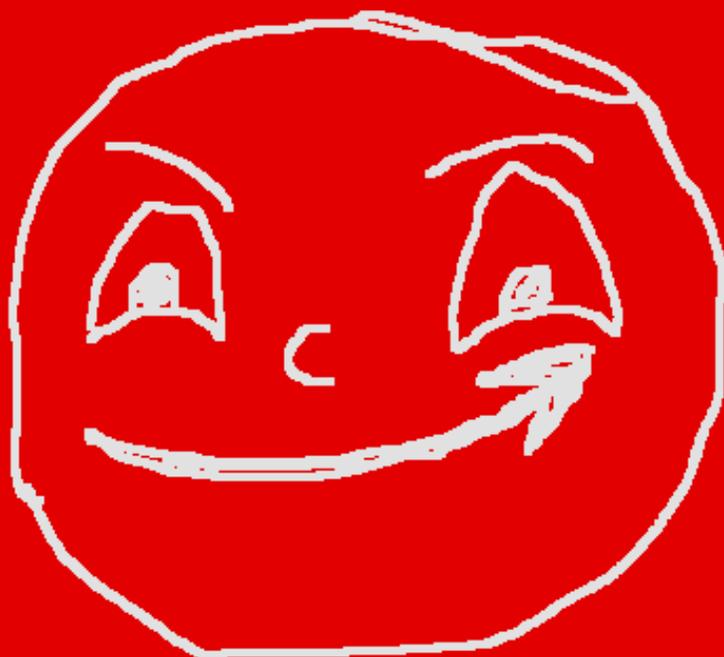


Jeremiasz Rzenno

# Unguilty pleasures



Jeremiasz Rzenno  
**UngUILTY Pleasures**

2021 Master's Thesis  
MDes Design Innovation & Citizenship  
Innovation School  
The Glasgow School of Art

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to all the people who made this project possible:

Dr Iain Reid, the project's supervisor, for all the inspiring conversations and invaluable feedback, without which this project would not have happened. Special thanks for bearing with me during all the turbulences and constant changes of direction.

Elio Caccavale for offering tremendous support and always challenging me to go beyond the beaten paths.

Prof. William Davies, Dr Angèle Christin, Benedict Dellot, Prof. Melanie Simms, Vicky Isley and Paul Smith, for agreeing to speak with me about their work and sharing their expertise.

Study participants for their commitment as well as inspiring and insightful conversations crucial for the project.

Filip Hanzel for making the on-line part of this project a reality.

Aleksandra Braska for the editorial design of this publication.

Kat Zavada for her unfathomable support, for always being there for me as a source of inspiration and healthy criticism.

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who seeks consensus between different actants, for it blurs authorship and what follows – responsibility. My practice is not about creating consensus or pleasing all parties. On the contrary, I see great value in conflict and dissensus as vehicles for liberation.

I use design as an interrogative medium focusing on the Political and sociological qualities of the discipline (Wodiczko, 1999). By focusing on the Political, I do not mean designing for politics but prioritising the Political nature of the design process and outcomes (DiSalvo, 2015).

The choice of this thesis topic was informed by my academic interests in the spheres of work & labour. What strikes me the most about this research area is the overwhelming presence of work dogma in almost every aspect of everyday life. The project is my first attempt at approaching design as a quasi-social science. With this project, I want to provoke a further conversation about work dogma and the spiritual violence of positivity at work. Unguilty Pleasures is an (auto)therapeutic tool for many working people, including myself.

## Method and approach

Concepts which shaped my approach can be divided into two main parts which remain in constant dialogue. The first spans humanistic studies from sociology, through anthropology to contemporary philosophy. The second is design theory, per se.

The project is informed by post-work studies and the critique of work dogma with a strong focus on works such as David Graeber’s “Bullshit Jobs” and David Frayne’s “Refusal of work”. The

*The joke is the highest form of power. Activists have the action and they live the life. Theorists have the words and they know their stuff. But the joke unites both perspectives. Jokes, when politically effective, perform what everybody knew but couldn't say.*

Excerpt from „*Can Jokes Bring Down Governments? Memes, Design, Politics*”  
(Metahaven, 2013, unpaginated)

philosophical aspect of my process is inspired by Byung-Chul Han and his analysis of Psychopolitics (Han, 2017). The central part of my research – happiness at work – is shaped by cultural analyses by William Davies, Carl Cederström, Eva Illouz among others. Finally, my research is inspired by aesthetics theory in the work and labour context widely described in Capitalism Realism by Mark Fisher.

Design theory drawing on humanistic studies and their methodologies is the crucial element for my project. The Critical Design approach with its base in Critical Theory (Malpass, 2013) was present in every step of my process. It dictated the necessity to use the process output as a provocation to raise questions instead of creating solutions (Dunne, 2009). This placed my process on the borderline of design and art which gave me an opportunity to explore the interplays between those two disciplines. Interrogative Design and its understanding of design as a research instrument rather than a way to find a practical solution, informed strongly by Wodiczko's works, was a significant inspiration as well as his concepts of the socio-aesthetic (Wodiczko, 1999). Adversarial Design, which proposes to embrace the productive power of a conflict, formed the design objectives for Unguilty Pleasures. The idea of design as a tool for renegotiating The Social and The Political and creating a space for vocalising dissensus and following its aesthetic of agonism became the essential element not only for the project, but also impacted my understanding of the discipline (DiSalvo, 2015). Designed by me, Reflective Artifacts which I used in the engagement phase of the process were strongly influenced by the idea of Cultural Probes by William Gaver, Tony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti drawn on Situationist and Dada techniques which had their starting point in visual art, literature and activism (Gaver, Dunne, Pacenti, 1999).

My secondary research also included internet ethnography with a special focus on pop culture - articles in popular press and most importantly their comment sections and internet forums.

*A/B* by Dunne & Raby (2014) from *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming*. (p. 7)

A	B
Affirmative	Critical
Problem solving	Problem finding
Provides answers	Asks questions
Design for production	Design for debate
Design as solution	Design as medium
In the service of industry	In the service of society
Fictional functions	Functional fictions
For how the world is	For how the world could be
Change the world to suit us	Change us to suit the world
Science fiction	Social fiction
Futures	Parallel worlds
The "real" real	The "unreal" real
Narratives of production	Narratives of consumption
Applications	Implications
Fun	Humor
Innovation	Provocation
Concept design	Conceptual design
Consumer	Citizen
Makes us buy	Makes us think
Ergonomics	Rhetoric
User-friendliness	Ethics
Process	Authorship

A/B, Dunne & Raby.

1.

# CONTEXTUALISING

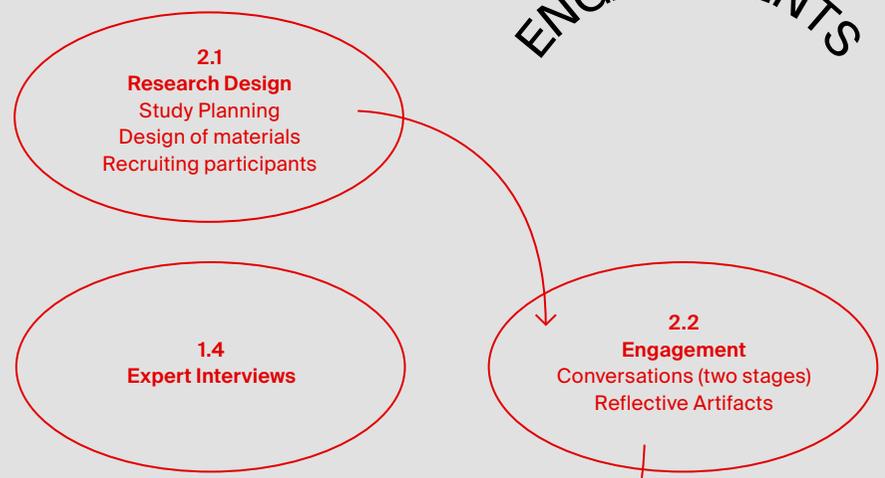


14

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2.

# FIELD WORK & ENGAGEMENTS

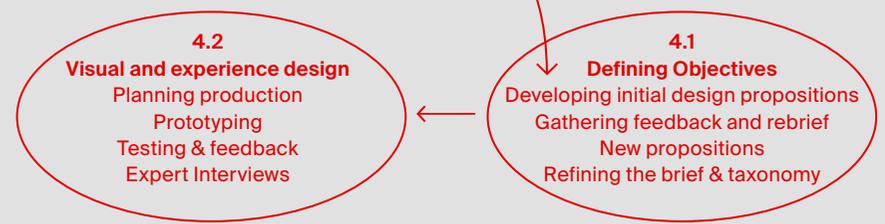


# 3. SYNTHESIS



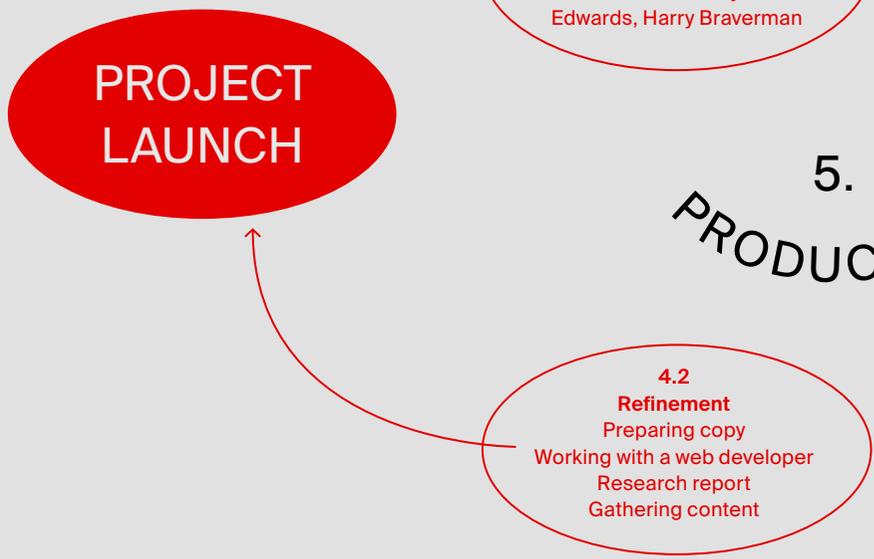
4.

# DEFINING



5.

# PRODUCTION



# Research Report

The project started right after the global outbreak of COVID-19 and its related lockdowns. My initial interests were informed by numerous press articles regarding the new working conditions of office workers and the often paranoid attempts of translating corporate micromanagement practices to the home environment. From the beginning I wanted to investigate the matter of the control of workers and workers' autonomy. At the initial stage I focused on the technological aspect of the issue, then my research evolved into more sociological areas which was finally narrowed down to the aesthetics of happiness in the context of workers' autonomy.

## Taylorism 2.0

Following the COVID related closures, millions of cognitive workers were forced to embrace the new normal of working from home. In order to keep track of their remote employees many companies decided to introduce different kinds of surveillance

software euphemistically called 'employee visibility software'. Many of the functionalities of such software expand way beyond simple time tracking or tattleware and provide employers with sophisticated behavioural insights and rating algorithms. Recent concerns about employee privacy resulted in a backlash on social networks such as Reddit where many workers have expressed their dissatisfaction as well as many mainstream media outlets (Lynn, 2020) (Allyn, 2020) (Harwell, 2020).

The reason why companies decide to monitor their workers so thoroughly is not simply a matter of discipline or a lack of trust. Work surveillance is tightly connected to workplace quantification (Moore, 2018). The aim of this strategy is to measure all elements of work in order to optimise processes and as a result also optimise human workers. Prodoscore, a leading work surveillance software provider, advertises on their website that thanks to its behavioural pattern recognition functionality, managers can focus on forcing their employees to replicate behaviours that lead to successful conversion (Prodoscore, 2020). Organisations often go much further than tracking their employee attendance and computer activity. Biosurveillance with the use of Fitbits or other health trackers is a common practice that usually is a part of corporate wellness programs (Farr, 2016). One of the most radical examples is the monitoring of brain activity of factory workers and military in China with the use of wireless sensors built into head gear (Chan, 2018).

The main conclusion is that employers' drive to increase productivity is so dominating that actions previously considered outside the work domain are being quantified and used for optimi-

sation. Even abstract and subjective feelings such as happiness or engagement due to their perceived impact on productivity are being managed, often in a very mechanistic manner mirroring the most Taylorist nightmares. But Late Capitalism is full of contradictions, because at the same time as workers are being watched over, there is still the ever prevailing Silicon Valley gospel about autonomy, flat hierarchies, flexibility and being yourself at work (Boltanski & Chiapello, 2018). This narrative is often the aspirational model for start-ups, but even for established corporations fearing to lose out.

### The Violence of Positivity

#### The economics of employee engagement

The domination of messages about engagement and positivity at the workplace is driven not only by the assumption that happier workers are more productive, but also by the fear of severe economic consequences resulting from employees being mentally withdrawn from their jobs (Davies, 2016). Lack of engagement, along with low-key mental health issues, is believed to be a major factor causing absenteeism or worse, what's termed in business literature, presenteeism<sup>1</sup> (Davies, 2016). This widely publicised issue has opened the way to a multibillion-dollar happiness industrial complex, represented by a myriad of positive psychologists, coaches, self-help Gurus and happiness evangelists.

#### Happy = Productive

The most significant paradigm shift in the field of happiness science and positive psychology has been not the discrediting of Abraham Maslov's

<sup>1</sup>Definition of Presenteeism by Oxford Dictionary on Lexico.com (2021): "The practice of being present at one's place of work for more hours than is required, especially as a manifestation of insecurity about one's job. 'one of the general symptoms of employee insecurity is presenteeism'" Retrieved from: <https://www.lexico.com/definition/presenteeism>

*Late Capitalism is full of contradictions, because at the same time as workers are being watched over, there is still the ever prevailing Silicon Valley gospel about autonomy, flat hierarchies, flexibility and being yourself at work*

pyramid of needs, but, as Eva Illouz claims in Manufacturing Happy Citizens - its inversion. Traditionally since its conceptualisation in the 1940s and popularisation in 1950s, the common sense and agreement in organisational studies that in order to achieve „higher” needs, „basic” needs, such as safety have to be completed first. Thus organisational science and HR departments would have been focused mostly on researching and improving different work arrangements, environments or job design. However, according to Illouz, in the last decade there has been an assumption

shift where leading Positive Psychologists and Happiness Scientists have been promoting the view that happiness is not only the derivative from fulfilling work, success and optimal working conditions but a substantial predecessor of professional achievement. (Illouz, Cabanas, 2019)

This assumption has been strongly adapted in the corporate world; trying to heighten the levels of positivity and engagement are seen as an essential strategy to increase productivity. A Chief Happiness Officer at Google, consultants and so on are only a few amongst roles recently created within the corporate realm. Although the direct correlation between happiness and productivity is disputable, many corporates are adopting measures like happiness or engagement as performance indicators for evaluating projects. Tony Hsieh – one of the most prominent evangelists of this movement and the founder of Zappos – has even suggested companies identify the 10% of employees who are reluctant or critical to these ideas and fire them (Davies, 2016). Jeff Bezos, who is very inspired by Hsieh and happened to buy his company has adopted this strategy too by offering, to employees dissatisfied with the company’s policies and work arrangements, a one-off payment to quit (Umoh, 2018).

### Corporate understandings of happiness

The word happy is typically used in one of two ways – as a valuing statement or to describe a psychological state. Understood as the latter its definition is more straightforward – an upbeat emotional state. When used as a valuing statement, happiness correlates with subjective understandings of The Good Life (Haybron, 2020).

→ Evolution of the good life concept



Therefore the perception of the good life is a fluid concept, changing throughout time. Some examples of this would be the Aristotelian concept of Eudaimonia – a belief that happiness is derived from living within virtue. It is something that can be only experienced at the end of life. Going further there is the medieval Christian understanding that happiness is reached only in Heaven – the concept of leading a good life was subservient to the art of a good death – ars bene moriendi. Therefore, it is a reward for living a life according to religious rules. It is only until the Enlightenment era that happiness is treated with importance, as a means in its end not as a derivative. Some proof of this intellectual shift is the United States Declaration of Independence and the right to pursue happiness. Enlightenment thought laid the foundations for the individualistic perceptions of happiness in the developed West, even though prudential values were still considered important elements supporting the moral fantasy of happiness. It was not until the counterculture era of the 1960s when the current hyper individualistic fantasy building on Willhelm Reich’s legacy started to become a norm promoted by enlightened tech entrepreneurs, founding fathers of positive psychology connected to influential institutions such as the Esalen Institute. This moral fantasy of happiness goes something like this: be authentic; enjoy yourself; be productive; don’t rely on others in achieving these goals; your fate is in your hands. This set of values requires constantly exercising self control in order to optimise our pleasures. (Cederström, 2019)

There are certainly lots of cultural differences in terms of contemporary perceptions of

the good life. Still, since this essay focuses on the workplace aspect and we live in highly globalised economies it targets the Silicon Valley narratives which usually set the aspirational standards for multinational corporations, start-ups and even governments.

*This moral fantasy of happiness goes something like this: be authentic; enjoy yourself; be productive; don't rely on others in achieving these goals; your fate is in your hands.*

(Cederström, 2018)

### **Representations of labour**

Although happiness understood as a moral fantasy is vague, fluid and by its nature resistant to quantification, following Drucker's maxim What can't be quantified can't be managed, many businesses turn towards technology and management consultancies for help – giving way to numerous start-ups, agencies and consultants claiming to have created tools and methodologies that capture and optimise employees' so-called well-being; but what is im-

portant to say that, as with any kind of collected data, it is only the representations of these states. The whole complexity behind the abstract idea of happiness is simplified and boiled down to single common denominators. What describes these denominators is an ideology that assumes that happiness is something to be developed and optimised. In cognitive capitalism, where the output of labour is often abstract and non-quantifiable, according to Mark Fisher (2009), "What we have is not a direct comparison of workers' performance or output, but a comparison between the audited representation of that performance and output." (p. 48) Due to its presumed correlation with productivity, happiness or engagement are often treated as these representations. The production of these representations becomes the main goal replacing the primary objectives of work, reducing employment to an aesthetic performance (Fisher, 2009). It is not longer about how hard you work – it is about how enthusiastic and vocal you are about it.

### **Guilt as control mechanism**

Byung-Chul Han argues that the Foucauldian conceptual model of Biopolitics evolved when shifting from the Disciplinary Society characteristic of Industrial Capitalism toward the Achievement Society characteristic of Cognitive Capitalism Governed by Psychopolitics (Han, 2017).

Labour Process Theory points out the antagonistic relation between the exploiting Capital and exploited Labour. Capital always seeks to maximise the extraction of Labour Power by subjecting workers to discipline. However, the negativity of discipline as a means of increasing economic pro-

ductivity hits a threshold beyond which it stagnates further growth, by provoking an immune reaction towards Capital in the form of resistance such as Organised Labour (Edwards, 1985).

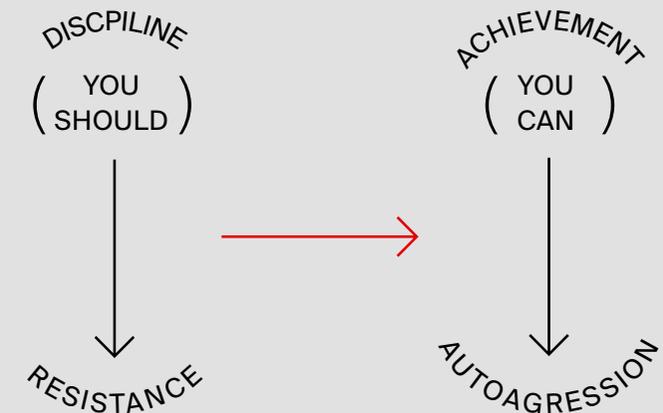
According to Byung-Chul Han (2017), “Psychopolitics shifts the inefficient paradigm of disciplination towards the efficient, positive paradigm of achievement. Thus, inhabitants of over-developed western prosperity are no longer ‘obedience subjects’ but ‘achievement subjects’”. The worker becomes an Entrepreneur – an Entrepreneur of Himself. The antagonistic relation between Capital and Labour is blurred. Excessive extraction of Labour Power that would previously result in resistance becomes internalised in different forms of autoaggression – most commonly guilt (Han, 2017). Because of the dominating ideology that you make your own fortune, you can only blame yourself for any shortage.

In these precarious conditions workers are required to constantly prove to themselves and their employers that they deserve their jobs. In the Achievement Society, enough is no longer enough (Han, 2015). The psychological contract at the modern workplace dictates that one should do more than is required or at least appear to be doing so. The more *bullshit*<sup>2</sup> a job is, the more the performative aspect is important.

Guilt becomes an important tool of control in the modern workplace and together with anxiety, which often accompanies it, can be caused by numerous factors. The soft but imminent pressure to do more than required causes guilt when you do not match up to the perceived standards of being constantly energetic and ambitious; when

<sup>2</sup>According to David Graeber (2019), “Provisional Definition: a bullshit job is a form of employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence.” (p.3)

you do not push yourself to the limits and step out from your comfort zones on a daily basis (Fisher, 2009). The emotional labour due to the never-ending performance of being happy and engaged is more exhausting than the responsibilities listed in a worker’s contract. The spiritual violence of this crying game is an even bigger burden when a worker earns a decent salary for this fruitless but aesthetic performance. The sense of guilt caused by earning a decent (or greater) salary in a Bullshit Job position has become even stronger during the current COVID pandemic, when compared to the situation of underpaid key workers.



(Han, 2017)

## Hypothesis

To challenge the dominant, broadly-promoted aesthetic of happiness, we should strive not only to promote its antithesis but to create and embrace a new anti-aesthetic. This process starts from the rejection of pre-imposed corporate happiness rigour. Instead of this I want to acknowledge and propose an open dialogue about small, but what is more important, spontaneous misbehaviours – manifestations of joy, free from the managerial corset - Unguilty Pleasures. This can not be treated as an alternative to traditional forms of fighting for workers autonomy such as organised labour, collective bargaining or direct actions. But sometimes emancipation starts from micro-disobedience. (Alvesson & Willmott, 1992)

These micro-disobediences can be binge-watching Netflix during work time, taking unnecessarily long breaks, choosing a different route than the algorithm decides, being intentionally mean to your customer or being grumpy when everybody is overenthusiastic or maybe not participating in the corporate socials. My project, Unguilty Pleasures, aims to archive past and gather present examples of these acts of micro-disobedience at work. And through these 'coming-outs' create a space free of slack-shaming and overstepping guilt. Because at the end of the day – you felt satisfaction not because you were sticking to the rules, but because you do you.

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Reddit post by user [u/Xineasaurus] posted in [r/ABoringDystopia]

Sprint 33	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri
Lucinda	😊	😊	😊	😐	😐	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
Theodore	😡	😐	😡	😡	😡	😐	😊	😐	😡	😐
Virginia	😐	😐	😐	😐	😡	😊	😐	😊	😊	😊
Olga	😊	😊	😊	😐	😐	😊	😊	😊	😊	😊
Elliot	😊	😊	😊	😐	😐	😊	😡	😊	😊	😊
Suresh	😐	😊	😊	😐	😐	😊	😊	😐	😐	😊
Emile	😐	😡	😐	😐	😐	😊	😡	😐	😐	😊

Niko-niko Calendar by Agile Alliance (Agile Alliance, n.d.)

# Engagement

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## Experts' interviews

Soon after defining the initial research areas and establishing Works On Work I started approaching experts, academics and artists whose interests lay in topics related to work. During this stage the scope of my research was still rather broad and I treated these informal talks not only as inspiration, but also an opportunity to establish a network of people working in the field.

Before approaching people together with Works On Works we created a map of experts from various fields such as work sociology, critical management studies, Human Resources, technology and worker unions.

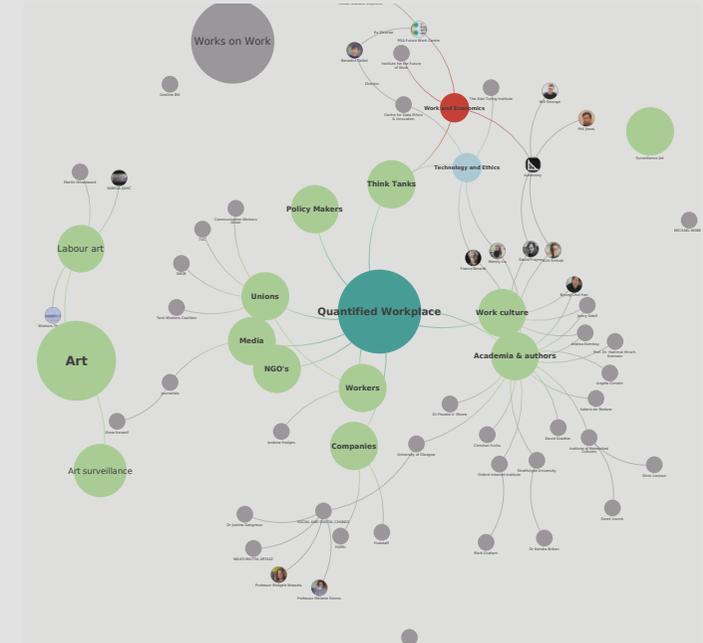
Some people I was in contact with were:

- Prof. William Davies, Professor in Political Economy, Goldsmiths University of London, author of “The Happiness Industry”.

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Map of experts, authors and organisations created on Kumu.io



- Benedict Dellot, Head of AI Monitoring at the Centre for Data Ethics & Innovation, prev. Head of the RSA Future Work Centre.
- Dr Angèle Christin, assistant professor in the Department of Communication and affiliated faculty in the Sociology Department and Program in Science, Technology, and Society, Stanford University.
- Prof. Melanie Simms, Professor of Work and Employment at Adam Smith Business School, University of Glasgow.
- Boredom Research, Vicky Isley and Paul Smith, independent artistic research duo.



## Research design

### 1. Finding participants

Talking with experts was important for my research process, but from the beginning I knew that the most significant part would be talking with workers. I specifically reached out to people working at corporations or within tech. I completed a participant group of seven people through my personal network as well as social platforms such as Reddit and LinkedIn. In order to get consent and introduce my research project in accessible, plain language I created an interactive form using Typeform.

### 2. Conversations

#### 2.1. Introduction - Building Trust

A 30-45 min informal conversation about work culture, workers' experiences and opinions on corporate engagement with employees. This stage finished with an open question, leaving the participant time to reflect and formed the basis for the conversation during the second meeting.

#### 2.2. Deep Interview

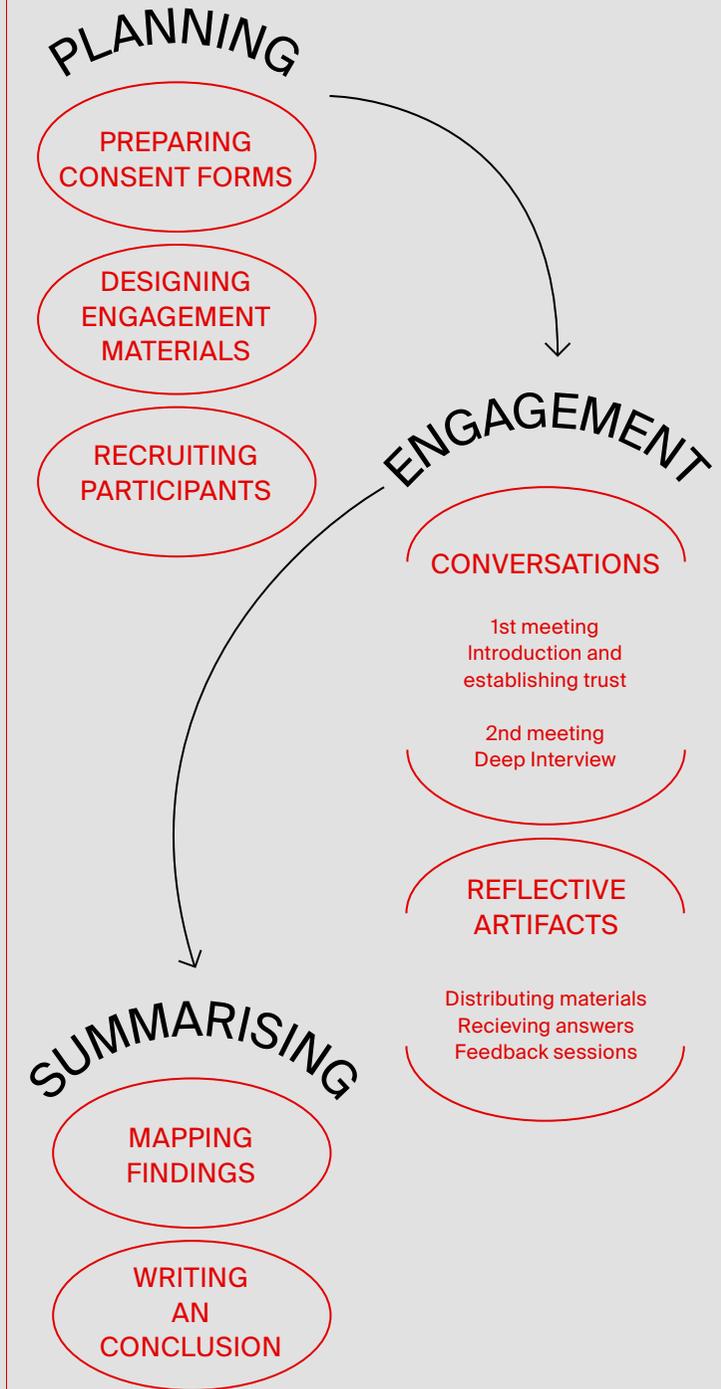
The second session took part about a week later. The duration was about 45-60 min. Conversation focused on the question with which the previous session had finished. The rest of the questions were more specific and detailed, tailored to the context of each participant's work environment and was finished and then the interviewee was introduced to the steps that were to be taken during the next stage.

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Research Design structure diagram

### 3. Reflective Artifacts

Participants received via traditional mail an envelope with exercises to be reflected on and completed individually over an extended period of one month.

At this stage everyone was fed up with doing everything online, so I decided to choose an “analogue” method. I was inspired by Cultural Probes designed by William Gaver, Tony Dunne, and Elena Pacenti. (Gaver, Dunne & Pacenti, 1999) It is extended in time and allows time for reflection. It is done independently. The main reason for choosing this method was to capture unforeseen directions, nuances, serendipities, but most importantly provoke healthy reflectivity towards the topic of happiness at work.

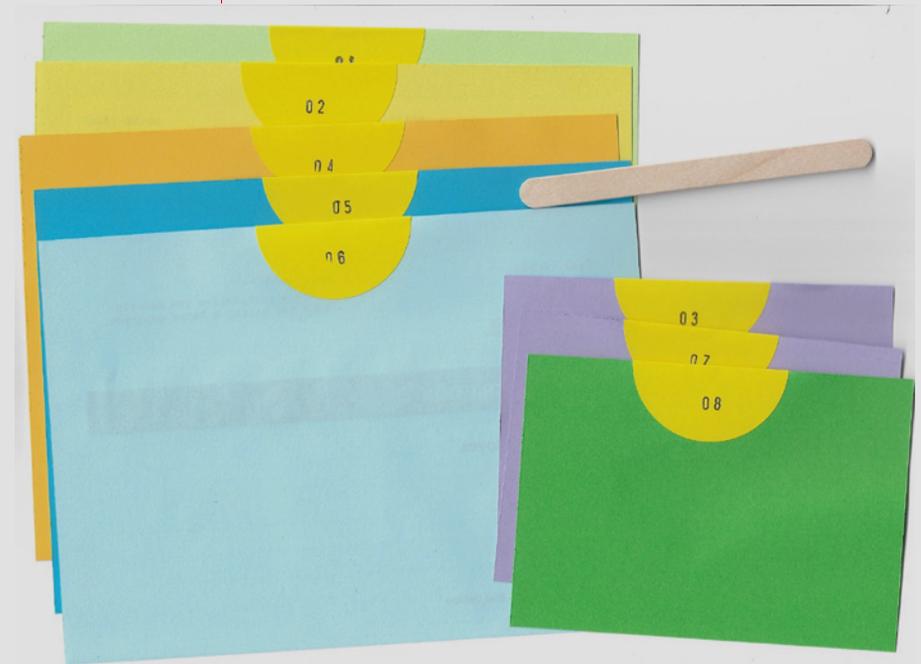
The kits given to the participants consisted of eight task sheets, a personal letter and instruction, and a diary. The task sheets were numbered and sealed so that the participant did them in correct order but also it was an element of fun and surprise. The tasks were inspired by corporate and Silicon Valley culture. Some examples include writing a “five easy steps” style advice on how to be happy at work, building on the cliché coaching article format. Another task was to write a job description for hiring a happy employee. One of the tasks that raised special interest was when participants were asked to confess their guilty pleasures at work. The aesthetic of this particular kit was a very important factor impacting the experience of the exercise. It was important that the artifacts were playful, yet not infantile.

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Reflective Artifacts sets

Task: 04/08 Description:

Task: 06/08 Description: Write a speculative job description for hiring a happy employee.

Participant:

Date: / /2020

**JOB DESCRIPTION**

**Happy Employee**

Job overview

Responsibilities and duties

Task: 07/08 Description: Share your guilty pleasure at work.

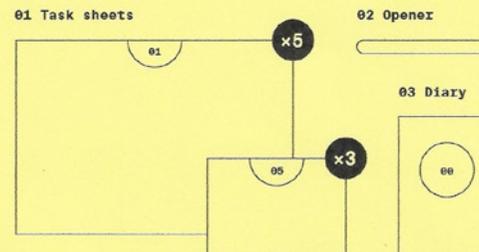
Participant:

Date: / /2020

Selected tasks form Reflective Artifacts

Side A of Reflective Artifacts information sheet

What's in this kit?



01 Task sheets

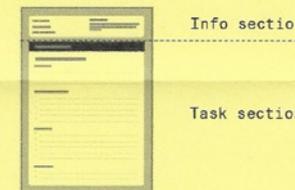
The task sheets are numbered, digits on the yellow "seals" indicate the order in which they are supposed to be done. If you don't feel like doing a specific task, just skip it. Maybe there will be a better moment for you to do it.

Some descriptions of tasks might seem abstract or implicit - this is intentional. An important feature of this activity is it being open for interpretation. There are no right or wrong answers here. I hope to see purely subjective opinions, hunches, emotional responses.

The tasks don't necessarily have to be finished in one sitting, some of them might require more time for reflection - and that is intentional.

I strongly endorse (if you feel so) going beyond purely textual responses and combining them with drawings, diagrams, memes or photos.

Task sheets consist of 2 sections:



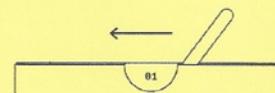
The one on top is informational, where I only ask you to fill in your name/alias and the date of finishing the task.

03 Project diary

In the kit, you will also find a plain notebook. I would like you to use it as a sort of reflective diary while you are engaging with the tasks but also any thoughts related to the topic of engagement and happiness at work.

None of this is compulsory, but I strongly believe it could be beneficial for both you and the project.

02 Opener



Task: 02/08  
Participant: Jade  
Date: 4/10/2020

Description: Who is a happy worker? What does the think, say, like, do etc? You can use words, images, draw.

Task: 06/08  
Participant:  
Date: 19/12/2020

Description: Write a speculative job description for hiring a happy employee.

**JOB DESCRIPTION**

**Happy Employee**

Job overview  
We are looking for people for the position Happy Employee Specialist. The work will be related to researching the joy of life of other employees and the implementation of certain activities so that the Responsibility and duties level of joy continues to increase.

- Taking happiness measurements
- Organization of events
- Helping others to be happy
- Conducting psychological conversations about happiness
- Organization of lectures on the good life

Qualifications

- Positive advent
- Creativity
- Open minded
- Communicativeness
- Empathy

Preferred abilities

- Organization and skill (parties)
- Good music taste

Task: 01/08  
Participant: Edo  
Date: 8/9/2020

Description: Write a "5 easy steps" style advice on how to be happy at work.

**5 EASY STEPS TO BECOME A HAPPY WORKER**

- 1 Meet your team! Talk, open up to your colleagues, spend time together (also after work).
- 2 Avoid unnecessary disputes and additional obligations if you don't want to perform them.
- 3 Remember to take breaks and avoid stress.
- 4 Do what is your responsibility, but don't forget to delegate tasks to others. You don't have to do everything yourself.
- 5 Most importantly - not take everything personally. Learn from your mistakes and keep striving!

Task: 06/08  
Participant:  
Date: 31/03/2020

Description: Write down 4 things that was the ultimate recipe for a happy workplace?

- 1 Purpose
- 2 Appreciation
- 3 Ability to delegate
- 4 Lack of pressure/judgment

### 4. Feedback

Short conversations by email regarding feedback about the engagements and information about future plans for the project.

### Reflections

#### Finding participants

I did not have very specific criteria regarding choosing the participants. The main criteria were that they had to be people working in international settings and more or less having parity in gender. I was not interested in gathering concrete data but hearing out personal stories.

#### Conversations

The unstructured form of these interviews allowed the conversation to develop in an organic manner and lead to subjective reflections on the ways contemporary work is organised. Holding the interview in two stages allowed the participants to have more time for personal reflection and digest the information. It allowed me to establish a relationship between myself and the participants. I have a constructivist approach to research so I did not try to be artificially objective or non-emotional during the interviews but I did strive for balance and my role was more of a listener.

Having so many conversations on Zoom densely packed together was very exhausting for me but it was an exceptional favour from the participants to find time and energy for another online activity on top of their standard work load. It was complicated to arrange two stage interviews in time convenient for both sides and because of that the

← Examples of Reflective Artifacts tasks filled by participants

whole study took longer than expected. Due to the focus on relationship building and the quasi-therapeutic nature of these talks it was at times draining especially when the meetings took much longer than initially planned. Now I recognise that I was unrealistic about the duration planned for this type of engagement.

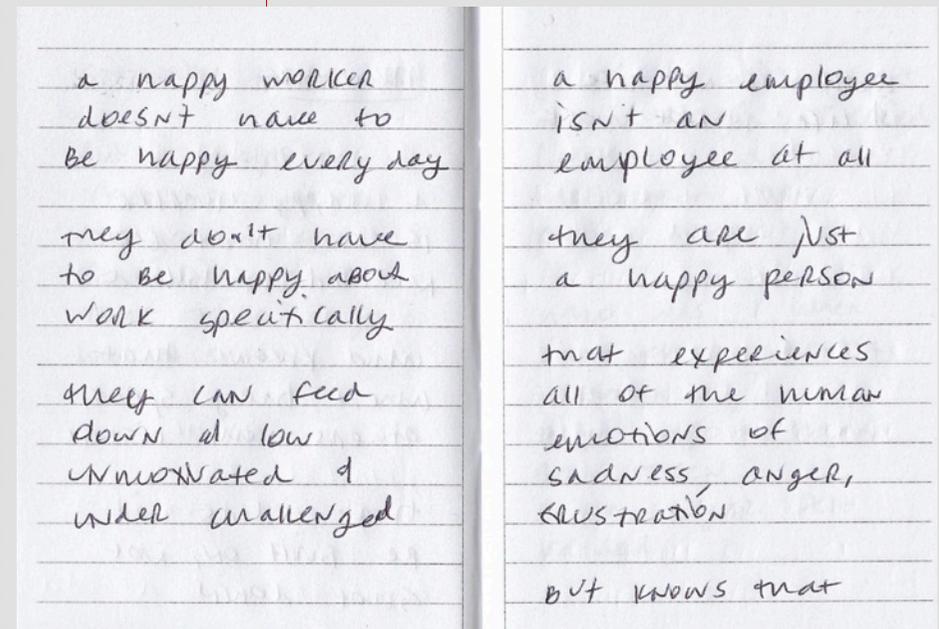
### Reflective artifacts

Getting the results back took much longer than planned to the point that one of the kits ended up lost in the post. Some participants shared their appreciation about the therapeutic value of the exercise. The main conclusion that emerged from Reflective Artifacts was participants' need to establish and keep their autonomy at work through subtle changes to their work process.

### Conclusion

Because sharing one's experience and emotions lies deep in people's nature and is a crucial element of digesting daily life, the informal, deep interview method has a value not only for the interviewer but the interviewee as well. It is worth highlighting that discussing even small misbehaviours at work such as not sticking to the established rules, moments of laziness or confessing to not being ambitious can be considered shameful. Because the role model of a hard working, engaged worker is so embedded in numerous cultures, not fitting to this standard, admitting it threatens not only a bad reputation or social exclusion, but moreover, actual issues with finding a job. Due to the fact that work is such a dominant feature of our lives, a large num-

ber of our relationships and personal interactions are transformed into their commodified version – networking. If every human relation is somehow understood as an “opportunity”, complaining about your job or being vocal about disagreeing with the socially accepted ideology of working hard becomes a display of bravado or simply a privilege for those who can afford financially and socially the reputation of being seen as slackers. Everybody does it, but because of the fear of being perceived as a slacker, and the self-deprivation of opportunity that entails, and therefore chances for success, people are not open with their guilty pleasures at the workplace.



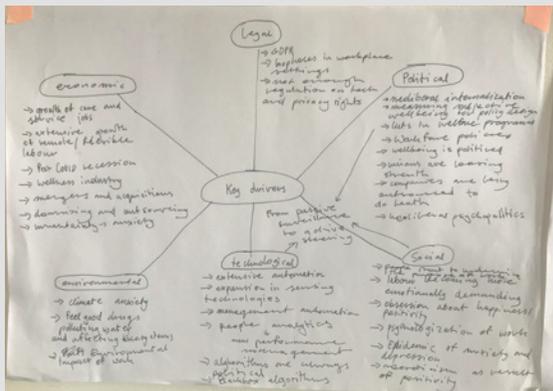
Excerpt from the Reflective Artifacts diary filled by a participant

# Design Phase

## Identifying Opportunities for Design

### PEST Analysis

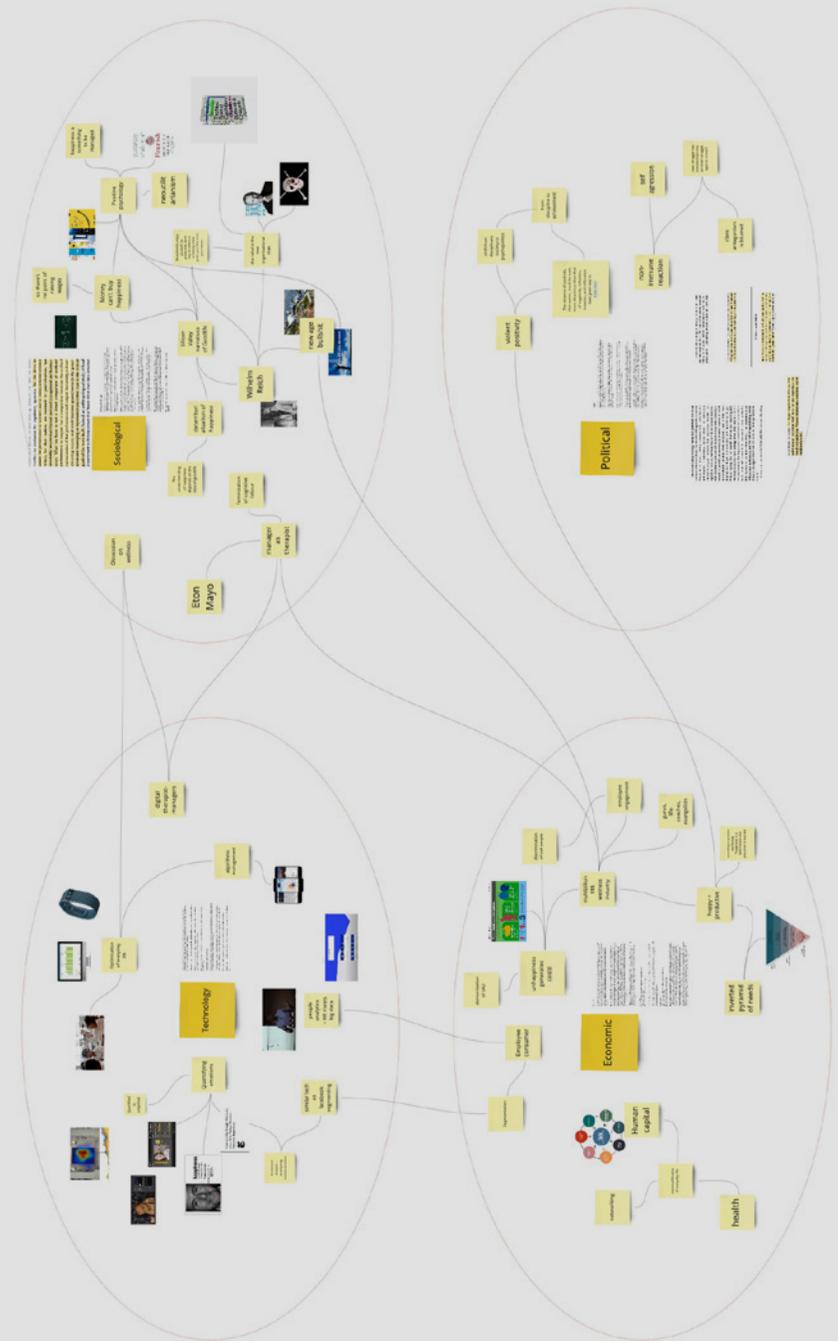
I synthesized my secondary and primary research findings by creating a knowledge map on Miro as well as writing short summaries in the form of a PEST analysis. The outcome of these exercises were my guiding principles for the design phase. The synthesis was an ongoing process since the start of the project.



→ Extended PEST analysis diagram made in Miro

Link to Miro board:  
[https://miro.com/app/board/o9J\\_khXqzQO/](https://miro.com/app/board/o9J_khXqzQO/)

← Initial PEST analysis diagram



## Initial Design Propositions

They were very broad in scope and approach. I did not treat them as very specific answers to my analysis but rather as thought experiments to stir more conversations with fellow students.



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Selected initial design propositions

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## Gathering Feedback

I presented my analysis and design propositions to fellow students, tutors and my close network to gather opinion and feedback. The initial propositions worked well as a conversation starter but many people I talked with found it hard to relate to. This pushed me into looking for ideas which are more embedded in everyday life and easier to identify with.

## Rebriefing

The next part of the synthesis included incorporating new conversations along with my previous research synthesis. After clustering all the findings I identified seven themes on which I based my design explorations. These themes were: Micro-Emancipations, Tyranny of Attitude, Side Effects of Loving Your Work, Marketisation of Emotions, Aesthetics of Happiness, Bio-Work, Optimising Non-Work Domains. Although the themes were often overlapping it helped to narrow down the exploration scope and rebriefing.

## Refining the brief & taxonomy

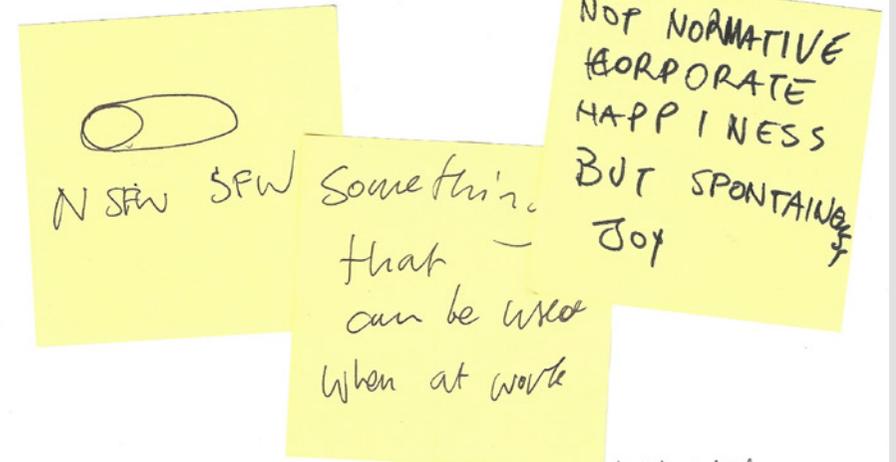
After the second synthesis I created new, more specific propositions based on the new themes and again presented them to my colleagues and research participants. After this I identified the theme that stirred the most interest - Micro-Emancipations. Based on the chosen theme I have created a new more specified brief on which I gathered feedback and iterated until the taxonomy and argument was direct and comprehensible.



Clustering research findings to identify new areas of design exploration

Brief

To create a **safer space**<sup>1</sup> to share and document personal stories of **micro-emancipation**<sup>2</sup> at work. The space will act as a form of a **confessional**<sup>3</sup>, where people would receive symbolic **resolution**<sup>4</sup> from **guilt**<sup>5</sup> as well as a space to anticipate and celebrate these small manifestations of **dissent**<sup>6</sup>, creativity and **worker autonomy**<sup>7</sup>.



- <sup>1</sup> A space in which individuals (that feel marginalized or stigmatized) can communicate their stories without fear of retaliation, hostility and judgement. → *Barney's re safe space (queer theory)*
- <sup>2</sup> Concrete minor everyday activities, forms, and techniques that offer themselves not only as means of control, but also as objects and facilitators of resistance and, thus, as vehicles for liberation.
- <sup>3</sup> A space for confessing – acknowledging some personal fact that the person would ostensibly prefer to keep hidden due to the breaching of cultural or organisational norms.
- <sup>4</sup> Understood as the self and social forgiving. A resolution of an inner conflict.
- <sup>5</sup> Since guilt is one of the main self-control and self-surveillance apparatus deliberately applied upon Post-Fordist workers.
- <sup>6</sup> To differ in sentiment or opinions, especially towards those in the position of power or the majority.
- <sup>7</sup> The capacity to make informed, uncoerced decisions regarding the Labour Process.

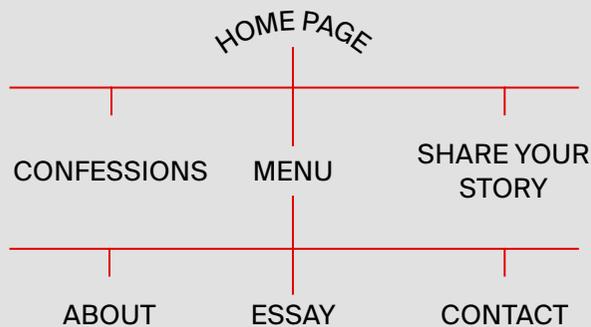
Hacking Boy TSA  
 + camel optimism  
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Iteration of the design brief

## Production

It was essential for me that this project's outcome is not just a concept, but a functional Thing. At this stage, my approach was to release as soon as possible, iterate and make improvements based on actual interactions with the MVP. Launching a fully functional web application in less than a month required sticking to a strict schedule. I started this stage by preparing a detailed production plan covering the following steps: Information Architecture, UX and Visual Design, Writing Copy, Web Development, Testing & Feedback.

WEEK	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J
WEEK	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday	Others		
I 30/11-06/12					what should be on the website?	what should be on the website?	what should be on the website?			All ideas written down on google docs file
II 07/12-13/12	what should be on the website? Photos of the wall	what should be on the website? Google Form preparation	UX - FIGMA	UX - FIGMA	UX - FIGMA Search for developer Google Form distribution					
III 14/12-20/12	Production website texts Google Form distribution PPJ draft	Production Domain ideas website texts PPJ draft	Production website texts PPJ draft	Production website texts PPJ draft	Essay PPJ	Essay	Essay			
IV 21/12-27/12	PPJ	PPJ	PPJ	PPJ	PPJ					
	28/12 DEADLINE									



↑  
Production schedule

←  
Website architecture

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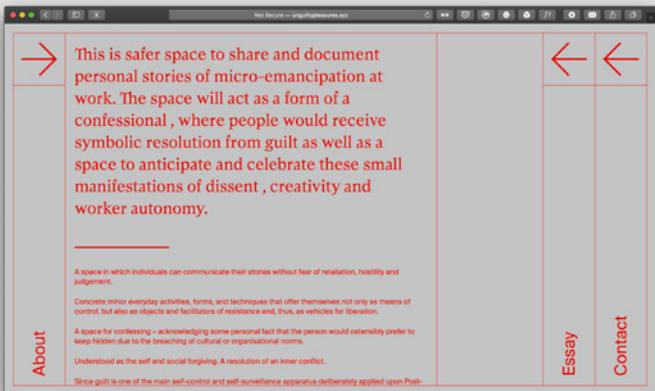
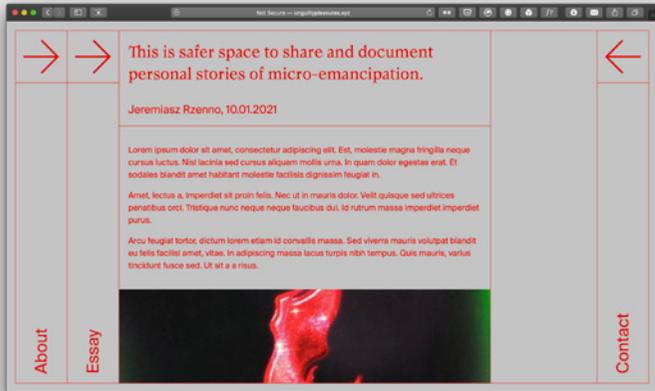
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## Visual design

The anti-aesthetic is inspired by brutalism and early internet style. Choosing pixelated black letter typography is meant to fuse medieval catholic iconography of sin and guilt with the digital character of contemporary office work.

The fonts used for this project were:





Visual design of the website

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Form design

User created drawing

## Drawing Pad Form

Asking people to sketch something often intimidates them and people skip it, but drawing with your computer mouse or touchpad gives such a low fidelity to the sketch and makes it playful instead of intimidating. People often doodle to kill time - designing something to do when you are bored at work was one of my project's objectives.

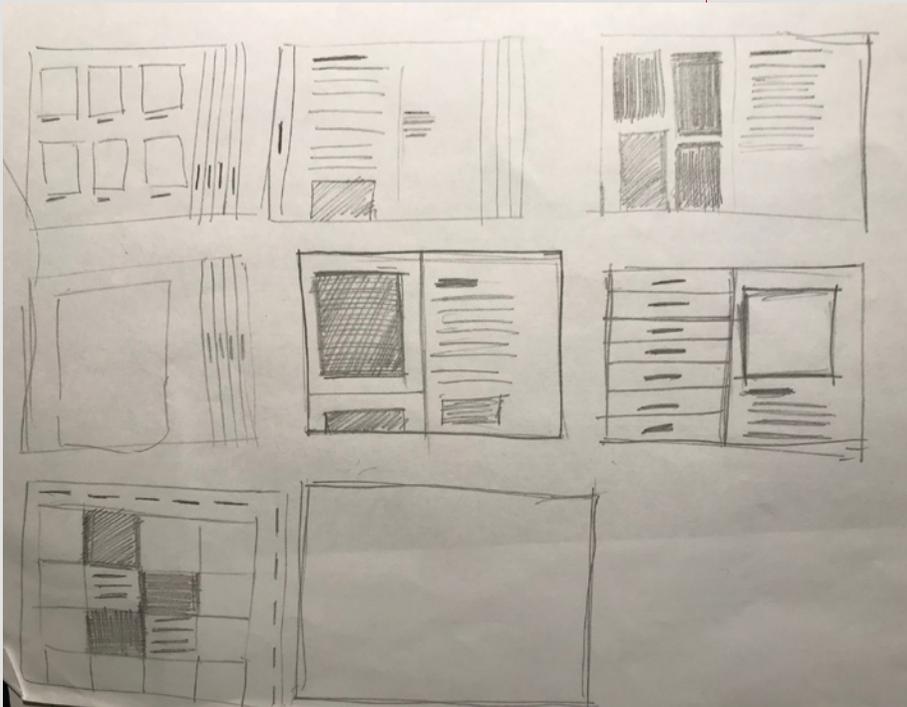


## Prototyping

Before I started to work in Figma I did some simple pen and paper sketches of the layout and consulted them with my friends. Having chosen the best layout sketch I translated it into Figma where I created an interactive prototype of the website including views for mobile and tablet.

Link to Figma prototype:

<https://www.figma.com/proto/6FdDUlow4Q-Gw1veI5eEq10/Microemancipations?node-id=113%3A375&viewport=-2064%2C3%2C0.07923508435487747&scaling=scale-down>



Layout sketches

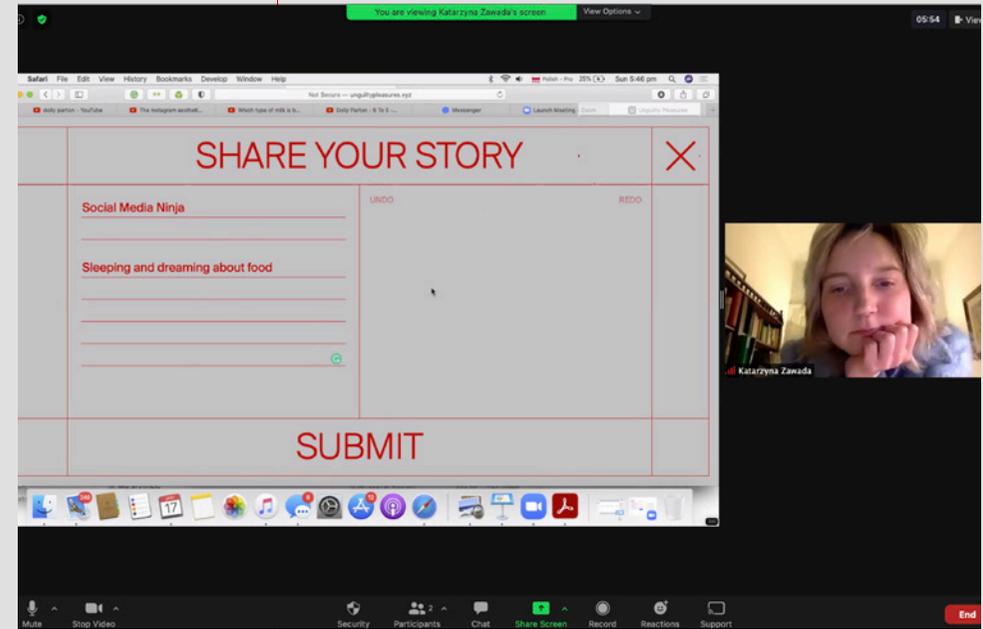
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## Testing and feedback

I arranged calls over Zoom and asked my friends to navigate the prototype while sharing their screen and vocally explaining what they are doing. Based on the feedback I made some necessary corrections.



Testing the prototype via Zoom with users

Unguity Pleasures



## End Note

UngUILTY Pleasures' launch will not be the final point, but the beginning of a long term project that I hope to maintain for years. Partly for archival purposes, partly as an anthropological tool, but more importantly as a source of critical joy.

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See the  
project here:

[www.unguiltypleasures.xyz](http://www.unguiltypleasures.xyz)