


Post-Fordist Passionate Work Ethics: Affective Economy of Flexibility and Precarity

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/itdl.96006>

Recibido: 15/05/2024 • Aceptado: 18/08/2024 • Publicado: 13/01/2025

ENG Abstract: In this study, I examine the Passionate Work Ethics with the concept of *affective economy*, which establishes the work ethics of today's flexible and precarious post-Fordist work regime. More specifically, I focus on *immaterial labor* as a specific form of labor in today's post-Fordist capitalism and flexible and precarious freelancing as its epitome. Based on interviews with independent professionals who are currently working as freelancers, this study seeks to understand how today's prevalent flexible and precarious post-Fordist work regime makes itself desirable, through what kind of structures of affects and affective mechanisms. The main claim of the study is that the Passionate Work Ethics, with its affective investment in our desires, hopes and fears that covers up precarity creates a work ethics that makes desirable widespread precarity and flexibility through passive joyful affects. In this context, it has been revealed that the Passionate Work Ethics operates by arousing motivation, impulse and desire with the promises of "freedom-autonomy," "spatio-temporal flexibility," "self-realization and self-development," and "affective satisfaction".

Keywords: Passionate Work Ethics; Affective Economy; Immaterial Labor; Precarity; Flexibility.

ES Ética posfordista del trabajo apasionado: economía afectiva de flexibilidad y precariedad

Resumen: En este estudio, examino la Ética del Trabajo Apasionado dentro del marco conceptual de la *economía afectiva*, que establece la ideología del trabajo del actual régimen laboral posfordista flexible y precario. Más concretamente, me centro en el "trabajo inmaterial" como forma específica de trabajo en el capitalismo posfordista actual y en el trabajo autónomo flexible y precario como su epítome. A partir de entrevistas con profesionales independientes que actualmente trabajan como autónomos, este estudio trata de entender cómo se hace deseable el régimen laboral posfordista, flexible y precario, a través de qué tipo de estructuras de afectos y mecanismos afectivos. La principal afirmación del estudio es que la Ética del Trabajo Apasionada, con su inversión afectiva en nuestros deseos, esperanzas y miedos que encubre la precariedad, crea una ética del trabajo que hace deseables la precariedad y la flexibilidad generalizadas a través de afectos pasivos gozosos. En este contexto, se ha revelado que la Ética del Trabajo Apasionada opera despertando la motivación, el impulso y el deseo con las promesas de "libertad-autonomía", "flexibilidad espacio-temporal", "autorrealización y autodesarrollo" y "satisfacción afectiva".

Palabras clave: Ética del Trabajo Apasionado; economía afectiva; trabajo inmaterial; precariedad; flexibilidad.

Summary/Sumario: 1. Affective Economy 2. Passionate Work Ethics 2.1.1. Narration of Freedom and Autonomy 2.1.2. Spatiotemporal Flexibility and Ability to Adjust Work-Life Balance 2.1.3. Self-Realization and Self-Improvement 2.1.4. Afectional Satisfaction 3. Methodology 4. The Case Study of Independent Professionals 4.1 Affective Orientation of Independent Professionals towards Freelance Work and the Passionate Work Ethics 4.2 Putting Subjectivity to Work 4.2.1 Financialization of Everyday Life 4.2.2. Turning Oneself into a Personal Brand 4.2.3. Encroachment of Working Time on Leisure Time 5. Conclusion

How to cite/Cómo citar: Çağlar Atmaca, Mustafa (2025). Post-Fordist Passionate Work Ethics: Affective Economy of Flexibility and Precarity. *Las Torres de Lucca* 14(1), 45-56. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/itdl.96006>

In this article, I explore the concept of *Passionate Work Ethics* within the framework of *affective economy*, suggesting that it shapes the work ethics in today's flexible and precarious post-Fordist work organization. I delve into how affects influence work in our current society, particularly focusing on immaterial labor within post-Fordist capitalism, with a specific emphasis on freelance work.

At the core of this study there is a question Spinoza (2002) posed centuries ago: how do people strive for their own servitude as if it were for their own salvation? I revisit this question in the context of contemporary work organization, where many claim to work passionately and enthusiastically, believing their work fosters personal growth and self-realization. The initial insight of this article was that there is a desired aspect to work alongside the necessary dimension of work which stems from *mute compulsion of capitalism*. Hence, how does this compulsory aspect transform into something people desire?

I posit that the power of the post-Fordist *Passionate Work Ethics* lies in its connection to a deeply human desire: the longing to engage in work that we genuinely enjoy and find fulfilling. However, this desire has been co-opted by capitalist forces, emphasizing profit and efficiency over genuine fulfillment. Essentially, this work ethics seeks to make precarity and flexibility appear attractive by invoking what Spinoza terms *passive joyful affects*.

The aim of this article is to understand how the prevailing post-Fordist work regime presents itself as desirable, examining the affects it generates, the promises it makes, and how workers respond to these promises. This study reveals the hidden complexities beneath the surface of what seems like a positive and pleasurable work environment. Despite people claiming to enjoy and desire their jobs, the reality often involves facing negative factors such as flexibility issues, job insecurity, low wages, and extended work hours. Therefore, this article critically explores the implications of finding joy in our work and pursuing our passions within the modern context of flexibility and precarity.

In recent decades, especially among white-collar workers, young graduates and new professionals, there is a growing expectation that work should be a fulfilling, enjoyable and passionate pursuit. This passionate approach to work has become almost standard, especially since the 1990s. I argue that *Passionate Work Ethics* helps maintain the current precarious and flexible job market, which is typical of our current post-Fordist labour regime.

The main idea of the article is that the contemporary post-Fordist work organization, and its accompanying work ethics, the *Passionate Work Ethics*, shape our desires, hopes, and fears through affective investments. In simpler terms, it cultivates a subjectivity in which people accept and even desire the uncertainties and flexibility of work. The key question driving this study is: What affective factors influence people's willingness to embrace the precarious and flexible work organization and the immaterial labor that are prevalent today?

To this end, this study examines freelance work as a prime example of how immaterial labor has become dominant in post-Fordist flexible and precarious job market. It aims to understand how these working conditions are promoted as desirable and how *Passionate Work Ethics* contributes to this promotion. Focusing on freelance work as a case that is epitome of the widespread flexible and precarious job market and immaterial labor, this study hypothesizes that this work ethics creates a sense of passive joyful affects that makes people desire to work under neoliberal conditions.

1. Affective Economy

Affective economy framework, influenced by both Marx and Spinoza, allows us to explore how subjectivity is produced and its affective aspects within the context of capitalist production relations. It prompts us to question: What affective mechanisms drive the daily reproduction of capitalist production relations, and what role does the affective production of subjectivity play in this process? Reflecting on Spinoza's observation that individuals seem to strive for their own servitude (2002), we can inquire about the factors compelling us to sell our labor power and participate in capitalist production relations to sustain our existence or *conatus*. How does this compulsion become normalized? How does something imposed upon us transform into something we passionately desire? And what affective processes are involved in this transformation?

Affective economy suggests that the economy not only produces goods and services but also shapes desires, affects, or affective subjectivities, and these desires and affects are crucial for the reproduction of any economic mode of production (Read, 2019). This concept serves as a response to the age-old question posed by Spinoza but adapted to the contemporary context of capitalist work relations: How do people enter into wage labor relations as if it were for their own salvation? How do they desire precarious and flexible work?

It is obvious that the compulsion imposed by capitalism to sell one's labor power drives us into wage labor relation. However, we should take another step to fully comprehend how today's flexible and precarious work arrangements are embraced. Because today, there exists a dimension beyond the economic compulsion of capitalism—a dimension eagerly pursued due to the promises of work, the satisfactions it offers, and the fulfillment of our desires. In this context, the notion of the *Passionate Work Ethics* highlights the enthusiastic and passionate integration of individuals who find themselves compelled to enter into labor relations.

One of the key arguments of this article is that understanding the reproduction of capitalist work relations in everyday life requires considering the affective experiences of individuals who perceive, experience, affect, and are affected by these relations. Collective emotions and affective regimes are fundamental aspects of how capitalist employment relations are established and reproduced on the social level. In other words, capitalist production relations also correspond to what is possible or impossible, what is desired or undesired in an "affective life" (Anderson, 2016) or "structures of feelings" (Williams, 1977). In this context, this article examines the affective regime of post-Fordist immaterial labor.

It is fair to say that emotions and affects were overlooked in mainstream social theory for quite some time, despite their significance in foundational texts like those of Hobbes and Machiavelli. While the relationship between emotions and politics has recently resurfaced, termed as ‘cultural’ or ‘affective turn’, this shift risks reducing everything in social theory to individual experiences and “repsychologization of the social” (Lordon, 2013, p. 2). Spinoza’s anti-humanist approach offers an alternative, emphasizing that affects are not merely individual but also constitute social realities. This challenges the prevailing notion that views emotions and affects as purely subjective. Rather, Spinoza suggests that understanding affects is crucial for grasping the structures and mechanisms that shape social and political life. Spinoza’s philosophy allows us to see affects “as constitutive rather than expressive and as social rather than individual” (Read, 2011). Accordingly, the political ceases to be merely a matter of individual *rational choices*. Spinoza shows us that the political is precisely about understanding the conditions of these choices and transforming these conditions. In other words, the political is about these choices and desires, conditioned by, in Read’s (2016) terms, “transindividual” conditions, which means that subjectivity is not given but produced. In this regard, conceptualizing the social organization of affects neither reduces the individual to a mere carrier of structural conditions nor reduces the economic and political to individual experience; rather, it means that “economic, political, and social structures can only exist, reproduce themselves if they operate at the level of affects and desire” (Read, 2011). By examining how seemingly individual affects like fear, hope, anger, etc. function within society, we gain insights into the complex interplay between affective experiences and social structures. In the context of capitalist relations of production, understanding the role of affective production in shaping subjectivity raises questions about what compels individuals to participate in and perpetuate these relations, and how such compulsion is normalized.

At this point, the effort by Lordon to blend Spinoza with Marx is fruitful for deepening our comprehension of the concept of affective economy. Lordon’s work, influenced by Francophone Spinoza studies, is a significant contribution that revitalizes the field of ideology studies, address its shortcomings in analyzing post-Fordist labor relations by incorporating the concepts of affect – a concept that has largely been overlooked – thereby enriching the field from a Spinozian viewpoint. Lordon’s study primarily delves into comprehending the affective composition of labor in the neoliberal era and explores how individuals can find themselves desiring conditions of exploitation and dominance in their daily lives. Lordon’s endeavor fundamentally seeks to unveil the underlying role of affects and desires in shaping employment relations, portraying capitalist exploitation as essentially the appropriation and exploitation of desires and affects. Crucially, Lordon underscores the historical dimension of desire. In essence, desire is not an isolated phenomenon but rather contingent upon the societal context it belongs to, or in simpler terms, the history of each society both gives rises and sets limits “to the range of undertakings that are possible within it, that is, to the range of objects of desire that a society consider legitimate” (Lordon, 2014, p. 5). Lordon coins the term *epithumé* to denote this societal barrier confronting desire—drawing from Foucault’s notion of episteme. *Epithumé* essentially determines the affective orientation of society, setting its limits and delineating its fundamental objects of desire. According to this, capitalism does not just create systems and rules; it also shapes our wants and desires which is “a matter of colinearisation, namely, of the production of suitable desires (suitable to the master-desire)” (Lordon, 2014, p. 35). It is not just about structures but also about how we feel inside. To understand capitalism fully, we need to see how it affects both the world outside and our psyches within.

While desire, as conceptualized by Spinoza, embodies an infinite existential drive, our desires, as influenced by capitalist structures (referred to as *epithumé*), are far from boundless. In practical terms, within a capitalist framework, individuals are constrained to meet their basic needs and maintain their livelihoods. For instance, those with capital may invest or engage in financial markets, while those reliant solely on their labor power are compelled to seek wage employment. This distinction does not imply a hierarchy in their inherent drives but rather manifests in the differing objects of desire they pursue, with capitalists driven to assert their desires over others’ by employing them. The ‘master-desire’ of capitalists shapes the wage labor relationship, where the necessity for money becomes paramount due to its role in sustaining life within the capitalist system. Consequently, individuals, driven by the imperative need for money, often find themselves drawn into wage labor arrangements, reinforcing the dominance of the capitalist desire. As Lordon (2014, p. 12) said, “the desire for persevering biologically-materially is narrowed down to the desire for money, which is in turn narrowed down to the desire to be employed”. The *willing* aspect of wage labor operates in the following manner: Money serves a dual purpose, acting both as a means of enslavement and liberation. It enslaves by tying individuals to employment as the route to fulfilling desires, yet it also liberates by seemingly granting limitless access to desired goods. However, this sense of freedom offered by money is illusory, as it is ultimately constrained by the capitalist system.

As Marx argued, “the advance of capitalist production develops a working class which by education, tradition, and habit looks upon the requirements of that mode of production as self-evident natural laws” (1982, p. 899). We learn what is desirable and what is undesirable, and in fact our desires are tamed within the limits of the capitalist *epithumé*. And this obedience is not achieved by brute force, but precisely by desire. Consistent with Spinoza’s idea, we may be aware of our desires but often unaware of their underlying causes, leading us to believe we freely desire what we do without recognizing the socio-economic factors shaping our desires. Hence, the notion of *passionate servitude* (Lordon, 2014, p. 14) as coined by Lordon from Spinoza’s philosophy, accurately captures individuals’ active desire, driven by their circumstances, for the servitude and exploitation of wage labor they feel compelled to choose. In other words, “the real chains are those of our affects and desires. There is no such thing as voluntary servitude, there is only passionate servitude” (Lordon, 2014, p. 14).

Wage serve as the *universal equivalent of desire* in this market society in which money is the condition of every possible joy and desire, according to Lordon. In such a society, unemployment signifies a disconnection from desired objects, while employment represents participation in what could be termed the affective economy of hope and fear. Thus, becoming wage labor is not solely driven by fear of unemployment but also by the necessity of generating feelings of joy, pleasure, and hope to sustain the dominance of this system. According to Spinoza, if domination relies solely on coercion and fear, it leads to sadness and diminishes our ability to act. Therefore, fostering feelings of joy and hope is crucial to empowering individuals to accept and engage with their circumstances. Essentially, power thrives on being desired, forming the foundation of obedience. In simpler terms, societal mechanisms operate because we desire them to, believing that fulfilling our desires requires their functioning.

Here, we can explore Lordon's endeavor to incorporate desires into the social fabric and dominant desires, thereby situating capitalist *epithumé* within the historical ebbs and flows of capitalism. As previously mentioned, desires have their own historical trajectory. From this viewpoint, the affective composition of society undergoes historical shifts in tandem with broader changes in social relations and modes of production. For instance, individuals or societies facing precarious circumstances often lean more towards fear than hope. Conversely, an increasing in security and survival prospects can prompt a shift from fear to hope as the prevailing affect. In essence, the affective composition aligns with the prevailing, socially ingrained collective sentiment, akin to Williams' notion of *structures of feeling* (1977), which delineates experiences within specific historical-social contexts. Additionally, affective composition can also be compared to the concept of *emotional tonality/situation* used by Virno to refer to the "ways of being and feeling so pervasive that they end up being common to the most diverse contexts of experience (work, leisure, feelings, politics, etc.)" (2004, p. 84). These frameworks underscore the societal construction of affects and their nexus with material production relations. Consequently, specific emotions and affective states ascend to dominance over time, driven by the dynamics of class relations in distinct historical periods.

Lordon periodizes the ways of articulating desires to the social structure and adapting to the master-desire, that is, colinearisation, with a historical perspective. The initial phase aligns with capitalism's primitive accumulation process, where labor becomes subject to capital's formal subsumption. This period is defined by a core principle regarding how affects shape labor: the imperative to sell labor power for survival. Workers, expelled from their lands and means of production, had no recourse but to engage in wage labor, driven primarily by a sad affect –fear of survival and starvation– due to primitive accumulation. Fear, as the primary force of conatus, dictated the affective landscape under formal subsumption during this phase. In this sense, as Read argued, "primitive accumulation is not just the destruction of any commons and the accumulation of wealth; it is also a primitive accumulation of conatus, of striving, as it precludes other means of self-preservation" (2016, p. 158).

The subsequent stage sees the emergence of Fordism and consumerism. Here, according to Lordon, the capitalist drive transitions from survival to consumption. According to Lordon, the Fordist configuration of capitalist *epithumé* "consisted in supplementing the sad affects of the spur of hunger with the joyful affects of the expanded access to consumable commodities, augmenting the desire to avoid an evil (material destitution) with the desire to pursue goods" (Lordon, 2014, p. 36). In this sense, the fear of starving, "the sadness of work is compensated for with the joys of consumption" (Read, 2016, p. 160). The fear of starvation is counterbalanced by the pleasure derived from consumption. In the era of the welfare state, where labor security is relatively assured, albeit for select groups, the affective landscape of labor is marked by hope and passive joy, following a Spinozist interpretation. Lordon contends that the Fordist structure of capitalist motivation essentially seeks to balance the sad fear of starvation with the joyous access to consumer products.

In the third stage, which is the post-Fordist period, Lordon argues that the capitalist *epithumé* addresses two affective challenges from previous phases: during the primitive accumulation era, the fear of survival inherent in labor was a driving force for conatus, yet it evoked sadness which is passive; while in the Fordist era of prosperity, the joy experienced was genuine but also passive. Lordon suggests that within the framework of the neoliberal *epithumé*, these limitations are overcome by transforming work itself, specifically wage labor, into an active source of joy:

The neoliberal epithumogenesis undertakes to produce intrinsic joyful affects, that is, affects that are intransitive rather than ceded to objects outside the activity of wage labor itself (as consumption goods are). Hence it is the activity itself that must be reconstructed, both objectively and in the imagination, as a source of immediate joy. The desire to find employment should no longer be merely a mediated desire for the goods that wages circuitously permit buying, but an intrinsic desire for the activity for its own sake. Neoliberal epithumogenesis thus assumes the specific task of producing on a large-scale desires that did not previously exist, or that existed only in a minority of capitalist enclaves: desires for happy labor, or, to borrow directly from its own vocabulary, desires for 'fulfilment' and 'self-realisation' in and through work (Lordon, 2014, p. 37).

In the context of the neoliberal *epithumé*, where the modern individual is progressively becoming their own entrepreneur, the situation of being able to sell one's labor power becomes the immediate prerequisite for self-realization. According to this, in the neoliberal *epithumé* in which the modern individual "increasingly become an entrepreneur of the self" (Read, 2016, p. 236), work has become the immediate condition of self-realization.

To sum up, wage ensures both the reproduction of labor power (i.e., conatus, in the Spinozist sense) and the satisfaction of desires in capitalist society. Work concretely determines our life, the conditions and

possibilities of surviving and pursuing the conatus. We can say that the compulsion to sell our labor, as the only way to survive in capitalism, to pursue our conatus in capitalist relations of production, is the fundamental determination that limits the contingency of life. Within this context, conatus as the ontological principle of perseverance in existence intersects with the economy, with work/wage as the determinant of our life, that is, the pursuing of the conatus and allows us to consider the economy on an affective dimension. Today, this affective dimension goes beyond the necessity to work for survival, appealing to affects and the desire for freedom. The capitalist *epithumé*, in the context of neoliberalism and its work ethics, creates an intrinsic motivation to the work itself and demands from the employees the ambition of seeking satisfaction from the work itself today. Therefore, Passionate Work Ethics should be seen as a part of the neoliberal *epithumé*, as a work ethics targeting,

[T]he energies and capacities of the body, and the objects and aims of its desire. (...) This involves the cultivation of habits, the internalization of routines, the incitement of desires, and the adjustment of hopes, all to guarantee a subject's adequacy of the lifetime demands of work. (Weeks, 2011, p. 54).

2. Passionate Work Ethics

In modern economies, work has evolved significantly since the decline of Fordism in the 1970s. This evolution, often referred to as neoliberalism or post-Fordism, involves a decrease in traditional job contracts, a rise in self-employment and entrepreneurship, increased job insecurity, and the practice of outsourcing. Scholars debate how these changes impact individuals' attachment to work. Some argue that personal connections to work have weakened due to these economic shifts. Authors like Beck & Beck-Gernsheim (2001), Bauman (2005), and Sennett (2007) suggest that traditional sources of attachment are disappearing, making it harder for employees to feel personally connected to their work. However, others contend that work remains influential in shaping identities, with new forms of attachment emerging as traditional ones fade away.

The topic of how people bond with their work, whether through new forms of attachment or changes in existing ones, has been extensively discussed in relevant literature over time (Cech, 2021; Cockayne, 2015; DePalma, 2021; Donzelot, 1991; Weeks, 2011). It is apparent that there is a shift in how people relate to their work in today's neoliberal environment, characterized by an emphasis on individualism rather than a complete loss of personal attachment. This discourse is fueled by the neoliberal belief that individuals are accountable for their own success, particularly evident in discussions around self-employment and entrepreneurship.

This section delves into what I term *Passionate Work Ethics* as a prevalent form of personal attachment to work within the current post-Fordist working framework. It is important to note that I am not suggesting this is the sole valid form of attachment, nor does it affect everyone equally. However, I argue that Passionate Work Ethics are the dominant emotional framework in today's flexible and precarious post-Fordist working conditions, especially within the realm of immaterial labor. While diverse affective structures may exist in different contexts, this article focuses on the operations of Passionate Work Ethics intrinsic to immaterial labor and freelance work, emblematic of the precarious and flexible nature of contemporary post-Fordist work environments.

In today's context, passion is seen as crucial for both workers and employers. According to Tokumitsu (2014), the motto "do what you love, love what you do" has become a prevalent philosophy in the workforce. Likewise, McRobbie (2016) observed that having a passion for work is now considered a standard requirement.

We can observe a new managerial approach that prioritizes psychological and emotional qualities like "passion," "desire," "enthusiasm," and "self-motivation." Many scholars have characterized this trend in such terms (Fleming, 2009; Sandoval, 2017; Jaffe, 2021). This focus on cultivating passion and enjoyment in the workplace fosters a jovial, informal atmosphere, which, in turn, enhances employee engagement and motivation (Hagel, Brown, Ranjan & Byler, 2014).

Numerous empirical studies delve into the phenomenon of personal and emotional connections to work, particularly within the realm of precarious freelance jobs and immaterial labor. For instance, DePalma (2021) discusses the *passion paradigm* as the experience of attraction, enjoyment, motivation, and perseverance at work. Rao & Neely (2019), on the other hand, highlight a *passion schema* prevalent in white-collar jobs, wherein individuals displaying enthusiasm and passion are favored in hiring and promotion processes, aligning with the idea of passion as *emotional capital*. Rivera's research (2015) on elite company recruitment processes underscores the importance of demonstrating enthusiasm and desire during job interviews, often revealing class dynamics in the pursuit of passion.

The pursuit of one's passions often entails significant sacrifices, including engaging in unpaid work. Mackenzie & McKinlay (2021) characterize this as *hope labor*, where individuals undertake unpaid or under-compensated work in hopes of future opportunities, often driven by the precariousness of neoliberalism. This dynamic perpetuates an entrepreneurial mindset, where individuals invest in their future despite current uncertainties. Cech's research (2021) on university students and graduates supports these findings, showing that many prioritize finding fulfilling work over income and job security. However, this *passion principle* is often only viable for the economically privileged, while those lacking financial safety nets face greater challenges. Moreover, the passion principle tends to foster an individualistic culture, where structural issues are overlooked in favor of personal fulfillment.

In this context, the passion principle also has a "demand side" (Cech, 2021, p. 28). This suggests that employees willingly consent to long work hours, the erosion of social rights, immersion in a hustle culture, and workaholism, rather than being mere victims of manipulative employers. Moreover, the passion principle

seemingly reconciles the conflicting demands of capitalism for obedient workers and individuals' expectations for self-expression and freedom. It serves as an affective mechanism to navigate this tension smoothly at the individual level, albeit by fully integrating workers into the capitalist work society.

Furthermore, the pursuit of passion can lead individuals into a "passion trap," wherein the emotional rewards of a favored job overshadow its negative aspects. This romanticization of work perpetuates self-exploitation, burnout, and loneliness, particularly in freelance and self-employed contexts where individuals lack collective support and face heightened competition. Armano and Murgia (2017) and Murgia and Pulignano (2021) highlight how the illusion of freedom in freelance and self-employed work can lead to self-exploitation and erasure of the boundary between work and personal life. Ultimately, the pursuit of passion in the workplace can mask exploitative dynamics and perpetuate precariousness, particularly in the absence of organized opposition and collective solidarity.

All these studies underscore the allure of freedom and autonomy promised by the new neoliberal work society. It does not only offer temporal and spatial freedom by breaking away from the constraints of Fordist work arrangements and its linear trajectory but also presents work as a realm for self-actualization and personal authenticity. For instance, as Fleming (2009) highlights, pseudo-authenticity and pseudo-individuality have become central tenets of neoliberal managerial ideology, fostering an illusion of freedom. This illusion stems from "the dilemma between labor's autonomous self-arrangement and subordination to precarious work" (Wong & Au-Yeung, 2019, p. 245). Wong and Au-Yeung's study indicates that young individuals, particularly those under thirty, embrace precarity as a means to pursue freedom. For these "freedom-seekers," precarity offers the allure of endless possibilities by removing obstacles to realizing their dreams. They view stability—a regular and 'secure' job—as conflicting with their innovative and venturesome nature.

Within this context, precarity and flexibility in the neoliberal work society appear to respond to demands for greater freedom and autonomy at work, offering a contrast to the routine and mechanical jobs of the Fordist era. While it provides individuals with more control over their careers and lives, it also exposes them to income and job insecurity—a paradox termed "the paradox of new work" by Horgan (2021). Nonetheless, despite this trade-off, some still prioritize "precarious autonomy" over a secure career, opting for a life filled with risks and uncertainties but perceived as exciting and dynamic.

The Passionate Work Ethics aligns with the dynamics of the new neoliberal work society. Freelance-gig jobs, increasingly prevalent today, are directly shaped by the Passionate Work Ethics, which disrupts the work-life balance in favor of work by appealing to individuals' desires for self-realization and autonomy, as well as employers' expectations of self-investment from employees. This intervention often leads to a paradox: on one hand, it fosters autonomous and free subjectivity, while on the other, it creates disrupted and insecure employment conditions. However, the Passionate Work Ethics provides a framework that makes this paradox tolerable, suggesting that freelance-gig jobs fulfill employees' aspirations for autonomy, freedom, flexibility, self-realization, and fulfillment.

2.1. Main Promises of Post-Fordist Passionate Work Ethics

We can now discern the key promises characterizing the affective appeal of today's neoliberal work environment by examining concepts found in relevant literature, job postings, and company materials. Commonly advertised features of freelancing-gig work, as observed on various freelance job platforms and company websites, include high income potential and opportunities for additional earnings, freedom, spatial mobility and flexibility in scheduling, the ability to arrange work-life balance, self-realization, autonomy as a solopreneur, job satisfaction and low stress. Alongside these promises, personal shortcomings may be highlighted; for instance, those hesitant to embrace flexible freelance opportunities might be portrayed as lacking in entrepreneurial spirit, or individuals stuck in unfulfilling jobs may be led to believe it is due to their own decision-making. Furthermore, certain requirements and skills are often emphasized, such as passion, accessibility, time and cost management proficiency, resilience in handling financial uncertainties, and the ability to build a personal brand. Throughout my research, these broad categories emerged consistently under different labels and recurred in my case study findings, prompting their organization into following overarching themes.

2.1.1. Narration of Freedom and Autonomy

Passionate Work Ethics primarily champion freedom and autonomy, with freelance jobs epitomizing these ideals by offering independence from traditional hierarchies. Freelancers enjoy the freedom to choose their work, clients, and schedule, devoid of the constraints of a 9-to-5 routine. This promise of freedom appeals especially to those seeking liberation from monotonous office life.

Autonomy, a concept closely tied to freedom, underscores the ability to work independently, without answering to superiors. The notion of "being your own boss" epitomizes it, contrasting with the familial rhetoric often employed in corporate settings. Freelance work thus emerges as a solution for individuals who feel restricted by corporate structures.

2.1.2. Spatiotemporal Flexibility and Ability to Adjust Work-Life Balance

The focus on freedom and autonomy leads us to consider the importance of adapting to flexible schedules and maintaining a work-life balance. The idea of spatiotemporal flexibility, promoted by neoliberal Passionate Work Ethics, serves as a guise for neoliberal transformation. While freelance work is touted as offering improved daily organization and work-life harmony, it also carries risks such as indefinite working hours and income instability.

Neoliberalism places the burden of managing these risks on the individual, extolling the virtues of adaptability and resilience in the face of uncertainty. Flexibility is praised as fostering open-mindedness, enhancing problem-solving skills, and breaking free from rigid life patterns, supposedly leading to a more enjoyable life. Consequently, embracing temporal flexibility and confronting risks head-on have become defining characteristics of the contemporary entrepreneurial mindset.

2.1.3. Self-Realization and Self-Improvement

Another significant aspect is the promise that freelance work offers avenues for self-realization, personal growth, and escaping from mundane, unfulfilling jobs. Here, work is viewed as more than just a means of earning a living; it is seen as a vehicle for finding purpose, progressing in life, and fostering personal development.

As mentioned in discussing the promise of freedom, there is a genuine fulfillment of the desire for autonomy. Traditional 9-to-5 jobs often trap individuals in roles they find meaningless, leading to what is often termed as “bullshit jobs” (Graeber, 2018). In contrast, freelance work, chosen freely based on personal interests and passions, does not entail such drudgery. By pursuing work aligned with their aspirations, freelancers achieve life balance, self-realization, and tap into their potential through intellectual, physical, and emotional satisfaction. The belief that work is a reflection of one’s desires and choices integrates it deeply into one’s sense of identity.

2.1.4. Affective Satisfaction

Another promise of Passionate Work Ethics is the assertion that non-monetary fulfillment outweighs monetary rewards. It suggests that even with a high salary, working in a job one lacks passion for would not bring satisfaction. Instead, it advocates for pursuing work that one genuinely loves and desires, prioritizing affective and intellectual contentment over material concerns. Criticism of financial issues related to one’s job is often attributed to personal shortcomings such as a lack of passion or courage to seek more fulfilling opportunities.

In addition to the promises outlined earlier, Passionate Work Ethics also imposes certain obligations that shape employees’ subjectivity. These obligations are essential for navigating the freelance market and dealing with the material (income fluctuations, irregular hours) and moral challenges (stress, pressure to retain clients, loneliness) arising from flexible and precarious work arrangements. These obligations include maintaining enthusiasm at work, embracing uncertainty, viewing risks as opportunities, and introducing flexibility into life. However, these obligations also highlight the drawbacks of freelance work.

Importantly, the responsibility for addressing these challenges falls on employees, relying on their financial resources and psychological resilience. This fosters an individualistic work and life ethics, where freelancers must effectively market themselves, turning into their own brand to survive in the competitive freelance market. Everything from CVs to networking becomes capital, emphasizing the paradox of individuality within a system that necessitates dependency on others, such as clients and networks. The promise of controlling work-life balance is not foolproof either. Adaptation to the flexible and precarious work environment blurs the line between leisure and work time, leading freelancers to engage in income-generating activities even during their leisure hours.

The appeal of flexible freelance work, with its promise of autonomy and creativity, is undeniable. However, its allure comes hand in hand with its own set of challenges. While celebrating the benefits of freelancing, it becomes clear that there exist corresponding negative sides. For example, while freelancers as autonomous workers enjoy the freedom to set their own schedules, they also face uncertainties, insecurity and dependence on clients. Similarly, the ability to work from anywhere can lead to irregular hours and encroachment on leisure time.

Despite these negative sides, many freelancers express a genuine passion for their work, finding it deeply fulfilling. The concept of Passionate Work Ethics acts as a buffer, helping individuals navigate the difficulties of freelance life. Thus, I argue that Passionate Work Ethics plays a crucial role in managing the tension inherent in this contradiction between the attractive and unattractive aspects of freelancing.

3. Methodology

The case study focuses on independent professionals in Turkey, examining the elements, strategies, and affective themes of this work ethics and its regime. It investigates how independent professionals perceive and respond to the conditions, questioning how and why they internalize this work ethics. The study employs an ethnographic approach to explore how individuals either embrace neoliberal work conditions or critically engage with them.

The target population comprises independent professionals engaged in freelance-gig work, chosen for their embodiment of post-Fordist work ethics. Emphasis is placed on immaterial labor, representing intellectually stimulating and creative work, aligning with the promises of Passionate Work Ethics. This category is seen as epitomizing contemporary employment relationships and offers insights into broader transformations in both work dynamics and individual subjectivity.

Freelance work encompasses various types, each with different degrees of precarity and flexibility. These include independent contractors, moonlighters, diversified workers, temporary workers, and freelance business owners. Additionally, a distinction is made between high-skilled and low-skilled freelance jobs, with independent professionals representing the former category. They are characterized in the literature by a desire for autonomy, freedom, and self-realization, often viewed as individual corporations pursuing their

own goals. This study focuses primarily on independent professionals due to their alignment with the values promoted by Passionate Work Ethics.

I gathered data from a variety of sources including documents, texts, books, social media, and job ads to identify the principles and requirements of neoliberal Passionate Work Ethics. Alongside structured in-depth interviews with 34 freelancers, I also drew insights from informal conversations and observations. The interview phase was crucial as it helped me delve into the nuances of participants' views on post-Fordist work arrangements. My goal was to uncover both the advantages and drawbacks of flexible and precarious work. Through strategic questioning, I aimed to understand how individuals navigate the complexities of contemporary work dynamics. Topics covered in the interviews included comparisons between freelance and traditional employment, satisfaction with current working conditions, work-life balance, the significance of work ethics, experiences of precarity and flexibility, and future expectations. By analyzing these interviews using MAXQDA, I identified commonalities, differences, and emerging patterns among participants. Central to my inquiry was the exploration of the affective aspects of work, particularly how individuals affectively engage with flexible and precarious employment, unpaid work, temporal flexibility, and the blurring of working and leisure time. I sought to understand how having a desired job influences individuals and whether they are more willing to make personal sacrifices for it.

4. The Case Study of Independent Professionals

4.1. Affective Orientation of Independent Professionals towards Freelance Work and the Passionate Work Ethics

In the second section, we explored how the desire for freedom, autonomy, and self-realization shapes the positive outlook towards freelance work and the Passionate Work Ethics. Now, we delve into the affective stance of independent professionals towards freelance work and how they experience the promises and obligations of the Passionate Work Ethics.

First of all, when considering the interviewees' affective attitudes, the distinction between traditional 9-to-5 jobs and flexible freelance work serves as a backdrop for the appeal of the Passionate Work Ethics. While both types of work have their pros and cons, flexible freelance work generally appears more attractive to the interviewees.

Before delving into the specifics of freelance work, it is essential to understand how regular employment is perceived. Interviewees often view traditional jobs negatively, citing feelings of being restricted and compelled:

I feel stuck, forced to go to work every morning and unhappy in a vicious cycle. (I-1)

Most of the time passed in the office is redundant. At most 3-4 hours were productive. I had the feeling that we stayed in the office just for the boss could control us. (I-2)

I don't think my mood is very suitable for office life, and when I experienced it, it was very difficult. (I-3)

This dissatisfaction with regular employment stems from a desire for freedom and autonomy, which are core promises of the Passionate Work Ethics. On the positive side, regular employment offers stability and a structured work-life balance, which some interviewees miss in freelance work. However, the allure of freedom and autonomy often outweighs these benefits.

Turning to freelance work, we will examine it through the lens of the four promises of Passionate Work Ethics: freedom and autonomy, spatiotemporal flexibility, self-realization, and affectional satisfaction. Interestingly, each positive aspect of freelance work has a corresponding negative aspect, creating a symmetrical dynamic. For instance, while freelancers enjoy freedom and autonomy, they also face insecurity and dependence on clients. Despite these challenges, many interviewees express a love for freelance work, citing its ability to fulfill their desires. This willingness to endure the negative aspects is fueled by the emotional barriers instilled by the Passionate Work Ethics. Ultimately, the ethics intervenes in the emotional conflict faced by independent professionals, often favoring precarious and flexible work conditions.

Delving into discussing the article's findings, we can start by noting that the Passionate Work Ethics serves as a guiding principle in job selection, particularly in sectors where immaterial forms of labor are prevalent. This suggests that factors like feeling of freedom and autonomy, flexibility in time and space, self-fulfillment, and emotional satisfaction play significant roles in motivating people's job choices today.

Freelancing offers a compelling allure to many, primarily rooted in the promise of freedom and independence. This sense of freedom permeates various dimensions of freelancing, from the flexibility to choose one's work environment and schedule to the autonomy of selecting clients and projects. The desire for freedom often emerges as a response to the constraints and pressures experienced in traditional employment settings:

I want to do what I want, when I want, where I want, so I aim to work on my own projects and/or as a freelancer. (I-4)

The freedom to work when and where I want, the freedom to choose my employer, and most importantly, the opportunity to reach people who need my skills are the main reasons why I became a freelancer. (I-5)

For some, the freedom of freelancing provides a pathway to pursue their passions without the constraints of corporate structures. The notion of “being your own boss” is central to the appeal of freelancing, as it allows individuals to escape hierarchical structures and take full control of their professional lives:

I don't want to take too much responsibility. I realize what a good decision I have made to be freelancer. I earn money by having fun. (I-2)

I was sure that I would never go back to the industry and the chaos of working under others in the office world, so I started looking for ways to make a living on my own. (I-6)

It appears that the flexibility in time and space is also highly valued among those interviewed when it comes to freelance work. This flexibility refers to freelancers having the freedom to choose where and when they work. Unlike regular employment with fixed hours spent at a specific location, freelancers have the liberty to determine their work environment and schedule:

For me, the best part of freelance life is that I can work from wherever and whenever I want. (I-7)

Being able to choose where and when to work is one of the biggest advantages for a freelancer. (I-8)

In this respect, freelancing is better in terms of adjusting my own time. (I-2)

Temporal and spatial flexibility are seen as positive aspects of freelancing by nearly all interviewees. Many view this flexibility as the primary motivation for pursuing freelance work, allowing them to work from anywhere and at any time.

Many interviewees find freelance work appealing also because it allows them to view work as a pathway to self-expression and fulfillment. Some express feeling fulfilled and happy in their work, seeing it as an opportunity for personal growth and creativity:

I am so happy, I really feel fulfilled. (I-1)

In this respect, it can offer an environment where I can realize myself. (I-9)

My dream is having a meaningful life, where I create something that can be useful to people, driven by my inner urge to create. I think this will be the point where I realize myself. (I-7)

For many, the allure of freelance work lies in its potential for personal and professional development. Despite the challenges it brings, such as long hours and blurred boundaries between work and leisure, individuals justify these difficulties as necessary for their growth and self-realization:

It has to be a job where I can show my creativity and do it from the heart. (I-2)

I don't have such big dreams. I do my job not to make money but to be useful, to work for my passion, to produce and to enjoy life. (I-10)

Many interviewees find freelance work appealing because it satisfies their desires, aligning with the post-Fordist Passionate Work Ethics which emphasizes fulfilling one's desires to enhance motivation. This satisfaction is not merely a feature of freelance work but is the general affective state it cultivates alongside other aspects. Freelancing satisfies desires by offering autonomy in determining work time and place, freedom, self-employment, and opportunities for self-realization and authenticity:

I had always dreamed of having my own business, of being able to work from wherever I wanted, on the jobs I enjoyed. (I-11)

In my ten years of working life, I am at the point where I feel the most peaceful. This was in line with the remote working practice that I have wanted for years. I have been longing for such a way of working for years. (IP-8)

Freelance work provides an environment where individuals can pursue their passions, feel content, and find peace. Despite the challenges inherent in freelancing, such as long hours and uncertain income, individuals justify these difficulties as necessary for pursuing work they love. Such non-monetary satisfactions often enable individuals to accept and tolerate the handicaps arising from the insecure and flexible financial conditions of freelancing. For example, engaging in work-related activities during leisure time is very common in freelance work and has become normalized. Thus, flexibility, for the majority, does not necessarily create a positive situation but rather leads to irregular working hours, or one needs to learn to cope with income irregularity. On the other hand, being your own boss also means taking on all the responsibilities of the job alone. Although this is often noted as a problem, it seems to be accepted as well. What is important here is that the attractive and unattractive promises are symmetrical. In other words, the promises that seem attractive also create a problem themselves. Therefore, it is evident that there is a contradictory situation. However, despite this conflicting situation, the attractive promises of freelance work outweigh the negatives in most cases.

4.2. Putting Subjectivity to Work

I now aim to explore how these appealing elements of freelancing translate into everyday life, shaping the subjectivity of employees. This includes the financialization of daily activities, the promotion of self-marketing, and the normalization of work-related activities during leisure time. Ultimately, this fosters a subjectivity characterized by freelance flexibility and precarity.

4.2.1. Financialization of Everyday Life

Financialization of everyday life is a concept I borrowed from Martin (2002), with a slightly different interpretation. It refers to how financial principles and risks become pervasive in daily activities, shaping both society and individuals. In essence, financialization extends beyond macroeconomics to influence everyday behavior, effectively colonizing daily life.

It can be argued that financial rationality becomes ingrained in all aspects of life, particularly for those in precarious freelance work. It entails freelancers constantly assessing profit and loss, trying to predict and mitigate risks in an uncertain economic landscape. This approach transforms them into neoliberal subjects, constantly seeking to secure their futures amidst economic instability. Interviews with freelancers highlight how financial concerns dominate their lives:

Until the last three months, I was looking into my finances every day to check my income. (I-12)

Irregular income necessitates meticulous financial planning for survival, and the pressure to secure their future pushes them towards creating passive income streams and addressing insurance and pension concerns. On the other hand, we clearly see that the economic turbulence created by the financialization of everyday life and an uncertain and insecure life is worrying:

I cannot overcome the stress caused by economic uncertainty. Stress is not something that can be overcome, but you can cope with it. If your income is irregular, plan your expenses regularly. (I-13)

I think I need to create passive sources of income and I am taking some steps. I also had some concerns about insurance and pension issues. I have drawn a road map for myself and I am slowly taking my own steps. (I-14)

Despite the stress caused by economic uncertainty, freelancers accept it as a part of their reality. Some even see it as integral to their identity, motivated by their passion for their work. However, there is a recognition that the obsession with Passionate Work Ethics can blind individuals to exploitative conditions. Ultimately, the financialization of everyday life among freelancers underscores the precariousness of their existence, prompting both adaptation and reflection on the broader implications of their work ethics.

4.2.2. Turning Oneself into a Personal Brand

Another key aspect of this process is the need for self-marketing, self-promotion, and self-branding. In a competitive freelance market, building reputation are essential for attracting clients. As I-16 points out, “no matter how experienced a person is, unless one can express this experience in various channels, it may not be possible to find customers” in the freelance market where competition is very high. In this respect, it is now essential to prepare a rich CV and portfolios showing past works and experiences, and to try to contact as many different people as possible through social media accounts and websites:

At that time, I wasn't very good at self-promotion. But that was a big mistake. Being a freelancer was all about how much you could market yourself and what you had to do was to actively use all social media platforms to show the people around how well you were doing. (I-17)

It is very difficult to get the first job there without points, stars, portfolio. You need to market yourself. Now I am also developing my profile there. I need to ensure Twitter visibility, I am preparing my portfolio. (I-3)

Freelancers now invest significant time and effort into showcasing their skills and experiences through various channels like websites and social media platforms. This self-promotion is not just a side task but has become integral to their work, blurring the lines between professional and personal time. For many, their entire lives have become centered around work, with self-commodification becoming a norm. For example, I-3, whose excerpt I shared above, clearly states this by saying that her working life is divided into two. She says that she spends her free time after the work she does for customers, mostly on activities aimed at her own development and marketing. Because, as an independent professional, she has to find her customers herself, so the activities she performs outside of working time to find customers are actually included in her working time, otherwise it is not possible to find customers:

I have two areas, client work and personal projects, it's divided into two. I tell you that I work two-three days, but those days are what I make money from. Other than that, I am always doing something on the computer. (I-3)

Freelancers embrace the idea of turning themselves into brands, seeing it as a necessary step to succeed in their field. They actively engage in self-marketing activities, even earning badges and certifications to enhance their reputation. For example, I-11 is clearly aware of what she needs to do to increase their reputation, gain the trust of customers, in short, increase her human capital. And for this purpose, she accepts, without question, requirements such as taking tests of freelance job sites, thereby earning badges and increasing their reputation. Ultimately, this trend highlights the growing subjugation of labor, time, and subjectivity to capital, posing significant challenges for individuals' autonomy and well-being.

4.2.3. Encroachment of Working Time on Leisure Time

In order to thrive in a competitive market where self-promotion is crucial, freelancers also often feel compelled to dedicate their free time to self-improvement, networking, and other work-related pursuits. Many

freelancers willingly embrace this obligation for various reasons. Some feel the need to enhance their skills to address any deficiencies in their qualifications. This drive for self-improvement can lead them to spend extensive hours learning and practicing, even working for free to gain experience:

For a month, I focused sixteen hours a day on deepening my software knowledge, understanding what I could do from scratch, and learning how to do things by following courses. (I-17)

On the days when I started to get jobs, my day was spent learning, researching and doing the work. I was in a very good process where both learning and working were carried out together. (...) When I look back, what I definitely did when I was feeling down was to make up for what I was lacking, to do research on those points, which was incredibly beneficial for me. (I-17)

Others prioritize self-marketing and networking, investing significant time in creating portfolios, networking, and showcasing their work to attract clients. This can involve attending courses, and participating in online communities to enhance their visibility and reputation. For example, I-10 says that she produces specific prototypes for every job she applies for. She even states that even if she does not get the job despite these exemplary works, she is not offended by it, and that this gives her feedback and contributes to her development.

Some freelancers simply enjoy immersing themselves in work-related activities during their leisure time just because they genuinely love what they do. They find satisfaction in learning and improving their skills, even if it means sacrificing their free time. For example, I-3 openly states that she does not consider such activities that she performs in her spare time as work, and moreover, she enjoys them:

I don't feel it like work, I enjoy it. Watching something on YouTube, learning something about design, don't feel like work to me. I think it might be tiring without realizing it. But I enjoy it a lot. (I-3)

Like I-3, I-2 also says that she enjoys doing activities in her non-working time that will benefit her work, because it satisfies her desire to learn something about her job. What they have in common is that they both feel that these activities they do in their spare time can be tiring, but they still enjoy doing these activities simply because they love their job:

Maybe this is personal, but I am a person who likes self-improvement, learning new things, improving myself. When technical issues come into play, for example, I am curious, I train myself. But I do this not out of necessity. Sometimes it feels like work, sometimes it gives me satisfaction. (I-2)

While these activities may not be paid, they still consume freelancers' leisure time and contribute to the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life. Despite this, many freelancers find fulfillment in these pursuits, viewing them as opportunities for self-growth and professional development.

5. Conclusion

It is noticeable that many individuals today express affection for their jobs, claiming to love and desire their work, believing it contributes to their personal growth and self-realization. What is particularly noteworthy is that many of these individuals, captivated by the affective allure, either overlook or accept the poor conditions of their work. Despite facing flexibility and precarity, freelancers, as observed in this article, are drawn to the enticing affective promises of Passionate Work Ethics as "the new postindustrial work ethic" which characterizes work "as a path to individual self-expression, self-development, and creativity" (Weeks, 2011, p. 46) and are willing to endure the challenges associated with it.

This critical examination seeks to uncover the "dark" side concealed behind the "good" and "pleasant" facade of work that individuals claim to love and desire. While people praise the flexibility of freelancing, they simultaneously struggle with its detrimental effects on work-life balance and financial stability. They appreciate the freedom and autonomy but complain the burden of full responsibility. Passionate Work Ethics, with its affective appeal, perpetuates existing socio-economic inequalities, masking material disadvantages under the guise of emotional fulfillment. While individuals yearn to escape the drudgery of traditional employment, this pursuit is often individualized and psychologized, placing the burden on the individual to find fulfilling work and tolerate adverse conditions.

This "cruelly optimistic" (Berlant, 2011) attachment to work, fueled by promises of freedom and flexibility, actually reinforces existing inequalities within the capitalist system. Freelancing may offer a semblance of liberation from traditional employment, but it ultimately perpetuates socio-economic disparities. While some may find fulfillment in freelancing, for many it exacerbates work-life imbalance, anxiety, and stress. Passionate Work Ethics, though appealing on an individual level, contributes to the isolation and fragmentation of society, benefitting only a privileged few. Although it may provide relief for some, it reinforces existing inequalities and disadvantages for the majority, perpetuating the cycle of individualism and personal development at the expense of collective well-being.

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