

# Labor Diaries: Ethnographic Analysis of Paid & Non-Paid Work Environments Spanning 2021 - 2023

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## Abstract:

I analyze in hindsight journal entries from three unrelated jobs to display the throughlines of alienation, occupational socialization and enculturation, relations to production, relational hierarchy and the specter of capitalism and its work ethic.

## Introduction:

Feb 9, 2022: “6:17pm A refers to me as ‘our wonderful volunteer’ and C refers to me as ‘[a] person to work with’. Volunteer v co-worker.”

Throughout this essay I will be narrativizing my previous and current work environments and how they contributed to or alleviated feelings of alienation, the unique work culture present at each, and relations to production over three years as a contribution to labor analysis studies during Covid-19 as a temporary worker. Through journal entries as fieldwork I provide a narrative for the daily life and momentum of these jobs, the wonderful interactions, tedious moments, aggravations, business work culture, and the phases of integration into a workspace. I critique my own entries as well, asking how social, occupational worries can be distractions from bigger issues both within one institution and among them all.

My situation as a temporary worker also greatly influences the unique feelings and situations I found myself in, affecting my relations to production in a way unlike full-time paid and/or long-term employees. These entries thus add to the field of temporary labor studies by providing personal evidence of two known temporary jobs and one unexpectedly temporary job.

I also briefly discuss structural and societal origins of alienation, as well as how external conflicts impact internal work culture such as Covid-19 and its reorganization of work environments and cultures both macro and micro; My analysis of three non-healthcare jobs during the Covid-19 course and aftermath highlights how work culture was changed in non-medical settings specifically, as most ethnographies that study Covid-19’s effect on work culture are only located “on the front lines”, such as hospitals, primary care units, and laboratories.

Each addition to the collective narrative of work experience down to micro interactions and charting the prevailing themes of each job-scape helps to track how work cultures change over time and in response to popular culture and world events. This contributes to the general

worker consciousness characterized by reimagining how one might react to/participate in/retaliate against these inherently exploitative environments. My entries also show how certain socioeconomic and ethical issues arose and how I “did my job” in response, what that implies and how it is imagined then practiced. It is important to continually note these symbolic interactions to be able to track how mass social/cultural movements influence and begin in the individual differences in character of response. Labor narratives are thus a tool of camaraderie building among and between generations and jobs for developing a more nuanced worker consciousness, labor praxis, and mass communication about norms and work mores. Noting how social benefits arise in work hierarchies based on pay, longevity, personality, etc points to what our culture values and strategically rewards; Being able to pinpoint moments of alienation and exploitation helps to illuminate and widen these concepts and understandings to become more useful in creating a more anti-capitalist labor organization that encompasses us all.

In my entries I often noted the specific tasks I was assigned and who instructed me to do them; how necessary these tasks seemed to me in the grand scheme of the job; the amount of a task(papers reviewed, shelves cleaned, customers/students attended to), the depth of my completion of that task(spending less time on one paper than another, avoiding helping customers)(a.k.a. Work-to-Rule(doing the bare minimum, often collectively and strategically to the point of slowdown)); who I talked to during my shift and the theme of the conversation (whether light and casual, personal (about me or them), or focused solely on work and fulfilling the needs of customers or students); the seasons; the lives of the employees; my developing feelings and relations to production in response to the completion of tasks I was assigned or developed myself to aid the job; the development of my effort; the amount of participation in defining my responsibilities I was given and determining the depth of my position; the culture and health of the business or superstructure that my manager operated for and how that impacted the air of my shift; how external culture is brought into the workplace (Covid-19, government and international activity and politics, natural disasters, etc). It is also important to note how I responded to alienation even if I did not recognize that’s what it was at the time, so I can understand if my realization could have been delayed or accelerated because of my social environment in and outside of work; as it is well studied that the workplace is a site of resocialization and can create, degrade, or enable certain personality traits, habits, and patterns of thoughts. The factors that determine the depth of this resocialization (such as time spent around employees or isolated from them, outside comments about my work) are necessary to track as well. I know I felt alienated at least once at each job, so I will be detailing the combination of business, obligation, and social interaction in my workplaces, both paid and unpaid, that contributed to this feeling and how I dealt with it, and how others are dealt with it as well: through malicious compliance, denial, quitting, complaining etc. These themes and relations to production directed my actions in and outside of work and will be the main objects of investigation for this essay.

Finally, I will be dissecting why these relatively micro themes overwhelmingly colored my entries instead of macro notes about the superstructure/institution/business I worked under. It is possible these social elements, job tasks, ethical dilemmas, bureaucratic annoyances, and world events were distractions; preoccupying me from focusing on the wider issues of the

normalized structures of labor, currency, and effort in capitalism and culture. This self analysis and exposure of my own distraction displays how the current structure deliberately and successfully derails macro economic change that is harder to conceptualize and actualize for the long term. The fact that I was so thoroughly distracted is quite terrifying in retrospect; approaching the working world I believed I had an understanding of what it feels like to be alienated and what it means to be a cog under capitalism, but I was only able to realize the depth and absurdity of my situation with the help of class conscious friends outside of my work and exiting the denial I adopted while working to survive my total environment.

The order of this ethnography is intended to mimic my own integration process into each of these jobs. Beginning with previous literature covering ethnographies of job-scapes, analyses on the requirements and symptoms of alienation, and social events that occurred during my working period that influence approaches and theories about working, to resemble the environment and mindsets that haunted me as I began working.

Throughout this essay I will be responding to these questions I propose: How does the process of alienation happen? What is the combination of tasks, social interactions, social and literal economy, bodily effects, employee camaraderie or lack thereof, customer behavior, time spent working, seasons, place in the hierarchy, pay, relations to production (both individual and collective) that make an environment ripe for exploitation? How does one's ability to "seize the means of production" impact their perception of their own alienation? How does participation change once a worker begins to feel alienated or realizes the levels of their exploitation? What are the reasons that volunteers or non-paid workers may feel alienated, not recognize their symptoms of exploitation, or be too distracted to even feel alienated? What are the reasons they may not be able to name and act on their feelings of alienation, forceful obfuscation, distraction, etc? Are these reasons different from feelings of alienation described by paid workers? What is the timeline of alienation, how fast can it happen? Are the resocializations that happen in work environments different if one is paid or not? How did each of these jobs shape my personality and my sense of alienation to the rest of the world and to the arena of work in general? Does alienation present differently depending on if the job is volunteer or paid? Why? What is the variety of responses and actions engaged in when one realizes their own alienation and exploitation and the depth and consequence of enduring it?

#### Literature review:

Several sections of literature are required to cover the interconnected areas of study that are inherent in workplaces and supply the foundation for understanding my emotions, experiences, and reactions to paid and unpaid labor; I will employ labor theory and alienation, ethnographies of work sites and their internal cultures and struggles, articles describing contemporary work culture as shaped by recent global phenomena, sociological cores of symbolic interactionism and role strain, relations to production and settings of production, worker participation and effort, psychobiology, and resocialization.

Often thought of under Marxism but inspired by Hegel and Feuerbach, alienation is characterized by estrangement from the social world and one's right to self-determination. This concept is most frequently applied to labor studies because the workplace run by a profit-motive manufactures wants and needs for a population; this false fulfillment is not enjoyable to facilitate, resulting in feelings of dissociation from other humans and one's self, as well as the product one is tasked to make and the process of production itself. Marx does agree on the human need to work, to be active and engaging with the world, the body, the self, and the social, "...the need to maintain physical existence. Yet the productive life is the life of the species. It is life-engendering life..." (1844, 31). This sets the basis for labor theory that accepts the human need to work with the understanding that we as humans create our environments and must remove the structural and cultural elements that make work alienating, degrading, and over-consumptive.

Several articles that delve into the growing contemporary work culture across generations after Covid-19 agree and describe the self-placed limits on effort in the workplace done to maintain a paycheck and one's species-being. Terms such as "lazy girl jobs", "quiet quitting", and more have begun to arise in the past four years not as a cause of the Covid-19 resignation and firing wave (malicious compliance as a concept and anti-capitalist praxis in general has existed for decades) but as a generational reterming of the rejection of hard labor: "The implication is that "lazy girl jobs" are frequently remote, or are often ones where you get to sit down at a desk, uninterrupted by noisy co-workers or belligerent customers, and have the autonomy to do work how you please. An ideal lazy girl job gets a comfortable salary with benefits and flexible hours, without any strain needed." (Torres). It is a layman's understanding and introduction to worker autonomy and avoiding burnout and alienation but these jobs need not be personally or culturally meaningful, just easy enough to maintain a work-life balance to individually prevent alienation; this praxis is personal not structural.

Many articles lay out the rights of labor and dissect how it is pursued or denied through ethnographic work, describing the development, failures, successes of trade unions in factories and straightforward production and office business, such as white collar businesses inhabiting skyscrapers, academic and law halls, financial centers and corporations, and colonial buildings. Only some mention the intricacies of a classroom teaching assistant, small town co-operative, and registrars office a liberal college. Some analyses cover specific aspects of work culture within the setting and coded their research with specific actions or psychological cornerstones of the job, i.e. volunteer motivation and resistance both formal and informal such as strikes and low-effort respectively.

A study by Bonjean and Grimes in 1970 details the potential correlation between workplace bureaucratization and its effects on the dimensions of alienation which they defined as powerlessness, normlessness, social isolation, general alienation, anomia, and self-estrangement. They analyzed three levels of office employees: managers, businessmen, and workers. Part of their findings were that "high bureaucratization is significantly related to anomia among hourly paid workers and to self-estrangement among independent businessmen...among workers, the authority dimension of bureaucracy is more closely related to various types of alienation than any of the other organizational dimensions...well developed

and systematically followed work procedures are significantly related to self-estrangement, anomia, and the general measure of alienation,” (370).

A similar Dutch study from 2021 titled “Predictors of work alienation: differences between hierarchical levels” set its theoretical base on the formula of “autonomy x psychological capital x hierarchical level” (Vanderstucken, 640) and find that in their comparison group of “supervisors and subordinates” that “When a high status is ascribed to employees by their colleagues, this will likely give them the sense of being resourceful and important, making them less sensitive to demanding aspects of the job,” (ibid, 643). Thus showing that the social psychology among workers influences perceived levels of autonomy and alienation regardless of actual structural alienation and denial of workplace participation. Referencing another study they state psychological capital is created by “(1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success (Luthans, Youssef and Avolio, 2007, p. 3)” (ibid, 644). Lastly, they locate their future research in “experience sampling methods in combination with diary studies. Such a research design could assess the level of work alienation on a daily basis over a prolonged time span,” (ibid, 652) and that “studies have indicated the role of task variety and task identity as factors that may reduce work alienation (e.g. Chiaburu et al., 2014).” (ibid, 652) which I will prove in my sections on relations to production.

An ethnography covering the social interactions and dynamics of teachers and teaching assistants in two primary schools of London during 2004-2005; Mansaray prioritizes in his study the analysis of the low paid and low regarded status of T.A.'s is further strained through local socioeconomic factors, specifically gentrification and racism in schools. His findings were that the transient nature of TA'ing at these schools influenced workers' demeanor and ability to compassionately respond to students' needs that were complicated by class and race. He regards the gaps in previous literature regarding TA studies, “Firstly, the focus of much of the analysis has been on TAs' and pupils' interactions and relations, and less on adult social relations between educators. There has been less emphasis on how TAs' presence contributes to, and alters, the social and cultural texture of institutional realities in urban schools as workplaces.” (Mansaray, 39); “The study of TAs' working lives therefore offers a relatively unexplored terrain. What is needed therefore is a theorised understanding of the constraints and possibilities realised in particular institutional and cultural arrangements within urban primary schools, and how these are structured by neighbourhood social relations of class.” (ibid 42 - 43). He also notes the peculiarity of the setting as a site of unique dynamics, “I pointed to the temporal and spatial constraints which structured assistants' work, the shaping influence of the habitus, and equally important, teachers' more authoritative expectations and roles as order-givers in classroom rituals. The result was a high degree of situational conformity,” (ibid, 262).

Another ethnography and economic analysis based in England during the 2010's discussed how two co-ops practice their democratic missions while trying to stay in business as well as social culture among employees and unpaid volunteers; how much are workers able to

uphold the principles they signed on for and how does this tug-of-war affect change how they perceive their job and interact with their environment? Langmead found that worker commitment to maintaining the integrity of their co-op missions can itself be alienating and exhausting; discussions between workers about business decisions of whether to supply local produce from competing markets or not left teams divided on the moral and social principle of siding with competitors versus the cooperatives missions of interdependence and local support, and the inherent business and profit motive of supply and demand needed to keep the co-op running.

Through a more general and non-ethnographic lens, Sandoval briefs labor history from Post-Fordism to new work culture or anti work culture and the place of the co-operative within capitalism. They usefully identify specific relations to job benefits that hang in the air in workplaces founded as alternative economic and moral sites of business, “Freelance workers often do not have access to paid annual leave, sick pay, paid parental leave and unemployment benefits,” (Sandoval). They also wisely remind cooperatives and other alternative economy seekers that neoliberalism continues economic and social oppression and alienation but more covertly and possibly in denial of alienation under the guise of the cooperative, “A danger of this argument for ‘economic pluralism’ is that co-operative workplaces remain confined to groups of privileged workers...Advocating worker co-operatives without questioning capitalism means to advocate a system in which workers ‘become their own capitalist’ (Capital Vol 3, p571). Turning workers into capitalists might improve the conditions of individual workers but does not solve other structural problems of capitalism that lead to huge social inequalities, economic and environmental crises.” (Sandoval).

These workplace ethnographies create the foundation for this analysis by serving as a location, class, and approach-based comparison. I occupy a unique position in each of my jobs with the amount of information I was limited to because of my unpaid position or simply low ranking position. I was also exclusively located in the Northeast United States during the course of the fieldwork (2021-2023), cornering my findings within a middle class but proletariat perspective through the latter half of the Covid-19 pandemic. This essay thus updates the domains of TA, Co-op, and student-worker ethnography done with an economic and political labor analysis framing complicated by the social reality these jobs lied within and internal cultures they had to adapt to. Analyses on biopsychosocial effects (alienation and perceived decreased autonomy significantly harks on workers’ executive function and memory (Seeman, 18)), hierarchy, perceived alienation, and workplace integrity will also ground the themes of the dissection of my entries.

Many previous studies on alienation do not use identical frames of reference or questionnaires, nor are there many longitudinal studies so it is difficult to compare. This is where my analysis comes in as well.

Most resocialization in workplace literature centers prisoners/juvenile delinquents “returning to society” or those in large organizational institutions such as hospitals. I hypothesize that this exclusion of smaller environments is not to argue that resocialization does not occur in places like classrooms, co-ops, or work-study jobs, but that without high sample

sizes and longitudinal studies, high turnover and micro interactions make for weak correlation and causation.

## PART 1: Contemporary Work Culture Among the Young: Shifting Relations to Production during Covid-19 and “The Great Resignation”

In many disciplines, through social, psychological, and medical science, it is accepted that humans are animals and thus require various amounts of stimulation and integration into our environments to feel satisfied and congruent with the concepts we've created to summarize our needs. Work and labor is one of them; humans are their “happiest” when they are able to freely involve themselves in work they find personally meaningful and/or valuable to their community, in work that is intricate and engaging but does not exceed their threshold of tediousness nor hark on their perceived dignity/pride.

For centuries this fundamental human drive to do *something* has been co-opted by other people with a capitalist, fascist, totalitarian mindset (“Work will set you free”); hypnotizing and kidnapping people into work camps, assembly lines, brothels, militaries and any other enterprise where human curiosity, ingenuity, and craving for stimulation can be profited off by abstracting the human from the labor. The central goal and practice of this abstraction is to create a replaceable and disposable worker that dissolves into an ever-rotating workforce that “will enhance the gross domestic product of a nation and contribute to its economy or to its debt repayment to the IMF,” (Terry, 24); paying minimal attention to their capacities beyond work, only ever looking for indicators of stamina and obedience, the most favored combination. Laborers doing this depersonalized work are often unpaid, minimally compensated, or compensated through non-monetary means, but an individual gaining their perception of fair compensation—which has been a central idea in labor praxis for decades now—does not always chip away at the specter of collective alienation and exploitation though; wages can become a distraction or deterrent from unionizing for even more radical labor-scapes.

Mainstream conversation about labor rights has stayed within the semi-palatable idea of minimum wage and unions solely topics of policy concern; more difficult to implement (who is making it difficult?) radical labor procedures such as universal wage or abolishing currency are interestingly not part of common knowledge and common worker consciousness; oddly enough these more “difficult” topics are a part of the work culture in other countries, as well as amendments such as paid maternal and paternal leave and sick leave and universal health care which removes the need for privatization and combining insurance hunting with job searching. These lags between labor analysis and praxis between countries are directly influenced by who work culture is created by.

For my purposes I define the signifiers of work culture and the instigators of relationships to labor as created on different levels by different but intersected authorities: companies and governments create the macro work/labor culture for their nation or region, emphasizing in their policies and advertisements the value of work and who it benefits, the framing of hard labor, the pathos involved in advertisements, the magnitude of unemployment and what is done in response; micro work culture is created more locally by employers, employees and unpaid employees, and is defined by both the social culture of individual jobs itself and the political

economy of the local business structure (monopolies/chains) and policies on labor that affect actual workers. Social culture describes the interactions between workers/ the social environments of individual workplaces and colleagues, the strategic amount of effort put in to assigned tasks for a certain goal (gaming the system, work-to-rule), the depth of a worker consciousness within a job-scape, frequency and depth of counterproductive work behavior (including malicious compliance), employers' response to their own bosses and how they relay their social and political business power to their employees. Local business culture involves the amount of monopolies, chains, local businesses within a city and the interactions of those economies, the amount and type of businesses hiring, the eagerness among business owners and locals who do not work locally to have a "thriving local economy".

The prevalence of people sharing their experiences, opinions, images, consequences, pay and status of their job on social media has given way to more camaraderie but also a more insidious work culture. In a micro sense the social work culture has evolved to be even more communicative and rich in detail, benefiting the collective worker consciousness by adding accessible evidence to the common imagination; individuals can interact and discuss how to undermine their bosses and tasks while still getting paid. Almost ethnographically they share images and videos of the backrooms of shops and restaurants to people who would normally never see them; they describe and rightfully complain about customers' impoliteness which has affected how everyday people communicate with servers and drive-through workers.

More insidiously in macro terms, corporations, employer collectives, and advertising firms that target impressionable young people who populate these platforms utilize the images produced and respond both by agreeing with the populace about their determinations about their jobs and use these trends to surveil and punish their employees for evidence of low-effort or 'unloyalty' (having multiple jobs to sustain a living).

For example, there is a work culture forming among Generation Z as they enter (or attempt to enter) the workforce and higher education and witness governmental, economic, and social collapses all while having new means of sharing their perspectives with peers near and far, thus being able to readapt their expectations of how much effort fulfills an assignment at a more accelerated pace than previous generations. Generational themes of labor theory or activity is not new, strides of underground radical labor ideas were still made during economic lags decades ago, coupled with waves of nationalism and war propaganda, from which came the value of hard physical labor, service to one's designated authority, and the acceptance of one's function in the "system." But these past four years specifically have been unique in the sheer rush of the recalibration of a worker consciousness in the general U.S. population; Covid-19 tore people from their steady jobs both through personal sickness and corporate lay-offs, leaving people with more time to sit with their jagged feelings about their many years of working for the system and being failed and distracted by it.

Those who managed to retain their jobs during Covid-19 or gain new ones, either through the gig economy or a more traditional route still find it difficult to (re)approach workplaces and colleagues; the social environment now hanging heavy with thoughts of the communicable disease and the sudden effects it can have both personally and on the local and national policy ground. Collegial stress may increase, leading to each person's relation to production becoming amenable, "For example, the lack personal protective equipment (PPE),

the physical weight caused by wearing them, the fear of being infected and that this could harm family members, the conflict between safety procedures and the desire to provide support, longer working hours, pressing multitasking and the stigmatization of people working in high-risk environments can deeply affect mental well-being of workers. In response, workers may develop a range of behavioral (e.g., consequences on performance), physical (e.g., headache, gastric disturbances), and psychological (e.g., mood swings, lowered motivation, depressive thoughts, and isolation) reactions,” (Giorgi, 3).

Returning to an industry setting or even casual retail work environment after one's personal relation to production and work has changed due to Covid-19 absence, lay-offs, and/or inundation with ideas about labor rights can be difficult and can illuminate one's own alienation and exploitation, especially when requests for accommodations to mental and physical health are denied. The contemporary work culture, frequently in politically liberal spaces, is beginning to add denial of accommodations, bureaucratization, gatekeeping, and disability harassment to the list of alienating factors and recognize these more thoroughly than in the past. Covid-19 illuminated the amount of job environments that could be remote and more reasonable shift hours, also adding to the rise of this contemporary work culture.

Specifically, those who demand PPE in the workplace and utilize the discussion of herd immunity to promote normalization of accommodations to other illnesses and aid for disabilities may be denied it, which leads to feelings of alienation and exploitation as it harks on workers' ability to make the rules of their workplace. Backlash against accommodations after Covid-19 cases has decreased leads to workers “...Experiencing stigma and discrimination in the workplace [which] could also lead to loss of productivity and income...As a result, there is an increased risk of burnout, psychological distress, emotional exhaustion, anxiety and depressive symptoms [16,26,32]. Not being socially supported due to stigma could also affect workers' self-efficacy level [33].” (Giorgi, 3).

The expansion of what work environments may look like and the wave of reprioritization by workers contribute to a more detailed labor consciousness as an unintended benefit of the quarantine procedures of Covid-19.

My personal labor consciousness and practical approach to work changed drastically and quickly in response to cultural trends, demands and new-found experience. I witnessed the phasing in and out of mask-wearing and the consequences of it on myself and the people around me.

Considering the work culture I helped create by volunteering and continuing my jobs that were all partially fulfilling I was frequently preoccupied with questions and conclusions such as: What does it mean that I sought out and returned to unpaid work? Was my labor in vain? What does it mean that I still felt alienated and exploited in work that was personally developed and intellectually stimulating? Myself and others often questioned me as to why I kept returning to jobs that did not pay me; my answer was always that it gave me the intellectual and social and physical stimulation I could not get at home and did not drain me energetically like most paid jobs do. My priorities were focused on preserving my mental health and engaging with environments and people that aligned with my interest and future goals, both TAing and the CO-OP fit those requirements, so I continued even though my labor was not materially compensated for. Is it exploitation if there was no promise to get paid in the first place? Is it

exploitation if I was privileged enough to not need the money at that time? I valued the social time it gave me over the pay it did not give me. I am still under capitalism and thus still getting the bad parts of that even though I was working in places that brought me into a collective space which were antithetical to capitalist work structure and mindset (individualism and competitiveness). For example, at Central Records (CR), the third job described in this essay I am paid and can undermine my tasks, not in competition but the stakes are high because of pay and I am still under capitalism

Lastly, as I attended my jobs in the past and my current paid job I utilize the work-to-rule concept but not to the degree of planned slowdown, I simply do the little that is required of me and not much else. Still, I find myself resisting the term “lazy girl jobs” because of its oversimplifying and gendered-but-not-feminist cornering of anti-capitalist praxis as well as its individualizing solution to alienation and burnout. The essence of finding a “lazy girl job” is to solve one’s personal issue of needing money but not wanting to or being able to find a job that is personally fulfilling. Users of this term are attempting to preserve their species-being but do not seem to be interested in wider labor theory or massive worker movements for living wages, less hours, paid leave, etc, which quite lags the collective worker consciousness to a point of tolerating work rather than trying to dissolve the specter of unnecessary jobs and the capitalist framework itself. These attempts at sharing tips on social media platforms for acquiring and trudging through these jobs stabs at the “Two forms of powerlessness which pervade contemporary capitalist society: the inability of individuals to alter the state of the world around them and the inability to control their own productive activity (Blauner 1964: 16-22), but does not solve powerlessness as a worker phenomenon nor does it create meaningful work for others.

Narrowing down to the temporary work culture that has also risen due to Covid-19 and the increase in cost of living, several useful questions arise, “How do workers experience temporary work? How does the organization of temporary work empower or constrain workers? In what ways is gender embedded in the organization of temporary work? What are the implications of the increasing use of temporary workers for social equality?” (Rogers, 138). This will be explored further through my entries under relations to production and alienation.

The findings of this paper state that temp workers often bear the brunt of the spectrum of monotonous secretarial work such as excessive filing “that nobody else wants to do” (ibid, 147), and frequent periods with no assignments or interaction at all. These swings of activity can result in feeling alienated and exploited, as they are “structurally constrained from forming satisfactory relationships in the workplace,” (ibid, 148). My entries certainly reflect this, both ends of work I was assigned and found difficult to deal with but my responses aligned with those of the subjects studied, I found other work to do, and took interest in what I was assigned. I also unintentionally restricted the amount of jobs I took on because of time and as the study states, temps often find it difficult to connect with the agency they work under. “For example, frequent phone calls and “check-ins” help the agency get to know a temporary. This relationship work, a type of emotional labor, often serves an economic purpose as well, because some temporaries feel that an agency is more likely to give them more work if they know them better,” (Rogers, 158). The temps in the study also confess how they enjoy some tedious, lonesome work because they are not bothered or distracted by tasks that require more intricate responses.

## PART 2: Work Environments: Physical

Intro:

The work environment and property are distinct in my mind; simultaneous and overlapping in the moment of perception but when theoretically separated it becomes clear that each has its own characteristics and interactions with those who engage with the arena in which someone produces labor and watches it be utilized by another.

I also want to be reminded that each space belongs to a higher institution; bigger than myself as both a consumer and worker; bigger than the paid workers, managers, supervisors. Each room and building and does not even belong to the workers or customers, it is not meant for *them*, it is meant to facilitate and carry out a presumably genuine social need and should thus be equipped to do so, but it is left upon the workers to supply themselves with what they need and fill in the gaps, often with quick and cheap solutions (though what is provided by the property holder is likely cheap as well).

What do these environments enable or suppress? First, the details of each work environment and the tasks allocated to me for my position will be described because they color and inform the background of my experiences and the options I had for response and retaliation.

### Physical Setting

TA:

The building Donna's classroom lies in sits near the highschool, giving me a nauseous sense of failed escape every time I approach it for class, twice a week, 5pm to 615pm. I curl left into the half circle parking lot and exchange seats with my mom, she drives back. Heading inside through the double doors of the one story hall. Upon walking in the left is a silent hall, but from the outside the windows are lit up and show students facing a projector screen. On the right are tables and a vending machine and further down is an auditorium of sorts. I never went down that way, too dark and intimidating. Straight down, the hallway is dotted with benches and bulletin boards advertising academic deadlines and events. Finally is the fork. Left is my way, a few doors down and again on the left is her room. Not her office, she doesn't even have one in this building or I think even at the college, she simply occupies this space for about 3 and a half hours on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

The room itself is a decent size for a classroom but still far smaller than what I envisioned college classrooms to be; I assumed they were all lecture halls with cascading bleachers of seats crowded with people. Around 30 computers and keyboards were lined on three of the walls, rolling chairs in front of them, a tall printer with an attitude, a tall desk for the professor and a side-car like desk attached to the main one but far lower where I sat and observed. The room was very beige and flat, no posters or decorations or unique materials. The most recent technology in the room was the projector screen that could be pulled down over the

whiteboard to display examples for assignments, videos, or previous readings. No real time captions included.

Students file into the seat they choose for themselves, rarely if ever moving to another, swirling in their chairs as the lecture proceeds; eyes flitting from screen to me to Donna to screen to me to screen to person in front of them to person beside them to Donna to screen. If the window was left too open for too long in the fall a squirrel or two would crawl in onto the windowsill and flicker its little head around until the panic of nearby students would scare it back out. Soon a sign appeared on the main desk saying to close the windows to prevent squirrels from coming in.

#### CO-OP:

The co-op has existed for decades now, maintaining itself by continuously providing local organic food, bulk products, environmentally friendly items, and acting as a general site in which individuals concerned about the environment and social change could gather and connect. Essentially its core is mutual and environmental aid that has had to survive as a business.

Upon entering the co-op the smell of spices was imbued in the air, the medium brown tones of the shelves and walls encased the color of the produce stands that sat right in front of the door. Right ahead is a small ramp for wheelchairs to access the elevated part of the first floor. The greens spilling over and full baskets of fruits and flowers created an atmosphere of lushness and life, frequently rotated and kept up to ensure this environment. To the left is a massive bulletin board displaying posters and business cards, advertising shows in plattsburgh, art exhibition and galleries, local businesses, individualized services such as tarot readings, community social events like yoga (held in the upper floor of the co-op), seasonal events such as county fairs and the 1812 parade. To the right is the line of two registers, the employees' backs to the glass. Below the registers are various maintenance items such as tape, a small old phone only used for scanning and pricing items, scissors, paper towels, etc. The aisle shelves are tall and packed with items, organized by type, brand, and packaging. Mounds of local breads, sauces, plant meat and deer meat, environmentally friendly cleaning supplies, reusable hand clothes, a fridge of pre-made sandwiches, salads, wraps and fruit cups, bags of flour baking soda and more, bagged pasta, condiments, cereals, etc Two register facing shelves are stocked with seasonal items often provided by other sellers and displayed by the co op.

The large fridges sat behind the main aisles, filled with cheeses, yogurt, milk, sausages and bacon, eggs, drinks such as kombucha, coffees, soda, etc.

In between the side fridges that house the tofu and cheesecakes is a recent addition, a smoothie bar run by one of the employees. To the right is a door that leads to the employees entrance to the smoothie bar, a door that leads outside near the recycling bins, and a staircase that brings you to the upper floor of the co op and right into the spice shelves, dusty and disorganized and filled with cobwebs dead flies dirt ripped up pieces of cardboard that hold the brown paper bags of spices.

Also behind the aisles to the furthest right is the basement door that leads down the concrete stairs to the massive storage area, low ceilings stacked to the top with back stock and

trash that needs to be taken out. Extra shelves and promotional items clutter the corners, deep in the first section of the basement is a room to the right that leads to the meat fridges. The sections of the basement get deeper and deeper, leading to ever more cluttered and low-ceilinged rooms. The next section contains the boiler for the building, massive shelves lie on their sides, pipes line the walls and ceilings, slabs of cardboard and wood collect dust on the floor and more. The final section is an unlit room that contains only concrete slabs.

#### CENTRAL RECORDS:

On the outside, the central records building is one story, an awning shading the entrance way where some employees go out to smoke on their lunch break; where some students slip on a mask; resting their skateboards or bikes against the 2ft tall rock ledge that boxes in the entranceway. A wheelchair button is stuck on the wall, not always working. There are two single doors to cross through; after opening the first set of doors, on the right is a bulletin board of community posters and information and recommendations. On the other wall is a fire alarm, light switches, another wheelchair button. A bench also rests in the foyer for waiting students. These double doors partially serve as a refuge from the weather, allowing for front desk student workers to see when students are approaching to prepare for their questions.

Once inside, the left houses beige cubicles with lightly tinted windows that contain the central records employees; desks crowded with images of loved ones' stacks of papers folders binders identical monitors and keyboards and mice crowded filing cabinets and minute distinctions of individuality. The filing room is staff only, locked and requiring a card to open, it houses all files for incoming students and those decades ago. Right in front of the doors is the front desk, an angular curve houses two monitors and keyboards, two phones, bowls of chocolates and candy, pens, notepads, various forms, dusty chairs. A binder with various 'helpful;' papers sits near each workers' station; made by the staff who have been there for just over a year now, these flyers of information about the office rarely answer the questions that arise during the shift.

The inside of the building is white, cream, eggshell. Behind the front desk lies the lunch room for CASA employees(adjacent group that aid with academic planning), housing a microwave, coffee maker, snacks, pop corn, etc. to the left of it is a line of computers for students to use, and further down the hallway is OARS, another department and leads into the design building. This building is rarely loud. Occasional chatter and gossip bubble up between employees but overall the drone of the air conditioner printer chuffing keyboard clacking microwave beeping door whooshing fills the air and keeps it even, a small lake tide.

I sit and stare out through the foyer and watch to see the subtle shift in gait of students crossing in front of the building or coming towards it. Making eye contact as they approach it. Sometimes I get nervous when students see me on my phone as they enter. Those who I know, even just slightly acquainted with, recognize me as a fellow student and not a worker. With those I do not know I watch them in my periphery and continue to mock work on whatever I am doing. Why do I want to be seen doing work? Sometimes when students sit on the benches near the front desk, waiting for an employee's expertise or answers to their questions we either make small talk or sit in silence. The work they see me doing shapes their interpretation of me,

the materials I surround myself with and my level of restlessness, misery, paranoia, exhaustion, excitement, awareness etc. Squirrels sprinting across.

### PART 3: Triangulating My Relationship to My Labor:

“The worker becomes an ever cheaper commodity the more commodities he creates. “  
(Marx, 1844, p. 29).

Intro:

Below is a table comparing the general information of each job and the aspects of my relations to labor that I want to compare. This is done to create preliminary hypotheses from the immediate similarities and differences between the sites, which will then be elaborated on for each individual job with entries as evidence, in chronological order. These conclusions will form the base of the thematic analysis in Part 4, where I will determine how these competing details and relations contributed to feelings and realities of alienation.

The quantitative aspects I noted and analyzed will be separated chronologically, these are separate sections not because decisions about effort and socialization are made separate from the influence of superiors or employees; quite the opposite, they are essential to the calculation of response but I will order my entries and analysis in separate sections for clarity.

First being descriptions of my relationship to labor I made in the moment, and then I will detail the interactions with my superiors and fellow same or near same-level employees that altered my relations to labor. I will then say how my specific entries and relations to the customers/students in each environment, as they also contribute to, and make up the driving force for my labor in the first place.

Then for each job I will summarize the worker culture, which I describe as the shared/accepted norms and lifestyles of the main group of employed people in a place, and the norms of the workplace itself. These are distinct, and I will utilize three examples to compare across jobs:

1. a shared dislike of the management/work itself and the common way it is actually applied/responded to are very different.
2. Drug use could be a popular and accepted coping mechanism of employees but the managerial workplace norm could be to not talk about such use on-shift, (or the need to cope, and cope with what) especially in front of customers.
3. How the body is allowed to move or be attended to: do employees eat during work and how often, bathroom breaks, spaces and time to sit, etc.

Table 1:

|               |           |                    |           |                      |
|---------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|
| Overall topic | Specifics | Teaching Assistant | Volunteer | Front Desk Associate |
|---------------|-----------|--------------------|-----------|----------------------|

|                          |                                                         |                                                                       |                                                                |                                                                                       |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| General Information      | Timeline                                                | October 14 2021-December 10 2021 /// August 30 2022 - December 8 2022 | January 29 2022 - January 17 2023                              | February 6 2023 - May 4 2023 /// September 7, 2023 - Present                          |
|                          | Institution                                             | SUNY Plattsburgh                                                      | North Country Food Co-Op                                       | Central Records, Hampshire College                                                    |
|                          | Pay                                                     | None                                                                  | None                                                           | 15/hr every two weeks                                                                 |
|                          | Shift                                                   | 1hr 15mins, Tues/Thurs                                                | 2hrs once a week, day varies                                   | Noon-4pm Mon/Weds/// Noon-2pm Tues/Thurs                                              |
|                          | Covid Policies                                          | Mask required during first semester; not required second sem but wore | Wore mask in crowds+when employees got sick but mostly off     | No masking rules                                                                      |
|                          | Participation in forming business policies              | None, controlled by institution, only classroom influence             | None, controlled by employees, as a volunteer I had no vote    | None, controlled by institution                                                       |
| My relations to my labor |                                                         |                                                                       |                                                                |                                                                                       |
|                          | Schedule Enmeshment/ "Bringing your work home with you" | Brought work/public life into home/private life and vice versa        | Brought work/public life into home/private life and vice versa | Did not integrate public and private, not encouraged nor required unlike previous two |
|                          | Job training/labor expectations                         | Self-directed, few instructions for output,                           | Superior-directed, many instructions for output given          | Self-directed, few instructions for output,                                           |

|                                     |                                                                                   |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                              |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                     | Investment in job/my labor alleviated feelings of alienation from world and self? | Yes, work/missions personally meaningful, but returned; out of work life remained dull | Yes, work/missions personally meaningful, but returned; out of work life remained dull                            | No, work/missions not personally meaningful, cope with pay & lush out of work life           |
| My relations my superiors/employees |                                                                                   |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                              |
|                                     | As Managerial Agents                                                              | Wanting to impress; medium stakes that lowered over time;                              | Wanting to impress and assimilate; low stakes always; dissonance w acts and beliefs                               | Impressing or mobility is unavailable, low stakes for this position                          |
|                                     | As Comrades/ Fellow Workers                                                       | Occasional solidarity, connect over integrity suffering under institutions             | Frequent solidarity with most employees but not managers, connection over managerial incompetence and its effects | Minimal solidarity with main employees, connection over institutional technical inadequacies |
|                                     | Non-work social relationships (within the workspace)                              | Single superior, became familial figure, and academic aid. Created spillover effects   | Multiple superiors, frequent vulnerability on both sides, academic aid, spillover effects                         | Multiple superiors, little emotional engagement, academic aid, no spillover effects          |
| My relations to customers/ students |                                                                                   |                                                                                        |                                                                                                                   |                                                                                              |
|                                     | Non-work socializing (within the                                                  | Complicated by ethical, timely, and job task                                           | Done so gradually, minimal                                                                                        | Minimal to none, environment is built for social-                                            |

|                           |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                           | workspace)                                                                                        | requirements;<br>different<br>students each<br>semester                                                                         |                                                                                                           | izing to be brief,<br>same main<br>employees, diff.<br>Student workers                                       |
|                           | Aiding superior<br>through making<br>judgments of<br>customers/<br>students and<br>how to respond | High involve-<br>ment and<br>priority; created<br>role conflict in<br>myself, worker v<br>person                                | Minimal priority,<br>observations of<br>customer<br>difficulty relayed<br>to employees,<br>felt alienting | Minimal time or<br>requirement to<br>make judge-<br>ments; speech<br>pattern<br>dissociation                 |
| On site worker<br>culture |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                              |
|                           | Talk of work<br>/managerial/<br>institutional<br>slights                                          | Common<br>opinion among<br>workers shared<br>during shift of<br>mismanagement<br>and institutional<br>dissonance/<br>difficulty | “”                                                                                                        | “”                                                                                                           |
|                           | Responses to<br>(unjust) work<br>and<br>managerial/instit<br>utional situations                   | Not taking<br>excessive<br>overtime to help<br>students to<br>prevent burnout                                                   | Frequent<br>demand of more<br>pay, bare<br>minimum work<br>and encouraging<br>others to do the<br>same    | No action taken<br>besides office<br>talk?                                                                   |
|                           | Drug usage (as<br>recreation,<br>medicinal,<br>coping<br>mechanism)                               | Common among<br>workers off-shift,<br>not talked about<br>during shift nor<br>with students                                     | Common among<br>workers off-shift,<br>often talked<br>about during<br>shift and with<br>customers         | Common among<br>workers off-shift,<br>occasionally<br>talked about<br>during shift, not<br>with customers    |
|                           | Bodily<br>Accommodation                                                                           | Extensive sitting,<br>bathroom breaks<br>allowed but<br>tense, eating<br>allowed but not<br>often done                          | No places to sit,<br>extreme<br>temperatures,<br>minimal<br>bathroom<br>breaks,                           | Extensive sitting,<br>bathroom breaks<br>allowed without<br>tenseness,<br>eating allowed<br>during shift and |

|     |                               |                                                                                                                   |                                                                          |                                                                 |
|-----|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
|     |                               |                                                                                                                   | occasional eating on shift/scheduled lunch breaks                        | food occasionally provided                                      |
|     | Professionalism/ Job Training | Minimal to none, only when asked, extremely personalized                                                          | Minimal to none, many tasks that required specific training/ instruction | Immediate rules that were later bent, minimal instruction       |
| Etc |                               |                                                                                                                   |                                                                          |                                                                 |
|     | Special treatment/ benefits   | Letter of recommendation for college apps. help in writing essay for app.                                         | Free food, large discount remained even when not working there           | Extra chances during registration process, first to be rehired  |
|     | Unpaid Overtime               | yes, often staying after class to talk and help and frequently taking many essays home to review, took around 3hr | barely, maybe a few mins before and after but never more than 10 minutes | never. allowed and encouraged to leave 5-20 mins early by staff |

## Teaching Assistant

### *Personal Relations to My Labor:*

When reviewing my entries right before and during the first weeks of my work as a TA during mid-October 2021, I frequently complained of how isolated and alone I felt; I explained that my disconnection with the world was brought on by lack of human connection and attunement with social events.

The jottings of my shifts below reflected my nervousness and preoccupation with performance in front of both the students and my superior, as this opportunity presented an excellent way to fill that social void. My desire to be seen consistently contributing valuable information was an attempt to establish a pattern of the appropriate (inter)actions that would curate an approval of my presence; my newness to both work as a whole and educational labor, my under qualification made me obsessed with any micro social aspects that could indicate others' perception of me. Fearing that my accidental invasions of personal space would be remembered and reprimanded, I monitored my behavior frequently, often to the point of

irrational self-consciousness. I felt a sudden and overwhelming responsibility since these students were looking to me for help.

My budding relationship to labor was warped, informed, and obfuscated by social and performance anxiety.

My labor was not defined for me and I was not trained beforehand on how to aid the students; I created my own strategy by looking online for suggestions on the appropriate interactions and what I should know and only received specific input from my superior when I asked her. This shows firstly that socialization and information are of priority when entering a workspace and second, her lack of a highly-planned socialization strategy to assimilate me to the environment and to the labor that defines this role in relation to her and the students; her instructions were vague, general, impersonal to the students who would be relying on me for help.

It is not surprising that she did not have a plan, as this position was not previously installed or set up by the institution, my first stint was halfway through the semester, and the main reason I got into the classroom without going through rigorous hiring and training procedures was because my therapist at the time and my superior were friends. I was essentially invisible and non-existent to the institution since I was not paid, registered, or recognized by any other authority of the college.

I knew this when signing up, and still felt aggrieved at her taking me on without a plan; I feel this start to my work life and this job contributed to my alienation and relationship to labor, as evidenced below.

October 15, 2021: "11:43am i still feel a bit bad that i didn't do anything to help ms baker's class. i did nothing! how do i actually help people? how. what do i do. thats my concern. i don't want to be a silent ornament in her room. just watching the students and not judging them. i want to be involved somehow. i think doing edx courses and writing mini essays myself will help, as well as seeing how ms baker and i can help this one girl with major depressive disorder. right now they're working on interviews and interview questions about their culture. some don't have a real culture so their research wont be as solid/thorough as it needs to be for personal narrative/cultural research essay."

October 19, 2021 "7:08pm i still feel a bit weird bc donna was asking much better questions than i was. Should i really be here? Do i really have the wisdom for this? I feel like i need to study more to help myself out. But donna said that another pprof told her not to overthink it..."

November 4, 2021 "felt deeply unqualified for this job as a TA, caused by not being able to tell if i'm being helpful or not. Asked baker for reassurance and she said "I don't need to take on too big a role that I'm a strong writer, she agreed that writing an essay along with them would help, and that the main goal of this class is to make them confident about writing and learn to enjoy it."

It did not take me long to find my own sense of norms for both labor and social relations here, and once I did I began to look forward to my TA shifts and the challenges they presented. My cemented status achieved through reassurance allowed me to not just be a laborer, or let the temporality, tasks, and alienation of my role be obfuscated fully by new social and

intellectual challenges; I was first distracted by being perceived and now I was distracted by perceiving.

November 12, 2021 "i'm really enjoying this work being a part of my life. Its intellectually stimulating, interesting, new, helpful, and fun. I love that I get to be around people my age twice a week. I'm so satisfied"

November 16, 2021 " ...im so in love w this job and all that it has given me. I hope the students think km kind bc sometimes i think I sound rude or will be interpreted ad harsh when actually i'm just trying to be clear "

After a few classes where I went around giving the students suggestions for research avenues to extend and fill out their prepared topics I found that they were struggling to find sites for reliable articles and studies; I took it upon myself to bring this up to my superior, half wondering why she had not noticed this in her rounds and half eager to assign myself the task of gathering vetted research sites I had used often to prove my usefulness and intelligence to both my superior and the students. When presenting these sites I was deeply nervous and stuttered through my explanation of why they were useful, simultaneously proud to have the floor to talk and worried that my insecure presentation of my labor will color others' perception of me more than the content and usefulness of the labor itself.

At the time of curating that list I did not think of it as labor or a labor product.

During mid November 2021 I also made a table of the students and their topics and levels of need to try and help them out more/ gain a better understanding of what gaps to fill in. I also, without any provocation by my superior but with her permission and facilitation, provided my personal email to the students so they can ask me questions about my suggestions. I believe this decision marked the true invitation of my TA labor from my public life into my private life, as although I spent time out of class giving feedback on papers, my email was a way for students to *reach* me outside of class time about class-related matters. Expansion of modes of communication exemplifies my increasing level of effort and willingness to do labor for this job to be perceived as a "good" TA; at the time I did realize that this action was the integration of my roles and intensifying my connection to this job and my labor, but I did not know or think about the appropriateness of this action or consider that it could be a breach of ethics itself. With this I wondered if I should play in to the role of a 'real' worker even more (a paid one) and create hours for myself where I answer any emails I may receive from students, review papers, collect research sites for them, or generally spend time and effort in my own house outside of the classroom for the purpose of their benefit.

A large part of what became my labor was bringing home the drafts of students' essays and writing suggestions in the margins which I initially took great pride in; I again felt real, true, and thorough in my role as a TA and this intellectual pride also obfuscated any personal aggrievement with the lack of compensation for this labor. Soon though, the fog of pride began to dissipate and the role strain of person v. worker took over as my main challenge/priority at this time.

November 30, 2021: "still enjoying the job but the amount of essays to go through responsibly and return on time can be stressful"

December 1, 2021: "I've realized that this volunteer teaching assistant job helps me connect to ppl but ultimately I don't enjoy teaching....I enjoy the ppl more than the content...I enjoy being in the classroom around the students but the TA work isn't enjoyable."

Late in the semester I began to become exhausted with the tasks of TA work that involved taking home at least 10 essays and providing adequate feedback (I was instructed by my superior to do this by reading first to understand then to criticize (instructed only after asking for help multiple times)) to return to students either the next day or next week. Once my superior took over the review process fully for final grades and had to grade them herself, I felt elated and free when I did not have to bring home essays. I also began to get bored by the monotony of the material taught, now feeling unchallenged by the prompt I also had to understand and the simplistic mode of teaching.

I did not return to TA'ing the spring of 2022 because my superior was only teaching English 100, and although I knew the amount, depth, and personal involvement in that work would be less intense than 101, I denied it partially because my superior did not believe she needed my extra labor and partially because I knew the lack of intellectual stimulation would not fulfill or assuage me and would very likely drain me instead.

Thus, part of the reason I decided not to contribute any labor at all was because I thought it would not be laborious enough. A labor threshold exists, of how much personal satisfaction would be needed to be able to at least tolerate the labor necessary to perform enough to complete the job tasks to a satisfactory level, mainly by the superior's marker.

My return in the fall of 2022 to the English 101 class begun with excited anticipation and a sense of being more knowledgeable about the image and result of my labor output; I was more aware of what the job tasks were asking of me and what is often needed to complete them to a personally and socially satisfying level (as at this time I still held the approval of both my superior and the students as high priorities for the exchange of my labor). My relation to my labor evolved during this semester, likely because I was of aid for the full semester and that the social interactions within the new classroom and the decisions and comments made about my labor during the time away, furthered a more conscious relationship to labor that had begun to germinate in the first semester.

August 30, 2022 : "803pm i am so exhausted. Doubting whether i will enjoy taing twice a week for next four months. I might jst be because it's their first day but the students were kind of closed off. Maybe theyll open up more as the class goes on. Im almost a bit annoyed that chelsie is in the class, i want this to be my territory. But whatever. It's raining hard right now which adds to my feelings of doubt and gloominess. I feel like ive been slapped back into reality."

After the first few classes went over and the structure of the topic and level of engagement between teacher-teacher assistant-and student began to develop my general nervousness dropped, rose concerning how my assistance should change this semester to adapt to the new students and slightly new curriculum, and my excitement and eagerness to adapt and interact with the students increased.

I enjoy going around and helping the students, it makes me feel useful "i like this group of students. Im happy i have this job" stayed at my desk until baker invited me over.

October 6, 2022: "6:56pm ...It feels good to have a responsibility to help students and it feels good when they say my suggestion is helpful. It feels weird knowing my behavior and words are going to be seen and remembered though. I exist in a way. Forever in time i will be their ta."

October 19, 2022: "248am i need to ask baker for reassurance that im going a good job ta'ig. The questions she asks the students are so much more detailed and helpful than mine. I wonder if the students eve take e seriously...i need to know if im actual being useful or not. An di don't want baker to answer in a childish pitiful way; i want real, concrete reassurance eon what im doing well and what i can improve on.

I did end up telling her about my worries about my under qualification and she agreed that "on-paper" i am under qualified by that my previous essays and communication with students as she has seen is more than enough to be of aid to her.

Late oct 2022

Making groups for her about my understanding of which students need the most aid  
Being more vulnerable by way of saying i will write an autoethnography to help the students see how it could be written

Mid late nov 2022

Marking up papers takes about 2n a half hours and theres a strategy to it  
Being in class feels more like hanging out than working.  
Hearing that some students felt relief in releasing their emotions in this essay brought me joy and made me feel like i was doing something right.

On the last day, December 8, some students stayed behind to chat and laugh and reminisce, to which afterwards I wrote, "...It kind of feels good to be finally done with this class but i will absolutely miss some of the students and the feeling of being helpful and doing ta work. But now that it's done, im glad, i'll have one less weekly obligation, more freetime. Feels good that it's over. Moving on. Finally..."

During my second semester TA session my superior admitted she didnt think id be of too much help initially but soon realized my work took off much of her workload and was upset that she would have to do this class without me once I left for college.

explain how my labor output changed as i became more in the habit and learned a way to review essays that was not half assed and tike convenient and how my output changed the second sem

*Relations to Superior(s):*

Volunteering with Ms Baker meant all attention was on me, I was her only TA for that semester, though she had many before in previous classes. She relied on me frequently, her expectations of me slowly rising as each semester went on and as she witnessed how I responded to the students and learned which gaps I was capable of filling for her, for free. My confidence and abilities increased as the weeks went on, my usefulness and eagerness to perform was incredibly valuable to her. My lack of comparison to how much effort I should put in when not getting paid made me an asset she didn't want to let go of. Any concern I had about the job expectations and future was kept to myself, partially because it was my first job, my control group, and partially because there was little to be concerned with except the lack of pay. I did not "feel" exploited or alienated, but I did feel my senses of belonging shift; creating a roadmap for me of how to talk to people and engage with the tasks of a job in a helpful but unique way without overstepping my ability or boundaries as a TA and then doing something wrong or embarrassing myself. I also began to relate to her in a unique way that definitely influenced how much I in turn relied on her and the depth of my effort and emotional labor done for her and the students, as those groups I gave unique responses to.

Baker became a bit of a mother figure to me, likely because of my similarity to her own children and as she learned more about my capabilities, interests, and output potential, she gradually increased her trust of me over the course of the semester. This was acknowledged by baker, her support of my academic goals and understanding of my own mothers' worry when I stayed after class made me feel like socializing and relation to her about non-work related topics was a reliable option. Through these actions she transitioned from solely a superior that I felt afraid of and obliged to do my best work for to someone who would give me slack and provide a relaxing, stimulating, low stakes environment that was mentally beneficial for me. Understandably, I preferred this environment to the stifling home I came from, which my actual mother noticed and expressed her ire and confusion when i mentioned hugging ms baker and sharing my academic plans and familial gripes with. This process was not ethically violating or harmful to the labor either of us provided to the students but I believe benefited it.

The fact that my relation to my superior, my *first* superior, shaped my understanding of what a work relationship could be. This role was a slightly active role on her part and not just me making up emotions and attachments out of thin air, but possibly it was on my part that I developed this as a way to deal with my social, occupational performance anxiety.

During my second semester ta session baker admitted she didnt think id be of too much help but soon realized my work took off much of her workload and was upset that she would have to do th3 class without me

October 19, 2021 “7:08pm i still feel a bit weird bc donna was asking much better questions than i was. Should i really be here? Do i really have the wisdom for this? I feel like i ned to study more to help myself out. But donna said that another pprof told her not to overthink it...”

November 4, 2021 “felt deeply unqualified for this job as a ta, caused by not being able to tell if i'm being helpful or not. Asked baker for reassurance and she said i don't need to take on too big a role that im a strong writer ,she agreed that writing an essay along w them would help, and that the main goal of this class is to make them confident aby writing and learn to enjoy it.”

### *Relations to Customers/Students:*

Any relations with students as a TA is contextualized by the fact that I am a proxy laborer, here for them through my superior, that I am temporary, and that ethical limitations keep me from relating to them as same-age friends; role conflict is plenty.

My simultaneous identities as a fellow teenager and a worker in the same classroom, to the same people conflicted frequently and was apparent during my stints to me, my superior, and to the students. Different reactions and dealings with my role conflict depended on: the phase of the semester; on-shift (on campus) interactions with students, off-shift (on campus) interactions with students; the presence of my superior; my non-work socialization goals, predictions, and worries.

This entry succinctly displays my role conflict, of person and worker; 1. My desire to connect conflicted with 2. the job requirement of attending to all students equally.

October 19, 2021 “7:08pm also i feel a bit bad bc my brain is mainly reshowing me the interactions i had with sagan and not with the first girl i talked to. I feel bad for leaning. She was so sweet.”

1. I knew quickly in the first semester that TA-ing is a way to create relationships but the time limit and ethical considerations makes it a risky and tense situation, not ideal for creating deep personal relationships. I held out hope but essentially resigned myself to stay in my worker lane; my in class interactions with students stayed focused on the assignment at hand and I anxiously monitored my body language to not be too open, inviting, or friendly. This behavior bled through to off-shift interactions that were still on campus, such as after class or walking to the parking lot with students, responding kindly to their friendly asks but fearful of being too vulnerable or prying into their own lives. During the second semester, I became more lax with my self-induced rules of behavior and relation to students (shared more about my life, was playful and casual) but still refused to go beyond roles of TA-student to person-person (refusal to hang out outside of class or off-campus, for example).

2. My job as a ta was defined initially as and my focus was to alleviate ms baker but soon it became two separate roles within one, be a friend and aid to the students and aid to ms baker, which often involve conflicting tasks that may slight either.

One of the most uncomfortable aspects of TA'ing, in a worker role, was the task of identifying students that needed more aid than others, pointing out to my superior, for example, who was unable to connect phenomena on their own, unable to come up with aspects of their assigned subject that they could practically research and investigate, only regurgitating what I tell them to write instead of putting examples in their own words. Typifying certain students as difficult felt contradictory to my role as person-to-person; I knew their dissonance from social mores or academic expectations was not a moral disgrace or physically harmful to anyone but it emotionally complicated my job as a TA, as I did not expect part of a teaching role would involve grouping and pathologizing students with attention or comprehension needs and relaying that to an exhausted teacher.

This is reflected in an ethnography of TA's done in urban Britain: "Consequently, assistants' focus tended to be those pupils who were viewed as problematic to the teachers' competence and limited resources of time and energy. For black male TAs, there was often a focus on black boys, who were viewed from the classroom perspective as embodying "deviant" or problematic masculinities. These findings suggest that the assistants' pedagogic action is constrained, not only by the routines of classroom experience and organisation... but also by the operations of the habitus, gender and the relational identities of teachers, pupils and assistants. The consequences were an ambivalent and ambiguous positioning for assistants." (Mansaray, 262).

#### *On Site Worker Culture:*

My most significant notice of dissonance between my superior and her superior, the authorities of the college, was nearing the end of the second semester when she received an extremely late notice from the college that students must include one of the main three sociological theories as a method to analyze the culture they chose to research for their autoethnography; this emphasis on theory was not made at the beginning of the semester and concerned her because she was required to submit these papers to the higher board to monitor if students were truly learning and producing decent quality work, which would circle back to judgment about her ability to teach and if she would be called back and paid for another semester at the college. She responded to this slight quite immediately by telling me she refused to pressure the student to include anything last minute and would instead project her ire to her own collegiate bosses. I found this respectable but also shocking that such dissonance occurs in the first place, especially among English, Composition, Literature, and Social Science departments who are usually raised with the concept of peer review and preliminary council. This effectively injected a suspicion of unseen authority into me that I had previously heard about but now saw its unique effects in an academic setting.

Drugs were never talked about during the shift between my superior and I or as open conversation between the teacher and the students. It was simply evaded even though she was well aware and shared with me late in the second semester (time created trust) that she

determined some students' marijuana usage was harming their ability to retain information and/or apply it, thus appearing to need more aid in class. I was intrigued with her perceptions, suddenly suspicious how she interpreted the students' demeanor and how that might impact the amount of time and effort she puts into aiding their work; she had described to me how she refused to coddle students who don't attempt to self-initiate by asking for help or by showing up to class.

The body is allowed to be attended to somewhat uniquely in a college classroom, no one is required to announce or get permission to leave indefinitely, and because of the smallness and slow, predictable movement of the group it is easy to notice when one person is gone and how much figurative space they take up in the classroom. My superior, the teacher, frequently put off her breaks and also shared the most about her injuries and other ways her body interrupted and inconvenienced her; still, she moved around more than anyone else in the room. It reminded me that the overwhelming majority of students across both semesters I aided were visibly able-bodied, did not mention any internal disabilities, or that any accommodation information was confidential between the student and the authorized teacher, not shared to the unauthorized TA. Food and drink is allowed among all, but rarely seen. A further, extremely micro study might be interesting to note the differences between colleges and subjects of how many times students get up to fill their water bottles.

## Co-Op Volunteer

### *My Relations to My Labor:*

January 29, 2022: "4:41pm i want to note the 3 step process that is filling spice jars at the co op. I did it all. First, go through the list and note which jars are empty or half filled or full. 3 pages of spices. Definitely 50+ spices. Then go upstairs with the list and a basket to the dusty spice room and collect the spice bags for all the jars that are empty and bring them down. Fill the jars and cross off what i filled. Done. i filled 7 jars. The scissors barely work and the place is dusty and filled with cobwebs. I took photos."

February 2, 2022: "Ive been labeling spice bags and filled some spice jars and rewrote the prices on some spice and tea jars using a little phone to type in the PLU and see the price. I scanned some things make the little price tags for them to stick on this black plastic that sits in the shelf channels. I am sweating so so much.... i am so tired. exhausted . my thighs and lower back hurt. I stood for two hours. Fcking hell man."

February 8, 2022: "...by kims instruction i fronted everything int he 3rd room of the coop. Brooke and i talked for a few mins before i left, asking me how long i plan to volunteer here. Brooke said they will leave this job soon but will continue to volunteer here. The employees of this places are always fast walking an fast talking. Every employee i talked to thanked me for helping out here."

I frequently noted and identified employees who give me tasks, and the amount they give me. The transference of labor and them deciding my labor was and is significant to me. Even in the first two months of volunteering it is clear that any visible additions to the business of the co-op were extremely important to me for developing my relation to production and therefore sense of belonging and usefulness within the work-space; the specific movements and items involved in each procedure, the corner of the building I was stationed in for them, the person who instructed me, the amount of labor output produced, how long it will last before it needs to be redone, and the effect it had on my body (physical exhaustion and psychological stress levels) were the founding components of my animate relationship to my labor.

Around early february, my post-shift entries were frequently surrounded by my wishes to be active not passive (by which I mean contribute in a more lasting and creditable way, instead all my labor was very temporal and thus quite invisible), noticing my surroundings and trying to make my life instead of having it be swayed or made for me. Feeling a sense of urgency, needing to do something and do more and keep up.

Feb 9, 2022: "6:17pm aleah refers to me as 'our wonderful volunteer' and chris refers to me as '[a] person to work with'. Volunteer v co-worker."

February 16, 2022: asked kim abt how to get a job there and she said submit a resume and letter of interest and cover lett3r and andrew said to dress well bc he didnt the first time for the interview. Took him 3 interviews to get a job here.

*After multiple recognitions that i am a person and people like me and taking stock of those who like my company and the reasons they've given for that i suddenly have an entry where i state the co op is the perfect place for me because of our aligned values ans political and social goals, suddenly i feel an urge to join ans be fully recognized through more time dedicated ti them and the ppl there and returned thru pay. What am i waiting for?*

After one month of weekly volunteering came feelings of being on the outskirts and relegated to absurdly simple and juvenile tasks: "23 feb "also while i was sweeping i ws thinking: this is not challenging. I feel like a fucking house maid. I want to be more than this...it was scary when i first started volunteering here which made it a challenge but now that im used to it and know the people it's nto scary anymore which makes it kind of boring.""

Interestingly, just a few weeks later I stated in my entries that *I enjoy working on tasks that can seem kind of mechanical and simple, especially while alone because it can become meditative and relaxing.*

During late mid to late February 2022 at the Co-op, I began to feel integrated into the workplace because of the increasing repertoire of tasks I was assigned, had done frequently enough to go on autopilot while doing them, and the employees began to trust me to do these tasks well and thoroughly enough to rely on my weekly hours to leave that task to me.

March 5, 2022; 1043pm “ i didnt write or include a letter of interest in my application bc i thought i neednt need one bc i though you only need a letter of interest when there are no jobs available. But apparently i do bc a post on their insta from yrs ago said to include a resume and letter of interests. Is that why ryan hasnt responded to my email? Bc i didnt include one stupid letter? Im getting annoyed...arent you people desperate for employees? Why do you need an extra page of me sucking up? Just let me in for fucks sakes. I know i can do the fucking tasks. Fuck. i thought i was done. I can feel the contempt building like cement. Im a loser before i even won. Fuck. i can imagine ryan telling me im fired, ending a job i didnt even have in the first place.”

Multiple employees said id be a good fit for the co op

Deciding to take a break from the co op for a few day bc i was anticipating getting the job and being there four to five days in a row so i wanted some time off so i don't get sick of it

April 30, 2022 “301pm ...also last time i was here i made a list of spices to fill on a brown paper bag and today i found it on the counter beside the plu machine! They kept my list! They didnt throw it away! I can't believe it! They really let it stay there!” this meant a lot to me, the remnants of *my* work still present even after being bureaucratically sidelined multiple times. More connection with the workers than the hiring manager (ryan) even though i consistently describe him as sweet, i am not personally close to him.

May 8, 2022: “228am i miss being ms bakers ta. I enjoyed it so much. I got to be around people my age, it wasn't taxing work i had to do, very relaxing and casual environment, intellectually and creatively stimulating work, ms baker is hilarious, etc. i should've been her ta for the second semester too but instead i decided to volunteer at the co-op . i miss being her ta so fucking much. It was so lovely. I enjoyed the students and reading their essays and the slow paced, low stakes atmosphere. I prefer it to the fucking mess i deal with at the coop. Being a ta was my pace. Fuck man. Makes me sad. I miss that ease! I miss sagan. Nothing in this world has ever been at my pace except for that class, that job. It was perfect. The co op is not my pace, it's much faster. Fuck. sorrow and aching is what i feel.”

May 15, 2022: “1258am oh and the guy ryan was showing how to use the register was at the co op yesterday. For fucks sakes. Hire me motherfucker whats stopping you?! Also i saw on a piece of paper in the prep room that assigned people to post something on social media each day? odd.”

May 16, 2022: “338pm just got back from writing in new hours at the coop and aleah and ryan were at the registers. They waved hi to me through the window then when i came in ryan thanked me for attending the virtual meeting as they had a quota to meet and not all the staff attended. He thanked me and said i was very helpful. Aleah added that they were very close to not meeting it. Theyre so sweet. Waved bye to them too. They say my name with such fullness and earnestness. They enunciate my name.

May 21, 2022: “just called my mom. Okay day at the co op of filling spices and sweeping. I don't like jada that much. I don't like how she tells me what to do as if i havent been volunteering here for four months now. I know what the fuck to do. Both aleah and jada complimented me on my red details. The guy jordan showed up again today.. Hes not on the schedule though. Maybe this just isnt my place. Im not meant ot be here. There was one customer who wouldnt shut up. Fucking annoying. A group of young ppl came in and i accidentally walked through the group. I was annoyed at that point. Aleah said it's graduation week at suny. Im just not an outgoing person i guess. Also now as im sitting at the counte jordan comes around looking nervous wandering where the bags are bc hes “been here so little time”. I point them to them and accidentally touch his shoulder in the process which im not happy about he aid sorry and i just nodded. Im just fucking tired.

May 26, 2022: “ told natalie how ryan passed me over again at the co op and she looked shocked then said many people are not pleased with the way he manages the place. Then she asked me about my goals and i went blank. I told her everything seems impossible and that it feels like theres no room for me in the world.”

June 8, 2022: sweating like hell moving cardboard to the recycling bins outside, often getting scrapes

July 12, 2022: “335pm home from the co op. During my first hour there i was not happy bc i was doing spices and sweating and there was another volunteer there named cadence who talked to herself a lot and has apparently been here since opening this morning. From overhearing kim i think shes in the summer job program they have. I think i have to accept now that i don't want a job there anymore. Im content with volunteering.

Interestingly from july to my last month at the co op in january i made few if any mentions of the tasks i was doing likely because it had become so routine that my only notings of tasks happened in congruence with distinct encounters with other people; my labor became normal and blips in the radar of routine were infrequent. I internalized and accepted the routine I originally felt was grating and unacceptable.

I only mentioned taking out the cardboard when it involved a new and concerning witness on August 5, 2022: “when I was taking out the cardboard there was some guy on the apartment steps like 30ft away just watching me as he smoked”.

### *Relations to Superior(s):*

Learning specifically about the bureaucracy and managerial patterns was the most disappointing part of my stint at the co op; I began to know them both as comrades and as managerial agents the feeling I developed during my TA days of a social dissonance created by role strain reappeared more intensely as I interacted with more people who were authorized to give me tasks.

When facing managers and business facilitators I still persistently wanted to impress them even when I knew no monetary return was ever to be delivered. Because of this, at the

beginning I frequently felt humiliated and lowly as I was both unassimilated with the norms and knowledge of the operation to be of exceptional help to anyone. This preoccupation with my own useful/uselessness increased feelings of social alienation, which did not cede, but lowered when I became more friendly with my superiors/instructors, learning to both ask for help and not need their help, as well as my extended stay as a volunteer allowed for me to be seen as a person and not just another transient volunteer who they will spend time training only to be gone, repeating the process.

#### *Relations to Employees/Other Volunteers:*

I applied to work at the co-op, but was continuously looked over. I watched in confusion as multiple others donned an employee nametag and came to me for questions about the lay of the store. I had to continuously remind myself to focus my ire at the manager and not the employees, hone in on the source of my alienation and feelings of invisibility.

There were multiple staff meetings at the co op during my time there, but i was not in them since i was not paid. This might further feelings of exploitation and alienation since i did consistent and considerable work for them but was not involved in or updated on business decisions like orders. I learned of management changes after the fact, and employees appeared and disappeared right in front of my eyes, i learned of structure changes only on the days i volunteered, i learned different info from different people.

“Since the right to govern rests ultimately with the collective of members and delegated authority is accountable to the group as a whole, members also call their enterprises “collectives”. In the nineteenth century lexicon, these enterprises would have been called “producers’ cooperatives”. The term remains technically correct but the participants themselves seldom use this designation,” (Rothschild, 2). Employees of the co op don't always refer to themselves this way and frequently i was asked by a friend if the cooperative was actually fulfilling of their missions if they were continuously stringing me along, harking on the integrity of the co-op and enlighten me to the drastic-ness of my situation as a volunteer that was denying me compensation for my labor.

Other volunteers presented a unique relationship to labor output and it's visibility int he workplace and how that impacted my approach to the job. I was often the only volunteer there; at certain points two different people volunteered during my hours which illuminated my possessiveness over my labor contribution and reignited my just-calmed anxiety about my performance. But interestingly i did not feel anything against volunteers i did nto see in person but only saw their names on the volunteer calendar, too abstracted and torn from the physical signs of their labor output for me to feel threatened by it.

In April of 2022 I began to talk to one co-op employee younger than me, previously I felt such irrational contempt towards her and her labor contribution and the approval and

opportunities bestowed upon her for her longevity as an employee. This changed as I attempted to acquire a position there as well and level it off, but also as I accepted that my volunteer status would not change and began to enjoy the temporality of it my conception of her as competition lessened.

#### *Relations to Customers/Students:*

I had minimal relations to customers here since the co-op was a store that charted business from the region and Canada and I was only there for two hours a week, thus leaving me even less time to notice or interact with regulars. In fact it was the other employees who pointed out the regulars to me and stated their opinions on them, what they often buy, what they talk about, how long they stay around to talk and if/when that begins to annoy the employees or not.

Conversations with regulars often ventured into friendly territory that did not necessarily include questions about the store or what the customer came for. Meanwhile, my personal interaction with customers always remained brief and work-related, rarely if ever encompassing more social than occupational elements. This was also an arena that thus contributed to feelings of distance from the employees that I was gradually getting more friendly and assimilated with, reminding me that certain connections and environmental affordances were off limits, inaccessible until a certain time floor had been achieved.

#### *On Site Worker Culture:*

One of the main conversations I ended up having with employees as I got more assimilated into the workplace were sharing annoyances about the managerial staff, a typical obstacle ironically found in this co-op. My attempts to get a job there were well known and encouraged heavily by the employees, so when they heard that the hiring/main manager pushed me aside without a word I gained a quiet legitimacy; though still a volunteer the fact that I struggled with the manager like they did established me as a comrade and opened the gates for more explicit discussion of harm workplaces often peddle out. I experienced more true camaraderie from the standard paid employees than the managers or other volunteers.

This camaraderie also appeared in the form of employees telling me about how they use drugs to cope with the stressors of the specter of work and capitalistic bleakness; even while this job in particular, several employees agreed, was distinctly less stressful than others they have had.

The body in the co-op was treated with supplements and run into the ground. There are no places to sit on the selling floor, and they are far too understaffed to allow employees to evade the selling floor unless it was an exceptionally empty day. There is an immense amount of communication among the employees to convey when one goes on break(s) or departs to another part of the building, complete with walkie-talkies, to ensure that their labor is within reach. Taller and stronger employees are called often to aid with grabbing produce or jars from high shelves or to carry heavier boxes of goods up and down stairs, but for the most part these

were exceptions, as the division of labor among both employees and volunteers simply depends on who was available to help or not.

What is also notable is the the environment was immensely friendly, casual, open, and human compared to other businesses in downtown, the professionalism was minimal to non-existent at first glance; the employees laughed loudly, talked across the store to each other, shared personal events more easily with each other and with customers, played music in the store according to their personal taste and not a mainstream radio station (though no profanity or harsh/heavy music was allowed), drawing and doodling on the glass facing the street was encouraged and used to advertise holiday sales or events at the co-op. The details of these aspects were always decided without me, not out of malice or strategy but of simple convenience; these decisions were likely made early in the day during opening time before my shift began. The whole conception of the operation was communal and welcoming, but they still had to fall back on professional, bureaucratic, business rules and did break them often; One time a homeless man came in asking if the co-op provided free food, to which one of the employees had to reluctantly say no, suddenly confronted with the hypocrisy, inconsistency, and painful irony of the colorful store that still wears a hefty price tag.

When the co-op opened a position for a full time paid employee, part of what was listed on the job description was a sense of humor. The environment as I experienced through volunteering did value humor, casualness, a sense of both friend camaraderie and working together in the literal, operative, productive sense of the phrase, beneficial mostly to the business and secondarily to the workers. This is apparent because of the employees' frequent claims of understaffing, wishes for pay increases, places to sit in the main floor of the workplace and at the register. "Ownership does not necessarily mean security. Workers might end up co-owning very little or nothing. In order to increase chances of succeeding in competitive markets, worker owners might even reproduce patterns of self-exploitation, working long hours for little pay. When discussing the potential of co-ops to address precarious labour it is important to acknowledge the structural insecurity of cultural industries and the precarity of capitalist markets in general that co-ops also cannot escape." (Sandoval)

Front Desk Associate, Central Records

November 7, 2023: "Classes and education is kinda the product we sell here" - CR employee

At central records during the spring semester 2023, i was hired immediately, and there were no other employees or volunteers to relate to or connect casually with. It was immediately adapting to the new title and occasional responsibility i was given. There was no ire to be directed because there was nothing to be irritated at; tasks and deadlines for the college misted over me and the heavier work that comes with graduation season falls to the employees only.

That changed dramatically in the fall, resulting in some change to my relation to my superiors, little difference in on site worker culture, little change to my relations to

customers/students, and quite large changes to my performance and relations to my labor and to other employees within my newfound rank.

### *My Relations to My Labor:*

My first semester working at CR during the spring of 2023 revealed even more new feelings about labor and my place in a job; the connection (or dis connection) between the variety and quality of my labor output and the personal return (or lack thereof) became apparent when I realized that even when I messed up filing or was not able to figure out the phone and thus left many students hanging, I still got paid the same amount. I was given little verbal instruction on how to do these tasks, and I was never told who I should direct students to when they need specific aid; I solved this by looking online to know who in the office facilitates which departments or specialties and kept written jottings of this beside me as i worked to refer to when students came in.

February 15, 2023: "I'm incredibly uninformed for a front desk person which means i'm not doing as well of a job as I could. Pushing students around in circles, directing them to the wrong people."

It is almost difficult to create or detail a relationship to my labor output at this job since I produce so little. My decisions of effort for this job took a sharp turn once I was reaccepted for the fall semester; I began to not hide when I was not doing homework when employees walked by, allowing myself to be on my phone or zone out . This changed when other students began working immediately beside me at CASA, and I began to compare our outputs; my anxiety had spiked for a moment but decreased when I realized I did enough to not be let go. I worried that our supervisors would be comparing us but we are in different departments though we are beside each other, and even with other student workers within CR, I have ceased to be worried because of my longevity at CR, their trust in me because of my communication to them, etc. The anticipation of possible competition created anxiety but was quickly alleviated when I realized our supervisors might notice or gossip about different levels of effort but will likely not fire students based on "inadequate" output.

September 12, 2023: "1:05pm a new student worker taught me how to use the phone just a minute ago, last semester i just ignored it or motioned for Maureen to answer the calls when she was in her office. The other worker answered the phone very professionally, introducing the office and asking "how can I help?", listing off the things they can do and transferring the call to someone else. I answer very nervously and unprofessionally. I feel so silly being here, being unfit but simultaneously wondering, do I want to fit in here and sound professional? How long would it take to deprogram myself out of professionalism if I did ingrain it into myself? Do I want to be more involved in this job or does alienation actually serve me positively in this case? Professionalizing myself would not increase my pay. Another new student worker has more confidence in telling me how the phone works. I feel bad for not being able to satisfy the needs of concerned students that call about their registration worries but I am not so stressed about

doing a satisfying job to the employers. I've mostly been prodding to see which areas the employers find a lack of full participation acceptable and completely utilizing that."

*Relations to Superior(s):*

My understanding of, fear of, respect for, and camaraderie to my superiors as simultaneous managerial forces and fellow workers began forming upon my first day of working there and being told the rules of professionalism I should abide by, which included a casual but modest dress code, no profanity, only quiet and contained music is allowed, and other unwritten rules of a traditional office space. I soon learned that these rules are flexible or easy to bypass, which is done by both student workers and main employees. I noticed such bypassing slowly, but that did not take away from how jarring it was when the employees swore as they gossiped and not reprimanding me for doing the same, no (direct) comments made to student workers about crop tops or tight clothing, and the occasional conversational yelling across the floor (done by employees only).

The extent to which I observed the employees creating and bending their self and institutional imposed rules of professionalism often shocked me, as it revealed and reminded me of their humanity in stark comparison to the beige, cubicled environment. Occasionally overhearing the rude way the employees talk about the students they attend sickened me. They say "you ain't getting it today babe", referring to a request to get a transcript; "i hate when students bring their little friends with them". Upon hearing this I thought back to the times I saw students come in with one of their friends close behind them, presumably for moral support/anxiety relief or that they were simply walking by the building and decided to go in together. I thought Maureen saying this into the void of the office space was unreasonable and even rude, as having company when asking one of the employees something is innocent, harmless, and not in violation of any code posted around. Her saying this in my presence and not just saving it for her other equal-level employees shows a distinct difference between work-study students and customer-students. I was allowed to witness the private conversations of the work culture that are done away from and about who the institution primarily serves.

This leads me to wonder how they talk about me and other student employees when we are not around to hear; this thought makes me anxious but it is not permeating enough as it is balanced by the fact that I am still employee after all, whatever annoying thing I might've done was not enough to kick me off the payroll so it's not my problem. This mindset is possibly the result of proving myself in my two previous jobs and not having such a big role in this position, such a low bar is set for interaction that little proving is asked for. Still, I maintain the slightest air of professionalism (politeness, cooperation, not being disruptive) because I have noticed it gives me some preference in academic areas; instances of these remind me that the employees are not above bias, making me suspicious of their actions and words towards other students especially if I have not interacted with them.

I am also assuaged by the fact that my superiors let me leave up to 20 minutes before my scheduled end time and I am still paid fully, I see this as a form of camaraderie.

### *Relations to Employees:*

Since the main employees of the job are all my superiors, the other employed people I run into are what I consider “same-level” employees, or other temporary student workers. I only see them briefly, our work-study schedules all differ and are not regulated because the college/our superiors allow our schedules to be based around our classes, so no student's work schedule is exactly alike.

My first semester at the front desk I never worked beside anyone, so the thought of comparing myself to other workers did not arise; it did arise during the second semester when I began to see other student-workers performing their labor differently than me, and I felt a sudden reemergence of anxiety and competition, I worried that my employers would compare target me for not being as professional or doing the bare minimum.

Seeing two new paid employees get established here who I don't take instruction from also affects my relationship to my labor and to the institution around me, as there is no competition felt but it reminds me how I am not aware of what goes on in the world of the main employees.

### *Relations to Customers/Students:*

I have felt an intriguing sense of camaraderie and alliance with the students who come in for help, looking worried about their situation and stressed over class registration, darting eyes and worried undertones, knowing I nor the employees here would be able to help them fully. The politeness on my side when I answer the phone or tell students where they can talk to someone who can help them properly feels so artificial and uncharacteristic of my usual, out of work speech patterns. I believe an excess of this role and the speech habits though a more traditional work schedule of 30+ hours would lead to feelings of alienation from self and others.

This work changed the way I perceive other student workers around campus; they might also feel a sense of alienation and disconnection with the college and department they work for, consciously changing the way they do the tasks assigned depending on their relationship to their superiors and customers.

### *On Site Worker Culture:*

Responses to institutional slights are a common topic among the workers here, and of course were relatable to student workers because we are both providing money and labor to the college that brings us more debt than alleviates it. These conversations still felt odd to be involved in, since these workers actually contribute to the institution more than the student workers do (much like any volunteer or temporary work situation).

The front desk was a considerably more “professional” environment than the previous but the main employees occasionally spoke of their past or current experiences with drug use as recreation and medicine. To me this broke the air of professionalism that was signified to me through the dress of employees, organization of the space and the items within, and of course the topics of conversation between same and different level workers.

Interestingly, I am given more room to attend to my needs as a human during my shift at this job than any of the others. I am allowed and encouraged to eat and take breaks as often as needed, as the employees are aware of how empty and long the shifts can be. This created a culture that is very comfortable but was ironically the hardest to adapt to. Similar to the co-op, employees frequently state when they are leaving for a meeting, a walk, lunch, etc, creating a labor accountability in the workplace; where and when can they be reached to facilitate some academic technical action.

The air of professionalism faded over time as I saw more and more the way the employees bent the rules themselves and allowed me to do the same.

### Compressed Analysis

There are some commonalities in my experiences across these three quite unrelated jobs, both among my relations and the culture of the space itself.

From my entries above and some conclusions can be made among all jobs:

- After 6 months or so total and with my semester based jobs after two-three months i began to shed the anxiety of what a proper worker should do; consciously began to only do the bare minimum of what was asked of me; began skirting the lines of my required tasks and started to socialize more and take advantage of the environment and change it rather than solely maintaining it. I hypothesize that this anxiety of labor performance was partly subconscious strategy to display my work ethic as a foundation for the friendships/work relationships I would inevitably create by being in the same space as others, **and** partly a culturally ingrained strategy to promote prioritization of labor output and competition over worker solidarity and connection.
- Built camaraderie with my superiors through our shared understanding of the weaknesses of the institution we work for (this affected my relationship to my labor in that i was both a worker like my superior and a worker unlike my superior, doing different tasks on a different schedule but feeling the pressures of alienation, “temporary” occupational socialization, and more.
- Because of volunteer/temporary nature, infrequent contact with other temporary workers, possibly adding to a sense of social alienation.
- Only occasionally or rarely interacting with same-level employees; impacts my feelings of alienation and anxiety about occupational performance and comparison; the amount to which I am able to or want to (why does this fluctuate?) connect with them also influences said feelings.
- A circle of accountability among my superiors unto their superiors; they assign me tasks and if i do them well it helps them look better in the eyes of their boss. They also reap the benefits of my labor.
- Opinions about customers, managers, and the institution are common topics within the workspace among employees of all levels, the depth and frequency of these conversations vary though

- Going against mission statements of institution or personal morals to maintain business and/or sense of self.
- The extent of professionalism or personalization of professional rules does not change the bureaucratic function or demands of the institution

The piling of of these work experiences and the building of my relationship to labor is evident in that I did not return to volunteering at the co op during the summer of 2023 after my paid stint at Central Records; I was both disillusioned with the amount of labor i did for them with no monetary return, my central records job likely reframed my comprehension of the magnitude of my own labor and the other/main forms of return offered by a job, and the social environment was not enthralling enough to overcome the monotony of the tasks I would have to do at the Co-op. I had gotten used to being paid to do things that pertained to my outside-of-work life instead of solely contributing to the business or institution, suddenly doing work for an institution was absurd and aggravating when other options existed. The social aspects of the co-op were my justification for the lack of pay and the monetary aspects of central records were my justification for the lack of social interaction and job participation; “The less power the job holder feels in his job, the lower his effort and performance and the more his tardiness from work. The same behavior is also significantly related with normlessness. Thus, the more an individual feels that upward mobility in the organization requires illegitimate means, the lower his effort and performance and the more his tardiness from work. Meaninglessness shows significant relationships to self-rated measures of effort and performance, and tardiness. The more the job holder feels that his work role is not integrated into related work roles and into the goals of the organization, the lower his effort and performance and the more his tardiness from work.” (Cummings, 173).

My relation to my labor is colored by both my volunteer status and the agreement that (especially as a TA) this job is temporary and has a designated end date that I cannot control. This unique, conscious worker transience very likely influenced my feelings of alienation and exploitation, as I wonder if the break between the semesters I worked allowed me to put my concerns on the backburner, either forgetting them or being able to tolerate them. I wonder if I worked for many semesters or if my TA responsibilities were more overwhelming that the feelings of alienation would build up to an intolerable level and would combine with the latent aggrievement over not being paid and would result in me leaving my position as a ta.

These studies done on the relationships between performance of a worker and their interactions with other workers are vital in forming a thorough ethnographic picture, especially since the perspectives of the more stable or tenured employees influenced the status, privileges, and respect I received as a volunteer or transient worker, “The temporary workers in Rogers’s study believed that regular workers did not think they were worth getting to know and noted experiences of being left to do their work while regular employees socialized. This type of alienation is perpetuated when temporary workers do not have the longevity on the job to build relationships” (Clark, 288) ; This means that a temporary worker can be engaging in feedback-seeking behaviors that cause a higher performance rating from their supervisor but may not increase their self-rating of performance.” (Clark, 289).

Those who were actually employed likely experienced the upsetting physical and psychological side-effects of their job, creating an odd connection between paid and non-paid workers in the same environment. Some employees also may feel alienated while others not, possibly making strong worker solidarity difficult, especially if communication is already fraught, as “The lack of shared interaction rituals and opportunities to communicate left grievances unacknowledged and encouraged a sense of uncertainty, distance and division between assistants and management,” (Mansaray 201) ; “Subordinates with less psychological capital may experience a stronger negative relationship between lack of autonomy and work alienation (Vanderstucken, 643)...Psychological capital seems to buffer the alienating effect of a lack of autonomy in subordinates, but not in supervisors, presumably because the latter do not suffer from work alienation as a consequence of a lack of autonomy” (ibid, 651).

#### PART 4: Occupational Socialization

Since I have described how my relations surrounding production shaped my effort and labor output during shifts, I will first describe how *anticipatory* resocialization shaped my labor consciousness even before the interpersonal resocialization began, both of which affected my actions and personality off-shift. I want to focus on both the individual and collective phases that are resocialization because they are both essential to the conscious, structural process of creating a job-scape for workers to assimilate into; “Recognizing the distinction between a particular occupational group and a particular type of socialization is critical because it directs our attention either to the product of a social process (e.g., the socialization of professionals), or to the process itself (e.g., socialization).” (Cruess, 58)

Work socialization as defined by Oxford Reference, is “The process of learning to labour in paid employment and conforming to the associated ideological structures: internalizing the norms, values and culture of the workplace, employing organization, profession, or occupational group; accommodating to power and authority relations at the workplace; acquiring the skills of secondary relationships; complying with the particular role and functions allocated to the individual worker; and adopting the behaviours preferred by employers (such as punctuality, team spirit, and loyalty). More generally, it involves learning to value the attitudes that reinforce the worth of work in general and the skills involved in doing particular jobs, such as strength, dexterity, numeracy, creativity, analytical abilities, or persuasiveness.”

The altering of one’s existing sense of norms and values is a conscious function of the managerial body of the job; to maintain longevity and integrity of business or internal goals workers must be made to believe in the value of said goals and adapt their lives to the conceptual, social, and schedule norms of the work environment.

I also feel a constant and essential pull to separate the components of my interactions: the agents and the setting; in that the employees I met are not representative of the school or company they work for and that they are people unable to be totally fused with the abstraction of

the institution and its mission statements, as all employment and political/social influence is conditional, malleable, and temporary.

Interactions between employees of all ranks are the main resocializing force for each other, orbiting the sun that is the workspace itself; each addition of opinion and visible changes in effort shift the on-site worker culture in response to macro environmental changes and micro managerial decisions. Employee individuality is a resocializing force as well; their personalities and interactions with me influenced my out-of-work lifestyle, personality, habits, mental health and outlook on the world.

Therefore it makes sense that before my TA and co-op jobs, I had a severe sense of derealization, feeling ripped out of the mainframe of reality, stuck on a separate plane that only I inhabit and feeling impossible to merge back. My lack of social interaction and no consistency in sites of resocialization pulled me out of the immediacy of the world and resulted in a mentally debilitating alienation from others; I became aware of said alienation and the need to resolve it quite quickly because of the intensity that punctured both my waking and sleeping moments.

Once I began working, many journal entries between my shift jottings were joyous; these work environments and tasks were extremely refreshing and allowed me to attach to the social world again in a meaningful and consuming way. One evening post-TA'ing I wrote, "October 19, 2021 "6:32pm...god i am so fucking happy and fulfilled. literally this is the fuel i needed. actual human interaction. such a fucking blessing. I feel blessed. I feel like a void has been filled. a genuine void. This class was so much better than the first one because I actually got to talk to people; last Thursday I just sat there and didn't say a word. engagement is so great." This sense of fulfillment repeated during the second semester. It was then that I also began to become aware of these jobs as sites of resocialization as a sense of norms and routine became established, "October 25 2022 6:59pm"...the co op + this class has rewired my brain or the better because now I know that there are people out there that are nice to me..."

In the middle of the second semester of TA'ing, as the repetition of the tasks began to weigh on me, my entries shifted into complaints of the return of feelings of derealization; this time it was the result of alienation from my labor and not from the social world. "September 13, 2022: 7:40pm I have trouble recognizing myself. Ms Baker saying my name when referring to me, my mom saying my name when she's upset with me, my friends or acquaintances or anyone saying my name makes me feel weird. It's not mine really. I don't feel like it's me at all. It feels like "kadin" is someone two inches to the right of me but not really me. Some shadow person that is glued to my back. I have trouble digesting compliments or comments at me. I just don't see or understand it. I don't know what parts of me make people think I'm smart or sweet. I can't comprehend that people really perceive me."

The sites of socialization were nearly identical from one semester to the next so from this I can hypothesize that length of stay, emotional involvement ( + emotional changes), and labor output produced in sites of resocialization determines the efficacy of the jobs' value-shaping tactics and also formulates the chances a worker will return to the site.

#### To and From Labor

As with my relations to labor, the visibility of the depth of my resocialization was most apparent through the fluctuations of my anxiety. My nervousness was at it's peak at the

beginning of each job and decreased as my sense of norms and routine developed; “Uncertainty is reduced through the information provided via various communication channels, notably social interactions with superiors and peers. As uncertainty decreases, newcomers become more adept at performing their tasks, more satisfied with their job, and more likely to remain in their organization” (Saks, 326)

Considering the actual phases of socialization during shifts, many studied forms were present, most notably was the anticipatory anxiety before my TA job commenced, I read articles and scoured for videos and other recommendations on how to be a “good” TA, wanting to assimilate and transition seamlessly into my worker role, prepared to produce the “best” labor output possible. This is an embarrassing, micro example of my attempt to self-assuage my anxiety through anticipatory socialization, a preemptive programming to be a blank slate for whichever workplace calls for me with no return; “A person may, for example, take up the values of a manager before actually becoming one. The direct preparatory activities include obtaining more knowledge about the future job, fantasizing what one will do in the job, and adjusting one’s perspectives on what one will be able to achieve (Noeth & Prediger, 1978, and Howell et al., 1977). Anticipatory socialization of this kind should be included in our definition of occupational socialization, because it directly prepares the individual for the job.” (Frese, 210).

This pre-socialization only somewhat assuaged my anxiety about the perception of my labor, but interestingly for my TA and CO-op stints it morphed away from solely my labor output to the symbiotic relationships with the people who gathered there out of obligation/pay. The consistent and predictable crowd of superiors, employees, and students who surrounded me provided calm, low-stakes, platonic interactions that created neural pathways for easier sociability in the future; this is corroborated by the findings of two researchers: “It should be recognised that work also has intrinsic values that might contribute to better health, as summarized by Frey and MacNaughton,(2016) such as providing opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills, form friendships, integrate into the community, and reach self-realisation.” (Burdorf), “In the social relations sphere, we predict that greater opportunity for self-fulfillment in work will carry over into more favorable relations in family life as revealed in indices of positive and/or negative ‘spillover’ from work experience to the family situation.” (Seeman, 4).

#### To and From Students/Employees

The effects of resocialization became especially apparent when I realized that my own internalized norms of how I should act towards students on shift of my TA job had changed dramatically; my previously debilitating worries about the perception of my labor had become usurped by the need to follow, understand, and create the social web between students. For example, “November 17, 2022 : 1:45am also i feel about when i talked to julia a bit harshly on tuesday in the small writing groups. I said "Plattsburgh is a city to you?!" i feel like I slipped between the boundaries of TA and same age acquaintance right then, my tone shifted, which was wrong of me. I need to keep myself in line. I suppose I slipped because Donna wasn't around. I wonder what that group of students thinks of me now that they've seen the difference in the way I act/speak depending on if donnas in the room. Fuck. i was getting playfully rude like donna is naturally, like i am with my mom, but i don't know these kids well enough to do that.”

The underbelly of my own words is shocking, “keep myself in line” is undeniably structural rhetoric; it was not consciously propagated by the students or teachers around me but

the intensity of capitalist propaganda infused into me early and sat dormant until I entered the workforce, successfully halting my class-consciousness.

These classic standards of action clouded my thoughts of all my jobs, as my conflicting interests and goals for each setting butted heads with my preconceptions of appropriate and ethical ways to interact as an unpaid pseudo-authority in which part of the “consumers” of my labor are people my age. It was the relationships of obligation and the conceptual environment that resocialized me: my superior as a TA and the paid employees at the co-op, and the collective casualness of the paid workers at Central Records. These presences helped me relax and deprogram me from this idea of professionalism I clung to; their actively forming relationships to labor giving me a literal role model to impersonate and assimilate with.

These entries below are a chronological display of my simultaneous positions as a TA and volunteer co-op member. Here exemplifies the results of being accepted in a site of resocialization and the the roles within being blended in a way that benefited me, their actions of friendliness that could be found anywhere gained new political context in these locations; such as molding my perception of the social interactions that are available in various workplaces and why.

February 13, 2022 “...while we bagged stuff, Aleah asked me about my interests and I replied with the same stuff she told me about herself. When she talked about her younger brothers and sister i told her i have an older half sister, when she talked about the books she likes and is reading i told her about my giant left handed guitar books.

"1120pm aleah said something abt overstimulation. I was stunned for a second. I didnt know other people knew or understood that word...it shocks me that u have an influence in other people, in anything outside my room.

February 9, 2022: “329am another thing about the co op. I have no idea how old any of the employees are. Most are probably late twenties and early thirties. Fuck man. Im 19. Again i am in a situation where i am mostly around people way older than me and not around people my age! I i get uncomfortable if i think about it for too long. I'm around people that can be my older brothers and sisters but not boyfriends or girlfriends. Theyre not my fucking age. Again. I feel out of place again.

The employees asked me a lot of questions about my home life, where my dad works, whats my moms name, what i'm reading and why I took a gap year. I Answered all those questions out of politeness and soon after felt like I revealed too much. I was hesitant to be overly friendly too quickly with the employees, as I didnt know them that well at the time and couldn't anticipate how long I would be there. We connected over movies and other media, creating an understanding about how much each of us knew, acknowledging the gaps of age and connecting over the miraculous throughlines.

May 10, 2022: feeling no connection to the outside world. 250am “Dead in the confines of my house but the rest of the world doesn't offer much solace or peace or fulfillment. I don't know

what to do.” So so so stressed out from this day that i was irritated and overstimulated and couldn't enjoy my things bringing work stress home w me

May 27 2022: “took me five minutes to muster up the courage to ask chris to help me” friends w aleah from our shared experiences of getting out knees busted. Joking and laughing while doing work in the prep room. Kim saying stephen is a better volunteer than employee.

June 4, 2022: hannah correcting ppl on my pronouns, filled spices and swept, seeing ppl from my highschool or young college students my age

June 17, 2022: 333pm aleah said im the only one who stocks spices now. Chris is going to rehab for like two months and everyone is playfully talking about it.

June 19, 2022: talked with aleah about college, 23, super encouraging of me to take cultural anthropology classes and is easier to troubleshoot things with than my mom, get to prep my answers with them

July 21, 2022: “1012pm so far my list of reasons to live is entirely social , entirely human. I want to look at beautiful people. I want to feel liked and wanted. I don't have any personal reasons to live, like a profession that is as big and necessary to my peace as those things are. I want little for myself. Except to witness beauty and feel seen. Those are my goals/reasons to live. Those are convincing.”

August 7, 2022: “123am i feel like i don't have the strongest grip on reality. I float into daydreams too often. My physical self, space, relationships, and tasks become dusty while i have vast and delicious ideas. If only i could bring them into reality.”

Venturing into my TA entries, they presented a different social dilemma compared to the co-op environment, as the people around me held closer potential for friendship. Not being able to achieve that was a similar but distinct feeling close to the distant in age I felt towards my co-op comrades.

December 1, 2022 “...I wonder which of these students I could have been best friends with if i was a student like they are, sitting beside them in this class or in the next dormover, etc.” Students talking to me outside of class as we walk to the door or as they wait for their ride, makes me feel more equal which i prefer honesty.

December 6, 2022 “...I felt so loose and excited and warm and happy. Happy to play w people my age. I felt so unconstrained. I wasnt a ta for a minute, i was a student. Laughing with them. I was able to let loose, let myself show my emotions and feelings without restraint. I restrain myself around my parents. I was able to be myself with the students today...”

Since having the time to form slightly deeper relationships with the co op employees over the students I approached the second semester of ta'ing with a higher regard and lookout for opportunities for friendship and out of work connection, trying to bring the relationship into the wider world and not be constrained to the environment and thus alienated from it once the temporary contract of labor is severed. I realized that to do this I had to overcome my hesitation about sharing information and meet my fellow in the middle, return them on their information offer. Similar to the information nexus I had trouble with at the co-op, I Only wanted a few students to know I got accepted to Bennington. "(1) individuals and groups engage in ongoing evaluations of their relationship; (2) based on these evaluations, they develop feelings of commitment toward one another that rise and fall relative to established decision criteria; and (3) when a decision criterion is reached, a role transition takes place in which the individual enters a new phase of group membership and the relationship is transformed." (Saks, 250-251)

TA'ing also forced me to think about the responsibility and ethics of my position and how one has to choose the path they take in interacting with people, can't flirt in class bc that's abusing my position, stressed because ta-ing is so temporary that it's hard to make friendships because of said power dynamic but am I exaggerating it? No one is telling me the rules or norms for this place, I am bringing in previous expectations and creating the norms alongside my superior. The power dynamic itself made me more aware of the depths and levels of friendship that can form and how the barrier of being one's TA can be hard or easy to cross for both involved, can't take it out of shift only briefly but not totally. I attended to only a few core students that both continuously asked my help and I felt I could be compatible with them as friends, regretting this because it shows bias and being unethical.

Both spaces required me to be more confident and initiative, it was a necessity to approach people my age without them raising their hand, to look for the signs of them being confused but too nervous to publicly display their desire for help. This was essential I allowed and pushed myself to ask more questions and shed the suit of professionalism even when in an environment such as the co-op few people wear such figurative suits or at least it is more apparent who does. Frequent entries about acceptance of myself and my direction in life, simultaneously working at the co op and as a ta. Entries are surrounded by concerns w my own identity often tied to music and hobbies and trying to decide who and what i am

Being removed from both work sites for various amounts of time allowed for an even fuller digestion of their benefits, resocialization effects, and detriments. I did not return to my co-op job even though their friendship benefited me because I was resocialized and reprogrammed once more at my central records job to value and be assuaged by monetary return for my labor over social return. Across all jobs, making people laugh made me feel like i've done something right and stepped in a social direction that is beneficial both personally ego satisfying and satisfying knowing i'm connecting with the people and not the business; I must note that but connecting w the employees gives me lasting business benefits such as discounts and recommendation letters.

I consider alienation as a type of resocialization, as it can lead to spillover to the home and out-of-work life: "1. The things you do at work help you deal with personal and practical

issues at home. 2. The things you do at work make you a more interesting person at home. 3. Having a good day on your job makes you a better companion when you get home. 4. The skills you use on your job are useful for things you have to do at home. On the negative side of family spillover: 1. Your job reduces the effort you can give to activities at home. 2. Stress at work makes you irritable at home. 3. Your job makes you feel too tired to do the things that need attention at home. 4. Job worries or problems distract you when you are at home. The alpha reliability for the positive spillover score was 0.74; and for the negative spillover, 0.84" (Seeman, 10)

## PART 5: Alienation, Estrangement, and Participation

February 3, 2022: "10:58am a couple things. I feel like an outsider at the co-op because every other employee seems so busy and fast walking. I don't know what they normally do because I'm not one of them. I feel at risk of being pushed out."

Alienation defined by Marx is, "What, then, constitutes the alienation of labor? First the fact that labor is external to the worker, i.e., it does not belong to his essential being; that in his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside of his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working, and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is forced labor. It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it," (Capital).

Estrangement from self and social life also constitutes alienation, which is further broken down into objective, subjective and complete alienation. Another individualized lens of alienation is so, "Marxist notion of separation from one's economic destiny; a lack of control over one's economic outcomes), normlessness (anxiety associated with questioning one's purpose as well as conflicts between one's ideal self and one's current situation)" (Clark, 288).

As apparent from entries in previous sections, alienation is a structural status and a feeling that ebbs and flows in response to micro and macro social, cultural, political, economic environments. My personal feelings of alienation towards my social world and my labor decreased when work norms were internalized and routinized, when my purpose (my usefulness) was agreed upon by those around me and I felt connected and meaningfully aligned with them and the environment; blips in this feeling came from managerial slights and realizations that I am a temporary worker, mostly invisible and replaceable under my superiors and under the institution or business itself. Still, these *feelings* of alienation and preoccupation with alleviating them can be a distraction from greater anger and action towards the economic and cultural system that causes the state of not working for one's essential being.

The dimensions of alienation are also apparent when I was alienated from the product of my labor, from the act of production, unfulfilling the "species being" or human desire to create and influence the world we created for ourselves and instilled with meaning, alienation is a created state. The new labor output shaped by the realization of one's own alienation is created and not monolithic; my perceived feelings of alienation, the specific actions and timeframes that

fit the definition of alienation, involvement in the shaping of the work I do and sway over managerial decisions (participation) contribute directly to the amount and frequency of effort I put into the tasks I was assigned at each job. My perceived feelings of alienation, the specific actions and timeframes that fit the definition of alienation, involvement in the shaping of the work I do and sway over managerial decisions (participation) contribute directly to the amount and frequency of effort I put into the tasks I was assigned at each job.

The alienation I felt before working manifested in extreme anxiety, depression, near-agoraphobia, low confidence, feeling “behind” people my age and unable to catch up, unwilling to take healthy risks, etc. My first job as an unpaid TA soothed my feelings of alienation for some time, satisfying social and intellectual stimulation needs, but my entries do display the symptoms of other dimensions of alienation: feeling a sense of urgency, needing to do something and do more and keep up. This longing was a symptom of alienation itself. Dissociation, much like alienation, can be created by a variety of physical, social, and psychological settings that characterize a workplace, it is a “...“situational emergent” rather than a trait or personality feature (Seeman, 1983, p. 172).” (Banai, 377). The Kuzior article focuses specifically on resignation reasons among “Generation Y and Z,” which again turn out to be symptoms of alienation, “lack of sense of belonging at work...not feeling valued by their organizations...not feeling valued by the managers,”. This age group, likely still funded by parents or family, may then recognize their alienation more easily and have the ability to act on it. The option for prioritizing one's mental health requires a foundation that can fund the pursuance of it. Participation in labor analysis and economic philosophy specifically denote the degree to which both a worker and employees as a whole have authority over structural issues (such as infrastructure, work hours, pay, paid leave, benefits, ) and the amount they do involve themselves if worker opinion is regarded, utilized, and credited at all.

Further, In my entries I do exhibit signs of alienation brought on by disagreements with the superiors I answered to and feeling drained or scraped by the tasks they assigned me. It is possible that I am being dramatic since I was not working in a factory or bar or trading floor. But still, these feelings arose and they influenced how I responded in and out of the workplace. I still believe in and align myself with the value and human necessity of meaningful labor but I want to find ways to avoid alienation. Though, alienation as a feeling can be useful as it helps you to look at your labor and contributions in a way that is outside the egocentric desire to satisfy obligations and colleagues and superiors. Alienation disenchants and de-romanticizes labor and the production process.

My entries during this time were frequently surrounded by my wishes to be active not passive, both in work and in life, by which I mean doing tasks personally satisfying in some way instead of doing the bare minimum for tasks I found no integration in, and being more involved in the tasks my superiors were involved in. Why did I wish for this? Though it is understandable from a human level that I wanted more complex tasks and responsibility, it is concerning that my world and the perception of social gravity was pigeon-holed to these incredibly small work-places.

In the tables comparing literature on pages 325-328 (Vanek), all 17 summaries noted that worker involvement in discussion about work environments and being allowed to sway the decision making of how to change it significantly improved worker morale, satisfaction with the job and employers, participation, and productivity. I am hesitant to weigh levels of alienation with levels of participation not because it is unreliable but because said participation under capitalism is always going to benefit capitalism and the business more than the worker, and one may feel alienated while also forcing themselves to maintain a certain level of performance/participation.

I feel also that my position as a consistently temporary worker also led to alienation, as if in this labor-purgatory: "This type of alienation is divided into two subdimensions; it involves alienation from the product as well as alienation from the process. Alienation from the product exists based on the subcontracting relationship that is characteristic of the temporary workforce. The work of the temporary employee first belongs to the temporary help agency for which they work and secondly to the company within which they are working. The company pays the temporary agency a wage; the temporary agency then pays the employee a lower wage, removing the worker from direct connection with the product. Along with alienation from the product, alienation from the process is also common. Temporary workers are rarely provided with enough information to understand the purpose or context of their work. Instead, they are given small tasks with little connection to the intent of those tasks (e.g., filing without understanding what is in the files or why the filing needs to happen)." (Clark, 288).

The push to zoom out and examine my actions and mindset in a macro, structural sense gave way to entries at the beginning of my second stint at Central Records, my paid job, that meta-analyzed my own actions and effort in the moment, giving me an enjoyable sense of power and mental distance from the institution, but no literal/physical/monetary distance. My participation and willingness to and anxiety abt participation has decreased immensely since last semester.

Very early in the job i felt "incredibly uninformed for a front desk person,". I felt alienated from the job itself and my desire to "do well" because i was unable to grasp what actually needed to be done, what what being asked of me, how much my presence would make a difference. Currently, I feel no allegiance or alliance to the office and don't feel excessively bad about not fulfilling what is asked of me. Many students gripe about central records not answering their emails or being unhelpful and hard to contact, and i feel upset when I also cannot aid whoever calls and to be in the same building as those other unhelpful employees. it makes me feel uncomfortable and un-belonging. I definitely do not belong there, the employees are nice to me and recognize me but i feel distinctly outside since i don't do any actual work, im far younger, and i have no real interest in doing this work outside of pay. So i feel unable to complain about the job but also unable to defend it.

September 14, 2023: "1212pm today for the first time in many months of working at this job i was actually given work to do. I was shocked. Maureen told me to put up flyers around campus advertising their div 2 workshops and info sessions that will be held next week. I groaned and said "in this heat?!" as i dropped the wealth of bags i brought with me in preparation to do homework for my two hour shift. She said she thought it was nice out, and i said i would do it.

She offered that i could stay here for an hour and spent the other putting up posters but i do not want to walk around carrying all my shit with me. Why didn't she ask barry, the other employee here during my shift to do it? Why me? I did a few, in and out of prescott tavern and the music building and the ash but decided to return because i don't want to do all this right now. I do not want to exhaust myself. As i walked i thought i can't believe im being asked to do work for my job. Wild. unheard of here. My new plan is to tell her that i did some but will do the rest after my shift and my class. Cause fuck this. Am i preventing alienation and burnout by refusing to do the totality of my workload during my paid shift? Or am i exploiting myself by doing this jobs work out of my paid work hours? I am not participating to the full extent i could in this job, not contributing, but what would that look like and would it really be worth it? My pay would not change but would i get enough personal benefits that influence my academic career and personal life to justify the extra effort? I feel little to no pride for this job, for this office. The employees are decently nice and averagely interesting people and the service they provide is an essential one for any college, and maybe for both of those reasons i do not feel any deep connection or alignment with them, they are not unique or singled out. Why did i feel deeply connected to my other jobs? Maybe because i was one of few volunteers and was able to consistently talk with the paid employees as casual friends as well as fellow workers to divide labor among."

September 20, 2023: 1206pm "at central records i've begun bringing more how to do but as soon as i get there maureen has something for me and it makes me annoyed. It pisses me off because i don't Actually want to do work for these people, i feel no benefit from helping them organize files and put labels on them. I want to work *through* this place and I enjoy getting paid to do the bare minimum so that's what i'm going to stick to. I'm not going to try and strategize or push myself to be exceptional or the best employee here since their approval or praise doesn't interest me or improve my life in any material or immaterial way. Their camaraderie is not essential. The money is."

## PART 6: Conclusions, Retrospective, Future of Relations To and Surrounding Labor

The strength of my tie to my labor is very malleable, almost scarily so, and it is overwhelming to consider the full scope of how culture, family, and previous work spaces have influenced my standards for effort and appropriate action. The underbelly of my main analysis is that my preoccupation with analyzing alienation and sociocultural interactions is a distraction from actually doing something about the overarching capitalist structure that pervaded all my work. I was too anxious in the moment to zoom out and consider the labor web that surrounded me; the anxiety in this situation is both genetic and strategically culturally formed to aid the nation-wide institution as it kept me focused only on the micro social, cultural, and institutional changes I could make instead of the macro.

One of the best examples being the last entry in the section above, mentioning how I was annoyed with doing work at the job I was paid to be at, in comparison to my numerous previous entries in my volunteer jobs where I gave myself more work to do (I was obliged to) and rarely griped about it; my entire mindset towards work effort had shifted within months as a

result of successful occupational socialization where I learned the norms which revised my actions and thoughts about my actions. Still, this change is incredibly internal and did not shift the goals or profit of the college nor did it affect the mass web of student workers.

Now being distanced from my first two jobs and able to zoom out within my third, I am concerned with where my labor goes and how long it remains in the system of being beneficial to the institution even when I am not there facilitating or adding to it. How temporary is temporary labor? Is the professor still using the list of research sites I collected for students? How is she crediting me? Will I ever receive monetary compensation for my time there? For my extensive work at the co-op the employees provided my mother with the working member owner discount even while I am away at college to compensate, but that pales in comparison to the amount I would have *earned* as a registered employee.

Emotional distance from the social world of the employees and the internal world of anxiety and interest is crucial to developing and being invested in more radical ideas about the future of labor; being consumed, convinced of, and preoccupied with the narrative arc of my labor within a small space halted these developments as I did not want my budding attachment and usefulness to the employees to be physically or ideologically disrupted. Minute, interval changes to the environment through new stimuli and challenges creates the illusion of change while ideology is still firmly maintained.

## Limitations and Future Study

The jobs analyzed here are fairly unrelated, tied together with the similarity of temporary work and two being in academic institutions. The campus job I had are possibly very different from other work-study positions on the same campus, so further ethnographies should be done here to compare and corroborate my feelings of alienation and relationships to labor. Further study should also be done surrounding professionalism/professionalism training as occupational socialization as a function of capitalist norms in seemingly “non/unprofessional” work settings such as co-operatives.

For this ethnography I chose to not contact or conduct interviews with previous or current employees of each institution about their experiences with alienation and labor relations. I wanted to focus on chronology and how stacking work experiences affected my relationship to work, labor, and the world around me. For my first two jobs I also did not have access to the contact information of any volunteers I shared space with at the time because of privacy and general temporary worker transience.

I enjoyed a unique position as none of my coworkers or peers were aware that I was taking field notes; their behavior could not have changed in response to my role as a participant-observer because that is not how I approached any of these jobs, but because of this some useful moments may have been missed or underemphasized.

I began my field notes for my first two jobs with a vague pretext of analyzing them in the future, knowing the details of the space, the tasks, and relationships would be important, but this

analyzation through labor studies and occupational sociology is a few years past, so I feel that some detail and analysis may have been lost or understated.

My future field notes of my relations to labor will be thoroughly underscored with the notion that there is a bigger world outside of my workplace, that I should not place assimilation as the height of accomplishment and let myself be distracted by minute-ness. I'd like to go forward in workplaces by rearranging my idea of success traditionally, and success of my ethnographic work, as taking notes and triangulating relations does not actually reshape any workplace dynamics, capitalist mores, or alter work conditions and contracts in and of itself. Such reshaping would be disturbing to the workers' and students' lives and the running of the college, and is thus significantly more risky and looked down upon compared to simple, invisible ethnographic note-taking. This analysis could be shared with fellow employees to find a consensus, add new observations, and create a plan of collective action. It could then be argued that this note-taking doesn't do much of anything without being in conjunction with, and for the purpose of attempting to bend the norms noted.

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