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Body Contracts. The Enthusiasm Economy and the Censoring of Exhaustion

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The text is a partial summary of the performative project Umowy o ciało (Body Contracts), which the authors carried out as part of a workshop at the Faculty of Polish Studies of the Jagiellonian University. The aim of the project was to create 'honest contracts' that would provide realistic representations of exploitation in the precarious and project-based labor market. The documents were created on the basis of sociological, autoethnographic and art-based research by five working groups focusing on the situation of dancers, servers, nightclub promoters, cultural animators and volunteers in the cultural industry. In the text we present the results of the project, highlighting two important observations from our research. The first relates to the affective dimension of the activities studied, requiring workers to be intensely involved in relationships with other people, to continuously perform work readiness and to show emotional attachment to their work. The second observation concerns yet another pressure accompanying these demands – namely, to hide signs of physical and mental fatigue. In our view, the latter expectation is nowadays amounting to a systemic form of affective censorship, founded primarily on cultural perceptions and mores, but also sanctioned by social dispositifs such as civil law.

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Body Contracts. The Enthusiasm Economy and the Censoring of Exhaustion

Brutal honesty[1]

The story takes place inside the office of the director of a provincial cultural center. In order to find new staff members, he interviews a cultural studies graduate applying for a job on a theater education project. The picture he paints explaining the terms and conditions of the contract and the responsibilities that come with the position suggest that it won't be a walk in the park. The list of duties includes around one hundred items, from holding workshops, through cleaning up after kids' classes, all the way to entertaining the director at the event closing the performance showcase capping off the workshops. All that for a monthly salary of 1,500 PLN before tax.

The scene outlined above seems somewhat unrealistic and definitely exaggerated, as employers rarely, if ever, divulge their actual requirements, especially to workers on junk contracts. Vague job descriptions and the laconic legalese of the documents do not reflect expectations regarding employee commitment. And the presumed outcomes seem removed, abstracted from the actual labor that the bodies and minds of the employees will have to contribute. The project we are describing here was supposed to draw attention to this phenomenon and recenter the language used in Poland to discuss labor – especially its precarious strain.

Body Contracts



Magdalena Niedzielska, *Ciało tańczącego freelancera* [*Body of a Dancing Freelancer*], illustration for the Dancing Body, digital reproduction of an X-ray picture, 2023.

This essay examines *Umowy o ciało* [*Body Contracts*], a research/performative project launched in the 2022/2023 academic year as part of classes in performance studies at the Jagiellonian University's Faculty of Polish Studies. The aim of the project was to highlight: 1) methods used by employers in the contemporary precarious job market to hide the physical and intellectual exploitation of candidates; 2) the role played by the law and a variety of institutional practices in the cultural and social construction of the precarious body, stripped of appropriate healthcare access, stable remuneration for regular effort, and paid leave. Using autoethnography, surveys, extended interviews, and art-based research methods, the people involved in the project were to draft templates of "honest contracts," illustrating the actual extent of worker exploitation in several carefully selected industries. Between May and July 2023, the course of the project and work on the "honest contracts" was documented on a custom blog.[2] In the future, drafts of the eponymous contracts will be posted on the website, and the documents will be used by project members in an interactive storytelling event. In the text below, we will share some of the preliminary results of our efforts.

As we feel it is hard to summarize a process that has concluded only theoretically, this essay is not an exhaustive breakdown of the project's results. The expected outcomes and schedule of

activities changed during project implementation, primarily dictated by the time constraints of the academic term and – naturally – the mounting fatigue of the participants. We are likewise not interested in simply reproducing here the contents that readers can find on the blog; we would prefer, first of all, to draw attention to the most important aspects and outcomes of the overlapping research efforts we have initiated – pointing to the social pressure coercing the precariat into an unceasing performance of their readiness to work and their emotional involvement in labor, as well as the concealment of their deepening exhaustion. Second, we want to confront the challenges presented by the very nature of our efforts, aligned with the functioning of the university. Because the text shows how a multitude of responsibilities affected the development of the project, it also testifies to the impact of exhaustion on contemporary academia.

The project team was split into five groups, each assigned to investigate different precarious workers' bodies. We realize that, at first glance, the selection of these and not other bodies might seem arbitrary; consequently, before we move to theoretical deliberations, we will present a brief summary of the project's development, so that readers can better understand our motivations and the background of the effort. In later parts of the essay, however, we will not avoid generalizations – for at least two reasons. First, our research identified specific instances of social and cultural codes affecting the current labor market (the very idea of drafting "honest contracts" forces us to confront the systemic consequences of civil law being more protective of employers than workers). Second, as nonstrategic and subjective as it was, the selection of jobs we discussed demonstrates considerable overlap with statistics on the student job market. According to the jobs listing website Aplikuj.pl, in 2019, the jobs most worked by students in Kraków included: cashier,

bartender/waiter, tutor, and physical laborer.[3] While some of professions we selected – especially dancer and cultural manager – are difficult to classify into any of these groups, the range we proposed has at least 50% overlap with the data from the report.

Largely based on previously unpublished surveys that were used for internal group feedback, the text is intended to encourage readers to visit the blog for a fuller picture of the effort, and help with understanding the project by situating it in the context of contemporary research, as well as sociological and cultural studies theories.

The need for autoethnography



Julia Król and Zuzanna Piwowar, *Kartka z kalendarza* [*Calendar Page*], illustration for the Managing Body, digital image, 2023.

The project can be traced back to the workshop leader's suggestion to prepare an interactive storytelling effort framed as an intervention into public circulations of academic knowledge. During the first few meetings, we discussed the works of contemporary artists and arts collectives that adopt a similar strategy, paying particular attention to the actions of groups like Blast Theory, Machina Ex, and Cantabile2. Drawing on their efforts, we tried to conceptualize the framework for a field game that would encourage participants to empathetically play the roles of other people (and also non-humans). All of the gameplay ideas shared a specific political sensibility and reference to performance theories – from the concept of public assembly to the post-humanities. The range proved too much, however, and the sheer number of theoretical propositions prompted the first crisis in our collaborative effort. The unanimous choice of a scenario was additionally hindered by

the awareness of organizational difficulties and ethical quandaries presented by nearly all of the concepts. Is it possible to explore someone else's experience? How do we ensure the mental comfort of the audience and participants of a project which aims to deepen awareness of pressing social issues? These and similar questions persuaded us to base our further efforts on autoethnography.

It is impossible to reconstruct the detailed course of collaboration that brought us all the way to *Body Contracts*, but what proved crucial was the materiality of conversations – the effect of laughter, exchanged glances, sudden calls of "Eureka!" and pauses, which over three or four meetings helped us devise a strategy of common thinking. Yet it was our shared eagerness for creative, critical labor involving our own experiences that proved the decisive factor. Everyone participating in the workshops is involved with activism or creative work (in various forms), to which they link their future development. At the same time, it is in enthusiasm-driven pursuits – such as activist or cultural manager – that we encounter the broadest extent of exploitation, in form and scope, which destroys our enthusiasm and ambition. That is why we decided to make the tension between enthusiasm and difficult working conditions the central theme of our project.

Hence the idea for drafting "honest contracts." For our interactive storytelling effort, we wanted to invite guests to negotiate with fake employers who, without sugarcoating, would then discuss the expectations and realities of positions offered in the sectors and industries that interested us, including dance, choreography, customer service in the catering sector, street promotion, and volunteering for cultural institutions. The selected pool of roles can be divided into three subgroups. The first includes activities that some students plan to choose as a profession and are often involved with alongside their academic efforts (cultural animation, choreography). The second

covers jobs that students undertake to make ends meet and continue their studies (food service, in-store promotion). The last group includes volunteering positions which, by design, are supposed to prepare those working them for a variety of jobs in the cultural sector, and are often carried out as part of student internships, usually unpaid.

The taxonomy outlined above can be complicated, for example, by noting the blurred line between "preparatory jobs" and "target professions" for positions that some of us have tied our long-term ambitions to. For example, cultural managers often perform considerable unpaid labor in order to expand their portfolios, *de facto* volunteering even when they already have a steady, paid job in their chosen profession. Another issue that ought to be mentioned is our own situation relative to the research project. Only in one instance did members of the working group examine a job they were not involved with personally – the group in question was working on the Promoting Body study group. Still, the project's efforts eventually acquired an autoethnographic aspect, as looking for insiders with relevant information required the researchers to assume their role to some extent: moving through the public space of the city to "fish out" interviewees and quickly capture their attention. The debriefings in these instances became a key stage of the research process, enabling an empathetic insight into the situations of both researchers and subjects.[4] In other cases, the autoethnographic aspect was tied more to the long-term experience of working in a given field and the ability to confront the information gleaned from interviews with one's own experience.

During the workshops, we devised a framework plan for the blog, which assumed that the posts must include: 1) brief self-presentations from the groups; 2) imagination-stimulating descriptions of the bodies performing each job; 3) a record of ongoing research as it develops; 4) preliminary conclusions. It

should be noted that every group adopted different working methods and a different approach to building "evocative autoethnography," a key element of which – to borrow Anna Kacperczyk's interpretation – involves not only the retracing of links between individual experience and the ways it is culturally constructed or coded, but also "an emphasis on eliciting an effect in the audience."[5] Some found it appealing to confront their own experiences with academic discourse (food service); others preferred to combine a similar mode of work with keeping a journal, or activities on the border between research and art. Regardless of the chosen model, for many of us, adopting an autoethnographic approach often prompted some unpleasant experiences, as it entailed removing the veil of enthusiasm and honestly facing our own bodies and their exhaustion. Our efforts, however, were driven by the need to preserve our own enthusiasm from burning out, tied strongly to the hope that the project would help us and our future audience avoid systemic forms of exploitation.

Enthusiasm as currency

The figure of enthusiasm as a veil might seem difficult to understand. After all, as a category, it typically connotes sincere commitment. Kant called enthusiasm the idea of the good accompanied by affect – and the latter could be defined as an essentially positive, indomitable force.[6] A person feeling enthusiasm, therefore, should be free from the risk of succumbing to cynicism or acting against themselves. In the course of our project, however, the key diagnosis was that the contemporary precarious job market imposes expectations on workers to remain ceaselessly involved



Tomasz Borys and Marta Soczyńska, *Twarzą w twarze* [*Face to Faces*], illustration for the Promoting Body, photography, 2023.

with their jobs and, furthermore, endlessly manifest their enthusiasm. People doing street promotions for Kraków nightclubs offer an extreme example. In the survey concluding the workshops, the group examining their situation wrote:

> Being alone in a crowd. That's the biggest complaint [from the surveyed], along with its attendant issue of figuratively having to wear a mask for work, not being fully oneself, having to conduct conversations according to a predefined script, and hiding behind the veil of the "promoting body." The notion of the mask appears time and again in the conclusions posted on our website; the metaphor of putting on a mask perfectly illustrates how the promoting body functions in space. The promoting body is adapted to one scenario, trained in behaviors designed to generate maximum profit for the employers, and coerced into concealing its personal nature with the actions expected of it. One of the people we interviewed said: "It's me, but me at 150%." Having to constantly play out a set script which the "performer" has no control over, being expected to smile all the time, be nice, entertaining, and high-spirited, forces them to become someone else: more lively, never tired, and always persuasive.

Adopting the subjects' perspective, as mentioned above, enabled members of the working group to personally interrogate the issue of being alone in a crowd. In the evaluation survey, they also emphasized that throughout the interviews, it proved a challenge to persuade those working promoter jobs to temporarily remove their masks, which they associated with "exiting their comfort zone." Learned scenarios of pushy persuasion – tailored to brief, direct, seemingly spontaneous and enthusiastic contact – ultimately proved incompatible with attempts at self-critical reflection, with the latter made even more difficult due to supervisor oversight.

Sociologist Elizabeth Wissinger, who built on Maurizio Lazzarato's concept of immaterial labor, argues that modern

forms of exploitation include cultural codes in which individual "personality and subjectivity become involved in the production of value."[7] This interpretation draws on subjectivity as defined by Foucault, who frames it as a repeating model of social readjustment regulated through a variety of technologies of power – clearly evinced by the group of people working promoter jobs.[8] As the members of the working group emphasized in the evaluation questionnaire, the surveyed workers were frightened that their conversations were always monitored by their employers, which perceptibly shaped their attitudes toward the researchers, their conversation style, and even the content of their answers. Their experience could be characterized as almost panoptic.

Promoter jobs are a clear example of what we could call affective exploitation in late capitalism. Brian Massumi explains that the "ability of affect to produce an economic effect more swiftly and surely than economics itself means that affect is itself a real condition, an intrinsic variable of the late-capitalist system, as infrastructural as a factory."[9] In the case of the promoting body, the factory comparison seems particularly apt. Promoters approach passersby almost like a conveyor belt, usually working off a practiced script tailored to generate an affective result (eliciting in the audience the feeling that using the offer pushed by the promoter will result in good, spontaneous fun). However, the situation in question does offer some benefits – promoter jobs don't require long-term investment in specific relationships, which in other professions involves a number of additional problems, the scale and diversity of which are well illustrated by statements from other working groups. As the group focused on cultural animation wrote in their evaluation survey:

> The labor of the animating body extends far beyond the scope of professional responsibilities, because it is compelled to ceaselessly feed relationships to guarantee new projects,

> meaning new contracts and new streams of income, ensuring continued survival. Consequently, industry parties, conferences, training courses, events after theater premieres, and private events for co-workers are an integral part of the life of the animating body. The number of private and professional relationships is rising exponentially along with the rise in salary for work performed.

For cultural animators, sustaining long-term relationships is tied to a strategic effort to improve prospects for future employment, which, *per se*, is not an exception in the current labor market. Given their precarious employment conditions, however, animators seem particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of structural opportunism.[10] At the 2014 Warsaw Cultural Animator Non-Congress, it was established that as many as 36% of the polled managers were working their jobs under civil law contracts, nearly 10% were undertaking them as part of an apprenticeship or internship, while 26% were volunteering.[11] There are indications that these numbers, clearly showing the prevalence of precarious employment in the field, have since risen, if only due to the restructuring of cultural centers and their resultant disinclination to offer regular employment for staff positions.[12] Consistent employment often depends on individual motivation and portfolio volume, but also on one's social and professional network and so-called "soft skills."

As the examples above illustrate, enthusiasm might be framed as an impression (illusion) of spontaneity and fun generated by individuals or groups of people, but also as the readiness to enter into persistent interactions with others, related to shared interests or one's profession. Enthusiasm can therefore be defined as both an affect and as the deeper disposition of an individual. We believe, however, that this dichotomy can ultimately be sustained only for heuristic purposes, as both levels or aspects ultimately permeate one another. One clear example

can be found in labor performed by freelance cultural animators, which can be extremely physically and mentally demanding – due to frequent traveling, the necessity to interact with many people, and the diverse tasks that the job entails – while still requiring constant kindness and a "stimulating" disposition. All the extra activities, performed, among other things, to ensure the continuity of employment, force workers not only to give up free time (or at least its free use), but also to ceaselessly exploit their soft skills and wear "masks" similar to those used by people working street promoter jobs.

The work of the cultural animator offers a good example of what we called the "enthusiasm economy" in our essay's subtitle. In English-language writing of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the term was usually applied to forms of economic life emerging around fan and hobby cultures; these often blended amateur and professional efforts, as well as unpaid work and commercial endeavors.[13] We believe, however, that the concept may be deployed in much broader contexts. Presently, both in the United States and Europe, a rising number of jobs require those working them to demonstrate a level of commitment far exceeding standard employment practices and performing clearly defined duties. Importantly, the desired engagement should also be emotional – workers are expected to treat their professional responsibilities as a personal passion, and the lack of affective commitment is considered a threat to the individual's productivity.

In his book *The Invention of Creativity*, German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz links the modern proliferation of management culture and work psychology, which positively valorize endless engagement, enthusiasm, and ingenuity, with the twentieth-century expansion of a social niche once occupied solely by artists.[14] The attributes that once applied almost exclusively to creative labor – including close ties between profession and

passion, emotional commitment to work, and the pursuit of self-fulfillment through work – have become prescriptive in post-industrial economies led by entrepreneurs and freelancers, who see their lives as an exciting game or an object to be shaped almost at will. Positive management psychology dictates that individuals "do not attempt to avoid tension but, rather, seek the positive form of tension associated with reshaping their environment."[15] According to Reckwitz, what was once a privilege might very well be a source of anguish – as aesthetics, personalities, and affects are increasingly subject to creeping capitalization, a shift painfully experienced by artists themselves. The disappearance of past forms of patronage, the spread of universal arts education, and the precarization of creative labor have imposed drastic forms of competition in the field of art, as evinced by the words of one of our workgroup members, drawing on her personal experience of contemporary forms of compulsory self-improvement in the dancer/choreographer profession:

> Dancing is a source of considerable satisfaction. The body invests years in learning, attends workshops, courses, physiotherapy, and specialist doctors. As a person involved with the matter of dancing, I generate knowledge that is then acquired and transmitted through practice. I wonder how many people realize the disproportion between the effort I have poured into this and the opportunities and working conditions in Poland. [...] My dancing body has tried to measure up to standards. I worked, pushing my physical limits without proper care for my primary work tool, I tried to meet expectations – my own and those of the people around me. I was determined, motivated, ready to tackle and accommodate transgressions – not because someone forced me to do something, but because I believed in the importance of what I was doing. Even when, while working in one city theater, I blacked out on stage after being kicked in the head during a performance and had to pay out of my pocket for the

> CT scan, because I didn't have health insurance. Even when loyalty was expected of me, without offering any social safety net in return. I often spent sizable sums from my salary to pay for regenerative treatments and specialist visits.[16]

The described situation of the "dancing body" corresponds to the traditional view of artistic work – particularly the expectation that a given profession will be conflated with personal passion or a mission (stemming from some sort of "calling"). At the same time, this body is subjected to the harsh realities of the marketplace, highly competitive and stripped of the safety nets we associate with the modern welfare state. The expectation mentioned above pressurizes artists to conceal the personal cost of their commitment to the job – even its health-related consequences. Reckwitz argues, however, that similar challenges are now affecting areas other than just the arts. Compare the inquiry into the dancing body posted on our blog (the first of the passages cited below) with a survey response written by a member of the workgroup investigating bodies in the food service sector:

> Dancers use their bodies as their own work instruments in a profound way. This involves not only the need for rigorous training, which often begins in childhood, but also a range of expectations revolving around their performance, appearance, and skills specific to a given production. The dancing body is a body pushed to the limit, a body functioning in the realities of precarious labor, often forced to perform freelance gigs, with no safety net and meager pay. It is a body with little chance of an employment contract, and consequently no chance of systemic care.[17]

> Even if the job is well paid, the money is usually not enough to cover unexpected costs, like physical therapy following an accident. And some injuries are permanent. No sum of money is enough to compensate for a serious, life-altering injury.

> Likewise, no matter how far-reaching your network of contacts, no friend or colleague will be able to get you "a new spine or a new mind"; the same goes for being friends with management: aside from improving your career or new job prospects, these relationships will never offset the costs suffered by rank-and-file working people.

Both passages draw attention to the bodily burdens of work that could, in the light of the contemporary humanities, be labeled as "immaterial." Relying on establishing and sustaining interpersonal relationships, these jobs are both mentally and physically draining. In this context, one ought to note an assumption appearing between the lines in the food service quote, one repeatedly stressed by other workgroups – that relationships built at work will never balance out the effort poured into it (including physical effort) and the resulting exhaustion. The passage above also offers an insight into a key aspect of the enthusiasm economy – namely, the belief that enthusiasm might be kindled in the course of performing a job – if it did not drive the person to do it in the first place – and that it might gradually become a path toward self-fulfillment.

The presumption that enthusiasm is a currency that can be exchanged bilaterally – spent on career growth or "collected" as a work benefit – stands as a stark illustration of the findings of the workgroup focused on volunteer work, drawn from their investigation of job adverts for volunteer positions in the cultural sector:

> Posts like these can often be found on Facebook, on festival websites, where organizers suggest volunteering for the event. To entice prospective volunteers, they offer opportunities like "becoming a part" of the festival, contributing to a prestigious event, and even "a chance at a total, better life" [the quotes come from a real

advertisement – authors' note].

In the advert mentioned, volunteering is quite literally presented as a portal to a better world, a framing that not only appeals to the enthusiasm of the posting's target audience, but promises benefits beyond just a salary – including the prospect of a rich life packed with adventure, new people, new projects, etc. The advert is ultimately the ideal reflection of the Kantian definition of enthusiasm as the idea of the good accompanied by affect. In another statement, exploring the actual conditions of unpaid or low-paid jobs in cultural institutions, the volunteering-focused workgroup argues that the job posting is actually inherently ironic – in reality, the "good life" of the volunteer has little to do with what is actually promised them:

> First come the artists and organizers, then the technical crew, art school students, and finally the volunteers. At one theater festival, we heard that a famous director had spent a couple of years as a volunteer, so maybe we too would be famous directors one day. But in this hierarchy, the bodies of volunteers may only rise to the position of coordinator. The polled respondents often brought up their dismay with theater circles, their feelings of resignation, their slowly fading passion for theater. The volunteering body is a body that stands always ready to work, brimming with interest in art and hope for a job in culture. Its collision with the precariousness and sometimes violence of unpaid work causes this hope to evaporate.

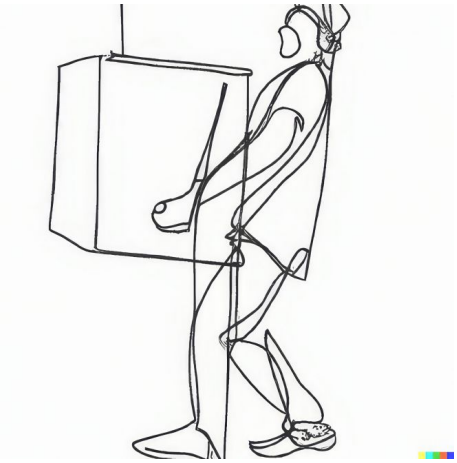
Volunteers often perform physical labor for free, in return for the speculative promise of a better future. Their work is then turned into a résumé entry and a thank-you card, testifying to the incredible opportunity that volunteering for a major festival must have been. While we have almost no research[18] suggesting that such unpaid labor translates into actual gain, measured

through either social mobility or personal satisfaction criteria, our surveys and autoethnographies paint a much more pessimistic picture.

Drafting our "body contracts," we had to take a closer look at the aspects of work that are most often concealed in job postings. The adoption of a particular form, the faux civil law contract, also forced us to confront how precarious employment conditions are often systemically sanctioned. Below, we attempt to draw some conclusions prompted by these experiences, at the same time placing them in a broader reflection straddling the intersection of sociology and cultural studies.

Invisible exhaustion

The challenges associated with performing the jobs described above are well captured in the theories of immaterial work that we drew on in the first part of this essay. As argued by a number of scholars – including Brian Massumi, Maurizio Lazzarrato, and Michael Hardt – jobs in late capitalism are immaterial in the sense that production, traditionally understood, is no longer their main effect and ultimate goal; instead, they seek to reproduce social relations themselves. This primarily applies to the service industries, which have seen exponential growth in late capitalism, as well as intellectual and digital labor. Antonio Negri claims that, as their importance has grown, interpersonal relationships have increasingly become the foundation of economic activity in modern societies.[19] This is why the "immateriality" and "relationality" of work can essentially be used interchangeably. Importantly, from our perspective,



Agata Gaik and Martyna Zawada, *Szukamy wolontariuszy* [*Looking for Volunteers*], illustrations for the Volunteering Body, digital graphics (using DALL-E), 2023.

despite the variety of forms and conditions that jobs come in, as well as the specific social position of those performing them, the "immateriality" of work does not necessarily imply its non-representability.

The research carried out for our project suggests the existence of culturally sanctioned protocols and codes of behavior that define attitudes widely considered desirable on the labor market. Contemporary forms of immaterial labor have recognizable faces – all of them universally enthusiastic. The line-up includes the beaming face of the street promoter, seeming to foreshadow the carefree atmosphere of the club party; the self-satisfied face of the dancer, uploading footage of her rehearsals to Instagram; the calm face of the volunteer, directing the visitor flow at an exhibition held in a run-down venue without a bathroom; the face of a cultural animator whose expressions conceal the fatigue brought on by the incessant performance of exalted excitement; and, finally, the smiling faces of the baristas serving coffee in urban coffee chains.

Italian philosopher Paolo Virno argues that, under the modern form of capitalism, the "living body, pillaged of every one of its qualities except pure vitality itself, becomes the substratum of productive capacity, the tangible sign of potential, the objective semblance of non-objectified labour."[20] This remark, which the whole *Body Contracts* project team praised early on in the effort, could not be more insightful. The enthusiastic faces of the precariat that we came across in the course of our research – and which we began to see also in mirrors and selfie collections – radiate "tangible signs" of being incessantly ready to work, manifested to satisfy (potential) employers and ensure continued job prospects. At the same time, it is patently clear that these signs conceal experiences subject to affective censorship. From the employers' perspective, bodies are turned into substrates of productive capacity, a framing which the

employees then secondarily internalize.

This does not mean, however, that the bodies in question can avoid fatigue. On the contrary. The seemingly abstract character of so-called "immaterial labor" is the sum total of a number of performative efforts undertaken by workers to display, under specific circumstances, their inexhaustible potential – and thus generate the appearance of unlimited vitality. Fatigue, or even exhaustion, is the inevitable result of such efforts, but it remains concealed by way of cultural performances deployed for purposes of self-creation or resulting from fear and desperation. Exhausted bodies are the seat of various, often conflicting affects, both deliberately stoked and sustained, as well as subjected to deep repression.

In a piece for *Teksty Drugie* published several years ago, Grzegorz Niziołek argued that after 1989, the institutional censorship of the Polish People's Republic was replaced by a much subtler – but no less problematic – "affective censorship."[21]

In the article, the scholar demonstrated its impact using the experiences of LGBTQ people as an example, claiming that the "lack of consent for the creation of positive models of homosexuality definitely had a devastating influence on the lives of many people."[22] The aforementioned minorities, however, are not the only ones lacking proper representation in public space, because in the dominant culture their experience remains coded as shameful or illegitimate. We believe that "affective censorship" also impacts precarious workers striving to adapt to the capitalist culture of success, downplaying their everyday difficulties and the courage it takes to overcome them.

Perhaps this particular observation does not entirely apply to Polish theater or performing arts. The plays staged by the popular Strzępka-Demirski duo already feature a plethora of neurotic characters exhausted by life – including its Sisyphean labors – and exuding fatigue.[23] But the experience portrayed on stage is not as easily articulated behind the scenes at actual

Polish theaters. Recent news about the abusive behavior of Krystian Lupa toward actors and technical staff across multiple venues has exposed the dismissive attitude of management staff – and the media outlets covering theater circles – toward rank-and-file "arts workers."[24]

The scale of the problem across the entire culture industry is increasingly illustrated by the public statements of precarious and project workers who, in the autoethnographic spirit, share their difficult experiences in popular industry magazines, among others.[25]



Agata Gaik and Martyna Zawada, *Szukamy wolontariuszy* [*Looking for Volunteers*], illustrations for the Volunteering Body, digital graphics (using DALL-E), 2023.

But it ought to be noted that the authors of these texts boast a particular privilege resulting from the specific nature of their jobs and, often, their position in the hierarchies of their profession. Access to media outlets, which can be used to publicize their experience, is simply not available to the masses of producers, mediators, and volunteers working in the culture sector, or the thousands of precarious workers in other industries. Our drafts for "honest contracts" were intended to bring them the semblance of justice, empathetically evoking the experience of getting caught up in violent employment practices, too often dismissed or concealed. As the project grew, we realized that these contracts performatively indicate the role played in censoring similar experiences by the law, conceived as a Foucauldian *dispositif*: a web of discourses and practices which encode strategies of knowledge and power.[26]

From a legal perspective, the provisions of our "honest contracts" are undoubtedly illicit. Explicitly stating in a commission contract intended for a food service worker that they are obliged to accept the risk of health damage – due

to hot oil burns, for example – could be read as an admission that the workplace is not compliant with occupational health and safety regulations, and that the employer will shirk liability should anything happen. In turn, a provision requiring the prospective worker to accept the possibility of receiving inappropriate comments and gestures from superiors would be nothing more than a sanction of mobbing and sexual harassment, which are patently illegal under Polish law. Incorporating these clauses in our "honest contracts" was, therefore, a provocation – and a deliberate one at that – designed to draw attention to the prevalence of unlawful, or at least controversial practices in the precarious job market. We were primarily interested in tracing the source of fatigue and exhaustion in contemporary enthusiasm economies, and a critique of the job market's legal landscape was, at least in the project's early stages, of secondary concern.

Imitating the specific poetics of legalese, we realized how disembodied language seems to be in a typical legal document. The sample requirements for workers that we included in the contracts were, despite their hyperbolic accumulation, realistic. However, in the context of the writing convention we adopted, they still seemed overly specific and sounded "unnatural." The impression was amplified by reading Polish labor law, which is rather vague about dangers to the workforce. The definition of workplace mobbing under the law offers a significant example: "mobbing is actions or behaviors regarding or aimed against a worker, involving persistent, long-term harassment or intimidation that degrade the worker's assessment of their professional fitness, demean or ridicule the worker, isolate them, or eliminate them from the team" (Article 94, Section 3, Paragraph 2 of the Polish Labor Code). Legal scholars emphasize that, due to the vagueness of the definition, it is difficult to prove improper treatment at work in Polish courts, and that the psychological pressure of providing relevant evidence is often

unbearable to plaintiffs.[27] In this light, it can be argued that the law plays a significant part in affectively censoring the exhaustion of the precariat.

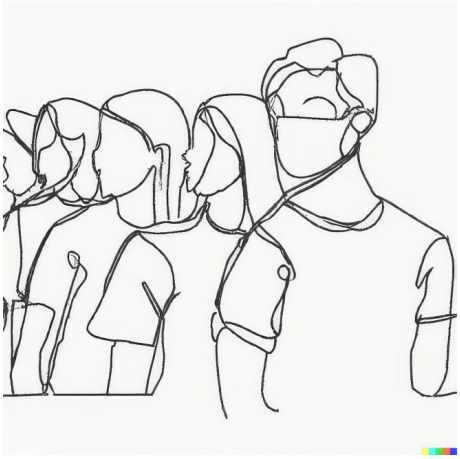
The Labor Code clauses pertaining to mobbing weren't the only ones to catch our eye. Other articles that drew our attention indirectly contribute to cultural censorship or diminishing the bodily-affective dimension of labor – including "immaterial" labor – by regulating responsibility for its outcomes rather than the process of producing them. This applies particularly to legislation covering commission or work-specific contracts, which are the most prevalent form of contract used in the professions we examined (especially when performed by people still in higher education). A good example can be found in the "shared responsibility" clause, which stipulates that when a commission or specific job is carried out by several people, the indisposition of one of them automatically redirects responsibility to the rest.

This phenomenon is well illustrated by the situation of food service workers – as well as those involved in volunteering – who are often forced to perform actions not covered by their contracts, especially when a co-worker withdraws from work for any reason, even health. In this context, the law mostly protects employers from potential abuses committed by employees – and for good reason – but the former often treat it as the legitimization of exploitative practices. Invoking the shared responsibility clause, the employer may theoretically delegate almost any duties to any employee – and practice suggests that incidents like these are not isolated. This undoubtedly distorts the meaning of "solidarity" that the Labor Code refers to.

Looking at the codes and clauses from a cultural studies perspective, it is apparent that the legal concept of a person – both a natural and a legal person – is based on abstraction of the individual from their corporeality. Occupational health and safety issues necessarily focus on drafting standardized procedures, as universal as possible – and this universality

remains essential for the functioning of the law as we know it. By recombining legalese with the experiences of specific bodies under specific circumstances, we wanted to provoke prospective audiences into a discussion about the extent of possible changes to existing law – even those selectively and inadequately protecting precarious worker bodies. Unfortunately, Polish legal frameworks have little to say about many forms of precarious work that we examined in *Body Contracts* – in particular, about the situation of volunteers, paving the way for abuse by treating volunteering as separate from all other forms of labor.[28] Neither do they provide appropriate regulatory assistance for individuals engaged in creative work; even if the draft bill on the status of the professional artist is passed, on which the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage began working under the United Right administration, it is likely that many in the arts realm will be left wanting. The current draft contains no provision for jobs in the culture sector that do not meet all the criteria to be called a "creative profession," but check many of the required boxes. These include, among others, cultural animator and cultural event production assistant jobs.

Enthusiast university



Agata Gaik and Martyna Zawada, *Szukamy wolontariuszy* [*Looking for Volunteers*], illustrations for the Volunteering Body, digital graphics (using DALL-E), 2023.

We believe that, shortly after writing this text, we will be able to bring our project to its planned conclusion – that is, the performative event. We also trust that it will ultimately prove useful as an intervention into the circulations of academic knowledge, as scholars have so far paid little attention to the problems discussed here. What seems warranted, however, is a little (self-)critical commentary on the context in which our collaborative effort developed – namely, the system of academic labor: labor performed both by students and teaching staff. A good starting point is offered by a provocative remark from Bernard Stiegler, who argues that the logic of supply and demand has suborned the contemporary university – at least in the Global North – to the extent that "the academic world is faced with the threat of finding itself *prescribed* by 'demand,' in terms of the demand for employment, not the demand for knowledge."[29] As members of the academic community, we experience first-hand the consequences of the process examined here by Stiegler.

In his *States of Shock*, Stiegler claims that under late capitalism, the drafting of teaching programs is increasingly defined by "subjecting the formation of attention to the criteria of so-called employability, which has nothing whatsoever to do with professionalization."[30] He also adds that professionalization ultimately "depends on supplying knowledge, not adaptability to the battlefield that is flexibility."[31] Unfortunately, workshops such as those we worked on in the course of the *Body Contracts*

project can easily become testing grounds for neoliberalism; symptomatically, we did discuss employability in the first two meetings. While we changed course in later stages of the project – prompted, at least early on, by intuition more than any declarative choices – this does not mean that we avoided problems related to Stinger's "formation of attention," as well as the process that is best described as "enthusiasm management." It is definitely easier to be excited about an effort expected to yield measurable results than one not promising an immediate reward – and the frame of which keeps shifting. It is why gradual changes to the project's priorities brought about changes in our commitment levels (all of which happened alongside our regular academic duties).

The evaluation surveys show that, despite experiencing similar issues, the majority of us are satisfied with the course of the project and its outcomes, and that our approach is motivated, among other factors, by the critical nature of our work. We would like to share some insights into the specific model of work we adopted with others – not only academics – who would like to develop similar projects in the future. In maintaining enthusiasm and critical engagement in the research process, the following helped us most:



Agata Gaik and Martyna Zawada, *Szukamy wolontariuszy* [*Looking for Volunteers*], illustrations for the Volunteering Body, digital graphics (using DALL-E), 2023.

– focusing on our bodies. The project concerned affects, but the affects we personally experienced were actively incorporated into the collaborative effort; examples include the physical exercises we performed to relax and strengthen relations within the group, and efforts to problematize our own fatigue during the check-ins opening each workshop class. Practices

like these allowed us to evade the aforementioned trap of concealing exhaustion while performing continuous productivity;

– the freedom to design action scripts regarding our own interests, but linked to a need to confront both the group and prospective future audiences (we acted on our own behalf and in our own interest, but not self-interestedly; rather, our efforts were explorative, transgressive, and consciousness-raising);

– looking for support outside the narrow institutional frames offered by the university; we found this in the prospect of collaboratively writing this text, among other places. Although we started out with the assumption that the essay would be published in an academic journal, the prospect of actually drafting it freed us from the academic routine of grades and ECTS points; it also inspired us to consider the potential audience we wanted to offer our knowledge to, defined along Stiegler's interpretation rather than conceived as know-how used for opportunistic adaptation.

As Polish universities try to outshine each other with their "excellence initiatives," we managed to bring to life a project with ambitions not at all related to the ambitions of professional or academic development. Thanks to it, we have certainly become more aware of the role that enthusiasm – a kindred emotion of ambition, tying the idea of good with affect – plays in both the labor market and in university life.

Anatomy of enthusiasm

As we head toward a conclusion, we would like to make a last aside. One resource we analyzed together in classes, before they became more project-driven, was the documentation for Marysia Lewandowska and Neil Cummings's *The Enthusiasts Archive*. Traveling across Poland in 2003 and 2004, the artists built an archive of films made in the amateur film clubs of the Polish People's Republic, which were then showcased at an exhibition at Ujazdowski Castle Centre for Contemporary Art and later uploaded online (today, the archive can be found at the Museum of Modern Art website). The project was well received by the audience, with viewers easily identifying with the characters. Some of them still remembered the times when the film clubs infused a little color into the gray socialist reality – and approached the exhibition with nostalgia. Others, especially those hailing from younger generations, read it as confirmation that their ambitions for building post-1989 culture and civic society around grassroots, enthusiasm-driven efforts were a valid course of action. Speaking with Marysia Lewandowska, Bogna Świątkowska, the founder of the Bęc Zmiana Foundation, said:



Frame from *Piosenka dla robotnika rannej zmiany* [*A Song for the Morning Shift Worker*] (Chorzów: AKF Chorzowska Ósemka, 1982), "Archiwum entuzjastów," https://entuzjasci.artmuseum.pl/exhibition (accessed August 20, 2023).

> The title [of the project] is important to me personally as it allowed me to identify some key areas of the system that culture operates and circulates in… As a category, enthusiasm was widely used in exploring the history of architecture, history of art, and urban spaces in Poland in the

> early 2000s. The title, the title of your exhibition, was helpful in identifying [...] what is essentially the contribution of the generation active in the early 2000s to recognizing the potential of culture.[32]

Like Świątkowska, we see a reflection of ourselves in the characters of *The Enthusiasts Archive*. We involve ourselves in grassroots cultural initiatives and believe in their socioformative potential. At the same time, we do not take our own enthusiasm for granted, and strive to protect it from burning out, which can feel inevitable due to the prevalence of exploitative practices in the culture industry. That is why we also sympathize with the experience shared recently in *Dwutygodnik* by cultural manager Katarzyna Renes, offering a warning to anyone who sees enthusiasm as veering ominously close to ideological attachment:

> I knew I had addictive tendencies. That once an idea or a cause grabs me, I will commit myself to it wholeheartedly, forgetting about everything else. I was planning to finish up my things with friends and then focus only on what I authentically contribute to, what helps me grow and truly interests me.
>
> But I never did that. Despite multiple attempts, I remained mired in the system, suggesting new projects, taking responsibility for things I should not be taking care of. I stayed silent when others failed to keep up their ends. It's typical for addictions. You know full well that the highs are no good for you, but you just don't want to stop.[33]

We share with Renes this awareness of the dark side of the "enthusiasm economy," with its predilection toward violence and exploitation. However, we want to join the public debate over these issues, emphasizing the need to protect individual and collective passions, all the while appreciating the need for engagement. What we don't want to do is equate said passions with destructive "addiction," and we see the project as

an attempt at a reparatory intervention.

1 The title "Umowy o ciało" is a play on the Polish term "umowa o dzieło," which is a type of commission contract used increasingly by employers to cut down labor costs and make it easier to terminate workers at will without severance – translator's note.

2 See: "Umowy o ciało," https://umowyocialo.wordpress.com (accessed August 20, 2023).

3 "Student pracuje w Krakowie," research report, *Aplikuj.pl*, June 2019, www.aplikuj.pl/userfiles/_CMS_/krakow/raport-student-pracuje-krakow.pdf (accessed August 20, 2023).

4 The interview methodology adopted by the whole team for the project was based on the model suggested by sociologist Steinar Kvale. See: Svend Brinkmann and Steinar Kvale, *Doing Interviews* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2018).

5 Anna Kacperczyk, "Autoetnografia – technika, metoda, nowy paradygmat? O metodologicznym statusie autoetnografii," *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* vol. 10, no. 3 (2013), 47.

6 See: Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner S. Pluhar (Indianapolis, IA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987), 272.

7 Elizabeth Wissinger, "Modelling a Way of Life: Immaterial and Affective Labour in the Fashion Modelling Industry," *Ephemera* vol. 7, no. 1 (2007), 252.

8 See: Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* vol. 8, no. 4 (1982), 777–795.

9 Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* no. 31 (1995), 106.

10 "Structural opportunism" is the term Kuba Szreder suggested for the precariat's relentless pursuit of professional growth and efforts to hold down jobs (particularly seen among workers in the arts). The significance of this phenomenon and its affective aspects, linked to performing enthusiasm and ignoring exploitation, was explored previously by sociologists Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello in their seminal volume on late capitalism, and before them by Richard Sennett. See: Kuba Szreder, "W obiegu. Strukturalny oportunizm jako sposób urządzenia pracy i życia uczestników artystycznej cyrkulacji," *Czas Kultury* no. 3 (2016), 16–24; Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2022); Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York City, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2000).

11 Michał Bargielski et al., *NieKongres animatorów kultury. Raport ewaluacyjny* (Warsaw: Mazowieckie Obserwatorium Kultury, 2014), 26; www.mazowieckieobserwatorium.pl (accessed August 20, 2023).

12 As demonstrated by the report published almost fifteen years ago by the ę Association for Creative Initiatives, the economic and social transformation of 1989 in Poland had a distinct and long-term impact on "first contact" cultural institutions. See: Marta Białek-Graczyk et al., *Zoom na domy kultury. Raport. Diagnoza domów kultury w województwie mazowieckim* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Inicjatyw Twórczych "ę," 2009), http://zoomnadomykultury.e.org.pl/data/files/raport_zoom.pdf (accessed August 20, 2023).

13 See: Brian Longhurst and Nicholas Abercrombie, *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (London: Sage, 1998), 132–133.

14 See: Andreas Reckwitz, *The Invention of Creativity*, trans. Steven Black (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2017).

15 Ibid., 100.

16 Magdalena Niedzielska, *Potencjalne ciało tańczące*, "Umowy o ciało," https://umowyocialo.wordpress.com/2023/08/14/potencjalne-ciala-tanczace (accessed August 20, 2023).

17 *Ciało tańczące*, "Umowy o ciało," https://umowyocialo.wordpress.com/2023/05/15/cialo-tanczace (accessed August 20, 2023).

18 Among the exceptions, of note is an article by Anita Basińska and Piotr Matczak, who argued in *Przegląd Socjologiczny* that short-term volunteering offers participants

prospects to both multiply and leverage social capital. See: idem, "Wolontariat jako narzędzie budowy kapitału społecznego w świetle badań nad wolontariatem akcyjnym w trzech polskich miastach," *Przegląd Socjologiczny* no. 4 (2010), 83–102.

19 Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA–London: Harvard University Press, 2000), 29.

20 Paolo Virno, *Déjà Vu and the End of History*, trans. David Broder (New York City, NY: Verso, 2015), 165.

21 Grzegorz Niziołek, "Affective Censorship," *Teksty Drugie* no. 1 (2017), 111–119.

22 Ibid., 114.

23 In this context, reports about abuse allegedly committed by Monika Strzępka as director of the Drama Theater in Warsaw may seem ironic. Among other commentators, the situation in question was discussed by one of our research team members, Zuzanna Piwowar. See: Zuzanna Piwowar, "Nasz folwark pachnie szałwią," *E-Teatr.pl*, November 3, 2023, https://e-teatr.pl/nasz-folwark-pachnie-szalwia-42558 (accessed December 1, 2023).

24 See: Zuzanna Piwowar, "Pies merda całym sobą," *E-Teatr.pl*, August 7, 2023, https://e-teatr.pl/pies-merda-calym-soba-39179 (accessed August 20, 2023).

25 See: Katarzyna Renes, "Moje życie z projektami," *Dwutygodnik* no. 350 (2022), www.dwutygodnik.com/artykul/10482-moje-zycie-z-projektami.html (accessed August 20, 2023).

26 See: Magdalena Nowicka, "O użyteczności kategorii dyspozytywu w badaniach społecznych," *Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej* vol. 12, no. 1 (2016), 170–191.

27 See: Michał Boczek, "Mobbing w polskim porządku prawnym," *Eunomia* vol. 98, no. 1 (2018), 53–62.

28 While Polish law has an act on public benefit organizations and volunteering, which covers issues such as contracts and agreements, defining scopes of responsibility, and reimbursing travel costs and expenses (as in the case of regular employees), employers and organizers often fail to comply with these provisions and do not clearly draft agreements outlining job responsibilities and conditions. It should be noted that existing regulations are still open to interpretation, often to the detriment of volunteers. The question was exhaustively examined by Barbara Janik and Mikołaj Jacek Łuczak: "We should point out an important distinction in the Act on Public Benefit Organizations and Volunteering's interpretation of 'labor.' The Act does not specifically define it, instead

repeatedly uses the following phrasing: 'Volunteers can render services, stipulated in the provisions outlined herein, corresponding to the rendering of labor.' It is key here, as the volunteer, from a legal standpoint, does not render labor for the so-called 'recipient,' which consequently means the latter cannot be considered an 'employer.' Used colloquially, as well as in legal, academic, and promotional texts, the phrase 'working as a volunteer' may be defined and interpreted in violation of existing law, which may result in the abuse of volunteers, and – more broadly – lead to violations of the existing social and economic order." Barbara Janik and Mikołaj Jacek Łuczak, "Dylematy zaangażowania – wolontariat w świadomości społecznej," *Kultura i Edukacja* no. 4 (2011), 71.

29 Bernard Stiegler, *States of Shock: Stupidity and Knowledge in the 21st Century*, trans. Daniel Ross (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2015), 169.

30 Ibid.

31 Ibid. The global economic order here becomes the stage for what Stiegler calls a "neoliberal jihad" – a campaign of deregulation and precarization of economic activity and of all sectors of public life.

32 Marysia Lewandowska, "Archiwum entuzjastów," a conversation with Bogna Świątkowska for Bęc Radio, archival recording available at Lewandowska's website, November 2019, https://marysialewandowska.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Bęc-radio-Marysia-Lewandowska.mp3 (accessed August 20, 2023).

33 Renes, "Moje życie z projektami."

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