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## **From passionate labour to compassionate work. Cultural co-ops, DWYL and social change.**

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The example of work in the cultural sector illustrates how passion and love for one's work often go hand in hand with rather unlovable working conditions. Studies show that cultural workers very often gain fulfilment and pleasure from parts of their work, while at the same time experiencing precariousness, high work pressure, stress, anxiety and individualisation (eg McRobbie 2002, 2015, 2010, Hope and Richards 2015, Ross 2000). But the desire for lovable work is not unique to the cultural industries. Cederström and Fleming (2012, 4) argue that the portrayal of labour as primary means for self-fulfilment and a source of fun and pleasure is a key feature of modern managerialism. Similarly, Miya Tokumitsu (2014) has recently critiqued the emergence of do what you love (DWYL) as the "unofficial work mantra for our time", which suggests, that "labour is not something one does for compensation, but an act of self-love".

Work as productive activity, as creative engagement with the world around us making use of human skills and capacities, can indeed be a genuine source of enjoyment and accomplishment. But the hope for loveable work clashes with the realities of capitalist labour. Examples of collapsing factory buildings, worker suicides, rising levels of burnout, stress, anxiety and depression show that "contemporary work is nothing like a love relationship" (Fleming 2015, 47). In this context DWYL offers an "uplifting piece of advice" (Tokumitsu 2014) that suggests it is possible to escape the dark side of work by focussing on one's passions and turning them into a career.

The desire for loveable work is not new. Observing the detrimental effects of capitalist labour on the minds and bodies of workers, 19<sup>th</sup> century utopian thinkers from Charles Fourier to Robert Owen and William Morris placed pleasurable work at the centre of the social alternatives they were envisioning. But unlike DWYL all of them described the realisation of gratifying work as a collective, not an individual pursuit. Thinking about how to realise lovable work for everyone Charles Fourier asked "Morality teaches us to love work: let it know, then, how to render work lovable"

This paper explores the prospects of rendering work loveable. It aims to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between work and pleasure, using the cultural sector as example. To do so I will first unpack the concept of passionate work, situating it within four possible ways of relating work and pleasure. I argue that DWYL is an ideology that, contrary to what it promises, limits the prospects of lovable work. In the second part of this paper I present findings from empirical research on worker co-operatives in the UK cultural industries. Considering the relation between work and pleasure in

cultural co-ops I explore how they might inspire and contribute to a movement for transforming the future of work.

### **On work and pleasure**

Attempting to provide answers to Fourier's quest of how to render work lovable, I will in the following explore how social theory and management studies have conceptualised the relation between work and pleasure. I identify four different approaches:<sup>1</sup> The first approach is the rhetoric of DWYL, which hails the power of passion as salvation from unfulfilling and exploited labour. This is contrasted with a second approach that suggests that pleasure needs to be sacrificed for the sake of a successful career and social status. A third approach, which can be found within anti-work narratives, posits work as necessarily painful and thus per definition separate from pleasure. Finally, I suggest a fourth approach that emphasises the need for systemic social change to sublimate the contradiction between work and pleasure.

#### *Salvation*

In the post-Fordist context loving one's work as a goal to aspire to has increasingly entered management textbooks, self-help guides and popular culture. We find motivational DWYL messages printed on pillowcases and t-shirts, painted on house walls or on framed posters in homes and offices alike (Tokumitsu 2014). Advice books tell the creative freelancer or entrepreneur to "Grow your sales, do what you love" (Qizilbash 2015), to "Fire your boss, do what you love and work better to live more" (Guillebeau 2015), to "Do what you love and change the world" (Zusak 2016), or to become a "productivity ninja" and to "Worry less, achieve more and love what you do" (Allcott 2015).

These examples illustrate the most recent surge of the DWYL discourse. But the shifting work ethic toward pleasurable work has been discussed and theorised for several decades. In 1987 Marsha Sinetar in her self-help book "Do What you Love and the Money will Follow" suggests strategies for how to find one's unique passions and use them to build a happy, successful and satisfying work life. She argued that money is likely to follow when doing what one loves because "our enjoyment predisposes us to create more and better works and enables other to see value in it" (Sinetar 1987, 125).

At a more conceptual level, in 1980 Alvin Toffler argued that the development of computer technologies would lead to an entirely new mode of production and thus to profound social, political, cultural and psychological transformations. In the realm of work he not only predicted a rise of flexible employment, work from home - and famously the rise of prosumption - but also stressed that worker of the future will "resist working for money alone". In the same year Jacques Donzelot noted the rise "of a new discourse about work, one that might be termed the search for 'pleasure in work'" (Donzelot 1980/1991, 251). Contrary

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction of approaches to relating work and pleasure is based on a typology of four ways of thinking introduced by Wolfgang Hofkirchner (2002, 2003): projectionism, reductionism dualism and dialectics.

to Toffler, he stressed that these discursive shifts do not indicate a transformation of the capitalist mode of production, but merely a change in the way people relate to their work. Berardi (2009, 96) argues that it was precisely the “absorption of creativity, desire, and individualistic, libertarian drives for self-realisation” that allowed capital to emerge renewed out of the economic crisis and social upheavals of the 1970s.

DWYL is the epitome of this hostile takeover of the desire for self-fulfillment and pleasure. In DWYL, work and pleasure become inextricably linked. It suggests doing a job that one loves and thus doing it with sufficient passion and pleasure will improve both, the quality of the work results and individual happiness and wellbeing. According to this narrative, the affective labour needed to turn one’s passion into a job one truly loves might be unpaid and stressful, but ultimately ‘worth it’. The experience of pleasure is not merely a welcome addition to, but a pre-condition for success at work. Questions of pay, working hours and social security assume a secondary place.

DWYL is appealing partly because it promises liberation from labour. It promises to replace alienated toil with a fulfilling work life. The message sounds both empowering and egalitarian: All it supposedly takes is to listen closely to one’s inner passions and turn them into a career. Everyone can do it. While the guarantee of a stable job and regular income has been lost for large parts of the population, DWYL serves as an inspirational alternative that keeps spirits up and hopes high. But DWYL is a trap. Its promises of liberation tie workers ever more relentlessly to a life that evolves around constant labour: labour that far beyond just doing one’s job includes the labour of finding work, the labour of self-improvement and self-management (see for example McRobbie 2015).

By mobilising the neoliberal dogma of self-help and individual responsibility, DWYL distracts from the need for structural change, shifting attention away from social problems to individual blame. DWYL oppresses by promising liberation, disempowers by celebrating empowerment and solidifies inequality by emphasising equal free choice. It is this dark side of love that Marx referred to when he described capital as “an animated monster which begins to ‘work’, as if its body were by love possessed” (Marx 1990, 302).

In DWYL, pleasure holds the power to eradicate labour’s alienating features, while making obsolete any struggles to challenge social power relations and improve working conditions for everyone. But, as Sophie Hope and Jenny Richards observe (2015, 133), “the post-capitalist utopia has not arrived, we are too busy working on improving our own self-image and portfolio careers, competing with peers rather than connecting with them”. In DWYL the relation between work and pleasure is such that pleasure is the starting point - a panacea for addressing all the ills of work under capitalism. It is individual pleasure for the sake of (better) work.

*Sacrifice*

The distinctiveness of DWYL as work ethic, and the specific way it relates work and pleasure, becomes even clearer when contrasted with some of the key features of an industrial work ethic. The work ethics of industrial capitalism Max Weber described in his seminal book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, preached “the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life” (Weber 2008, 18). Following Weber, Kathi Weeks (2011, 46) describes the industrial work ethics as a secular version of the protestant ethics in which the concept of social mobility replaces the hope for salvation in the afterlife. As Beradi (2009, 84) stresses, “the Fordist factory had no relation with pleasure”.

Weber explained how at an ideological level this constant drive for more work, money and growth shares the irrationalism of religious beliefs and stresses that “from the point of view of the happiness of, or utility to, the single individual, it appears as entirely transcendental and absolutely irrational” (18). This irrational suppression of enjoyment on which the industrial work rests, has also been stressed by Herbert Marcuse who argued that in capitalism “For the duration of work, which occupies practically the entire existence of the mature individual, pleasure is ‘suspended’ and pain prevails” (Marcuse 1955, 35).

Others have stressed that the subordination of pleasure under work does not stop when the workday ends and even during ‘free time’ pleasure remains subordinate to work. Theodor W. Adorno observed this encroaching of work upon free time in his analysis of astrology columns in the Los Angeles Times in 1952-3. He noted that these advice columns suggest a “division between work and pleasure, subjecting the latter to the former’s rule” (Adorno 1994, 105). Adorno argued that these columns recommend parties and other social events as a way to make acquaintances that might turn into business partners or in other ways could be beneficial for career advancement.

This observation can be interpreted as a shift towards work under the veil of pleasure and thus as a precursor to DWYL. Adorno argued that leisure time has been “seized by rational self-interest and is attended not because anybody really likes it but because it is required in order to make one’s way or maintain one’s status” (Adorno 1994, 103f). However in the discourse Adorno describes here, the seeming pleasure of networking remains a pleasure for the sake of work. This marks a subtle but important difference compared to contemporary DWYL discourses, which reverse the argument by celebrating work for the sake of pleasure.

While DWYL argues for the experience of pleasure as pre-condition for success at work, in the industrial work ethic pleasure is suppressed and only tolerated in so far it contributes to regeneration or in other ways improves the ability to continue to engage in diligent work, which remains devoid of all pleasure. Success at work remains key in both. The difference however is that in DWYL work success as a consequence is extrapolated from finding pleasure at work, while in the industrial work ethic, pleasure is reduced to work as the only source for potential future happiness.

## *Separation*

Anti-work theorists have radically challenged this link between work and happiness assumed by DWYL and the industrial work ethic. Here, work is seen as the antithesis to happiness. They have argued that confronted with the detrimental effects capitalist labour has on the human body and mind simply demanding to improve working conditions is not enough. Anti-work approaches suggest a much more radical response: the abolition of work. Advocates of abolishing work call for the “liberation from work” rather than a “liberation of work” (Weeks 2011, 97). While for some the abolition of work refers to waged work only (Srnicek and Williams 2015), a more radical anti-work thesis rejects “work itself as the principle of reality and rationality” (Baudrillard 1975, 141). Bob Black (1985, 1) for example argued that “In order to stop suffering, we have to stop working”. Similarly Krisis-Group (1999) stressed that “social emancipation cannot be achieved by means of a re-definition of labour, but only by a conscious devaluation of the very concept”.

Advocates of this approach often refer to Paul Lafarquet’s essay *The Right to Be Lazy* in which he proposes laziness as a cure for the working classes’ “compulsory toil” (Lafarquet 1883, 20). He argues that work needs to be limited to a maximum of three hours per day and become “a mere condiment to the pleasures of idleness” (Lafarquet 1883, 11). However, anti-work is more than just a call for more free time and leisure. Quite on the contrary, leisure is problematized as “non work for the sake of work” (Black 1985).

Among the proposed ways to abolish work are eliminating all work that is not socially useful and using labour saving technologies to reduce socially necessary but unpleasant work (Black 1985, 8f, Dean 2014). Finally, the remaining work should, according to this perspective, be turned into play, replacing it with pleasurable free activities and making a game out of work that needs to be done (Black 1985, 8). Black for example envisions an alternative that rests on the “production of use-values” through “delightful play-activity” (Black 1985, 8). Similarly Dean states that “Antiwork is what we do out of love, fun, interest, talent, enthusiasm, inspiration, etc” (Dean 2014).

A key feature of the anti-work approach is that the terms work and labour are understood as describing necessarily unpleasant activities. Thus, work per definition cannot be improved but needs to be abolished. Harry Cleaver for examples suggest to “keep the concept of work as alienated activity as a reference to what we do not want to do but then seek to develop new concepts appropriate to the new activities and relationships we come up with” (Cleaver 2002).

By emphasising pleasure instead of toil the anti-work approach makes an important contribution to challenging capitalism’s obsession with hard work as human virtue and as the key means for social integration. It attacks the very centre of a work ethic that glorifies busyness and relegates those out of (waged) work to the margins of society. Anti-work also offers a promising alternative to demands for full employment and work as a right for everybody often

proclaimed by labour movements. These demands too easily align with capital interests and do little to challenge work as the main imperative that structures social life. Considering technological advances that have led to significant productivity gains the demand for the reduction of work time needs to again be at the centre of any progressive worker politics.

However, anti-work's call for replacing work with pleasurable activity is not without limitations. It rests on a dualism that opposes work and pleasure. Work is connected to pain, and anti-work to pleasure. Using the example of care work Feminist critics for example have problematized the distinction between work as a burden and non-work as pleasure. For a mother, Maria Mies for example argues "work is always both: a burden as well as a source of enjoyment, self-fulfilment, and happiness. Children may give her a lot of work and trouble, but this work is never totally alienated or dead" (Mies 1998, 216). Karl Marx made a similar argument that highlights that also liberated work remains ambivalent in that it can be a source of both pleasurable and serious exertion. Using the example of composing music he argued that realising "attractive work, the individual's self-realization [...] in no way means that it becomes mere fun, mere amusement. [...] Really free working, e.g. composing, is at the same time precisely the most damned seriousness, the most intense exertion" (Marx 1993, 611). Both examples show that defining work and pleasure in opposition to each other does not help to understand the complexity of human activity. On the one hand, free pleasurable activity can require hard work and effort. On the other hand, exploited labour can at times be experienced as fun and pleasurable.

Another trend that challenges the antiwork discourse is the changing relationship between work and play, creating "a hybrid form of 'playbour'" (Kücklich 2005). To a certain extent Black's argument that "The secret of turning work into play [...] is to arrange useful activities to take advantage of whatever it is that various people at various times in fact enjoy doing" (Black 1985) resembles Google's strategy of creating playful office spaces, including gourmet meals, inspirational talks, massage rooms, yoga, tennis and a range of other pleasurable activities, in order to build an environment that is conducive for harnessing the creativity and ideas of its employees. In the context of DWYL and playbor anti-work's emphasis on pleasurable activity loses its critical edge. Both examples show that even if an activity is experienced as "delightful", fun and pleasurable or is done "out of love" it can still take place within an exploitative, unequal and competitive context.

### *Sublation*

Instead of emphasising a dualism of work and pleasure, it seems to be important to focus on the contradictions and the conflictual relationship of work and pleasure in contemporary capitalism. Christian Fuchs for example highlights this contradiction, stressing that "Capitalism connects labour and play in a destructive dialectic" (Fuchs 2014, 124). Humanist Marxism offers a critique of labour that both emphasises its pleasurable essence and foregrounds the social context under which it is performed. It emphasises the contradiction between work and pleasure but also points towards a possible reconciliation.



This perspective draws on Marx's early writings in the Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts from 1844, where he argues that "free conscious activity is man's species character" (Marx 2007, 75) and develops a critique of capitalist labour as the instrumentalisation of this "free conscious activity" (Marx 2007, 75). Work is unfree and dominative as long as it serves as a means for existence rather than an end in itself (Marx 2007, 75). Recovering the pleasurable essence of work thus requires overcoming the social context that coerces those who have nothing to sell but their labour power (Marx 1990, 272) to a life of estranged labour. According to this perspective, work can become pleasurable only once it no longer is "a means to an end – the product – but an end in itself, the meaningful expression of human energy; hence work is enjoyable" (Fromm 2013, 34).

Contrary to the anti-work thesis, humanist Marxism does not reject the term work as such. Christian Fuchs and Sebastian Seignani (2013) based on a review of the etymological origins of the terms work and labour in different languages suggest to distinguish between work as an anthropological category that describes the production of use values, and labour as its historically specific expression under capitalism – both waged and unwaged – that is exploited and alienated. This proposal to distinguish between work and labour addresses some of the terminological confusion that often surrounds calls for "post-work" or the "refusal of work". David Frayne for example stresses that his discussion of the "refusal of work" does not "amount to a refusal of productive activity in any general sense" (Frayne 2015, 21). Using Fuchs and Seignani's terminology what Frayne refers to thus is a refusal of labour, not a refusal of work. Similarly, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams' arguments for a post-work future (Srnicek and Williams 2015), could be described more precisely as a post-labour future.

Terminology aside, a dialectical perspective that highlights the contradiction between work and pleasure, shares with the anti-work approach an emphasis on pleasure instead of toil. However, while the latter rejects the term work as necessarily unpleasant activity (liberation from work) the former wants to recover its pleasurable essence (liberation of work) by abolishing its coerced appearance. Rather than conceptualising both approaches in opposition to each other, it seems more fruitful to combine them. In this sense any true liberation of work at the same time needs to also be a liberation from work, or rather, from labour. Or as Antonio Negri puts it "Work which is liberated is liberation from work" (Negri 1991, 165). In a society in which work is liberated each individual would have both, the right to enjoy work as a pleasurable or sometimes challenging activity and the right to be lazy.

Ideas of how to achieve such change for examples include a guaranteed basic income as a way to weaken the link between work and income, a reduction of working hours, the elimination of "bullshit jobs" (Graeber 2013), and the use of labour-saving technologies to reduce necessary labour (Srnicek and Williams 2015). But most importantly any radical transformation of work and the role it plays in our lives depends on movements of people who want to bring about these changes and collectively struggle to achieve them.

## **Cultural Co-ops: “A new radical voice”?**

Taking the cultural industries as an example an important starting point for collective solutions is to expose and emphasise the individualising implications of the DWYL discourse, which tend to be particularly prevalent in these industries. As Angela McRobbie (2015, 74) highlights, striving for “passionate work” is not merely a choice but increasingly a requirement for succeeding in the competitive field of cultural work. What is problematic about DWYL is not the hope to gain pleasure and enjoyment out of one’s work, but the assumption that this can be achieved on an individual basis, rendering social and political change obsolete. As part of a neoliberal work culture, DWYL transfers the battleground from society onto the self. It favours self-management over politics.

As Ros Gill (2014, 516) argues, an increasingly extensive body of research has shown the individualising dynamics of cultural sector work. Based on a deeply entrenched individualism, loveable work becomes an aspiration individuals need to compete to achieve, rather than a real possibility for everyone. In this context McRobbie stressed that cultural work is “a field that has been subjected to such intense individualization that the idea of a common cause has for many years been all but lost” (2016, 15). On the other hand however, it could be precisely the experience of precariousness and frustrations about unfulfilled hopes and promises as well as persistently bad working conditions that motivate cultural workers to form new alliances of resistance against neoliberal work cultures (Gill and Pratt 2008, 3, Standing 2011, de Peuter 2014). In this context it becomes important to ask “how the actual practice of creative labour is able to mobilize a new radical voice” (McRobbie 2015, 16).

Among the recently discussed starting points for mobilising a radical voice of creative labour are initiatives that try to reinvigorate the union movement by exploring ways to adapt workplace politics to increasingly precarious work realities (de Peuter 2011: 422; de Peuter 2014: 268; Cohen 2012: 152). It is in this context that I will in the following explore how worker co-operatives might contribute to creating alternative futures for cultural work. Worker co-ops are organisations that are owned and controlled by the people working in them. The World Declaration on Worker Co-operatives highlights that worker co-ops aim at “creating and maintaining sustainable jobs and generating wealth, in order to improve the quality of life of the worker-members, dignify human work, allow workers’ democratic self-management and promote community and local development” (CICOPA 2004: 3).

The co-operative model suggests an alternative to the logic of individualisation and competition that characterises much of cultural work. It offers an organisational structure that allows cultural workers to join together in order to create workplaces that are collectively owned and democratically controlled and thus challenge capitalist power relations at work by eliminating the divisions between workers and owners (Sandoval 2016a,b).

Co-operatives thus might contribute to challenging individualisation of cultural sector work by mobilising the power of collectivity to resist precarious labour and create alternatives that help rendering work loveable for everyone. To explore whether cultural co-ops in practice can indeed be part of such a project I will in the following discuss some findings of 25 semi-structured interviews with members of 20 worker co-operatives in the UK cultural sector<sup>2</sup>. I will first show that the critique of individualisation is one key driver for starting a co-operative in the cultural sector. I then discuss the role DWYL plays within cultural co-ops and finally point towards an emerging alternative to DWYL that turns individual passion into more collective compassion.

### Criticising cultural work

The dissatisfaction with working condition in the cultural sector and the desire to create alternatives to it was a main factor that motivated the cultural workers I interviewed to turn towards co-operative models. Their critique of working conditions very much echoes the problems identified by existing research on cultural sector work, including individualism, competitiveness, long working hours, precariousness and work hierarchies. One co-op member for examples stressed that by refusing to play by the established rules, co-operatives are a way of *“challenging the art system as it is now: highly exploitative, really bad relations between people”* (Interviewee 4). Frustrated with previous experiences, a co-op founder described setting-up a co-operative as *“a reaction against what we met in a previous job. We were determined not to have a hierarchy when we formed a co-op”* (Interviewee 17). Or similarly: *“We didn’t want to replicate what a lot of people were doing in the design industry. [...] So we wanted to make sure that we have the fairest workplace we could”* (Interviewee 21). Another co-op member recounts how finding ways to resist precarity led her to explore co-operatives as a

*“way of moving forward into a better place to be then where we were before. You know, working for other people or just constantly being super-precarious and super-dependent on everyone else.”* (Interviewee 4)

In all of the above quotes co-operators use the personal pronoun “we” to emphasise the collective experience of bad working realities and the desire to

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<sup>2</sup> The semi-structured interviews were conducted between August 2014 and June 2015. The interviews were part of a larger project on cultural work and the politics of worker co-operatives. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and looked both at (a) the individual interviewees experiences, motivations and opinions of working in a co-op and (b) the co-ops’ legal and internal organizational structures, modes of decision making and business practices. The interview material was coded with NVivo and analyzed using thematic analysis. The co-ops included in this study are part of the following cultural sectors: media, acting, software and technology, music, film, graphics design, publishing, printing, arts, and architecture. The majority of interviews took place in London, but interviews were also conducted in Scotland, Eastern and Northern England. Two interviews were held via Skype.

join together to create alternatives to it. In fact, challenging individualisation seems to be a key driver of co-operative practice. As one interviewee stressed: *“None of us wanted to be on our own. We had done it on our own, we know how hard it is to be a sole trader”* (Interviewee 14). While this quote refers to difficult experiences of individualisation at the economic level due to being a sole trader, other co-operators highlighted limits that individualisation creates at the level of collaborative creative production:

*“the results of all this design education and all this cultural competitiveness and probably this capitalist system and environment which means that these people were not really... it was hard to establish this ethics of work of true collaboration. So that's what drives me today”* (Interviewee 1).

This participant attributes the individualism of cultural sector work to structural problems such as art and design education and capitalist work cultures and regards co-operatives as part of the project of creating alternatives. Similarly, another participant criticised that art education tends to privilege individual creative exploration over social collaboration:

*“And then the individualism that is grown in art schools. Because most artists are schooled in art schools. [...] it is like, come in this white room, this is your studio and do whatever you want. It is not like, go and meet the people, the person here, the person there, they are your future”* (Interviewee 4).

The critique of the structures of cultural work I encountered shows that co-ops create spaces to develop a much needed “critical language” (Gill 2014, 524) to voice and challenge experiences of precarity, individualism and inequality of cultural work. Co-operators seem to be driven at least in part by a desire for solidarity and collaboration. This desire might offer an alternative to the individualising logic of DWYL. To further explore this possibility in the next section I take a closer look at what role DWYL plays in cultural co-ops.

## **Cultural co-ops and DWYL**

Despite the strong critique of cultural sector work, co-ops cannot escape the dynamics of the established cultural industries and capitalist markets. Like so many cultural workers (Gill 2014, 515), co-operators I interviewed experienced the blurry boundaries between work and leisure. As one participant stressed: *“It's work, but it feels like a leisure activity”* (Interviewee 11). Expanding on this issue another co-operator explained the difficulty of drawing a line between work and life outside it:

*“Where do you draw the line? If I am reading something at home that's related to something that I want to get up at the co-op. Is that work or is that not work? Who cares? Some people might see that as a problem. I don't, personally, but I can see how some people might see that.”* (Interviewee 12)

The fact that this co-operator does not experience the blurred boundaries between work and freetime as problematic illustrates a common experience in cultural work. It is precisely the fact that cultural work for many is very personal, a form of self-expression and linked to individual passions that makes it so susceptible to the discourse of DWYL. But pleasure is turned against itself when the subjective experience of loving ones work is exploited by an industry that tends to compel cultural workers to give away their work for free or for little pay, to accept precarious contracts or to work persistently long hours. As Andrew Ross (2000) argued, the willingness to accept bad pay and conditions is turned into a required demonstration of creative passion and commitment.

The subjective experience of pleasure comes into conflict with structures of exploitation. Co-ops can only challenge these structures to some extent. While in collectively owned co-ops the work of co-operators is not exploited for a private profit of owners and investors, co-ops are still subject to the power dynamics of capitalist markets. Co-ops, like small businesses and freelancers, remain only “pseudo-independent” (Miege 1989, 57) as they still need to rely on markets and clients who might use their market power to put a downward pressure on pay rates, demand free work samples or set impossible deadlines. In co-ops exploitation does not necessarily disappear, but it can become less visible.

However, I also encountered a discourse that is explicitly critical of using the experience of passion and loving ones work as an excuse for not getting paid. One participant highlighted exactly this problem when stressing many cultural workers feel embarrassed to demand decent pay:

*“Everybody is very conscious about that we are cultural workers and we are always embarrassed to talk about money. [...] Because there is some kind of assumption that art is not connected to the economy that people need to do things for free, because you do art, because you do what you love, that it is not a proper job as well” (Interviewee 4)*

Here, this participant emphasises that doing pleasurable work and being able to earn a living should not be considered mutually exclusive. She regards it as part of her work as a co-operator to challenge this assumption by creating awareness on this issue among cultural workers. Such a problematisation of the relation between making art and culture as a source of pleasure and a source of income offers an active critique of the DWYL rhetoric.

Passion in co-ops is however not only experienced in regard to the work itself, but is often also felt for the co-operative project. One co-operator explained “*I don’t mind getting called some days when I am not working to help. It [the co-op] is something I am proud of and it’s something that I really believe in*” (Interviewee 15). On the one hand this quote illustrates a desire to help each other and to support colleagues if needed. It shows a deep commitment many co-operators feel for the co-operative project. On the other hand, the passion and love for the co-operative model, as an idea to be “proud of” and to “really believe in”, risks reproducing a dynamic of hyper-flexibility and overwork not dissimilar from non-cooperative workplaces. In fact, in many co-ops the blurred boundaries

between work and freetime, which as discussed above are common in cultural sector work, are further complicated by political activism as a third possible dimension among which time needs to be divided. Caught between the need to keep the co-op running, generate a constant flow of income, be supportive of co-workers and wanting to contribute to wider political activism co-operators risk stress, bournout and anxiety.

We have seen so far that the relation between co-ops and DWYL is complicated. On the one hand, the fact that co-ops are critical and aware of the problems of cultural sector work breaks with DWYL because it brings demands for good working condition back onto the agenda. It creates spaces in which the inequalities, stresses and power relations of cultural sector work, which as Ros Gill (2014) has observed tend to be rendered unspeakable by neoliberal work cultures, are voiced, discussed and critiqued. A caring co-operative work culture has the potential to create a space to express vulnerability and discuss inequality. On the other hand the double pressure of having to operate within competitive markets while at the same time being passionate about making a contribution to progressive social change might put co-op members at risk of reproducing exhausting work patterns based on an “entrepreneurial ‘can do’ spirit” (Gill 2014, 516)

Looking more closely at how cultural co-operators want to create alternatives to dominant work patterns in the cultural sector reveals another way in which cultural co-ops highlight the limitations of DWYL and point beyond it. I will turn to this in the next section.

### **Compassion at work**

Asked about why she would recommend the co-operative model to cultural workers one co-operator I interviewed stressed:

*“It is the most likely way that they can create work where they get paid to do something that they love. And, where their work actually has a positive impact on the world, and on the environment and on people” (Interviewee 6)*

While at first this statement might be read as an endorsement of a simple DWYL narrative, it in fact adds an important dimension by stressing that co-ops are not only a way of getting paid for doing what one loves but, also for having a positive impact on the world. The focus on having a positive impact on one’s social and ecological environment takes the idea of love beyond the individual level and instead frames it as a relational category. It is not only about loving one’s own work or gaining individual pleasure but includes a concern for others. One of my interviewees emphasised this concern for others by describing his co-op as a workplace that puts people before profit and in which members try to be compassionate:

*“You know, like, efficiency is not the most important thing when you are not a profit making company. We like to be compassionate, we like to treat people like human beings” (Interviewee 15).*

Rather than just being passionate for one's individual work, a focus on compassion moves collective wellbeing into focus. Co-operators expressed a sense of "collective responsibility we have for each other, to... support" (Interviewee 16). Others used the concept of solidarity for pointing at care for co-workers as an important principle of co-operative practice:

*"It's about solidarity and not competition and inside the organisation people support each other [...] So that to me it's just really obvious almost but actually it is not in the industry"* (Interviewee 1).

Similarly another co-operator stressed:

*"I think we provide solidarity, we can ask each other questions, check each other's work [...] the fact that we have come together is significant, because for us... you know what it's like as a freelance producer, it's an extremely competitive, I really mean extremely competitive workplace"* (Interviewee 14)

All of the above quotes describe co-ops as spaces that provide alternatives to competitive and individualised work structures the participants experienced in their previous work in the cultural sector. Alternatives that are built on a culture of compassion, care, solidarity and mutual support. My interviewees repeatedly used the metaphor of the family as an ideal to represent a sense of caring and looking out for one another: *"It's the way you take care of the members of your family"* (Interviewee 15). *"It is like an economic family"* (Interviewee 4). *"Sometimes we call it a family"* (Interviewee 23). *"I feel like it's a kind of a family of people"* (Interviewee 18). In describing their workplaces as a family my interviewees are rejecting individualised and competitive notions of economic life and instead emphasise how their workplaces are built around values of care, which tend to be perceived as characteristic of family life.

In practice being supportive and caring in a co-operative workplace for example means to be sympathetic towards the needs of co-workers: *"We are able to respond to people's needs, you know. Day to day or periods in their life, we can step up and be flexible for people. And it's not just like another employment where they see what they can get out of you"* (Interviewee 15). This interviewee puts forward a progressive version of workplace flexibility. Instead of flexibility being used as a euphemism for precarity, co-operatives try to create an organisational structure that can be flexible *for* workers. This flexibility is important to support people through difficult life situations as well as to create space for political activism and other time outside work: *"We try to understand one another's needs as well to go and see friends and do other stuff. I want to go to [activist group] meetings, she know that. Wednesday every two weeks."* (Interviewee 5).

Co-ops as *"a community that is very forgiving and understanding"* (Interviewee 16) can potentially create an environment which is nurturing for the soul that has suffered from being "put to work" (Berardi 2009) in the competitive climate of neoliberal capitalism. They can offer a form of collective self-care. Taking care of oneself and fellow co-operators seems essential to be able to deal with the

various stresses and pressures that come with trying to create co-operative alternatives against and yet within capitalist structures that are geared for competition. In this context, as Laurie Penny (2016) argues in her poignant analysis of self-care in neoliberalism, “caring for oneself and one’s friends in a world of prejudice is not an optional part of the struggle—in many ways, it is the struggle”

Co-ops have the potential to ignite a much-needed sense of community that all too easily tends to fall by the wayside of a competitive working life. In doing so they create an opportunity to find pleasure and fulfilment not just in one’s individual work or career advancement but in co-operation, in human relationships, in solidarity and in support for oneself and others. The alternative to DWYL and passionate labour co-ops are proposing does not consist in the absence of passion but its redirection.

## Conclusions

*“[Co-ops] help you solve problems that you cannot solve on your own [...] If we fight each other we don’t get anywhere” (Interviewee 6).*

My interview research shows that cultural co-ops neither employ an industrial work ethic that glorifies work and suppresses pleasure, nor do they glorify pleasure, downplaying the structural problems of contemporary work cultures as DWYL suggests. As worker co-operatives they also do not reject the notion of work as such, but rather try to transform it. They bring questions of ownership and workers rights back onto the agenda to empower workers to gain control over their work. Co-ops take seriously the power structures of contemporary capitalism while at the same refusing to be determined by them.

Co-operatives are not perfect. Working in a co-op does not necessarily warrant an escape from precarity, stress, overwork and underpay. Neither does it eliminate all boring and unpleasant work or guarantee meaningful and supportive work relationships. However, individual cultural workers getting together to start a co-operative that is commonly owned by all of them, that practices democratic decision making and aims to be mutually beneficial for everyone involved already is an act of resistance and a refusal to accept the that one person’s success depends on another’s failure.

Competition systematically turns “the other into a competitor and therefore an enemy” (Berardi 2009, 80). Competition is both the result and consequence of individualisation. It leads to a “loss of solidarity” (Berardi 2009 80) that “deprives [...] cultural workers from political force” (Cruz 2016, 6). Co-ops work in the opposite direction. They create an environment that is conducive to compassion and solidarity and encourages further forms of co-operation to emerge. Strengthening the collective political force of cultural workers is important for as long as passionate, or gratifying or pleasurable or attractive work is pursued as an individual goal it will ultimately remain an illusion.



If there is any chance for the liberation of and from labour to succeed and to achieve loveable work activity for everyone it depends on our ability to collectively reinvent and reconstruct social life and the role work plays within it. By creating alternative workplaces and challenging competitive work structures, co-ops resist the ideology of DWYL that invokes individual choice and effort as the key to success or failure. Worker co-ops as a form of prefigurative politics suggest an immediate response to the experience of an unfulfilling working life. They go beyond passionate labour and instead encourage compassionate work. And while clearly not all of the everyday tasks and routines in co-operatives are revolutionary, if co-ops succeed in creating communities that are both nurturing and politically radical they prepare the ground on which to act together. The model of worker co-operatives turns DWYL from its head to its feet by turning the desire for lovable work from a matter of individual transformation and competition into a practice of co-operation and social change.

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