

# ***Alienation in Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie*, Bericht für eine Akademie und Ein Hungerkünstler***

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## **Introduction**

In his early writings, Marx places the concept of alienation at the center of his thinking. For Marx, the origin of man's alienation lies in his relationship to labor. Alienation is not a condition that one experiences at a particular moment, but rather something that affects the worker under the conditions of production in capitalism, that is, when the first commodities are produced. Alienated labor becomes increasingly prevalent in the production process as the mechanisms of capitalist exchange spread. Alienation is not an a priori condition of human nature, but develops from the moment one is integrated into the production process. Labor is in this sense considered existential for man, as Marx describes and evaluates the relationship between it and modern economies, in which goods are produced for the market. He employs the following German terms, generally translated as “alienation” (Entfremdung), “estrangement” (Entäußerung), with the corresponding adjectives “alien” or “foreign” (fremd) to explain his conceptions. There does not seem to be any consistent distinction between “alienation” and “estrangement”. The concept of alienation is most thoroughly treated in Marx's early *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, which were not published until 1932 and were not available in English until the late 1950s. Substantial reinterpretations of Marx were undertaken in light of these writings. In modern society, based on the division of labor, the relationship of the worker to his labor is interrupted in four ways: Man is alienated a) from the product of his labor, b) from his

own activity, c) from himself, and d) from his species, that is, from nature and his fellow human beings. This paper seeks to test if and how Marx's concept of alienation can be applied to Kafka. In the first section of this paper, I will describe the relationship between technological development and labor from the view of alienation in Franz Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie* in relation to Marx's addressing of the colonial aspect of the alienation of the worker, the equation of man and machine in his *Philosophical-Economic Manuscripts* (1932/1959, 25), an aspect that considered global aspects of capitalism. Many Marxists, and Marx himself, understand alienation in close relation to technology, and argue that technological forces are in and of themselves the cause of alienation, as evident in the economic effects of rapid industrialization and its spread to every aspect of human life. In the second section, I will outline alienation as a process of dehumanization and deindividuation due to the abstraction of human labor and relations of exchange in capitalist society. In this context, I will analyze the narratological manifestation of the effects of the precarization of artistic labor and biopolitical subjugation of the artist's body in the circus setting, based on Franz Kafka's *Ein Hungerkünstler*. The cage expresses the spatial confinement to the place of alienation, the degraded status of the artist. In the third section, I will confront this process of dehumanization with the literary representations of an ironic rehumanization process in Franz Kafka's *Bericht für eine Akademie* which is still profoundly affected by the alienating conditions of the represented society. Considering the Theater von Oklahoma in the last chapter of Kafka's *Amerika*, I will ask if a different organization of labor, and workers' resistance to capital, could be the beginning of a new era of autonomy and emancipation in terms of free consciousness and subjectivity and the end of alienation.

Marx provides a broad historical framework in which to examine alienation and delineates in his 1844 manuscript on ‘Alienated Labour’ the elements that constitute the alienation of labor:

“First, in the fact that labour is external to the worker, that is, that it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel well but unhappy, does not freely develop his physical and mental energy, but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker, therefore, feels himself only outside his work, and feels beside himself in his work. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His work therefore is not voluntary but coerced; it is forced labour. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need, but only a means for satisfying needs external to it.” (Marx/ Engels 1974, 274)

Marx’s concept of alienation is essentially a structural term and is bound to his analysis of capitalism. While it has its psychological correlates, alienation cannot be equated with the psychological state of individuals abstracted from characteristics of a social system. The concept of alienation as “a fact of political economy” thus requires an understanding of the larger context of labor within capitalism (cf. Rubinstein 1981, 203f.). For Marx, alienation is present only in alienating circumstances. Alienation presupposes private property, wage labor, and other institutions of capitalism. Time spent working is determined by the worker’s superiors. External labor, the labor in which the human being is externalized, is a labor of rare sacrifice, of mortification (Marx 1867/1976, 274f.). This paper argues that “alienation is not ontologically identified with otherness and refutation but constitutes instead a historically determined form, and therefore it is possible to overcome it historically” (Berardi 2009, 42).

## 1. The Alienating Machine in Franz Kafka's *In der Strafkolonie*

The economic system, as an amalgamation of “productive forces resulting from the cooperation and use of labour”, can be seen as a large-scale division and allocation of space for alienated labor. This section questions which role technology plays in the capitalist labor process as a whole. The development of the potential still existing in the material and intellectual structure of technology is limited by capitalist society. As far as “work is only an expression of human activity within alienation” (55), that is, in the mode of production that characterizes capitalism, the focus is not on production as human objectification, but on the process of production as alienated human labor. Capital alienates the material, the instruments, and finally the labor process itself. The product of labor thus alienates itself from the worker through “the activity of alienation” (Marx 1932/1959, 35), in opposition to the “state of alienation” (Marx 1932/1959, 35) which only applies to the non-worker. In the capitalist era, more and more complicated machines simplify the labor process and intensify this process of the workers’ alienation (cf. Marx 1932/1959, 50).

These machines absorb the functionality of the laborer. Alienated labor still occurs in the 20th and 21st centuries, though in a transformed form. New forms of alienation have arisen from the development of new technologies and the increasing importance of digital and abstracted labor. Exploitation is also facilitated by technological factors that foster both cooperation and competition and through which wages can be calculated. How do technological shifts and changes in forms of cooperation, which are also increasingly dependent on technological innovations, change the way we conceptualize alienation as Marx described it? Further, this

paper will investigate non-labor-related environments, as Marx argues that the alienation of the worker impacts the relationship they have with the world.

Kafka's texts can be seen as an attempt to capture Marx's concept of alienation in a narrative setting. In particular, Kafka's stories, such as *Die Verwandlung*, *Bericht über eine Akademie*, and *Ein Hungerkünstler*, illustrate aspects of the dehumanization of the human being under conditions of labor. In these narratives, the subject is trapped in an increasingly alienated economic structure (including familial structures) and new capitalist working conditions. Indeed, the features of Marx's concept of alienation clearly determine the ideological character of these texts. Franz Kafka's disturbing, enigmatic short story *In der Strafkolonie* was written in 1917 and published in 1918, and follows this tradition, engaging the theme of enslavement in a penal colony marked by alienation and estranged labor conditions. Labor in the Penal Colony represents a "machine system" that possesses "an entirely objective organization of production, which confronts the worker as a pre-existing material condition of production" (Marx 1867/1976, 508). The bodies of the laborers are subjected to rules of obedience and, in the case of disobedience, are objectified as material to be punished and "diverted in one's general judgment." (Kafka, 8) Society thus becomes a machine that plots against the worker who is its victim. In the story, a complex and gruesome machine is used to inscribe the verdict – disobedience – into the naked body of a worker, who is killed in this supposed administration of "justice". The machine is thus a representation of an alienating social force, and its description can be seen as an allegory of the control over the labor process in the colony as a whole.

For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's writing itself becomes an "abstract machine" that is "the unlimited social field, but it is also the body of desire" (ibid. 88). The properties of the text produce intensities "which are inscribed in all sorts of connections and polyvalences." (ibid.)

The cage and the man's binds as a form of restraint, are properties that produce different connections and polyvalences in terms of the alienation of the characters, but also in terms of the pursuit for autonomy and its impossibility created by the machine's autonomization:

“Now, have a look at this apparatus,” he added immediately, drying his hands with a towel and pointing to the device. “Up to this point I had to do some work by hand, but from now on the apparatus should work entirely on its own.” The Traveller nodded and followed the Officer. The latter tried to protect himself against all eventualities by saying, “Of course, breakdowns do happen. I really hope none will occur today, but we must be prepared for it. The apparatus is supposed to keep going for twelve hours without interruption. But if any breakdowns do occur, they'll only be very minor, and we'll deal with them right away.” (Kafka 1919, 1f)

The machine is also a representation of the former commandant's and officer's will, which arguably also stands for the capitalist production and disciplinary process as a whole. This text passage also focalizes the way the machine works and the way it is used in accordance with other alienating forces. The machine is working “for twelve hours without interruption” (ibid.) and can therefore be seen as an agency that competes and exchanges human labor forces. In addition, all human labor forces in the colony seem to be dependent on the machine. According to Marx, “the division of labor renders him [the worker] ever more one-sided and dependent, bringing with it the competition not only of men but also of machines.” (Marx 1844/ 1959, 5) Executing the will of the former commandant, it works as an instance of punishment for one of the workers whose only fault is that he slept too long. It is thereby placed in close relation to all the human workers in the penal colony and has an alienating effect on all involved. The whole story seems to revolve around the machine and this effect. Kafka highlights the explorer's

emotion of anxiety, which likely has to do with the fact that without the machine, the whole organization in the Penal Colony would probably collapse. The bodies of the workers to be subjected to the operation of the machine, as the machine stands for more than just punishment, are already integrated into all the bodily movements of the characters in the story. The machine is inscribed, segmented, and its labor power is used as time for appropriating the labor of others, or “alien labor”. Although the officer of the colony was in the machine, first as its mechanic and then as its victim, and although the characters belong to the labor process of the machine from which they are alienated, it seems like the characters are in a sort of adjacency to the machine, always in contact with this or that segment, but also always reified by the machine and kept outside the process. Marx insisted that there were “many idyllic methods of primitive accumulation” that “made the soil part and parcel of capital” (Marx 1867/1954, 685).

According to Marx, alienation is expressed by machine fetishism in the sphere of production. These notions can be found in this text as well as the machine as an alienating force of colonial construction that considers the expanses of land as unowned and uncultivated. The machine thus becomes a tool for the control and cultivation of land and workers. Here, in this penal colony, it becomes a tool for punishment. The officer makes repeated references to the late commandant of the penal colony, the one who designed the machine. Following his death, the execution device he designed has fallen out of favor with the authorities. Its last great champion is the officer, who enthusiastically explains its workings to the traveler. The machine is thus represented as an innovation and major investment that brings order to the whole working process in the colony:

“Now I know all about it,” said the Traveller, as the Officer turned back to him again. “Except the most important thing,” said the latter, grabbing the Traveller by the arm and pointing up high. “There in the Inscriber is the mechanism which determines the movement of the Harrow, and this mechanism is arranged according to the diagram on which the sentence is set down. I still use the diagrams of the previous Commandant. Here they are.” He pulled some pages out of the leather folder. “Unfortunately I can’t hand them to you. They are the most cherished thing I possess. Sit down, and I’ll show you them from this distance. Then you’ll be able to see it all well.” (Kafka 1919, 7)

We can see that basic ideas related to alienation are embodied in the machine as a “labour-power machine” (Marx 1867/1976, 357). Furthermore, all the bodies of the workers seem to be subjected to the running of the machine using their labor as “time for appropriating the labour of others [fremde Arbeit]” (ibid.). Here the abstract labor is socialized in symbiosis with other abstract labors and with the machine itself as it “is regulated according to the inscription demanded by the sentence.”<sup>1</sup>

No human beings are needed to carry out the punishment of disobedient workers and the machine becomes “the instrument of labour”, assuming a material mode of existence which “necessitates the replacement of human force by natural forces and the replacement of the rule of thumb by the conscious application of natural science” (Marx 1867/1976, 508). Alienation, in a word, appears as a painful necessity. To be more precise, the machine in *The Penal Colony* operates in this large-scale industrial punitive context as a “technical necessity dictated by the

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<sup>1</sup> Kafka, F. (1919). In the Penal Colony. Translation by Ian Johnston of Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC downloaded from <http://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/kafka/> This “inscription is made on the body” (1) and must be “always clear” (1). It “keeps making the inscription deeper for twelve hours” (7).

very nature of the instrument of labour.” (Marx 1867/1976, 508) While some Marxists draw on the fact that technology is essentially neutral and indifferent with respect to the ends it serves, that this alienation is associated with a specific use of the machine, others argue that it is only in the most immediate and superficial sense that one may see alienation as resulting from the structure of technology.

The form technological development takes is strongly influenced by the structure of economic institutions. These authors carefully demonstrate that, under capitalism, profit is the determinant of the social division of labor, and that technological innovations are largely geared to forms compatible with capitalist production. Use of machines separates the era of modern industry from that of manufacture. Marx relates the concept of alienation to new forms of machinery without defining what machines make up the nineteenth-century means of production.

*In the Penal Colony* paradoxically ends with the execution of the officer himself. In addition to a multitude of aesthetic breaks, this plot logic alone reveals a critique of technological alienation.

*In the Penal Colony*, it is precisely from the point of view of those who cause the suffering and pain, or rather set the alienating machines in motion, that a strange content becomes visible, which one would associate with the concept of alienation:

“At least, here in the small, deep, sandy valley, closed in on all sides by barren slopes, apart from the Officer and the Traveller there were present only the Condemned, a vacant-looking man with a broad mouth and dilapidated hair and face, and the Soldier, who held the **heavy chain** to which were connected the **small chains** which **bound** the Condemned Man by his feet and wrist bones, as well as by his neck, and which were also linked to each other by **connecting chains**. The Condemned Man, incidentally, had an expression of such dog-like resignation that it looked as

if one could set him free to roam around the slopes and would only have to whistle at the start of the execution for him to return.” (Kafka 1919, 1 (own emphasis))

The machine positions itself automatically. In the capitalist period, complex and advanced machinery are introduced more frequently. Marx argues that these take away from the worker’s operation and remove the appeal of labor as an intrinsic and potentially fulfilling human activity. Marx’s critique of technological alienation is most fully expressed in his description of the role of machines in modern industrial life, where the great majority of people’s daily activities consist of working on devices they neither own nor comprehend. When the officer realizes that he cannot convince his visitor of the effect of the machine, he has the stunned condemned man freed from the machine, undresses, and lays himself into the machine, the gears of which he rearranges so that it inscribes the words “Be just” into his back. He even dismantles the entire apparatus. In the sense of justice, then, this spectacle is an enactment of an alienating force. The machine as such an alienating force and its effect on the human body is already presented by the officer as meaningful at the beginning of the narrative and that’s important for the later exposition of the topic of alienation:

The Traveller had leaned his ear towards the Officer and, with his hands in his coat pockets, was observing the machine at work. The Condemned Man was also watching, but without understanding. He bent forward a little and followed the moving needles, as the Soldier, after a signal from the Officer, cut through his shirt and trousers with a knife from the back, so that they fell off the Condemned Man. He wanted to grab the falling garments to cover his bare flesh, but the Soldier held him up and shook the last rags from him. The Officer turned the machine off, and in the silence which then ensued the Condemned Man was laid out under the Harrow. The chains were taken off and the straps fastened in their place. For

the Condemned Man it seemed at first glance to signify almost a relief. And now the Harrow sunk down a stage lower, for the Condemned was a thin man. (Kafka 1919, 6)

Marx uses alienation to characterize an economic system presupposing greed, exchange, competition, and private ownership of productive resources. In that system, he argues, money is used to value goods and to devalue people, because workers themselves become commodities bought and sold as labor. The devaluation of the human world, he writes, grows in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things (Early Writings 323f.):

So the Officer went over to him and said, with his face turned towards the Traveller, “The machine is very complicated. Now and then something has to tear or break. One shouldn’t let that detract from one’s overall opinion. Anyway, we have an immediate replacement for the strap. I’ll use a chain—even though that will affect the sensitivity of the movements for the right arm.” And while he put the chain in place, he kept talking, “Our resources for maintaining the machine are very limited at the moment. Under the previous Commandant, I had free access to a cash box specially set aside for this purpose. There was a store room here in which all possible replacement parts were kept. I admit I made almost extravagant use of it. I mean earlier, not now, as the New Commandant claims. For him everything serves only as a pretext to fight against the old arrangements. Now he keeps the cash box for machinery under his own control, and if I ask him for a new strap, he demands the torn one as a piece of evidence, the new one doesn’t arrive for ten days, and it’s an inferior brand, of not much use to me. But how I am supposed to get the machine to work in the meantime without a strap—no one’s concerned about that.” (Kafka 1919/1941, 8f)

The thing in turn becomes money, and now we have another kind of abstraction—one that later, in Marxism, would be called real abstraction (cf. Sohn-Rethel 1977). There are thus two

abstractions: one is as yet not real, which is the abstraction of the individual self, and another is real, or social, which results in alienation. The representation of the machine depicts alienation in this twofold sense:

“[...] You should have seen the executions in earlier days! The entire valley was overflowing with people, even a day before the execution. They all came merely to watch. Early in the morning the Commandant appeared with his women. Fanfares woke up the entire campsite. I delivered the news that everything was ready. The whole society—and every high official had to attend—arranged itself around the machine. This pile of cane chairs is a sorry leftover from that time. The machine was freshly cleaned and glowed. For almost every execution I had new replacement parts. In front of hundreds of eyes—all the spectators stood on tip toe right up to the hills there—the condemned man was laid down under the Harrow by the Commandant himself. [...]” (Kafka 1919/1941, 10)

The machine which is surrounded by “the whole society” (ibid.) is operated by an officer whose function is also judicial. Its purpose is to carve the transgressed commandment deeper and deeper into the body of the condemned in a long and bloody procedure that finally leads to his death. The officer is a proponent of the apparatus. However, since the death of the old commander, this form of punishment has lost its popularity, as there are no more crowds of spectators like the one described above. The new commandant is even described as a detractor of this kind of punishment, as he does not attend executions and has limited the funds available for the constant repairs on the machine. He is probably hoping for critical comments from the traveler, an expert in the field of punishment, in order to put an end to this state-of-the-art, and at the same time archaic, method of punishment. It is a method that does not announce the sentence to the defendant before execution, let alone leave an opportunity for defense. It is only

during the twelve hours of suffering and pain that the condemned must endure that which he allegedly recognizes from the writing. The needle is carved by the screeching machine over and over again and ever deeper into his body. This drawn-out process can also be associated with the idea of redemption. This process is supposed to create meaning, and thus the twelve-hour act can be seen as a form “of social control and regulation of the labour forces” (Marx 1867/1976, 672), by enforcing rules it appears as a spectacle that seems to have a wide-spread meaning for all the workers in the whole colony.

## **2. Dehumanization: The Animal in *Bericht über eine Akademie***

According to Marx, alienation *from* nature, and domination *upon* nature were thus two sides of one and the same process. When alienated from himself, man is powerless to exercise his free activity in any but his animal manners. “The animal is immediately identical with its life activity. It does not distinguish itself from it. It is its life activity.” (Marx 1932/1959, 75) The human being, Marx points out, is different from animals because he “makes his life activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness. He has conscious life activity which directly distinguishes him from animal life activity.” (ibid.) Marx argues that human labor is “reality forming” and that it alters nature, and that this is the only way to alter the animal nature of human beings.

*Ein Bericht für eine Akademie* is a short story by Franz Kafka, written and published in 1917. The ape Rotpeter, formerly Peter, is captured by an expedition of the Hagenbeck company. This company actually existed, capturing animals all over the world and selling them to zoological gardens, where lions, walruses, and panthers were exhibited. But they often took people along with the animals, because they organized so-called 'Völkerschauen'. This story deals with

Marx's notion that man, in his fallen status, is alienated from himself and dominated by “inhuman conditions and elements – in a word, man is no longer a real species of being” (Marx 1971, 99). Rotpeter begins his account with his incarnation and capture and his stay in a cage on the Hagenbeck steamer on his way from the German colony in West Africa to Hamburg. By imitating the sailors on board the ship, he is able to lead a life of his own, later also adapting to the conventions of society. In this context, Kafka focuses on the qualities of the animal that are regressively humanized, while human actions are seen as complicitly causing more and more alienation. Yet, in this story, it is no longer a question of man becoming-animal, but the alienating process of an ape becoming man:

If people had wanted it, my journey back at first would have been possible through the entire gateway which heaven builds over the earth, but as my development was whipped onwards, the gate simultaneously grew lower and narrower all the time. I felt myself more comfortable and more enclosed in the world of human beings. (Kafka 1917, 1)

In fact, the animal captured by the man finds itself alienated by the human alienating force, as the whole beginning of this story tells us. But, in turn, the alienated animal force precipitates and solidifies the alienation of the alienated force:

One supervises oneself with a whip and tears oneself apart at the slightest resistance. My ape nature ran off, head over heels, out of me, so that in the process my first teacher himself almost became an ape and soon had to give up training and be carried off to a mental hospital. Fortunately he was soon discharged again. (Kafka 1917, 7)

The narrator, speaking before a scientific conference, describes his former life as an ape. His story begins in a West African jungle, in which a hunting expedition shoots and captures him. Caged on a ship for his voyage to Europe, he finds himself for the first time without the freedom

to move as he wills. Out of the desire to escape from this situation, he studies the habits of the crew, and imitates them with surprising ease; he reports encountering particular difficulty only in learning to drink alcohol. Throughout the story, the narrator reiterates that he learned his human behavior not out of any desire to be human, but only to provide himself with a means of escape from his cage, which is in a sense a semiotic cage. Upon arriving in Europe, the ape realizes that he is faced with a choice between “the Zoological Garden or the Music Hall” and devotes himself to becoming human enough to become an able performer. He accomplishes this, with the help of many teachers, and reports to the academy that his transformation is so complete that he can no longer properly describe his emotions and experiences as an ape. In conclusion, the ape expresses a degree of satisfaction with his fate.

Marx uses the word "animal" to refer to a person's natural needs, and "spiritual" or "human essence" to describe the work that connects us all. Both refer to the processes of externalization, estrangement, reification, and alienation that occur in the interaction between these two spheres, which Marx also calls dehumanization. However, it's important to understand that in Marx's work, the idea that workers are reduced to animals is not accurate. When workers sell their labor, they become less than animals because they are giving up their creative freedom. This freedom is not just about having fun, it's about the ability to transform the world and make things happen. Alienation does not bring us back to nature, it takes away our ability to create and work meaningfully.

### **3. Alienated Abstract Labor in *Ein Hungerkünstler***

The early twentieth century was a time of social change, of technical modernization, which also affected artistic labor. At the heart of Kafka's 1922 short story *Ein Hungerkünstler*, a parable of the art of hunger, is a deep alienation of the relationship between artistic labor and the market

economy, and, as Moody (2018, 39) points out, “a sustained interrogation of the possibility of autonomous art in a commercialized context.” According to Nieto Galan (2014, 64), in the late 19th and beginning of the 20th century, the art of hunger became “progressively a commodity [...] in the urban marketplace which could be exploited for amusement and profit.” Yet, what does “abstract labor” and “artistic labor” mean for Marx? With the expression of abstract labor, Marx refers to labor simply as a producer of exchange value, and therefore as pure distribution of time materialized in value. The fact that activity deployed in time produces objects possessing a concrete usage is not at all interesting from the point of view of capital.

Kafka’s *A Hunger Artist* is about a man who fasts for a living. He travels with the impresario (his manager) from town to town in Europe. In each city, the hunger artist chooses a public place and puts himself on display in a locked cage, where he fasts for up to forty days. People come to this public place to see him suffer.

At the beginning of the story, Kafka describes in general terms that times have changed, and with them working conditions, which have led to the almost complete disappearance of hunger artists. From its first sentence, the story positions the hunger artist’s process of alienation at the center of the tale, opening thusly:

“In the last decades interest in hunger artists has declined considerably. Whereas in earlier days there was good money to be earned putting on major productions of this sort under one’s own management, nowadays that is totally impossible. Those were different times. Back then the hunger artist captured the attention of the entire city. From day to day while the fasting lasted, participation increased.” (Kafka 1922, 1)

From the outset, the hunger artist is framed as a creature of the commercialized public sphere. His position as an artist is declining within the market economy as he is increasingly integrated

into the sphere of commercialized mass culture. Right at the beginning of the text, Kafka brings into play the impossibility of the Hunger Artist to work independently, as well as the changed financial situation under capitalism. Marx already reflects on alienation in connection with the monetary system in his *Economic- Philosophical Manuscripts*. (Marx 1932/1959, 37) He essentially elaborates the connections between private property, greed, the separation of labor, capital and real property, exchange and competition, value and the devaluation of human beings, monopoly and competition. (Marx 1932/1959, 37) In this story, the impresario here embodies the capitalist. The limit of forty days of fasting is necessary because the hunger artist is needed as a living body to generate profit over a longer period of time. One can see this measuring of the hunger artist's working time as symptomatic of the gigantic social forces that, in Marx's sense (Marx 1974, 143), are created by it, use it, and keep it within the limits necessary to maintain the value of the capital already created. The way Kafka describes the conditions of artistic labor and the setting of labor time concerning the process of valorization is therefore important for his critique of capitalism:

The impresario had set the maximum length of time for the fast at forty days—he would never allow the fasting go on beyond that point, not even in the cosmopolitan cities. And, in fact, he had a good reason. Experience had shown that for about forty days one could increasingly whip up a city's interest by gradually increasing advertising, but that then the people turned away—one could demonstrate a significant decline in popularity. In this respect, there were, of course, small differences among different towns and among different countries, but as a rule it was true that forty days was the maximum length of time. (Kafka 1922, 3)

He earns his living, so to speak, by suffering in a timeframe set by the impresario. He is also suffering from the fact that his profession has gradually lost prestige within the conditions of

modernity. Also, his profession gradually loses importance and is devalued, as already noted in the opening lines of the text.

“During these last decades, the interest in professional fasting has markedly diminished. It used to pay well to stage such great performances under one's management, but that is quite impossible today. We live in a different world now.” (1)

It is precisely the impresario who sets the stage for the starving artist as an alienated performer. Even if the whole experience gradually becomes visible as an end in itself, the suffering of the hunger artist is always attributed to meaning and use, aesthetically broken, though remnants of a concept of redemptive suffering are still apparent. By employing religious motifs, the concept of redemptive suffering emerges:

The impresario came and in silence—the music made talking impossible—raised his arms over the hunger artist, as if inviting heaven to look upon its work here on the straw, this unfortunate martyr, something the hunger artist certainly was, only in a completely different sense [...]. (Kafka 1922, 4 )

Reading this passage in terms of Marx, Kafka consciously shows here the mystification of capital relations by the capitalist, who thus also completes the mystification of the exploitation process of capital. Profit, as embodied by the Hunger Artist, is basically the same as surplus value, only in a mystified form. This, however, grows out of the capitalist mode of production by necessity:

Although the hunger artist was very familiar with this perversion of the truth, it always strained his nerves again and was too much for him. What was a result of the premature ending of the fast people were now proposing as its cause! It was impossible to fight against this lack of understanding, against this world of misunderstanding. **In good faith** he always listened eagerly

to the impresario at the bars of his cage, but each time, once the photographs came out, he would let go of the bars and, with a sigh, sink back into the straw, and a reassured public could come up again and view him. (Kafka 1922, 4 (own emphasis))

According to Marx, the realization of labor appears so much as de-realization that the worker is de-realized to the point of starvation. (cf. Marx 1932/1959, 38) Objectification appears so much as the loss of the object that the worker is deprived of the most necessary objects, not only of life but also of the objects of labor. The hunger artist possesses nothing at the beginning of the story but his cage and a clock that measures his labor time. The self-valorization process of the circus owner's capital has, in Marx's sense, "a definite quantity of the unpaid labor of other people [fremde Arbeit]" (672), which can be measured in terms of commanded labor time. Dreaming of an autonomous art and self-governmental art practice, he rebels against the market that dominates the circumstances of his artistic practices. He rages against the impresario who dictates the duration of his fast thus limiting it to forty days. Now this time limit is not set at random, but the labor time, as Marx already notes, is strongly determined by the economically changing market conditions: "after that the town began to lose interest, sympathetic support began notably to fall off" (Kafka 1922, 3). In addition, the circus owner is presented as the one who has "dominion over unpaid labour" (ibid.). The hunger artist's labor itself becomes an object which he can seize, in accordance with Marx (1844, 38), only with the greatest effort:

It was the easiest thing in the world. About this he did not remain silent, but people did not believe him. At best they thought he was being modest. Most of them, however, believed he was a publicity seeker or a total swindler, for whom, at all events, fasting was easy, because he understood how to make it easy, and then had the nerve to half admit it. He had to accept all that. Over the years he had become accustomed to it. But this dissatisfaction kept gnawing at his

insides all the time and never yet—and this one had to say to his credit—had he left the cage of his own free will after any period of fasting. (Kafka 1922, 2).

Most of the time, when an artist makes something, the rights of that labor do not belong to them, but to the company/person they work for. Although it is the artist who created and made the work, they are separated from it completely. The essence of the labor put into the product is also the essence of the worker, just as the artist puts their essence into their work. But the artist is both recognized and remains the object of credit for the resultant work, while the proletariat worker is separated from product completely, leaving behind his embedded labor, which is, or was, a part of him, but is no longer a part of him or his essence. By externalizing the worker's labor it becomes a productive force in the commodity and a commodity itself.

Marx transformed the concept of alienation and estranged labor, which is in a certain sense anthropological, into a historical and materialist concept in *Capital*. Alienation, therefore, appears again and again in *Capital*. Marx historicizes the concept of alienation and later adapts it to his new insights. The alien character of the hunger artist's labor is clearly shown in the fact that the body is spent, his labor time is commanded externally, and he himself becomes a commodity for the circus owner's accumulation of capital. In the spirit of Marx, labor time is determined externally. External labor, the labor in which the human being is externalized, is a labor of rare sacrifice, of mortification, as Marx (1867/1976, 274f.) already elaborates in the early writings:

And at this moment the hunger artist always fought back. Of course, he still freely laid his bony arms in the helpful outstretched hands of the ladies bending over him, but he did not want to stand up. Why stop right now after forty days? He could have kept going for even longer, for an unlimited length of time. Why stop right now, when he was in his best form, indeed, not yet even in his best fasting form? Why did people want to rob him of the fame of fasting longer, not just so that he could become the greatest hunger artist of all time, which he probably was already, but also so that he could surpass himself in some unimaginable way, for he felt there were no limits to his capacity for fasting. (Kafka 1922, 6)

Marx utilized his theory of alienation as a diagnostic tool for the problems associated with capitalism. For one, Marx described the worker as being separated (alienated) from the fruits of their own labor. The worker is unable to attain the true rewards of his/her work and is left devalued in accordance with their output. The more wealth a worker produces, the more that worker impoverishes, that is, the more commodities a worker produces, the more their value decreases. Additionally, Marx thought of labor under capitalism as producing labor (and the worker) itself as a commodity, further dehumanizing and devaluing the laborer. Another aspect of alienation discussed by Marx concerns how profits are utilized in the capitalist economy. Under capitalism, profits are reinvested into the business or corporation, they aren't enjoyed by the laborers that actually produced said wealth. This leaves the worker disconnected from his/her work (workers do not own what they produce), which, according to Marx, is inherently anti-human (Marx thought of labor as a fundamental aspect of the human condition). In addition, because of the realities of capitalism, workers are unable to work in a fulfilling manner, workers are forced to work to live rather than living to work. Marx thought we are alienated as workers insofar as we do not control our work and do not own what we produce.

Marx is ambiguous on the scope of “alienation” - it appears in his early writings but the concept seems to evolve over time. The concept apparently originates with the Hegelian idea that we don't feel at home in the world, and Marx picks up the idea and talks about how humans are “alienated” from the products and process of their labor, from each other and from their “species-being.” However, the focus is not so much on 'a fair reward', but on having no stake in the work process (no development through it, etc.). Alienation can be described from the “species being”. that Marx is describing. Marx's concept of alienation has several layers. The first is the alienation of the worker from their own labor. The second is their own alienation from their life, and then the third is the alienation from their species-life. To me, this concept of alienation is still useful, as it is still relevant in the world of production. The laborer does not own the product of their labor. The labor they spend on that product becomes embedded in the object itself, taking a life of its own, separate from the worker: “The co-operation of wage-labourers is entirely the effect of capital, which employs them simultaneously. The connection of their functions and their unity as a single productive body lie outside them, in capital which brings and keeps them together. Therefore the connection of their labours confronts them ideally as the plan, practically as the authority of the capitalist, as the power of a foreign will, which subjects their deed to its own aim.” (Marx 1974, 6) And this alienation of the social combination of their own activities from the direct agents of these activities becomes more and more expressed, as their ability to do labor itself is modified through these forms in such a way that in its independence, i.e., outside that capitalist interrelation, it becomes impotent, so that its productive capacity is “undermined” and “the elevation of direct labour into social labour appears as a reduction of individual labour to the level of helplessness in the fact of communality, represented by, and concentrated in, capital.” It is this aspect of alienation, which

is progressively more and more emphasized by Marx and first of all not because of its genetic importance (co-operation as the historically first form of existence of industrial capital), but rather since, while expressing alienation in the most direct way it carries in itself the seeds and possibilities of its radical overcoming.

But these socially created conval, productive forces, the objectified results of the productive activity of the laborers, are concentrated in the hands of a minority, which has control over them and, through this control, over the life-conditions of the immediate producers. “Capitalist production is the first to develop on the large scale - tearing them away from the individual independent labourer - both the objective and subjective conditions of their labour, but it develops them as powers, dominating the individual labourer and alien to him ... the conditions of this to which they are capitalized.”

The individual has the ability to free themselves from the bondage of preset, already determined, and immutable social ties that bind him to a predetermined circle of persons and activities, but only insofar as all their social contacts become established and realized through the mediation of commodities and their universal incarnation, money. The historical process of individuation takes on the antagonistic form of depersonalization of the individual (cf. Marcuse 1954, 146).

In *Reason and Revolution*, one of Herbert Marcuse’s most important texts, we read:

The worker alienated from his product is at the same time alienated from himself. His labor itself becomes no longer his own, and the fact that it becomes the property of another bespeaks an expropriation that touches the very essence of man. Labor in its true form is a medium for man's true self-fulfillment and autonomy, for the full development of his potentialities. (Marcuse 1954, 277)

Here Marcuse links two very different topics as if they were one and the same: the development of potentialities concretely determined in the social and technical history of the conflict between workers and capital), and human autonomy.

### **Conclusion and Further Research**

In conclusion, Marx's concept of alienation has several layers. The first is the alienation of the worker from their own labor. The second is their own alienation from their life, and then the third is the alienation from their species' life. Also, the idea that man's "species-being is estranged from him" (32) is very confusing. He also seems to say that we are all alienated in some form, hence the ambiguity and difficulty in trying to figure it all out.

For my future research work, I would like to make a few comments about Kafka's *Amerika*, a text written around the same time as *In the Penal Colony*. Critics have emphasized the utopian nature of The Theatre of Oklahoma, and some have seen it as a futuristic vision of the ideal society that has achieved personal and social redemption. The many comic elements in the scene lead other Kafka interpreters to the logical conclusion that it is a satire of a utopia. This capitalist world in the heart of America, however, was one that Kafka may have truly believed in. Since the chapter was written at a time of economic crisis, I think it likely that the orientation towards questions of emancipated labor was more prominent than questions of guilt and redemption, religious questions that were emphasized above all concerning the Theater of Oklahoma.

Marx believed that the active foundations of a far greater human understanding and social solidarity would be laid. At the same time, a greater, 'total' individuality would be created by such varied activities, and hence "the free development of each' would no longer conflict with the free development of all" (Marx 1988, 53). Kafka's last chapter of *Amerika* thus raises the

question if it is possible to organize production and consumption without the use of some form of money or market exchange. But above all, work will have become "not only a means of living but the main need of life". With this sentence in particular, we are back to the earlier philosophical ideas about (alienated) labor and a vision of human liberation that sees this liberation in everyone in society being able to work productively and creatively in a way that suits their abilities, for their pleasure and self-development as well as for the benefit of others. By equipping everyone with a comprehensive scientific, artistic, and humanistic education – necessary both to supervise production and to participate in decisions about what to produce –, the "opposition between intellectual and manual labor" would be overcome.

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