

I WAS GETTING BURNED OUT
AND I WAS LOVIN' EVERY SECOND OF IT

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Implementing methods from activism into her artistic practice, and following the ideas of connection and sisterhood at the core of her performance, Gosia Wdowik invited Weronika Murek to write a text to be published in the frame of *Kunstenfestivaldesaerts*. Murek's text accompanies the reader in a reflection on professional exhaustion, one of the elements of *She was a friend of someone else*.

I was getting burned out and I was lovin' every second of it.

But hear me out: I'm putting the emphasis on "getting" rather than on "burned out". Being burned out was a mess. Getting to be burned out was a fun ride since I got burned out doing things I always wanted to do.

I wrote and I read and I researched and I got paid for it.

There's an internet quote – attributed to Oprah Winfrey or Albert Einstein or 2Pac or John the Apostle – and presented on one of those beautiful stock-ish (as in stocked photography) pictures of the sunset over a rocky beach, a foggy mountain, a morning overview of a Manhattanesque horizon.

The quote goes: "*Find a way to get paid for doing what you love. Then every pay cheque will be a bonus.*"

In my experience it was more a case of: "*Work your ass off to figure out how to get paid peanuts and bananas doing what you love (or what makes you feel secure). Then every pay cheque will be a disappointment and will get you closer to despair without you even noticing it.*"

Of course you're not going to find that quote anywhere. Maybe it's because society's found better ways to drag you to the edge of the abyss. Or maybe the quote is too long for Instagram's caption frame to handle it nicely. Besides, there's still "love" mentioned, and "love" is always a bonus in your life. Doing something you love isn't common. After all, we don't all live in a Hallmark universe.

So here I was: I read and wrote and researched and conceptualised, and I loved every minute of it. If you love what you do, your work never starts, right?

I came from a simple family background. My parents were both the first generation in their families to go to university. They had a bright (but communistically monochromatic) future ahead of them and previous generations

of farmers and coal miners behind them. Hence it's always been clear in my family that a job in the arts is not a real job. It's a caprice. It can be professional but never not suspicious – making money out of a personal whim sounded a bit like the porn industry, just with a bigger chance that you'd get paid your fee with a poetry book about fly fishing in northern Poland printed on gloss chalk overlay paper rather than with real money.

A human job was supposed to be vexatious, worrisome and a source of hassle. It was supposed to start when you clocked in and to last until late afternoon, leaving you out of breath and proud. So me working in literature and theatre had nothing to do with a proper human job. It was just a way of spending your free time. By proper work, I mean the work you hate and you tell your neighbour about it so they can do likewise and repay you with the very same story so you might have a proper bonding experience, a chummy connection of souls based on a common feeling of hatred. There it was: I've been working without even realising that I've been working. If you love what you do, your work never starts.

But then again: you're given deadlines. Your deadlines get deadlier and deadlier. You get an offer: what about a short text about ballet? So are you in? Why not? It's just a bit of reading, one book, maybe four (it might be a small piece for mankind, but it's a really annoying for a writer), then writing. And then another call and another – can you do it more quickly? Can you send it now? And so on. We're afraid of making things real. If they're not real, there's no possibility of failing to take action. Inaction is easy. Inertia is painless.

It's action stations all the time. It's just that "actions" are getting scarcer. And the stations are getting to be more like those empty train or bus stations at night when you're waiting for a train or a bus without knowing exactly how long the delay is going to be. It may come or not. We just don't know. We can only hope. Of course, we should hope, we have things to do. But at the end of the day, all we can do is wait in a state of being half asleep and half awake. As Wdowik puts it: *this performance has too many beginnings and too few endings.*

Gosia Wdowik's work is inspired – in the director's own words – by people who have been trying to make sense of their experiences of mental and emotional exhaustion as well as the underlying structural mechanisms. It's also a

tribute to the many women whose energy and labour has been going into resisting oppressive misogynist systems and the criminalisation of solidarity among women.

So there we go: you're living your best life, you're living your childhood dream, and spending your time doing what inspires you and what you love. Then one day, you're not able to get out of bed.

The work never starts, so it never finishes, right?

Weronika Murek

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Weronika Murek is a polish writer. She wrote several theater plays and published her first novel, *Growing Southern Plants the Michurin Method*, in 2015.

BIO

Gosia Wdowik (1988) is a theatre maker and active member of GILDIA (Union of Polish Theater Makers). Her heart is based in Poland but her imagination is always somewhere else. During her Master Studies at Das Theater (2020-2022), she worked with the topic of burnout and explored the space between exhaustion and agency by implementing methods from activism into her artistic practice. Her main question was: How to create both theatre and change from a place of exhaustion? In her recent performance *Shame* she explored social shame connected with working-class origins in her own family over three generations of women. Past works include *If you lived here* with Tamara Antonijevic, *Transit Monumental* together with K.A.U. kollektive, *Fiasko* and *Return of Goddess*. With *Girls* and *Football players* she tackles the topic of bodily emancipation.