socioeconomic class. Second, I will explore in detail the conditions of Atomized Workers, analyzing the ways in which they are distinct from other workers but how they still do not exhibit a shared class identity. Finally, I will offer a conclusion that raises questions how Atomized Workers should be understood politically, and discusses their potential to organize collectively.

3.1 Problems with "New" Class Analysis

There have been several attempts to create a new class category for the new form of work that has been created by modern capitalism. In her work, Ursula Huws seeks to define a "cybertariat," an emergent class of office, communications, and technical workers that complicate the traditional Marxian class picture. Her project, undertaken in *The Making of a Cybertariat?* and *Labor in the Global Digital Economy,* seeks to address what she sees as a failure of socialists to address the growing category of office work (or desk work, computer work), primarily because of the struggle that exists in trying to place them into a class category. Importantly, her conception of the cybertariat is as a global class, created by the rise of immaterial, computer-based work across the world. The cybertariat includes those who engage in digital-focused work without the autonomy, social advantages, and income of a manager or highly-skilled technical professional.[68]

Huws recognizes that appeal to a new global class as a response to the seemingly aporetic character of the knowledge worker (or immaterial laborer) — whose class positionality is hard to pin down — has been somewhat unpopular. As Huws summarizes her critics, some seek to define these workers simply as a "'white-collar proletariat' or 'new working class'; to follow Lenin or Poulantzas in locating them as part of a petty bourgeoisie whose interests lie with small employers and are opposed to those of manual workers; or to hedge their bets along with Wright, and regard them as 'occupying contradictory locations within class relations.'"[69] Though she dismisses these critics as lacking imagination or falling into a 19th century understanding of

[68] Ursula Huws, "The Making of a Cybertariat? Virtual Work in a Real World," *Socialist Register* 37 (2001): 3, https://socialistregister.com/index.php/srv/article/view/5753.
[69] Ibid, 4.

class dynamics, Huws does not make a compelling case for the cybertariat's existence as a class for itself.[70]

Huws makes an allusion to the proletariat in her terminology, though doesn't directly argue that the workers she is talking about belong to the proletariat or even constitute a "new" working class. This hesitancy to bring them into the fold shows a similarity to Standing's position, who conceives of his precariat as outside of the working class. This hesitancy exists for good reason. For example, it is hard to argue that a telecommunications worker in Sri Lanka and a data analyst in San Francisco belong to the same class, even if their work shares a similar experiential character, and involves a similar form of computerized work. Nevertheless, in creating the impression that these new digital workers have a proletarian condition, Huws is signaling that there is a potential for their membership in a new, global class.

However, Huws herself questions whether there truly is a potential for solidarity or class consciousness among such workers. As she observes, "The question is, how permanent are [these positions] likely to be? And will they form the basis of new collective identities? Or will workers choose to group themselves in relation to some other variable, such as the employer they work for, or the site where they are based? The answer to this question will be a crucial determinant of the extent to which new class identities will develop independently of geography, and of the potential for organizing at a transnational level."[71] Despite the prescience and importance of her question, Huws leaves it largely unaddressed throughout her work, which points to the difficulty in fitting the new forms of work created by the neoliberal order into the model of class relations. Huws' uncertainty with regards to the cybertariat's capacity for organization demonstrates the challenges of framing this form of labor in class terms, especially since a key political definition

[70] Ibid, 12.
[71] Ibid, 13.

of class includes the an ability to act collectively. Utilizing a category like the Atomized Worker allows for a discussion of the new forms of labor which Huws is discussing without having to argue that all such workers share the same class character — a position which is challenging to defend.

More prominent than Huws in the contemporary discussion of class analysis in modern capitalism is Guy Standing, who orients his understanding of a new category of laborer around the increasing experience of precarity that many workers face. Throughout his work, Standing emphasizes that the precariat is not yet a "class-for-itself" as its existence is relatively recent and its constituent members too diverse.[72] However, in employing the term "class" in the first place, and in utilizing Marxian wordplay to do so, Standing is making the argument that the precariat has the ability to be a class of itself, to be seen as a group of collective actors organized around a social and economic identity. But this is simply not the case. Standing aptly describes how the forces of precarization, flexibility, and insecurity are impacting the modern worker, charting how much of labor has taken on a precarious character. However, as he himself recognizes, precarity cuts across class divisions. Traditionally working class positions are subject to layoffs; formerly stable, post-college jobs are instead temporary hires; new jobs are created only for contract work, requiring various skills and specializations. Though this change does indeed signal an alteration of class dynamics (formerly secure middle class roles are subject to alienation and lack the autonomy that the professional classes hold), it does not mean that precarity has *created* a class. Thus, the precariat is an umbrella term with uncertain political or analytical utility.

Standing's response to the charge that the precariat is not a class would be that traditional Marxists just aren't ready to adapt their vision of class to the modern landscape. As he writes, these Marxists, whose "desire to compress the precariat into old notions of 'the working class' or

[72] Standing, "The Precariat," vii.

'the proletariat' distract us from developing an appropriate vocabulary and set of images to guide twenty-first century analysis."[73] He argues that the distinctness of the precariat — defined by its vulnerability within the relations of distribution, precarity in the relations of production, and marginality in their relations with the state — makes the precariat have both material and social distinctions from the working class. Yet Standing seeks to bring more precision to his definition in order to make the case for the precariat's distinction. As Wright summarizes it, the precariat can be defined by "the collapse of occupational identity; lack of control over time; detachment from labor; low social mobility; overqualification; uncertainty; and poverty and poverty traps."[74] Taken together, these elements create a class that is distinct from others, and though it may not be a class-for-itself because it does not act as a unified actor, it remains "a distinct class location in terms of its structural location within the class structure of capitalism, differentiated from the working class and the other classes in [Standing's] inventory."[75]

However, even if we adopt a strict view of the precariat, including only those who meet the list of criteria in our categorization, we still end up looking at a large category with distinct experiences of labor, material prosperity, and perspectives on their work. In his follow-up to *The Precariat*, Standing outlines three ways in which someone can become part of the precariat. The first involves people who were "bumped out" of working class communities, who lack the security and stability that their parents or grandparents had, and typically hold reactionary political positions. As Standing argues, "People in this part of the precariat typically blame the 'other' for their plight and are keen to punish others in the precariat by cutting 'their' benefits."[76] Though Standing is aptly describing the new experience that many lower-class individuals have

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[73] Ibid, 31.
[74] Erik Olin Wright, *Understanding Class*, First published (London New York: Verso, 2015), 162.
[75] Ibid, 164.
[76] Guy Standing, *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 29, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472510631.

undergone in the 21st century, it is unclear whether this distinguishes them from members of the working class.

The fact that many people in this "variety" of the precariat come from working class families, and many of them enter the same industry as their family, only to realize that the security of the work that their parents used to have has deteriorated suggests not that they are entering a new class identity, but rather that the character of the working class has changed. For example, almost 35% of workers in the United States were unionized in 1950, while in 2022 that number went down to 10%.[77] Additionally, hourly compensation began to plateau in 1973 despite consistent increases in productivity.[78] These are just two examples of how historically secure, well-paying, working-class jobs began to become precarious and increasingly exploitative. Additionally, the precarity that these working class jobs now have is in large part due to a changed political and regulatory landscape — involving things such as right-to-work legislation and decreased oversight of corporate behavior — rather than a originating solely in the changed experience of labor itself. While Standing critiques those Marxists who hold onto "old notions" of the working class, by arguing that the insecurity faced by modern industrial, agricultural, mechanical and service workers places them in an entirely new class category from a generation before them, he himself fails to consider that the working-class may have simply changed character since the 1970s.

The second variety of the precariat are those who Standing labels as "traditional denizens," such as migrants and asylum seekers, the disabled and ex-convicts.[79] These members of the precariat are the least secure, and their precarious existence strongly affects their material

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[77] "Labor Unions and the U.S. Economy," U.S. Department of the Treasury, February 8, 2025, https://home.treasury.gov/news/featured-stories/labor-unions-and-the-us-economy.
[78] "Wage Stagnation in Nine Charts," Economic Policy Institute, accessed March 27, 2025, https://www.epi.org/publication/charting-wage-stagnation/.
[79] Standing, "A Precariat Charter," 29.

conditions, as they are faced with "a pragmatic need to survive."[80] Given their lack of support and need for employment, these workers are willing to take on most work that is presented to them, which is often exploitative and done under the table. Because of their often nebulous legal status, employers are able to pay them less than their counterparts, creating a dynamic in which the first variety of the precariat often targets their anger and disillusionment towards the second. Standing makes this relationship clear, and yet still seeks to characterize both varieties not as fundamentally distinct, but as belonging to the same class category. Though they share a precarious existence, the nature of their precarity and the way they are perceived by the broader society suggests a fundamentally different experience not only of work, but of social positionality.

Finally, the third variety of the precariat, which "consists of the educated, plunged into a precariat existence after being promised the opposite, a bright career of personal development and satisfaction."[81] They are experiencing a form of "status frustration" where the life they expected to lead, the job they expected to have, and the security that those with their level of educational attainment once had is no longer achievable. To Standing, the biggest challenging facing this variety of the precarity is to "induce the other varieties to share a common vision."[82] Because of their education, they are more likely to gain an "awareness of the drabness or absurdity of the labour they are expected to accept," motivating Standing to see this group as those with the most rallying potential for the rest of the precariat.[83] In practice, however, this would entail a large number of paternalistic if not pretentious office workers who are unsatisfied with their lives telling migrants and low-income gig workers that they are all members of the

[80] Ibid, 29.
[81] Ibid, 30.
[82] Ibid, 31.
[83] Ibid, 31.

same team. Not only is such a vision unrealistic, but it points to the disunity of Standing's precariat: their material and social lives rarely organically intersect in a meaningful way. If the the individual varieties of the precariat are not organized themselves, cross-group collectivisation becomes more fantasy than fact.

Standing is aware of this division within the precariat, remarking that it is often "at war with itself," but yet remains committed to viewing them as a class, problematizing the notion of class as group capable of being organized collectively.[84] Georges Van Den Abbeele, who focuses on analyzing the gig economy's impact on the experience of work, arrives at a similar critique of *The Precariat*, arguing that "it might be helpful to consider 'precarity' less as a noun than as a verb, that is, less the constitution of a 'class' no matter how incoherent or internally conflicted than as a general process by which the gig economy redefines what we mean by 'work,' in ways that may be either advantageous or disadvantageous to different workers based on their particular circumstances."[85] Precarity can thus be better understood as a lens through which we can analyze the new landscape of work, and rather than confine our exploration of precarious or insecure labor by fitting all those who undergo precarity into one social class, we should use it to explore how it has changed work in different circumstances.

Now that we have challenged Standing's usage of class in his analysis of precarity, I turn to address the question of how precariousness is experienced between workers across contexts. The first two varieties Standing outlines experience precarity in a more direct material sense: the first has lost out on stability in employment, causing a paycheck-to-paycheck experience that often forces people to work multiple jobs; the second, on top of a lack of stable work, has political insecurity as well. There is no question that these two varieties' existence can be

[84] Ibid, 25.
[85] Georges Van Den Abbeele, *Can the Precariat be organized?: The Gig Economy, Worksite Dispersion, and the Challenge of Mutual Aid,* 84-85.

categorized as precarious. What should be questioned, however, is the extent to which this experience is new, or whether their precarious existence alone is enough to justify their social categorization as distinct from other classes.

I argue that the first variety of the precariat is simply a new aspect, or division, of working class labor. Given the scale at which working class jobs have moved into precarity, there is a declining level of "traditional" working class labor. The experience of work may have changed somewhat, but the class positionality of the worker remains, broadly, in the working class. The second variety is certainly the most precarious, but it is not a new phenomenon: migrants and convicts have been marginalized and exploited well before the changing dynamics of modern capitalism, and the way in which Standing defines their experience is not particular to the modern age. I do not mean to suggest that discussing such laborers is not worthwhile. Rather, my project aims to understand the new form of work created by modern capital, and there is currently a dearth of analysis surrounding the experience of the third variety of the precariat, which bears similarities to my conception of the Atomized Worker.

3.2 Understanding the Condition of the Atomized Worker

Atomized Workers originate from a condition of insecurity, though the sense of precarity they experience can arise in more ways than Standing outlines. Dejours et. al argue that there are many ways in which someone can feel insecure in their work, and that "this is not an accidental feature of contemporary work organizations, but a systemic or cultural one."[86] This is made clear in their discussion of the notion of performance reviews at work. As they argue,

[86]Christophe Dejours et al., *The Return of Work in Critical Theory: Self, Society, Politics* (Columbia University Press, 2018), 38, https://www.degruyter.com/document/doi/10.7312/dejo18728/html.

> If one is regularly having to stand back from one's work and question its worth from an "objective," "neutral," or "impartial" point of view, if what one has achieved in the past is in principle never enough to secure ongoing recognition of one's competence and willingness to work, it would not be unreasonable to start finding insecurities in relation to one's working activity even if one was not initially aware of having them.[87]

The lack of autonomy and the extent to which workers are subject to the control of their managers can create a sense of precarity and insecurity — both in one's position at work and in one's self. The new managerial focus on objective performance evaluation as a means of comparing workers to one another ignores the reality that much the labor performed by Atomized Workers is not capable of being reduced to a single metric. Drawing on Dejours' conception of "the real," which encapsulates the challenging things that a worker encounters such as fatigue, lack of experience, contradictory or confusing managerial directives, and the occurrence of unexpected events, we can see how performance evaluation only measures the *result* of work, and not the affective and subjective experience that workers are deal with on a daily basis.[88]

This creates stress and a sense of constant scrutiny within psyche of the Atomized Worker, as they are required to invest their selfhood into their work, but are only judged on so-called "objective" qualitative and quantitative criteria. As Dejours et al. argue, "Actual work requires the engagement of subjectivity in the experience of the real, not only during the time of production itself but beyond, extending into time off work, the pressures and concerns that occupy us in our private spaces, even in insomnia and professional dreams."[89] By judging only the results of work, modern managerial performance evaluation "generates feelings of injustice

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[87] Ibid, 38.
[88] Parisa Dashtipour and Bénédicte Vidaillet, "Work as Affective Experience: The Contribution of Christophe Dejours' 'Psychodynamics of Work,'" *Organization* 24, no. 1 (January 2017): 23, https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508416668191.
[89] Dejours et. al, "The Return of Work in Critical Theory," 159.

and often functions as a denial of recognition of the efforts by into work."[90] This has the effect of isolating and atomizing the worker, who, because of the communicative and immaterial nature of the work they engage in are expected to invest their emotions and their self into their work, and yet are judged merely by the results of their labor — which are often themselves disconnected to the overall productivity of the firm.

The constant scrutiny placed on workers' performance also leads them to be in competition with those they are meant to be collaborators with. As Dejours et al. draw our attention to, "Individual performance evaluation destroys relationships of trust and loyalty within work teams. Mutual respect, mutual support, thoughtfulness, and civility fade quickly, and in the end, all solidarity and forms of togetherness disappear."[91] This devolution of togetherness does not mean that work itself experienced alone, as "teamwork" and "open communication" are preached by corporate leaders, but rather that this experience of collective engagement with work is really a mirage. Teammates are reframed as competitors; group projects become an opportunity to stand out from the crowd; interactions with others seen a time to flex one's leadership muscles.

While this team-based work has begun to affect workers across class lines, from warehouse workers to executives, it has the most profound effect on the Atomized Worker. Working-class wage workers who are subjected to the contemporary managerial language of communication can more readily be ignored because they are secondary to their working activity. The experience of work for the retail worker or the manufacturing worker, for example, is not oriented around projects or affective investment into the task at hand. Thus, the supposedly comforting language that corporate managers use in employee training or instill in shift leaders

[90] Ibid, 159.
[91] Ibid, 162.

— like "just be yourself," or "we're all family here" — can be dismissed by the worker as vain attempts to gain support for corporate and distract from the fact that they are being paid minimum wage. The professional classes, on the other hand, who have more security and autonomy than Atomized Workers, are the ones directing the projects and calling for affective involvement of their employees, and thus speak the new language and shape the structure of work as if it is their own.

The emphasis on personal evaluation is just one way in which communicative and project-based work is more detrimental than beneficial to the experience of the Atomized Worker. In practice, teams shift constantly, and individuals are often moved to different projects with very little say, creating the requirement to be flexible and constantly adaptive in the workplace. As Richard Senett argues, "'I can work with anyone' is the social formula for potential ability. It won't matter who the other person is; in fast-changing firms it can't matter. Your skill lies in cooperating, whatever the circumstances."[92] Cooperation itself is treated as an individual skill; the ability to "work with anyone" becomes integrated into the Atomized Worker's vision of the self, creating a conflicting dynamic of work in which one must reframe social cooperation not as genuine and earnest, but as quantifiable.

This reshaping of the worker's communicative abilities mirrors the precarity of other aspects of the Atomized Worker's life. Because of its this kind of work's constantly evolving nature, workers cannot become wedded to an individual project or goal. As Sennett describes, "An organization in which the contents are constantly shifting requires the mobile capacity to solve problems; getting deeply involved in any one problem would be dysfunctional, since projects end as abruptly as they begin."[93] Workers in these roles must show their care deeply for

[92]Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism*, Castle Lectures Series (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 126.
[93] Ibid, 126.

the mission of their company, demonstrate their ability to adapt, and prove that they are a ready and willing "team member" regardless of the task at hand, all while not attaching themselves to the actual work itself. This further alienates the Atomized Worker: they are subject to the whims of management, the scrutiny of the product of their work, the marketing of their selfhood, all while feeling disconnected to the *content* of their work — which should, in theory, be the most valuable and potentially fulfilling aspect of their job. In other words, the most valued Atomized Worker is the one "whose product is possibility" and who is attuned to "the instabilities which rule the global marketplace."[94]

Additionally, as Sennett makes clear, the forward-looking nature of the modern organization induces an anxiety which causes a more shallow engagement with work, which undermines the actual "ability" or expertise of the worker, and instead places the value on their capacity to move on and adapt. For the Atomized Worker, capital has turned emotional regulation and intelligence into a marketable product. In Sennett's words, "Such hollowing out of ability compounds the organizations' tendency to discount past achievement in looking toward the future."[95] Modern capitalism's myopic focus on growth has watered down the substance of the contributions that Atomized Workers make to their workplaces, all while requiring increasingly higher levels of specialization and education in order to attain desirable, stable positions. For example,. by 2031, experts estimate that 72% of jobs in the United States will require college degrees, and over 15% will require advanced degrees, signaling a push towards "professionalization," but without the benefits of security and autonomy that such credentials once provided.[96]

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[94] Ibid, 126.
[95] Ibid, 127.
[96] "After Everything: Projections of Jobs, Education, and Training Requirements through 2031" (Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, May 2024), https://cew.georgetown.edu/wp-content/uploads/Projections2031-ES.pdf.

I have explored how the language of management and the organization of the modern workplace has succeeded in isolating and drawing the social intelligence of the Atomized Worker into the folds of capital's value generating machine. I now examine how the direct experience of work, from the integration of technology in the workplace to the blurring of time in and out of work has prohibited Atomized Workers from recognizing their shared positionality with one another, and has led to labor being the defining aspect of their lives.

First, because of technological innovation, the speed at which people can communicate with one another and information can be processed marks a clear distinction between the modern age and the Fordist era. It also has stakes for the Atomized Worker. Franco Berardi, a contemporary Italian autonomist philosopher, has focused much attention onto the condition of "information workers," his category for those who engage primarily in immaterial labor. Berardi describes the effects of information technology on the working experience: "Both simple executing workers and entrepreneurial managers share the vivid perception that they depend on a constant flow that cannot be interrupted and from which they cannot step back save at the price of being marginalized."[97] Workers must constantly be adapting and adjusting to developments, and a failure to do so implies a loss of knowledge or skill. One must be fluent in the language of development itself in order to be valued in the modern corporation.

This inability to "step back" has blurred the line between work and life. Berardi writes: "Info-producers can be seen as neuro-workers. They prepare their nervous system as an active receiving terminal for as much time as possible. The entire lived day becomes subject to a semiotic activation which becomes directly productive only when necessary."[98] The working activity, given its immaterial and affective content, is no longer confined to the workplace itself,

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[97] Franco Berardi and Jason Smith, *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*, Foreign Agents Series (Los Angeles, Calif: Semiotext(e), 2009), 89.
[98] Ibid, 90.

creating the impression and feeling that one is always working. To some degree, this experience is embraced by the Atomized Worker, as they have come to view their work as a self-defining and intrinsic to their being. As was discussed above, the investment of the self into their work has created a level of attachment to their jobs that goes beyond the wage relation itself. While many productivist workers are able to separate their working activity from leisure and time off, Atomized Workers are unable to achieve this detachment because the commodity of their work involves their creativity, authenticity, communicative abilities, and is directly tied to the image of their identity. This integration of these historically non-productive human capacities into the world of work demonstrates a new thrust of capitalism, one which has created a desire for production and development within its subjects. As Berardi argues, "Capital was able to renew its psychic, ideological and economic energy, specifically thanks to the absorption of creativity, desire, and individualistic, libertarian drives for self-realization."[99] Modern capitalism has to do very little to justify its existence in the eyes of Atomized Workers, who have internalized its drive for growth and progress and directed it onto themselves.

What further distinguishes Atomized Workers from the stability of the Fordist-era office worker and the current experience of the professional and managerial classes is that they are not rewarded for their affective investment into their work, both socially and from their employer. Work as vocation, meaning seeing one's job as their calling, as in harmony with their identity and goals in life, has become a thing of privilege, reserved only for those in a certain class position. This dynamic has in part been formed by the aesthetic value that we ascribe to different jobs. While earlier periods of capitalist development had an equalizing view of labor, which saw all professions as fulfilling a certain function, the aestheticization of work has drawn distinction in the value of labor based on how it is perceived socially. Zygmunt Bauman, in *Work,*

[99] Ibid, 96.

Consumerism and the New Poor, argues, "The aesthetic scrutiny and evaluation of work [...] emphasizes distinction, magnifies the differences and elevates certain professions to the rank of engrossing, refined objects of aesthetic, indeed artistic, experience, while denying to other kinds of remunerated livelihood-securing occupations any value at all."[100] The jobs that Bauman is referring to are also those with security and which provide more than sufficient levels of prosperity to the worker, creating not only material distinctions between the desirable, professional position and the Atomized Worker, but also aesthetic and cultural divides.

For the privileged vocational worker, attaching one's selfhood to their job is seen as desirable and impressive. Lawyers, bankers, successful artists, high-level engineers — these professionals curate the narrative of their lives around their work, setting themselves apart from others because of their purpose-driven and well-rewarded careers. Bauman makes the case that being a genuine "workaholic" requires a privileged social position:

> The trick is no longer to limit work time to the bare minimum, so vacating more space for leisure, but on the contrary to efface altogether the line dividing vocation from avocation, job from hobby, work from recreation; to lift work itself to the rank of supreme and most satisfying entertainment. An entertaining job is a highly coveted privilege. And those privileged by it jump headlong into the opportunities of strong sensations and thrilling experience which such jobs offer.[101]

Not every worker who pours their lives into their labor is rewarded with stability and aesthetic admirability, despite being conditioned to do so. In the age of flexibility and constant turnover, getting too attached to one's job or identifying one's place in the world with the type of labor or skills one is engaging in "means becoming a hostage to fate."[102] As Bauman makes clear, "For

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[100] Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*, 2nd ed, Issues in Society (Maidenhead: McGraw-Hill Education, 2007), 33.
[101] Ibid, 34.
[102] Ibid, 35.

the majority of people other than the chosen few, in the present-day flexible labour market, embracing one's work as a vocation carries enormous risks and is a recipe for psychological and emotional disaster."[103] Combining Bauman's critique with Dejours et al. and Berardi's analysis of the modern requirement for emotional investment into labor reveals how the Atomized Worker is caught in a double bind: they are simultaneously expected to bring their "authentic" selves into the workplace, to be eager to "work with anyone," all while trying not to get too attached because of the very real possibility that the position they have or the very industry they are working in is only temporary. The precarity they experience is not only economic, but personal, causing work to occupy a large and conflicting amount of space within their psyche. The condition of the Atomized Worker is full of contradictory experiences: attaching themselves to the job while constantly fearing being let go, investing the self at work while lacking a sense of direction or purpose, expected to work as a team while being evaluated and judged as an individual. Recognizing and reconciling these contradictions is necessary in order for Atomized Workers to reach a position of solidarity with one another.

[103] Ibid, 35.

Conclusion: Towards An Atomized Solidarity

The neoliberal economy and its characteristic attributes — globalization, digitization, deregulation, decline in social spending — have created a political and social landscape that is more unequal than any other period of modernity. Since 1980, inequality has risen in most major and emerging economies, and despite increases in average familial wealth in the United States, the gap between the top 10% of earners and the rest of American society is the largest it has ever been. [104, 105] Given this picture of inequality, it is natural to question the merits of placing our attention on groups like Atomized Workers, when we could be directing our energy towards those who are most directly harmed by this inequality. This is a fair critique, and genuine progressive political projects must strive to achieve the emancipation of the most marginalized and precarious individuals, as without bringing them into the fold, change will not come for those who need it most.

At the same time, this picture of inequality does not undermine the reality that Atomized Workers have been forced into an undesirable and stressful existence, and that the processes of atomization and the new managerial doctrines of the modern age have led the number of workers in this condition to increase every year. On top of this, conceptions like the precariat, which bundle Atomized Workers into the same class categories as migrants and members of the precarious working class, can create the adverse effect of equating their social and material realities, diluting their potential to be useful political terms. By naming Atomized Worker and distinguishing it from existing class categories and other experiences of labor, we can begin to

[104] "Rising Inequality: A Major Issue of Our Time," Brookings, accessed March 26, 2025, https://www.brookings.edu/articles/rising-inequality-a-major-issue-of-our-time/.
[105] "Nine Charts about Wealth Inequality in America," Urban Institute, 2022, https://apps.urban.org/features/wealth-inequality-charts/.

create a new vocabulary which encapsulates the nature of their work, and can potentially lead them to a form of collective consciousness.

Working class laborers primarily organize themselves within the location of work itself. Though they have solidarity with workers across different industries, their organizing power comes from the ability to refuse work — to strike — at their workplace itself, as they hold the productive power of the firm. If Amazon warehouse workers, Starbucks baristas, or Toyota assembly workers organize a strike, the productivity of their companies grinds to a halt.

Atomized Workers, on the other hand, do not share in this power, as they do not physically work as a collective, will interact with workers of differing levels of job security and income, and hold a different (yet at times comparable) relationship to the means of production. For example, a temporary legal assistant for a major law firm who earns $45,000 a year and works from home does not have the ability to "organize" her workplace, as her "teams" include individuals with a range of class positions and income levels. She can, however, develop solidarity with fellow Atomized Workers in different industries and different places, who share in her experience of work. Imagine the case of an employee for a marketing agency earning the same income as the legal assistant. He works in an open floorplan office, often works with and takes directives from senior level employees, and is not part of a static "group" of coworkers but rather moves periodically from project to project. He does not have the ability to strike, as it is unclear who would join him, and if he quit, his role would quickly be filled by a new, anxious, ambitious, and precarious employee.

Upon hearing of his existence, our legal assistant immediately recognizes that she shares a similar experience with our marketer, and yet their potential to organize is low, as there is no union that both workers can join. However, by recognizing one another as Atomized Workers,

and by having a language to describe their experience of isolation, disaffection, and insecurity, there is a potential for solidarity. Such solidarity could lead them seeing themselves as members of a divided collective, and they could rally around their experience of having their selfhood and affective energies seized by the firms and corporations they work for. Atomized Workers have the potential for political power only when they have the capacity to genuinely articulate their condition.

The emancipation of the Atomized Worker might not top the list of desired reforms to the existing capitalist order, but remedying their individualized and disaffected condition is essential to improve the contemporary experience of work for millions around the world. This paper, and its analysis of the uniqueness of the experience of work shared by Atomized Workers across industries, is only the beginning of this project.

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