

**Consumer Culture and its Social Effects on Education:
Replacing the Citizen with the Consumer, the Commodification of Identity,
Issues of Entitlement, Narcissism, and the Crisis of Authority**

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Abstract

Some of the difficulties that educators are having in teaching their students today are resultant from what Hannah Arendt (2006), called the *crisis of authority* in our modern world. It is hindering, among other things, the teacher's ability to educate and protect the children from the world. This study proposes the importance of including consumer culture as the fundamental context with which to understand some of today's more negative aspects of individualism and individuation that may be partly caused by a *culture of entitlement* in contemporary society in general, as well as in education and schools. Using consumer culture as an all-encompassing term to understand what Zygmunt Bauman (2007) referred to as our 'liquid' society, this study shows how this *crisis* is the result of capitalism's metamorphosis from that of producers to that of consumers. It discusses how the change of capitalism's ethos over the decades has had a marked effect on the individual sense of being and belonging by fundamentally replacing the citizen with the consumer. In education, consumer culture is promoting an individualized consumerist ethos that compromises the more metaphysical and holistic aspects of teaching (*educere*) while promoting the exclusively functionalist and mechanical *educare* with its more practical, skills-oriented, standardized, individualizing and 'marketable' aims of education. To understand the genesis of consumer culture's alienating form of individualism, this study makes a brief historical analysis of capitalism's initial stages of consolidation to its semiotic and surveillance forms of today. It demonstrates how the quasi-complete commodification of daily life, including often within rapports, is manufacturing our identities and personas through egotism, egoism, and even simulation. Through an autoethnography, this study manages to align and illustrate this discussion and theories espoused by several scholars through ten vignettes from this author's personal life experiences both as a citizen and educator.

To my patient and ever-encouraging wife, who was my greatest motivator for the completion of my Masters years ago, and who also pushed me to embark on this final journey towards this dissertation; and to my beloved mother, who passed away two and a half years ago after, often unfairly, blaming herself and her ailments for ‘taking me away’ from the timely completion of this project - *¡conseguiamos, Came!* And to my dad, whose wonderful altruism towards social causes to which he volunteered that *did* take him away from his own dissertation completion decades ago -this one is for us!

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Chapter One: Introduction

On September 2012, the Edmonton School Board fired a high school physics teacher for insubordination for not adhering to the Board's policy of giving 'no zeros' for student work.¹ After several parental complaints of the teacher's assigning zeroes for incomplete student work, the teacher was suspended without pay. The 'no-zero' policy, common in many jurisdictions in North America, takes its basis on the idea that zero grades negatively impact student self-esteem and growth. Both teacher and principal were brought before the superintendent to explain his conduct. Soon after, he received his final dismissal notice by courier. The teacher took the school board to court on the basis of wrongful dismissal. By 2015, he was cleared of three charges of unprofessional conduct. In the final court of appeal, the school board was ordered to award the teacher retroactive pay and to top up his pension, as he took early retirement.

Increasingly, across North America, teachers are reprimanded or dismissed for exercising their professional judgement in a number of academic and professional arenas. Despite being overturned, this example is illustrative of changing cultural

¹ See this case on online news, as well as other cases where teachers have been disciplined for 'failing students,' for example, at <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/edmonton-teacher-fired-for-breaking-no-zero-policy-won-t-get-job-back-1.2738397>; and Christian Science Monitor, August 12, 1993 or at <https://www.csmonitor.com/layout/set/print/1993/0812/12142.html>; <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/sacked-high-school-teachers-whiteboard-message-to-students-goes-viral/news-story/e57445cf3af31df2607b632416fe673a>. Also see Florida teacher fired, in the New York Post online at <https://nypost.com/2018/09/26/teacher-says-she-was-fired-for-ignoring-schools-no-zero-policy>; there are other similar cases.

and social expectations in education which I argue are reflective of a larger trend. My project seeks to explore some of the sociological complexities around changes in education and schooling in the last decades. From the vantage point of the practicing teacher, I analyze the change in teachers' work through a theoretical socio-cultural analysis. I then bring this analysis to my practice and their microcosmic manifestations in the school and classroom. My dissertation asks questions around the conditions leading to the weakened authority of teachers in terms of their expertise and professional autonomy and judgement over their work with students. These questions specifically focus on issues and questions of educational attainment, the purpose of education, its professional rapports, conducts and relationships between teachers, students, parents and administrators. In terms of the latter, I ask questions around today's sense of *entitlement* and how it may affect students and their sense of rights and responsibilities.

The incident that opens this work signals what Hannah Arendt (2006) called a *crisis in education* (p.170) as further affected by what she termed a *crisis of authority* (p.91). My study engages this ongoing crisis in North American schools through a theoretical and autoethnographic examination of the weakening of teacher authority in their professional work as educators. I am concerned with how a growing policing of teacher's autonomy impacts on adult authority as well as student moral and intellectual growth. What is crucial for my project is not simply questioning the rightful

or wrongful dismissal of teachers, but to better understand and deconstruct North American cultural and societal values that have *resulted* in policies such as ‘no-zero’ that impact upon professional judgement and autonomy. This conflict between a once sacrosanct educator’s authority, which in the past mostly concerned itself with academics, is now micromanaged by school board administrations and trustees on behest of today’s social expectations and consumer cultures that greatly impact on the relationship between teacher and student.

1.1. The Problem

Much is written of consumer culture and its influence on daily life, ranging from issues around social values, individualism, the family, identity relationships, private debt, politics, the environment, and education, among others. Under-examined in the literature is the effect that consumer culture is having on the pedagogical rapports and relationships among students, parents, teachers and administrators alike, and how consumer culture may ultimately be affecting educational attainment.

In this dissertation, I look to my teaching practice to unpack what I perceive to be a radical change in school culture as affected by the market forces of consumerism. I argue that schools are beset by consumer culture, and its *sponsor*, semiocapitalism, which alters the way members relate to themselves, and consequently, to each other. Semiocapitalism, which I will discuss in much more detail in Chapter Four, is a term that was used by Jean Baudrillard (2005), and currently by Bifo Berardi (2009, 2019) that describes late capitalism’s usage of semiotics (symbols and codes) in order to create

value from images that can then be translated into commodities themselves as they suscite consumer interest in the marketplace. This study will focus on both the possible socio-cultural causes of these specific rapports by bringing teacher knowledge and daily professional field experience of the effects of consumer culture on education, especially with regards to the rapports between and among the educator, students, parents and administrators. My object of examination is the pedagogical relation, and the way teacher authority is eroded by the students' and parents' growing sense of entitlement, even narcissism, and the increasing commodification of all rapports.

The inquiry emerges from my experience as a teacher, from which I observe the educator's authority increasingly restrained by consumer culture. As I argue in this dissertation, consumer culture is indirectly dictating professional interpersonal relationships through a public relations paradigm. In this paradigm students and parents are 'clients' that are served and appeased by educators and administrators alike. This dissertation will give several examples of such dynamics, by means of my recollection of in-class and in-school occurrences. I also offer examples from my personal experiences that I have had outside of education that I feel have been affected by consumer culture. Most certainly, despite the fact that these experiences inform my perceptions of consumer culture and its effects, my study will draw on critical theory and cultural studies as an overarching framework and will provide a means to challenge my own perceptions by deconstructing them in order to have them reiterated or contextualized. My autoethnographic recounts of my experiences will be analyzed by

means of the writings and insights of several philosophers, social scholars and political and educational theorists such as Zygmunt Bauman (2007, 2007a, 2007b, 2013a, 2013b, 2016), Hannah Arendt (1998, 2006), Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 1991, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1998), Jean Baudrillard (2005), Franco ‘Bifo’ Berardi (2009, 2011, 2019), Benjamin Barber (1996, 2007), as well as academics in education, such as Gert Biesta (2012, 2013), Henry Giroux (1994a, 1994b, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2017), Trevor Norris (2011), and social psychologists such as Jean Twenge (2009, 2014, 2017). I will also cite several field studies.

This study is generated from my ongoing observations of today’s ethos of contemporary consumer advocacy culture and its effect on the classroom. I have witnessed, often, education consumed by consumerist expectations that reorient the pedagogical relationship towards a business model -one that expects teachers and administrators to cater to student and parent expectations and demands. As an educator, these demands come across as exclusively individualistic, based on students’ sense of client-server entitlement and an increasingly unconditional expectation of mandatory success. With regards to educational attainment, by no means do I suggest that we diminish the educator’s responsibility. I am not suggesting that we ignore the importance and the necessity of continuous professional learning and training that educators and school administrators alike need to do in order to update themselves and keep up with new pedagogical research and initiatives. My difficulty with education and/or school board directives, such as the ‘no-zero’ policy, stem from their emphasis

placed exclusively on schools and educators as professional service providers, and increasingly not co-shared with the student's sense of responsibility. For this reason, I take a closer look at whether or not consumer society and culture have commodified the pedagogical relationship to fit a service-consumption dynamic and template.

Another important aspect of this study is to consider pedagogy itself and the overall purpose of education. I ask: What constitutes educational attainment? Why are we in school? What is it that we are learning and for what purposes? As a teacher, what does it mean to teach or to educate? Returning to the example of 'no-zero' policy that resulted initially with the dismissal of the teacher, it seems to me that the school board failed to see how its policy 'caters' to students rather than seeking to 'educate' them. The policy seems to privilege the short-term socio-emotional well-being of the student over the long-term pedagogical educational opportunity of a life lesson. In so doing, the Board, perhaps unwittingly, removed from the students' educational experience the learning of personal rewards and merits resultant from sustained self-discipline, self-sacrifice, self-regulation and responsibility because it also removes from his or her learning experience any consequence for not trying, and, ultimately, of personal responsibility. I will argue that these are concepts that have been increasingly removed by today's consumer society and culture. By removing this learning of self-discipline, effort and reward, how is the student going to learn to apply these to the good of society in general and the collective good? Without learning personal responsibility, how can we learn social responsibility? It is very important that we not succumb to the

constant politicizing of these concepts, namely of *merit* and *personal responsibility* - terms often used by the business community and neoliberals to dissuade attention away from collective social and civil responsibilities. Actions that are intended for self-amelioration and personal growth are not the monopoly of political rhetoric.

My concern is that the *no-zero* or *no failure* policy, while presented to be benign and supportive of student growth, actually gives students a false reality of their knowledge and abilities. At the same time, these kinds of policies disempower the teacher disallowing him or her the professional responsibility for academic programs and decisions. Policies such as these cater to the child's (and many of the parents') immediate wants as a form of instant gratification through a consumer advocacy's public relations mindset, rather than educational needs and long-term goals that are meta-consumption and outside the realms of capitalism.

My perception as a teacher is that education is no longer seen as a metaphysical and intellectual endeavour for the sake of self-amelioration, the development of a citizenry, and thus for the betterment of *civil* society as a whole. What I mean by this, is that it seems to me that mass education promotes mostly learning for practicality -for the productive-consumption application of society. It appears that learning for learning's sake is not a goal but has been increasingly pegged to a practical productive and functionalist purpose of existence. I believe that this has molded education into becoming an individual, self-centred, economic reward-seeking endeavour, and thus not a collective (i.e. civic) endeavour that can be 'free' from the paradigm of productive

capitalism. I observe education as having become an individualized and individualizing project for more personal material gain, preparation for the workforce and for dreams of big-ticket consumption and status. In other words, education has become commodified. This is not to say that there wasn't an aim of personal gain in the past in education as a means to fulfil one's dreams or a way to a better life. Still, this aspect of education seems to have been always coupled with its more metaphysical educational aims. There was also an equal emphasis on an education towards supporting one's ethical, moral and civil capacities and role of the *citizen* towards the collective, as well as the greater appreciation for the more creative, spiritual and inspirational aspects of human experience, such as through the teaching of the arts. But in contemporary society, it seems that the citizen has been replaced by the consumer and that school is becoming the training ground for new producers and consumers. It has become much more materialistic. We see this through many government budget cuts for the arts and the over emphasis on the sciences and maths. The impression one has is that students are indirectly being educated to become cogs in the machinery of production and consumption by emphasizing certain disciplines and professions, over others, that better serve the marketplace.

Many of these school board policies are also in place, from my experience, to avert possible attritions and even confrontations and conflicts between students and teachers, as well as between teachers and parents, or parents and administrators. Again, this conflict management orientation is reflective of a public relations paradigm

borrowed from the rapports and protocols of the marketplace and client services. For example, any parental and/or trustee denouncement against a teacher is usually adhered to by school boards immediately by isolating the teacher, often with little opportunity *a priori* for the educator to defend him or herself. The client is always right. As we have seen, suspension is often immediate. This is typical of the consumer advocacy culture. It delegates responsibility by default. Consumerism does not require personal responsibility but relies on its elimination in order to release the endless powers of personal gratification. I will explore this idea further when discussing entitlement, the commodification of rapports, and even narcissism.

In the past, perhaps in an exaggerated manner, emphasis was on the other side of the spectrum. The citizen rather tended to adhere to the more oppressive culture of compliance to the group, social values and expectations or institution (wherever or whatever these may have been) and his or her obligation and, as was often the case, even the 'oppressive' duty towards something or someone outside of his or her own wants and needs or perception of self. Individual wishes and dreams were often squashed, openly, through oppression or discrimination along class, racial and gendered lines. Consumer culture may have taken us from one extreme to the other. Perhaps before there was an exaggerated advocacy of or on behalf of the group or collective to the strong detriment of the individual when he or she was perceived as being too egotistical and individualistic. The idea around human rights was perhaps not as nuanced nor as sophisticated as it is today. The individual was often silenced by the

expectation of the collective -as may still be the case in many other cultures that continue to exist outside Western-style capitalism. Today, perhaps, we have gone to the other extreme. Consumer culture, as I will argue, relies (and helps to foment) exclusively the individual's drive to self-advocate and the seeking of personal and individual gratification, regardless of its possible effects on the group, dismissing any concerns of a greater collective good. By constantly re-asserting, promoting or creating new individualized needs and demands above and beyond that of the group, the individual has, often at times, become the new oppressor -over the group.

In order to understand the effects of consumer culture in education and my practice, I will need to dedicate a good part of this project to historicising consumer culture per se. I map out its evolution from Weber's description of the sociological foundations and original *ethos* of capitalism, to that of its current soul and manifestations, as described by Jean Baudrillard and Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. To gain insights and discernments as to 'what has happened' in education, my project includes a brief and yet good understanding of 'what has happened to capitalism' from its mercantilist origins to today's semiotic and surveillance capitalism that feed consumer culture.

As a result, this project will be two-fold. In the first sections, I seek to understand consumer culture and its effects on civic culture at large. I first analyze the evolution of capitalism and its constant changes and development, independently from my context in education. The initial part of my study lays the groundwork for my

analysis of the second part of my study narrating my autoethnography of contemporary educational practices. In the second part, my teaching and experiences serve as examples extending my analysis of consumer culture. Therefore, this project advances a heavy theoretical analysis of consumer culture and imbues within it my own personal and professional experiences to both illustrate and lift up the theoretical framework.

1.2. Rationale

With nearly twenty years of full-time teaching experience in the Ontario public school system as an elementary and high-school teacher, I have a frontline and historical vantage point to consider consumerism's effects on education. Informing my perceptions are personal living experiences, including several professional ones that I had prior to teaching. I will briefly describe them here. For example, before I began to teach, I owned a tour operating business for seven years in Brazil, where I lived between 1994 and 2001. I prepared high school students for their holiday excursions and exchange programs overseas by organizing and booking intricate pedagogical itineraries to Europe and Canada. Over the course of their academic year, I set up scheduled weekly workshops in their schools to teach them about the cities and monuments they were going to visit in order to subsequently accompany them on these month-long excursions as their group escort. The groups would range in numbers between 55 and 75 private high school students, plus four to five accompanying teachers.

Before my work in tourism and education, I was also a reporter at one of Toronto's 'ethnic' newspapers, writing in English for the second generation of Italian-Canadians. I am also an immigrant, 62 years of age, having arrived at the age of seven with my two-year-old brother, my Italian father and Spanish mother. For my parents, it was their second emigration and immigration, having left Italy and Spain respectively, for Brazil, where they met and formed a family. In 1967, the four of us emigrated to Canada. My parents' life experiences and inevitable comparisons between countries, time periods, political, social, and cultural contexts have always been readily relayed to my brother and me over the course of the years, not just as a result of immigration, but of their experiences with World War II and the Spanish Civil War. These life-long conversations have surely left an indelible imprint on my opinions and perceptions. My perspectives, therefore, are informed by my experiences in the classroom, several professional fields involving youth and by an intragenerational, multinational and multilingual background.

As modelled above, autoethnography is the methodology used to reconsider, reflect on and relay educational experiences. I unpack these anecdotal experiences and put them under a sociologist's lens by means of insights from the various scholars mentioned above who have also written about consumer culture and its social effects. In this dissertation I focus on five main aspects of commodifying culture -identity creation, commodification, entitlement, narcissism, and authority. These five themes emerge out of my experiences in school and teaching practise. My autoethnography

provides examples of the effects of consumerism on and from my professional experience, namely that between teacher and student, teacher and parent, teacher and administrator, and student and parent. I demonstrate that these professional rapports have inevitably placed the teacher at the centre because he or she is the axis from and to which all of the relational spokes are attached to with regards to education. The teacher has a professional rapport with all of the above, but all of the above do not necessarily have nor need a rapport with each other. The educator is, therefore, in a very good position to observe and comment.

Through the course of the years, I have noticed the increasing ‘difficulty’ that it is ‘to teach’ and the more bureaucratic, controlled and micromanaged education has become. Gert Biesta (2012) aptly puts that schools increasingly reflect “the disappearance of teaching and the concomitant disappearance of the teacher” (p.35). Over the last twenty years, I have observed the shortening attention span of students, many of their poor study habits, increasing lack of interest, motivation, effort and self-discipline. I find it increasingly difficult to teach them. Our roles as teachers today go much beyond academics, as we try to instil a work ethic and the importance of education upon an increasingly disinterested and distracted student body. Although teachers try to teach work ethics, accountability and effort, these concepts are not enforced by the system and are, increasingly, not being taught at home. In my years of practice, I noticed that some parents ignore, excuse and even condone and justify their child’s inaction and disinterested behaviours. As a result, it is becoming increasingly

difficult to address many students' apathy and passivity towards their studies. There are very few tools that remain at teachers' disposal to deal with this reality. The paradox is that at the same time, many teachers are increasingly experiencing the onus of student success being placed exclusively on them by parental expectations and by the system as a whole. The shift of responsibility for children, it seems, has been transferred completely to the teacher and the system.

1.3. The Research Questions

My questions are interconnected with regards to society at large and the metamorphosis of capitalism, the evolution of consumer culture and their manifestations in education. The questions are based on my personal observations, as well as my direct professional experiences as an educator with regards to relationships with students, parents, colleagues and administrators. My main interest is with school and its intersections with consumer culture and its effects on rapport, relationships, the sense of self, identity-creation, values, goals, and other issues. I also seek to follow why and how consumer culture has spilled over and into the educational system.

My overarching question for this dissertation is: How has capitalism changed and evolved that has resulted in today's consumer culture? Specifically, I examine:

1. What is the ethos of consumer culture and to what extent does it affect the self, namely one's identity and social values, that can then affect the interpersonal relationships in society and in schools?

2. Is there a connection between consumer culture and the erosion of teacher authority in society in general and in education in particular?
3. If so, what is the relation between consumer culture and erosion of authority and can it be identified and observed in teacher/student/parent rapports in education?

1.4. My Reasons for this Study

The aim with this dissertation is to lift up, deconstruct and analyze my own autoethnographic accounts of consumer culture invading the pedagogical relationship of teachers and students. Drawing on scholarly theorizations of capitalism, consumer culture, especially their effects on the self and interpersonal rapports, I unpack my teaching practice and experiences. I will analyze these experiences through the theoretical interventions of scholars engaging socio-cultural and capitalist forces impacting on education. It is my expectation that, in many instances, their theories, reflections and insights will be illuminated by my autoethnographic recount of my classroom experiences.

With the understanding that the young are very vulnerable and influenced by the 'messaging' of society, especially as advertised through consumer culture, I argue that it is the responsibility of the adult and educator to understand this dynamic as much as possible. It is important to discern how society, especially we the adults, have shifted in our views and definitions, for example, of what it means to be a child or teenager in today's society. Have the roles changed? Have we unknowingly even

disempowered children? To what extent are we, as educators, contributing to this?

Trevor Norris (2011) in his book, *Consuming Schools: Commercialism and the End of Politics*, comments on another work, entitled *Consuming Children: Education, Entertainment, Advertising* (2001) authored by Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen. Norris points out that “authors Jane Kenway and Elizabeth Bullen outline the changing conceptions of the child throughout history and argue that the prevalence of consumer culture has dramatically altered schooling. In eroding the demarcations between education, entertainment, and advertising it has brought schooling into what they call the age of desire” (in Norris, 2011, p.61). Consulting the original text, I find Kenway et al. (2001) further explaining:

The nature of being young, the relationships of the young to adults, to the family and to other social institutions, such as the school, have changed considerably across time and place [...] The demarcations between education, entertainment and advertising collapse and...the lines between generations both blur and harden. (p.2)

This blurring they find profoundly impacts on the desires, social expectations and lives of young children. As Norris, (2011) notes, the contemporary experiences of childhood and adolescence are increasingly constructed by consumer culture (p.60). He finds that what is commonly referred to Generation X or Y could in fact be called the ‘Branded Generation’ (p.60). Norris (2011) argues that “the struggle to mature, develop, and individuate is often impeded rather than facilitated by consumerism, in what

psychologists call the Peter Pan syndrome, when we *want* to remain infantile, carefree, and forever young” (p.61). Norris (2011) further finds:

Consumerism might seem to be like this syndrome, but instead of protecting childhood, consumerism exploits it; instead of keeping children safe from a world of commerce, it exposes them to it so as to create consumers. It *sells* them the ideal of youth; it does not release the imagination but captures it in a commodity. (p.61)

Norris (2011) indicates that consumer culture is literally capitalizing on the lives of children by conflating education, culture, and childhood itself with consumption.

Without spaces like school that protect children from the forces of consumer culture and politics (even while formed by it), children have no space outside capitalism.

As a result of the growing conflation between education and capital enterprise, school is an active agent in the reproduction of society, subject to consumerism and consumption. Norris (2011) finds this trend towards making students consumers a dangerous one, writing:

Education is profoundly compromised when youth are viewed as consumers and not as future members of the public world, and when education is viewed as an opportunity to secure a new market of consumers rather than appropriation of citizens for public participation. (p.47)

To make this case, Norris (2011) cites Ivan Illich’s 1971 essay, *Deschooling Society*, where Illich, who is prescient in his anticipation of the prevalence of consumerism states that schools are the “reproductive organ of a consumer society [...] that schools

also produce consumers” (in Norris, 2011, p.42). Illich, Norris suggests, warned against the uncritical understandings of school as apart from politics and dominant society culture (p.42).

Following Norris, in this work, I call for teachers to begin to think more critically and closely about the social, political, cultural and increasingly corporate conditions shaping their work and understandings of education. For example, in his provocative book *Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture*, Henry Giroux (2000) states that corporations “substitute corporate propaganda for real learning, use the requisite balance between the public and the private, and in doing so treat schools like any other business” (p.173). Giroux has dedicated much of his writing and research on the effect of corporate power infiltrated in schools, with specific analysis on their effect on school policies, and subsequently, children (see Giroux, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2009, 2014a). Giroux often describes, for example, how much of the so-called partnerships between school boards and private corporate interests, for the sake of reducing public costs towards projects and initiatives, have basically shackled the public educational system to an increasing amount of corporate dependence. In so doing, these arrangements have permitted education’s gradual commodification.

In this project I do not discuss the ascendancy of commercialism and consumerism in the school per se, as this is the context rather than the scope of this study. This topic has already been highly documented and theorized. My entry point

and contribution to this discussion is to analyze the effects of consumerism on self and interpersonal rapports as manifest in society and in education. For this, I look to scholars like Zygmunt Bauman (2004, 2007, 2007b) who analyze youth identity creation through consumerism. Bauman uses the concept of a 'liquid society' to conceptualize capitalism's effect on society, rendering it insecure, unstable, uncertain, fast-paced, and where individualism reigns (p.1). 'Liquid society' is a metaphor used to describe the ever-changing, unfixed aspects of modern societies. In contrast to liquid society, Bauman reiterates the longing of community and of belongingness that are so desperately being sought through the digital world since, in his views, have nearly all disappeared from the real world (Bauman, 2004, pp.93-94). The youth face multiple challenges in navigating many influences of contemporary society such as peer pressures, social media, consumption needs and 'created' desires. The detrimental and generative effects of consumerism on youth is richly documented (for example, Sennett, 2006; Perry, 2008; Takanishi, 1993; Weis & Dimitriadis, 2008; Yon, 2000) as is the rising influence of media and television (see Roberts, 1993; Rushkoff, 1999).

An emerging influence on the relationships and rapports on teachers and students is the powerful role of social media in and as a consumer commodity. There is some literature around the effects on community creation in everyday life through various forms of social media (Kasser, 2002, 2014; Schor, 2004), such as online video games. These are offered as a *new* social sphere of identity and belonging, or, as Steinkuehler (2006) in a very interesting essay put it, as a new form of 'pop

cosmopolitanism' (p.1) Other studies show the effect of digital life on the formation of youth relationships, identity and emerging attitudes (Davis, 2011) as well as new and emerging forms of othering (see Borrero, 2012, p.1) resultant from new youth hierarchies in and outside of school. In several of his works, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi (2009, 2019) writes about consumerism as having become inflected by semiocapitalism, cognitive capitalism or surveillance capitalism -all showing how capitalism has morphed into an incredibly powerful and all-pervasive cultural and social force – one that penetrates all private and public aspects of personal and common life.

As an educator, I observe how the insights of these scholars play out, to different degrees, in the classroom, in administration, as well as within the educational structure in general. I will lift these ideas up in personal anecdotes as well as real-life classroom examples and stories. I also use the theories put forth by these scholars to discern and contribute further to the understanding of how consumer society and culture may be affecting the actual praxis of education and educational attainment. As a result, I hope to be able to shed more light on some of the many issues that affect the rapports and professional relationships in education, especially within the context of consumer culture.

1.5. Organization of this Study

This dissertation hovers over many interconnected issues and themes that are tied to capitalism and consumer culture. These issues and themes inform my main thesis statement that interpersonal and intrapersonal rapports have been and are

greatly influenced by consumer culture, starting with the commodification and manufacturing of self through identity creation. For this reason, in this project I find it necessary to provide a periodization of capitalism and its overarching effects on society, but mostly on the individual. The intention is to include various aspects and subtopics of capitalism and its effects on the individual self and ultimately these rapports so that we can paint a larger picture of how these issues are all interconnected.

In Chapter Two I discuss my project's methodology. I present the qualitative methodology of autoethnography and explain why it is an acceptable strategy for both my research and writing in this area of social studies and education. I also briefly describe my perspectives and personal contexts that resulted in my choice of methodology. I explain how I chose to conduct my study, including my reasoning for selecting autoethnography as my methodology. In Chapter Three I explain my theoretical constructs, by expanding on critical theory, critical pedagogy and cultural studies as my main theoretical frameworks that drive my focus and research for this dissertation. I briefly discuss these traditions of thought and reiterate their importance in understanding consumer culture and its effects on contemporary society and education. I also present the contexts of my stories, namely the grades, age groups, school demographics, as well as the socio-economic profiles of all those that I include in my autoethnographic storytelling.

In Chapter Four, entitled *The Metamorphosis of Capitalism*, I begin my examination of capitalism's trajectory and development leading to an analysis of what is meant by consumer culture. I review the historical changes of capitalism's *ethos* from its previous and predominant one of savings and investment for production, to that of today's ethos of consumption (although, technically, the two go hand in hand). Despite the fact that consumption per se has always existed by the very nature of human needs, such as food, shelter and other materials needed for survival, it has outgrown the old classic capitalist ethos by replacing it with a new one. To understand this new consumerist ethos and the definition of consumption as a culture, I briefly review the trajectory of the classical form of capitalism, from its more ascetic origins of productivity to today's more indulgent consumer form of capitalism. In doing so, my intention is neither to downplay nor diminish the colonialist, exploitative and geopolitical contexts that have also driven the history of capitalism. Instead, for the purposes of this study, I focus more on the changes of its internal rationale and changing strategies over the decades, in its seeking consolidation and continuous expansion.

To study the origins of capitalism, I look at the prominent works of Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Max Weber. I include the very contemporary insights and concepts of the mechanisms of consumer culture, as are *semiocapitalism*, *cognitive capitalism* and *surveillance capitalism* theorized by Baudrillard (2005), Zuboff (2019), and Berardi (2009, 2011, 2019). I suggest that these constructs can support teachers to better

understand consumer capitalism and consumer culture. In my subsequent chapters, I will not discuss capitalism and consumer culture from the context of models of economic productivity, as much as I will from the prism of culture, societal norms and its current underlying philosophy. This analysis seeks to illuminate how capitalism is used to manufacture identity and, as Berardi (2009) says, put ‘the soul at work’ (p.74). With this term, Berardi alludes to the notion that our identities and personas, as a result of semiocapitalism, have bought into the cycle of production-consumption, as a form of personal and individualized success.

Chapters Five through Seven are entitled respectively, *Commodifying Identity: Replacing the Citizen with the Consumer*; *Archiving Humbleness and the Collective - Entitlement and Narcissism*; and *The Subjugation of Education - From Consummate to Consumable Student*. With each chapter I define briefly what is meant by each term and expand on these definitions using examples from the context of education and the rapports inside and outside the school. From Chapter Four onwards is where I include several autoethnographic examples, accounts and stories from both my personal and professional life as a student, citizen and teacher, as well as from those I witnessed from some students, parents, and administrators. In each chapter I unpack these autoethnographic experiences with the writings and insights of various scholars by incorporating each of them as part of my literature review for each theme. I also include a few studies and surveys that shed some light into student expectations and educational attainment. These studies support me to inform and deconstruct my

autoethnographic stories. Chapter Eight is entitled *Conclusion - Refounding Belonging*. Here, I offer a synthesis of my observations, views and analysis and discuss commonalities between all themes covered. I reiterate the effects of consumer culture upon the individual in society in general, as well as in education.

Finally, I conclude this inquiry with recommendations for further study. I also suggest that re-inventing community or at least a stronger empathetic sense of the other (with a good deal of collectivity) and a much stronger sense of belonging is possible, where the need to grow, mature and learn *together* could ultimately re-surface. Although the idea and term *community* in today's urban scenarios is very elusive and fluid, and often so overused that it comes across more as a cliché than a palpable reality, my point is that individualisms, as promoted by consumer culture are not conducive to the betterment of society -much to the contrary. I use the etymological root of community that is, what we have in common that binds us emotionally, psychologically, and socially. Diversity is enrichening, but even through diversity we should be able to find what we have in common, apart from civil respect and adherence to the rules and laws of our society. What we need to strive for goes beyond civility, but should enter the realm of commonality, empathy and solidarity.

1.6 Conclusion

The sequence of themes and topics that I discuss in my study follow a certain logic. By first discussing the metamorphosis of capitalism, I show the shift from the capitalism of producers to that of consumers. This shift replaces the traditional and

overt factory floor type of labour relations that stood outside the means of production. I then map the contemporary and covert internalizing effects of semicapitalism and surveillance capitalism. I describe and elaborate these terms in Chapter Four, as per the elaborations, insights and descriptors of Berardi (2009), Norris (2011) and Zuboff (2019). With this change, comes the 'subjugation of the soul', as Bifo Berardi (2009, p.74) terms it, with work and consumption as a newly absorbed and metabolized form of personal identity, where, in a sense, we have become our own exploiters. With this internalization, the sense of collective and community dissipates, leading to their replacement with individualized projects and personal gratifications that are increasingly outside or *in lieu* of the group. A heightened form of isolationism, identity and belonging become commodified and digitalized, created by the semiotic logic of capital. Perhaps in an attempt at re-inventing one's sense of worth (now that the group is gone and our identities have become commodities in themselves) the need to feel socially alive, be affirmed and noticed become more exasperated. Thus, a sense of entitlement and even narcissism may ensue, which in turn lead to a general crisis of authority, now that 'it is all about me'. Inevitably, education gets caught in the middle. This is the sequence of events (not necessarily a cause and effect) that I believe result in our current social malaise in general, and the compromising of education in particular. These also describe the sequence of my study and chapters.

To research, analyse and discuss any form of human relationships and interpersonal rapports, be these professional or not, needs, logically and necessarily, an

understanding of self and identity. Only then can one look at rapports. As a classroom teacher, and by the very nature of the vocation, I cannot help but be one of these participants in any given rapport. I am unable to pry myself away as a co-subject from my own research, sense of self, my values, experiences and upbringing. These inevitably form my relationships with my students, parents and school administrators. Nor am I able to ignore my views and perceptions of the relationships and rapports between and among students with their own parents and administrators. Consequently, I am part of my own study. My experiences and perspectives must be consciously included in the research equation since they are there subliminally, regardless. Human relationships are not an exact empirical science. Although one strives towards objectivity, it is more realistic and even accurate to be able to dissect one's own perspectives and vantage points while doing this observation of the other.

A storytelling approach, by means of an autoethnography, can support teachers in finding a vocabulary and analytical framework for how to understand *their* reality and the environment around them. It can also help create a common ground in the dialogue among teachers for the possibility to intervene, collectively, upon what they may construe as negative aspects of contemporary education and schooling. The sharing of stories, followed by our deconstruction and unpacking of them by means of several cited scholars should help us teachers and educators reflect and ground theories such as neoliberalism, consumer culture, entitlement, commodification, narcissism and authority that otherwise would remain in the abstract and impossible to address.

This dissertation ultimately demonstrates that teachers have more power to re-engage the meaningful aspects of education and those that support strong people rather than successful ones. It also offers dialogic possibilities from educators ‘on the field’, and their perspectives and experiences as a counterbalance to a bureaucracy that often imposes policies and micromanagement strategies downloaded upon teachers, with little a priori consultation or subsequent allowance for teacher voice and opinion. In doing so, it advances and contributes teacher experiences, knowledge and theory to pressing conversations of the meanings, enactments and future of education where, for many years, teachers’ voices have been dismissed or overlooked in existential questions engaging their work, practice and their students. Fundamentally, this dissertation seeks to understand how we can bring back a more holistic and altruistic approach to education beyond the productivist-consumerist ontology of contemporary times.

Chapter Two: Methodology

The degree of influence the teacher may have on rapports of teaching can be very significant. Rapport is described as the feelings of intimacy, closeness, inter-personality and relations between teacher and students, or among people in general. Interactions between teacher and students affect the persona of that student resulting in the child often being very different in school than at home. How a student acts and behaves at school, or is expected to perform, as compared to at home, may be the result of these varying rapports, as well as the different motivations, parental expectations, those of the teacher, and of the system as a whole. Therefore, the *performatives*² may be very different. The teacher too has his or her performatives. What the student believes he or she may have to input into the educational ‘system’ in order to achieve the desired output, or success (be it passing a test, grade, or achieving a degree) may be very different from the teacher or parent’s belief.

Unlike other empirical phenomena, rapports are deeply intersubjective and contingent on relational and personal interactions. For this reason, any project that looks into the relationships and rapports among individuals within the context of education lends itself to ethnography and intersubjective research. If the educator *is* the researcher, then an autoethnography is the appropriate method of study with which

² By ‘performatives,’ Lyotard (1984, 1989) for example, “talks of performativity or the subsumption of education to the efficient functioning of the social system. Education is no longer concerned with the pursuit of ideals such as that of personal autonomy or emancipation, but with the means, techniques or skills that contribute to the efficient operation of the state in the world market and contribute to maintaining the internal cohesion and legitimation of the state.” (in Marshall, 1999, p.309)

to bring an intersubjective lens to an examination of the circulation of consumer and capitalist effects in and on the teacher-student rapport in the classroom. This type of field work and research necessarily becomes one that involves the study of all subjects, including the researcher.

2.1 An Autoethnography

Conducting research on rapports and relationships per se is a challenge. This is especially the case with regards to methodology and the researcher's objectivity. As teacher-researchers, our personal experiences, perceptions, philosophies, belief systems, personalities and perhaps temperaments may often influence, even if subliminally, our observations, judgements and opinions with regards to nearly anything outside of an exact science. As researchers, we try to be as objective as possible. However, in the humanities and social sciences, when studying and analysing any aspect of human and social life, objectivity is a very difficult undertaking. The researcher in social sciences must be aware that he or she is also part of his or her research both as the unwitting subject and object of the analysis and its conclusions. Outcomes are most likely manufactured by his or her lens as well as the final perceptions of what was studied. Judgements and discernments are as much a part of the viewer as the viewed. In other words, the focus and results of a research may say as much about the researcher as it does about the subject of the research. In the case of an older middle-aged researcher, such as myself, this may be even more compounded, considering the longer-life experiences and set thoughts and opinions that have often

been there for decades. Inevitable are the comparisons that older researchers may make on how it was before as compared to how they are seeing things today. We older researchers are often pretty accusatory. At the same time, it can be said that age can also be an advantage for there are things and experiences to be compared, thus more discernment opportunities. As long as we are aware that we are bringing to our research a lot of personal baggage, we can bring their contents to the forefront of our work and catch ourselves, as much as possible, with our own biases and prejudices.

In contemporary research methodologies, autoethnography is a legitimate and accepted situation when doing research. The work is a branch of ethnography that was developed for and by ethnographers who found it. As Adams et al (2015) claims:

[It is] necessary and desirable to recognize that we are part of what we study, and, as researchers, to show how we are shaped and affected by our fieldwork experiences. To deny the self an active and situated place in the field, is only fooling ourselves. (p.10)

Thus, rather than simply considering true objectivity as impossible in research and writing in the social sciences, many researchers point instead to the actual *necessity* of understanding subjectivity and one's place in the research. Researchers realize they need to include themselves as part of many of their projects and analysis. As Adams et al. (2015) argues:

Social researchers started to radically rethink how they conducted and represented their research; they desired more realistic and responsible ways of researching the experiences of others, raised concerns about what any person

could know, verify, and responsibly present as cultural truth, and wanted accounts that foregrounded dialogue, incompleteness, the impossibility of separating or collapsing life from/texts [...] many of us no longer wish to become the kinds of ethnographers -distant, removed, neutral, disengaged, above-it - traditional ethnography would have us be. (p.10)

Because my project involves conducting social research that includes my presence, I am inevitably a co-participant in my own research. As a result, therefore, the methodology best suited for the study of the effects of consumer culture on individuals and their rapports and relationships outside and within education is the qualitative methodology of an autoethnography. Ellis et al. (2011) defines autoethnography as:

An approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience. This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product. (p.1)

As an educator analysing his practise and making observations from it, I am immersed in my own judgements, perceptions and realities of education. As a teacher, I have daily rapports and professional relationships with students, parents and administrators. By the very nature of the profession, I am not passive in these rapports and relationships, but very active, and thus a co-creator of them. Education, to use

Paulo Freire's (2014a) term, is dialogic, so it makes me a co-protagonist of this dialogue that I am now analysing between myself and what I am observing (my student).

Through the use of autoethnography, I am conscientious of my own position and vantage point that will, undeniably, inform and condition my writing. Even my choice of topic for this dissertation is obviously a reflection of my own interests regarding contemporary society, and along with them, all possible prejudices and judgements that I may have, especially around the issues and consequences of consumer culture. Still, I am aware that I must strive not to be factious nor self-serving in my research and writing, but to be open to other interpretations and viewpoints. As Ellis (2011) et al. writes:

Autoethnographers must not only use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research [...] interviewing cultural members [...] and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts [...]. (p.4)

Ellis et al. (2011) explains that autobiographers can make texts “aesthetic and evocative by using techniques of showing, which are designed to bring readers into the scene -particularly into thoughts, emotions, and actions- in order to experience an experience” (p.4). When researchers do *autoethnography*, she (2011) suggests they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made

possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences. Ellis et al. (2011) reminds us that “autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences” (p.4). She (2011) further reiterates that autoethnographers must not only use their “methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, but also must consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies” (p.4). They must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. To accomplish this, Ellis et al. (2011) finds that it “might require comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research, interviewing cultural members, and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts” (p.5). She (2011) further claims:

When researchers write *autoethnographies*, they seek to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience. They accomplish this by first discerning patterns of cultural experience evidenced by field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describing these patterns using facets of storytelling (e.g., character and plot development), showing and telling, and alterations of authorial voice. Thus, the autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts, she or he may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people. (p.5)

Ellis et al. (2011) further states that the “forms of autoethnography differ in how much emphasis is placed on the study of others, the researcher's self and his or her

interaction with others, traditional analysis, and the interview context, as well as on power relationships” (p.5). As a result, she stipulates that there are several types of autoethnographies, ranging from:

Indigenous/native ethnographies [...] that develop from colonized or economically subordinated people; *narrative ethnographies* [...] that refer to texts presented in the form of stories that incorporate the ethnographer’s experiences into the ethnographic descriptions and analysis of others; *reflexive, dyadic interviews*, [...] that focus on the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself; *reflective ethnographies* [...] that document ways a researcher changes as a result of doing fieldwork; *layered accounts* [...] that often focus on the author’s experience alongside data, abstract analysis, and relevant literature; *interactive interviews* [...] that provide an in-depth and intimate understanding of people’s experiences with emotionally charged and sensitive topics, *community autoethnographies* [...] that use the personal experience of researchers-in-collaboration to illustrate how a community manifests particular social/cultural issues; *co-constructed narratives* [...] that illustrate the meanings of relational experiences, particularly how people collaboratively cope with the ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions, of being friends; to *personal narratives* [...] stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narratives specifically focused on their academic, research, and personal lives. (pp.5-6)

For this study, my autoethnography will be predominantly a *narrative* one (Ellis et al., 2011, p.5), as I will be presenting texts in the form of stories that incorporate my (the ethnographer’s) experiences with its subsequent deconstruction and analysis using the cited scholars. Moreover, my autoethnography will also be *layered* (Ellis et al., 2011,

p.5) since my written accounts will be placed alongside abstract analysis and the relevant literature from the scholars that I cite. My data collection (stories) will proceed simultaneously with their analysis and the literature.

Several educational scholars have used one or more of these various forms of autoethnographies when writing in the social sciences, including when analysing their field experiences in teaching. Even years before the academic consolidation of autoethnography as a conceptual part of qualitative research methodology, the field of educational research provided examples of autoethnographic projects that attempted to understand the relationships between the subject (the researcher) and object (in our case, the citizen, student, parent and school administrator). One well-known example in education is that of Peter McLaren (1980) as documented in his insightful book *Cries from the Corridor*. This study is based on McLaren's research and writing around his experiences as a teacher in a north Toronto school. Through a combination of qualitative and autoethnographic methods, McLaren (1980) is able to conjure excellent analysis and insights of his own relationships with his students and their self-awareness and positioning in society as marginalized youth in a socio-economically challenging part of the city. McLaren (1980) reflects on issues of class, economics, race, and prejudice as a result of his daily and direct engagement with his students in his classroom, at school, and in some cases, even in his students' homes (see for example, pp.205-210). His analysis and overall project for his book was predominantly autoethnographic, mostly narrative, and at times reflective and layered.

My narrative autoethnography, as mentioned, drives my writing in this project with examples and stories from personal experience from inside and outside my teaching practice. I use theoretical constructs of identity creation and its commodification, specifically entitlement, narcissism, and the erosion of teacher authority to demonstrate some of the effects and causes that consumer culture has on teachers and students within their pedagogical rapports. I bring a number of theories to these autoethnographic narratives in order to think the autobiographical against social and cultural theories of education and capital as engaged by a number of scholars. In order to contextualize the themes and analyse my anecdotal stories, I unpack and analyze them through the writings of several scholars mentioned in the introduction within the theoretical frameworks of Critical Theory, including Critical Pedagogy, Cultural Studies and some Psychoanalysis. I describe each of the areas of theoretical engagement with autoethnographic methods in the sections to follow.

I include ten autoethnographic vignettes in this project. Before this study, these stories were imprinted in my memory, based mainly on their novel impact on me and my lack of experience at the time of their occurrence. For various reasons, they have had a significant effect on my views or values regarding some aspects of human relationships and rapports. For this study, I then look at how these specific vignettes corroborate the theories and discussions that I include in the scholars I cite. In a sense, my autoethnographic stories attempt a dialogue with the theories and discussions written by these scholars, in the hope that I can better understand and analyze my

experiences as I deconstruct them. At the same time, it is in these theories and writings from these academics that I am reminded of some of these personal experiences. The highway between my vignette story telling of personal and professional experiences and the theoretical discussions using my chosen scholars is based on *two-way traffic*: The experiences seek out their theoretical deconstruction and corroboration, as much as these scholars' theories remind me and help me illustrate many of my own specific experiences.

This project seeks to couple the theory to the praxis -the latter being my autoethnographic accounts. For example, in Chapter Four and my first vignette, 'The Cool Running Shoes,' I recall the discussion I had with my class around what makes us consider something 'cool', especially regarding the purchasing of expensive running shoes. In this particular instance, my questions for the class were around how autonomous is our opinion that something is cool? To what extent is it based on personal taste as compared to one subliminally-imposed by advertising and the marketplace? I unpack this first vignette with my discussion on how semiocapitalism may be designating the taste of consumers. I engage the writings of Baudrillard (2005), Bauman (2007, 2007b), Berardi (2009), and Norris (2011) to help me dissect this story and my dialogue with my students. My second vignette, 'Hiding Behind Zoom Screens', I include it as part of my analysis of surveillance capitalism and shareveillance capitalism, where the lines that have usually demarcated the notion of private, public and social have become blurred. I bring this narrative into conversation with the work

of Shoshana Zuboff (2019) as well as Berardi (2019) to contextualize my online teaching experience and issues around identity creation, simulation and privacy.

In Chapter Five I begin with a brief description of how the increasing disenfranchisement of the worker and the loss of the notion of group solidarity and the collective may have resulted in the accentuation of individualism and of personal life projects. As in Chapter Four, where I feel the need to briefly summarize what I feel to be the metamorphosis of capitalism, in Chapter Five, I need to take this theoretical preamble a step further and engage my chosen scholars on the issue of how this change in capitalism's focus has furthered the cause of individualism over that of the group, or, perhaps, over that of civil society as a whole. My initial discussion in this chapter begins with a description of the weakening of unionism. I describe how it has come about as a result of neoliberal policy in the last three to four decades, resulting in its imperceptible replacement with an exacerbated form of egocentrism. My intent is to show the trajectory of how the group has slowly been replaced by the individual, as far as behavioural and social culture is concerned. For this, I use the arguments of Bauman (2007, 2007b), Berardi (2009) and Norris (2011).

These scholars would argue that with the demise of the pleasures offered by the group, consumerism steps in as a means to fill the gap. Moreover, this hyper-commodification of life, including that of relationships and rapports, is what I discuss also with my two main stories, 'Your Favourite Ice Cream' and 'Why do Children Here Play with Toys and not With Children?' They serve to exemplify my whole discussion

on commodification, specifically around identity creation and its effects on relationships and rapports. I discuss this topic and analyze these stories through Bauman (2004, 2007), Berardi (2009), Norris (2011), Katie Davis (2011), Byun Chul-Han (2017) and John F. Shumaker (2018).

In Chapter Six, I link my discussion of Chapter Five to what I sense to be an increase of entitlement and narcissism *culture* in today's society. I present it as a possible consequence of individualisms and egotisms that have been nourished by consumer culture in correlation to the depoliticizing of society and the marketing of superficial individualized identities. In this chapter, I use the arguments of Bauman (2004, 2007) and Berardi (2009, 2019) to discuss society's cultural shift of focus from that of the group or collective to the championing of the individual. With this change, I argue, examples of individualized entitlements and narcissisms have become more prevalent. With 'The Reference Letter' and 'I Failed Grade Four', I juxtapose two autoethnographic experiences, each depicting opposite situations. They serve as a means to discuss and look at a form of entitlement and narcissism by analyzing the change of attitudes. I analyze the first vignette by means of research and studies conducted around identity formation and entitlement, such as that done in the U.S. by Adam Howard (2010), and Anette Lareau (2010, 2018), among others. These studies help to explain my experiences as described by the vignette. With my second story, my aim is to describe the opposite scenario and attitudes, again based on my personal experience, from decades ago, so as to make comparisons.

Having laid the groundwork in Chapters Four, Five and Six, by Chapter Seven, I focus exclusively on my experiences as a teacher and schooling by discussing the effects of consumer culture's grasp of individualism and individuality by starting this chapter's discussion on how the purpose of education may have changed as a result of consumer culture. I include the increased bureaucracy surrounding education, as a result of this change. I discuss how teaching per se has become more difficult due to a crisis of authority, affecting, in general, educational attainment and more specifically, critical thinking. I discuss the differences between *educere* and *educare* (Craft, 1984, p.5; Randall, 2004, p.162), and link these with the transformation of education and schooling from the more holistic approach ('educere') of before, towards a predominantly mechanical ('educare') emphasis of today. I include the example of standardized testing as an illustration of this shift. I cite from the writings of Gert Biesta (2012), who discusses the changes of the functions of the teacher. I engage the writings of Hannah Arendt (2006) and her critique of the loss of authority and adult responsibilities towards the young that also impact teaching.

In my vignette, 'Sir, Why do I Need to Know This?', I illustrate my discussion on the purpose of education with an analysis from Mario Di Paolantonio (2019) and how education today is seen mostly as a cognitive and individualized endeavour rather than a collective experience of learning together. In Pierre Bourdieu (1990), I include his analysis of 'cultural capital' and apply it to consumer culture and how social class may have been substituted by market class and consumerism. With my recount of an

episode entitled, 'Why Can't I Hold Back my Child?', I give an example of education's *industrialization* through a bureaucracy which I like to refer to as conveyor-belt education. Again, my purpose is to argue how this plays into individual entitlement in explaining why, in today's culture, failing or holding a student back is taboo, even when requested by the parent. With the vignette, 'Urban II and Colin Powell,' I use this example as part of my discussion around how teaching critical thinking has become complicated by consumer culture and the educational bureaucracy that caters to it. Then in my final vignette, 'Get Off Your High Horse, Sir!' I bring Arendt (2006) and her analysis of the crisis of authority to education in order to understand the teacher's loss of authority within the educational system.

My intention is to interweave all of these ten vignettes, that are based on personal experiences inside and outside of education, with the theories and analysis of these scholars. I chose each vignette a priori, before engaging the scholar's theories and discussions. They were episodes in my teaching and life experiences that stood out (among many others) that made me think about the different (sometimes opposing) expectations and perspectives. Moreover, which one represents a reflection of consumer culture and which one stands out as independent of it, is in itself, an interesting comparison. To the extent that I am able to unpack, deconstruct and contextualize these vignettes and my experiences by means of the theories and scholars, is the dialogic sense of my autoethnography.

2.2 My Context and Perspectives

In any autoethnography, the researcher-writer's personal experience and history *is* the predominant context from which nearly all of his or her research and writing exudes. For this reason, I will describe in this section, briefly, my background and the main crossroads that have intersected my life experiences and have affected my formation, and logically, may currently be informing my autoethnography. Regarding school, for example, my autoethnography is based on my classroom experience within the context of two distinct realities -that of a former student and that of a current and full-time employed teacher -of other students.

My first experience as a student in a classroom was at the age of seven when my family and I immigrated from Brazil. With no knowledge of English and having never been able to attend school in Brazil due to local schools being filled to capacity with no room for my registration at the time (one of the main reasons for our emigration), I started Grade One less than two weeks after we arrived in Toronto, on March 31, 1967. Until then, I had never been inside a school anywhere. In my first year, I distinctly remember being bullied by two boys, while at the same time, making my first Canadian friends. My parents also suffered the often-frigid reception from Toronto society at the time. Due to difficulties in our adaptation to our new country, my parents, who were not Brazilian, but had emigrated there from Europe in their late 20s, decided to return to Brazil. Clearly, the reception that Toronto had given them, after the year and a half of residence, was still not like what they had experienced in São Paulo, Brazil. The

problem was not economic, but more cultural, emotional and social. Toronto in the 1960s was a very different city than it is today, especially for the foreigner. In Latin America, as 'white' European immigrants, they were privileged. In North America, as 'southern' European immigrants, they were looked upon more as invasive -at least this is the perception my parents and many other Italian immigrants felt at the time. Surely, these sentiments have had a strong influence on me.

Therefore, about a year and a half later, my mother, brother and I returned to my native country where my mother hired a private tutor for my first summer in order to prepare me for Grade Four in the public-school system in São Paulo for the upcoming new academic year of 1969. That first year back in Brazil was most memorable for me, for all sorts of reasons, especially when compared to my Toronto experience before that. Meanwhile, my father had remained in Toronto and decided to return to school himself to give our possible stay in Canada another opportunity. He called us back. Upon returning definitively to Canada a year later, I attended elementary school and a few years later my first year of secondary education in Mississauga, at the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board.

The neighbourhood where we lived in Clarkson and where I attended my three schools were predominantly of a blue collar working-class socio-economic background. Here we were treated very well and there was a sense of community and neighbourhood. We ended up living there for six years. In the middle of my Grade Ten year, we moved to Toronto, where I finished my secondary schooling with the Toronto

Catholic District School Board (TCDSB) in a school run by American nuns in a mostly working-class area of a predominantly Italian-Canadian immigrants. My sense of integration and belonging ameliorated, certainly. That sense of exclusion had already been eliminated through my road hockey friends in Mississauga. My postsecondary education has been all in Toronto, where I received an Honour B.A. in Political Science, at the University of Toronto, a Journalism Degree at Ryerson University (now called Toronto Metropolitan University), Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) certification from the University of Toronto, and my B.Ed. and M.Ed. at York University. That was my life as a student.

Currently, my second and lengthier experience within the classroom is that of a full-time teacher. My first assignment, although I was not yet qualified to teach, but was able to work with a Special Permission from the Ontario Ministry of Education, was that of a Long-Term fulltime Supply teacher (LTO) of a Grade 10 English class, Grade 11 World Religions, and a Grade 10 Civic/Career Studies class for an all-girl secondary school at the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB). The following year, I graduated from York University's Faculty of Education. In the interim I also taught summer school, specifically Grade 11 History, and Grade 10 English for the TCDSB, as well as six months teaching Italian and Spanish as an itinerant instructor for the TCDSB's International Languages Program, prior to that. In 2003, I was fortunate to be hired as a full-time elementary school teacher for the same board.

As an elementary school teacher, I have taught the full Ontario curriculum, including now six years of Grade Eight, two years as a teacher of gifted students, two years a Grade 6/7 split class, four years a Special Education class, two years a Grade 5/6 split class and two years of Grades Five and Seven Mathematics, Language, and Religion classes. I have also taken a two-year sabbatical for family and personal reasons. My full-time teaching experience has always been at the TCDSB, and include seven schools (including my recent two years online assignment at St. Anne's Catholic Academy of Virtual Learning) -each with its particular demographic and socio-cultural context.

For my first seven years, my school was considered a middle-class school of 300 students, predominantly of Filipino parents and located in mid-town Toronto. The next two years I taught Special Education at a downtown school of mostly Portuguese parents. This school was mid-size with approximately 400 students, and had a high percentage of identified students (students who needed modification or accommodation in their curricula). My subsequent five years of teaching (including a two-year sabbatical) were at a predominantly upper middle-class school of mixed ethnicity, but predominantly of Anglo-Saxon extraction and located in the northeastern part of the city. It had highly professional and 'involved' parents. This school had both a strong French Immersion program and Congregated Gifted classes. The next two years I taught in a Special Education program at two schools close to

home (one of them where I had taught Special Education before). Both were working class schools, predominantly with students of Portuguese extraction.

Five of these seven schools are very different from one another. The fifth school was a completely virtual one where I taught Grade Eight online from home for two years, before my current ‘brick-and-mortar’ in-school assignment. The school where I taught Special Education before my online teaching was much more similar to the first one from the point of view of demographics, socio-cultural composition and level of educational attainment. The others, each had their own socio-demographic, economic and cultural reality. My online school had students from all of Toronto and of all socio-economic backgrounds since there were no physical nor geographic constraints to attend a virtual school. The fascinating aspect of a virtual school is that the student can opt to become invisible, literally. Behind the ‘cameras off’ blackened screen of a Zoom computer conferencing program, it was up to the teacher to feel and extract his or her student’s socio-demographic reality, profiles and needs. Currently, I am back teaching Special Education Mathematics and Language at two different schools, and for the first time in Scarborough. My current students are predominantly of Ethiopian and Eritrean background, most with immigrant parents.

My experiences from all previous schools have been very different. Social class, economic conditions, ethnicity and levels of education of parents often condition a school dynamic and level of educational attainment. Moreover, with online teaching, we add a completely different context to student learning and teacher-student rapport.

These different and varied school contexts from which I do my autoethnography offer a rich source for analysis, insights and nuances on the variations of consumer culture's ability to influence the relationships and rapports across a wide range of socio-economic and cultural realities of an elementary public-school system. The fact that these experiences also span close to twenty years of teaching practice, with all the changes of social norms and school policies over the course of the decades, plus the fact that these encompass practically two generations of students (many today are adults), should also contribute to the discussion.

In summary, this autoethnography originates from my personal experiences as an immigrant child and student and then as an adult citizen and teacher. My project is then informed and conceptualized through specific thinkers and scholars within my literature review and theoretical framework. It involves critical theory, critical pedagogy, and cultural studies as a means to frame and understand the influences of consumer culture. Specifically, this study analyzes consumer culture by focusing on issues of identity, entitlement, commodification, narcissism, and the erosion of authority. Permeating all of these are narratives, personal and non, that reveal experiences, perspectives and perceptions that are valid starting points to any writing and autoethnographic research. As Mariza Mendez (2013) writes:

An important advantage, I believe, is the potential of autoethnography to contribute to others' lives by making them reflect on and empathize with the narratives presented. Through reading a cultural or social account of an

experience, some may become aware of realities that have not been thought of before, which makes autoethnography a valuable form of inquiry. (p.282)

2.3 Conducting the Study

In my first few years of teaching, I came across a caricature (see the Appendix) that perfectly encapsulated my perceptions, questions and opinions that resulted in this project. The caricature was a drawing of a distraught elementary school student with his parents holding a report card with an 'F' grade on it. The parents are very angry, holding the report card, while spewing at their child. On top of this scene there is a caption 1960. On the same caricature panel, there is a dividing line that separates this scene from the one on the right. The one on the right has the same boy and parents, holding the same failing 'F' grade, except this time the boy is also very angry. On this side of the caricature, you now also have the boy's teacher sitting at her desk. The difference on this side of the caricature is that the parents and the boy are all three very angry -all three of them now with the same angry faces spewing at the teacher. The teacher is the only one now with the distraught face previously shown only by the boy. The caption on top of this right half of the caricature reads, '2010.'

This caricature clearly summarizes the main questions that have driven this project. In a sense, this study seeks to understand this 'attitudinal' shift of the past sixty years as depicted by the juxtaposing of the two scenes. How did this social paradigm shift occur? Have individual responsibilities been delegated and relegated? Are we now living in the age of indiscriminate entitlement? To understand my

perceptions and their origins, I thus need to deconstruct my own experiences and contextualize them. Moreover, I need to understand to what extent they have been apparent also in my teaching experiences.

In order to pursue my project of understanding this societal and cultural paradigm shift, I soon realized that I had to work backwards: Where is the genesis of this hyper-individualism and entitlement that have rendered (in my mind and experience) education strictly an individualized and functionalist machination of society with responsibilities now shifted? When and how did this blame game begin (as illustrated by this caricature)? What are the values and types of relationships and rapports that this shift both feeds off of and promotes? Through some intuition, I arrived at a very generalized concept, such as consumer culture, to then begin a back-tracking analysis and see if it does encapsulate this shift of these societal relationships. Therefore, my initial chapters would require the reviewing of the concepts of what is meant by consumer culture, semicapitalism, surveillance and shareveillance capitalism, commodification, identity -all these representing the genesis of what I believe to be the cause of this hyper-individualism and shift of responsibility. For that, I needed to dedicate portions of my chapters to the explanation of these concepts and to demonstrate how these may be the roots, or at least part and parcel to what I loosely refer to this societal-cultural shift of the slow replacement of the group by the individual.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Constructs

For this project, I realized soon that I would need the intersection of various theoretical frameworks in order to best direct my research and literature review, as well as inform my analysis and discussions. For this purpose, I have included Critical Theory, Critical Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies, as the bases for my research and as a means to construct my arguments, analysis of my autoethnographies and my overall discussion.

3.1 Critical Theory

This study is conceptual-theoretical-reflective in nature. This research looks at consumer culture as a powerful cultural determinant that seems to cross all social, ethnic and economic lines through its commoditising of both private and public life. Looking at the intersecting spheres of private and public lives, including in schools, my research is inspired by Critical Theory³. It draws upon Critical Theory from several renowned scholars that I will cite in my project and have already mentioned here. Not all are considered classical critical theorists, but all have forayed into critiques and analysis of society. For example, Pierre Bourdieu (1990, 2000) developed a concept of

³ According to The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, “the Frankfurt School, known more appropriately as Critical Theory, is a philosophical and sociological movement spread across many universities around the world. It was originally located at the Institute for Social Research (*Institut für Sozialforschung*), an attached institute at the Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany [...]. The Institute was founded in 1923 [...] The academic influence of the critical method is far reaching. Some of the key issues and philosophical preoccupations of the School involve the critique of modernity and capitalist society, the definition of social emancipation, as well as the detection of the pathologies of society. Critical Theory provides a specific interpretation of Marxist philosophy with regards to some of its central economic and political notions like commodification, reification, fetishization and critique of mass culture.” (See <https://www.iep.utm.edu/frankfurt/>)

cultural capital, social reproduction and social elimination. He argued that children are not simply socialized into the values of society as a whole, but rather into the culture that corresponds to their class (Bourdieu, 1990, pp.70-73). This set of cultural experiences, values and beliefs represent *cultural capital*, or a set of values, beliefs, norms, attitudes and experiences that equip people for their life in society.

The term *cultural capital* is used because, like money, the culture that has been given to us by our parents and family can be translated into social resources, such as power and status and can be spent in the education system as we try to achieve things that are considered to be culturally important by the mainstream. Bourdieu (1990) states that culture becomes the mediating link between ruling-class interests and everyday life and that the school is one of the vehicles through which the culture of the ruling groups is validated and confirmed as natural and necessary, whereas the cultures of other groups is seen as inferior rather than just different. If he were alive today, Bourdieu might probably ask us: Is the market and its consumerist ethos imposing a new cultural capital? If so, how is it being 'spent' in school? What cultural capital of consumerism is a student to reproduce in order to succeed? Is this culture nudging its way into the parents' upbringing of their children? Are we bringing to the school the marketplace rapport that we have outside of school?

Another critical theorist is Henry Giroux (1994, 2001, 2004, 2009) who has written extensively on the effect of neoliberalism and consumerism on youth culture and how they affect education and hurt children. Norris (2011) is another scholar

whose research focuses on the intersection of education, politics and philosophy, particularly the contributions of humanities and conceptually-based research in education. He is particularly interested in the political and pedagogical implications of consumerism. Another theorist, who also engages in this type of research is Alex Molnar (2005) who is the founder of the *Commercialism in Education Research Unit* at the University of Colorado -the only research unit in the world dedicated exclusively to school commercialism. He has dedicated himself to critiquing the effects of commercialism in education.

To contextualize and think through my autoethnographic findings, I also turn briefly to the work of Gert Biesta (2013), who is a professor of educational theory. Biesta's concern for education revolve around education and politics. He (2013) argues for the re-thinking of the purpose of education and how to implement its practice in modern times. I also anchor a good portion of my analysis and discussion around the writings of Hannah Arendt and her views on education and authority and I extend these ideas by looking at the political philosophy of Franco 'Bifo' Berardi. Berardi's views of contemporary neoliberal society and the effects of the general commodification of many aspects of daily life, such as work, align well with my study and methods.

Critical Theory permeates the methodology of my whole project. My initial analysis of the changes in capitalism and the effect of semiocapitalism on society and the individual, is based on Critical Theory. I bring this to my experiences of schooling as a teacher. My intent is to offer a critique of consumer culture as a means to

understand what Arendt (2006, p.170) calls the crisis in education as a sub-product of a general crisis of society where the commonweal and sense of the collective good is being eroded through the promotions of individualisms and egotisms. To teach and educate under these circumstances has become a challenge, as demonstrated by my teaching experiences and those expressed by many of my colleagues. Understanding the current circumstances is central to this project and to our collective concern for the present and future of education under a hyper form of capitalism now circulating the globe. In the sections to follow I expand on the critical constructs used in the dissertation that qualify and extend ordinary understandings of student and teacher rapport.

3.2 Critical Pedagogy

In my study, Critical Pedagogy serves as the focussing augmentation lens of a microscope placed on top of the Critical Theory stage with regards to classroom practice, pedagogy, the school and education norms as a whole. It informs my autoethnography as a theoretical construct with which to analyse and deconstruct my ten stories, but is not meant to serve my description of the metamorphosis of capitalism, where History and Cultural Studies come more into play. For each vignette I employ Critical Pedagogy to question the outcome and analyze the underlying cultural or social values that emanate from them. Critical Pedagogy is proactive and not just reactive and analytical when applied to my vignettes. I use it to discuss the dialogues and experiences that I include in this project between myself and my students, or my

experiences. It is the praxis of Critical Theory. One definition of Critical Pedagogy is that of:

A prism that reflects the complexities of the interactions between teaching and learning. It highlights some of the hidden subtleties that may have escaped our view previously. It enables us to see more widely and more deeply. This prism tends to focus on shades of social, cultural, political and even economic conditions and it does all of this under the broad view of history. (Wink, 2000)

Although less cited in my work, Paulo Freire (1993, 1997, 1998, 2014a, 2014b) is the quintessential critical pedagogue who argues that the educator's role, together with his/her student, is to reveal the causes and conditions of injustice and oppression. He described this social and political rapport as generating a specific form of pedagogy where both teacher and students are agents of their own *conscientization*, or awareness of their own reality and that of their world. With *conscientization*, both students and teacher embark on addressing the injustices in their own lives, and with this *new* realization, help change the world. Freire's life work and philosophy are a main inspiration for my project.

For my study, *conscientization* is very pertinent as a theoretical concept with regards to my analysis of how consumer culture and its ethos manifest themselves in society (Freire, 2014a, p. 104). As an educator, I must bring *conscientization* or critical awareness forth to the surface, together with my students, so that we may all become *conscientized* about our role as either subjects or objects of consumer culture. As Freire invited us to look upon our social state and condition through the lens of economic and

social oppression, we can also look at our state through the lens of consumer culture - its conditioning and symbiotic permanence that may also be oppressing us. In this study, I look at the psychological and social oppression wrought by hyper-capitalism to inquire: Does consumer culture not also influence and determine, often, the oppressive-like conditions for how children and adults alike relate to each within their rapports?

Freire (1993, 1997, 1998, 2014a) connects pedagogical theory to practice, or as Freire would say, praxis -that is, between Critical Pedagogy and how it can reveal and denounce oppression and injustice. Freire invites educators and students alike 'liberate' themselves from any oppressive conditions imposed upon them through an increased awareness of their own cultural experiences and thus free themselves in a transformative way. For Freire, Critical Pedagogy breathes life into education by engaging with the real world above and beyond curriculum, revealing the mechanisms of society that affect them that result in injustice and, perhaps, their own oppression. My project uses the Freirean approach to analyze these mechanisms of today's consumer capitalism and its culture and ethos to see how it may be oppressive to youth and adults alike.

For Freire (1998), education is a form of intervention in the world (p.90), for it can reproduce the dominant ideology or unmask it, but it is unable to do exclusively one and not the other, as we are susceptible and influenced by both and may consciously think we are doing one, when in fact we may subconsciously be doing the

other (p.91). Dominant ideology, Freire (1998) further claims, may make education ‘appear’ progressive, but may in fact be fomenting injustice (p.92). It is not enough to teach the curriculum literally if we are to be subjects of change. We should use the curriculum as a tool and *document* for teaching critical thinking and pedagogy *around* and *with* the content. Freire suggested a type of problem-posing education, where nothing is static but analyzed and questioned. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2014a) he stated:

In a problem-posing education, people develop their power to perceive critically the way they exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation...the form of action they adopt is to a large extent a function of how they perceive themselves in the world. (p.83)

Perhaps more easily done in the social sciences, this *critical dialoguing* leads us into what Freire (2014a) called in his native Portuguese, *conscientização critica*, or ‘critical consciousness’ (p.104,113,114,119). Conscientization refers to the conscience awakening process or an analysis using critical dialogue with students on what constitutes knowledge. This *conscientization* would result in students learning how to decipher societal influences that act upon them, both ideologically and spiritually, such as the forces and effects of globalization and consumer culture. In my stories, ‘The Cool Running Shoes,’ ‘Urban II and Colin Powell’, for example, my class’s attempt at this ‘dialogic conscientization’ becomes evident. Students’ ability to analyze these forces

would ‘liberate’ them to become agents of their own change and the change of society, if they so choose. It makes them independent critical thinkers.

This dissertation, in a sense, is an attempt at *conscientizing* myself, a researcher and consumer and a teacher with my students (who are also consumers), on the forces that act upon us as a result of consumer culture. To what extent can these be seen as oppressive? As Wink (2000) says, “Critical Pedagogy has helped me understand that when I write, I am clarifying my own thinking” (p.29). My own clarity in thinking is embarked upon by means of a ‘dialogic’ relationship between my autoethnographic stories and their unpacking and analysis through the lens of the writings of several critical theorists that I will cite in this project.

3.3 Cultural Studies

Culture is an evocative term that can denote and connote many meanings, purposes and applications. Any human action can be construed as cultural, from the way we walk, talk, and eat. It is still a relatively young academic ‘discipline’ of research and study and is still evolving in its epistemology⁴. It is an all-encompassing word that denotes and creates interpretations and perceptions of human action. Chris Barker

⁴ The online Encyclopaedia Britannica states that, “cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary field concerned with the role of social institutions in the shaping of culture. Cultural studies emerged in Britain in the late 1950s and subsequently spread internationally, notably to the United States and Australia. Originally identified with the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham (founded 1964) and with such scholars as Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams, cultural studies later became a well-established field in many academic institutions, and it has since had broad influence in sociology, anthropology, historiography, literary criticism, philosophy, and art criticism. Among its central concerns are the place of race or ethnicity, class, and gender in the production of cultural knowledge.” (See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/cultural-studies>)

(2003) stipulates that some of the key concepts that revolve around the study of culture include culture and its signifying practices, issues of representation, on materialism and non-reductionism, articulation, power, of popular culture, types of texts and readers, on subjectivity and identity, and ideology and politics, among others. These all interplay in forming a very fluid 'discipline' of cultural studies. Barker (2003) stipulates that questions around epistemology and cultural studies result in varying discussions on appropriate methodologies to be applied in Cultural Studies research. Among the key methods of Cultural Studies is ethnography.

Together with Critical Theory and Critical Pedagogy, my project relies on Cultural Studies and social analysis from scholars who have written in the field. Cultural Studies scholars are important interlocutors for my research because as with educational scholars, they are interdisciplinary and concerned with the role of social and cultural institutions in the shaping of culture. Within the realm of Cultural Studies, this study will review briefly some of the scholars that have made cultural analysis of society. Baudrillard (2005), for example, offers us a cultural critique of commodity in consumer society. Bauman (2001, 2007, 2007a, 2007b, 2013a, 2013b, 2016) speaks to us of today's 'liquid' society and the ever-changing faces of contemporary culture. Sociologist Richard Sennett (2006, 2007) writes about culture and societal values within the context of capitalism and consumer culture as well. Berger (2015) discusses the impact of advertising on American society and Alter (2013, 2017) writes about the rise of addictive technology and other forces that shape the way we think and act. In

education, Rizvi (2000, 2010) gives us very comprehensive insights on the effects of globalization on education and policy, and J.M. Twenge (2014, 2017) on narcissism and today's iGen generation and the effects that consumer culture and the internet are having on today's youth. Juliet Schor (2004), for example, writes about children as consumers and commodities, and Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) on current youth and their unpreparedness for today's workforce. In this project, I will not cite all of these scholars, but I mention them here to illustrate the intersection of Cultural Studies with Sociology, Critical Theory, Philosophy and even Psychology.

Some of the older texts (again, not all of them to be cited here) have been very insightful and helpful in this study. For example, Anthony Giddens (1984, 1990) writes on the effects of modern life on social and public institutions. Bridging socio-cultural commentary and psychoanalysis, we also have Christopher Lasch's (1979) famous work on narcissism, entitled *The Culture of Narcissism*, as one of the first analysis of the driving force behind consumerism. There is also Thorstein Veblen's still relevant 1899 book on the consumer class, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Veblen, 1994). Also instructive is Benjamin Barber (1996, 2007) and his writings around the power of advertising and its manipulation of society. Social and cultural commentaries arise also from non-academics. Christopher Hedges (2009), for example, is a Pulitzer Prize winning journalist who writes a good deal about consumer culture and its erosion of politics and society. He has interesting insights into the entertainment industry and consumerism as the main drivers of current society's culture and how they may be

affecting youth culture and adult complacency. These are a few of the scholars and writers who offer me insights and a framework for my autoethnography from the perspective of Cultural Studies. All have contributed towards a greater understanding of how materialism and consumerism have been shaping society.

From the outset, I knew that my personal experiences, as an individual, citizen, former student and then teacher, were driving my interests in wanting to understand what I have always perceived as a fundamental socio-cultural shift over the decades. My perception is based on my impressions of a previous 'humbleness' of my childhood experiences -that period in time when (as per my perceptions even today) people seemed to be more adherent to collective expectations, authority, and to a public requirement of personal responsibility and even self-sacrifice. This was perhaps a period when we were subjected to more visible signs of authority and vertical rapports, and thus more fearful of social chastisements and reprisals. We may have been kept in check by the more oppressive controls of group expectations.

Going to the other extreme today, I sensed an increased societal egoism and egotism as early as the 1970s. Was it me growing up with my own sense of perceptions changing? Or was society really changing? As Berardi (2009, 2019) pinpoints, 'spring of 1968' seemed to be a turning point in the West when certain authorities and social rigidities began to be publicly questioned and even protested (2009, p.27; 2019, p.9). Was that period of contestation the beginning of

a pendulum that has swung to today's forms of individualism? Yet, as Berardi (2019) reminds us, 1968 marked a very positive period for progressive social change (pp.11-12). I always wondered what may have caused (again, in my mind) these fundamental paradigm shifts in the relations and rapports among individuals. Was it the result, possibly, of socio-cultural reactionary forces that ensued, melting group protest by erecting a new 'me' generation of neoliberal individualism?

Thus, to respond to these perceptions and questions, both to myself and for the sake of this project, I revisit certain personal experiences as autoethnographic vignettes, while, at the same time, contextualizing them through my theoretical framework and the lens of my cited scholars. I realized I needed to undertake a larger focus on how capitalism changed that has resulted in the semiotics that then condition human behaviour, expectations and, consequently, interpersonal relationships and rapports. These experiences, as I hope to show, shed light on the greater cultural and capitalist shift as it manifests in the North American public-school classroom.

In the next chapter, I briefly explore the metamorphosis of capitalism. I look at some of its various nuanced changes in ethos and strategies over time. The intent is to see if here lies some of the possible explanations to this paradigm shift in the relationships and rapports between peoples in society.

Chapter 4: The Metamorphosis of Capitalism

In the last chapter I discussed my methodology for examining the impacts of capitalism's latest manifestation of the lifeworld of schools, students and teachers. This chapter maps out capitalism's metamorphosis from its simpler origins and methods to today's more sophisticated, subliminal and semiotic manifestations. In this chapter, I will briefly describe capitalism's change in form from the period of capital investments done solely towards productivity of manufactured goods to the subsequent concept of the manufacturing of needs. To understand the initial structural change of capitalism, I engage three of the most significant theorists discussing the origins of capitalism: Adam Smith, Karl Marx and Max Weber. I will also include contemporary analysis from Trevor Norris, Benjamin Barber and Zygmunt Bauman. I will conclude this chapter with today's semiocapitalism and surveillance capitalism and how it has permeated society, including education, by also citing the thoughts of Jean Baudrillard, Franco 'Bifo' Berardi and Shoshanah Zuboff.

4.1 From Producers to Consumers

Capitalism, as a concept, evolved around the mid-eighteenth century as a quasi-revolutionary act of empowerment, supposedly, of the common-folk, or commonweal and of nations around the beginning of the industrial revolution. What I mean by common-folk within the context of the time, is anyone not belonging to any royal family nor the immediate court of a given monarchy nor anyone directly associated with the aristocratic elites of any given country. In a sense, capitalism started as a

revision of what was, until that point in time, the predominant economic system in Europe, mercantilism. It coincided with the period of the enlightenment and the beginning of the end of what had been the predominant social and economic order for centuries -the dominance of most of the social and economic life of Europe by the monarchies. In *Wealth of Nations*, written in 1776, Adam Smith (Smith, 2007) spelled out the formula for a nation's social and economic suffrage through private productivity, capital accumulation and reinvestment. Smith argued that this formula aimed at ultimately shaking off the shackles of the economic power of the monarchies and their predominant closed-knit ownership of economic activity. Smith sought to promote a new sense of the division of labour with free markets. The idea was to increase the private participation of economic activity as a means to liberate it from state (royal) monopolies and control -thus paving the way for laissez-faire economics, which he believed would boost productivity and therefore wealth. He wrote:

In mercantile and manufacturing towns, where the inferior ranks of people are chiefly maintained by the employment of capital, they are in general industrious, sober, and thriving [...] In those towns which are principally supported by the constant or occasional residence of a court, and in which the inferior ranks of people are chiefly maintained by the spending of revenue, they are in general idle, dissolute, and poor [...]. (Smith, 2007, p.262)

Written at the beginning of the industrial revolution, capitalism was still an idea for and on behalf of the few who could invest in such an endeavour -long before the concept of proletarian labour emerged less than a century later. Moreover, Smith could

not have predicted the time when oligarchic and corporate monopolies and cartels of 'big capital' (themselves the new monarchies?) could actually render countries poor and dependent once again. During his time, as a result of the industrial revolution and the move of capitalism towards greater mass production, capitalism became a more consolidated social and economic norm, especially in England and other parts of northern Europe. Capitalism's subsequent social impact led to the insights of Karl Marx and his notions of commodities and the relationships between capital as the means of production and labour (Marx, 1986). By then, we could say that the spirit or ethos of classic capitalism was formed, as described years later by Max Weber.

In his investigation, Weber (2001) made a link between capitalism and Protestantism, as a quasi-religious ethic of frugal self-sacrifice for the sake of capital accumulation and subsequent reinvestment. He argued that entrepreneurship, especially under Protestantism, was based on a puritanical ethos of prudence, asceticism, conservatism, austerity and managerial planning and productivity. He writes:

This philosophy of [Protestant] avarice appears to be the ideal of the honest man of recognized credit, and above all the idea of the duty of the individual toward the increase of his capital, which is assumed as an end in itself [...] The *summum bonum* [the supreme good] of this ethic, the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudaemonistic [happiness], not to say hedonistic, admixture [...] Man is dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of his life. (Weber, 2001, pp.16-18)

Weber (2001), therefore, describes succinctly the spirit of (traditional) capitalism, which was focused exclusively on the accumulation of capital, while still, in a sense, embracing the filo-religious foundation of self-sacrifice, duty and the metaphysical notion of a higher purpose -one which would also, as a consequence, bring to the bearer increasing amounts of money. It had not yet evolved into a capitalism of mass consumption that would later help it to continue to amass even more capital, but in a much more oligopolistic fashion after having shaken off, unwittingly, any moral or ethical foundation that it may have had previously as part of its fabric. In order to justify and explain this spirit, the original capitalist focused strictly on production and accumulation, leaving consumption to rule itself, as a byproduct or consequence of investment and productivity.

Contemporary scholars, such as Trevor Norris (2011), reiterate Weber's claim by asserting:

That the rise of capitalism was driven primarily by shifting *religious* values, specifically those that encouraged the application of rationalism towards the pursuit of economic gain [...] coupled with rationalism, moral worth could be affirmed through divinely sanctioned values such as hard work and thrift, while avoiding the sinful luxury of self-indulgence. Work was construed as a moral and religious duty in itself, rather than driven by the desire to consume. (pp.24-25)

Political theorist Benjamin Barber (2007) also describes this origin of the ethos of capitalism. He claims that the Protestant ethic Weber associated with early capitalism, actually defined the values of capitalism which emerged from spontaneous

entrepreneurial creativity which already had begun before Adam Smith's writings (pp.39-40). Barber (2007) further argues that Weber was adamant in noting that, during early capitalism, focus was not on acquisition or acquisitiveness per se, features he discerned in every society and that belong to no one economic model, but that it was rather on capital formation (pp.39-40).

For my study's purposes it is important to distinguish between the classical traditional capitalism of producers from today's capitalism of consumers. The evolution of the latter is a paradox to the emergence of the former. Whereas capitalism began with the traditional productivity of an ethos of "ascetic-minded work and investment", as Weber (1946, p.332) would have us believe, having over time generated surplus wealth, it then became destructive to this same ascetic ethos. "The paradox of all rational asceticism...is that rational asceticism itself has created the very wealth it rejected" (Weber, 1946, p.332). Of course, a simple historical analysis of how an imperial state accumulated capital through the extraction of another nations' wealth through colonialism, could easily check Weber's claim of the asceticism of original capital accumulation. Obviously, what he meant was the accumulation of capital by the individual and not the nation-state. Norris (2011) says that although these original individual values of frugality, ascetism and reinvestment in productivity "may have characterized the early stages of modern capitalism several centuries ago" (p.25), it no longer sufficed. Continuous consumption and demand had to be created in order to continue with the production end of capitalism's dynamics.

As stagnation ensued, capitalism had to re-visit its ethos, especially before, between and after the social and economic shake up of the two world wars. Whereas the traditional manufacturing of goods to supply real needs of post-war societies began to decline, the new strategy of *manufacturing needs* began to address this decline and absorb the commodity and service surpluses of overproduction. This has resulted in an evident contradiction within modern capitalism -the creation of great wealth while creating great inequality at the same time. Barber (2007) says that where Weber's early capitalism was a mechanism that gave others what they wanted and needed, current capitalism is catering to those who do not need, since it can't tap into the non-existing capital of those who *do* need -that is, most of the world- thus the increasing inequality and the new international division of labour (pp.138-178).

To create demand among those who already have everything (including disposable cash) became a central challenge for manufacturers or producers. To create this new demand, they realized that they could begin to tap into the subconscious universe of the consumer, to begin to condition his or her wants and make these appear and even 'feel' like needs. The manufacturer now had to produce and manipulate feelings around his object and thought processes within the consumer. From the 1950s and 1960s onwards, the marketing and advertisement industry exploded, especially in the US. So, what is the new ethos of consumer capitalism? As Norris (2011) summarizes, "consumerism is now advanced by unleashing the desire to spend; [it] must advocate hedonistic self-indulgence, not puritanical self-denial, [it] has come to

replace Puritanism and the Protestant work ethic upon which Weber focused” (pp. 25-26).

In summary, the dynamics and ethos of classic capitalism as a producer, whose riches were earned through a mix of frugal ascetism and rationalism that supplied human demands based on real and basic livelihood needs, was able to sustain itself for a long period of time because there was a natural demand supplied by what we could call authentic infrastructural livelihood needs of the general populace (i.e. household utensils, clothes, refrigerators, televisions, certain foodstuffs, transportation, etc.). Classic capitalism reinvested its profits on production, while the demands for these basic needs persisted. The well of real needs, for a long time after the wars, seemed to never run dry. In fact, objects were made to last because there was no need for their replacement since the concept of market saturation was irrelevant at the time. Manufacturers would have a competitive edge over a rival if and when their product was more resistant and lasted longer than the competitor's. Even this would be turned upside down, as we will see later, with the creation of the industrial strategy called planned or *calculated obsolescence*. While the *real needs* market of producers persisted, the working class was becoming the middle-class -jobs were often guaranteed for a lifetime, workers were able to purchase homes, buy the cars and appliances they assembled and, albeit surprises, plan for the future. Everything was meant to last. As Bauman (2007) writes:

Indeed, the society of producers, the principal societal model of the 'solid' phase of modernity, was primarily security oriented [...] it put a wager on the human desire for a reliable, trustworthy, orderly, regular, transparent, and by the same token durable, time-resistance and secure setting [...] In that era, large volumes of spacious, heavy, solid and immovable possessions augured a secure future [...] a durably protected and safe existence [...] long-term security being their major purpose and value, acquired goods were not meant to be immediately consumed; on the contrary, they were meant to be protected from impairment or dispersal and stay intact [...]. (pp.29-30)

As Bauman implies, this reliance on durability and permanence began to waiver with the onset of market saturation. Once these long-term demands for appliances, cars, and the like, were met by the richer capitalist societies, the market began to become saturated with the effect of inducing stagnation in productivity and with it, the decline of profit and the slowing down of the accumulation of capital. The result was the need for capitalism to reinvent itself and focus on the creation and 'manufacturing' of new demands that would go beyond the simple consumption of life's necessities. Capitalism soon would start investing its profits not only on productivity, but, increasingly, on advertising and marketing in order to create these new invented demands, as well as the re-purchasing of the same but 'new and improved' products. Rather than producing an excellent item that could last a very long time, industry realized that they could produce less robust and replaceable items so that the consumer would end up having to buy the same item more than once over the course of his or her lifetime. Durability was tossed out as a criterium for marketing. The behind-the-scenes

concept of ‘planned obsolescence’⁵ was born. Objects that we already possessed would begin to feel and appear out-dated, no longer as good as new ones that were being advertised.

This notion of expendability began to be pushed incessantly through advertisement, with the continuous re-modelling and re-packaging of existing objects. This market strategy coupled with re-branding became crucial in the creation of new needs or renewal as the method to tap into a market of consumers who already have everything. Desires were continuously created and a consumer culture further consolidated. As a result, our relationship with our possessions, when we used to try to preserve them at all costs, has greatly altered. Rather than buying objects that last a long time, as was the case before, we are conditioned to ‘discard’ this notion of durability, by replacing it with novelty -the desire to have the latest fad, latest model, the ‘new and improved’ version of whatever we already possess. Durability has been completely relegated, thanks to the incessant advertising of novelties. Thus, consumer culture today emphasizes the discarding of old objects and replacing them with the new, even if the old one still works. As Bauman (2007) writes, “if Max Weber was right

⁵ The Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary defines *planned/built-in obsolescence* as, “the practice of making or designing something (such as a car) in such a way that it will only be usable for a short time so that people will have to buy another one”(See <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/built-in%20planned%20obsolescence>). The online Encyclopedia Britannica says, “this term was supposedly coined after World War 2 by American industrial designers and writers to indicate industry’s desire to produce consumer items that would be replaced even before their actual utility expired. Although the concept is often linked with the second half of the 20th century, it is likely that American industrialists saw this profit-making opportunity well before then.” (See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/planned-obsolescence>)

and the ethical principle of the producing life was [...] the delay of gratification, then the ethical guideline of the consuming life [...] has to be to avoid staying satisfied [...]" (p.98).

Capitalism's new ethos of consumption for consumption's sake became consolidated with the blurring of the distinctions between needs and desires. This was achieved through mass advertising and the permeation of consumer culture in all aspects of society. Objects for possession were no longer standing alone, but have become increasingly integrated within our sense of self and of our 'wishful' manufacturing of identities and even self-esteem. As I will argue throughout this project, this shift has been having a profound effect on all aspects of society, including in education, because of its influence on the desires of individuals, what we aspire towards, its molding of our predispositions, on how we relate to one another, our outlook on life, and even around life itself. In his book, *Consuming Life*, Bauman (2007b) explains this well:

Consumerism arrives when consumption takes over that linchpin role which was played by work in the society of producers [...] Unlike consumption, primarily a treat and occupation of individual human beings, consumerism is an attribute of society. For society to acquire that attribute the thoroughly individual capacity for wanting, desiring and longing needs to be, just as labour capacity was in the producers' society, detached ('alienated') from individuals and recycled/reified into an extraneous force which sets the 'society of consumers' in motion and keeps it on course as a specific form of human togetherness while by the same token setting specific parameters for effective individual life strategies and

otherwise manipulating the probabilities of individual choices and conduct.
(p.28)

Consumer culture, therefore, needs to produce dissatisfaction in the consumer, as its main product, after or on account of an initial buying euphoria that offers the immediate illusion of the satisfaction of needs. This psychological trick of advertising aimed at desire is the main underlying and subliminal stimulus to keep the consumer focused on novelties. His or her perpetual dissatisfaction with objects that no longer deliver on their promise to fulfil needs will push him or her to buy the next gadget, the next novelty or the new and improved version of what he or she already possesses. This cycle of bottomless consumption is the hallmark of today's capitalism and consumer culture. By appealing to the impermanence and brevity of the emotional use of objects, the consumer is indirectly forced to replace them. As Bauman (2007) writes:

Consumerism, a sharp opposition to the preceding forms of life, associates happiness not so much with the gratification of needs (as its 'official transcripts' tend to imply), as with the *ever rising volume and intensity* of desires, which imply in turn prompt use and speedy replacement of the objects intended and hope to gratify them [...] the advent of consumerism augurs the era of 'inbuilt obsolescence' of goods offered on the market [...] an instability of desires and insatiability of needs [...] a liquid modern setting is inhospitable to long-term planning, investment and storage; indeed, it strips the delay in gratification of its past sense of prudence, circumspection and, above all, reasonability. (p.31)

What we have then with contemporary consumption is the notion that real, functionalist and practical needs are no longer the main driving force of buying. What

we are purchasing are whims and replacements of what we already have, due to the power of advertisement, that quickly makes us realize that what we have no longer suffices. Advertisement promotes our constant dissatisfaction of what we possess, thus of what we are and of how we see ourselves and seek to promote ourselves. This, in essence, is the ethos of consumerism.

4.2 The Ethos of Consumerism

Consumer culture does not impose itself in an authoritarian way. It is not a form of ‘cultural revolution’ that is overtly mandated or enforced, nor is it something that we necessarily manifest in a conscientious way. It is more seductive and subliminal than that. It relies more on our primal instincts rather than our obedience. It flirts and taps into our innermost feelings in one way or another. Adam Smith didn't talk too much about consumption in his theory of capitalism. But Hobbes knowingly did allude to ‘greed’ from his observations on how individuals do seek out comfort for selfish gain. Norris (2011) explains that for Hobbes and Locke:

Humans are compelled to enter into civil society and submit to a social contract largely because the state of nature is characterized by tremendous uncertainty concerning the protection and security of one's possession [and] that humans are driven primarily by their innate and incessant appetites and desires, and that ‘all men must seek incessantly to obtain satisfaction of their desires’. (Locke in Norris, pp.26-27)

As Norris (2011) indicates, that without realizing he was preempting consumerism, Locke's theory of politics was intended primarily to safeguard the *private*

sphere of the possessing individual, to ensure security and enable individuals to maximize their self-interest. Locke argued that in the state of nature one can dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, because “God, who hath given the world to men in common, hath also given them reason to make use of it to the best advantage of life and convenience. The earth and all that is therein is given to men for the support and comfort of their being” (Locke in Norris, pp. 26-27).

Thus, began a paradigm shift with the liberalization of the social narrative, especially in northern European societies after the Reformation, with the new modernizing emphasis and acknowledgement of the individual and his or her needs, wants, and rights over those formerly attributed exclusively to the collective, as dictated by the powerful few. It may be that the motivation behind this new shift, or this new form of liberalism, was to unshackle the individual from the dominating social and economic institutions of the time, be it the Church, the absolute monarchies, the nobility, or any centralized source of power and control. In a sense, it is as if it sought to continue a form of reformation, -not the religious/institutional version of Martin Luther’s- but an economic one, emphasizing individualism, based primarily on materialistic and economic terms. It coincided or ‘hitched a ride’ with revolutionary Europe, especially with the French Revolution, and its emphasis on individual rights and freedoms. It became fertile ground for a new ethos around the individual and a greater awareness of individuality, not just social and political, but also economic.

So how does consumer capitalism create needs from wants? In other words, how does the consumption of unnecessary goods become necessary? How is demand created? To answer this, we need to understand the concept of commodity. Norris (2011) argues that whereas Adam Smith opened *The Wealth of Nations*, “with the discussion of the division of labour, Karl Marx opened *Das Kapital* with the first extensive analysis of commodity and its political implications in terms of its use-value and exchange-value” (p.22). Norris (2011) elaborates on Marx’s view on commodity:

Use-value refers to the function or utility of a commodity and is based on its inherent physical properties and specific function (for example, corn is produced to be eaten). While the use-value of a commodity is fixed by its specific function, exchange-values are interchangeable depositories of use-value. The exchange valuable commodity is derived only when placed in relation to other commodities. Exchange-value is based on a variable relationship in which use-values are exchanged for other use-values, and their value is determined by their exchangeability: the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place. Hence exchange value appears to be something accidental and purely relative. (Marx, in Norris, 2011, p.22)

If we were to simplify this difference by using the example of the purchasing of corn, we could say that in classical producer capitalism the consumer buys corn only to eat it, without necessarily feeling, wanting nor expecting anything more from it than nourishment. In consumer capitalism, corn is not just eaten. You could be made to eat much more of it than just for the purpose of nourishing yourself. In a sense, you begin

to consume the corn before eating it by metabolizing a greater significance attributed to it through advertisement, before its actual purchase, with a more subliminal reason for its purchase -rather than to simply nourish yourself. Thus, the exchange value of the corn is made to be more complex, more than a simple necessity, rendering its purchase more fulfilling through the power of advertisement. Advertisers must first define corn by creating, packaging and making it associated with a feeling and an idea that adds layers of emotional significance and a greater dimensionality that takes the consumer beyond the simple purchasing and eating of the corn. Its psychological and emotional consumption must precede the actual material purchasing of it. The product has to firstly be defined and packaged in order to create an add-on value-exchange context -all before it is sold- in order to increase its demand and thus probability of sale. In other words, before the corn is eaten, it must be desired, and not just by the stomach. For that to happen, it can be presented, for example, as a symbol of health, of nature, or even of patriotism -because by buying it you may be buying something local and home-grown that helps boost a national product over a foreign competitor.

Basically, through consumer culture you buy feelings and emotions that are subsequently packaged into objects and services. For this to happen, consumer capitalism must be in the constant dynamic of vying for our attention, wants, tastes, desires, insecurities -in other words, where possible, tap into our whole persona -and even create it. More than tapping on these feelings through advertising and other media, including through other industries, such as sport and entertainment, consumer

culture manages to create them by fetishizing the product and giving it multidimensional purposes and status. Even Marx understood this according to Norris (2011, p. 22) who writes, “an important part of Marx’s understanding of the commodity is not only this distinction between use-value and exchange-value, but also his analysis of how it leads to the fetishistic character of commodities”, which he claims also “take on a religious character” (p.22).

Capitalism today has a new ethos. It revolves around strategies that incessantly work at increasing the ‘commodification’ of everyday life. The tremendous power of advertisement, marketing, the entertainment industries, and the new digital tools at consumer capitalism’s disposal, have managed to disseminate this new culture and its values throughout contemporary society, irrespective of geography, race, ethnicity, social class and economic condition. The sole purpose of such strategies is to render one constantly unsatisfied with what one has, in order to keep buying. Bauman is very caustic, sarcastic, and critical with this new ethos. Bauman (2007) states:

Consumer society thrives as long as it manages to render the non-satisfaction of its members (and so, in its own terms, their unhappiness) perpetual. The explicit method of achieving such an effect is to denigrate and devalue consumer products shortly after they have been hyped into the universe of consumers’ desires. What starts as an effort to satisfy a need must end up as a compulsion or an addiction. And it does, as long as the urge to seek solutions to problems and relief from pains and anxieties in shops, and only in shops, remains an aspect of behaviour that is not just allowed, but eagerly encouraged, to condense into a habit or a strategy with no apparent alternative. (p.47)

Following Bauman, one might say that this new consumer capitalism and its cultural promotion is capitalism's new consumerist invisible hand⁶. How beneficial this hand is for the consumer is the gist of our discussion.

4.3 Semiocapitalism

As discussed so far, there has been a clear shift from the production of goods to today's understanding how capitalism emphasizes the production of needs. As I argue, this is the result of the omnipotence of consumer culture (now through the digital tools that it has at its disposal) and our interiorization of it in our daily lives. How does this interiorization of consumer culture manifest itself through our daily actions and show itself in education and in school rapports? As Norris (2011) claims, Marx didn't predict how fancy would outstrip and overtake need as the main force driving commodity consumption. We can say, in a sense, that capitalism has also moved from the material to the metaphysical. Consumer capitalism, as a culture, really is a modern phenomenon beyond traditional Marxist analysis of capitalism. Norris (2011) says Marxist analysis suffers from a "productivist bias" (pp. 23-24). He stipulates that because the value of

⁶ The online Encyclopaedia Britannica states, "Adam Smith used the term 'invisible hand' as a metaphor to describe the mechanisms through which beneficial social and economic outcomes may arise from the accumulated self-interested actions of individuals, none of whom intends to bring about such outcomes. The notion of the invisible hand has been employed in economics and other social sciences to explain the division of labour, the emergence of a medium of exchange, the growth of wealth, and the patterns (such as price levels) manifest in market competition. More controversially, it has been used to argue that free markets, made up of economic agents who act in their own self-interest, deliver the best possible social and economic outcomes." (See <https://www.britannica.com/topic/invisible-hand>). In my case, I am using Smith's metaphor also to describe how consumer culture as well behaves in the same way, for its ethos too relies on self-interest that is argued to benefit the individual and society as a whole. My point is that the linchpin of this ethos is *self-interest* and that it is greatly promoted by manufacturers and their advertisement gurus.

commodities comes only from the labour that went into them, Marx disregarded the inherent value of anything outside of the economic system of production and consumption. Norris (2011) adds:

The [...] limit of Marx's analysis is that he didn't question how we come to develop certain needs, whether there is a limit to our needs, or the extent to which human needs might be socially constructed. In doing so, he overemphasized the uniform or common characteristics of need. For example, on the first page of *Das Kapital* he asserted that a commodity is 'a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another. The nature of such wants, whether they spring from the stomach or from fancy, makes no difference' [...] In suggesting this, Marx overlooked the infinity of wants that spring from 'fancy' [...]. (pp.23-24)

As Norris (2011) indicates, it is primarily fancy rather than need that allows us to be influenced by consumerism. Whereas our roles, rights and obligations as citizens may be much more easily demarcated by the topography and positioning of laws and conventions through our institutions, constitutions, governments, and the state, I argue that we are now much more influenced by the vast uncharted oceans of the subliminally persuasive powers of consumerism -where there is no demarcation, no boundaries and no jurisdictions.

Consumerism and consumer culture have at their disposal all the technologies and algorithms needed to undertake their strategy of surveillance capitalism (I will discuss this concept in more detail below). These are not difficult to understand and are easily made evident when we know that server data banks and our computers today

function and cater to us, often, based on algorithms collected from our own usage, through our surfing of social networking sites, for example. As we have now come to understand, current technologies, unbeknownst to the user, serve to collect our data for the consumer market, or even now, what I call the political market, where our surfing patterns take us to groups and news sources (often fake) that foment and cater to our own potential and predisposed biases. Fake news has also become a commodity within this cybermarketplace. The fodder and fan that supply energy to surveillance capitalism are the signs and codes embedded in these technologies. What is more hidden and stealth, and thus more intrusive in our lives, is when these tools become non-palpable, invisible, and nearly non-identifiable. Here we are talking about semiocapitalism, also called cognitive capitalism. It is when technologies, tools and strategies begin to manifest themselves in us, and, worse, are also even created by us without our realizing it. Semiocapitalism shows how capitalism has morphed into an incredibly powerful cultural and social force. It is fundamental we understand what is meant by semiocapitalism, if we are to understand the powers of today's market culture. The second, fundamentally, relies on the first.

Postmodernist philosopher, Jean Baudrillard (2005) was one of the first to recognize the power of symbols and signs in propaganda, advertisement and politics in conditioning human thought, social action, and of being. In his book, *The System of Objects*, originally published in 1968, he already stated that semiotics has been successfully harnessed by capitalism resulting in its full penetration into all forms of

human social existence (pp.173-174). Semiotics is the study of signs.⁷ Basically, it is today monopolized by capitalism and its production of codes and messages. Rather than the production of objects, as Marx emphasized, Baudrillard focused on understanding the production of signs. As Norris (2011) explains, “from the means of production to the means of consumption [...] the sign proves to have much more impact than the physical commodity itself because sign value exceeds use value” (p. 120). In other words, as I have been discussing, the functionality of the object is purposely diminished by the productive forces of capitalism (through advertisement, for example) while increased in their symbolic meanings and what they represent or are made to convey.

Semiocapitalism uses the power of signs, codes and images to inculcate the individual from inside. As Mario Di Paolantonio (2019) defines it:

Semiocapitalism [is] understood as the contemporary fusion of media and capitalism, in which informational commodities are received, produced and recombined, rel[ying] ever more so on our minds, communication, curiosity and creativity, employing our cognitive-affective labour, or our desire for learning and self-expression. Semiocapitalism is relentless [in its] outward and inward expansion of the economic domain. This is an expansion that does not simply stretch outward, rendering and exploiting nature and the world around us as a resource, but also reaches inward usurping, mining and reaping our interiority

⁷ Semiotics, also called semiology, “is the study of signs, symbols, signification, sign-using behaviour and how meaning is created, not what it is. It was defined by one of its founders, the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, as the study of ‘the life of signs within society’.” (See <https://www.britannica.com/science/scientific-method>; https://www.uvm.edu/~tstreete/semiotics_and_ads/terminology.html; and <https://www.cs.princeton.edu/~chazelle/courses/BIB/semio2.htm>

(our 'soul'), drawing out our passions, desires and creative impulses as a resource itself to be exploited. (p.5)

The concept of semiocapitalism describes how productivity, and with it, consumption, is internalized. Consumer culture is the internalization of semiocapitalism.

4.3.1 'The Cool Running Shoes'

Some years ago, even before the onslaught of social media, in one of the Grade 8 classes I taught during a lesson in Media Literacy, we discussed the power of advertising and of images. After reading an article on the subject of advertisement, as part of a media literacy textbook supplied by the school board, we began to talk about running shoes. Part of this class discussion involved the whole concept of cool or 'sick'-terms often used by the youth to describe something they really approved of and liked. Running shoes came up because one of my students called himself a collector of running shoes as he would buy (or try to buy) the latest craze or running shoe launched in the market. He loved basketball and his shoes revolved around those applicable to that sport.

We started discussing what young people meant by cool and what makes a specific running shoe cool and others not. These were questions that were answered, in a sense, very generically. I asked them for their definition of cool. After much back and forth, I remember that cool was determined by most to be a term that applies to anything or any object that the group approves, and, in a sense, rubber stamps as accepted as part of a collective or consensual sense of aesthetics, a sign of inclusivity,

of being with the 'in' crowd, of legitimation, and so forth. Cool, they seemed to say, is rarely determined by an individual choice (unless this person is a celebrity or considered a trend setter, or what today we call today an influencer). Instead, it is based on a consensus that seems to be externally determined. If the influencer determines something to be cool, then it becomes so to the larger group. It is interesting that in the beginning of our conversation, when I asked the students when do things become cool, most were unable to answer. Some understood that advertisement has a lot to do with it, and when celebrities endorse something -that makes it cool, they would say.

I asked students 'why are they [running shoes] cool?' -to which the common answer was, 'they just are!' I then asked them, why running shoes and not shirts? Why running shoes and not socks? Here, the students were insightful enough to explain that cool is 'what's shown on TV' and on the web and that these are the objects that are pushed through advertising. Socks are 'not seen' so they are not as important. They understood that exposure to objects such as running shoes made the students like them, and many of them (especially the boys), want them. The girls were quick to say that running shoes are a 'boys' thing'. This, of course, would have opened up a completely other discussion altogether as to why some things are advertised more to boys and not to girls. Instead, I wanted to persist on the topic of cool and running shoes, as an example of semiotics.

It is here when I asked them, 'so, are these running shoes cool because you think they are cool, on your own and they do match your sense of what is beautiful or cool, or

is it because you know everyone else thinks they are cool? Do we accept them to be cool as a way for us to be socially accepted? Is our sense of aesthetics and 'fashion' externally induced and created or do we still have an internal and personal sense of style and aesthetics? For example, I told them, when I was fourteen and fifteen, bell-bottom pants and 'elevator' shoes were very appealing then. So why not today? The students were able to discern (and not in these exact words) the possibility that what they thought was 'cool' is the result of something that can be 'manufactured' (together with the running shoe) and inculcated subliminally, perhaps as much as it can be the result of an independent and individual preference. This class experience involved critical thinking, using a Socratic method of questioning, and it shed a good light on all of us onto how easily we are all susceptible to external forces, imagery, symbols and their significance as induced by objects. The students understood that (and for many it was a surprise) the idea that what is cool is really determined not by them but by what is presented to them as cool.

This vignette depicts Baudrillard's (2005) theory that to become an object of consumption the object must become a sign, that is to say, it must become external, in a sense, to our relationship that it may merely signify. As Norris (2011) further explicates:

Previously, goods were presented on the basis of their material qualities and function. Now, advertisers focus more on selling their brand and brand meaning. This gradual transition results in an association of the sign with the lifestyle and its integration into the social life of people. Through the transformation of the

commodity into a sign, it is able to enter into a series in which it becomes immersed within the never-ending stream of signs. (p.124)

Basically, the purchasing of an object is the acquiring of a code or symbol of a sense of sociability and social acceptance which that object represents. As Norris (2011) summarizes, one “buys into a code of signs more than the meaning of the object itself” (p.124). On the surface, objects are presented and sold for their ‘functionality’ and their looks, but in reality, they are meant to serve that which the consumer is not quite aware of: Their symbols and their codes that chain the consumer to the ever-lasting conveyor belt of fashions, trends, feelings and ‘sociabilities’ created and manipulated by the manufacturers and their advertisement partners. Consumption has thus become a new form of sociability.

If my students believed in cool running shoes, it was not because of their durability, functionality nor the actual physical need for possessing them. It was on how they allowed them to better integrate (in their mind, most likely subconsciously) to the larger society of youth and social acceptance. But this is never conscious nor calculated. It is embedded deeply into an aesthetically manufactured persona, created by the marketplace of consumer culture. As Baudrillard (2005) said, what is consummated and consumed is never the object but the relationship itself, “signified yet absent, simultaneously included and excluded; it is the idea of the relationship that is consumed in the series of objects that displays it” (p.68). Norris (2011) extends this idea by stating that “politics, religion and education -every human undertaking is

swept up and absorbed by this process” (p.125) of socialization through advertisement and symbol and meaning creation. The proliferation of signs and a reduction of the sign to the status of commodity points towards the simultaneous experience of the loss of reality and any encounter of hyperreality. Thus, we may have arrived at a point, through consumer culture, where we risk detaching ourselves from our ‘real’ reality and who we really are, as ourselves, when we begin living the codes and symbols of a narrative that is created for us by semiocapitalism. This may be so much the case that we are now creating our own narratives for others to consume about us (such as through shareveillance, which I will discuss below) via the tools of social networking and its virtual reality.

Objects and what they represent and symbolize have also been discussed decades before Baudrillard, by Thorstein Veblen (1994) in his book *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, originally written in 1899. In this work, Veblen (1994) had already talked about emulation and how the lower or working classes seek to consume the objects that the leisure class has. He wrote that the upper classes showed their position through ostentation and leisure, and that the working class has to exchange its labour in order to try to afford to buy and emulate some of that leisure time and its significant objects. He used the expression ‘conspicuous consumption’, to describe an attempt at displaying status through habits and symbols that allow people to emulate others from higher classes and rank themselves accordingly (p.43). Similar to Baudrillard (2005),

Veblen (1994) also analyzed the social representations and human relationships that objects of consumption have on society as a whole.

As we can see, semiocapitalism plays a strong role in shaping both the consumer and the worker, meshing them often into one. Berardi (2009) talked about the interiority of producers, by describing how codes, signs, and their systems also enter the workforce and create our work culture, resulting in semiotics taking over the workers' identities and sense of being (pp.74-75). Expanding on this, Di Paolantonio (2019) states:

Berardi talks about the current transformation of every domain of social life into economy [and how it] has led to this 'subjugation of the soul' to work processes, and that 'the soul', that which Berardi refers to 'as the best part of us' -which aspires towards creativity, sensuality, delight and communication- risks being usurped by the incessant compulsion to define ourselves more and more through our functional relations. (p.2)

With regards to semiocapitalism and productivity, under a Fordist model of production, capitalism exploited the worker's labour and time. Today, semiocapitalism is able to subtly exploit the interiority of the individual. Instead of 'proletariat', Berardi (2009) calls these new workers 'cognitariats' (p.103). So, if capitalism has gone through a metamorphosis, so has the worker and consumer. The labourer has become a 'cognitive worker' and more integrated into what Berardi (2019) calls, the 'infosphere' (p.19). His or her existence is psychologically and emotionally more tied down and

conditioned by work from an identity standpoint. As Berardi (2009) says, if industrial capitalism exploited the body, semicapitalism exploits the psyche and that:

There is no possibility of political resistance to the absolute domination of semicapitalism, since its foundations are not external, residing neither in the military violence of the state, nor in the economic corporate abuse: they are incorporated in the pathogenic refrains that persuasively entered the collective unconscious. (p.139)

With semicapitalism at work, it is critical to investigate the strategies and tools used by the markets to tap onto our habits and behavior. It is important to ask: How are these habits and behaviours harnessed and even inculcated? Our next section will briefly discuss what is also referred to as surveillance capitalism with regards to this question.

4.4 Surveillance and 'Shareveillance' Capitalism

According to Norris (2011), Hannah Arendt wrote that we live at a time that privileges the private over the public (Arendt, in Norris, p. 81). I would add that the new public is the private exposed. We either do it consciously (such as through shareveillance that I will discuss briefly below), or unknowingly through algorithms that continuously monitor and compile data from our usage of online platforms and social networking. Never have we been so exposed and outright stimulated to simulate by revealing our private' lives -whether we are aware if it or not. When we are aware of it, we may even be doing it in a narcissistic way in order to seek public admiration and approval. Regardless as to whether we expose ourselves purposely (a spontaneous and

free form of ‘shareveillance’?) or not, (by means of our online habits), our new reality is that our every digitalized action is now being fed to data banks and harnessed by the market’s Trojan Horse (our very own smart phones in hand, or computers in our own homes).

Therefore, not only has consumer capitalism become interiorized within us through semiotics, it is now *technically* mining our own private behavior, and with it, we are mining ourselves. It is codifying our every digital action while simultaneously creating it through the algorithms. Surveillance capitalism commoditizes our online habits when we surf the internet, reinforces them and then sells them to us and to anonymous and interested buyers. This is shareveillance when used by the marketplace. It is also shareveillance when we choose to ‘share’ our private lives publicly through social media and our everyday internet posts.

There are several studies around this most recent of capitalism’s strategies. In her 2019 book entitled, *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, Shoshana Zuboff starts with the definition:

Sur-veil-lance Cap-i-tal-ism, n.

1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; 2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modifications; 3. A rogue mutation of capitalism marked by concentrations of wealth, knowledge, and power unprecedented in human history; 4. The foundational framework of a surveillance economy; 5. As significant a threat to human

nature in the twenty-first century as industrial capitalism was to the natural world in the nineteenth and the twentieth; 6. The origin of the new instrumentarian power that asserts dominance over society and presents startling challenges to market democracy; 7. A movement that aims to impose a new collective order based on total certainty; 8. An expropriation of critical human rights that is best understood as a coup from above: an overthrow from the people's sovereignty. (Zuboff, 2019, no page number, before Table of Contents)

My intent here is not to discuss in detail the effects of surveillance capitalism, but only to recognize it as, perhaps, the latest stage of capitalism's metamorphosis. What is unprecedented throughout the metamorphosis of capitalism is that surveillance capitalism is now that stage of capitalism where we are its unwitting protagonists. We now mine capitalism because it is now mining us, like raw materials for the market. No longer is capitalism simply a systemic imposition from the outside, nor from above (such as through the power of advertisement and its owners -the corporations). It is no longer a one-way street, determined by external forces and power that subsequently controlled, for example, labour relations and the means of production. It is now a two-lane highway, paved and maintained by all of us, so that we can travel in these self-driving vehicles that we are helpless to board. We are both the pavers and the asphalt.

Today, we are both consumer and producer of all the semiotic codes, signs, symbols and the dynamics of capitalism through the complete (and unknowing) surrender of our behaviour to the digital world -when we use it. Through surveillance

capitalism, capitalism per se has come full circle and now is being reinvested by us on a continuous 24-hour digital cycle. Every time we surf the web, open a site, write a comment on a social networking platform, the technology is such that it is able to trace our digital behavior, thus what we like, keep looking up and what our general tastes and preferences are. These then can be tapped and even purchased by interested companies, as well as even requested by governments. With some of the home listening devices that many of us have, such as Amazon's Echo, or Google's Alexa, for example, the outside world is literally listening in. While we are happy to oblige, because of the convenience of accessing these listening devices for anything we may need -ranging from music to commands in and around our now 'smart' homes- they are always on. They could also be seen, potentially, as spying devices. We are not always accessing them but they are always accessing us. In the middle of a random conversation at home, my Amazon Alexa listening device sometimes chimes when she thinks I am trying to access her. I wasn't. I was having a private conversation in my own home.

Of course, the main (supposedly) driving force behind surveillance capitalism is for the compilation of data for the market. The danger, evidently, is that this market now is no longer just for the sale of products per se, but of loyalties, opinions, and everything even outside the world of objects and services. It is now active in the world of politics and is affecting our own democracies, such as through the manufacturing of fake news. Biases can be very easily reinforced, since the algorithms result in the

creation of multiple parallel worlds that the user may not be aware of. As Zuboff (2019) says:

Surveillance capitalists know everything *about us*, whereas their operations are designed to be unknowable *to us*. They accumulate vast domains of new knowledge *from us*, but not *for us*. They predict our futures for the sake of others' gain, not ours. As long as surveillance capitalism and its behavioral futures markets are allowed to thrive, ownership of the new means of behavioral modification eclipses ownership of the means of production as the fountainhead of capitalist wealth and power in the twenty-first century. (p. 11)

Zuboff (2019) reiterates that what we are living today is a constantly digital inter-connected life. With our added addiction to cell phones (using them and looking constantly at their screens, even when walking, driving and dining with friends and family) we are, literally, spending a huge portion of our day in the infosphere, rather than within the senses given us by the real world outside of it. Our presence and time, whether consciously or not, are being spent in the cyberworld through our own devices and our docile compliance. It is as if we are constantly looking out the window, but rarely making it to the street. The danger is the complete loss of active and conscious protagonism of our own lives. We are increasingly unable to discern who we are from what we are being persuaded to be. We are living in a world of alternative facts. As Zuboff (2019) explains:

Just as industrial civilization flourished at the expense of nature and now threatens to cost us the Earth, an information civilization shaped by surveillance capitalism and its new instrumentarian power will thrive at the expense of

human nature and will threaten to cost us our humanity. The industrial legacy of climate chaos fills us with dismay, remorse, and fear. As surveillance capitalism becomes the dominant form of information capitalism in our time, what fresh legacy of damage and regret will be mourned by future generations? (pp. 11-12)

Berardi (2019) too emphasizes the unknown territory that surveillance capitalism is having us tread. He stipulates that what technological potency allows us to do now is bigger than anything we can fathom. He asserts that an abyss has opened up between our technical capacity to manufacture and our capacity to conceptualize, and that it is growing every day. Berardi (2019) explains: “Our capacity to manufacture is unlimited, but our ability to predict the implications of networked technology is limited” (pp. 39-40). He (2019) believes that our impotence to imagine, to criticize and to choose is deepening as our technological potency, and the growing automation of the technological procedures, are expanding. As with others, Berardi also makes the distinction between capitalism under the open guises of production during the industrial age, and today’s surveillance capitalism. He (2019) says that “power has been embedded in the extrastatecraft space of algorithmically generated infrastructure” (p.55). The effects of surveillance capitalism on our society are multiple. It has managed not only to permeate, but to generate and expand the infosphere of cyberspace and confound it with the once-real-world. Berardi (2019) says:

In theocratic times, truth used to be identified with the utterance of power, coming from God. Power was the source of reason and of law, and the voice of power commanded the multitude’s silence. Lately, power is no longer

synonymous with reason and law and that power no longer commands silence. On the contrary, power is now the master of noise. The exercise of power is based on simulation and nervous hyper-stimulation. (p.191)

Following Korean-German philosopher Byung-Chul Han, Berardi (2019) says that the new discursive weapon of power is the 'shit-storm' and that the shitstorm redefines the very source of power. Referencing Han's book *In the Swarm*, Berardi notes that "shit-storms occur for many reasons. They arise in a culture where respect is lacking and indiscretion prevails. The shit-storm represents an authentic phenomenon of digital communication" (Han, in Berardi, 2019, pp. 91-92).

Surveillance capitalism serves and sells to commercial and state entities, be they private firms and/or governments. As I have been alluding to, this sharing has been called, *shareveillance*. Sometimes, we purposely share our lives' events, family outings and comments on social media, which also have the effect of creating a digital online persona or narrative that is, often, superficially produced. Thus, the effect of shareveillance is twofold. On the one hand, we purposely share our happy scenes and cosmetic personas to the general public. We are quite aware of this. Then, on the other hand, strictly from the application of collected data is concerned, it can be used to create algorithms that can then push us products and beliefs in a very persuasive manner. Also, it allows governments to accumulate these data, if it so chooses. As Birchall (2016) asks, how much data and what kind of data should citizens have to share with surveillant states? And how much data should government departments share

with citizens? (p.2). As we saw with the Assange and Snowden affairs, this sharing can expose and upset those in power. Moreover, Birchell (2016) says that:

Shareveillance also produces an *anti-politicized* public, because shareveillant practices both invoke political agency and yet, severely delimit it, not least by the way in which, for example, they encourage actions framed by the notion of choice and the citizen qua consumer [...] shareveillance forecloses politics even while seeming to foster forms of democratic engagement with governance through open data. (p. 2)

We can't control government usage of the data it may collect, nor when and for what use it does so. The same goes with private companies and the platforms that may sell them our data. On top of that, even if we willingly share ourselves online through our images, comments or chats and groups that we may join, we may be unwittingly presenting ourselves as characters and personas that, in so doing, distance our real selves from our digital selves. We may create an identity that suits the cyber world and not our real one for the real world. In sharing our adventures and our daily lives, are we staging it? Based on my experiences, the answer is often, yes. When we decide to share our lives and experiences in public, we are able to control the narrative and the image, or so we think. We don't seem to be too concerned when surveillance or data collection is done through our purposeful shareveilling of ourselves. When we think we are in control, then we are willing to share our 'private' lives publicly on the internet and on screen. However, if we feel vulnerable and no longer in control of our digital exposures,

we seem to shut down. The virtual classroom, at least from my experience, seems to demonstrate this.

4.4.1 'Hiding Behind Zoom Screens'

Beginning with the Covid-19 pandemic and the stay-home orders from our provincial government over two years ago, I ended up teaching online from home for two straight years, until this year when I returned to the regular classroom. But for those two years, each time, I was responsible for some thirty Grade Eight students on a full-time basis by following a regular school day schedule. Using the school board's licensed Zoom application software for our daily online conferencing, my camera and screen were always on during the course of the six plus hours of the school day. Of the thirty students, I had only two, maximum three students who were with their cameras on, spontaneously, with no qualms about being seen. All of the others preferred their screens to remain black with their cameras off. What could be the reasons for their preferences for visual anonymity? Was it so as to not be (perhaps in their mind) scrutinized by their fellow peers about where and how they live? After all, if their screens were on, we the public would be able to peer into their private homes. Did they feel vulnerable? Even though I had insisted, initially in September about the importance of being on screen (for our own socialization and integration and as the only real way to get to know each other well and produce a safe environment of trust and companionship for the duration of the school year), I was not successful in having my students on screen the whole time. Only during presentations did I insist that they

turn their cameras on -and that was because it was the only way they would get an oral participation mark. Many of my online teacher colleagues agreed that to have all students visible on the screen with their cameras on, had been a lost battle.

My experience was very common with nearly all of my colleagues who taught online. What surprised me was the realization that even several teachers also preferred to be off camera. So, when students and even adults alike hide behind their Zoom blackened screens, is it because the camera pries into their ‘real’ reality -as opposed to a controlled catered one? It is ironic that we can feel very uncomfortable ‘exposing’ or revealing ourselves from our homes, and yet we are gleefully willing to do so incessantly under other circumstances through digital media. This implies some insecurity that we feel in today’s world where our being seen *simply as we are*, is not good enough. It seems that we would rather be proactive and project a mannequinist *e-persona* or character that we decide to manufacture and control, than to be ourselves.

In the next chapter, I will delve deeper into this through a discussion around identity creation, including how it may have manifested itself in education, based on my experiences. I call this chapter *Commodifying Identity - Replacing the Citizen with the Consumer*. I will discuss the concept of commodity further, based on its own metamorphosis starting with Marx’s analysis of its meaning, to my view of its contemporary application as a consumable product -also revealing itself in education. What is my final conclusion as to why the black screens? Perhaps it is a form of resistance. It allows students the freedom to get up, walk around, and really be home

and as private as possible. It allows them to not even be fully present 'at school' while being home. Perhaps online learning, from home, allowed education to be even more student-centered than any pedagogue could have ever fathomed. It empowered many students.

Chapter Five: Commodifying Identity – Replacing the Citizen with the Consumer

We are in a post-Fordian development model of production in the West from the perspective of the traditional relationships between labour and capital. Unionism, labour relations and the exchange values of traditional shop work have basically disappeared. Technologies have rendered labour less valuable than before. Precarious work, new technologies, automations, working-from-home and several other contemporary realities have further changed this relationship completely.

Berardi (2009) claims that today “the non-hierarchical character of network communication becomes dominant in the entire cycle of social labor” (p.88). The psychological and emotional effect of this non-hierarchical character of labour is that it shows itself as an independent form of work, but only aesthetically. Traditionally, labour-capital relations were more marked, more visibly separate. The worker was quite aware that he or she was exchanging his or her time for pay, and that his or her emotional allegiance to the work was not necessarily required. The worker had the union to channel his or her allegiance. Labour arrangements and relations with capital was clear and simple.

What has happened over the course of the last forty years or so, especially with the onset of neoliberalism, is that this allegiance has become subliminally co-opted by a new form of individualism from our previous form of labour relations. Through the stimulating of internal competitions, coupled with the political decay of unionism, the sole worker bought into the new work ethic of personal effort for personal gain. The de-

politicization of work left the worker stranded in the cold, only to be warmed and embraced by consumer culture, thus channeling larger, collective ideals, into personalized and isolating projects. Consequently, the clearly visible hierarchy of the past metamorphosed into personal conditioning and inward-looking struggles. Berardi (2009) alludes to the fact that the new hierarchy is no longer on the shop floor but is transversal and invisible, for its centre of command is within us. He (2009) states that our sense of work independence is really ideological fiction with new internalized centres of command. Berardi (2009) notes:

We have a strict interdependence of subjective fragments, all distinct but objectively dependent from a fluid process, from a chain of automatisms both external and internal to the labor process which regulate every gesture, every productive parcel [...] both simple executing workers and intrapreneurial managers share the vivid perception that they depend on a constant flow that cannot be interrupted and from which they cannot step back save it the price of being marginalized. Control over the labor process is no longer guaranteed by a hierarchy of bigger and smaller bosses [...] but it is incorporated in the flux. (pp. 88-89)

It is exactly within this scenario described by Berardi above, that interiorization of work and consumer culture seems to take place. The interiorization of work is evident when we, even unwittingly, buy into life as purely an economic enterprise. The ‘intellectualization of labour,’ according to Berardi (2009):

Has had a major effect on the technologic and organizational transformation of the productive process in the last two decades of the twentieth century by

opening up completely new perspectives for self-realization [in the previous arrangements around Fordian production], worker's disaffection for industrial labor based on a critique of hierarchy and repetition, took energies away from capital [...] all desires were located outside capital, attracting forces that were distancing themselves from its domination. The exact opposite happened in the new info-productive reality of the new economy: Desire called new energies towards the enterprise and self-realization through work. (p.96)

Berardi (2009) analyses that consequently, today, as a result of this absorption of work within our own individual projects and motivations, labour has pushed aside other aspects of life that were more visibly seen and desired outside of productive labour and business -thus, the 'soul at work.' Energies and thoughts have been placed increasingly within the sphere of work and no longer separate. As he (2009) said, "capital was able to renew psychic, ideological and economic energy, specifically thanks to the absorption of creativity, desire, and individualistic, libertarian drives for self-realization" (p. 96). In other words, the sense of self of the worker has changed.

However, what has not changed is that the owners of the original dichotomous means of production have remained the same, and with it, the power division from industrial times. This may in part explain the increasing wage gaps and accumulation of wealth of the last couple of decades by the very few. The difference in wage and earnings between the proverbial 'top one percent' and the rest of the workforce has never been so prominent. With the decrease of wages and increase of profits, this trend was inevitable. The more specialized worker, who now sees his or her position as more

entrepreneurial, is working much longer hours⁸ because she or he may no longer view his or her labour as merely an exchange of time for a wage. Thus, productivity has increased enormously, and with it, the concentration of wealth, since the original dichotomy between who owns the means of production from those who can execute them, has remained intact.

I would add to Berardi's (2009) argument that the power and allure of consumerism has further cemented the worker's new sense of self by co-opting him or her to no longer seeing him or herself belonging to the workshop floor, but now as an intricate consumer on the boutique floor. Hyper consumerism reinforces the individual to work harder. The worker began to seek fulfillment in consumption because, as Berardi (2009) finds, the experience of production had become so alienating. Before, higher wages that were achieved through strong unionism and collective bargaining agreements allowed the worker to actually afford the purchasing of many of the products that he or she produced. This is something that is becoming more difficult because of lower wages and urban gentrification and only has become possible through increased private debt. In turn, this debt and continuous purchasing have been facilitated by the financial sector and governments that, until recently, had their

⁸ Berardi (2009) gives us some statistics: "[...] in the last two decades disaffection and absenteeism have become a marginal phenomenon, while they had been the central element in social relations during the late-industrial period. In the 1980s (and even more, as we know, in the 1990s) the average labour time increased impressively. In the year 1996, the average worker invested in it 148 hours more than their colleagues did in 1973. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics the percentage of individuals working more than 49 hours per week grew from 13% in 1976 to 19% in 1998. As for managers, it grew from 40% to 45%." (p.78)

interest rates very low. With interest rates now rising, so are debts. We are at record levels of private debt.⁹ Regardless, the identity of the worker is in perfect symbiosis with consumption as people came to identify less and less with traditional work-related values and social groupings and increasingly more with consumer products and the messages and meanings conveyed to promote them. Collective workers have become individualized consumers. Citing the economist Robert Heilbroner, Norris (2011) finds that in contrast to Marx's theory of class conflict, conspicuous consumption promotes emulation and identifications such that:

The lower classes are not at swords points with the upper; they are bound up with them by the intangible but steely bonds of common attitudes. The workers do not seek to displace their managers, but to emulate them. (Heilbroner, in Norris, 2011, p.30)

Thus today, in the so-called developed world, consumption has become more democratized -if we are to use a political term applied to civil society. In the first half of the twentieth century, through unionism, the worker had a social and public home (and a sense of belonging), also as a political player within society's means of production. Through the unions, he or she had a political sense and social platform with which to assert his or her sense of justice, militancy and contribution to the betterment of civil

⁹ Look at the following publications: <https://research.stlouisfed.org/publications/page1-econ/2020/03/02/making-sense-of-private-debt>; see also <https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/42/the-private-debt-crisis/>; and as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, both public and private debt have increased exponentially. See https://www.richmondfed.org/publications/research/economic_brief/2020/eb_20-06; also <https://blogs.imf.org/2021/12/15/global-debt-reaches-a-record-226-trillion/>

society. The worker had a sense of activism. With the erosion of the power of unions, especially as a result of neoliberalism, the worker began to lose a sense of militant group identity and strength.

Consequently, a good part of our identity, as adults, is made around work and consumption. We may be using these to fill in the voids and longings that contemporary society has removed from us, to a great extent, such as a sense of community, solidarity, and family time. Productivity, embedded within the semiotics of capitalism, drives us to see ourselves as entrepreneurs when our work involves cognitive production, rather than labourers, when our work was purely menial. For those who are cognitive labourers, we no longer see ourselves as alienated, such as in the 1960s and 1970s, but identify ourselves with the whole productive forces of semiocapitalism. I believe that this comes part and parcel with our ‘subjugation of the soul,’ to use Berardi’s term (2009, p.24), as consumers as well, logically, if we are to agree that productivity and consumption are no longer separate from our sense of self, due to the effects of semiocapitalism.

Berardi’s (2009) use of the term, ‘the subjugation of the soul to work processes’ (p.24) is based on his argument that the current transformation of every domain of social life has been made to exist exclusively for the economy. With it, I would add, the subjugation of the soul to consumerism or market processes and the resulting commodification of many aspects of our daily lives, including our aspirations and expectations, which also involve much of our professional, social and even personal

relationships and rapports. As I will discuss below, I believe that this subjugation of the soul also applies to identity creation through a commodification of identity, and it also affects education. Let us begin with an attempt at understanding who we are or are made to be, within the context of the powerful influences of semiocapitalism and consumer culture in the creation of one's identity. For this, we need to understand how identity is made to be a commodity.

5.1 Commodification

The term commodity is one that has changed very little, if at all, since Adam Smith's definition of commodity. For Smith (2007), a commodity is something that can be exchanged, bartered, bought or sold, including labour (pp.28-29). What has changed is how far-reaching this concept can be and how pervasive it has become, beyond the simple material objects that could be bought or sold. Thus, the passive noun or object 'commodity' has had to be revised to also include the active verb to commodify, or the new active noun, commodification, which implies an active force in contemporary society that creates or invents an object (even if this 'object' is invisible, non-material and even metaphysical -such as relationships and rapports among people) that can be sold or consumed, even without the need for monetary exchange.

Contemporary consumer culture has taken commodification a step further in the sense that for something to be commodified, it no longer needs necessarily to be physical nor of any actual commercial value in the monetary sense but can be an intrinsically cultural or a social commodity that may pay the user social dividends, such

as status, approval, reputation and any other ephemeral or metaphysical sense of personal or social ascension. To commodify means to render something or someone useful for one's individual purposes. Marx anticipated this according to Norris (2011) noting:

An important part of Marx's understanding of commodity is not only the distinction between use-value and exchange-value, but also his analysis of how it leads to the 'fetishistic' character of commodities. 'At first glance, a commodity seems a commonplace sort of thing, one easily understood. Analysis shows, however, that it is a very queer thing indeed, full of metaphysical subtleties and theological whimsies.' Marx went on to outline how the commodity acquires a life of its own by being endowed with particular characteristics beyond its immediate use -its metaphysical subtleties and theological whimsies- when its exchange-value overcomes and eclipses its use-value and the commodity becomes valued primarily for exchange. (Marx, in Norris, p. 22)

As noted, even in Marx's time, there was the realization of the semiotic power of objects for exchange, beyond their simple use value. There was the awareness that commodity exchanges were not just of matter but resulted also in the exchanges of their symbolisms and embedded social value and meanings.

By means of commodification as a theme, I argue that it is permeating society, even relationships and rapports, including the commodity fetishism around schools and how education too has been increasingly commodified. As I will discuss in Chapter

Seven, learning, for its own sake, has been relegated greatly, if not outright replaced, by the predominant education lexicon of the 'acquiring of skills'.

Much has been written about how education and schooling have become commodities, as burgeoning student debts can attest -to cite a very specific monetary example. Before even entering the workforce and beginning to work, the young are already owing money to the system, since higher education in North America (especially, in the United States) has become more of a consumable than a right. However, what I am mostly interested in, here, is a discussion on the commodification of the relationships and rapports within the context of education -obviously as a reflection of what is happening in the society. I want to explore the metaphysical signs and attitudes of commodification, rather than the more obvious monetary and financial exchange value. Bauman (2007), for example, describes how the commodification of students, even among themselves, is stimulated by consumer culture and the commodification of relationships they have absorbed from greater society:

The schoolgirls and schoolboys avidly and enthusiastically putting on display their qualities in the hope of capturing attention and possibly also gaining the recognition and approval required to stay in the game of socializing [...] are enticed, nudged or forced to promote an attractive and desirable *commodity*, and so to try as hard as they can, and using the best means at their disposal, to enhance the market value of the goods they sell. And the commodity they are prompted to put on the market, promote and sell are *themselves*. They are, simultaneously, *promoters of commodities* and the *commodities they promote*. (pp. 5-6)

As an aside, but also an example of what we mean by the commodification of relationships, it is interesting to observe the difference between some traditions of older, pre-industrial cultures that, in many instances, manage to maintain some timeless forms of intergenerational rapports. For example, the reverence directed at the elderly in many pre-capitalist cultures, still noticeable in many parts of the world, often appears to have become somewhat extinct in many Western industrialized cultural narratives and actions. In semicapitalist societies throughout, the young, productive and consuming generations are caught up in the incessant economic structures of productivity and no longer are able to give the old their time nor are they socio-culturally required to do so, nor personally take care of their elderly parents in a very direct way in their own home. Today's economic system and structures just don't have the room for it.

To be fair, every family's situation is different, and needs vary greatly. There are many cases where the family has no one to take care of an elderly parent. But this too is symptomatic of a society where the extended family has also been pushed away by the current values fomented by the socio-economic structures of consumer capitalism. The 'soul at work' has no time for caregiving, even if it wanted to. As a result, this task too is now dictated by the marketplace. Any way we may want to look at it, the reality is that often, care, has been increasingly delegated to strangers, when the old no longer can take care of themselves and we and our extended families are distant and are also unable to do so. The caring of the elderly has also become a product of consumption

and a for-profit endeavour. With the COVID-19 pandemic, we have seen the disastrous results of elderly care when some of these for-profit institutions are left to decide the quality of care afforded our elderly. Retirement homes, long-term care residences, expensive as they are, have replaced the traditional extended family's caring of the elderly. The reasons, albeit all individual and personal circumstances aside, I believe, are structural because they are based on the new culture that has 'subjugated the soul' to work and its production-consumption symbiosis. No longer in their productive years, the elderly are, literally, filed away and archived.

We could also argue that with regards the very young, the market also 'removes' them from their parents through daycare, so that these same parents can continue to produce and serve the system. Raising your child directly from home and with the focus nearly exclusively on that child over the course of a whole day, is a luxury today. It was the norm before, since productivity and the need for both parents to work was not as common, since that economic 'need' was often not there, because it was not created. Today it is. The economic structure of high consumption capitalism recruits the whole family for outside work. The expenses for our newly acquired tastes and 'big-ticket items' require that we earn as much money as possible and not just 'enough' to be happy. Even after hours, 'the soul at work' is still plugged into its place of employment, through electronic devices. This has become so notorious that France, Spain, and other countries, for example, have outlawed firms of fifty or more employees from

connecting with their employees after hours.¹⁰ This is also currently in place in Ontario, since June of last year. However, it seems to be very difficult to implement it here, as it goes against our self-imposed ethos of the ‘soul at work,’ although these new labour laws are meant to act as a push-back against it. As a teacher, I realized early on that over the course of the week, I probably spend more hours during the day with my students than many of them with their own parents.

Commodification has greatly reduced our free time and independence from exchange value. We seem to be less and less able to distinguish leisure and enjoyment from consumption. As we seem to have less and less time, agendas are now needed for the visitation of friends and family. Dropping by has become a thing of the past in the lexicon of today’s consumer culture societies. To better understand that there is (or was) perhaps a qualitative distinction between interpersonal relationships and rapports from the consumed objects or commodities that drove/drive them, I wish to offer a few examples from personal experience, as well as from those that I witnessed or even conducted in the classroom, sometimes as a means of helping my students make this discernment. I believe these examples to be indicative of how many of our lives’ experiences are often veiled forms of commodification.

¹⁰ France now has the legal right to avoid work emails outside working hours. The new law, which has been dubbed the ‘right to disconnect,’ came into force on 1 January 2017. Companies with more than 50 workers are obliged to draw up a charter of good conduct, setting out the hours when staff are not supposed to send or answer emails. France has a working week of 35 hours, in place since 2000. Supporters of the law say that employees who are expected to check and reply to their work emails out of hours were not being paid fairly for their overtime, and that the practice carried a risk of stress, burnout, sleep problems and relationship difficulties. See <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-38479439>

5.1.1 'Your Favourite Ice Cream'

In more than one Grade Eight class that I taught over the course of my career, I opened up a discussion around the value of 'things.' We talked about consumption and the value of objects. I would pose the same question over the course of these years and would always get the same insightful responses from my students. Before I asked my main question that would open the class discussion, I would invite them to first imagine being able to have their favourite ice cream sundae, let's say, every night of the week at home after dinner. I wanted them to first envision their favourite flavour, perhaps two large scoops, on a tall, classic glass sundae cup. I first asked them how good would that be? Obviously, the responses all revolved around 'great' or 'wonderful' and that it would be 'special!' But how special? Then I asked them to imagine having that exact same ice cream sundae not nightly but only on a Sunday afternoon -perhaps in an ice cream parlour, or even in the mall food court, with friends or cousins. Then here came my final question: Which one would *taste* better? Predictably, as I thought, despite some hesitation to ponder an answer, my students overwhelmingly confirmed that the one on Sunday with friends at a parlour or at the mall, would 'taste' better. I asked them why? Isn't it the same ice cream? Why would the one on Sundays 'taste' better? Nearly always they would answer 'because that one's more special!'

Clearly, their insight captured the importance of *rarity* coupled with relationship as the main dynamic of pleasure and happiness -above and beyond the ice cream as a commodity per se. The students were able to discern that having less, can also be a

richer experience than having more, especially when the human component (i.e., friendships and relationships) are present. For my students, I recall that this was a very good though-provoking exercise on the limited value of things, especially when taken out of the context of human rapports, when compared to the unlimited value of human relationships. Their attention moved from the ice cream as a commodity, to the immeasurable pleasures of the relationship with friends and family.

5.1.2 ‘Why Do Children Here Play with Toys and Not with Children?’

Similarly, when I immigrated to Canada from Brazil in March of 1967, a few months later I apparently had asked my mother (she always reminded me of this) a simple question, ‘why do kids here play with toys and not with children?’ I never recalled having asked her that, but she always reminded me for years that I had asked that question when any topic around the dinner table came up regarding the social adjustments we had to initially make as a result of our immigration. I had a group of close friends in the ‘vila’¹¹ in São Paulo, where we used to live before emigrating. I remember we had very few toys, and yet our imaginations and fantasies carried us in our games and play for hours on end. When we immigrated to Toronto, I had noticed the more prevalent availability of toys everywhere, both at school and on the playgrounds. Consequently, I had probably observed more individual children playing

¹¹ A ‘vila’ in Brazil was the name given to a type of short, dead-end street with a row of houses on each side. Often, it could even have a gate that could, literally, close the ‘vila’ at the entrance, when needed. These were traditionally built in the 19th century to house factory workers in the city centres. Later, they housed middle-class families as a means to more affordable housing. They often catered very well to community building, due to the proximity of the homes and the number of families that got to know each other. Today, there are very few ‘vilas’ left in São Paulo.

with these toys, than groups of toyless children playing with each other. Perhaps my innocent observation was as if the toys interfered with the playing together, as they were mostly of use for individualized play. In Brazil, at the time, we often made our own toys and would spontaneously share them with one another. We really had no choice. At least that was my experience.

Coincidentally, when I had returned to Brazil in December of 1969, I took with me a brand-new soccer ball. We rented a house in another 'vila' on the outskirts of São Paulo, where armies of kids again roamed freely everywhere. Technically, the soccer ball was mine, was my possession -my commodity, if you wish. But in the 'vila', my soccer ball became immediately the 'vila's ball' -by default. No one else had a soccer ball. Thus, my former ball became a collective possession that belonged to the whole community. It was impossible for me to literally and psychologically possess it. The irony is that it could never be stolen, hidden, or uncared for, otherwise no one would be able to play. I never had it in my home again! But I remember that I always knew exactly where it was, as it skipped along all day on this makeshift dirt field next to the 'vila' rolling along with its constant rotation of different kids -many of whom I had never seen before. At night, it probably would be in one of these kid's home, until the next day. No one individual had possession of that soccer ball. The ball, as a commodity, was usurped completely by the community's rapports and its limitless games of soccer played by dozens of ecstatic children. I also recall my nice lady neighbor, 'Dona' Ilda, who, with shovel in hand and a few willing parents, literally

smoothened out the dirt field next to the 'vila' and created the soccer ground for us kids to roll the 'vila's ball' and give the adults some well-deserved retrieve.

In contrast, today's youth not only have their toys, but they also have digital online 'vilas' that simulate relationships and rapports that may appear to them equally as real. The market supplies them with everything, so there is no need to pick up a shovel, create, imagine, nor negotiate. We can run across our fields of video games and online gaming with communities of children that we haven't even had the necessity to meet in person. This new 'reality' can be also positive, surely, but the play is no longer live and interpersonal in the same way. It is digitalized. From an intergenerational perspective, there is a sense of loss for us older folks, since this relation has been commodified. For us adults as well, relationships today are often left to our devices and the quick and often-formal connections they allow. Bauman (2004) writes:

We talk these days of nothing with greater solemnity or more relish than of 'networks' of 'connection' or 'relationships', only because the 'real stuff' -the closely knit networks, firm and secure connections, fully fledged relationships- have all but fallen apart [...] if we talk compulsively about networks and try excessively to conjure them (or at least their phantoms) [...] it is because we painfully miss the safety nets which the true networks of kinship, friends and brothers-in-fate used to provide matter-of-factly, with or without our efforts [...] Exposed to the 'contacts made easy' by electronic technology, we lose the ability to enter into spontaneous interaction with real people. In fact, we grow shy of face-to-face contacts. We tend to reach for mobiles and furiously press buttons and knead messages in order to avoid making ourselves hostage to fate -in order to escape from complex, messy, unpredictable, difficult to interrupt and to opt

out from interactions with those 'real people' physically present around us [...] Human beings may have been recycled into consumables, but consumables cannot be made into humans. Not into the kinds of humans that inspire our desperate search for roots, kinship, friendship and love -not humans one could *identify with*. (pp.93-94)

Another example of our distancing from one another as a result of commodification, is that before, if students had to work, they often did so in order to contribute to the family expenses. This probably taught the young that they were part of the fortunes of their family as much as the adults, and thus also responsible for its upkeep. Then we moved to having students work towards paying their tuition, or for their summer trip. This was me, and most of my generation, both out of choice, but mostly out of necessity. Today, as Norris (2011) points out, teenagers, in many cases, “work now to buy consumer products for themselves” (p.64). Tuitions, for example, are covered by large student loans. So, I ask, what does this now teach the young, especially if the family does not need our economic participation? Although we all agree that the student learns that hard work can literally pay off and thus gives value to money, consumer culture has been able to now have it focused for the self only. From the increased commodification of self and rapports that today's consumer culture stimulates, it follows that perhaps one's identity and persona need also be a product or commodity that we are made to manufacture and create. Things are not left to spontaneity and originality (although we desperately seek these). There is little space and time for the imagination.

5.2 Identity Creation

Identity is a concept that can be discussed at length from many different vantage points and themes. It can be defined and identified in many ways. It can also be formed or created as a result of many dynamics. For the purposes of this project, however, I will discuss it as a byproduct of consumer culture, with a focus on semiocapitalism and its strong impact on identity creation, especially among the youth. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary¹², for example, defines identity as:

The distinguishing character or personality of the individual, or the relationship established by psychological identification; the condition of being the same with something described or asserted; sameness of essential or generic character in different instances; sameness in all that constitutes the objective reality of a thing: Oneness. (np)

Therefore, identity requires a relationship with ideas, beliefs, forms of being and of seeing oneself (as well as how others see you) that is connected to a body/object or set of ideas external to the person identified. Identity and its creation thus can be conditioned by the external forces acting upon the (young) mind, while this identity forms. We can say that education, in a sense, is the formation of an aspect of identity. Consequently, the influences of these external forces, such as family, the environment, socio-economic conditions, demographics, school and society as a whole are key.

¹² See the detailed definition at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/identity#synonyms>

Alternatively, a lack of identity could be defined or simply construed as a form of alienation or isolation from an external relationship or rapport.

Berardi (2009) writes that “in the 1960s alienation meant incommunicability, based on the rarefying of relational acts among human beings” (p.106). In other words, alienation was construed as a form of psychological, social or perhaps even emotional separation or detachment of an individual from the group, community, or society at large. In the case of the worker Berardi (2009) says, “workers were forced to stand by the assembly line surrounded by a hellish clanking noise, making it impossible for workers to exchange a word, since the only comprehensible language was that of the machine” (p.106). Alienation here was circumstantial, yet daily, as the conditions of the workplace separated the workers from one another, thus alienating them. However, he resumes, “in the post-industrial landscape of semiocapitalism, relational discomfort is still a central element of the social scene, but it is a product of a completely different, even opposite, situation from the one characterizing the decade of full industrial development” (pp.106-107). Today, it is communication overload, since the assembly lines have been replaced by the digital telecommunications network, which links people through symbols. As Berardi (2009) finds:

Productive life is overloaded with symbols that not only have an operational value, but also an affective, emotional, imperative or dissuasive one [...] each producer of semiotic flows is also a consumer of them, and each user is part of the productive process: all exits are also an entry, every receiver is also a transmitter. (p.107)

This has implications on how we may both see and show ourselves in public, either as adults at work and play, or the youth at school and play. The influences in the creation and shaping of our identities are omnipresent, especially now when they are also digital. In being digital, they are no longer fixed but fleeting and always changing. New ones always pop-up vying for our attention and immediate adherence. As Berardi (2009) says, “everywhere, attention is under siege” (p.108). As a result, there is no privacy. As he says, there is nothing shielding one from being watched, but also there is no privacy from the point of view of not being able to avoid the constant hum of advertising and infiltration of semiocapitalism into our own once private lives. As he writes, “we suffer from a cognitive space overload with nervous incentives to act: this is the alienation of our times” (2009, p. 208) and then further explains:

Alienation, in its etymology, means to be other than oneself. Alienation [in the present times is an] era marked by the submission of the soul, in which animated, creative, linguistic, emotional corporeality is subsumed and incorporated by the production of value [...] the separation of body and soul, in industrial times (where body was exploited, but mind and soul remained intact and separate from the productive process) workers understood the situation. Now we don't. The soul is at work. (pp.108-109)

The soul is at work and at play, but the games are no longer imagined nor the result of our own creation nor imagination. They are made for us and by us (unwittingly) and reach us at digital speed, as fast as we are able to contribute to it and send them out ourselves. When we are passively on the receiving end, we have

difficulty in picking and choosing, since the choices given to us arrive at such a fury that we have little time to review them, since the new one is just around the corner. By the same token, we in turn disseminate them at equal speed and with a semblance of independence. Before, in an analogic world, we had more time to see the second hand of the clock and deal with a message and think about it, ponder it, discuss it, consciously accept or reject it. We had control of time.

Now, as infostorms stream along digitally, quickly and from everywhere, it seems that we have little opportunity to distinguish, metabolize, and really choose with full independent awareness -if we really ever had such an opportunity. The speed of this infosphere, it seems to me, makes us opinionate and decide more viscerally than intellectually -as the successes of extremisms through fake news and imageries in politics seem to confirm. This is very problematic for the young who are still in their formative years. The potential for subconscious manipulation by the current covert semicapitalistic system seems much more prevalent than the more overt up-front one from the past. As Byung-Chul Han (2017) says, there is a distinctive shift from the former controls of time, space and the body from the outside forces that he calls biopolitics, that determined one's positioning and identification (or not) with the sources of production and identity, to today's neoliberal 'psychopolitics' which is the internalized control of self-exploitation, as we put our soul to work. Byung-Chul Han (2017) writes:

But neoliberalism, a further development -indeed, a mutated form- of capitalism- is not primarily concerned with the biological, somatic, corporal. It has discovered the psyche as a protective force. This psychic turn -that is, the turn to psychopolitics- also connects with the mode of operation of contemporary capitalism. Now, immaterial and nonphysical forms of production are what determine the course of capitalism. (p. 25)

Identity creation and the manipulation and formation ‘of the soul’ by semiocapitalism may now be driving with much more speed and efficiency, than in the past, both our sense of identities and desires to (and where to) belong. That is the power of semiotics and its algorithms that generate Big Data¹³, that are in place to re-enforce identity creation. It suits consumer culture very well. Han (2017) says that if, “Big Data has access to the realm of our unconscious actions and inclinations, it is possible to construct a psychopolitics that would reach deep into our psyche to exploit it” (p. 64). We often act according to the codes and symbols that we internalize from the marketplace, rather than, often, those that we can more conscientiously decide for ourselves (as I discussed in my example ‘The Cool Running Shoes’ story in Chapter Four). Like Bauman’s description of current society as liquid, we too become fluid and are made to metaphorically flow over the terrains filling every crevice laid out before us by consumer capitalism and its stealth semiotics. We struggle to be exclusively ourselves, especially when we have little time and space to independently discover who

¹³ For a full definition of Big Data, see Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/big%20data>

we are. The external influences and even pressures are too strong. As Bauman (2007) puts it:

The consumerist culture is marked by a constant pressure to be someone else. Consumer markets focus on the prompt devaluation of their past offers, to clear a site in public demand for new ones to fill [...] changing identity, discarding the past and seeking new beginnings, struggling to be born again -these are promoted by that culture as a duty disguised as a privilege [...] is the most attractive novelty and a way of being-in-the-world [...] The tickets to performances, the badges and other publicly displayed tokens of identity are all market supplied [...] Consumer goods are seldom if ever identity-neutral; they tend to come complete with 'identity supplied' [...] The work dedicated to the construction of identities fit for public display and publicly recognizable, as well as obtaining the coveted 'experience of community', requires primarily shopping skills [...] The dream of making uncertainties less daunting and happiness more profound [...] lies at the heart of the consumers' obsession with the manipulation of identities. (pp. 100-114)

Bauman (2007) suggests that in the liquid modern society of consumers no identities are gifts at birth and that none are given, let alone given once and for all and in a secure fashion. Identities are "projects and tasks yet to be undertaken" (p.110). Bauman (2004) uses the metaphor of a cloakroom to describe today's sense of a fluid identity:

Locations where the feeling of belonging was traditionally invested (job, family, neighbourhood) are either not available, or untrustworthy when they are so unlikely to quench the thirst for togetherness or placate the fear of loneliness and abandonment. Hence the growing demand for what may be called 'local communities' -conjured into being, if in apparition only, by hanging up

individual troubles, as theatregoers do with their coats, in one room. Any hyped or shocking event may provide an occasion to do so: a new public enemy promoted to number one position, an exciting football contest, a particularly 'photo-opportune', clever or cruel crime, the first showing of a heavily hyped film, or a marriage, divorce or misfortune of a celebrity currently in the limelight. Cloakroom communities are patched together for the duration of the spectacle and promptly dismantled again once the spectators collect their coats from the hooks of the cloakroom. (pp. 30-31)

The issue with non-fixed identities is that it creates pressures for one to constantly re-invent and re-insert oneself in the 'competitive world' of images, attention, legitimacy, and, obviously, work. That is how we exploit ourselves. By the same token that we now have the preponderance of precarious work conditions, so too have our identities and projects become precarious, as we often need to re-train, review and re-brand ourselves for continuous work and social opportunities in today's unstable work and social conditions of Bauman's liquid society. There are many examples today of how identity creation is being created online, ranging from having one's own YouTube channel, as an example, with the intent of increasing the number of followers, all the way to narcissism and how it also manifests itself through shareveillance.

The problem with the liquidity of identities (my pun intended), and their digitalized ephemeral creations, is two-prong (with possible consequences for the youth and education): There is the real-life social disengagement (as compared to a digitalized less personal sense of engagement in the cyberworld) and possible

implications on mental health. Both are interconnected. Regarding our real-life social health, there is a strong perception that the loss of community and social physical engagement, artificially replaced by the cyberworld and digitization, has resulted in loneliness and a sense of longing. As clinical psychologist John F. Schumaker (2018) remarked, “[...] modern consumer culture [is] breeding an increasingly trivialized and disengaged strain of personhood, devoid of the loftier qualities needed to sustain a viable society and healthy life supports” (p.1). One can add that if consumer culture stimulates materialism and all of the added social values that are artificially attached to it, it trivializes all other spheres of life that lie outside of the marketplace. In that sense, we are not being brought up as civilians but as consumers, and thus disinterested in society at large, except within the paradigm of consumption and status. Consequently, our interests become shallow and trivial. Schumaker (2018) is very critical, and scathingly notes:

While the ever-deepening mental-health crisis is common knowledge, less understood is the even more serious ‘personality crisis’ that has rendered the consuming public largely unfit for democracy and nigh useless in the face of multiple emergencies that beg for responsible and conscientious citizenship. In times of crisis, we turn reflexively to the ‘state of the economy’ without considering possible collapses within the general ‘state of the person,’ or what psychologist Erich Fromm called a culture’s ‘social character.’ By this he meant the shared constellation of personality and character traits disseminating from a society’s dominant modes of inculturation, all which serve to forge common

values, priorities, ethics, lifestyles and worldviews, and even the so-called ‘will of the people’. (p. 1)

Schumaker (2018) speaks of cultural infantilism, echoing Giroux (2000, 2001, 2002, 2017), Barber (2007), and Hedges (2009) among others, meaning that there is an apparent trend over the last few decades, of delayed maturity, perhaps as a result of consumer culture’s constant emphasis on remaining young. Also coined as Peter Pan Syndrome, the pressures are to delay responsibilities as much as possible, delegating decisions around lifestyles to enjoyment, hedonisms and consumption. Schumaker (2018) explains:

In the *Journal Medical Hypotheses*, from Science Direct, Bruce G. Charlton writes that ‘the rise of the boy-genius detailed the cultural evolution of personality profile marked by delayed cognitive maturation, emotional and spiritual shallowness, and diminished profundity of character that manifests itself in a childlike flexibility of attitudes, behaviors and knowledge.’ While these unfinished personalities may have increased adaptability in a mercurial culture of inconsistent loyalties, abbreviated attention span and compulsive novelty-seeking, they also expose society to the rawness and limitations of youth that hamper higher order judgment and decision-making abilities, and culminate in a culture of irresponsibility. (p. 2)

Giroux (2017) also emphasizes the infantilist culture of daily life of adults and the subliminal pressures to assume the role of unthinking children, while at the same time, crippling the imagination of the young and destroying their traditional role as the

repository of society's dreams. As we see, this echoes the concerns and critiques from Arendt, Bauman and others.

The effects and dynamics of this liquified form of un-fixed identity creation can be very problematic, especially for the formation of the young. In education, it can seriously hinder independent critical thinking skills, and the ability to distinguish narratives from actual facts. The infosphere may confuse and condition the youth, especially when they need to develop their own sense of being and identity, independent from the onslaught of outside influences. In order to develop, the young need their own private time and space, free from the constant 'hummm' of the internet and semiocapitalism. Their soul cannot be at work nor at play 24-hours a day if they are to have the time and space to develop at their own pace with the possibility of reflection and introspection.

In 2011, Katie Davis, of Harvard University, published a paper of her qualitative research study of a teenager's life with digital media. She discussed the issue of multitasking among the youth, especially digitally. As teachers and adults, we are mindful of the risks associated with youth's digital media activities. So much so, that in our school board, at the beginning of every school year, we have students and parents sign internet usage forms. As adults, if we understand multi-tasking as doing many physical things at once, today's youth are doing so ten-fold, but digitally. Here is where semiotics can have a crucial effect on their formation. Citing some of the research, Davis (2011) writes:

Digital media play a central role in youth's multitasking behavior, allowing them simultaneously to conduct multiple conversations through instant messaging, surf the web, talk or text on their cell phone, and listen to music on just about any of their electronic devices. Parents and educators worry that learning is compromised when young people's attention is so divided, and empirical evidence appears to justify this concern (cf. Gasser & Palfrey, 2009). Further, Sherry Turkle (2011) cautioned that important developmental tasks of adolescents, such as the achievement of autonomy, intimacy, and a sense of identity, may be undermined by youth's digital media use. She suggested that maintaining a constant connection to others poses a challenge to achieving a sense of personal autonomy, and genuine intimacy may be difficult to attain without the risks involved in confronting others face-to-face. With respect to identity development, Turkle recalled Erikson's (1968) observation that youth require stillness for self-reflection. She notes that the 'always on' nature of digital media makes finding such stillness extremely difficult. (p. 1962)

Today, even just sitting still has become a very difficult endeavor in this hyper-sensorial age, especially for young children and teenagers alike. As teachers, it is very common for us to have, in any given classroom, and regardless of grade, age group, socio-economic status, or ethnic background (but predominantly with boys), students that suffer from ADHD¹⁴ and other symptoms of hyperactivities. It is possible that this

¹⁴ Ontario's *Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH)* says on their website that, "attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is one of the most common disorders among young people. It affects attention span and concentration and can also affect how impulsive and active the person is. Most young people are, at times, inattentive, distractible, impulsive or highly active. They may have ADHD if such behaviours occur more frequently and are more severe than is considered average among young people of the same age or developmental level. A diagnosis of ADHD might also result if the behaviours persist over time and negatively affect the person's family and his or her social and school life. Studies have shown different rates of ADHD among young people, ranging from one per cent to 13 per cent. ADHD is three to four times more common in boys than girls." (See <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-illness-and-addiction-index/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder>)

disorder may be caused by the effects of digital overload and sensorial hyper-stimulation perhaps being always on a multitasked brain that cannot stay still to engage in a classroom's single-one-task-at-a-time rhythm.

There is no conclusive study around the causes, but just speculations. But these are questions that many experienced teachers often ask themselves. Can I, as a teacher, compete for my student's attention with the speed and multi-faceted stimuli of the online world? Evidently, I am much slower than a videogame, less sensorial, and much less interesting than the graphics that overload these games. I often imagine how difficult it is for some of my students to maintain their attention on me or the task or seatwork assignment at hand, when it looks and feels flat. Most students seem to be able to. Many cannot. Many high school teachers complain about the difficulty they have in simply getting their students to put away their phones in the middle of lessons. Moreover, for the reasons of rights and entitlement culture, the simple request and removal of phones during lessons can be in itself, especially among young adults, controversially complicated.

Never have we become so open about issues of mental health as in these last few years. This may be, perhaps, because of an increased perception of how common depression, anxiety and issues around our psycho-emotional well-being have become.

The American Centers for Disease Control and Prevention define ADHD as, "one of the most common *neurodevelopmental* disorders of childhood. It is usually first diagnosed in childhood and often lasts into adulthood. Children with ADHD may have trouble paying attention, controlling impulsive behaviors (may act without thinking about what the result will be), or be overly active." (See <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/adhd/facts.html>)

Thankfully, we are no longer hiding issues of mental health as taboo but are beginning to discuss and address them head on. The competitiveness inherent in our consumer capitalist culture seems to be adding increased pressures to both adult and youth.

Berardi (2009) believes this as well:

When economic competition is the dominant psychological imperative of the social consortium, we can be positive that the conditions for mass depression will be produced [...] social psychologists have in fact remarked that two pathologies are of great actuality in these last decades of liberalist hyper-capitalism: Panic and depression. This is the result of an overstimulated hyper cyberspace where the 'infosphere' over-stimulates beyond the individual brain's limited capacities of elaboration. (pp.100-101)

It may well be that this hyperactivity of the senses and our constantly being plugged into the socket of the infosphere may contribute to both adult and youth depression and other mental-emotional problems. The speed and rhythm of the cyberworld may be too fast and convoluted for the natural rhythm of many of us, especially when we choose to be always plugged in. It is like the old whack-a-mole game where we constantly try to hit the popping head before another randomly pops up.

This hyperactivity to be and to quickly belong to and be accepted, typical of the adolescent, manifests clearly within education as well. Schools are also a microcosm of consumer culture, and it is the main venue where the youth begin to form their social identities, both physically, and then digitally after school. Semiocapitalism quickly and subtly designates camps and cliques of what is cool and not, and of how one should

present oneself to our peers for approval, if we are to be considered as part of the ‘in’ crowd. Everyday expressions among the young, such as cool, nerd, psycho, brainy, and other labels, tend to designate and categorize peers according to the semiotics and codes of the times. If one does not feel that one belongs nor is able to keep up, the young’s sense of inadequacy and exclusion may lead to depression. As Berardi (2009) remarks:

Depression comes from the fact that our emotional, physical, and intellectual energy can’t bear the rhythm imposed by competition and chemical ideological euphoria inducers for long [...] the feelings of loneliness and loss of meaning are spreading in every place where the triumph of capitalism has subjugated time, life and emotions to the hellish rhythms of the automated competition. (pp.167-168)

This competition may cause the young to feel the stress and pressure of having to perform for acceptance or to eliminate a possibly negative label that may have been attributed to them by the group. This performance may become so engrained, that the person’s ability to get to know oneself and thus the distinction between who he or she truly is or believes in, and what he or she must do to fit in, may become blurred. Peer pressure does condition autonomy. As Davis (2011) remarks, “the youth’s ability to be connected constantly to parents and friends makes it difficult for them to achieve autonomy” (p.1978). She says that attaining a sense of personal autonomy “represents an important developmental task of adolescence and emerging adulthood” (p.1978). Davis (2011) also comments on the issue of intimacy by citing studies and researchers

who say that spreading oneself thin by connecting constantly and briefly with many people through digital media (rather than prolonged periods with less people) “makes building intimacy difficult” (p. 1978). In terms of digital media’s impact on identity Bauman (2007b) notes sarcastically:

Fortunately for the addicts of identity alteration, of new beginnings and multiple births, the Internet opens opportunities denied or closed off ‘in real life.’ The wondrous advantage of the virtual life space over the ‘off-line’ one(s) consists in the possibility to get the identity recognized without actually practicing it [...] No wonder that more often than not the identities assumed during a visit to the internet world of instant connections and disconnections on demand are of a kind that would be physically or socially untenable offline. They are, fully and truly, ‘carnival identities’, but thanks to the laptop or mobile telephone the carnivals, and particularly the privatized ones among them, can be enjoyed anytime -and most importantly at the time of one's own choosing. (pp. 114-115)

Real live identities take a lifetime to foster, build and be recognized. They require real live other people for assurance and recognition. More importantly, they require substance and responsibility, for their consistency must be maintained for credibility. Online ones, on the other hand, allow for alter-egos and make-believe, especially for the more calculating adult. Etiquettes necessary in real-life can be thrown to the sidelines. Online, our identities can be bought and paid for, manipulated and altered as we see fit, without any concern for negative repercussions. As Bauman (2007b) concludes:

In the carnivalesque game of identities, off-line socializing is revealed for what it in fact is in the world of consumers: a rather cumbersome and not particularly enjoyable burden, tolerated and suffered because unavoidable, since recognition of the chosen identity needs to be achieved in long and possibly interminable effort -with all the risks of bluffs being called or imputed which face-to-face encounters necessarily entail [...] In the internet game of identities, the 'other' (the addressee and sender of messages) is reduced to his or her hard core of a thoroughly manipulable instrument of self-confirmation, short stripped of most or all of the unnecessary bits irrelevant to the task still (however grudgingly and reluctantly) tolerated and offline interaction. (p. 115)

Perhaps this is why manners and respect are often thrown to the wind when some people connect to the internet and speak to a complete stranger in such a way so as to feel free from the in-person need for social controls (such as respect, proper language and thought). Hiding behind our icons or avatars, we feel protected and are able to bring out, often, our worse version of ourselves, especially when posting around polarizing issues such as politics. As in *vino veritas*¹⁵, the intoxicating effect of the internet opens up our unhinged and unfiltered true selves, as in a form of *digitus veritas*. It would be interesting to know, for example, how many Facebook profiles are of people, with a true picture of themselves on their page, rather than that of an icon, or pet, or scene. Many people go on the internet not as their true selves, nor with their own real names. What they have instead, is the opportunity for simulation.

¹⁵ The meaning states that 'when drunk' people tell the truth and reveal who they really are. See the definition at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/in-vino-veritas>

The young need the time and space to find themselves by themselves and their peers, but with no outside market interference wherever possible. They also require responsible mentoring and adult help to develop. They do not need the continuous external bombardment of semicapitalism and many of the shallow and superficial messages and narratives that are created for them day and night. For the formation of one's identity, stillness and an alone space is needed -for reflection, imagination, creative play, discovery and critical thinking. Learning also implies discovery through deduction. If all is presented, packaged and sold, there is very little chance of that. In the very noisy cyberworld that we are plugged into through digital technology, these spaces are greatly reduced. This has implications for both the ability for the adult parent to protect the youth from the world, as Arendt (1994) would have us do, as well as for the effectiveness of the teacher to do so with his or her students. The formation, nurturing and maturing of our youth should be paramount in any given society, if we believe in progress and in a future. Yet, as adults, we often feel helpless or disempowered under a loss of authority to help and guide our youth free from the marketplace, since we can't compete with the attention-grabbing powers of semicapitalism and its digital tools. Consumer culture that is now embedded in both the family home and school makes the adult's task of raising the young very challenging. Consequently, identity formation from within, often becomes really identity creation from the outside -if we are to understand semicapitalism as being internalized.

The commodification of many spheres of our lives not only has resulted in angst among us because of false identity formations that lead to anxiety and depression but may have also fomented egotistical individualism in the form of self-centered entitlement and narcissism. In the next chapter, which I name *Archiving Humbleness and the Collective - Entitlement and Narcissism*, I discuss how the *divide et impera* aspect of consumer culture has not only separated us from our true potential identities, but also from one another and the commonweal. Due to the emergence of arrogances that are packaged with the wrappings of false entitlements and even narcissism, we question everyone and expect perfection from everyone, more than we do from ourselves. This manufactured sense of me, I argue, results in what I call the ‘death of humility,’ which seems to be destroying the sense of community, or solidarity, and, perhaps, a real-life sense of belonging -further pushing us apart from one another. From a social and political context, I will initially and briefly look back at what I believe to be the genesis of this state of affairs: The disenfranchisement of the worker.

Chapter Six: Archiving Humbleness and the Collective - Entitlement and Narcissism

I argue that the two more nocive and divisive consequences resultant of consumer culture are what appears to be an emergent and exaggerated sense of entitlement and narcissism. It seems that with the onset of social media, these have become more visible, if not more prevalent. Perhaps our current form of alienation, as described by Berardi (2009, 2019) has resulted in a greater clamour of people struggling to assert ourselves in a very noisy and image-competitive infosphere. Relieved from traditional guilts, we seem to have become much more accusatory of the other. Again, this might just be a perception based on the prevalence of social media. We point fingers, it seems, like we have never allowed ourselves to do before. We play a 'blame game' and delegate responsibilities fortuitously. We seem to have much higher expectations of others and institutions. We vie for attention and demand our rights before we consider our responsibilities. This may be the logical consequence of a society whose predominant narrative caters to placing and isolating the individual at the centre of all social and economic endeavours, rather than with the common good.

Again, perhaps these are just my perceptions based on the prevalence of social media and the exposure of all forms of advocacy, complaints, criticisms and reviews about anything and anyone. Maybe this is just the observation of a middle-aged person brought up in a different and more austere and inferiority-complexed time. Or, perhaps, our former adherence to a sense of collectivity was, in many ways,

exaggerated and often oppressive, keeping us subdued with self-esteems checked and contained. Perhaps we were less aware of our rights, since we were less informed and cognizant of them. Our sense of responsibility for family, work, and civil society tended to often annihilate the self. Still, there may have been strong group identities, perhaps less fluid and more solid, maybe stagnant and even discriminatory, but they seemed more evident. Individuality and clamour were probably more scoffed at and kept checked, as may still be the case in many parts of the world -but surely, not in many Western cultures currently. My perception is that today as a culture we have come full circle and are exerting our individualism, often in an exorbitant way.

We seem to be living in an urban 'community-less' and self-isolating form of individualism. To make up for this lack of external pillars that held up a more commonly recognizable edifice that housed a sense of belonging, perhaps we now feel the need to build our own personal fortifications through a sense of entitlement, and even narcissism. To understand further these concepts and their link to consumer culture, let us look at the possible origins of these new forms of personal and individualized constructions. In my analysis of capitalism's metamorphosis and how it may have dulled our sense of collectivity, I see it replacing the previous notion or awareness of a 'greater society' with a current insistence on the pursuit of individuality and individualism, but without the awareness that it is being formed by semicapitalism and the marketplace. The genesis of this paradigm, I believe, can be located in a shift in labour relations.

6.1 Disenfranchising the Worker

It has been argued that the diminishing power of unions and the erasure and outright failure of any romanticized idealisms, such as communism, left many workers and workers' organizations politically and ideologically orphaned. As Berardi (2019) explains, in the past century, "the century that trusted in the mythology of the future" (p.22), Communism was seen in many parts of the world as the only real alternative to countervail social injustices, colonialism and global wars. However, the usurpation of a supposed altruistic and communal ideology by totalitarianism, compromised the original ideal. As Berardi observes, in the case of the Soviet Union, the main driving force behind Communist internationalism, "the continuation of the authoritarian political style deeply entrenched in Russian culture from the time of the czars enforced a totalitarian model of control over social life" (p.23). Communism thus became globally identified with totalitarianism. As Berardi (2019) stated, "the Soviet failure provoked the failure of Communism worldwide" (p.23). Berardi (2019) summarizes:

The simultaneous defeat of the workers' movement and obliteration of the prospect of Communism -two different events that happened in the same years from different causes, albeit interdependently- have destroyed the common ground that was bringing together the class of industrial workers of the West, and the billions of people who have suffered in the long history of colonization. Communist internationalism was the only attempt to reconcile the workers of the West and the oppressed population of the Global South, and this attempt has failed. (p. 23)

The collapse of this ideological tension between the Eastern Bloc countries and the West aided in loosening worker rights and employment models in the West. In my view, it also allowed capitalism to tweak its ideology through the emergence of neoliberalism, now that a strong state was no longer desirable, with the end of the Cold War, and thus undertake its final offensive push for expansion into new marketable territories -the previously communist countries of Eastern Europe, including through NATO (the sharp spearhead of Capitalism's long lance). Strong and powerful acts of deregulation, as the state weakened, ensued. Public assets began to be sold and auctioned off (privatization). This would all have a profound effect on labour relations.

As we see today, the number of precarious non-unionized work positions have increased, and with it, the decrease, as Berardi (2019) puts it, "of social conflict between employers and workers" (p.23). Today, such overt social conflicts have been "cancelled by the precarization of labour and by the ideological offensive of neoliberalism" (p.59). This both contributed towards and became the consequence of the collapse of any utopian political idealisms that fomented and linked worker and student militancy together in the past. It has split the aspirations that were originally shared internationally, at least from the context of worker rights. The geopolitical balance that existed before between the social-democratic and capitalist states of the West and the state-controlled communist economies of the East, ended up disenfranchising *all* workers globally. This disenfranchisement today is compromising democracy itself. As Berardi (2019) summarizes:

The separation of the western working class from the oppressed populations of the colonized countries is resulting nowadays in a political catastrophe that is threatening the very roots of peace [...] Divested of a strategic horizon of social emancipation, unable to recognize exploitation as their common lot and their common ground of identification, Western workers are following nationalist agendas in order to avert the effects of globalization, and resorting to nationalist and racist forms of identification...The collapse of democracy has been prepared by forty years of neoliberal competition. (pp.24, 26)

To relieve the pain of this disenfranchisement, the worker's soul would have to be engaged in a new way of feeling and living his or her labour. The former dichotomy of perceptions between enterprise and labour today has changed in "the social imagination", according to Berardi (2009, p. 77). He argues that "whereas before industrial workers, basically, could do one another's jobs, interchangeably, with little training, thus resulting in the perceived detachment between enterprise and labour, today's workers have this dichotomy much less perceived" (p.77). Berardi (2009) clarifies:

Enterprise and labour are less opposed in the social perception and in the cognitive workers' consciousness [...] in order to understand this mutation and the perception of the notion of enterprise, we need to consider a decisive factor: while industrial workers invested mechanical energies in their wage-earning services according to a depersonalized model of repetition, *high tech* workers invest their specific competences, their creative, innovative and communicative energies in the labour process [...]. (pp. 77-78)

His argument is that not only have the previously polarized perceptions of capital on one end (enterprise) and labour on the other hand been blurred, but the latter has been increasingly co-opted into a self-perception of being also as entrepreneurial. Moreover, technology and the increasing digitalization of work, has further camouflaged labour, by blurring it, especially from an aesthetics and semiotic context of the past. For example, an inventory clerk at a warehouse may sit in front of a computer screen and keyboard for as many hours as an architect. The difference is that each has their specialization and, as Berardi (2009) notes, are not interchangeable; “The content of their elaborating activities is completely different and cannot be easily transmitted” (p.76). That was not necessarily the case on the workshop floor during the previous industrial age of producers. Metaphorically, the blue tone of the blue-collar worker has faded greatly, but still very present within a closer look at its fabric.

This fading has added to the weakening of unionism, since this once proletarian blue-collar identity and self-perception has greatly diminished, and with it, the will and psychological need to oppose the owner of the traditional means of production. This is what Berardi has called the shift from manual labour to ‘cognitive labour.’ The former labourer no longer sees him/herself as that, since the symbols and semiotics around his/her new place of work (desks, computers, automation) and its required specialization looks more and more as intellectualizing than menial. Berardi (2009) insightfully explains the workers’ disaffection (from labour) to acceptance. Apart from

the political defeats of the working classes during the 1970s and 1980s, Berardi (2009) describes the psychological and emotional consequences of this:

It seems that ever less pleasure and reassurance can be found in human relations, in everyday life, in effectivity and communication. A consequence of this loss of eros in everyday life is the investment of desire in one's work, understood as the only place providing narcissist reinforcement to individuals used to perceiving the other according to rules of competition [...] In the last decades, the effect produced in everyday life is that of a generalized loss of solidarity. The imperative of competition has become predominant at work, in media, in culture at large, through a systematic transformation of the other into a competitor and therefore an enemy. (pp.79-80)

Adding to Berardi's analysis, I believe that consumerism, ironically, was able to erase the verticalizing concept of class and replace it with the horizontalizing tide of individualism through consumption and the dedication to work as a means to paying for these new personalizing identities. However, it is a false sense of democratization because it has run in correlation with the disempowering of worker collective bargaining and an increase in the concentration of wealth among the top echelons of today's social strata. The end result, politically, is that it has managed to shift the worker's attention elsewhere. As Bauman (2004) also writes:

All in all, factory halls and yards no longer seem secure enough as stocks in which to invest in hopes of radical social change. [...] There is no obvious home to be shared by social discontents [...] social grievances find themselves orphaned. They've lost the common ground on which common purposes can be

negotiated and common strategies worked out. Each handicapped category is now on its own, abandoned to its own resources and its own ingenuity. (p.35)

Thus, the strength of many workers' organizations and movements from the past has mostly dissipated under consumer capitalism. As Bauman (2004) tells us, the war for social justice has been shortchanged into a "plethora of battles for recognition" (p. 35). Social class has been broken down into a multitude of smaller advocacy groups and associations along gender issues, race issues, sexual orientation issues, consumer issues, animal rights, the environment, education issues and so forth. These are all very valid revindications, but the point here is that they are not working together. They seem to work as separate causes -all vying for society's attention. I would argue that the breakdown of the previously existent spheres where social and collective struggles united different groups into a common cause, has resulted in isolationism, each one of us with our own struggles. Bauman (2004) writes:

[...] the crumbling of previously stable settings and routines [...] does not favour a united, solidary stand and prevents individual troubles and anxieties from condensing into class conflict [...] there is no time for diffuse discontents to condense for a bid for a better world... such people would wish a *different today for each* rather than think seriously about a *better future for all* [...]. (pp.34-35)

So, consumer culture conditions us to be preoccupied with our immediate needs for survival, or outright gratification. We are often unable to step outside of ourselves and our own personal self-projects. As a result, we are often politically isolated, since politics itself has also lost its clear ideological framework and collective and public

drive from the times of producer capitalism. As Norris (2011) also reminds us, “when isolated into private units of possessiveness, we are less able to conceive of ourselves as members of a democratic political community with the capacity to engage in anything beyond our own self-interest and gratification” (p.27).

As political unionism has been waning, it is logical that the economic stability of the working class has also waned. Purchasing power and real wages in the developed world have stagnated or even dropped. For example, in the United States, real wages for the middle and lower classes have dropped over the course of the last thirty years.¹⁶ In the case of the top twenty OECD countries, studies have shown that the labour share of national wages have also dropped.¹⁷ One reason may be that, with the weakening of the unions and the explosion of non-unionized ‘precarious’ work in the last decade or so (such as part-time jobs), the labour shares of national incomes (and with it, the purchasing power of the worker) have worsened.

¹⁶A December 28, 2020, updated report called *Congressional Research Service* publication from the U.S. Congress, concluded that “Real wages rose at the top of the distribution, whereas wages rose at lower rates or *fell at the middle and bottom*. Real (inflation-adjusted) wages at the 90th percentile increased over 1979 to 2019 for the workforce as a whole and across sex, race, and Hispanic ethnicity. However, at the 90th percentile, wage growth was much higher for White workers and lower for Black and Hispanic workers. By contrast, middle (50th percentile) and bottom (10th percentile) wages grew to a lesser degree (e.g., women) or *declined in real terms* (e.g., men). [Between 1979 and 2019] wages declined markedly at the 10th, 50th, and 90th percentiles for workers with a high school diploma (or equivalent) or less education, suggesting increasingly few labor market opportunities for less- educated workers, a decrease in wage bargaining power, or both. The median wage for high-school-educated workers fell by 11.1%, whereas the wage at the 10th and 90th percentiles fell by 5.4% and 8.3%, respectively.” (See the report at <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R45090.pdf>)

¹⁷ <https://www.oecd.org/g20/topics/employment-and-social-policy/The-Labour-Share-in-G20-Economies.pdf>

Today, consumerism has also been facilitated by financial institutions that foment consumer culture through easy credit and lower interest rates, specifically in North America. With interest rates that were, until recently, at all-time lows from lending institutions (credit cards excepted), the consequence has been that of an explosive private debt. Now with inflation and an on-going supply chain crisis due to the COVID-19 epidemic, private debt may start to become unmanageable for many. Individualized household debt, I would argue, further pries the worker *away* from the mindset of collective political militancy since she or he is too overwhelmed and preoccupied with his or her own debt. There is little emotional and psychological energy left for causes outside the household -except with his or her credit card, credit rating and the banks. The psychological focus thus has turned to private and individual responsibilities, shame and guilt and away from the awareness that guilt and shame may lie elsewhere as well -in the structural-institutional cultures that have stimulated these. Private debt, naturally, brings the focus of the worker-debtor to his and her own need to pay off the debt, rather than the systemically structural reasons for it -thus further consolidating his or her isolationism and 'imprisonment' to consumer culture. Money is also a consumable that must be bought and paid. Whereas before labour was able to see itself as a collective and feel its condition as an often-exploited class, today, that sense of collectivity has been greatly eroded and reduced to the predominant sense of individualized responsibilities with the focus now on personal shame seeking homemade solutions.

6.2 Depoliticizing Society

As we have seen, this individualization of society may have led us to political isolationism, replacing politics with personal projects and problems that occupy our emotions. It may result in the sensation that we no longer are able to make a difference in this world. Our causes become personal and patrimonial. We flirt with causes outside of us but mostly at a physical distance, replaced, perhaps, by some digital proximity through social media 'activism', such as donations or social network groups. Our time, it seems, is often not there to be given. In our accelerated life, we psychologically (if not chronologically) simply feel that we just don't have the time.

Thus, our digital relationships have rendered us more depersonalized than if we were in real-life groups. As a result, we may feel politically isolated and powerless to enact real change in the real world. However, we are often still able to appease our emptiness and isolationism and feel that we are making a difference. Bauman (2007b) cites Jodi Dean from the essay *Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics* to describe how social media makes us feel we are engaged politically when we are not:

The technological fetish is 'political'... enabling us to go about the rest of our lives relieved of the guilt that we might not be doing our part and secured in the belief that we are after all informed, engaged citizens... We don't have to assume political responsibility because... The technology is doing it for us... (It) lets us think that all we need is to universalize a particular technology and then we will have a democratic or reconciled social order. (Dean, in Bauman, 2007b, p.108)

Elaborating on this idea, Bauman (2007b) adds: “As far as ‘real politics’ is concerned, as dissent travels towards electronic warehouses, it is sterilized, diffused and made irrelevant” (p.109).

But not all is lost, of course. In some instances, however, a sense of a collective consciousness seems to be on an upswing in the last two decades or so. Some social ‘movements’ have begun to manifest themselves, albeit sporadically. We do have a new surging of a sense of collective and new arenas for public activism, even physically, in a physical space -though many of these have not quite crystallized into effectively organized real change. For example, Occupy Wall Street¹⁸ and similar attempts began, but succumbed quickly. Other large manifestations have sprung up, such as the ‘Me Too’¹⁹ and ‘Black Lives Matter’²⁰ movements, and the burgeoning ‘Truth & Reconciliation’²¹ initiative, which was formed by a commission set up by Canada’s

¹⁸ See their website, <http://occupywallst.org> where they self-describe, as a leaderless resistance movement with people of many colours, genders and political persuasions: “The one thing we all have in common is that we are the 99% that will no longer tolerate the greed and corruption of the 1%. We are using the revolutionary Arab Spring tactic to achieve our ends and encourage the use of nonviolence to maximize the safety of all participants.”

¹⁹ See their website on how to address sexual harassment and sexual violence. Although it seeks to address violence against women on a case-by-case basis, as a forum for individuals who seek help, it has been brought to the public attention as a movement. See <https://metoomvmt.org> as well as <https://www.bbc.com/news/newsbeat-53269751> or even the Human Rights Watch website with a report about this movement two years after its inception, at <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/global-1#>

²⁰ An anti-racist organization condemning police violence and profiling of black people. See their website at <https://blacklivesmatter.com>

²¹ This began as a Canadian government-endorsed and then driven initiative, in an attempt to recognize, reconcile and subsequently address the nation’s grave historical mistreatment and injustices perpetuated against Indigenous peoples. See the government’s site at <http://www.trc.ca>, as well as <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525> and <https://nctr.ca>

federal government, but is now increasingly being driven by public outcry, especially after the recent discovery of unmarked graves in Canada's residential school system.

These socio-political movements are increasingly widespread and show that we have not lost our sense of group and solidarity towards others and our fellow citizens. It is significant, however, that these are not economic-related (with the possible exceptions of Occupy Wall Street and the Gilets Jaunes²²) as much as they are social - having sprung up based on a collective sense of what is socially unjust (be it racism, xenophobia, sexual harassment, sexism and other issues of social discrimination). With the possible exception of *Truth & Reconciliation*, these tend to be spontaneous and driven by specific events, often connected to the news cycle and resulting in large protests as a reaction to the injustice. Some remain active by consolidating themselves through social media and websites, while others just simply disappear. For now, frequently, many end up dissipating as the news cycle rotates, perhaps because they were not formally organized but were just a massive spontaneous protest against a specific issue at the time. In many cases, they are not yet a collective and permanent fixture where people can meet and discuss these social issues through on-going and semi-institutional means -unless online.

²² "The yellow vests movement" or yellow jackets movement (French: Mouvement des gilets jaunes) is a populist, grassroots protest movement for economic justice that began in France in October 2018. See several articles on their origin and militancy, at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/03/who-are-the-gilets-jaunes-and-what-do-they-want>, and <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50424469>, or <https://www.rfi.fr/en/tag/gilets-jaunes/>

Our sense of self within the context of society is, perhaps, highly individualized and not collectively militant enough, in any organized way, to warrant more time to these movements. It seems that change is desired, but it too has some ‘calculated obsolescence’ indirectly determined by mass and internet media. They have not kept us on the streets for too long, as our attention span is still limited. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has resulted in a huge global outcry. In the West, this event, perhaps, may be the beginning of bringing us back together as we feel for the other. Moreover, it may also allow us to look at our own positions in the world, as we assume our own responsibilities and even hypocrisies. For that to happen, our sense of individual as well as national Western World entitlements must subside. We need to do a *mea culpa* first, as ‘Westerners’ if we wish to look at the other side of the world to point our fingers. Typical of our stance today is to always seek those responsible rather than to look at and admit our own responsibilities.

6.3 Issues of Entitlement

As discussed, the disenfranchisement of the worker has coincided with the increased depoliticization of society, which in turn, I believe, has become fodder for the increasing prevalence of entitlement in contemporary society. The loss of us seems to be in correlation with the sublimation of the me. As I have argued, with the waning of a proletarian collective consciousness, and with it viable and strong channels for traditional forms of collective militancy, workers have been left orphaned and thus have become, perhaps unwittingly, absorbed by the narrative of personal success by

channeling their energies (once shared collectively through strong unions) now towards individual personal projects. If before there was class militancy and a sense of group and working-class rights and entitlements, today, it seems, these have been increasingly channeled to oneself. In many ways, this collective form of militancy seems to have been morphed into individual entitlement. Now, we are no longer blue-collar workers. We are all consumers.

Entitlement is a complex term that has various definitions and connotative meanings. The Oxford online dictionary has several.²³ Its first definition describes entitlement as “the official right to have or do something” (n.p.) The second definition says, “something that you have an official right to; the amount that you have the right to receive” (n.p.). The third says, “a government system that provides financial support to a particular group of people” (n.p.). The fourth definition states, “(usually disapprovingly) the feeling of having a right to the good things in life without necessarily having to work for them” (n.p.). For my purposes of describing the effects of consumer culture on society, specifically on rapports and relationships such as those involving education, I am interested in the fourth definition. It tends to reflect the meaning that various colleague teachers anecdotally attribute to the term when using the expression ‘student entitlement’ or when they say, ‘students feel entitled.’

²³ See https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/entitlement

By this meaning of entitlement, teachers do not mean the normative rights of students (which is entitlement as defined by the first three definitions above), but the entitlement that means student privilege, special treatment and demands that are expected by some students (often as a reflection of their parents). My focus here is the student and parental expectations of success in academic achievement and how these are often translated as demands upon the educational system to provide them and how they may be alimanted by consumer culture outside the school system per se. The issue arises when these are not necessarily aligned with the educational system's requirements of the student before the goal or achievement marker is granted. Student entitlement here means that the student expects the system to give him or her the marker of achievement but without necessarily adhering to the quid pro quo that should have been clearly stipulated a priori, in the formal arrangement. Therefore, for teachers, entitlement in this case has a negative connotation. It is a common complaint many teachers have with regards to the attitude or even behaviour a particular student and/or parent may show, resultant from such a demand -and how these have become more frequent.

For many educators a sense of entitlement is the result of a discrepancy between the teacher's clearly described expectations of the work and effort to be made by the student in order to assess his or her learning, and thus earn a good mark on what has actually been produced. A sense of entitlement is shown when rather than acknowledging the shortcomings in his or her productivity and accept the equivalent

grade, the student and/or parent complains and blames the situation of the poor grade on the teacher's assessment, rather than on the student's level of production (again, see the Appendix caricature). This is not to say that teachers don't make mistakes, and some may be inconsistent with their instructions, expectations and marking formats. But the issue here is that if the instructions and expectations were made clear and yet the student did not produce according to these and did not get a good grade, he or she and/or the parent may then complain to the teacher or even principal.

This reflects a misguided concept of entitlement, where student effort seems to be removed from the discussion. As I will discuss below, I believe this mindset has been created by consumer culture. In creating demands for everything, to the point where not being able to have something is increasingly unacceptable -a sort of a taboo within consumer society- the educational system seems to have also become conditioned by this demand and the consumer right to have a good mark, recognition and graduation. For example, regardless if the expectations stipulated by the educational system is met or not, the natural expectation is for a Grade Eight student to graduate. This is the case at the elementary and middle-school level for all schools in Ontario. Grade Eight graduation, for example, is becoming an increasingly elaborate festivity as a promoted consumable, with all the pomp and ceremony (at least before COVID-19) that was once meant to display a more adult-like achievement. It often comes across today as an event-planning exercise, with stretch-limousines and all. It is an event as much as a ceremony of achievement.

Of course, the stretch-limousine scenario, as a visible example, is not general practice, and it is dependent upon the demographics and socio-economic conditions of the school community, but it is becoming more prevalent. Elementary graduation seems to have become now more of an expectation than an achievement. Teachers know that regardless of the actual educational attainment and effort that a student may or may not have put forward over the course of the years, graduation is certain and the risk of not going to Grade 9 right after Grade 8, practically non-existent. As I will also discuss in Chapter Seven, even if a concerned parent wants to hold a student back, because of the child not reaching those grade-level expectations, the system often does not allow it. In this case, entitlement is controlled by the system. But in this chapter, I will first discuss entitlement as an expectation from a student and/or parent.

6.3.1 'The Reference Letter'

In my third year of teaching on a full-time basis, coinciding with my first year of teaching Grade 8, I had a class of 32 students. They were a mixed group of about half of them girls and half of them boys. They represented an array of talents and learning styles that I was able to accommodate with effort and much planning. Contrary to my previous two years of teaching in the Gifted Program, including a Grade 8 cohort of Gifted students, this year I had to plan for several students on the opposite side of Special Education, some with learning difficulties, a couple with behavioural issues, and one student with FSA (Fetal Alcohol Syndrome). In total, of the 32 students in this Grade 8 class, a dozen or so students, therefore, had Individualized Education Programs

(IEPs).²⁴ One of my other so-called ‘regular’ students, whom I will call Josephine, was a bright girl who attracted a lot of attention from both her peers and the teachers. She was well aware of her effect on all due to her strong personality and sense of presence. She was well-known among teachers and often intimidating to many students. She had a few close friends, more followers than equals, and she was able to exert a lot of influence over them. Before I was given this class, I was forewarned by my colleagues about Josephine. Basically, she was described by some of my colleagues as a very egocentric young lady, very cliquish and often disrespectful of others, including teachers.

Over the course of the year, these descriptions panned out and I did have constant issues with getting her to pay attention, be more respectful or at least not be disruptive to the class. Literally, Josephine’s eye-rolling was constant each time I brought this to her attention. When I made these facts known to her mother, she brushed it off as a personality trait. She demonstrated not to be too concerned that Josephine was constantly disrupting the class and that she was not studying and working to her potential. The mother mostly downplayed the situation and did not give

²⁴ An ‘IEP’ (Individual Educational Plan) is a school board document that is composed by the teacher(s) as a plan for study, teaching and assessment for students who need accommodations or modifications in the way they are taught, usually as a result of a Learning Disability, Language Impairment or other cognitive or neurological issues that have been formally identified and that may hinder the educational attainment of the student and his/her access of the curriculum. It can also be produced for a student who has not been identified formally for any of the above, but that at the educators’ discretion, may also receive an IEP. Regardless, these are only made with parental permission and after a formal meeting involving the teacher, administrator, parent and in many instances, other professionals, such as school board child psychologist, language-learning specialist, social worker or occupational therapist.

it the attention and importance that I felt it merited. Even when I explained the effect Josephine was having on the class as a whole and on my teaching, this did not seem to resonate with the mother, at least from what I could gather from her facial expressions and comments during parent-teacher interviews.

By mid-year, when students begin to apply to the local high schools, Josephine and her mother both requested I write a reference letter for her towards being accepted at a 'prestigious' private high school. I remember being surprised to be asked (considering my complaints) and was not sure if it was part of the high school's protocol or if it was Josephine and her parent's spontaneous request. Once I realized it was not an explicit expectation from the high school, my surprise was even greater, after the year of tugging back and forth that Josephine and I had over her behaviour. I came to realize that a positive letter of reference was their expectation. Although I agreed to write the letter, I made it clear that I would only express my opinions based on the guidelines stipulated by the high school. I was given the school's criteria as to what topics they were looking for. The letter was going to be part of her application package but not one that I had to mail directly to the high school admissions department as per normal protocol. Therefore, Josephine and her mother were going to have direct access to the letter's content before submitting it.

The expectation was that I would, naturally, write a very positive reference letter about Josephine. While I did describe her good qualities and potential, I was also very direct and honest about some of her shortcomings as a student, based on the high

school's checklist. After her mother read the letter at home, she decided to complain directly to my principal without engaging me first. Fortunately for me, the principal endorsed my position, telling me later that she told Josephine's mother that I had even been generous. This is rare. Often, principals feel obligated to adhere to parental requests by asking teachers to accommodate them. It is a public relations approach that probably seeks to de-escalate any possibility of friction between the parent and the administration (the Board). Principals are mandated to act on behest of superintendents, who much prefer to avoid any run-ins with parents, trustees or the school board administrators. There seems to be a domino effect of adherence and a public relations approach from the Board Director down. Usually, it ends with the teacher accommodating a parental request. That is the sense of systemic entitlement I am referring to.

As the mother saw that the principal wouldn't budge, had she known, she may have been more successful were she to have gone directly to the superintendent and made a bigger fuss about the situation -which some parents now do. Instead, she saw no other alternative but to call me directly and try to persuade me into enhancing the letter's content before submitting it to the college. I remember how she said that I was 'compromising the future of a 13-year-old'. I recall thinking to myself (but dared not tell her), *madam, it is by the very fact that you are calling me rather than addressing these issues and my observations directly with your daughter, as a lesson to be learned, that may be one of the reasons why she misbehaves in the first place!* Obviously, I couldn't say that.

It was not my place -but I did think it out loud to myself! Rather than learning, and better still, having her daughter learn from this experience, the mother chose to advocate for her for the sake of her daughter's wishes of attending a 'prestigious' high school. I told Josephine's mother that since my signature was at the bottom of the letter, I could not, in good conscience write disingenuously. I later found out that Josephine was not accepted, and surely, it was not just because of the letter. Instead, she went on to the local high school where most of her friends were going to attend anyway. I am sure she was fine.

This episode clearly shows an example of the negative connotation of entitlement, as experienced by some of us teachers. Regardless of the merits as to whether or not my student had proven herself over the course of the year to warrant a very positive endorsement on my part, was irrelevant to the culture of entitlement. The status and reputation of this private high school was what was desired. So why, especially when her friends had applied to attend the local high school, was Josephine and/or her mother so intent in having her go to this school? Perhaps Josephine's desire was consistent with her sense of self. We can speculate that perhaps Josephine's sense of identity, based on a self-conception of privilege was socio-culturally constructed and can be viewed, fundamentally, as a form of self-understanding.

Identities link the personal and the social and can be constituted relationally. As Adam Howard (2010), who was part of a six-year multisite ethnographic study of the lessons that students at elite schools are taught about their place in the world reminds

us, “they entail action and interaction in a sociocultural context [and] are social products that live in and through activity and practice [...] are always performed and acted” (p.1973). Although my classroom and school were not elite, Josephine’s behaviour in class, over the course of the year, constantly showed her sense of self as being above most of her classmates, and even teachers. This may be learned or perceived at home or from the immediate socio-cultural environment.

As we have seen from the mother’s attitude, there exists a sense of entitlement that attempts to undermine the professional judgement of educators. As Lareau (2018) says, that although “much of this literature suggests that parental involvement is especially beneficial for low-income children [and] can reduce class gaps in educational achievement, there is evidence that there is also the dark side of parent involvement” (p.2). Lareau (2010, 2018) further states:

Researchers have also documented ways in which highly resourced parents are able to subvert organizational policies on behalf of their children -as when, for example, a mother is able to gain admission to a school’s gifted program for a child whose tests results were insufficient [...] In these studies, parents’ advocacy has the effect of exempting their children from rules whose legitimacy rests on their uniform application. (p.2)

This is a clear example of entitlement, when a student or parent is unwilling to automatically defer to the educator or school administrator the authority to make decisions concerning the needs of the system and pedagogy. I will also discuss the ‘crisis of authority’ in education in Chapter Seven.

Perhaps to Josephine and her mother, that high school represented a form of brand-identity facilitated by its own self-promotion and status-building allotted it from the outside (the education market). This is not to take away the quality of the school nor its achievements. But equally as significant is the reputation (advertisement) and status it has acquired for itself as a consumable educational product over the course of the years since it had become privatized. I am here not to criticize the school's advertisement nor self-promotion, which is normal procedure as a private profit-oriented school. But what is also significant is its commodification through perception and thus desired by many students and parents for its status, regardless as to whether or not the student may be able to pursue its academic rigour after admission, nor if the school is 'really that good.' As Benjamin Barber (2007) writes:

Thus brands are gradually dissociated from the specific content of the products and services they label and reaffiliated with styles, sentiments, and emotions at best remotely linked to those products and services [...] Branding and privatization turn out to work in tandem. As identity moves away from public categories rooted in religion and nationality and toward commercial categories associated with brands and consumables, identity itself is privatized. (pp.174 - 200)

What perhaps Josephine and her mother sought, understandably, was the enhancement of privilege and the cultural capital that they felt with that high school's brand that would distinguish her from the rest. Like any parent and child, they sought what they perceived to be a greater guarantor of success in today's competitive

capitalist society -one that is also conditioned by consumerist ideals and status. Pierre Bourdieu's (1990) concept of cultural capital suggests that socio-economic opportunities are not based solely on individual effort and on real meritocracy but on cultural capital, or the prior knowledge, contacts, socialization and general personal baggage that an individual may already have that can be advantageous for him or her to succeed in a society dominated by ruling classes.

Bourdieu's (1990) theory states that an individual's knowledge and ability to reproduce the ruling bourgeois culture either in school and/or society at large, becomes a major determinant of an individual's life chances. Moreover, unequal distribution of this form of capital (as further attested by those who can access 'prestigious' high schools, versus those who cannot) helps conserve social hierarchies. For Bourdieu (1990), children are not simply socialised into the values of society as a whole, but rather into the culture that corresponds to their class (pp. 70-73). This set of cultural experiences, values and beliefs represent cultural capital, or a set of values, beliefs, norms, attitudes, experiences and so forth that equip people for their life in society. Understandably, Josephine and her mother wanted to be able to access the cultural capital of a private high school and attempt to reproduce it. They believed they had it.

In my teaching experience, I was also made aware of a collective sense of entitlement when parents from another school organized themselves and vehemently protested against the school board's decision to move its Gifted Centre from one school to another -to the school where I was going to be the new teacher of that new Gifted

Centre. Although I did not personally witness the parental disputes with the Board over the course of the previous summer, I was made aware of them by my colleagues at the new school of the many meetings and organized protests made by the parents of the school that was losing its Centre. That school was located in a well-to-do upper middle-class neighbourhood. From the school board's perspective, this first school, where the Gifted Centre was originally located, was becoming too overcrowded while the second (where I was going to teach) had the available space and was not too far from the first. Despite an apparent petition, pressures and opposition by a well-organized parental group, the Board ultimately was able to proceed with the transfer of the Gifted Centre.

6.3.2 'I Failed Grade Four'

In sharp contrast to this sense of student and parental entitlement that I have experienced as a teacher, I also have my personal experience as an elementary school student. From my childhood perspectives in late 1960s and early 1970s, this issue of student entitlement and demands seemed much rarer. Perhaps as a consequence of a more verticalized social structure of society at large at the time, parents generally deferred complete responsibility and professional judgement to the teacher and the system. Ministry and school board policies reflected this social and cultural context of the times as attested by the fact that, unlike our example of the no-zero and no fail policies of many jurisdictions today, students did 'fail' in the past and were made to either remediate the failing grade during summer school or repeat the whole grade altogether. I have personal experience with this.

Back in 1970, I failed Grade Four in Brazil. Two and a half years before, I had begun my schooling in Canada in Grade One at the age of seven, as a newly arrived seven-year-old immigrant. As mentioned, I began my education only about a week and a half after having immigrated from Brazil to Toronto, on March 31, 1967. Also, as I had mentioned before, I had not started school yet in Brazil, due to lack of available spaces with a burgeoning population. Once in Toronto, I started my education at a school in the upper-midtown part of the city. It still exists as part of the TDSB (Toronto District School Board) and is located close to the intersection of Avenue Road and Wilson Avenue. By no means was it a neighbourhood populated by immigrant families. We knew friends close by -a married couple (he was French and she German), who had also previously lived in Brazil. They helped us a lot in those initial months. So, with their help, we ended up renting an apartment close by where there was also a school right next door, and they registered me at this school.

The only rental unit we found was an all-adult building with large letters in vinyl on the glass at the entrance foyer, 'No children and no pets allowed'. These types of rental buildings did exist then -culturally a very foreign concept to many immigrant families at the time (especially equating children with pets). But the building superintendent was an elderly German gentleman who took to us, and for whatever reason was persuaded by Liz (our German friend) to allow the four of us (with two kids!) to rent a two-bedroom ground-floor apartment. I was seven years of age, my brother two, my mother forty-two, and my father forty -all now 'new' Canadians, as we were

referred to at the time. The superintendent (I called him ‘Mr. Hi’ since each time he saw me, he’d say ‘hi!’) said he was going to retire to Spain in a year anyways, so was not too concerned about breaking the rule of ‘not renting to families.’ He instructed my brother and I to always leave and enter our newly rented apartment from the side windows as much as possible (our apartment was on the ground floor, slightly lower than ground level). That way, we could sneak out to school and come back unseen, as much as possible, so as to avoid some ugly stares from the disapproving neighbours who expected their building to be child-free. Luckily, all we got were just a few frowns from some of the more elderly neighbours, but no formal complaints -at least none that we were made aware of. That was good. I think Mr. Hi protected us.

I started my schooling in April, with only two months left before the end of the school year. I had no knowledge of English. In September, although I began Grade Two, my English was still limited so the teachers and principal thought I should be held back and do Grade One again. For my parents, that was understandable. I did it for a few months, improved, and then the principal moved me back to Grade Two where I remained for the rest of the year. The following year, by the beginning of Grade Three, my family decided to return to Brazil, for several reasons that I won’t address here, but that I alluded to in Chapter Two. My mother, brother and I went ahead while my father remained in Toronto longer in order to work and raise some more money before joining us in São Paulo. We were apart for a full year.

Once back in Brazil, I entered the public-school system in that country for the first time ever and due to my age would begin attending Grade Four in February, the beginning of their school year. But before school began, my future Grade Four teacher (whom I will never forget – ‘Dona’ Leuza Romane Salvetti) agreed to tutor me for the duration of her summer holidays. The purpose was to bring me up to speed and prepare me for middle school and Grade Four. After some diagnostic assessments in Mathematics and Language and subsequent meetings with my mother, they both agreed I was pretty behind and needed tutoring before the beginning of the school year. I spent two months one-on-one with ‘Dona’ Leuza, in her make-shift classroom situated in her garage. The hope was that by the time Grade Four began, I would be more prepared. The issue was not as much the language, since Portuguese was my first language, although I had never studied it formally before. The problem were the knowledge gaps I had, especially in Mathematics.

Over the course of the following academic year, at my neighbourhood public school, located in Santo André, which is part of greater São Paulo, as expected, I did okay in Language and most of the other subjects, but continued to struggle in Mathematics. Dona Leuza helped me a lot, often taking me aside to drill me after school or even before classes started (these were rotary classrooms, due to the continuous lack of schools and space, with two cohorts of students each day in each physical classroom -my classes were held from 7am to 1pm, and the second group took our seats from 1pm to 7pm). I recall the huge piles of homework. And yet, all of us

children were still able to enjoy ourselves immensely, even if it was tag, hide-and-seek and that ‘communal’ soccer ball I had brought from Canada. Despite being very busy with school, we had a tremendous sense of carefree freedom, neglected me nearly a year before on that Avenue Road apartment building. Looking back, I can confidently say that our ‘vila’ and its wave of children supplied me with the best and most adventurous year of my infancy.

By the end of my school year, at the age of nine, we all braced ourselves for the *final exams* -today, unheard of for a Grade 4 student. These were to determine if we would pass the grade and school year. They were high stakes exams, for if you failed even one exam from one subject only, you would have to repeat the whole year (and not just that one subject). I passed all of my exams (Language, History, Science and Geography), except Mathematics. I had messed up one word-problem-solving question and it resulted in my failing grade for my Mathematics exam. I would have to repeat the year. I distinctly remember ‘Dona’ Leuza being visibly distraught, holding back tears, at the final parent-teacher interview with my mother. She knew I had come a long way and that I had made great progress over the course of the year. But the rules were clear. All three of us accepted them, (including my mother) despite how tough that was. I remember it to this day. But I don’t remember it as a trauma nor something unfair. The possibility of failing a grade was part of the system and part of the rigour. Looking back, surely, it was the school system’s stance of one size fits all approach -by today’s standards, surely unfair, but it did teach us many valuable life lessons.

What saved me from having to repeat the year was that my father called us back to Canada. Rather than repeat Grade Four in Brazil, I found myself back in Canada by December of 1970. My father bought our first home, in Clarkson, Mississauga, where in January of the new year I began Grade Five. The determining factor was my age and not any academic benchmark. Despite my somewhat limited English, my apparent overall skills and knowledge that I had learned from my Grade Four experience in Brazil prepared me well. I did very well in my new school, part of the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board. Perhaps the rigours of ‘Dona’ Leuza and my experience of failing the grade prepared me to study hard and realize that I would only reap what I had sown. Although failing a whole grade due to *one* exam does seem today to be extreme, it did teach me, nevertheless, that I was fundamentally responsible for my grades and successes as much as the teacher.

It may be that from one extreme we have now gone completely to another. Today, it appears that failure has been stigmatized as a *permanent* condition and not as a momentary setback. In today’s culture, we want no setbacks, no hinderances and no no’s. As an educator, I believe that with such a micromanaging of emotions we run the risk of remaining untested, unchallenged, forever fragile and unprepared for the rigours of real life -perpetually infantilized. We run the risk of becoming overly sensitive, self-centered, perhaps unaccepting of constructive criticism and the opinions of others, and increasingly entitled. Is our sense of entitlement perhaps a means of sheltering ourselves from our own inadequacies and insecurities? Benjamin Barber (2007) says

that the tension between easy and hard have challenged every society, but ours is perhaps the first in which the institutions of civilization seem to be on the side of easy.

Barber (2007) writes:

Ours rewards the easy and penalizes the hard. It promises profits for life to those who cut corners and simplify the complex at every turn [...] weight loss without exercise, marriage without commitment, painting or piano by the numbers without practice or discipline, internet college degrees without course work for learning, athletic success through steroids and showboating. (pp. 87-88)

Barber continues by saying that “lying, cheating, and deception (especially self-deception) are features of the human condition, but they become more acceptable today in part because they are seen as a justifiable form of taking the easy way” (p.88). Thus, since consumer culture stimulates individualism and isolationism (as I described previously), then, by logic, we feel less accountable to the group or to truth. Morality becomes compromised and a sense of obligation towards the other or to once-sacrosanct expectations, obliterated. Beyond a strong sense of entitlement may lie narcissism.

6.4 Issues of Narcissism

I am briefly including the theme of narcissism as a byproduct of consumer culture because it seems to come across as exacerbated examples of both identity creation and entitlement. In fact, I will discuss here how it is a veiled requirement of consumer culture that tries to boost an obsessive sense of self and ego aimed at self-promotion. In the highly trafficked and populated cyberworld of digital and real-life

identities, consumer culture constantly tries to create needs by making us work incessantly hard to stand out and be noticed. The irony is that wanting to stand out relies on a new and veiled form of uniformity. It is a race to coolness within preset paradigms and aesthetics set by the marketplace. In wanting to be so different, we are all increasingly looking and sounding the same.

I would like to discuss narcissism here as being not only a psychiatric or psychological condition, but also as a cultural and social one. I am in no position, nor is it the focus of this segment to discuss its psychology, although the definitions below do indicate the term as one within the field of psychology. I can discuss it mainly from the point of view of sociology and education. In education, narcissism, inevitably, is sometimes present within the relationships and rapports between some students, their parents and teachers (as we have seen with ‘The Reference Letter’ episode). With regards to consumer culture’s version of narcissism. *The Oxford Online Dictionary*²⁵ defines narcissism as:

A personality trait characterized by perceptions of grandiosity, superiority, and the need for attention and admiration. There has been an increase in focus on examining the development of narcissism and how the trait influences a range of social and health behaviors. A key feature of narcissism is that it is characterized by high self-esteem with a simultaneously fragile ego that requires continual monitoring and manipulation [...]. (n.p.)

²⁵ See <https://oxfordre.com/communication/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.001.0001/acrefore-9780190228613-e-530>

Jean M. Twenge and Keith Campbell are both American psychologists who wrote a very insightful and factually detailed book around the topic of narcissism, entitled, *The Narcissism Epidemic*. In it, they argue that the cultural focus on ‘self-admiration’ began with the shift toward focusing on the individual in the 1970s, documented in Tom Wolfe’s article on ‘The Me Decade’ in 1976 and Christopher Lasch’s 1979 book, *The Culture of Narcissism*. Twenge et al. (2009) state that in the three decades since, narcissism has grown exponentially:

The fight for the greater good of the 1960s became looking out for number one by the 1980s. Parenting became more indulgent, celebrity worship grew, and reality TV became a showcase of narcissistic people. The internet brought useful technology but also the possibility of instant fame and a ‘Look at me!’ mentality. (p. 4)

Shumaker (2018) adds that “guilt has lost much of its former powers of persuasion and deterrence [and that] character building as a socialization pathway to ethical resolve and civic commitment is virtually extinct” (p.2). He says that many traits of “narcissism, as well as diagnosis of narcissistic personality” is a normal outcome of current-cultural conditions (p.2).

Social media and the internet, clearly, become a very willing and attractive venue and forum where narcissism can be displayed. In the digital world, where we can present identities and profiles as we see fit, a form of shareveillance has become very common. As previously discussed, shareveillance can mean the sharing of data from surveillance capitalism among interested buyers, but it can also mean our very own

purposeful sharing of our lives and activities publicly. The motivations can be many, ranging from the simple pleasure of sharing some family outing photos with some digital friends, to digitally self-promote by creating online identities for self-branding. In the latter version, we may be seeking notoriety as influencers who count the number of followers. This version of shareveillance renders our private lives public, through manufactured narratives, personas and alter-egos. Our public and private lives basically are made to become the same. Rarely do we post our negative sides, our sufferings and ineptitudes. On the contrary, some of us make ourselves to be digital mannequins.

In a sense, it is the overproduction of the self to others and to the self -the self we want to be rather than the self we are. We self-commoditize. For example, parents may decide to constantly post pictures and stories about their families in any given social media platform, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, or Tik-Tok. Parents may share their personal or family stories with other families, or whomever can access the posts, daily. By sharing only the positive and the most aesthetically appealing image and narrative, an online identity and image is being formed, always filtered when controlled by the poster, that can often be tinged with certain superficialities. In many aspects, this strong predisposition to incessantly share minute details publicly and online could be construed as a form of narcissism. It is the preoccupation of self and self-promotion -to be seen, appreciated and admired by all.

One thing it is to do this as adults. It is completely another thing to expect and

influence the young to also begin to promote themselves, without yet knowing who they are, nor what they really want. Bauman (2007b) says:

The teenagers equipped with portable electronic confessionals are simply apprentices training and trained in the art of living in a confessional society -a society notorious for effacing the boundary which once separated the private from the public. (p.3)

As is readily known among us educators, many students have gotten into serious personal and public trouble through such digital exposures of either themselves or others on the internet. They are still too young and inexperienced to be putting themselves out there. I have seen a principal once having to suspend students for inappropriate social media exposures involving other students. I even know of instances when the police were called, and charges laid -and this was at the elementary school level.

This form of shareveillance is the curation of the self. Many reasons may motivate the making of private affairs public. In some instances, for example, parents may post images and activities involving their children as a means to compensate their lack of time with their children because of long working hours, perhaps resulting also in parental burnout.²⁶ They may unwittingly shift from loving their children to the love of

²⁶ According to *Psychology Today*, parental burnout is an exhaustion syndrome, characterized by feeling overwhelmed, physical and emotional exhaustion, emotional distancing from one's children, and a sense of being an ineffective parent. See a study on parental burnout, published at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/targeted-parenting/201909/the-burnout-we-cant-talk-about-parent-burnout>

parenting their children. The lack of time, patience, and energy to spend with their children may also lead some parents to make up for it through consumerism (buying children whatever they wish, and/or keeping them very busy with extra-curricular activities). Perhaps it is an attempt to show that all is well. That is when digital narratives and public affirmations come into play. Perhaps some parents may feel guilty because of the lack of time they have for their children (Berardi's 'souls are at work'), so they share the positive and good times, rather than share nothing at all.

This plays perfectly well into consumer society. Guilt can be discarded by parents providing their children's wants with consumer goods since the child's real needs (which is more of their parent's time and undivided attention) consumer society will not provide. Instead, consumer culture promotes a form of commodification of relationships, even within the family unit. As Norris (2011) also says, "many marketing strategies also seek to exploit the already fragile emotional landscapes of divorced families. Parents who spend less time with their children because of work or divorce may be more likely to show their love and ease their guilt by spending. Kids may interpret the absence of consumer goods as an absence of affection" (p.55).

My perspectives discussed so far around identity creation, commodification, entitlement, and narcissism have shown them to be interrelated and by-products of consumer culture. In the next chapter, I will focus exclusively on these intersections and their implication on education and the classroom.

Chapter Seven: The Subjugation of Education - From Consummate to Consumable Student

In the previous two chapters, I discussed some of the ways that consumer culture has been subjugating our sense of self into a predominantly economic realm of our existence. I discussed how it may fodder the creation of individualized manufactured identities, maybe as the subconscious need to compensate the loss of ‘group’ identity of bygone times. I also discussed how newly manufactured individualisms may also have led us along a path of entitlement and narcissism -perhaps also as a means to fill the void of a dissipating sense of the collectivity. In this chapter, I will discuss how some of these marketplace identities also show up in education and schooling. By deconstructing other personal experiences as a teacher in the school, I will argue that these identities and individualized expectations condition education by affecting its overall purpose, such as the increased replacement of pedagogy with bureaucracy -as an example. For instance, I will look at the issue of educational attainment by using the topic of critical thinking. I will finally discuss how these forms of hyper individualism have led to what Arendt (2006) called a ‘crisis of authority’ in society and in education.

7.1 The Purpose of School in a Consumer Society

As I have argued all along, the consumerist culture of entitlement has supported the individual as a consumer, often at the expense of him or her as a citizen. The consumer thinks exclusively on what he or she wants. The citizen is forced to think about what others also want. When many classroom teachers speak of an increased

sense of entitlement among some students and their parents, they are implying, in a very indirect but Arendtian way (Arendt, 2006), the erosion of teacher authority and their ability to *educere*, as well as *educare* (see Craft, 1984; Bass, 2004). For many teachers, a strong sense of entitlement is challenging the balance between the two. I argue that the subjugation of education to consumer culture has resulted in the breaking of this balance, by eroding the concept of achievement and meritocracy in school and replacing it with a (consumer's) right to educational attainment regardless of student effort. As we can assume, this is not a situation specific to education, but the result of a spill-over effect of consumer culture and semiocapitalism onto the sphere of education.

A consumerist sense of entitlement has permeated education by compromising the more metaphysical and holistic aspects of teaching (*educere*) while tipping the balance towards the more practical, skills-oriented, standardized and individualizing aims of education (*educare*). By metaphysical, I mean, again, the learning of things that are not meant to be necessarily applicable, nor palpable skills for functionalist purposes meant to be translated exclusively into commodities. The study of the classics for example, were not meant to serve any productivist nor clearly palpable purpose, with the exception, perhaps, as a demonstration of cultural capital.

Our current sense of entitlement is confounding what is meant by a right to an education with the more arduous, laborious and the more lasting earning of one. It often appears that education has become something to be purchased and consumed

and no longer as something to be co-produced by students and their teachers. As a result, entitlement culture, as I have discussed so far, while promoting everyone, regardless of effort, is doing students a disservice by not promoting their maturity, growth and the acquiring of the fortitude needed to prepare them for the realities of an increasingly complex and unforgiving adult world.

Educators seek to strike a good balance between *educere* and *educare*. The first, whose etymological root means to lead out, implies the more progressive view of education that prepares students to solve problems of the world yet to come (Craft, 1984). The second means to train or mold, and it implies the more conservative, rote, standardized-testing type of education for purposes of productivity and capitalist cultural reproduction. Both fall under the definition of education which explains the often-polarized views of what the whole purpose of schooling should be. Conservative governments have pushed for policies that envision mostly *educare*, while more liberal administrations have generally given ample support for *educere*. As a teacher, I would like to assume that a good education implies the balancing of both.

It is my belief that entitlement has wedged itself between *educare* and *educere* and is pushing them increasingly apart. From initially tipping the balance towards *educare*, entitlement now stands on its own and requires no allegiance from both ends of the education spectrum. I argue that it is neutralizing education and converting it into a bureaucracy. As Gert Biesta (2012) provocatively admits, there is a “concern about a very particular development that has been going on in our educational

institutions and our societies more generally, which is the disappearance of the teacher” (p.35). What Biesta alludes to is the evident shift in the role of the teacher, no longer as one who teaches, but facilitates. Also, Biesta seems to allude to the apparent demise of teacher authority, which allows him or her to teach. What we have today, instead, is an education system that predominantly seeks statistical results. As Bass et al. (2004) argue:

Standardized testing has further institutionalized the basics as the inviolable principle in deciding what to teach and how to teach it [...] as a result, the function of the educational system changes from providing students with a well-rounded education to preparing them to pass the all-important test. (p.162)

In Ontario, for example, we have the standardized tests of EQAO (Education Quality and Accountability Office) that is administered in elementary school in Grades 3 and 6, and then at the secondary school level in Grade 10, as the high school Literacy Test. This branch of the province’s Ministry of Education serves to test school levels and achievement but is not meant to test nor hold accountable the individual student per se (with the exception of the Grade 10 Literacy Test, which the student must pass in order to graduate), although it is the student who writes this province-wide test. At the elementary level, it is the epitome of a bureaucratic exercise for ministerial purposes rather than the measure of an individual child’s *educere*. For the Grade 3 and 6 tests, at no point is the student required to pass, for his or her own sake, nor are the individual test results ever divulged to the student nor to the parents. The sole purpose of the EQAO test is to assess the system and standards of educational attainment in all of

Ontario elementary schools. This province-wide examination is often at the centre of a school's preoccupation and preparation to teach to the tests -clearly for purely productivist-functional bureaucratic purposes²⁷. The focus of these larger tests is not student-centred as much as it is school-centred. These exams are meant to compare results between provincial schools and school districts and allow the Ontario Ministry of Education to have a good diagnosis of teaching effectiveness, based on longitudinal results comparisons. The system's emphasis on the necessity of skill over the pleasure of knowledge, has trickled down to the student body so much, that what many expect to be taught are just the useful skills in much of the school curriculum. In the following section I describe a few moments in my teaching where these expectations were made clear.

7.1.1 'Sir, Why do We Need to Know This?'

Between February and June of 2002, I was a full-time substitute teacher covering for a permanent one who was on maternity leave. Although I was not yet certified to teach, I was given a Ministry Letter of Permission, as the Long-Term-Occasional (LTO) replacement at a Secondary School. Despite no prior teaching experience, I was given

²⁷ The larger standardized tests in Ontario, involving reading, writing and mathematics, occur in Grades 3, 6, and then in high school. There is also a mathematics test in Grade 9 and a literacy one in Grade 10. Other diagnostic tests, such as CAT4 (or the online version CAT5) which is the *Canadian Achievement Test* are also administered by teachers and are usually given in Grades 4 and 7. This latter test is modelled to fit the curriculum as well, and assesses the essential learning outcomes in Reading, Language, Spelling, and Mathematics. This one is the one that is mostly 'student-centered' and pedagogical in nature, for it does serve the student mostly for grade placement between the end of Grades 1 through 12 to see how the student is doing, in comparison to others at the same grade level. It provides a profile of strengths and needs. There are other lesser used tests, but they are available, pending the Boards' and/or local school decisions.

the opportunity to teach Grade 10 Applied English, Grade 10 Civics & Career Studies, and a Grade 11 Academic World Religions course. I recall that my Civics class included topics around government, jurisdictions, rights, obligations, privileges, the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and other more abstract and knowledge-based issues. I understood then, even before actually teaching it, that the topic could be ‘boring’ for some of the students. Nevertheless, I assumed that students would understand the ‘importance’ of knowing some of this material, as it applied to all of us as citizens and that we were mandated to cover it anyways.

What was surprising to me was the initial question from a student, ‘sir, why do we need to know this?’ It was a straightforward question that I had difficulty, initially, in answering. My naïveté, at the time, did not prepare me to address the need to know, as compared to the interest or outright even pleasure of knowing. Evidently, my internal reaction (before I actually addressed the question) was based on my own biases, expectations, interests and mandate to teach the material. I guess for me, knowledge for knowledge’s sake was sufficient enough currency to justify being simply open to it, regardless how applicable that knowledge could be. During any given lesson, if I delved into etymology, for example, and the simple origin of a daily word on what I thought could be an interesting sidebar to a lesson, there were numerous students who didn’t understand the need for these. Their reaction was interesting to me.

To satisfy my own curiosity, when I brought this up to my principal to see her opinion and reaction, she surprised me as well. I remember specifically her telling me

to just focus on the teaching of skills, which is all that they will need to know, and that with these skills they would then be able to pursue their interests. I remember thinking to myself, isn't it the other way around? With an exposure to snippets of knowledge and trivia, couldn't that stimulate interest, fascination, and even passion in an area where then students would seek the skills needed to continue pursuing a newly discovered passion? How do they know what they like if I don't expose them to as many of these snippets as possible? Isn't my role to show them as much of the world as possible, while 'protecting them from it' -as Arendt (2006) would have us do?

Though there is obviously no right or wrong answer to these questions -as they are only a matter of perspectives- what stood out for me was an exaggerated (in my mind, of course) emphasis on the functionality and skills and techniques over the simple love of knowing. Perhaps, this is in line with an industrialized vision of education, where knowledge is only useful as a commodity -an end purpose. It goes without saying, that we do need to teach the skills. But aren't these just the tools? Shouldn't the imponderable and the immeasurable also be introduced to students? Critics (especially the very conservative ones) could say that this runs the risk of indoctrination, and that teachers won't be able to distinguish the presentation of a topic and position, from the persuading of their positions or politics around one. The irony here, as Norris (2011) points out is:

Even if education is expected to be value neutral and teachers are not to impose their values on students, advertising does just the opposite: it teaches values

based on consumption. However, unlike education and educators, advertisers do not work towards a better future for society. (p.65)

Within this context perhaps, is why teaching critical thinking, as I will discuss later, becomes key for presenting to students some body of knowledge ‘outside’ the simplicity of the learning of skills. I would say that the most important skill an educator could teach a student is critical and independent thinking.

My role as a teacher is not to have students as ‘apprentices’ of consumer society, but as sensitive human beings and fully empowered citizens who can then change the world by not simply becoming the future cogs that will run it. As Arendt (2006) reminded us, the critique of modernity and political action in the public realm is profoundly relevant for educators and educational theorists who seek to locate their activity within the context of the eclipse of public life by consumerism. As I also mentioned previously, Freire (2014a) also reminded us of the need for conscientization, meaning the insight and awareness, in a dialogic constructivist fashion, between the educator and his or her students. Arendt’s work points towards us educators and how we can fall short of our responsibility for renewing the world, and how education can become complicit in the erosion of a vibrant and robust public realm. Freire pointed towards the direction of how we can bring the student into the fold of his or her awareness of his or her situation in society.

Although skills and standards (*educare*) are important, the issue, of course, becomes when they outstrip and override many attempts at *educere*. This becomes

alarmingly apparent when the education bureaucracy completely overrides the educational element of schooling. It is especially notorious when even if a student fails any of these standardizing tests, remediation becomes secondary to the continuation of the system. A perfect example is when a parent is often unable to (or at least is strongly dissuaded from) holding back or 'failing' his or her own child by repeating the year. It is in these moments when the educational system reveals itself as predominantly bureaucratic and industrial. It is what I refer to as conveyor belt education. As we have seen, at least at the elementary school level (which represents the age level when children begin to learn about effort, challenges, successes and failures and a general work ethic that they will be required to apply to a much greater degree in high school, and later in life) students are made to pass, regardless of how much effort they put or don't put into their studies. This is problematic. The child is not to blame, as the system overrides that child's real needs. I believe the system is failing the students, especially the less privileged, who may not have the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) to reproduce what the system wants. Regardless, they still are moved along. They are pushed forward towards the check-out counter of consumer capitalism. Although the rhetoric often describes pedagogy as catering to student needs and of being student-centered, often, the bureaucracy of the system overrides all good intentions. The conveyor belt of public education cannot be stopped, for ultimately, 'educational attainment' is secondary to the a system that, instead, ends up excluding those, in the long run, who never attained it.

7.2 Conveyor Belt Education

As we have seen, in our current educational system no one is allowed to fail. The word is taboo, and our consumer and entitlement society does not tolerate it. A consumer does not fail but consumes. If a consumer has no money, he or she borrows it and can depend on the financial system to administer his or her debt. Equally, in education, failure is not tolerated because it interrupts the flow and line-up towards the semiotic cashier register of the apprentice-consumer. In education today, failure is seen as a final end-result, a final consumable that no one wants, a factory defect - rather than, possibly, an experiential stepping-stone and lesson in itself that can lead towards a greater sense of personal responsibility and effort -with greater emotional rewards and knowledge of self, traits that society needs in abundance.

Today's meaning of 'failure' conjures a sense of permanence, and not that of a momentary hurdle. It is seen and felt as a final end-all occurrence -too dramatic for our contemporary entitled sensitivities. No one 'fails' unless permanently -the chronic 'loser' label. The psychological reasoning given for the total avoidance of failure revolves around issues of self-esteem and the emotional hardship of 'failing.' As a result, our elementary educational system promotes and 'graduates' students, regardless of achievement. There may also be a financial and administrative reason, which is the governmental cost of a child repeating another year. The way that the Ministry of Education in Ontario funds school boards is based on a per pupil funding or

on ‘student enrollment.’²⁸ A repeating child would cost the system twice for that one child to do one grade, if he or she were to repeat the year. The child would be filling someone else’s seat. It’s simple mathematics.

7.2.1 ‘Why Can’t I Hold Back My Child?’

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic in Ontario, by June of 2022 I had taught online from home on a full-time basis for two and a half academic school years. As part of the virtual online staff of the Toronto Catholic District School Board’s (TCDSB) St. Anne Catholic Academy of Virtual Learning, I covered the full Grade Eight curriculum, with the exception of French and Instrumental Music. Over the course of these two years, I had 31 and 32 students respectively, and with eleven of whom (the first year) were Special Education students, including two ‘gifted’ and ten other students with some learning difficulties.

During my first on-line year of teaching, a Special Education student, whom I will refer to as Luke, had been struggling academically (and socially) since Grade Four - according to his mother. In my class, Luke was having a lot of difficulty in understanding instructions let alone the content of the work. Basically, he was doing Grades Three and Four work in Mathematics and Language and was still struggling. I was modifying my teaching and content in all subjects to help Luke as much as

²⁸ See the Ontario Ministry of Education document for 2018-2019, for example, entitled *Education Funding: A Guide to the Grants for Student Education Needs*, at <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/funding/1819/GSNGuide2018-19Revised.pdf>

possible. Still, he was not able to complete most of what I was assigning him. He tried very hard. Luke was a very pleasant and keen student, always present, one of the handful of students with camera on, punctual and paying attention at all times. His mother told me he was very happy with me as his teacher (he was ‘originally scared’, she said, for he ‘had never had a male teacher before.’) He was very present and engaged.

Over the course of that year, his mother expressed to me more than once that she felt Luke was ‘not ready for high school’ due to his many academic gaps. She told me she was trying since Grade Six to ‘hold him back’ and repeat the year, to see if he could do better, as he would be ‘older and more mature.’ In principle (due to my own personal experience) I felt it was a legitimate wish and idea, as long as Luke understood the reasons and accepted them. She told me he has ‘known this forever’ about her wish and was accepting of the possibility of ‘staying back another year.’ I told her I would support her wishes when the end-of-year’s annual review of IEP students came around -when a committee would be set up, as per protocol, that would include the ‘home school’ principal, Special Education teacher, the Board psychologist, myself (as his current homeroom teacher), plus the parent- in order to discuss Luke’s ‘progress’ and see the ‘next steps’ to be taken. When the meeting occurred and she expressed her wishes, all present were reticent and believed it was not the best decision for his ‘self-esteem.’ The school psychologist, especially, albeit very respectfully, emphasized this point. The principal as well tried to dissuade the mother. Luke’s mother told me later

that she ‘expected that’ but was still disappointed at her powerlessness in holding her son back.

My main point with this episode is that even assuming the mother knew her son better than anyone present, she was unable to have the committee see it her way. They said they would look into the matter and discuss it (in a sense, avoiding definitive answers on the spot of what we all knew was going to happen -that Luke would be going to Grade Nine the following year). Nevertheless, in order to support her, I sent an email a few days later to the committee reiterating my support for her wishes, although I was never asked and was aware that my opinions would not be considered. But I sent it as a promise to the mother.

Later that month, she told me the home-school principal called her with the guidance councillor of the accepting high school where Luke was going to attend the following September and re-assured her that he ‘will be fine’ and that the Special Education Department in his new school will set up a whole program that will cater to his needs -the ‘locally-developed’ courses in Math and Language that should make things much easier for him. She told me later that she felt comforted and thanked me for the support of her original wishes and that ‘we’ll see what happens next year’ -I remember her telling me. I have called her since. Luke seems to be doing okay.

What stands out for me with this episode is that despite parents having a fundamental say in their child’s education (such as accepting or not student placement in a Special Education Program, psychological testing, or social work, for example)

when it comes to ‘halting the conveyor belt’, by having the child repeat a year for purely academic reasons, that is when the system manages to impose itself and override even the parent. The financial costs of holding students back and the disruption to the rhythm and speed of this belt seems to take priority over the individual case. It seems to me that to hold back students would require more classes and more teachers. It falls in line with the same rationale as to why the system has one teacher teach nearly all subjects of a Grade Eight Program, for example, as I had to do, regardless if a teacher has experience and expertise or not in a particular subject. It appears that repeating a year can both be considered ‘failing’ and costly not only for the student, but for the system as well. This is the industry of elementary schooling.

Opposite to this mother’s position, you also have some parents who ‘advocate’ for their child’s rightful ‘success’ rather than the acceptance of the more arduous journey towards it, as we have seen. Very different from the frustrations expressed by Luke’s mother above, sociologists often speak of ‘helicopter parents’²⁹ who constantly oversee their child’s successes by protecting them from any possible setbacks, justified or not, with continuous and unconditional support, regardless of circumstances. Caring

²⁹ As an example for a definition and explanation, see <https://www.newportacademy.com/resources/restoring-families/the-effects-of-helicopter-parenting/>: “The term ‘helicopter parenting’ describes parents who are overinvolved in their children’s lives. They hover close by, and swoop down to help at the first sign of trouble. The phrase first appeared in 1969, in Dr. Haim G. Ginott’s book *Between Parent & Teenager*. Subsequently, in the early 2000s, helicopter parenting became a popular way to describe this style of child rearing. And today, research is revealing the effects of helicopter parenting. Moreover, helicopter parenting has spawned the more recently coined terms “lawnmower parents” and ‘snowplow parents.’ Such parents not only hover but also mow down or plow away any obstacles in a child’s or teenager’s path. Moreover, they continue this behavior from afar, when teens are in college. One of the biggest problems with helicopter parenting is that kids don’t get a chance to learn how to navigate the world on their own. And that can have negative emotional and mental health repercussions.”

and supporting is perfectly normal and expected from any parent. The problem becomes when the child perceives that he or she will be supported and defended, regardless of the facts and his or her efforts. For now, at least in both Toronto public school boards, despite what students do in the elementary school system, they will pass, as per norm, as per the system, for administrative and cultural reasons, not necessarily for pedagogical nor educational ones.

Conveyor belt education has often moved many unprepared students along. So much so, that the Ontario Ministry of Education, since 2013, had implemented Pathways, a program designed to help Grade Eight elementary students transition to Grade Nine more smoothly. From my experience, many Grade Nine high school teachers have often ‘complained’ about knowledge gaps from many students entering high school from Grade Eight, especially in the areas of Mathematics and Language. In the past, as a Grade Seven and Grade Eight teacher of Mathematics and Language, I participated in several cross-panel discussions and workshops with my Grades Nine and Ten counterparts in order to discuss the main difficulties and knowledge gaps that our Grade Eight students were having when entering high school. Curricular and transition strategies were planned and attempted that would hopefully help us, Grades Seven and Eight teachers, better prepare our students for secondary school. To me, this very initiative implied that there was an issue with either the pedagogy or elementary school structure that was failing many students in preparing them for their first years of secondary education.

It was clear to all of us participants that these panels and workshops were set up by our Board in order to attempt at bridging the learning gaps and expectations that high schools had regarding the level of Grade Eight graduates, especially when it came to literacy and numeracy. So, the question remains, why such a gap? Is it caused by an elementary school system that automatically promotes all students from year to year with little systemic accountability on how much the *individual* child has really learned? EQAO monitors the system but does not address the individual child. The discrepancy lies in that, unlike Grade Eight, Grade Nine students are held more systemically accountable, starting with mid-term exams all the way to their need to earn 30 total credits (one per subject), plus pass the Grade Ten Literacy Test (the high school 'EQAO' that does count for the individual). All this is needed in order to graduate. This onus on students' accountability starts only a few months after their Grade Eight 'mandatory' graduation. All of a sudden, the ladder's steps towards educational attainment have become very steep. The students discover that they will have to merit and earn their first course credit. Surely, their previous ten years of elementary school did not prepare them for this, as far as the elementary school system and the way it was set up.

7.3 Social Reproduction through Consumer Cultural Capital

What I have discussed so far are the more visible and structural signs of the productivist purpose of today's education. What we should also look at are the semiotics that feed it and that are in place that render education as a career-orienting, perhaps materialistic and technical endeavour, often void of meaning outside of its

purely functionalist ends. As Di Paolantonio (2019) asks, can creativity, self-actualization and curiosity, which are so valued in education, still speak and help foster a sense of the soul (using Berardi's terms) that exceeds economy and work? Or do these valued notions inevitably put the soul to work? Di Paolantonio (2019) provides an account of what is at stake in Berardi's conception of the soul and its subjugation to work. In his view, education tends to replicate a form of learning that puts the soul to work promoting a narrow, "self-enterprising subject with a frantic instrumental orientation towards the world" (p.4). Di Paolantonio (2019) says that the idea of the soul has become 'a rather quaint' and out of place term in contemporary educational discourse, giving way to the predominance of the mind and brain metaphors in education. So, is education today all brain and mind and cognitivity, with little room for the sentimental-soulful-spiritual elements of a person's learning and being? Is this what has been forcing education to focus on the individual much more than on the group? As Di Paolantonio (2019) writes:

The emphasis on the optimization of the learners 'brain power' thus tends to replicate the problematic notion of a hyper-individualized and hyper-perfectible learner in isolation from her immersion in the world. In focusing on how to improve the functioning of the brain, the assumption here is that learning happens not in relation or towards others, but in a removed and self-enclosed process of retention and computation that serves only the interest of the subject's self-perfection. (p.3)

With our current Ontario Ministry of Education's push towards online learning, even beyond COVID-19, and especially pushing towards a hybrid model of teaching (where a teacher in the regular classroom with 30 students, would have, at the same time, more students online on his or her screen studying from home), this individualization of learning and teaching seems to have reached a pinnacle moment. The students see me, as I remain on camera, but they are not seen by me, barely heard and do not show themselves to each other. Moreover, with this hybrid model, the idea of education as being something very individualistic is further pushed. Education becomes just functionalist and technical and no longer a human collective endeavor - something that could be discovered together and constructed from a dialogic dynamic, as Freire (2014a) would have advocated, and not constrained exclusively by the curriculum and its dispensing technologies. Indirectly, the messages being given to our students by our current mechanized educational system is that we are here to learn competency, become skilled, prepared, and therefore, useful to society and the workplace -not necessarily to awaken us to the wonderful and imponderable mysteries of life and existence. Functionalist education does not necessarily make us better human beings for the *res publica* but perhaps efficient ones for the machinery of contemporary capitalism.

Thus, the new cultural capital needed to succeed in school today may be packaged and presented by consumer capitalism. As previously discussed, the term cultural capital was coined by Pierre Bourdieu (1990) who argued that not all classes

start with the same kind or level of cultural capital. Children socialised into the dominant culture will have a big advantage over children not socialised into this culture because schools attempt to reproduce a general set of dominant cultural values and ideas. He wrote that each economic class develops an associated 'class culture' involving ways of seeing the social world and ways of doing things within that world. These things are specific to, and develop out of, class experiences of the social world. Thus, student success in the public education system is only meritocratic in relation to a pupil's ability to fit in with the dominant cultural values perpetuated through the school system. Therefore, equal opportunity does not culturally exist a priori. If the student is unable to fit in, Bourdieu argued, he or she is subject to "social elimination" through "self-exclusion" (pp.42,153, 158-159, 209). Within our conveyor belt education, the student has very little time to learn or adhere to the cultural capital needed to succeed, since there is no possibility of momentary failure and to 'try it again.' Social elimination is much more direct when the student realizes, by the age of sixteen (when students can 'drop out' of high school in Ontario) that he or she has not acquired the sufficient educational attainment needed to succeed well in high school. In a sense, all that 'passing' in elementary school was a form of 'false advertising' by the system.

Thus, by social elimination, Bourdieu (1990) meant that one of the roles of the school system is to progressively remove pupils from access to higher knowledge and social rewards. Bourdieu (1990) called this 'differentiation' -the need to make pupils

different in ways that are recognized as valid by a dominant culture. He criticized the role of education as having always existed in order to socially reproduce privilege and indirectly enable a dominant social class to maintain its power and wealth legitimately. He argued that since there is no objective way of differentiating between different class cultures (upper, middle and working-class cultures for example), the high value placed on the dominant cultural values characteristic of an upper or ruling class is simply a reflection of their powerful position within capitalist society.

Bourdieu uses class and Marxist analysis to describe exclusion, and the perpetuation of cultural capital through social reproduction. I believe that consumer cultural capitalism is fundamentally replacing the notion of class as a cultural and even social criteria for exclusion. It has also changed the rules for social elimination as well as social reproduction. Today, perhaps, it is the consumerist ethos that promises social inclusion if one is able to reproduce the consumerist cultural capital needed, such as consumer goods and identity creation with which social status can be acquired. Maybe one can become even an influencer. Simulation of self may suffice for inclusion, as long as the persona and identity one reproduces is accepted as cool.

Perhaps it may be that social reproduction, as influenced by the consumerist ethos, does not need social class as a criterium for social reproduction in order to demonstrate your cultural capital. It may just require yourself and your ability to consume and demonstrate your 'consumer cultural capital' by means of your possessions, identity creation, visibility and the ways you present yourself in

accordance to the codes, images and symbols promoted by semiocapitalism. It may be that one's acceptance in the world is externalized and no longer simply structural. From the very vertical knowing of one's place in society of bygone times, consumer capitalism culture, in the attempt to continuously expand its markets, seems to be 'culturally inclusive' by co-opting everyone, regardless of class, by reducing Bourdieu's verticalized concept of cultural capital along social class lines to today's horizontally imposed cultural capital of consumable values. Ironically, consumer capitalism is dynamically 'all-inclusive' in its dissemination of the culture of consumer rights and desires that makes little class distinctions, from an ideological standpoint -although in reality, it has materialistically increased them. In a sense, borrowing from Marx, we could say that late consumer capitalism is re-branding Marx's slogan from 'workers of the world, unite!' to 'consumers of the world, unite!' Consumption buys you the cultural capital necessary to be and feel accepted into mainstream society, even if it is simply in the cyber world of social media. For example, emulating the Kardashians becomes an ideal.

Consumer culture's 'invitation' is to reinvent oneself and adhere to materialism, regardless of the social and cultural capital one may be born into at the outset. As if in a form of consumer communism, the consumer is not made to self-eliminate but to adhere to the common horizontalized aspiration so as to achieve his or her social approval and *equality* through materialism. Consumer culture erases cultural capital and replaces it with consumer culture capital. An increased sense of entitlement makes

us cease to look at our limitations and replaces it with deservedness by allowing us to seek all that we want, including expressing all of our opinions as we see fit. I could say, facetiously, that in social media I don't need to know Mathematics to have a heated discussion with an engineer on how to build bridges.

7.4 The Decline of Critical Thinking

If one is trying to socially reproduce along the lines of consumer cultural capital, then there is little purpose for critical thinking. The powerful effects of semiocapitalism may be compromising our socio-emotional and intellectual independence, especially when it comes to our ability to think for ourselves. How we are able to manage and control the infosphere's conditioning of our thoughts and what we absorb with its incessant and 'invasive' subliminal messaging, depends on how we are able to filter fake news from the real ones, adhere to or resist conspiracy theories, ignore powerful advertising and messaging that try to persuade us into believing one thing or another, as well as what makes us consume impulsively with little forethought. How we metabolize or resist these will depend on our powers of critical and independent thinking.

Information technologies today are no longer just tools that we control and use as we please. We think we do but our addiction to them is often imperceptible. In some ways, they have become our new appendages. They have been proactive and invasive in our lives for some time, as part of semiocapitalism's penetration into our thought processes opening us up for the immediate absorption of the message -as Marshall

McLuhan (2001) had so famously described and illustrated in his book, *The Medium is the Message*. Digitalized information is often too fast and voluminous for serious reflection. Especially the young who are more susceptible to unscrupulous messaging, as their critical thinking skills are still forming, they are often conditioned and molded by them.

Instead of autonomous thinkers we may have become automatous thinkers, 'thinking' that we 'are making up our own mind' around any given topic, when, perhaps, we may be parroting an opinion from what we have just absorbed from the infosphere and the algorithms that perpetuated and enforced that initial stance. Our ability to form proper independent thoughts, opinions or judgements about any given topic becomes more difficult and the ability to think critically becomes seriously compromised. The sheer speed of infosphere messaging results in our knee-jerk reactions that speak more about our visceral opinion-forming processes than serene, pondered cerebral critical-thinking ones. We seem to react to a topic more than we think about it. It is faster, filterless and more conducive to our already present and expressed narratives and biases. This seems to have become much more prevalent when the topic is politics and world events. The result has been the pre-packaged formation of opinions and the polarization of peoples into 'camps.' This has become especially notorious with current election campaigns, the news cycles and the internet that continuously promote narratives and images that attempt to inculcate our thoughts and form our opinions, especially through social media.

7.4.1 'Urban II and Colin Powell'

In the summer of 2003, I taught a Grade 11 course entitled Ancient History to the 16th Century. Again, I was not yet certified, but had a special letter of permission from the Ontario Ministry of Education to teach this full-credit academic-level course over a six-week period to approximately 25 students. This course was held Monday through Friday, for the full school day from 8:30am to 2:30pm. These summer courses function to cover in six intense weeks what the regular course would have covered over the course of a regular school year. They are meant to allow students who did not pass during the regular year, as well as others who just want to earn an extra credit towards their total, to complete the course in the summer.

One of the units that I taught was about the Crusades. Before I introduced it, I decided to approach it with current events and one that dominated the news at the time. I began with a discussion on the American invasion of Iraq. This was the summer of 2003 and the US had just invaded that country on March 19 of that year. I remember that at the time there was very little criticism nor much independent evaluation as to the reasons and motives behind the US-led invasion (contrary to the West's unanimous and daily condemnation of Russia's invasion of the Ukraine -not that we are justifying one over the other, but how hypocrisy can reign unquestioned when we lack some critical thinking skills). I recall several of my students stating how they 'followed the news' and knew about the 'weapons of mass destruction' that Saddam Hussein had and how he was 'harboring terrorists'. Overall, in most news and entertainment outlets at

the time, I do not recall there being much debate (none that I saw from the US networks) about whether or not the invasion was warranted, let alone legal. CBC television did have a few town hall meetings and interview programs with discussion panels arguing the legitimacy or not of the invasion. As we know, Canada was invited by the American administration to join the coalition, but the Chrétien government prudently declined.

In my History class, many of my students seemed to think and expressed it a good thing that we were ‘getting rid’ of a dictator like Saddam. This ‘we’ was very indicative to me, for it showed the power of the American narrative of ‘freedom’ being often equated with war. Many of my students knew why the US invaded, that is, they saw this war as a liberating exercise. The fact that it was an unlawful attack and invasion of a foreign sovereign country (according to international law) and an attack on its people was practically never questioned by most. Today we have the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The media coverage and narratives are completely different, for reasons we will not discuss here.

The irony is that we have never been as informed nor as knowledgeable as today. Berardi (2019) says that the average young person today is more informed than the average young person fifty years ago “but at the same time is much less prepared to express critical views and to choose between cultural and political alternations” (p.16). As do I, he also believes that the reason lies in the radical change of educational criteria that resulted from the neoliberal reformation of the school system worldwide that has

engaged in transforming the school system in compliance with the market. Berardi (2019) ascertains that:

The neoliberal forging of *homo economicus* translated every notion and every act of knowledge into economic terms, leading to the abolition of the autonomy of knowledge, and that every act of research, of teaching, of learning and of inventing is subjected to economic questions = is it rentable? Is it fostering capital accumulation? Is it fulfilling the demands of competition? (p. 18)

Clearly, if education has been set up to serve the market, where does critical thinking fit in?

After a good discussion around the declared and possible underlying *undeclared* reasons behind the Bush's administration's decision to invade Iraq and their campaign to convince other countries to join him, I introduced the unit on the Crusades. I asked students, why study the Crusades? Why do I bring up Iraq before studying about the Crusades? What possible connections could there be? How can we make the study of the Crusades relevant to today's society? I remember getting very few opinions, and understandably so, with some students saying that both wars, perhaps, were to get rid of dictators. It is here that I introduced two speeches: Pope Urban II's speech (see Robinson, 1904) that he gave at Clermont in 1085, where he rallied the monarchies of Europe to launch the First Crusade against Islam's expansionism into the Holy Land, and the US Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech given at the UN Security Council,

on February 5, 2003, that tried to instill fears about Saddam's supposed weapons of mass destruction³⁰ in order to justify the invasion.

I organized the students into groups to go over both speeches. Their task was to compare them and highlight any similarities between them by discussing their *tones* and the persuasive language in both, that could reveal motives, sentiments and the mindset employed in these speeches. What did the two speeches have in common? Needless to say, this exercise was very revealing and fascinating to those students who picked up on the intent of both speeches as sales pitches to promote the war agenda. Both speeches, it was concluded, attempted to persuade with the use of morality to justify for ultimate invasion through the narrative of the imminent (although unproven) threat of a new enemy.

The fact is that until this exercise was completed, many of my students felt that the invasion of Iraq was justified. Now they had serious doubts and it would be up to them to research and seek some diverse opinions and facts. Is this perhaps a contemporary example of the infosphere's manipulative forces? They realized that their opinion, it appears, was based on what they picked up from much of the narrative in American news items and official discourse, especially from the US government, that emphasized the weapons of mass destruction, as a tagline or catchphrase that could have been used by any advertisement firm. The power of today's technology in

³⁰ For full transcript of his speech, see <https://2001-2009.state.gov/secretary/former/powell/remarks/2003/17300.htm>

disseminating information and propaganda, interchangeably, is what has compromised critical thinking. As Berardi (2019) has pointed out:

We might think of 1968 as the peak of human evolution, at the moment in which technology, knowledge and social consciousness reached the point of maximum convergence. Since then, technological potency has steadily expanded while social consciousness has decreased proportionately. As a result, technology has been increasing power over social life, while society has decreasing power over technology, and is no more able to govern itself. (pp.11-12)

As I mentioned before, it is interesting how Berardi (2019) uses 1968 as the turning point (perhaps more symbolically) of the beginning of the current crisis of critical thinking. He states that levels of post-secondary education (knowledge), basically, is much less than 50 years ago (p.14). He summarizes,

The general trend of the past century, peaking in '68, was a steady expansion of mass education and an explosion of consciousness. The general trend of the post-'68 years is a steady relative decline in higher education, and simultaneously an unprecedented explosion of information resulting from the formation of cyberspace and from the proliferation of media. Since '68, the content of knowledge has enormously increased and has materialized in technology, increasing the general intellect's productivity, but simultaneously jeopardizing the very conditions of consciousness [...] the expansion of the infosphere has forced the acceleration of the mental reaction to info nervous stimulation. But the critical mind is unable to function in conditions of info-nervous saturation, while the rate of education and the quality of education have fallen and deteriorated [...] the outcome of these two trends (expansion of the knowledgeable and the collapse of the critical mind) is the fantastic ignorance

boom whose effects are exposed in the political history of the Trump age, and in the deterioration of the daily life of the majority of people worldwide. (p.19)

With the continuous bombardment of information dropping on us -the information consumers of the infosphere- to be able to absorb it and critique it properly requires time and the slowing of this onslaught. The problem is compounded by the fact that fake intruders enter this stream of information, and unless we have sophisticated and well-polished antennae, we may not be able to discern nor distinguish between the sound waves of fact and the static of fiction. Therefore, we have access to information, but little real time nor the tool to digest it properly nor select it accordingly -thus the explosion and political successes of fake news. As I mentioned, we absorb information more viscerally than intellectually.

In our History unit on the Crusades, we tried to construct knowledge together using a constructivist approach where both teacher and students attempted at learning together. As Biesta (2012) suggests, there is a difference between learning from a teacher (as if he or she were just a resource) with what is being learned from the teacher remains within the control of the student, and the experience of being taught which is when something enters our being from the outside and beyond the control of the learner (p.36). In our case, discussing Iraq, the topic introduced by me as a preamble to the study of the First Crusade, hopefully allowed many of the students to learn and construct new meaning and significance of all Crusades (be it Papal or Pentagonal) and discern information by attempting to first think about the motives

behind the narratives in order to then try to deconstruct them. Critical thinking requires not just the absorption of information, but sufficient time to digest and dissect it properly. It requires a Freirean dialogic dynamic that can lead to ‘conscientization’.

7.5 The Crisis of Authority in Education

What I have been discussing throughout this project, basically, has been the trajectory of capitalism from the moment it shifted from that of producers to consumers, through semicapitalism, surveillance capitalism, their effect on identity creation, and how it all may have led to a skewed sense of entitlement and even narcissism. Fundamentally, my point is that there has been a shift from an awareness and conscious adherence of a collective idea regarding the common good or commonweal, perhaps dictated by the verticality of a bygone society, to the contemporary championing of individualism – the latter catering perfectly to personal projects and consumer culture. For example, this hyper individualism may explain the impasses that we often find in the crumbling of political engagement.

Even before the internet and the creation of virtual groups and social media, scholars were already discerning the societal shifts that began to erode politics and citizenry participation. With the erosion of clearly demarcated political advocacy groups, identifiable and practical ideologies to drive them, we could say that contemporary society has been suffering from what Hannah Arendt (2006) called a crisis of authority. Consumer culture provides a fundamental context with which to update Hannah Arendt’s views of this crisis impacting all spheres of public life. Using

her definitions of authority of what constitutes the private, social and public spheres of life, that were once clearly demarcated, I have been arguing that consumer culture is the new private, social and public that are all meshed together aggravating this crisis. Arendt (2006) more specifically argued that the social swallowed both the public and the private, prioritizing 'behaviour' or an economy of survival (consumption) as the principle value and motor for both.

Arendt believed that the erosion of authority in the Western World resulted in the breakdown of traditional foundations of knowledge (Arendt, 2006). She stated that this erosion reduced the adult's ability to shelter the child from the adult world. I suggest that consumer culture today has been laying siege on the adult's authority by erasing the divisions between the private, social and public spheres of society that Arendt believed was supposed to protect education which she described as the bringing of the young into the world. For Arendt (2006), authority meant a foundation or building block from which societies construct themselves and from where they are able to progress. It was based on the expected adherence to a sense of a collective legacy greater than us.

The issue we have with authority today is that we confuse it with power and violence, since it always demands obedience. For Arendt, authority was not meant to be coercive. It was meant to be consensual in its preservation of a foundation as the starting point for progress. As Arendt (2006) explained:

The authoritarian relation between the one who commands and the one who obeys rests neither on common reason nor on the power of the one who commands. It depends upon the consensus and that what they have in common is the hierarchy itself, whose rightness and legitimacy both recognize and where both have their predetermined stable place. (p. 93)

Arendt believed that progress and modernity could not be achieved in a social vacuum, with no sense of legacy nor tradition to critique. This loss of a sense of legacy and foundation, she believed, has resulted in a crisis of authority.

Although Arendt wrote these thoughts over sixty years ago, they are still relevant today as universal philosophical posits that can be used to analyze any historical epoch that recognizes itself as being in a crisis. Authority for Arendt (2006) fundamentally revolves around adult responsibility for the world. For example, the role of school and education, she believed, is to prepare children for this world, while at the same time protect them from it. The crisis of authority is the result of the wavering of these roles and the abdication of adult responsibility for the private, social and public spheres of life. To what is the adult conceding to? I believe it is the societal structures imposed by the market and consumer culture.

In order to understand where and how this crisis of authority today occurs and how consumer culture may be its main aggravate, we must understand Arendt's distinctions between what she considered to be the private, social, and public spheres. Arendt (1998) describes that for the ancient Greeks, the private sphere was where the family was structured to be together for survival, both emotionally and physically, as an

economic household unit with its functionalist hierarchies and completely detached from the social and public spheres (pp.29-30). It was meant to protect both child and adult from the world and was not meant to be socially active nor the space for politics. The public sphere, on the other hand, was the very essence of freedom. It meant to be free of this more static, restrained, functionalist and hierarchical realm of the private. In the polis or city (hence the word politics), one was supposed to be 'neither ruler nor ruled', but rather to be seen, heard as well as to see and hear open debates around issues pertaining to the common good. This was the ancient Greek expectation when men of equal stature who were citizens and not slaves could debate and determine their perception of the common good and it was in this context that the idea of democracy was born. It was in the polis, therefore, the only truly free venue for politics to build the world. Change and progress were meant to happen through politics, in the public sphere. Regarding the social sphere, Arendt (1998) said that the emergence of the social, which is neither private nor public, is a relatively new phenomenon whose origin coincides with the emergence of the modern age. It is the space that resulted from an increasing gap between the private and the public and where we are neither in the hearth of the family home nor in the creation of the world through politics. In a sense, it is the leisure time not in the home but an innocuous space between the two world-building spheres of private and public life. But is it that innocuous?

Arendt (1998) warned that in modern times the private economic sphere of the domos that 'houses' the family would slowly be coopted by social economics. With the

rise of society, that is, the rise of the household economic activities to the public realm, housekeeping and all the matters pertaining formerly to the private sphere of the family would become a collective concern in the modern world with the two realms constantly flowing into each other. The result is the blurring of the old borderline between private and public, changing almost beyond recognition the meaning of the two terms. Arendt added that it is a striking coincidence the rise of society with the decline of the family, indicating clearly that what actually took place was the absorption of the family unit into corresponding social groups (p.29).

These groups, in a sense, replaced the family, and instead of a single head of this new household, these groups are led by the despotic rule of the numbers of its members, the natural strength of the common interest and one unanimous opinion representing the common interest and the right opinion. With mass society, these groups have now been absorbed into one society. The social embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength (Arendt, 1998, p.41). Moreover, it is the expansion of the social that has eroded the authority of both the private and public spheres. The consequences in the political realm, Arendt (1998) believed, is that the larger the population in any given body politic, the more likely it will be the social rather than the political that constitutes the public realm (p.43).

I would argue that today the divisions between the three distinct spheres of the private, social and public have been erased by consumer culture and through the all-encompassing sphere of the social. I believe that the new public, rather than being

political has been greatly commodified and dictated by the marketplace and the invisible hands of its powerbrokers. Economics has swallowed up politics making it increasingly susceptible to the narratives of consumer capitalism. It is not politics that drive economics today, but it is economic interest that seems to be driving politics. Governance has become a commodity prize for the highest bidder. Arguably, the result is a severe crisis of authority also of the state. Authority designates the rules of engagement. With the rules of engagement, you create politics and with politics, advocacy and militancy. Without authority, it seems that you have disbandment. With disbandment, the tools at one's disposal for social changes are dulled greatly and society succumbs to the survival of the fittest.

But we may be unaware of this disbandment because of consumer culture. As Arendt (2006) writes, a consumer society “cannot possibly know how to take care of a world and the things which belong exclusively to the space of worldly appearances, because it's central attitude toward all objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches” (p.208). The erosion of authority seems to be in correlation with what I believe to be the emergence of a new and individualized form of ‘authority’, where personal interests supported by strong self-advocacy skills taught by consumerism, manage to override and impose themselves over the former foundational narrative of a collective consensus on what was considered to be of common interest. In simpler terms, it is what we can currently call an individual's increased sense of entitlement.

Consumer culture has entered the private home. It contests adult authority and responsibility entrusted to the raising of children. Consumer culture challenges the once-fully-private and independent sphere of parental authority. It is as if the markets are now raising and educating the child. In many ways it may be more difficult today for parents to have an autonomous and independent influence in the raising and educating of their children due to the incessant external influences of consumer culture and its values, that enter the home through television and all digital technologies. Do many parents appear to be succumbing to the dictates of market tyranny? Whereas we have examples of how overt authoritarianism (such as Fascism) was able to condition and control the public, social and private spheres of a citizen's life, it is ironic that consumer culture has become (in my opinion) equally as successful in penetrating the family unit -but much more covertly than any authoritarian state has ever managed. I remember a young Russian traveller on a train in Italy, in the summer of 1980, when I backpacked through Western Europe, discussing with an American backpacker about freedom. The statement that stood out for me as I listened to the conversation (in English, of course) was the Russian saying at the end, "At least *I* knew I was not free, because I could see the bars of my cell." Truly, the market comes across as benevolent and not dictatorial, but its effect on conditioning the consumer-citizen can be equally as powerful. Norris (2011) writes:

Some marketers argue that they are performing a public service by educating children [...] that marketers are part of the dramatic transformation of the

traditional family from an authoritarian parent-centred structure to a bi-directional relationship more democratically centred upon children's real needs and interests [...] According to these marketers, increasing one's ability to make consumer choices is the same as democratizing the family, and marketers are providing a service to society by spreading democracy [...] while some parents may ask for their kids' opinion, many others are simply overwhelmed by constant berating. (pp. 62-63)

Social media has been a very effective instrument of marketing and the site where the blurring of the private, public and social has been most prevalent. It is through social media that the social is omnipresent and the private exposed. It is also where the public is co-opted for it is being used as a tool to also penetrate politics. For example, we have presidents and prime ministers who tweet regularly and apps such as WhatsApp that have virtually organized whole online campaigns to help elect a Brazilian president in 2018. Even in Australia, the conservatives won against all predictions and polls and many blamed social media. It is a global phenomenon, especially in developed consumer capitalist 'democracies'. We are now in the brave new world of fake news and alternative reality. It is my opinion that politics have fallen within this social realm, that Arendt alluded to, marketed like any other product. We are consuming sound bites and images with little time, space nor opportunity for independent debate that have very little to do with politics per se. Election campaigns are today product launch advertisement campaigns that sell the commodity of politics,

a new and improved regime, through an individual symbol or code (the candidate), via their image and codes, like any other product.

As a consequence, we are reactive and not proactive, susceptible to visceral conclusions and outbursts, with a false sense of empowerment allotted us through social media. Of course, the problem isn't the tool, but how it is being used. The crisis of authority is such that even these can't be easily regulated. Our reinvigorated sense of individual authority is fomented by consumer culture and has evolved to the detriment of a common or collective source of authority based on a common sense of a foundation -and a common good. Today, I would argue, that the only communal sense of authority that has remained is civil authority, not the political nor private one. We do all agree to line up at a bus stop, at a bank teller and to wait our turn. But we agree little on what else is sacrosanct -which is fine, but at what expense? Many will argue that it is our new freedom. But it may be a Tower of Babel freedom -we are free to clamour, complain, criticize and be as we wish. We are listening but are not always hearing nor understanding one another.

Thus, with consumer culture we are content to relegate politics to the screen. Arendt (1998) believed that the phenomenon of conformism is characteristic of the last stage of this modern development. She said that "behaviour has replaced action as the foremost mode of human relationship" (p.41). Truly, as customers and clients we behave and feel free. Our uniformed individualism, constructed through consumer society, allows us to feel that we are not ruled by anyone but live in completely free

societies. But do we? Arendt (1998) wrote, “the rule by nobody is not necessarily no-rule; it may indeed, under certain circumstances, even turn out to be one of its cruelest and more tyrannical versions” (p.40). It seems to be the case, therefore, that the education of the citizen has been replaced by the creation of the consumer. As mentioned, the crisis of authority has also spilled over onto an educational system that often undermines the authority of the teacher’s professional judgement through Board bureaucracies that curtail it in favour of keeping the peace with parents, in typical public relations fashion. This dynamic is clearly understood by those students who feel they can contest a teacher’s role.

7.5.1 ‘Get Off Your High Horse, Sir!’

During my Grade 10 Civics & Career Studies class that I taught in 2002 at an all-girls’ high school, also at the Toronto Catholic District School Board (TCDSB), and again, as a non-certified teacher with a letter of permission from the Ontario Ministry of Education, I encountered an interesting episode that challenged my perception and sense of my adult responsibility and authority as the teacher in the room. I was both an inexperienced teacher and an experienced adult, at the age of 42. The incidence was nothing more than a particular student’s comment on what I said. I don’t quite recall the context nor circumstances around it, but I do remember that I may have explained, requested, perhaps in a lecture-style way, something around self-control, respect and/or some kind of adherence to expected behaviour. Probably I was trying to get a

handful of students to focus and not interrupt. What I do recall was one student's response to me, 'get off your high horse, sir!'

At that time, I did not know what the expression meant and was taken aback by it. I understood it was a criticism around what I had said, perhaps more about how I said it rather than, maybe, the content itself. This incident happened between February and June of 2002, for I was brought in as a Long-Term Occasional teacher to fill in for a teacher on maternity leave. I had just returned from Brazil on September of 2001, where I lived for seven years, running my wholesale tour operating business. As a tour operator during those years, I had plenty of experience with teenagers in my programming and travelling as their escort for month-long summer tours to Europe, with 60 or more Brazilian high school students at a time (with the obvious accompaniment of at least five other teachers). Although the circumstances of a tour are very different than those of a classroom, and the students were very different from both cultural and socio-economic perspectives, for me, this student's comment was a first. I was being judged by someone much younger whom I was mandated to teach. I remember she didn't do it in a malicious, angry, nor necessarily condescending way, but in a very relaxed, matter-of-fact way -as if from an adult.

As the teacher I felt it my place to teach, orient, mentor, share my thoughts and experiences around the subject matter. Being this a Civics class, perhaps my assumption and opportunity was not too far-fetched. Having not come in to teach this class since the beginning of the year, but only at mid-year in February, that could have

played as a factor since I was still establishing a rapport with the students. It could have been for all sorts of reasons. My style, words, demeanour towards the class, in her mind perhaps, I may have come across as arrogant. Clearly, her view of the teacher (adult) and student (teenager) rapport was supposed to be one of equality, a two-way street where the authority of the teacher should be made irrelevant, and thus erased. The irony is that my teaching style is not at all authoritarian, nor am I what students consider a strict or tough teacher. As per my temperament, I am always dialogic, sometimes to an extreme, and verbose for sure. Perhaps that verbosity is what triggered my student. The main issue, however, is that regardless of the reasons for the student's directive to me, my authority during that particular episode was questioned. It did not matter that I was the teacher. It was admirable that the student felt comfortable to throw the slight criticism, but also significant, for it levelled the two of us.

The risk here with episodes such as these, is that with the erasure of this authority, we also erase the adult-teacher in the room and we weaken the adult's responsibility and effectiveness in protecting the child, which brings us back to Arendt (2006). Her insight regarding the crisis of education, already visible when she wrote about it in 1954/2006, is very telling. As she says:

There is of course a connection between the loss of authority in public and political life and in the private pre-political realms of the family and the school. The more radical the distrust of authority becomes in the public sphere, the greater the probability naturally becomes that the private sphere will not remain inviolate. (p. 187)

In this particular incident with my Civics Class student, Arendt (2006) would have witnessed this distrust of authority based on how this particular student dismissed it from my position and role as a teacher. Specifically, with regards to education and the loss of authority, Arendt (2006) logically, would not blame my student (as shouldn't I):

In education [...] there can be no such ambiguity in regard to the present-day loss of authority. Children cannot throw off educational authority; as though they were in a position of oppression by an adult majority -even though this absurdity of treating children as an oppressed minority in need of liberation has been tried out in modern educational practice. Authority has been discarded by the adults, and this can only mean one thing: that the adults refuse to assume responsibility for the world into which they have brought their children. (p.187)

I believe that this student reacted according to this void of adult responsibility which, perhaps, she was probably accustomed to from her public and private spheres of her life. The student was simply comfortable in exercising her sense of equality and empowerment in the classroom with the teacher, as if she were with a friend, or at home. Examples such as these inform me how it is the mixing of the public, social and private spheres that reduce the individual to behave equally in public as they do in private, with little discernment of the difference. Consequently, the notion or idea of adult authority becomes compromised. It is perfect fertile land for consumer culture.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion - Refounding Belonging

My dissertation charts out the societal and cultural paradigm shifts of how we have come to relate to one another and how much current social cultures have pried us away from a sense of a common good and collective aspirations. Following capitalism's trajectory from that of ascetic producers to late capitalism consumers, our societal culture has also shifted. Like a pendulum, we have swung, perhaps, from the extremes of the previous relegation of the individual, where one adhered to an overtly controlling external group, clan, familial and societal expectations and controls, to an age of individualism promotion and individuation. As I have argued, consumer capitalism has promoted this, by stealthily wedging separations and fomenting many artificial distinctions, as if it were a form of *divide et impera*. Although most of us agree that the protection of the rights of the individual is sacrosanct and a huge achievement in contemporary society, my argument is that consumer culture has taken full advantage of this and has distorted it for the market, by isolating our energies and desire, as Berardi (2009, p.96) describes it, away from social and political consciousness and discernment from one another and our common good. It promotes individuations.

It seems to me, that this materialistic wedge has resulted in new solitudes and isolation by directing our attention to our pursuit of happiness solely *in our own space* within the marketplace. As cited in this project, Bauman, Baudrillard, Norris, Barber, Berardi and others have argued that consumer culture helps perpetuate this isolationism in order to replace this general malaise with the purchasing of objects, the

pursuit of individual projects, simulation and identity creation based, often, on superficial and shallow values and criteria advertised in today's infosphere. As I have argued, consumer culture has promoted an exacerbated (perhaps illusory) sense of individualistic freedom frequently at the expense of a feeling of belonging to a commonweal, common good, common goal, and a sense of group, community, or greater society. In other words, our civilization has changed from being conceptually civilian to now being predominantly and culturally economic. As I have discussed in Chapter Six, even labour has hitched a ride on the consumerist-cultural bandwagon. Labour struggles have been co-opted by a culture that has erased the socio-cultural, and therefore psychological-emotional distinctions between those with the capital and the means of production, and those who only had their labour to offer. As Berardi (2009) has pointed out in so many words, we now, unwittingly, self-exploit. Popular struggles have lost their point of reference, focus and even purpose.

Therefore, this social and cultural change that has ensued from the capitalism of the producers to that of consumers, has subtly been tearing us away from the notion that there is a greater society out there above and beyond our own harvest of individual self-projects that consumer culture irrigates daily. It is as if consumer society has made us orphans of the larger social family, whose current macro-economic and productive structures have resulted, for example, in our often not even knowing who we have as immediate physical neighbours. In large cities, this is very common. The socio-economic structures of contemporary society make us commute our bodies and minds

far away from where we actually live and from a true physical sense of place, community and belonging. Our work is elsewhere, our attention is elsewhere and volatile to the whims and winds of unstable labour markets. In large urban centres, and with our 'soul at work', to use Berardi's (2009) term, we spend our workday and leisure times connected to productivity and it rarely has anything to do with where we physically live. A sense of community, as a consequence, has disappeared. In large cities, it rarely exists spontaneously, unless in impoverished areas around the world where interdependence, solidarity and collaboration within communities are still to be found as a means for survival. But then again, these communities do not have the means for high consumption and are excluded from consumer capitalism and its culture. Their economic exclusion makes them look to one another. This can be easily witnessed in any large urban centre in the so-called developing and under-developed world, as well as in many pockets of our so-called inner-cities.

As a teacher, by means of this project, I wanted to register that there has been a substantial spill-over effect of this change towards individualism and individuation into education. It has caused a shift with regards to the purpose of school and teaching, as well as what is considered to be educational attainment. Throughout my project, I have argued that the culprit has been the hyper-commodification of life, including that among individuals and their relationships to one another. Capitalism's materialistic values have permeated our sense of identity and of being. It has tended to exalt the me over the us. In education, as Di Paolantonio (2019) points out, learning and teaching

often follow the narratives of psychology, as an individualizing cerebral and cognitive enterprise, rather than that of group interaction and co-operative learning. Efforts are made to improve the *individual* learner, often at the behest of collaborative interdependent learning, as if learning and educational attainment occur in isolation and solely for the individual. Learning is seen often as a solitary grooming endeavor to render the student a productive asset for society. It is not often viewed as the result of collective discovery of things that cannot be quantified. Already in 2001, a comprehensive study of the effects of globalization on educational policies demonstrated this. Henry et al. (2001) explains:

In education, the new human capital approach is regarded as much an individual benefit as a social one. Earlier educational policy wisdom viewed education as a social good which justified increasing funding. Redefining education as an individual good justified introducing the principal of ‘user pays’ in education [...] Neoliberal ideology has introduced quasi-market approaches and new post-bureaucratic state educational systems [...] reform in the public sector saw structures and practices of departments and agencies transformed under the rubric of ‘corporate managerialism’ [...]. (pp. 30-31)

Moreover, the crisis of authority in education that I discuss regarding teachers and local school administrators (who are often unable to exercise more autonomously their professional judgements) is also reiterated by Henry’s et al. (2001) study. He (2001) says, “the effects of globalization upon the administrative structures of nation-states, have made educational policy production too important for educators and as a result educational policy framing occurs at a higher level” (p.31). He (2001) also adds:

Simultaneous with this is a squeezing of power from the middle [...] The upshot, they suggest, is a simultaneous centralization and devolution of authority that squeezes power from middle-levels of educational administration and redistributes it upward to more central states and downward to individual schools and reform groups. Politicians have sought to reassert control over the bureaucracy and the setting of policy agendas. The result: policy objectives become narrower, are set at a higher level, whilst responsibility for their achievement is handed off to policy practitioners at the point where the service is delivered. Managerialism has also concentrated on achieving more across-government policy coherence, an important factor in the human capital interpretation of education [...] Broad policy settings have been framed at a higher level and in the process often exclude professional educational advice. (pp. 31-32)

As I have discussed since the outset, the impression that educators such as myself have is that the traditional concept of *in loco parentis*, as per Ontario's Education Act of the past (which allowed for a parent-like form of adult responsibility and authority) has been replaced subtly by the market/consumer culture and its indirect reframing of the roles of teachers as the *de facto* service providers rather than the 'parents in school'. *In loco parentis* implies strong central authority of educational institutions, stating that teachers and schools take the role of parents when the students are placed under their care. Therefore, teachers and schools acting as responsible parents become liable for foreseeable injuries, and these injuries include mental illness. The problem today is that the teacher and schools remain liable and

accountable but are unable to exert the authority to justify this, as I discussed in Chapter Seven.

The shackling of teachers' discretionary powers is also having the effect of increasingly pushing parents and teachers apart within the service provider-consumer spectrum. As I have discussed in this dissertation, an increasing wedge between many parents, their children (our 'education consumers' by the consumer culture paradigm) and the education system seem to have been slowly pushed by this new culture. A new managerialism adopted by the school boards (in a sense, education's 'public relations' department) often pits teachers (the service providers), *opposite* to principals and administrators as well.³¹

This situation was anticipated by Arendt (2006) and her views on the 'crisis of authority' in modern societies. This crisis, in my view, is part and parcel with our contemporary social culture of blaming, deflection and the knee-jerk action and reaction by the delegation of responsibility to the other, always away from oneself, by pointing at an individual, system or institution. For example, with the Ontario Conservative government under Doug Ford, discussions have been taking place

³¹ The policies on education of the Mike Harris government in Ontario (1995-2002) split administrators and teachers that used to belong to the same union. The passage of Bill 160 was the cause of a huge teacher strike that resulted in the government's removal of principals and vice principals from the Ontario Teacher's Federation (OTF) to which they had belonged together with the teachers. Thus, administrators fell completely within the control of the ministry, to this day.

regarding the re-training of teachers on how to teach mathematics.³² Although this is a legitimate idea, my point is that it completely delegates the onus away from the system and points the finger at the individual teacher. It is unable to culturally fathom the idea that, perhaps, those responsible for the problem of this drop in the scores are all of us players in the system, from government policy all the way to the student, and more importantly, a problem generated by the structure of the system itself. The main concern that the government is having is resultant from Canada's drop in international scores and ranking of mathematics levels between 2003 and 2012, although it has remained stable ever since.³³ The fact that statistical data is being taken in the area of Mathematics (as opposed to other subjects) also corroborates our argument that education has become strictly functionalist, emphasising economic productivity over a more holistic philosophy around education.

What needs to be addressed is the overall system and not just blame the teacher. Rather, the government must start at the top, from engaging with the Faculties of

³² See the Globe and Mail online article of September 12, 2018 <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-report-calls-for-standardized-math-course-for-all-student-teachers-in/>; Also see CBC online news for September 04, 2018 at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/discovery-math-ontario-schools-fundamentals-1.4810612>; See the Globe and Mail online news of August 28, 2018, at <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/article-ontario-pushes-for-more-teacher-training-as-math-score-hits-new-low/>.

³³ The Council of Ministers of Education, Canada (CMEC), in their publication of 2015, based on the OECD-PISA Study of 2015 stated, "In mathematics, after a significant decline between 2003 and 2012, the performance of Canadian students in mathematics remained unchanged between 2012 and 2015. On average across OECD countries, mathematics performance also remained broadly stable over the 2012 to 2015 period, although changes in performance were observed in some of the 61 countries that participated in both cycles. Mathematics performance increased on a statistically significant basis in 10 countries and decreased in 12, with no statistically significant changes observed in the remaining countries." (CMEC Report, p. 39)

Education, all the way to investing in smaller classrooms, specialized teachers, including Mathematics graduates, for example, from the universities as teachers of Mathematics. Instead, at the elementary school level, our Ministry of Education prefers to save money through splitting classroom grades, when the numbers are low, and putting teachers to teach everything, regardless of their specializations. The system doesn't invest in the human component as much as it should. To the contrary, governments, like the current Ford Government, have begun huge budgetary cutbacks in education.³⁴

This individuation of the self, as I have argued, has isolated and even marginalized us to the point where social compensation, more often than not, is subconsciously paid in the form of misplaced entitlements and even narcissisms. The end result, it seems, is a confused state of affairs for a society that simulates togetherness but that is actually living a Tower of Babel syndrome. As I mentioned, today's consumer society socially and culturally co-opts all social classes. As I have also argued, this explains the current loss of party (political) ideology and a clearer notion of social and cultural exclusions that one may have been aware of before. The desire to consume and what Berardi (2009) aptly expressed as the soul at work helps to explain this socio-political phenomenon. Thus, the awareness of exclusion is today purely

³⁴ For media coverage of the Ford Government's intent to overhaul Ontario's education, see local media articles from the CBC, at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-teachers-strike-education-funding-increase-cuts-1.5462332>; <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ontario-education-spending-gap-1.6047233>; Chatelaine Magazine, <https://www.chatelaine.com/news/doug-ford-education-changes-ontario-cuts/> and others.

economic and metabolized as an individuated personal failure and no longer conceived as structural, and thus no longer politically-activated. As Arendt (2006) had already remarked in the 1950s:

There, however, is an important difference between the earlier stages of society and mass society with respect to the situation of the individual. As long as society itself was restricted to certain classes of the population, the individual's chances for survival against its pressures were rather good; they lay in the simultaneous presence within the population of other non-society strata into which the individual could escape, and one reason why these individuals so frequently ended by joining revolutionary parties was that they discovered in those who were not admitted to society certain traits of humanity which had become extinct in society. (pp.196-197)

The point here is not to imply that it was better before when social classes were culturally more marked as well as economically more visible, but that today's mass society has assimilated and de-fanged previous social struggles by co-opting their culture into consumer culture. As everything becomes a consumable, everything becomes short-lived -a form of calculated obsolescence, including of social struggles. As Arendt (2006) explained, "mass' society is now also mass culture, because a good part of the despair of individuals under the conditions of mass society is due to the fact that these avenues of escape are now closed because society has incorporated all strata of the population" (p.197).

Mass culture is consumer culture, and as such, it makes everything consumable and disposable. Consumer culture is unable to make culture outside immediate

consumption, thus projecting short-sightedness and volatility. Again, Arendt (2006) wrote:

Art and culture have become 'entertainment' and meant to be used up like any other consumable commodity, and not to be preserved or kept [...] so the need for entertainment has begun to threaten the cultural world [...] Culture relates to objects and is a phenomenon of the world; entertainment relates to people and is a phenomenon of life. An object is cultural to the extent that it can endure; its durability is the very opposite of functionality, which is the quality which makes it disappear again from the phenomenal world by being used and used up [...] Culture is being threatened when all worldly objects and things, produced by the present or the past, are treated as mere functions for the life process of society, as though they are there only to fulfill some need, and for this functionalization it is almost irrelevant whether the needs in question are of a high or low order. (pp. 202-205)

To illustrate Arendt's point, we could say that cathedrals, for example, were built for something much greater than simple functionality. Today's office towers are not. They are built to serve capital gain. Previous constructions before capitalism, as an analogy, demonstrate how culture existed to produce something bigger and longer-lasting than ourselves -a non-consumable or something eternal that should last for centuries, or for even posthumous contemplation -as the ancient Egyptians and their pyramids can attest. This non-consumable culture was meant to take us outside of our individuated functionalist consumable selves and project us into a concept or sense of belonging to an eternal, of legacy, or as Arendt (2006) described, a foundation. Today, we are propped up to be immediate consumers, or functional vessels of immediate consumable

gratification for instant pleasures. Metaphorically, today much of our lives are built within drywalls, hollow, easily punctured, removable and susceptible to the elements and whims of what Bauman calls our liquid society. We are no longer housed nor protected by the eternity of stone masonry.

Thus, mass society and mass consumer culture do not stimulate sustained admiration of something outside of our own individual needs, unlike art, for example, that has traditionally managed to bring us outside functionality and time restraints. As Arendt (2006) reiterates:

From the viewpoint of shared durability, artworks clearly are superior to all other things since they stay longer in the world than anything else, they are the worldliest of all things. Moreover, they are the only things without any function in the life process of society; strictly speaking, they are fabricated not for men, but for the world which is managed to outlast the lifespan of mortals, the coming and going of the generations. Not only are they not consumed like consumer goods and not used up like used objects; they are deliberately removed from the processes of consumption and usage and isolated against the sphere of human life necessities. This removal can be achieved in a great variety of ways; and only where it is done does culture, in the specific sense, come into being. (p. 206)

It should not surprise us then that art programs and curricula in our public-school systems have been continuously defunded over the course of the last decades, as per the rationale of the functionalist student-as-an-asset economic criteria of late

capitalism.³⁵ Neoliberal thought and policies have reduced art to the fringes of education, while exalting the sciences and mathematics. It's not to say that one is better than the other, but that the balance of what is valued in the curriculum has tilted to those subjects where careers and life purposes are more easily commodified.

As we are reminded by Arendt (2006):

Culture, word and concept, is Roman in origin. The word 'culture' derives from *colere* - to cultivate, to dwell, to take care of, to tend and preserve- and it relates primarily to the intercourse of man with nature in the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation. As such, it indicates an attitude of loving care and stands in sharp contrast to all efforts to subject nature to the domination of man. Hence it does not only apply to the tilling of soil but can also designate the 'cult' of the gods, the taking care of what properly belongs to them. (p. 208)

To cultivate culture requires patience and the relegation of immediate gratification - which is completely opposite to the ethos of consumer culture. It requires discernment of information that follows us in the infosphere. It requires a complete separation from us and its commodification. It requires a true choice to engage, and not one that is subliminally imposed upon us.

³⁵ For current media articles regarding the Ontario Ministry of Education cuts to the Arts budgets in Ontario's schools, under the current Doug Ford government, for example, see The Toronto Star at <https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2018/04/03/arts-education-squeezed-out-across-ontario-schools-new-report-says.html>; The CBC, at <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/tdsb-arts-funding-cuts-1.5414621>; The National Post, at <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/ontario-eliminates-indigenous-culture-fund-cuts-millions-for-the-arts>, as well as the general knowledge of how the arts are 'being squeezed out of schools,' see Forbes magazine article at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorrison/2019/04/09/how-the-arts-are-being-squeezed-out-of-schools/?sh=40b40461aaf4>

8.1 Me Versus Us

This autoethnography and its vignettes hopefully have revealed many of the changes and the times from when social culture had more of a collective narrative, to the much more individualistic consumer culture of today. From my personal experiences with my move between Brazil and Canada and my examples and descriptions of the no pets, no children allowed scenario on one end to the communal soccer ball and the 'vila' at the other, it is clear to me that when things or actions are commoditized or de-commoditized, human relationships and rapports change. The creation of a comfortable (noise-free) adult zone in that Avenue Road apartment building where we went to live when we first arrived in Toronto, separated children from adults. The 'community' soccer ball back in Brazil brought them together -as 'Dona' Ilda's preparation of the soccer field on which we played, attests. Perhaps consumer culture was already much more ingrained in North America at the time than in South America -thus my naïve commentary as a child about playing with toys as compared to playing with children. These are a few of my experiences as a young boy that revealed to me the existing differences when human activities are completely commoditized, versus not.

As a teacher, the vignettes that included my own students, their parents, and administrators, further accentuated these differences. The vignette 'Your Favourite Ice-Cream', for example, shows how when presented with a 'de-commoditized' context of how an object or action can be construed as something to be done together, how

much more valuable the object becomes. Students were able to spontaneously feel an added value to the ice cream, when presented as rare (consuming the ice-cream only on Sundays, rather than daily) and as being *better* than ‘more’, as long as it was consumed together. It wasn’t a commodity exchange, but a sharing of a moment that brought it beyond its simple consumption.

With both the vignettes ‘The Cool Running Shoes’ and ‘Urban II and Colin Powell’ I sought to show how the power of semiocapitalism and advertisement condition purchases, tastes, and opinions. At the same time, through a Freirean form of dialogue in the classroom, and when prompted to think critically about these two topics, my students were able to exercise critical thinking by revealing to themselves a form of conscientization on how they had previously absorbed a narrative subliminally-imposed from the outside, rather than constructed autonomously and consciously from within one’s own thinking. As I demonstrate, without critical thinking, the marketplace can sell a war as easily as it does a running shoe.

The vignette ‘Hiding Behind the Zoom Screen’ is indicative of surveillance capitalism and the trichotomies created online between the private, public, and social. We realize that by the same token that individuals can present and ‘sell’ themselves through social media exposures and simulations -when these are controlled and curated by the person- the same person prefers to hide behind a black screen in anonymity when the alternative is the real and raw exposure of the private home and the real true person. At the same time, this online teaching experience reveals how

important it is to preserve one's privacy and sense of autonomy at all costs, even if it means not adhering to the teacher's request to show oneself on the screen.

The vignettes 'The Reference Letter' and 'I Failed Grade Four' are meant to juxtapose one another and reveal a paradigm shift of attitudes with regards to entitlement. With my experience in having written final exams at the age of nine, to subsequently failing one of them and thus repeating the year (had I not returned to Canada), we see the culture of responsibility and consequence of a time when issues of 'self-esteem' were not considered as important as the rigour of educational attainment. With the 'reference letter' story, we see the reverse situation, with entitlement void of responsibility. Yet, with the other vignette 'Why Can't I Hold My Child Back?', when a parent wants to teach her child that responsibility, effort and that educational attainment go hand-in-hand, suggesting that 'passing' should not be a guarantee, then the system comes in and overrides the parent for the sake of bureaucracy (and perhaps administrative costs). With consumer culture, the 'conveyor belt' bureaucracy of the Ministry, school boards and the 'consumption' of education override pedagogy and learning.

The story 'Sir, Why do We Need to Know This?' shows the student's understanding of what is important and practical to study, rather than simply the acquisition of knowledge. It is reflective of today's functionalist-practical 'skills-oriented' approach to education, often dismissive of a more holistic philosophy of learning and content, such as the government cut-backs of the arts demonstrate. Many

students have metabolized and normalized this emphasis on the purpose of education strictly on social-economic terms. This episode also reinforces the questioning of authority, be it the curriculum (as in this case), or of the educator, as the 'Get off Your High Horse, Sir!' vignette illustrates.

All of these stories demonstrate an evident shift of expectations and attitudes from a time when things were not as questioned and consequences accepted - regardless how unfair or harsh they may have been- to today when we are able to question, blame and challenge everything around us. Consumer culture has enabled us to self-advocate to the point where even if warranted or not, becomes irrelevant. Consequently, the result is that we may have lost much of our prior notion of collectivity, the group, and the common good.

8.2 Next Steps

It is my hope that this dissertation can forge further investigation within the discipline of Cultural Studies. Perhaps what could be looked at are the cultural and societal effects upon the individual during the different stages of capitalism as analyzed from a decade-by-decade basis. What would have constituted a sense of individualism and individuation back in the 1940s, 1950s, and so forth? What was the individual's sense of self? Of his or her identity? What were his or her expectations of society? What were society's expectations of him or her? What societal pressures were exerted upon his or her sense of purpose and identity? How are these conditions and societal pressures compared to today? How were relationships and rapports -including

those in education and schools- affected and determined? Also, it would be fascinating to undertake a more longitudinal research project that would compare today's perceptions and beliefs around education to those of decades ago, including the changes in access to schooling. What constituted *educere* versus *educare* from the past decades? How do they compare?

Specifically, one could unpack attitudes or 'values' around educational attainment in Ontario, for example, in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, by analyzing school board polity and policies that most likely reflected the values and beliefs of the time. Has there been a continuum in the liberalization of education and educational attainment expectations and beliefs on behalf, supposedly, of the individual student and away from a general societal view of education? In Ontario, for example, from the *open concept classroom* of the mid-1970s, to today's emphasis on standardized testing, what effect have these policy changes had on educational attainment results?

These questions would be part of a much larger historical-longitudinal study that could involve research on educational policy in general, or specific to a region. It could also include interviews with individuals who went to school during different decades, and their opinions on what constituted success and, more to the point, *from where* did they feel came the pressures upon their sense or views of success. Very important in the comparisons would be the accessibility to education of the general public. How many went to school and to what levels? If it was more elitist then than now, does this correlate with the changes in the curriculum and the emphasis and the

purposes of schooling altogether? Another possibility would be the narrowing down of such historical-longitudinal research, such as an analysis of what constituted entitlement in the past, as compared to today. How do we compare the private, public, and social of the past decades to today's? There are many possibilities for historical-longitudinal research that could target some of the specific subtopics or themes discussed in this project.

8.3 The Re-Foundation of Belonging

In conclusion, I invite educators and parents to ponder the idea that unless we are able to re-discover our civil, communal and public selves over our individualistic consumer selves, we will have lost our children to the whims of the invisible and yet fisted hand of the corporate marketplace. For that, we must free ourselves from the grasp of consumer culture and rehabilitate our sense of being, identity and belonging, that is not only individuated, but more collective, not functionalist but emotional, humanistic and timeless. We must re-establish the human scale to all that we do. We are a social species who need constant reaffirmation, love, and a sense of solidarity and care from our fellow human beings. The solitude and loneliness that often are bequeathed upon us by consumerism cannot be mitigated by objects nor simulation, nor through manufactured identities and personas. They require our natural human and spontaneous vulnerabilities and not entitlement fortifications -not commodities. They require honesty and not public relations. We must re-discover our group and

collective selves, not as one that is isolated and pursuant only of its own group goals, but one that can link and find commonality with other groups and communities.

My elderly 95-year-old father, who has gone through much and has seen a lot during his lifetime, has always said to me, “poverty is a blessing.” Today it sounds very alien to our sensitivities, especially as North Americans. But I think I know exactly what he means. It grounds you. It gives you the mindset of gratitude for all of life’s gifts, regardless how little or trivial they may appear. That ice cream sundae consumed on Sunday, as compared to daily, is the ‘poverty’ that he is talking about. It gives us that gratitude that renders us happy and human. When you have little, your assets become your family, neighbours and friends. You are grateful and appreciative. You are not entitled but humbled at what you do have, have achieved and have been given. It allows you to give, to help, for you *can* understand need, empathy and solidarity, since you have lived these needs yourself. You understand that survival requires being with your fellow human, not in isolation. We need to work on re-inventing community. With community comes action. We need to re-discover these. Otherwise, we will have compromised our future as a civilization -with *civis* or civil being the operative root word. As Berardi (2009) writes:

Political action must happen therefore according to modalities analogous to a therapeutic intervention. Political action and therapy both need to start from the obsessive loci of desire. Their task is to refocus our attention on deterritorializing points of attraction, so that new investments of desire become

possible, which will be autonomous from competition, acquisition, possession, and accumulation. (p.140)

I do believe that the push back has begun. The new generations are quite aware of this soul at work that the previous generation had absorbed. They are establishing a much healthier balance between work, careers and the enjoyment of life's pleasures. This generation is also quite aware of the ravages that consumer culture is causing the environment and on climate change. They know that the current socio-economic system is not sustainable. They also know that for the first time in generations, they will have less in material wealth and social guarantees than their parents. In fact, many are currently dependent upon the parental accumulated reserves from the previous producer stage of capitalism that their parents and grandparents belonged to. The new generations will have to change society for their own social and economic survival. Perhaps it is a question of time when the current full cycle of society and history will have rotated its complete spin, if we are to believe in the insights of the seventeenth century Neapolitan scholar and historian Giambattista Vico (2013), and that we will arrive at the original point of departure³⁷, a *res publica* where we will be able to reach

³⁷ There have been philosophers, such as Gianbattista Vico (1668-1744) that describe history as cyclical. "Vico also emphasizes the cyclical feature of historical development. Society progresses towards perfection, but without reaching it (thus history is 'ideal'), interrupted as it is by a break or return (*ricorso*) to a relatively more primitive condition. Out of this reversal, history begins its course anew, albeit from the irreversibly higher point to which it has already attained. Vico observes that in the latter part of the age of men (manifest in the institutions and customs of medieval feudalism) the 'barbarism' which marks the first stages of civil society returns as a 'civil disease' to corrupt the body politic from within. This development is marked by the decline of popular commonwealths into bureaucratic monarchies, and, by the force of unrestrained passions, the return of corrupt manners which had characterized the earlier societies of gods and heroes. Out of this 'second barbarism,' however, either through the appearance of wise legislators, the rise of the fittest, or the last vestiges of civilization, society returns to the 'primitive simplicity of the first world of peoples,' and individuals are again 'religious, truthful, and faithful'." (Stanford University's Online Encyclopedia of Philosophy, at <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/vico/>)

out and look at each other for who we really are, and no longer through the dark shaded lenses of a pair of Gucci sunglasses.

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Appendix



Cartoon by Daryl Cagle, April 21, 2010