Introduction

Passionate Work and the Good Life

> Among the 47,361 employees surveyed in 120 countries worldwide, 25% report life ratings high enough to put them in the thriving group. Among engaged workers, however, the figure rises to 45%, while among those who are actively disengaged, just 13% are thriving. . . . There is much that managers and leaders can do to help employees around the globe feel like they have good jobs—and therefore good lives.
>
> Steve Crabtree, "A Good Job Means a Good Life" (2011)

Finding passion for one's work is often described as a positive ideal. It is commonly held in relation to the "good life," something that hinges on the uncomplicated desire that work might provide human life with purpose, financial well-being, and success. Richard Sennett has described this as an instinct, or as an ethos of the artisan or craftsman, whose "desire to do a job well for its own sake" is "an enduring, basic human impulse."[1] Such longing stems from a longer lineage of intellectual thought, of which one influential figure is the young Karl Marx. Commenting on early works of Marx, Thomas Henricks notes that "in the Marxian vision of the good life, people participate together in communities on terms of relative equality."[2] *Equality* carries the meaning of laboring according to the human will; in such a world, labor "expresses the special privilege of human beings to transform freely the conditions of their existence."[3] Like Sennett's, Henricks's notion is built on the model of the craftsman and artist: "The objects we create and the tools we use not only reflect the human abilities we share with others but also provide the basis for our public lives together."[4]

These humanist visions describe the ennobling possibility of labor: the view that work executed in line with one's passions will realize our creative capacities and contribute toward building a better world. Certainly there are qualifications as to what Sennett and Marx would endorse as passionate work. Neither, as a general overview of their scholarship suggests, would support a model of craftsmanship that obtains passion at the cost of exploitation and a precarious existence.[5] Both also produced highly influential and critical accounts of capitalism. Yet their visions, rooted in the notion of an authentic inner life expressible through labor, indicate the persistence of passionate work as a cultural imaginary for how the intricacies of everyday life are to be negotiated.

This vision of passion should be familiar to the contemporary reader. After all, as Miya Tokumitsu relates, the media are replete with images that project work as an object of bliss.[6] A cursory search on a search engine would yield an assortment of strategies to find your passion. It is also the case that celebrities such as Oprah Winfrey, Steve Jobs, and Jeff Bezos have been ardent evangelists of the passionate work ethos. The commencement speech delivered by the late Jobs at Stanford University, which exhorted listeners to "do what you love," remains one of the most popular inspirational talks on YouTube, having accumulated over 36 million views at the time of writing.[7]

On the corporate front, companies have become more involved in attracting and developing passionate employees. In the 2000s, companies such as Zappos and Google created the position of a chief happiness officer, the newest entrant to the C-suite responsible for the mission of organizational happiness.[8] Others, such as Amazon, have initiated "pay to quit" policies, a scheme that offers a nominal sum for unpassionate employees to resign voluntarily.[9] Those uncertain about their passions may also enroll in colleges such as the Wayfinding Academy, a program that prioritizes the discovery of passions. Customizing the curriculum to the interests of each individual student, the Wayfinding Academy claims to empower students to "live life on purpose," helping them find the kind of work that can help them "thrive" and "grow" throughout their lives.[10]

Post-Fordist Trade-off

Concerns arose in the late twentieth century that the shift toward post-Fordism had engendered a different logic of oppression.[11] Writing in the 1970s, Harry Braverman associated the monopolization of technical and scientific knowledge with the accumulation of social power by the technological and managerial classes. The separation of conception from execution polarizes knowledge, forcing the working class into performing simple tasks that erode the relevance of their craft skills and intensify their estrangement from the production process. For Braverman, workplace alienation materializes class warfare at the structural level; alienation and deskilling have become the mechanisms by which "workers would sink to the level of general and undifferentiated labor power" and be subject to the weakening of their bargaining power and the cash value of their labor.[12]

But by the 1990s, a different work ethos had emerged around the New Economy. Corporations in the growing creative and technology sectors had co-opted the resistance to work as a corporate philosophy to engineer a workplace that refused distinctions between traditional boundaries of work and leisure.[13] Instead of denying workers their autonomy or swamping them with bureaucracy and hierarchy, these companies forged a post-Fordist work ethos that encouraged workers to freely express themselves, build team relationships, and blur spheres of leisure and work. Work strove to be a space for pleasure, intimacy, and personal identification, where companies believed that those qualities would best draw the human capabilities most valued in those industries: creative, intellectual, and communicative skills, as well as the worker's emotions and relational capital.[14]

By now there exists a considerable body of work that has addressed the problematics of this postindustrial work ethos. Studies of cultural workers, in particular, have highlighted how autonomy is exchanged for short-term precarious work contracts, lengthy hours, pressures to keep one's skills relevant, and the need to juggle multiple jobs to make a decent wage.[15] The consensus—as David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker have found in interviews across different creative industries—is that the freedom of this work ethic is at best "complicated" and "ambivalent" and at worst blatantly exploitative.[16] While many creative workers do enjoy a certain degree of autonomy and creative pleasure in their work, many are also subject, willingly or unwillingly, to the problematics characterized by post-Fordist work. The individualistic drive for fulfillment through work comes at the cost of fair wages and organized labor, and work culture is said to drive such exploitation through an array of bohemian symbols that makes its adherence cool and exciting. "The humane workplace (with its feel-good simulation and its tests of mettle)," Andrew Ross writes, "has taken precedence over the just workplace (with protection for all, democratic control over the enterprise, and assurances of security beyond the job)."[17] And development of the technological capacities of crowdsourcing and videocasting and the normalization of entrepreneurialism, internships, and hustle culture have made this work ethos common and its exploitation pervasive.[18]

The salience of these problems has prompted critiques of passion on platforms such as the *Atlantic*, *Jacobin*, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *Harvard Business Review*.[19] The call to follow one's passion has been publicly denounced as an alibi for overworking employees, producing a host of bodily, psychological, and relational ailments that make for a "bruising workplace."[20] It has been accused of downplaying the fact that craftsmanship can be difficult and painful, rather than exciting and stimulating.[21] Most of all, however, passionate work is attacked for its fallacious promise. Jonathan Malesic, for instance, has described the popular *ikigai* model of job fulfillment, which locates the "dream job" within four overlapping qualities (passion, wage, purpose, and skill), as a dangerous lie. Labeling a quadrant covered by passion, purpose, and skill, but short of a wage, as "exploitation," Malesic indicates the problems that exist in the zones of partial exclusion. He writes, "Even in the best of economic times, people rarely find remunerative work that they also love," and high-paying dream jobs have become even rarer after the recession.[22]

These accounts share the assumption that people have, to varying degrees, been seduced into the fantasy of passionate work. The problem, following the shift from Fordism to post-Fordism, is that people have "traded" their wages, time, and job security (ideals assumed by Fordism) for a fantasy of passionate work or self-exploitative pleasure. Terms such as "aspirational labor" (Duffy), "hope labor" (Kuehn and Corrigan), "venture labor" (Neff), and "glamorous labor" (Rosenblat) assert this dynamic, informing the ways that affect is directed toward the capture of labor power, usually through the production of false hopes.[23] Certainly, the trade-off is more nuanced in its variations. The expressed love for the job may be more of a rhetorical strategy than an internalized belief, and the want for autonomy is not always absent a demand for justice.[24] Yet, despite these differences, it remains clear that the shift to post-Fordism has normalized the cultural intelligibility of the trade-off. Tiziana Terranova's influential diagnosis of digital labor—that such work tends toward being "simultaneously voluntarily given and unwaged, enjoyed and exploited"—reflects a key characteristic of post-Fordist work: its capacity to tolerate and harness contradictions between pleasure and a fair wage.[25]

The heuristic of the trade-off serves a powerful explanatory function, but this book argues that the transparency of its exchange has obfuscated yet another ideological purpose in passionate work: its use in dictating how life is to be led happily and well *despite* economic hardship. To explain the cost of corporatist autonomy, trade-off theorists have typically centered their arguments on the false allure of passion. People are driven to chase their passions through false impressions, believing that it will bring them happiness and a better life, but end up being exploited of their wages, time, and creativity. This perspective provides analytical clarity, and its resonance in public discourse reflects how it taps into a contemporary state of affairs. Still, this argument is limited by its assumption—in the logic of the trade-off, the subject exploited is one who *desires* passion and who takes steps to pursue it. Passionate work is a trap laid for subjects "tricked" into its fantasy.

My contention is that this approach obscures the organizational logic that passion serves for capitalism. It also imposes the meaning of passion on certain professions—usually middle- and upper-class, creative, and cultural workers, and entrepreneurs—as indicative of what passion means for work culture at large, narrowing its usefulness and span as an organizational logic of work today. Passionate work, this book argues, does much more. It is not simply a feeling but a logic to labor that informs the governmentality of work.

Affective Structure

I came to examine passionate work because I am interested in and dismayed at how contemporary forms of labor have become more affective and exploitative at the same time. But as the study proceeded, I noticed something else: a different language for passionate work has emerged, where *people are asked to follow their passions precisely because of the existing problems of the economy*. Indeed, what has become clear is that the dynamics of passionate work are not simply centered on a conventional passionate subject—someone who "follows their passion"—and neither does passionate work operate only at the level of a trade-off, an exchange of love for exploitation. Instead, passion is increasingly mobilized as a shield, a means of attenuating the psychic drain of economic uncertainty and income scarcity. This changes the relationship between passion and exploitation: if exploitation is commonly seen as a *cause* of passionate work, then passionate work is now made a *reaction* to exploitation, a panacea for the marginal subject at risk of falling out of the "normal" system of economic personhood.

Passionate Work embarks on the inquiry on those terms, seeking to understand what passionate work does even when the subjects of its address do not feel passion as it is conventionally understood. Instead of focusing on subjects of the "passion economy"—those who have woven their passions into their labor—I gravitate toward subjects and contexts that do not typically conjure impressions of passionate engagement: newly retrenched unemployed individuals, call center workers, and those forced into the precarious work of freelancing.[26] Passion emerges in these spaces as a means of endurance, a way of cobbling a veneer of normalcy amid protracted economic disenchantment. This approach expands on what Kathleen Stewart calls the "contact zones" of analysis, capturing the purposes of passion as it swerves and relays through the circuits that make up a world.[27] Consequently, *passion* is best apprehended not as a self-evident term with clearly defined boundaries in meaning. Rather, its enduring usefulness and relevance must be understood through its fluidity, its capability of joining itself to a range of objects, emotions, discourses, and histories to bring out imagined qualities of the passionate subject.

For this reason, I theorize passionate work as an *affective structure*, a zone of orientation that clusters a variety of affects and circulates them in a way that would make passion matter differently for different subjects. Passion clusters not in the sense that it is an emotional "blend," as cultural historian Fay Bound Alberti puts it.[28] Alberti uses emotional clusters to explain the repertoire of feelings found in emotional states. Loneliness, for instance, can include feelings of rage, sorrow, jealousy, and resentment. Similarly, passion can feel like many things. My interest, however, does not primarily lie with the range of sensations that passion can arouse, although it does have many facets; nor does it center on the ways that the term has gained vernacular use, although that remains important to the contextualization of the affect.

The aim is more specific: I seek to understand the politics of passionate work by examining how it forms an interpretive schema, such that access into the good life through work is made thinkable in a condition of structural violence. Feelings, Sara Ahmed writes, "do not reside in subjects or objects, but are produced as effects of circulation."[29] The more an emotion is associated with an object, the more the association is solidified and naturalized as how things are. I extend this associational proposition by suggesting that affective structures also influence what is recognized within circulation. The more we come into contact with an emotion, the easier its recall in other sites; the more it is used, the more elastic the emotion becomes, structuring how the world comes to gain meaning. Emotion is nonsubjective in this sense: learned emotional vocabularies and conditioned emotional dispositions, Rei Terada writes, influence the terms that we come to recognize and naturalize the sentiments we encounter.[30] The cultural salience to passionate work, coupled with its fluidity of meaning, has allowed it to tinge and enter a variety of contexts that influence the ways that work is transformed, governed, and encountered.

This approach has influenced the methods undertaken for this project. To chart the elasticity of passionate work, I have stitched an array of materials together. The chapters that follow are centered on the fields of managerial ideology (chapter 1), unemployment (chapter 2), gamification (chapter 3), and coworking (chapter 4), but the objects they assemble range from historical managerial texts to contemporary career guides, from social scientific work on unemployment to networking advice, from software protocols to descriptions of office furniture. This wide overview reflects, in part, the saturation of passionate work in our worlds, but it also serves the strategic purpose of bringing its dynamic into focus. As an example, I piece social scientific texts from different disciplinary fields in chapter 2 to illustrate the entanglements that exist between passionate work and unemployment. *Marienthal,* a sociological text influential for insisting on the psychological necessity of employment, shows us how apathy can be used as a label to pathologize unemployment, rendering it a condition uninvestable with any meaningful human interest. This argument is pulled through into happiness and policy studies on optimum unemployment insurance—showing the effort spent in orchestrating a world where joblessness is *made to be* "rationally" painful. This example shows how passionate work is regularized as an affective structure through the sedimentation of ideas, norms, and attitudes. As a rubric for an ideal, it magnetizes a distributed effort to shape work to proximate a particular form.

To capture these tendencies, I attend to the connections in my materials, revealing the often surreptitious collaborations that disparate actors have in making their claims. For instance, I was led to the theory of flow, a psychological theory of concentration and engagement, while examining the case of gamification in chapter 3. At that point, I was engaged in a critique of the compassionate impulse of gamification—its argument that gamified software protocols could yield better lives for low-value information workers—and I thought that flow would simply be another data point. But upon looking deeper, I was struck by the resonances of passion and compassion in these separate accounts. The flow experience (typically described as that of passion) is modeled after the psychological resilience of prisoners who were able to survive war untraumatized, and its theorist, Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, was driven to deploy this quality of psychological engagement to ease the boredom of factory line workers. From line workers to information workers, these similarities show the ways that passionate work can congeal a world.

Understanding passionate work as an affective structure allows us to attend to it as its logic gets stretched out and pulled from the center into the margins. It reveals an expanded utility and highlights the many kinds of compromises and violence that it exacts through its differentiated worldmaking projects. Some might dispute the accuracy of understanding passionate work in this broad sense, of reading it as culture rather than feeling, structure rather than state, and of associating negative affects with the hip "do what you love" movement characteristic of passionate work. I draw my conceptualization of the term from Raymond Williams, who describes culture as neither isolated nor static. Feelings, he points out, can exist as "structures of feeling," "a pattern of impulses, restraints, tones," which have a general organization but which can vary in specific experiences depending on the lived condition that people find themselves in.[31] Similarly, *affective structure* is used here to reference the many forms of recognition that passion affords. It highlights variation in discourses, institutional arrangements, and intended outcomes, while maintaining that a central tenor and logic determine how people are expected to relate to their labor.

At the same time, an affective structure does more than describe a continuum of experiences. The mode of recognition it provides is itself a politics, a means of assuming sameness and difference in feelings, a tool to produce the terms by which unvalued workers in mundane occupations are to be pitied and rescued from their predicament. The idea that passion can be recognized in different ways allows for calls for change while keeping workers relegated to their place. It enables passion to be issued in compromised terms—where excluded subjects can yet experience a semblance of what it might feel to be a valued passionate worker—while bypassing the challenging politics needed to truly engineer fairer conditions of livelihoods.

This description of passionate work as recuperation and endurance may appear contradictory. After all, the ethic of passionate work has largely been critiqued as being the cause for normalizing the characteristics of "bad jobs," whether for wage, job security, or the ethic of overwork. So how has passion continued to be offered as a solution? One reason, I submit, is that as passion becomes a normalized post-Fordist affect, it also subtly shifts ideas about what the good life should encompass and the priorities that people should hold. And within this shift, it has become possible for passion to be presented as an affect that can bring people closer to an idealized selfhood in late capitalism: a resilient subject capable of managing economic disappointment and endurance of a precarious order. Lauren Berlant writes that the Great Recession marks an economic-affective turn, where "the promise of the good life can no longer mask the living precarity of this historical present."[32] The good life has become frayed, and ideas of steady progression—fantasies that hard work can lead to home ownership, a progressively secure future for the family, and an improvement in job status—have become fragile, prone to damage. The affective structure of passionate work is contextualized within this particular milieu as a form of repair and reassurance. Addressed to the postrecessionary realities of joblessness, class anxiety, and precarity, passionate work nonetheless maintains that work can lead to some kind of a good life.

I describe the promises clustered around passionate work to be *compromises*, meaning that they are at once more minor and phantasmic than what the good life is traditionally assumed to be. These new icons of the good life promise much less, but because they promise less, they seem more adequate, easier to achieve, and less likely to hurt if they end up being unachievable. In a scene of anticipated damage, compromised promises are more affectively investable because they allow for pivoting and shifting to different investments of hope. In a milieu of damage, "the hope is that what misses the mark and disappoints won't much threaten anything in the ongoing reproduction of life, but will allow . . . a kind of compromised endurance," Berlant offers.[33] Adaptation to this future takes the form of damage control, and anticipating how the failure to achieve one's ideal can nonetheless enable some measure of continued existence.

This style of navigation carries pragmatic consequences in the everyday. It eases hardship, producing what is called resilience in the vernacular. We cannot downplay relief. Faced with the pressures of life, relief may be what remains to cohere a world. But it is also critical to examine the shape that relief takes, for relief does not simply normalize the damaged, precarious future of work; it can intensify the norm of work and make work the very site of relief. In its most extreme form, passionate work would have us investing more into work to find relief from the precariousness of work itself. This perverse logic deserves greater scrutiny. Ahmed offers that recovering can indicate how we feel structural injury; to recover may be to re-cover, to cover over and write out an urgent diagnosis of something that needs resistance and refusal.[34] Tackling rather than masking hardship, passionate work shapes our encounter with the grim conditions of labor, channeling disappointment toward resilience, sapping it of its potential for radical change. But what can we say to an apparatus that affords survival even as it continues the norm of a workerist society? The book explores this condition to clarify the politics of compromises offered.

Energetic Attachments

To further this discussion, we might first inquire into the specificity of the term. Why focus on passion as opposed to feelings such as happiness or engagement? For one thing, *passion* in the vernacular encompasses the meanings of alternate terms—such as *happiness*, *engagement*, *love*, *bliss*, *purpose*, and *calling*—that communicate the optimistic view that work can be a source of fulfillment. At the same time, *passion* references something specific about energetic expression. In *Cold Intimacies*, Eva Illouz describes emotions as “the ‘energy-laden’ side of action, where energy is understood to simultaneously implicate cognition, affect, evaluation, motivation, and the body.”[35] Illouz would call all emotions energetic if not energy giving—emotions provide the “mood” to an action by coloring the style of how we act.

But even if emotion were to influence action, it would be passion that takes form as one of the most energetic affects. Passion is defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as “an intense desire or enthusiasm for something; the zealous pursuit of an aim.” Passion is intense and zealous: if it were to color an act, it would do so energetically, forcefully, persistently. We might imagine a passionate person talking quickly, gesturing excitedly. Passion is spirited, and as Reynold Lawrie offers, it cannot be expressed by anything other than pure energetic expression. It describes “intensity,” “fire,” and “urgency,” states that would urge activity and force: “It would be inconceivable to have a passion for something, and not desire to pursue the object in some way or another.”[36]

Thinking of passion as a form of *energeticity* connects the affect to a longer cultural imagination of human energetics. Anson Rabinbach notes that motors and machines have historically served as metaphors for human labor power because they provide a language for the expandability in the capacities to labor.[37] Automata were invested in as ideal laboring bodies in the eighteenth century because they were assumed to be perpetual motion machines, able to function without limit and continue operations forever without complaints of fatigue, discontent, and aversion. Obviously this was never realized, but the hope for inexhaustible labor power continued well into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with inquiries into the efficiency of energy conversion in human bodies. Ergonomics and time-motion studies, for instance, share similar claims of societal uplift: inducing motivation in workers, reducing their fatigue, and uncovering the precision of movements that can minimize waste have all been described to optimize the production and expenditure of energy, help workers reach their potential, and, in the process, bring forth a better society.[38]

This history reflects the long-standing preoccupation with human energetics and the desire for its extension. Passion offers a scene of this, stretching human vigor in a context of enervation. Like the perpetual motion machine—an animating model of human labor—passion seems unassailable in its conjuration of inner fortitude. In chapter 2, I elaborate on how passion is repeatedly turned to for its capacity to provoke action in the face of adversity. A quality of obsession embedded in passion is imagined to extend the human capability of pursuit, offering a model of driven action that provides fuel beyond what is reasonably possible, which enables extreme expressions of human perseverance and grit. Here, passion coincides with the idea of a well-managed self. The promise of doing more, taking more, *achieving more* is undivorceable from the fantasy figure of the strong, capable, independent man of Western individualism. And in this sense, passionate work might be better characterized not by an inclination for work but by a wanting for the energetic attachments implied by the term. Objects of our passion are things we pursue relentlessly; passion is a relation of force between things that urges activity, often without restraint. This relation of force is central, for regardless of the objects of investment, passion can allow the conjuration of energy, motivating someone who is spent into action.

We might take this to mean that there is a minimal distinction between the affect and object of passion, the former referring to a passionate personhood and the latter to the thing that one is passionate about. In the mid-twentieth century, psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Mark Lepper developed ideas of selfhood that stress the innate drive of humans to action.[39] Maslow's concept of self-actualization and Lepper's theory of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation point toward the common denominator of a latent passionate species—a being that is naturally desiring and which, when properly attuned, would express these desires in healthful ways that would promote learning, well-being, and self-determination.[40] As Maslow famously related, self-actualization can occur only when an "individual is doing what he, individually, is fitted for."[41] In his view, people who do not fulfill the rule, who lead "stupid lives in stupid jobs," regress with bodily aliments and malcontent.[42] Passionate personhoods will make passion inherently good, for even a wrong object of passion will not make passion bad in and of itself—it merely reveals passion to be incorrectly directed, with the fix found in redirecting passions to something better. Passion, as we inherit the term, evinces this recursive structure to desire: we are passionate for passion, wanting the energetics that an object of desire can provide and believing that it offers the apex of fulfillment and well-being.

Passion opens inquiry into desire and energetics, but when examining it, we have to ask not just about the objects that people are passionate about but also where the passion comes from, who speaks for it, and the attachments that it displaces. The very history of the term *passion* shows the importance of this question: the Latin root of *passion*, *passio*, has a diametrically opposed meaning to how it is used today. For much of our history, passio has been described as a passive form of suffering, an external force imposed on the body that leads one to involuntary acts that needed to be struggled against.[43] Susan James, for example, remarks that Aristotle considers passions to be passive because they are "responses that have to be provoked in us by external things and as states that we suffer. We do not have the power to experience passions unaided, but must wait on circumstances to excite them."[44] When insulted we feel angry, despite our wish to feel otherwise. Anger becomes registered on our body, with flushes and heavy breathing. Even if we adopt countermeasures to calm ourselves, anger still displays its powerful effects on us. Like maladies that come upon individuals, Aristotelian passions are affects that hinder people from acting according to their will.

Beginning in the seventeenth century, however, the word's meaning changed to convey signs of a person's authentic inner motivations. As Amélie Oksenberg Rorty writes, "Instead of being reactions to invasions from something external to the self, passions became the very activities of the mind, its own motions. So transformed they become proper motives, and along with desires, the beginnings of actions."[45] This shift generally corresponded with the displacement of *passion* from popular use, replaced by the secular category of *emotion* to reference the transformed nature of the Western modern subject: a subject who is self-contained, interiorized, possessing an autonomous will.[46] The Latin word for emotion, *emovere*, which indexes movement, captures this new identity of the interiorized subject: feelings are seen as stemming from the inside and migrating out as an expression or act.[47]

The qualities ascribed to passion today may be traced from this new emotional landscape. By the late eighteenth century, the meaning of passion would be influenced by the Romantic ethic, a post-Calvinist theology that embraces sentiments as drivers of moral volition.[48] The Romantic worldview sees spiritual value in the richness of emotional experience. Inner feelings are guides toward appreciating beauty in the divine and intuitive hints that lead toward a transcendental way of being. This view would even invert the relationship assumed in passio, where emotions are understood to be subordinate to reason. James Averill writes that the Romantics saw passion as something that needed protection from reason, lest reason befoul the otherworldly creativity that the purity of the passions aroused.[49] With Romanticism, therefore, passion would take on its full modern meaning. The interiorized qualities of passion, with its strong drive and desire, would no longer be resisted. Instead, people are to use passions as models for action, to produce good-willed behavior and to develop into what they are divinely ordained to be.[50]

From outside affliction to interior authenticity, the somersault history of passion tells a story of naturalization, a tale which legitimates the disappearance of desire from critical inquiry. Ahmed reminds us that our emotional contact with things is "shaped by past histories of contact, unavailable in the present."[51] An instance of emotional experience is a pressurization of dense affective contacts, sedimented historically. Passion extends this proposition, for it shapes the terms by which those historical contacts can be explained, even if it is turned to analytically. The turn from passio to passion, Teresa Brennan notes, produced the "self-contained individual," a subject who is made to trust in his desires, seeing them as coming "from nowhere other than the history embodied in his genes."[52] Structural ways of explaining our feelings are to be placed aside in favor of autobiographical explanations.

The injunction to "find your passion" showcases this fantasy of self-contained interiority. Someone reflecting on this question, for instance, may describe a liking for fiction as a unique attribute of the self. They might recall the time they first felt overjoyed writing a story, the pride they felt when they were commended for their effort, and the affirmation provided to them. The question then becomes a source of reflexive selfhood, a moment where emotional knowledge is both sourced and verified as a basis for genetic identity.

These accounts would necessarily have to forsake a more complicated history of struggle that had to be in place for the valorization of energetic attachments to be made commonsense. Erased is the political history that grounds the "good" in the energetic exercise of human capacities. There is a mutability to desire that is important to consider in passion: the history of passionate work is characterized by that of transposition—the tendency toward naming one population's desire as another's—and the suppression of this relationship as passion becomes imputed as personal want. This naturalization of passion determines the terms by which desire is made sensible: as natural want, it urges both an uncritical examination of passion and a willingness to use it as a source of motivation and drive. Unpacking passion requires us to resist this interiority to passion: Who gets to claim what people should be passionate about and what happens when this history is erased? From there we can ask: Why do some objects inspire passion so easily, while it remains nearly impossible for others to spark the slightest interest? And finally, given the strong relations between passion and work, what are the openings that can be afforded to rethink how passions should proceed? These questions guide the inquiry of the book.

Struggle in a Moment of Disenchantment

I began this book in 2015, at a moment where I sensed a cultural contradiction between the circulation of passion and an indignation expressed toward the exposure of economic inequality and hardship. A Pew report published a year later notes that belief in the American Dream had changed significantly since the Great Recession: "In 2009, nearly 4 in 10 Americans said they felt it was common for a person to start poor, work hard, and become rich. Five years later, that number had declined to 23 percent."[53] This is not surprising given the strong discussions about wealth inequality and the harsh economic realities faced by many. But passionate work continued to remain a strong cultural discourse in the public sphere. This trend emerged again with the pandemic, four years after I began the research. As with the recession, the virus has presented a space where people turn to passion as unemployment skyrockets and their livelihoods are threatened.

We are advised to take the quarantine with a "growth mindset," to find our passions so that we can come out of the lockdown with a stronger sense of what to do with our careers. More people are also encouraged to join the "passion industry," to create small digital businesses out of their passions as unemployment stretches on. Even children are not exempt and are entreated to find their passions to grow up with more grit so they can better survive in a world that is getting ever harsher.[54]

The repetition of these accounts highlights the cultural significance of passion in a moment of disenchantment. Writing in the shadow of the Great Recession, Italian philosopher Franco Berardi concludes in *The Soul at Work* that the "crash in the global economy" burst the "work bubble"—the abrupt loss of jobs made brutally apparent the "abandonment of vital social functions and a commodification of language, affections, teaching, therapy, and self-care" caused by an ethic of overwork.[55] Widespread disaffection, he speculates, would then incentivize people to look for alternatives, "extra-economic networks of survival" that would reclaim the freedom and joy of life. He writes, "In the days to come, politics and therapy will be one and the same. The people will feel hopeless and depressed and panicked. . . . Our cultural task will be to attend to these people and to take care of their trauma, showing them the way to pursue the happy adaptation at hand."[56]

A crisis need not be negative if it can be directed toward new subversive imaginaries. In line with other autonomist Marxist theorists, Berardi's manifesto urges for revolution from the angle of social reproduction, arguing that the processes involved in the reproduction can produce the alternative subjectivities and organizations of life that can oppose the workerist norm. This represents what Paolo Virno has called the "neutral kernel" of disenchantment, the lines of political potential to which disenchantment can be directed.[57] Such an effort is essential, Peter Fleming offers, because the most insidious aspect of the ideology of work is not its "love thesis"—the lie that corporations care for workers—since most people are already aware of its hypocrisy.[58] Instead, it is the possibility that awareness drives no corrective action because alternate possibilities are unthinkable. This argument dovetails with what scholars such as Eric Cazdyn, Fredric Jameson, and Mark Fisher suggest: that late capitalism continues not because of a lack of knowledge about its problems but because its alternative has become impossible to envision. Fisher's account of "capitalist realism," for instance, points to the preemptive formatting of human desires that renders capitalism the only viable economic and political system that people can imagine.[59] Seeing problems but left without a solution, then, we willingly cede ourselves to amnesia regarding the harms that capitalism can do. [60] Intervention thus takes on the critical purpose of building substantive alternatives to the cruel optimisms of the conventional good life.

Yet, the recuperation of abandonment does not always originate outside capitalist imperatives. Social reproduction is a terrain of struggle open to different kinds of intervention, each offering rationales for how life is to be organized, invested, or disinvested in the ongoing precarious order. Since the late twentieth century, autonomist and feminist theorists such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, Maurizio Lazzarato, Cristina Morini, and Paolo Virno have described social reproduction as a crucial component in the chain of post-Fordist value creation. The reliance on intellectual, creative, and affective qualities in modern information industries has made the subjectivities, social cooperation, and relationships of workers more important. These cannot be extracted simply with more hours of work—they have to be paired with a variety of services and contexts that can extend such capacities for labor. Hence, recuperative practices of meditation, therapy, and yoga, for instance, have become some of the more popular methods to increase the mental capacity for creative labor.[61] Likewise, surrogate pregnancy, corporate egg-freezing perks, and commercial childcare facilities show how commodified life-providing services have tapped into reproductive science and the global care chain to create alignment between reproductive choices and the temporal rhythms of labor, an effort to draw the maximum from the worker's most intellectually productive and creative years.[62]

But while these accounts tend to focus on the relationship between social reproduction and its effect on increasing production, we need to see social reproduction as important in the ways it screens cost in production, too. As Silvia Federici grasped during the Italian *operaist* struggles, the "social factory"—a provocative term used by Mario Tronti—describes more than just the entry of capitalist relations into a pristine terrain of social life. The private sites of social life—"the kitchen, the bedroom, the home"—have already historically been part of capitalist relations used to produce and maintain commodified labor power.[63] What is happening with the social factory is more an intensification than the emergence of something new, and the suppression of this historical relationship from view is what allows the masculine realm of commodified labor power to be imagined as self-replenishing rather than dependent on the feminized labor of child raising, caring, and household maintenance.[64]

The fact that social reproduction is, as Nancy Fraser writes, "an indispensable background condition for the possibility of economic production in a capitalist society" alerts us to the problems of its invisibility.[65] As many feminists have argued, writing off social reproduction from accounting books has provided a tremendous concession to capitalist economic development. It fetishizes the replenishment of the labor power, allowing it to be left to the workers' seemingly natural ability for self-preservation, and poses the sphere of production as an autonomous domain, unentangled from unpaid feminized labor. Not only does this hide the labor of social reproduction; it also makes routine production seemingly undamaging to the human systems that it extracts from. Thus, production can be made into an object of fantasy—able to continue endlessly without harm.[66]

As a result, the struggle for making capitalist relations of domestic and reproductive labor visible and a priority has taken on a particular political efficacy.[67] The politicization of reproduction relates to a larger goal: if reproduction is the originating point of labor power, then its politicization should destabilize and send reverberations down the circuit of labor, providing for new possibilities of resistance throughout the entire circuit. Demanding wages for housework, for instance, is not only aimed at addressing the sexism involved in economic relationships; it also hopes to challenge the social relations of capitalism at a fundamental level. Federici writes, "Capitalism requires unwaged reproductive labor in order to contain the cost of labor power . . . and a successful campaign draining the source of this unpaid labor would break the process of capital accumulation."[68] Focusing on social reproduction can foreground what is often read as an "externality" to production, bringing to light the costs to production that are often ignored and dismissed.

The political significance to social reproduction explains why it is necessary to reconsider the conventional perspectives of passionate work. While commodified labor power has characteristically served as the source of critique for passion, I find its relationship to social reproduction to be more disturbing, because it threatens to appropriate the futures that disappointment opens. Passionate work has become an important site of recuperation, applied anticipatively as a way of allowing subjects to be stretched out in their capacity to be worn down.[69] Whether through career advice, gamification, or coworking, the idea of passion is already deployed to prepare for economic fallout and disappointment, such that workers can be cushioned and encouraged to pick themselves up and reattach themselves to the compromised fantasies of the good life made accessible through work.

The act of screening damage, however, is not equivalent to its removal. Part of this book's effort is directed toward revealing the compromised forms of living that passionate work endorses and the stakes involved in returning to optimism in work. We see the violence of passion, for instance, exercised in states of awkward exuberance, where temporary zeal is expressed at the risk of humiliation, or numbness, where passionate actions are made to continue without the feelings of tedium and fatigue. Most apparent, however, is the fragility involved in keeping a facade of undamaged calm. Left in a world of diminishing substantive sources of support, one's push to show resilience also means that cracks can occur more easily, suddenly, and without warning.

This conceptualization means that passionate work is fundamentally about an aspect of capitalism at a historic juncture. Its analysis shows how capitalism is recuperating itself amid a protracted period of transformation—a time of stagnant wages, precarity, and heightened inequality—and, in the process, soothing the revolutionary affects that economic disappointment can raise. The ambivalence lies in that endurance is being urgently required for many of the populations addressed within this discourse, who need to conceive a different way forward. But it is also clear that the endurance endorsed here fails to provide the substantive change needed to challenge work as a necessity. And by directing energies toward the reattachment of work, alternative imaginaries are stifled.

Connecting passionate work to the good life is my way of beginning a conversation about a political impasse: attachment to work is at once necessary for survival and problematic for flourishing. We need to focus on the dynamics of this process, to understand how it traverses into many different aspects of the social world. A seemingly obvious answer to the conundrum of passion is that our attachments need to change, that the problem of passionate work would be resolved if the range of our attachments could shift to pursue the structural transformation desired. This is a tempting proposition, but I hesitate to proceed too easily with it. It is true that a different "mattering map," as Lawrence Grossberg puts it, would open our affective horizons, but it remains true also that passionate work does not simply produce an attachment to work; it also recalibrates our conditions of life, making certain kinds of lives unlivable and attachments impossible.[70] Finding new attachments, therefore, cannot be done in situ. It is not merely about pivoting from one attachment to another, as the dominant ideology of passion suggests. Enabling certain attachments would require struggle: one needs to challenge the conditions for certain kinds of lives and possibilities to be made viable. Furthermore, it is important to consider the terms by which work has shaped our understanding of *passion*. To fashion worlds more amendable to care, we might need to change how the meaning of passion is understood. The book proceeds with this hope in mind, believing that a change in the inquiry into passionate work can shift the ways that we have come to recognize the problems of work culture today.

Organization of Chapters

This book embarks on this argument through four chapters. Chapter 1, "From Happiness to Passion," sets up the context by denaturalizing passion as ordinary desire, asking who it is that speaks for this desire. If it is indeed passion that is desired, then how is this desire made historically consistent and biologically natural? The narrative pivots around the shift from happiness to passion as the ideal emotional state in the twentieth century. Starting from the 1920s, I examine how happiness in work took shape as a promise of the good life within the field of human relations. This field gathered all members of administration—foremen, managers, and supervisors—to push the agenda of happiness to line workers, who were believed to be incapable of recognizing the cause of their persistent dissatisfaction. Such rhetoric, however, encountered a backlash by the mid-twentieth century. Concerned about the conformity of American workers, the human relations movement condemned the once-lauded idea of happiness as manipulative and inimical to the development of individualities.

The emphasis on self-actualization and unique individualities that followed laid the foundation for the late twentieth-century ideal of the passionate worker. In one aspect, the notion of passion that emerged in this period carried on the argument of managerial theorists: under the right conditions, workers would voluntarily commit themselves to work. However, in naturalizing that as ordinary desire, academics, management professionals, and popular writers also contributed to erasing the conflictual history that precedes passion, presenting the desire for passion as a historically consistent demand articulated by workers themselves. From an affect that managers struggle to impose on workers to a demand that workers seemingly issue themselves, the narrative shift from happiness to passion reflects on one of the most successful corporate ideological projects of the twentieth century.

Chapters 2 to 4 follow with contemporary accounts. Chapter 2, "Jobless, Undamaged, Resilient," focuses on the very present space of serialized unemployment, a condition where unemployment is normalized and where social welfare is in retreat. The first of a two-part argument centers on apathy, an affect commonly understood to describe a damaged motivational structure encountered after a job is lost. I trouble this view, however, through a close reading of *Marienthal*, an influential social scientific text on unemployment. Curiously, in *Marienthal* apathy is not used to signal depression or listlessness as much as to highlight an adaptation to material lack. The text describes the jobless who found contentment and optimism that removed them from the motivation to seek reemployment. This development—a threat to the ability of capitalism to control its workers through desire and survival—then played out in unemployment policy over the next few decades, emerging especially through policy attempts to make unemployment more painful, such that the drive toward reemployment could be made rational and compulsory.

Ironically, though, the more punishing unemployment becomes, the more passionate the unemployed have to be. In the second part, I consider how passion can be rendered a modality for resilience, a way for the serialized unemployed to persist in a brutal marketplace by presenting themselves as undamaged. Passion here is imagined to spur the human qualities of tenacity and positivity, affording the capacity to take on damage without revealing its signs. Reading a range of career guides, I show how this demand for resilience diffuses the burden of its exercise into a variety of domains—from the effusive techniques of networking to the protective realm of fist pumps and meditative chants—entering also into the social, with the forced participation of family and friends.

Chapter 3, "The Compassionate Imagination," pivots on the argument of resilience by turning to another group of workers: those who would like to act passionately but are unable to because of their poor conditions of work. I address this through the gamification movement, a community that utilizes a humanitarian imagination to justify how familiar gaming tropes may be used to transform the experience of banal, mind-numbing work. Gamification here is imagined as a play technique that can be embedded into software, ensuring that unvalued information workers can return to the fold of passion and appreciate its meritocratic possibilities of career progression. Of course, such an argument is easily dismissed as a corporate ruse, but embarking on two case studies, I argue that gamification reflects a more complicated and troubling politics, germane especially where behavioral conditioning has become the norm in big data and surveillance industries.

This argument starts with Csíkszentmihályi's theory of flow, an influential theory of concentration used in game design and positive psychology. At first glance, the theory would seem to describe a conventional application of industrial psychology. Applied to production line labor in some of his earliest 1970s research, Csíkszentmihályi's theory provides a seemingly trite argument of how workers in banal jobs may yet develop excitement by making work more of a game. But within this account exists a more complicated politics. According to Csíkszentmihályi, flow is modeled after the psychological resilience of survivors of war, people who were able to disconnect from the trauma of their situation and come out of it psychologically unscathed through play. Understanding this leads us to an insight of what flow can achieve—this feeling of engagement can be defined in both an additive and a subtractive sense. Not only does it potentially indicate creative pleasures; it can also afford a state of suspension, a condition that enables action while shielding subjects from negative states such as boredom, fatigue, and fear. "Open Badges," the second case, materializes the context for hopefulness to suspension by seeking to perfect an ambient form of human capital development. Each task here, no matter how banal, holds the potential of yielding points and badges—signifiers of one's capability, which can be used as currency for advancement. Hence, by ceding themselves to the algorithmic flow of the gamification program with the dopamine hits of points and badges, workers are promised a record of human capital accretion and career progression.

If chapters 2 and 3 are centered on regaining the passions that workers have been denied or which they have lost, chapter 4, "Urban Preserves," turns its attention instead toward the preservation of passions that workers are assumed to possess. The central figure here is the middle-class lonely freelancer, a subject forced into a precarious economy, placed on the edges of superfluousness, who lacks the social capital to remain confident in herself. Loneliness constitutes a nebulous experience that captures this sense of middle-class melancholia, a state of abandonment that threatens the ability of subjects to engage with the world passionately—that is, with the hustling qualities of boldness, spontaneity, and creativity.

Coworking represents an attempt to address this need, by seeking to dispel the deep sense of abandonment and risk that middle-class freelancers face as they lose the security of their traditional jobs and workplaces. Assembling a range of coworking objects and discourses—from the ordinary fear of losing one's seat in a café to the aesthetics of office interiors and events such as work sprints and "fuckup nights"—I show how coworking represents an attempt to build a space for attunement to the rhythms of capitalism, where workers feel "right" and affectively aligned to how they ought to be feeling about their work. This is done by making work a tightly bound concern—for example, by creating an atmosphere that allows workers freedom to cultivate their passions while protecting them from the sense of precarity and abandonment that freelancing entails. In this way, investment in work can continue unimpeded, made possibly even more authentic as workers share and build communities untethered to corporations.

In the conclusion, I tie together the various openings found in the previous chapters to offer a different way of understanding passion. Passion, as it is currently understood, comes in the last instance. It is invoked in crisis as an improvisational way of taking control over the insecurity of the situation. This does not, however, need to be the only way that passion can be considered. Visiting the varied historical meanings of passion, I explore how passio can lead us to a different understanding of passion. If passion is conventionally about forcefulness, energetic intensity, and interiorized authenticity, then moving toward "passio passions" offers an alternative. It leads us to return to a politics that stresses holding back and delayed contemplation—the ethics of being a nonsovereign actor involves a deeper intent, locating oneself in vitalizing flows of affect, allying with and adding to it rather than claiming it to be one's own. Passion needs room for ambivalence, the space for us to be comfortable even in the absence of wanting. Written as critique, diagnostic, and provocation, *Passionate Work* takes a tentative step toward locating passion's politics and possibilities, imagining a different path that can unsettle the lasting hold that passion wields over our worlds.