Art Workers

Material Conditions and Labour Struggles in Contemporary Art Practice

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Edited by:
ERIK KRIKORTZ,
AIRI TRIISBERG &
MINNA HENRIKSSON

Berlin / Helsinki / Stockholm / Tallinn
2015

Editors: Minna Henriksson, Erik Krikortz & Airi Triisberg

Proofreading: Andrew Gryf Paterson
Graphic design: Summer Studio/Carolina Dahl & Minna Sakaria
Typeface: Grot 10, designed by A2-Type and manipulated by Summer Studio.
Typeface on pages 199–229: Picasso Serif and Picasso Sans, designed by Dries Wiewauters.

This book is published in the framework of the project Nordic-Baltic Art Workers' Network for Fair Pay which has been financially supported by:
Kulturkontakt Nord
Oskar Öflunds Stiftelse
Arts Promotion Centre Finland
Cultural Endowment of Estonia

Taiteen edistämiskeskus
Centret för konstfrämjande
Arts Promotion Centre Finland

Thank you for assistance and support: HIAP – Helsinki International Artist Programme, Sezgin Boynik, Tanja von Dahlern, Taru Elfving, Sofie Grettve, Kalle Hamm, Minna Heikinaho, Vladan Jeremić, Elina Juopperi, Dzamil Kamanger, Jussi Kivi, Barbora Kleinhamplová, Jussi Koitela, Irmeli Kokko and the students of the Taiteilija Taidemaailmassa course at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, Raakel Kuukka, Jan Olof Mallander, Marge Monko, Reinhard Schultz, Indrek Sirkel, Maria-Kristiina Soomre, Tereza Stejskalová, Katarina Jönsson Norling, Erik Åström, ArtLeaks, Precarious Workers Brigade, W.A.G.E., and everyone who contributed to the art workers' movement in Tallinn a.k.a. Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit.

Printed by Greif, Tartu, 2015
Print run: 700

ISBN: 978–91–637–7946–6

II. Forms of Organising and Labour Struggles

Introduction

This publication is the outcome of a networking process initiated by a group of art workers from Helsinki, Stockholm and Tallinn in 2012. The network was born out of the need to establish a political and intellectual framework for supporting and sustaining local initiatives which are advocating for change in the precarious work realities that dominate the visual art sector. The idea to form an exchange platform for sharing useful knowledges, practices and resistive strategies grew out of two self-organised initiatives in particular – the Reko collective in Stockholm and the art workers' movement in Tallinn. The Reko initiative was formed in 2007, anticipating the introduction of the Swedish MU Agreement that obligates state-run art institutions to pay fees for artists who are participating in exhibition projects. In 2010 and 2011, Reko published annual reports that were monitoring the implementation of the MU Agreement. By collecting and analysing hard data from individual artists and art institutions, Reko produced comprehensive information about the material conditions within exhibition practice in Sweden. The art workers' movement in Tallinn sparked off in 2010, and was initially also mobilised on dissent against the exploitation of unpaid labour in exhibition practice. However, throughout its one and a half years of existence, the movement developed a discourse that addressed the issue of precarious labour in the cultural field of Estonia from a broader perspective, also problematising questions related to social security, cultural funding and cultural policies. Organised in a somewhat chaotic manner, the art workers' movement in Tallinn was essentially a militant research platform where the process of mapping precarious working conditions was accompanied by a collective politicisation that the analysis of these conditions brought along. In January 2012, when the idea to form a regional art workers' network first emerged, both initiatives were somewhat hibernating. Due to lack of funding, Reko had not been able to publish a successive survey in 2012, whereas the art workers' movement in Tallinn had seemingly run out of collective energy. Initially, the idea to establish a translocal network emerged as a potential way out from this impasse, aimed at re-energising the local practices by creating new connections, stimulating new impulses and, not

least importantly, providing some financial resources that would sustain these initiatives.

Almost two years later, by the time when the founding group of this network reached the end of a lengthy fund-raising process in the autumn of 2013, the local situation had substantially changed both in Stockholm and Tallinn. Or perhaps it would be more precise to say that, from our perspective, it hadn't changed at all – Reko still had no funding for continuing their practice and the art workers' movement in Tallinn had not caught fire again. It was slowly becoming obvious that these initiatives were not just in a sleep mode, but had most probably arrived at the finish line of their activities. Nevertheless, while these particular cycles of debate and struggle were fading out in Stockholm and Tallinn, a new one was emerging in Helsinki, the third location where our network had established a foothold. In the context of Helsinki, the issue of gallery rent has recently become an entrance point upon which broader discussions about art economy and cultural policy are accumulating. When witnessing and observing these processes of appearance and disappearance, we learned the lesson that the rhythms of politicisation in the art field are no different from the temporalities of cognitive labour – most of all, they are precarious and cyclic.

In response to the developments in our local contexts, we revised our activity plans in 2013, shifting our focus from extensive networking towards knowledge production. In the situation where some of our initial strongholds were falling, it seemed that there would be little sense in the experiment of rooting a translocal network in contexts where a cycle of struggle had just come to an end. Instead of prioritising local interventions in respective languages, we decided to publish a book in English. To some extent, this book is a retrospection of recent art workers' struggles, aiming to document, contextualise and revisit them from a critical perspective. At the same time, this book is also an attempt to capture the present situation of material conditions and organising practices in the art field together with related challenges and potentialities. Last but not least, this book is motivated by an aspiration to imagine desirable futures that are constructed from the subject position of precarious (art) workers.

The first chapter of this book, titled *Mapping Material Conditions in the Art Field*, presents research results that have been collected in our local contexts. Rather than aiming to provide a comprehensive overview of the economic and social situation of art workers in the national contexts of Estonia, Finland and Sweden, the writings in this chapter articulate issues that are frequently addressed as the most problematic aspects of art economy. By taking the local particularities of questions such as the remuneration of artistic labour, gallery rent and social security as departure point, the contributions in this chapter outline a composition of problems that occupy a dominant role in maintaining precarious working and living conditions in the contemporary art field. In many contexts, precisely these most urgent problems have served as entry points into public debates and collective

practices that define the focal point in the second part of the book, captured under the title *Forms of Organising and Labour Struggles*.

Corresponding with the theme of unpaid labour that forms a red thread in this publication, the course of mapping material conditions in contemporary art practice unfolds with a contribution by Erik Krikortz, who discusses the effects of the notorious MU Agreement in Sweden. In the Nordic and Baltic region, the MU Agreement is often celebrated as a progressive ideal that deserves to be strived for. Indeed, in many ways, the MU Agreement represents an exemplary model for regulating work relations between artists and art institutions – not only because it establishes parameters according to which artistic labour should be remunerated, but perhaps even more importantly, because it sets a paradigm in which the abolishment of unpaid labour within exhibition practice is linked to a political decision rather than delegated into the realm of informal agreements among collegial peers in the art field. However, as much as the MU Agreement serves as an exemplary case of "best practice" – to use the managerial vocabulary that is favoured by cultural policy makers – a prototype legislation that has stimulated fruitful discussions about the remuneration of artistic labour widely beyond the national borders of Sweden, its actual effects are far from being supreme. As Erik Krikortz demonstrates in his contribution, the limited ramifications of the MU Agreement are not only a result of its narrow scope which applies to a handful of state-run institutions, but also the lacking control mechanisms that would monitor and, if needed, sanction art institutions that do not comply to the standards established in the agreement. In fact, during the first years after the introduction of the MU Agreement, it was the artists' initiative Reko that observed and evaluated its effects. Writing from the perspective of this independent "public watchdog," Erik Krikortz revisits the MU Agreement from a critical perspective, reflecting on the developments that have followed its introduction during the last six years.

The contribution by Minna Henriksson addresses an issue that is perhaps less prevalent in the international art contexts, but not in the least exceptional: the practice of charging rent from artists who exhibit in non-profit galleries. While writing in the high tide of public critique against the gallery rent model in Helsinki and Finland, Minna Henriksson contextualises this problem in its local dimensions. The gallery rent model in Helsinki originally emerged in connection with the democratisation of the art scene which was manifested in the foundation of artist-run spaces in 1980s and 1990s. Operating according to the principles of self-organisation, these spaces were often maintained in collective effort together with affiliated artists. However, in the following decades, the rising rent prices in the increasingly gentrified central area of Helsinki have been accompanied with the gradual institutionalisation of the formerly counter-institutional art spaces. The majority of non-profit galleries in Helsinki today operate both on public funding and by charging rent from artists, whereas the public funding model that sustains gallery rent practice is still being defended with the

argument of democracy. From this perspective, it is claimed that the model of channelling exhibition funding through the hands of artists balances the power position of art institutions. In contrast to this argument, Minna Henriksson demonstrates how the current situation in Finland is actually out of balance, resulting in a situation where the funding institutions have substantially more power over exhibition practice than artists or galleries. From the interviews that Minna Henriksson has conducted with practising artists Elina Juopperi, Jussi Kivi, Raakel Kuukka and Marge Monko, it also becomes evident that the widespread practice of charging gallery rent is an essential component in maintaining the status quo of unpaid labour: as long as artists are made responsible for covering the exhibition costs, with or without the support of public funding, there is virtually no place where the demand for fair pay can be anchored. In addition to texts and interviews, Minna Henriksson's contribution also includes a drawing that envisions possibilities how the problematic situation could be changed. This drawing has been produced in collaboration with art practitioners Minna Heikinaho and Jussi Koitela who have been actively engaged in discussions about cultural policies and artists' working conditions in Finland. Whereas the contribution by Minna Henriksson is primarily aimed at making an intervention into the local context, it also relates to neighbouring discussions in Estonia where the gallery rent issue was heatedly debated a few years earlier, stimulating gradual changes in the current situation.

Placing the issue of unpaid labour into a broader context, Airi Triisberg analyses the relationship between unwaged labour and social security. Her account originates from the collective process of knowledge production that took place in the framework of the art workers' movement in Tallinn. By mapping out the income modalities in the art field, Airi Triisberg exemplifies how art workers occupy an ambiguous position within wage-labour relations. She then continues to discuss the consequences of such ambiguity in relation to the widespread practice of modelling social security on waged employment. Using the health insurance system in Estonia as a case study, she demonstrates how art workers fall between two chairs in the system that defines wage as the dividing line between work and non-work. Furthermore, in reference to feminist Marxist conceptualisations of unpaid reproductive labour as a key resource of capitalist accumulation, Airi Triisberg draws parallels between the precarious social situation of art and care workers. Aiming to articulate proximities between radical feminist politics of the 1970s and current struggles against precarious work relations in the art field and beyond, she concludes her analysis by invoking feminist Marxist imaginaries of social change.

The precarious work reality in the art field will not change unless art workers organise and struggle against it. Mapping material conditions in the contemporary art sector remains ineffective without an accompanying politicisation. Corresponding with that battle call, the second chapter of this book puts a focus on practices of organising in the realm of art and

social movements. In recent years, there has been a wave of art workers' collectives emerging in various localities of the international art world. This wave of mobilisation has brought along an intensified interest for the historical legacy of labour organising within the art field. A great deal of such research has been collected and published in the *ArtLeaks Gazette*. Corina L. Apostol, co-founder of the ArtLeaks platform, summarises this research in her contribution which sketches a genealogy from Paris Commune to contemporary activist groups. Reflecting on historical moments when art practitioners have sought affinities and alliances with workers' movements and revolutionary struggles, she builds a ground for a comparative study that articulates both continuity and change. Her analysis is complemented with a visual contribution by artist collective Fokus Grupa. The imagery used in the drawings by Fokus Grupa is derived from historical photographs and documents, re-articulating moments of politicisation in art history. In this publication, a selection from the series *I Sing to Pass the Time* is presented, displaying images that emphasise links between art and workers' struggles in particular. Insofar as the work of Fokus Grupa relies on historical documents, it also exemplifies the fact that the legacy of art workers' struggles in USA has been very well documented and publicised whereas there is only little visual material available from other geographical contexts.

Art workers' initiatives often use their visual skills in order to develop activist strategies. Thus, the visual imagery presented in this publication has largely been produced in connection with activist practices, such as the *Bust Your Boss Card* developed by Precarious Workers Brigade. The card borrows the format of the "bust card" that is handed out at protests, giving legal information to activists and demonstrators. The *Bust Your Boss Card* is conceived as a visual awareness raising tool that encourages art and cultural workers to confront their "bosses" by demanding transparency for the material conditions of cultural work. In a corresponding manner, the graphic image by artists Taaniel Raudsepp and Sigrid Viir visualises the budget outline of their joint exhibition *Corridor* from 2010. This graph was produced in connection with the art workers' movement in Tallinn, articulating the problem of unpaid labour within exhibition practice. It was originally made for *Art Workers' Voice*, a newspaper insert that the art workers' movement in Tallinn published in the Estonian cultural weekly *Sirp* in 2011. It is one of the few examples of activist imagery originating from the politicisation process in Tallinn. In contrast to this, this publication includes several examples of the rich and distinct visual language that has been developed by the ArtLeaks platform. In addition to activist imagery, some visual contributions in this book operate at the border zone between individual artistic practice and collective struggles. For example, Marge Monko's work *I Don't Eat Flowers* originates from the period when the art workers' movement was active in Tallinn, indicating confluences between her activist engagements and artistic practice. Zoran Popović's *Answer to International Strike of Artists* is a visual response to a call for collective struggle that was

initiated by Goran Đorđević in 1979, whereas Krisdy Shindler's work *Can Art Manipulate Money?* is a remake of one of the most widely publicised images in the history of art workers' organising, paraphrasing the poster *Does Money Manipulate Art?* by Art Workers' Coalition from 1969.

Three contributions in this book are focused on contextualising recent or current examples of art workers' labour organising. In that framework, Airi Triisberg revisits the short cycle of mobilisation that politicised art practitioners in Tallinn and Estonia during 2010–2011. Writing from the position of an activist who took part in that process, she looks back at its development with a taint of self-criticism. In particular, she reflects on the significance that the adoption of the neologism "art workers" held in the context of Estonia. She analyses the self-identification of art workers as a dialectical process which is based on the negotiation of two distinct class positions – the subjectivity as workers, on the one hand, and the subjectivity as "professional art practitioners," who occupy a unique position in the social stratification, on the other hand. Conceptualising this process of self-identification as a strategy of "disidentification" – defined by José Esteban Muñoz as a political position located between identification and counter-identification – she discusses how the art workers' movement in Tallinn was working both "on and against the dominant ideology."[1] To elaborate, while demanding that artistic labour must be recognised as such, the art workers in Tallinn simultaneously suggested that artistic labour should be recognised as a particular type of labour that holds a unique role in society. To some extent, the art workers' movement in Tallinn is further contextualised in the conversation between Airi Triisberg and Tereza Stejskalová, the co-founder of the campaign Call Against Zero Wage in Prague. By juxtaposing these two cycles of struggle, Tereza Stejskalová and Airi Triisberg discuss their commonalities which are partly linked to the socio-political realities in post-socialist contexts. However, whereas the editorial choice to highlight these two examples from Eastern Europe aims to create visibility for art workers' initiatives that operate in the peripheries of the Western art world, and are perhaps less well-known, the focus on these examples is by no means intended to reinforce the conceptual East-West divide. Quite the contrary, the conversation between Tereza Stejskalová and Airi Triisberg also emphasises the transnational dimensions of art workers' self-organisation, acknowledging activist routes along which concepts, tools and resistive practices travel. From that perspective, one of the most influential activist collectives in the international art world is perhaps the London-based Precarious Workers Brigade whose practice is quite explicitly focused on developing tools that can be easily shared and applied outside their immediate context of origin. Moreover, the practice of Precarious Workers Brigade is marked by an aspiration to create transversal alliances with other precarious social groups, representing a political practice that is strongly rooted in radical social movements, and not exclusively in the art field. In order to

acknowledge these important political efforts to expand the struggle against precarious labour beyond the narrow occupational sectors of art, culture or education, we have re-published an interview with Precarious Workers Brigade that was initially produced for the Czech journal *A2*, initiated by Tereza Stejskalová and Barbora Kleinhamplová.

One of the dominant challenges that emerge in relation to the strategies of labour organising in the art field is connected to the apparent impossibility of forming trade unions. In many contexts, this challenge is first perceived as a spatial one, exemplifying the modalities of dispersion that are not only characteristic to artistic labour, but to the production mode in post-fordist capitalism in general. Secondly, trade unionist politics also seem to be founded on temporalities that are substantially different from the ruptured and intermittent modes of precarious labour. These two dimensions are frequently addressed in post-operaist strands of political thinking that recall the historical model of fordist factory as an exemplary site of condensation – not only condensing the time and space of production, but also of resistance.[2] The new reality where fordist organisation of labour is losing its centrality in capitalist production thus also poses political challenges to trade unionist method, pointing toward the urgency of reinventing forms and spaces of workers' struggles. From that perspective, the attempts to mobilise art workers' struggles around the politics of trade unionism seems anachronistic if not futile. As Silvia Federici stresses, struggle against precarious labour is not about demanding access to conventional wage-labour relations; it is more about demanding good life while acknowledging that capitalism is dependent on forms of work that are unpaid and precarious.[3] In Federici's thinking, the struggle for autonomy from capital and the state should also include the unwaged workers who cannot be organised in the orthodox trade unionist manner. Historically, the appeal for rethinking class struggle beyond its classical subject of industrial proletariat was first articulated within the feminist strands of operaist struggles in the 1970s. In the present-day social movements, this autonomist feminist Marxist appeal is reminiscent in demands for universal basic income. Referring to the current practices developed in the context of radical social movements, Lotta Tenhunen discusses the politics of basic income from the perspective of precarious workers, framing it as a political horizon for the mobilisation of transversal struggles in the social factory of contemporary capitalist production.

The last contribution in this publication is an outcome of collective discussions between artist Michael Baers and the editors of this book. It was originally intended as a visual essay experimenting with radical imagination and suggesting desirable futures for art workers' struggles which would perhaps be a little more ambitious than what is usually considered feasible within the common sense of pragmatically oriented labour organising. However, in the dialogical process of developing those scenarios together, the accent of this contribution changed a bit, placing the discussion itself

on the central position. Moreover, as it often happens when the futures are at stake, what gets genuinely addressed is the present or the past. In many ways, the unresolved contradictions that are articulated in this conversation also epitomise one of the most important dilemmas that forms a re-occurring question in this publication — how to construct labour struggles and political imaginaries from the precarious subject position of art workers, without isolating these struggles into the occupational sector of visual art?

We hope that this book can provide some useful knowledge and stimulating impulses for our comrades in struggles against precarious labour!

In solidarity,
Airi Triisberg, Minna Henriksson, Erik Krikortz

1. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.11.
2. Gerald Raunig, *Factories of Knowledge, Industries of Creativity* (London, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013), p.17.
3. Silvia Federici, *Precarious Labour: A Feminist Viewpoint* (2006), http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/(accessed 6 February 2014).

Marge Monko, *I Don't Eat Flowers*, 2011.

I. Mapping Material Conditions in the Art Field

ERIK KRIKORTZ

Paying Artists: The Unfulfilled Promises of the MU Agreement

The new exhibition agreement in Sweden – the MU Agreement – aimed at regulating the working conditions and fees for artists exhibiting at public art institutions, had the potential of changing the situation for artists, and the way artistic work is being valued in Sweden.[1] Six years after its introduction, few Swedish art institutions follow the agreement, and, to put it bluntly, little has changed. This text will go into the details of the much talked-about MU Agreement, recount the role of the activist artists' initiative Reko, delve into possible explanations for the agreement's relative failure, review the current situation and, lastly, make projections for the future. It is written from the point of view of one of the artists who founded Reko, an initiative that for a couple of years scrutinised the working conditions at Swedish art institutions, primarily in relation to the MU Agreement.

The first central agreement about exhibition fees in Sweden was made in 1971 between the state committee of Museum and Exhibition Experts, and Konstnärernas Riksorganisation (KRO, The Swedish Artists' National Organization). Subsequently, craftspeople, designers, illustrators and photographers were also included. The agreement was made to satisfy one of the core principles of art politics, namely that artists should get paid for their work. It was changed continuously, but never implemented correctly, and the fees were remarkably low. In 2005 the artists' organisations demanded a renegotiation of the agreement, and in January 2009, the MU Agreement was introduced.[2]

Exhibitions are an important part of the labour market for visual artists, and the new agreement was hailed as a reform that would have a large impact on the visual arts sector. For the artists, a group with a weak position on the labour market and extremely low incomes, the agreement was good news. Not only would exhibiting artists begin to receive adequate fees, but the quality of exhibition practice in Sweden might increase. One could assume that if artists started being treated like professionals when exhibiting, this approach could spread to other parts of the sector. Reasonable fees could also make the art field more democratic, since young people

from less privileged social groups might then consider artistic careers. The result would be more diverse perspectives and stories told.

Main MU concepts

The MU Agreement comprises of three main concepts. The first is that institutions have to negotiate the working conditions and sign a written contract with each exhibiting artist. In other sectors, this would be a natural part of each professional working relation, but in the Swedish visual arts sector vague oral agreements have been a common practice. With oral agreements, the artist usually gets the short end of the stick in case of misunderstandings, or if something unexpected happens, e.g. the exhibition gets cancelled, or an artwork gets damaged. Historically, whenever a written contract was actually provided, it was often presented to the artist as a *fait accompli* – and therefore it makes sense that the MU Agreement emphasises that each contract should actually be negotiated.

The second concept is the exhibition fee, which can be described as a copyright fee, or rent, for the exhibited artworks. This minimum fee is paid per week and depends on two variables: the number of exhibiting artists and the art institutions' category. Museums and galleries are grouped in four categories, mainly on the basis of the number of yearly visitors.

Minimum exhibition fee per week (December 2014):

Category	Number of artists			
	1	2–3	4–8	9–20
1	4 300	4 300×1,5	4 300×2	4 300×2,5
2	3 200	3 200×1,5	3 200×2	3 200×2,5
3	2 200	2 200×1,5	2 200×2	2 200×2,5
4	1 100	1 100×1,5	1 100×2	1 100×2,5

- Example: an exhibition with six artists in a category 2 institution means a minimum exhibition fee of 6 400 SEK per week.
- The exhibition fee for group exhibitions shall be divided between the artists, but does not have to be distributed symmetrically.
- The weekly minimum fee gets reduced after 12 weeks: week 13–16 by 25%, week 17–20 by 50%, and after that by 75%.
- The minimum fee per artist, regardless of exhibiting institution and exhibition length, is 5 300 SEK for a solo show, 3 200 SEK for a smaller group exhibition (2–3 artists), and 2 200 SEK for a larger group exhibition (4 artists or more).
- The fees are revised according to the consumer price index (CPI) every three years. As the salaries in Sweden increase more than the CPI, the fees still get hollowed out with time.
- Examples of categories: category 1 includes state-run institutions and art museums/galleries with more than 100 000 annual visitors, whereas category 4 includes galleries with less than 10 000 annual visitors.

All rates in SEK. 1 SEK = 0,108 € (9 December 2014).

The third concept is the participation fee, which primarily covers the work that the institution requires the artist to do before, during and after the exhibition – e.g. production, catalogue, installation, meetings, participation in programme (opening, guided tours, lectures, talks, etc.), and post-exhibition work. This fee should be negotiated before the contract is signed. The recommended lowest hourly rate by KRO/KIF is 750 kronor, or approximately 80 euros, which is similar to – but stays in the lower end of the spectrum of – fees charged by architects, designers, engineers or consultants. The MU Agreement also states that the institution, as part of the participation fee, should regulate the reimbursement of the artists' expenses (e.g. transports, insurances, travels, technical equipment), and the use of copyrighted material after the exhibition period (e.g. images published on the institution's website).

However, regulating the reimbursement of expenses and the use of copyrighted material doesn't mean that the institution needs to pay the artist. An individual contract between artist and art institution could omit all copyright fees (apart from the exhibition fee), and let the artist themself carry all expenses. The same goes for the hourly work fee; the institution could pay the artist nothing for the required work effort, and this wouldn't necessarily mean that they are violating the agreement. It is only mandatory to negotiate these parts. The agreement doesn't regulate any reimbursement or fee except for the exhibition fee. Hence, in a legitimate exhibition, with a contract that has been negotiated in accordance to the MU Agreement, the artist could still be paying for doing work, instead of being paid.

Few institutions follow the agreement

Among the few institutions that pay the minimum exhibition fee, the fee is almost without exception perceived as a maximum fee. Even very large exhibitions at the largest institutions are generally not paid above the minimum fee, with some exceptions. According to the *Reko Report 2011*, only 26% of the institutions consistently pay the required minimum fee or more. Looking at each artist and contract, the minimum fee was paid in 32% of the cases. According to the same report, the artists' expenses get reimbursed in 82% of the cases.[3] This could be seen as a good figure, at least compared to how poorly the institutions pay the artists. But, if we would take a step back and compare the situation with other professional sectors, we would realise that 82% is not very impressive. Take for instance a construction company that builds new walls inside a public art institution. No doubt they would get reimbursed for material and transports, and on top of that get paid for their work. Why doesn't it work like that when the same public art institution hires the most exciting artist they can find for an exhibition? The work fee rarely gets paid at all, and when it gets paid, the levels are normally very low. This is one of the biggest challenges for those who want to improve working conditions for exhibiting artists.

Reko made verified studies in 2010 and 2011, covering the first two years of the MU Agreement. Since both institutions and exhibiting artists were asked to answer the surveys, the results were quite reliable. Not a single institution has complained about the numbers in the reports, which indicates that they contained few, if any, errors. The Swedish Arts Council released a report in summer 2013,[4] and the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis published one in autumn 2014.[5] These reports differed from the Reko reports in the sense that they relied fully on the self-evaluations of the institutions. In the Arts Council's report, 39% claim that they follow the MU Agreement, which would mean at least paying the exhibition fee. A very poor outcome, but still substantially better than the 26% in the *Reko Report 2011* published two years prior. According to the Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, the artists were paid the minimum fee in 28% of the cases, which is a slight decrease compared to the 32% in the *Reko Report 2011* three years before. Since the information in these studies comes from uncontrolled self-evaluations, it is not inconceivable that some institutions (with or without intention) have presented a slightly biased image. The problem with these self-evaluations becomes evident in the report from the Arts Council. When the institutions are asked how familiar they are with the MU Agreement, only 15% say that they are very familiar with the agreement. On the question of whether the institutions feel that they have the information they need about the implementation of the agreement, 41% say no.[6] This illustrates that even institutions trying to answer the surveys as truthfully as possible, could very well have misinterpreted the agreement. Although the figures in these two reports could be inflated due to the fact that they stem from pure self-evaluations, the reports indicate that the Swedish art institutions are still not following the MU Agreement.

Reko – concept and results

Reko is an activist artists' initiative formed in 2007 in response to the poor working conditions for artists.[7] We, the founders of the initiative, had taken part in numerous endless discussions about art in relation to money and labour. Our unanimous impression was a sense of circularity; that these discussions, albeit interesting at times, didn't reach any conclusions that could lead to action. We felt that there was a general satisfaction with keeping the discussions on a theoretical level, and not getting soiled by practicalities or concrete conclusions. Ironically, socially engaged artists could make great artistic efforts in favour of weak or peripheral groups in society, but would not be able to address the precarious situation of their own peer group. One can easily argue that underpaid, overworked, and amateurish artists have little means to contribute to social change. Hence an effort to change what is actually an outrageous situation that would never be accepted in any other sector would make sense and could not easily be dismissed as

egocentrism. With Reko, we felt that in order to make a change and really be able to improve the working conditions of artists, we would have to follow an argument to the end, make conclusions and get concrete. Our discourse would have to be presented in an accessible way, in order to make an impact. We needed to use the media to voice our opinion and reach the public.

After mapping the labour market for visual artists, we felt that exhibiting at public art institutions was the most dysfunctional situation, where artists would be in the public eye, but at the same time get completely ripped off. Public art institutions were shamelessly exploiting artists; in a way no public institutions would exploit any other category of workers. Museum directors would say that exhibiting artists might get a grant sometime in the future, and that an exhibition fee would therefore be superfluous. A critical eye would notice that the referred grants – that only a small minority of artists receive – are not enough to support a person (much less a family) or a professional practice, and can normally only be obtained every other year. Although exhibitions at public art institutions attract approximately 6.5 million visitors per year,[8] and exhibiting artists usually have to do without adequate pay, artists are still often bashed in the public debate by populists, conservatives and neoliberals for the comparatively few grants that get distributed yearly by the Swedish Arts Grants Committee. Artists are depicted as non-contributing parasites, and even though the political consensus still officially talks about improving the working conditions of artists, very little is done at the political level to help the situation. Instead the visual arts sector gets a smaller and smaller share of the public budgets. Maybe this political lameness and disinterest might somehow be linked to the populist image of the artist as a no-good receiver of social benefits (a.k.a. working grants). Hence, improved and professionalised working conditions for exhibiting artists would not only create an economic improvement for individual artists, and free more time for focused artistic production, but also have the potential of creating a new image of the artist as a professional. Not as someone who is exclusively an entrepreneur – as the new economic paradigm would suggest – but as someone who also works for the public and gets paid for it, like any number of other professional groups (teachers, academics, health care professionals, politicians, administrators, technicians, etc.). An artist would then no longer be a parasite, "free spirit" and outcast, but a regular cultural worker.

When we looked into the situation, we noticed that public art institutions operated completely in the dark. The authorities that are supposed to control and help create decent working conditions for artists – the Swedish Arts Council, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, and the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis – either didn't have the resources to create, or didn't see the need for, financial transparency related to exhibitions at public art institutions. There was no deeper research or detailed statistics, which could be used to really understand the situation and establish a powerful argument. The economy of the art institutions

was an opaque mass, and the perennial chorus about the poor working conditions had the trustworthiness of an urban legend. Hence in order to create a debate, we would first have to deliver comprehensive research from the ground and up.

The underlying idea of Reko that emanated from these thoughts, was to create a sort of "fair trade label" for art exhibitions – and examine and reveal the conditions under which art is produced. Simply put, we wanted to create transparency around production conditions, and provide a precise definition of the problems. By coincidence, the MU Agreement was emerging at the same time that the Reko concept was formed, and hence became our point of reference. Reko would certainly become more relevant if the project was building on the MU Agreement, rather than on self-made criteria. We therefore waited to launch the initiative until the agreement started to apply, and mainly asked questions relating directly to the new agreement. Reko examined aspects like: Do the artists get written contracts? Are their expenses paid? Are exhibition and copyright fees paid at an acceptable level? Do the artists get paid for working with the exhibitions? What is the policy of the institutions regarding artists' working conditions? Do they provide information about their activities and financing? We gathered the data by contacting over a hundred institutions, and over a thousand artists that had exhibited in approximately four hundred different exhibitions, first via emails, and then often followed up by phone calls. Our survey could be answered online, but we would also email a simplified version to less Internet savvy artists and institutions. Sometimes we would even ask the questions over the phone. One state-run museum claimed that they didn't know how to use email, and hence we sent them a paper version of the survey (which they didn't return). With some institutions we would have up to a dozen contacts.

Reko's goal was to produce knowledge with the potential to radically change the working conditions for exhibiting artists. Since the poor situation was sedimented over decades, and the mind-set deeply anchored, we assumed that changing it would require endurance and a long process, where Reko could hopefully play an instrumental role. In a situation where secrecy or a lack of insight into working conditions helps uphold the status quo, we figured that hard data would maybe cut the Gordian knot. The two Reko reports from 2010 and 2011 certainly did contain analyses and discussions, but the plentiful and controlled data was the unique thing about them.

Each couple of years, reports about the working conditions of artists are published by government organisations such as the mentioned Swedish Arts Council, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee, or the Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis. These reports always show similarly disastrous results, but they never provide comprehensive information at a detailed level. One of our most important insights was that nothing would change without transparency. Politicians always have many issues on their tables, and therefore only react when something creates a stir. Reports repeating the same

old message – that artists are treated badly at public art institutions, or that the incomes of artists are among the lowest in society – but without conveying much detail, will not necessarily inspire political action. For this to happen, the information should be more detailed, comprehensive and accessible. In order to create maximum transparency, we chose to rank the institutions according to four different criteria.

The Reko Index emulated established ranking models, e.g. university rankings and Greenpeace's environmental rankings. We thought that a ranking would be the most accessible and clearest way to structure the research, and that it also would attract the press. Since we wanted the results of our research to reach the public and create awareness among politicians,

The Reko Seal, illustration published on the cover of *Rekorapporten 2011*. © Magnus Bard.

we saw media attention as something necessary. The Reko Mark, given to all institutions with a good enough practice, and the Reko Prize, awarded to the institution with the fairest conditions for artists, complemented the index. This was influenced by the idea of "fair trade," which was an important symbolic to draw upon that emphasises good examples, and points towards solutions. It was also a way to motivate institutions even more, to create a positive competition. Reko was not only about collecting important data, but also analysing it, and finding creative and efficient ways to reach out with the research.

National media covered the Reko reports extensively, even beyond our rather high expectations. But also local media reported about their local art institutions. The detailed information about individual institutions, and

the fact that institutions could be compared to each other, appealed to media logic. The fairest institutions received well-deserved praise, and the worst institutions negative publicity. The Reko reports managed to create a debate, and politicians all over the country referred to the reports.[9] Reko's research was referenced in the two already mentioned government reports, and has supplied the artists' organisation KRO with information. The initiative has also been recognised internationally, by artists' organisations, media and politicians.

A very interesting finding was that the size of the institution has little effect on the working conditions for artists. Among the smaller institutions, an equal proportion acquired the Reko Mark as those listed among the larger institutions. This contradicted an argument that some midsize or smaller institutions had used: that they would love to give artists better conditions, had they only a larger budget. An important result of the reports was that they created a discussion among the institutions. The two top-scoring institutions in the *Reko Report 2011*, Museum Anna Nordlander and Bildmuseet, had both been placed in the lower regions of the ranking in the previous year. According to Anders Jansson, director of Reko Prize-winning Museum Anna Nordlander, Reko had led him to discuss the working conditions for exhibiting artists with Bildmuseet, situated in the neighbouring city. Both institutions felt that they should be able to give artists fair conditions, and radically changed their practices.[10]

After the second report, more and more institutions asked us what they could do in order to provide good working conditions for artists. The activist artists' initiative was suddenly an institution that large museums asked for advice. However, just as we felt that Reko was onto a good way of contributing towards real change, the initiative would no longer receive funding. Most funding bodies in Sweden only support new initiatives, and it is close to impossible to receive continuous funding. The Swedish Arts Council supported both Reko reports, and also funded the MU Campaign, an effort by KRO to educate artists and institutions about the agreement. One after the other, both Reko and the MU Campaign – as the two major initiatives to take forward the implementation of the MU Agreement – stopped receiving support from the Arts Council. And this despite the fact that the MU Agreement still functioned in a very unsatisfactory way. Erik Åström, coordinator for regional issues at the Arts Council, in December 2014, says that the MU Campaign didn't show the results that they were hoping for, and that the Arts Council still needs to decide how to best support the implementation of the MU Agreement.[11]

Why has the MU Agreement failed?

If the Arts Council really wants to promote the implementation of the agreement, there are two obvious things that they could do. Firstly, they could resume their support to the most important initiatives that address the

issue. If the Arts Council felt that the MU Campaign was inefficient, they could discuss possible changes with KRO. The same would go for Reko, or a subsequent initiative that fills the same function. Secondly, they could attach conditions to the money they distribute through the regions. In earlier days, the Arts Council used to distribute public money directly to a large number of art institutions, but in 2011 the centre-right government introduced a new funding model, the *kultursamverkansmodellen*. The model implies that the Arts Council decides how much funding each region should receive, but that the regions themselves distribute the money to the institutions.

After six years, it would be reasonable to say that the MU Agreement has been somewhat of a failure. Only someone with very low expectations would state a different opinion.

"Not much has happened economically yet," says Katarina Jönsson Norling, chair of KRO, over the phone. "In some places small changes have occurred, but not on the level that it makes a difference for the artists."

"But," she adds, "there is a readiness now."[12]

The agreement has indeed only led to very slight improvements of the working conditions for exhibiting artists. For some institutions the MU Agreement has contributed to a change, but for most institutions the agreement has meant very little. Whereas the expectations on the new agreement were high, a critical eye could see, already from the outset, a few important weaknesses, things that could lower the impact of the agreement significantly:

1. Out of the professional contemporary art institutions in Sweden (118 according to the *Reko Report 2011*), only a handful of state-run museums were actually constrained by the agreement. Although almost all institutions are primarily funded with public money, very few actually have to follow the agreement, due to the fact that the government only can make agreements with state-run institutions. Neither the old centre-right government, nor the new red-green government has shown any interest in attaching conditions to funding distributed through the Arts Council. For all art institutions but a few, the MU Agreement is therefore merely a recommendation; although some regions have declared the intention to have local art institutions follow the agreement.

2. Neither the authorities, nor the artists' organisations, make controlled and detailed studies of how art institutions follow the agreement. The Reko initiative made an attempt to fill this function, but would only receive funding for two years. After the *Reko Report 2011*, there has been no similar research done, and we have seen less transparency in the field. We realised that the Reko research could probably also be done biannually with a good result, but this potentially money-saving insight didn't convince funders to support the continuation of the initiative.

3. Failure to follow the MU Agreement bears no consequences. Some of the state-run institutions that are constrained by the agreement have failed to comply. There has been no evidence presented that shows any retribution.

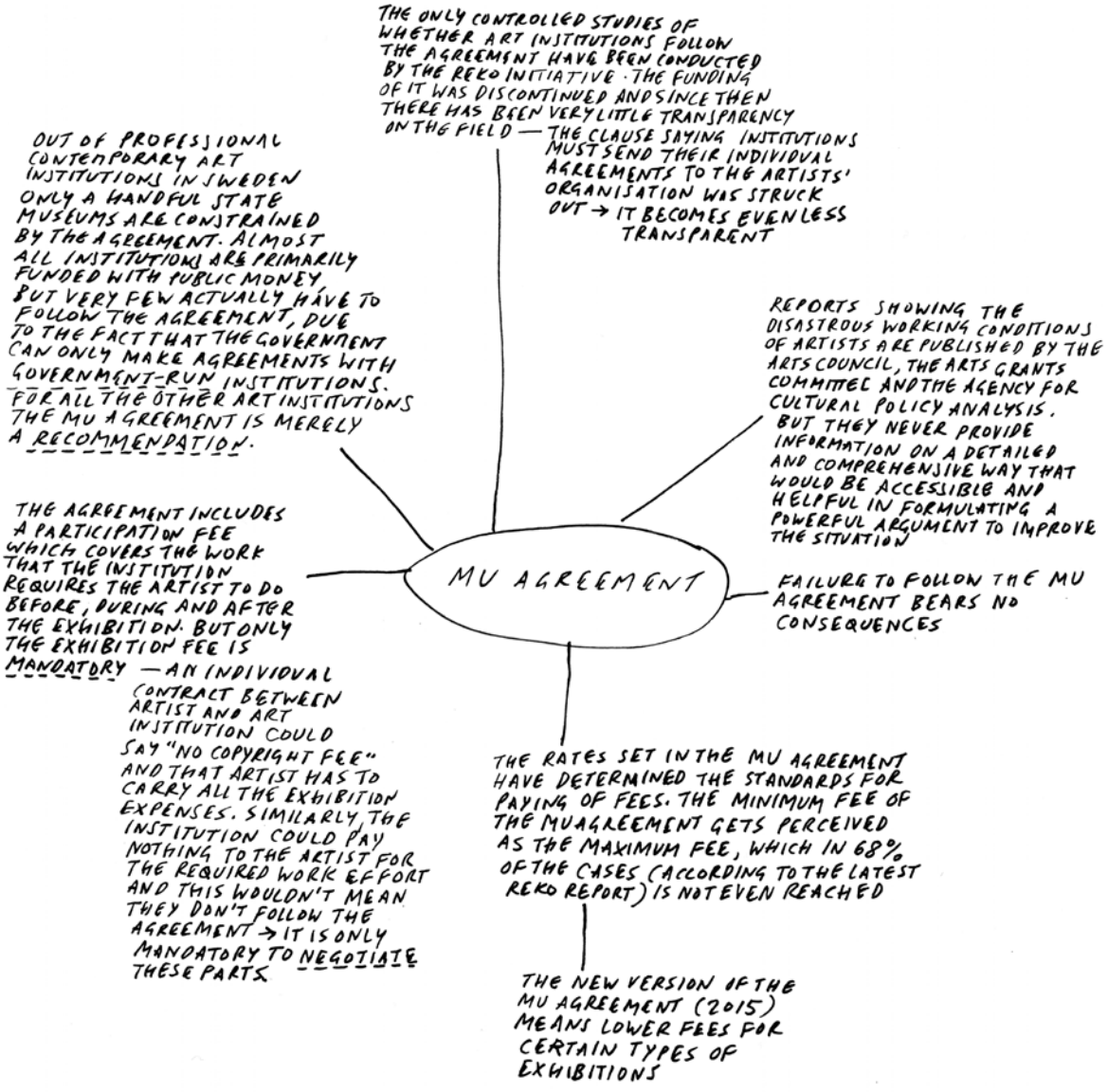
4. Only the exhibition fee is mandatory. The agreement states that artists and institutions should negotiate about the participation fee (work hours, expenses, etc.), but the institutions can always choose to omit this fee. Few artists are skilled negotiators, or have a position to make demands.

In July 2014, an updated version of the MU Agreement was introduced. A few more state museums now must follow the agreement, but the total number is still very small (less than ten of the 118 institutions listed in the *Reko Report 2011*). Apart from this minimal change, none of the four problems outlined above were counteracted in the update. One other positive change was that also international artists were included in the agreement – although it could be questioned whether their exclusion would be legal in the EU context in the first place. Some changes, however, were negative. The new version of the agreement means lower fees for exhibitions in certain institutions, and the clause stating that the institutions must send their individual contracts to the artists' organisation KRO was struck out, which could make it even more difficult to create transparency.

Things have started to move recently

"Why should the government finance activities that build on free labour and unfair conditions for artists?" asked Katarina Jönsson Norling, chair of KRO, and Johan Wingestad, chair of the Association of Swedish Craftsmen and Industrial Designers (KIF), in a debate article in December 2014. The article was published four days after the interpellation debate about the MU Agreement in the Swedish parliament. They went on to claim that the government should attach conditions in relation to funding, not only for state-run museums, but also museums that receive money distributed by the regions. The condition would be that the museums implement the MU Agreement fully.[13]

MP Cecilia Magnusson of the centre-right Moderate Party had in an interpellation confronted Alice Bah Kuhnke, the new Minister of Culture and Democracy, with the claim that funding needs to come with conditions, in order for the MU Agreement to get fully implemented.[14] The response of the minister was that the working conditions of visual artists are one of the most important priorities, and a central issue for the government. Alice Bah Kuhnke said that a few more state-run institutions will be ordered to follow the agreement, and that the Swedish Arts Council will be assigned to report to what extent institutions receiving state money through the regions apply the MU Agreement, but she didn't say anything about attached conditions,


MU AGREEMENT
THE ONLY CONTROLLED STUDIES OF WHETHER ART INSTITUTIONS FOLLOW THE AGREEMENT HAVE BEEN CONDUCTED BY THE REKO INITIATIVE. THE FUNDING OF IT WAS DISCONTINUED AND SINCE THEN THERE HAS BEEN VERY LITTLE TRANSPARENCY ON THE FIELD — THE CLAUSE SAYING INSTITUTIONS MUST SEND THEIR INDIVIDUAL AGREEMENTS TO THE ARTISTS' ORGANISATION WAS STRUCK OUT → IT BECOMES EVEN LESS TRANSPARENT
OUT OF PROFESSIONAL CONTEMPORARY ART INSTITUTIONS IN SWEDEN ONLY A HANDFUL STATE MUSEUMS ARE CONSTRAINED BY THE AGREEMENT. ALMOST ALL INSTITUTIONS ARE PRIMARILY FUNDED WITH PUBLIC MONEY BUT VERY FEW ACTUALLY HAVE TO FOLLOW THE AGREEMENT, DUE TO THE FACT THAT THE GOVERNMENT CAN ONLY MAKE AGREEMENTS WITH GOVERNMENT-RUN INSTITUTIONS. FOR ALL THE OTHER ART INSTITUTIONS THE MU AGREEMENT IS MERELY A RECOMMENDATION.
REPORTS SHOWING THE DISASTROUS WORKING CONDITIONS OF ARTISTS ARE PUBLISHED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL, THE ARTS GRANTS COMMITTEE AND THE AGENCY FOR CULTURAL POLICY ANALYSIS. BUT THEY NEVER PROVIDE INFORMATION ON A DETAILED AND COMPREHENSIVE WAY THAT WOULD BE ACCESSIBLE AND HELPFUL IN FORMULATING A POWERFUL ARGUMENT TO IMPROVE THE SITUATION
THE AGREEMENT INCLUDES A PARTICIPATION FEE WHICH COVERS THE WORK THAT THE INSTITUTION REQUIRES THE ARTIST TO DO BEFORE, DURING AND AFTER THE EXHIBITION. BUT ONLY THE EXHIBITION FEE IS MANDATORY — AN INDIVIDUAL CONTRACT BETWEEN ARTIST AND ART INSTITUTION COULD SAY "NO COPYRIGHT FEE" AND THAT ARTIST HAS TO CARRY ALL THE EXHIBITION EXPENSES. SIMILARLY, THE INSTITUTION COULD PAY NOTHING TO THE ARTIST FOR THE REQUIRED WORK EFFORT AND THIS WOULDN'T MEAN THEY DON'T FOLLOW THE AGREEMENT → IT IS ONLY MANDATORY TO NEGOTIATE THESE PARTS
FAILURE TO FOLLOW THE MU AGREEMENT BEARS NO CONSEQUENCES
THE RATES SET IN THE MU AGREEMENT HAVE DETERMINED THE STANDARDS FOR PAYING OF FEES. THE MINIMUM FEE OF THE MU AGREEMENT GETS PERCEIVED AS THE MAXIMUM FEE, WHICH IN 68% OF THE CASES (ACCORDING TO THE LATEST REKO REPORT) IS NOT EVEN REACHED
THE NEW VERSION OF THE MU AGREEMENT (2015) MEANS LOWER FEES FOR CERTAIN TYPES OF EXHIBITIONS

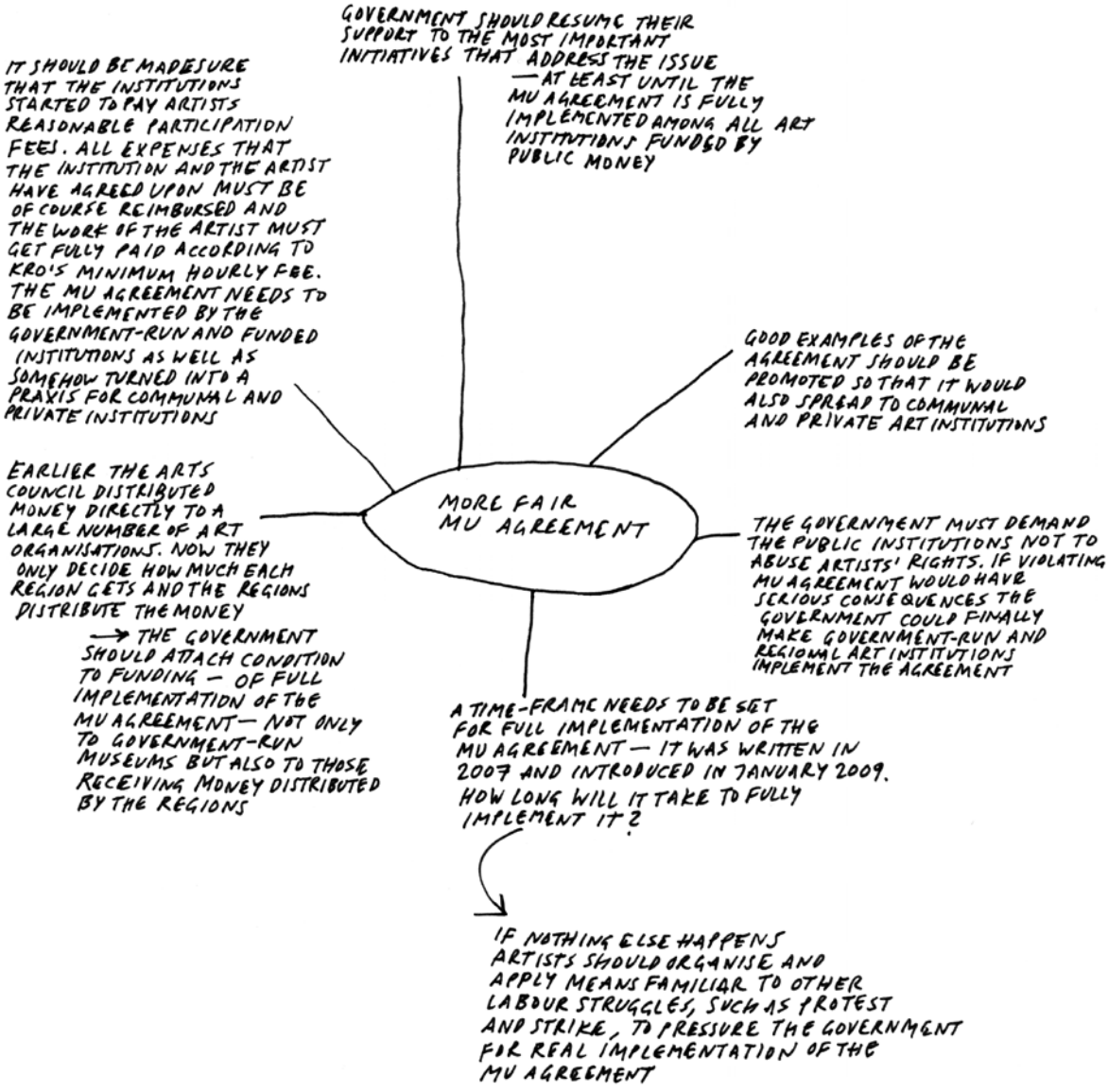
or consequences for those who fail to comply with the agreement.[15] It is interesting to notice that the centre-right opposition now seems to have an agenda more oriented towards labour rights than the red-green centre-left government. The red-green parties in Sweden are generally perceived as more generous towards arts and culture, and the previous centre-right government did very little to promote labour rights for artists. This relation now seems to have changed.

Alice Bah Kuhnke is reluctant to attaching conditions to funding distributed through the regions, although – in contrast to what has sometimes been put forward as an argument – it would not be difficult to put into practice. Erik Åström, of the Arts Council, says that the question is delicate, but that it is indeed possible to tighten up the practices of the regional museums. The Arts Council only needs to get a clear order from the government. Erik Åström makes a comparison with the reform through which culture was made more accessible to disabled people. The government gave an order and a set deadline, and the Arts Council made economic redispositions and executed the order. The same could be done in conjunction with the MU Agreement.[16]

When Reko took the initiative to rank working conditions at public art institutions, and create a "fair trade label," the artists' organisation KRO was at first excited and supportive, but then suddenly hesitant, since they believed it might create unwanted conflicts with the institutions. This led us to emphasise even more the good examples set by some institutions, and we tried to prevent the Reko Index from becoming a "black list." The overwhelming response to the first report, also from the art institutions, proved that the fear of conflict was exaggerated. The new direction of KRO has a different, and more fearless approach, maybe informed by the fact that the purely diplomatic path hasn't led to any decisive improvements. One interesting example of KRO's new agency is the scandal at the Swedish embassy in Tokyo. Here, the organisation has taken the role of a traditional union, an organisation that defends its members and does not hesitate to take legal action. To briefly summarise, the Tokyo embassy has repeatedly refused to pay exhibition fees to artists that have been invited to exhibit. Several failed attempts of dialogue led KRO to threaten to sue the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which in January 2015 apologised for the behaviour of the embassy. The two parties have yet to reach a settlement.[17]

"It is remarkable that an embassy, that should set a good example, is unwilling to inform itself about the MU Agreement and pay fair fees to exhibiting artists. Both the current and the previous government have said that they wanted the agreement to regulate the whole sector, and here the government itself doesn't even manage to implement the agreement," says KRO's lawyer Sofie Grettve.[18]

It is difficult to say with certainty what this new active approach and openness of KRO will lead to. But it is easy to imagine that an artists' organisation demanding labour rights in a more outspoken manner will have more success, and create a stronger interest among politicians.


GOVERNMENT SHOULD RESUME THEIR SUPPORT TO THE MOST IMPORTANT INITIATIVES THAT ADDRESS THE ISSUE
— AT LEAST UNTIL THE MU AGREEMENT IS FULLY IMPLEMENTED AMONG ALL ART INSTITUTIONS FUNDED BY PUBLIC MONEY
IT SHOULD BE MADE SURE THAT THE INSTITUTIONS STARTED TO PAY ARTISTS REASONABLE PARTICIPATION FEES. ALL EXPENSES THAT THE INSTITUTION AND THE ARTIST HAVE AGREED UPON MUST BE OF COURSE REIMBURSED AND THE WORK OF THE ARTIST MUST GET FULLY PAID ACCORDING TO KRO'S MINIMUM HOURLY FEE. THE MU AGREEMENT NEEDS TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY THE GOVERNMENT-RUN AND FUNDED INSTITUTIONS AS WELL AS SOMEHOW TURNED INTO A PRAXIS FOR COMMUNAL AND PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS
GOOD EXAMPLES OF THE AGREEMENT SHOULD BE PROMOTED SO THAT IT WOULD ALSO SPREAD TO COMMUNAL AND PRIVATE ART INSTITUTIONS
MORE FAIR MU AGREEMENT
EARLIER THE ARTS COUNCIL DISTRIBUTED MONEY DIRECTLY TO A LARGE NUMBER OF ART ORGANISATIONS. NOW THEY ONLY DECIDE HOW MUCH EACH REGION GETS AND THE REGIONS DISTRIBUTE THE MONEY
→ THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD ATTACH CONDITION TO FUNDING — OF FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MU AGREEMENT — NOT ONLY TO GOVERNMENT-RUN MUSEUMS BUT ALSO TO THOSE RECEIVING MONEY DISTRIBUTED BY THE REGIONS
THE GOVERNMENT MUST DEMAND THE PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS NOT TO ABUSE ARTISTS' RIGHTS. IF VIOLATING MU AGREEMENT WOULD HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES THE GOVERNMENT COULD FINALLY MAKE GOVERNMENT-RUN AND REGIONAL ART INSTITUTIONS IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT
A TIME-FRAME NEEDS TO BE SET FOR FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MU AGREEMENT — IT WAS WRITTEN IN 2007 AND INTRODUCED IN JANUARY 2009. HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE TO FULLY IMPLEMENT IT?
IF NOTHING ELSE HAPPENS ARTISTS SHOULD ORGANISE AND APPLY MEANS FAMILIAR TO OTHER LABOUR STRUGGLES, SUCH AS PROTEST AND STRIKE, TO PRESSURE THE GOVERNMENT FOR REAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MU AGREEMENT

"Some of the art institutions we meet need us to have a more driving attitude," says Katarina Jönsson Norling, "because then they can point to our demands when they talk to their politicians."[19]

Visions for the future

Over six years since the introduction of the MU Agreement, it is reasonable to ask whether the agreement will ever reach a higher level of implementation than today. A drastic change would need to occur for it to do so. One possibility would be that the red-green government would move from talk to action. Saying that the working conditions for visual artists is a central issue for the government doesn't help much, unless major changes of politics follow suit. Alice Bah Kuhnke, the Minister of Culture and Democracy, needs to decide whether art institutions supported by the state should be allowed to break the MU Agreement, or whether the current government wants to make a serious effort to turn the agreement into reality.

A first step would be to attach conditions to all government funding, regardless of direct support or funding that the regions distribute. The government must demand that public institutions do not abuse artists' rights. If violating the MU Agreement would have serious consequences, as it would have to break a similar agreement in any other sector, then the government could finally make state-run and regional art institutions fully implement the agreement. In order to turn the agreement into praxis also for the municipal and private art institutions, good examples set by these institutions could certainly be helpful. But it would also take something else, namely the transparency, knowledge and inspiration that initiatives such as Reko and the MU Campaign have and could provide.

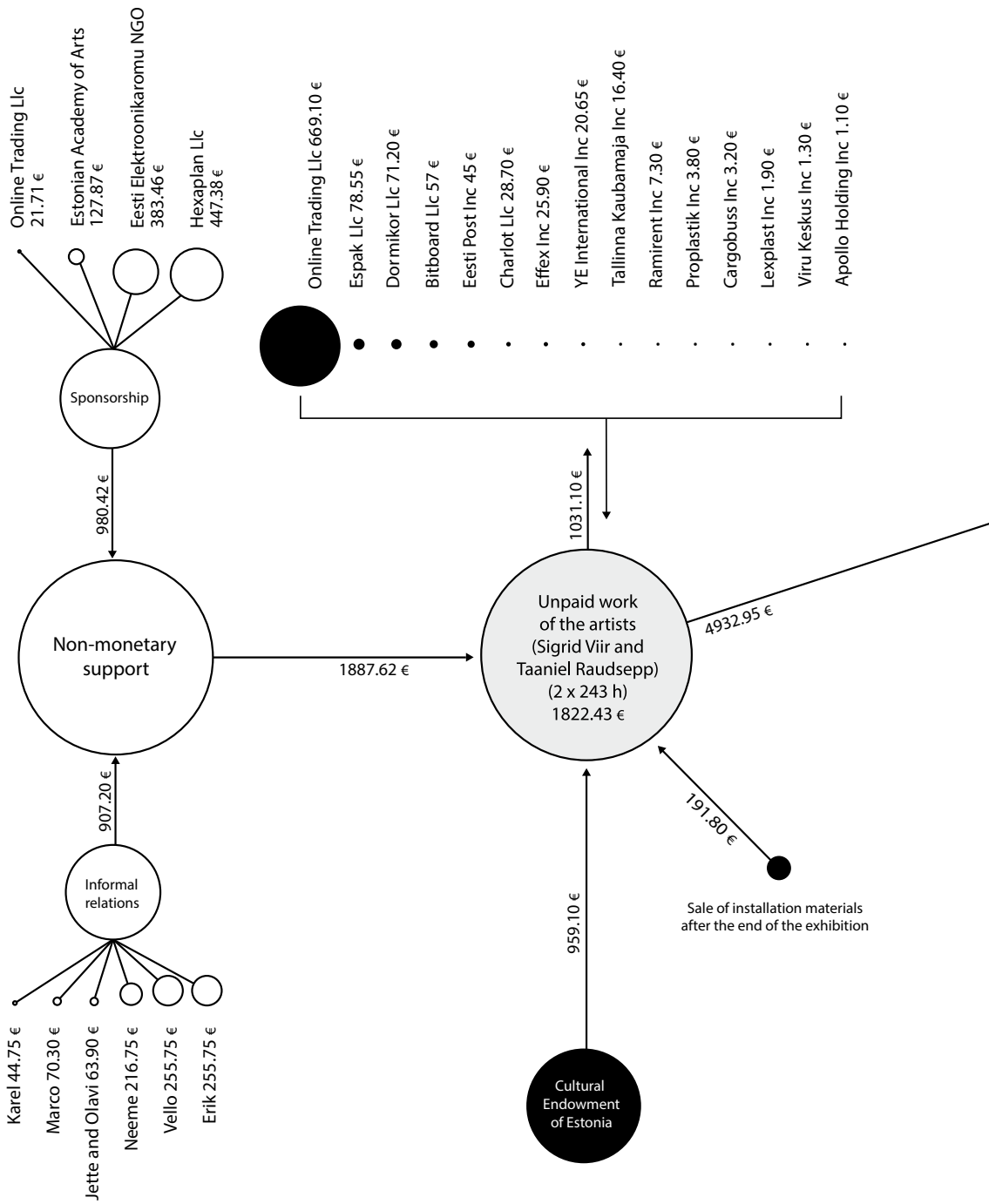
Hence this would be the second important step for the government, to understand the need of these kinds of initiatives and grant them long-term support – until the MU Agreement is fully implemented among all art institutions funded by public money. Given the current situation, and the disinterested politics that has led to this point, such an ambition sounds utopian and even slightly absurd. To put things in perspective, one would have to compare these art institutions to publicly funded institutions in other sectors. By doing this exercise, one notices that the absurdity is in the art sector – where the conditions are poorer than in any comparable sector, and the professionals have a uniquely weak position.

The third step would be to make sure that the institutions started paying artists reasonable participation fees. All expenses that the institution and artist have decided upon together must of course be reimbursed, and the work the artist does, that has been agreed with the institution, must get fully paid according to KRO/KIF's minimum hourly fee. This step either requires a revised MU Agreement, or it must be implemented by the state-run and funded institutions first, and, helped by transparency and information campaigns, turned into praxis also for municipal and private institutions.

If the government and the Arts Council want the agreement to be fully implemented, they need to set a deadline. The agreement was written in 2007 and introduced in January 2009, over six years ago. How many years should it take before the public art institutions acknowledge the MU Agreement and adapt their budgets to also include the artists? Ten years? Fifteen? This is something that the artists' organisations also need to think about. If nothing happens in one, two, three years, what would be the next step – what could the artists possibly do to improve the situation? Would massive protests, or even a strike, be feasible alternatives, or are Swedish artists not organised enough? Is this kind of solidarity an option?

There are signs that something is about to happen, both on the political level and within the artist community. The new red-green government is being challenged by conservative politicians to implement the MU Agreement fully. Alice Bah Kuhnke, the Minister of Culture and Democracy, hasn't picked up the ball yet, but the issue is out in the open. The Arts Council is apparently ready to promote new measures to forward the implementation of the MU Agreement, but they are waiting for orders from the government. A group of artists stands up against the Swedish embassy in Tokyo, and gets full support from KRO. The artists' organisations write debate articles and show a more fearless attitude in general. Individual artists voice their discontent and inspire others. Networking and exchanging knowledge across borders will make us even stronger in our struggle as an international artist community.

1. MU is an abbreviation of the Swedish words *medverkansersättning* (participation fee) and *utställningsersättning* (exhibition fee).
2. For the original version of the MU Agreement (2009) cf. Erik Krikortz, Jan Rydén and Tanja von Dahlern (eds.), Reko Report 2010 (Stockholm: c/o konst, 2010), pp. 49–61; available online at http://projektreko.org/downloads/Reko_Report_100803.pdf. For an updated version of the MU Agreement (2014) cf. http://kro.se/sites/default/files/mu_sv_150213.pdf (accessed 5 January 2015).
3. Erik Krikortz and Erik Hall (eds.), *Rekorapporten 2011* (Stockholm: c/o konst, 2011).
4. The Swedish Arts Council, "MU-avtalet – nulägesanalys och förslag till revidering," *Kulturrådets skriftserie* 2013:3, Stockholm.
5. The Swedish Agency for Cultural Policy Analysis, "Museer 2013," *Kulturfakta* 2014:1, Stockholm.
6. The Swedish Arts Council, "MU-avtalet – nulägesanalys och förslag till revidering," p. 14.
7. Reko is an old Swedish word that means fair, just or decent.
8. Katarina Jönsson Norling and Johan Wingestad, "Konstnärer måste få betalt," *SVT.se*, 12 December 2014, http://www.svt.se/opinion/konstarer-maste-fa-betalt (accessed 5 January 2015).
9. Cf. e.g. Madeleine Sjöstedt, "Det kanske är dags att tala med Reepalu?," *Svenska Dagbladet*, 7 October 2011, http://www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/det-kanske-ar-dags-att-tala-med-reepalu_6534165.svd (accessed 5 January 2015). Sjöstedt was until recently Stockholm's Vice Mayor responsible for culture.
10. Krikortz et al., *Rekorapporten 2011,* pp. 16–17.
11. Interview with Erik Åström by Erik Krikortz, 22 December 2014.
12. Interview with Katarina Jönsson Norling by Erik Krikortz, 16 December 2014.
13. Jönsson Norling et al., "Konstnärer måste få betalt."
14. Cecilia Magnusson, "Interpellation 2014/15:163 MU-avtalet," Swedish Parliament, 2014.
15. Alice Bah Kuhnke, speech at the interpellation debate at the Swedish Parliament, 8 December 2014, http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Debatter--beslut/Interpellationsdebatter1/Debatt/?did=H210163#/pos=11 (accessed 18 December 2014).
16. Interview with Erik Åström.
17. The Swedish Artists' National Organization, "Ansökan om stämning – utkast" (drafted plaint), 5 December 2014, http://www.kro.se/sites/default/files/stamningsansokan.pdf (accessed 5 January 2015).
18. The Swedish Artists' National Organization, "KRO stämmer staten för brott mot MU-avtalet," 5 December 2014, http://www.kro.se/node/218 (accessed 5 January 2015).
19. Interview with Katarina Jönsson Norling.



Budget outline of an exhibition project by Taaniel Raudsepp and Sigrid Viir. This graph was originally produced for a special insert that the art workers' movement in Estonia published in cultural newspaper *Sirp* in 2011.

Informal relations and sponsorship:
Help of friends, family members and acquaintances; borrowed materials and sponsorship. We thank: Sigrid's father Vello and Taaniel's brother Frank who helped us to install the exhibition, both 38 hours of unpaid work; fellow student Karel who helped us to film a video, 7 hours of unpaid work; Sigrid's friends Jette and Olavi who lent their car with a filled petrol tank; a colleague Neeme and professor Marco who lent their security cameras. Sponsorship: Hexaplan lent file cabinets, Online Trading gave a discount for building materials, Eesti Elektroonikaromu gave 20 monitors for free, Estonian Academy of Arts lent necessary technical equipment.

Unpaid work of the artists:
Calculated according to the average net income in 2010, including the period between May 2009 – October 2010: Developing the exhibition concept in order to apply for time-slot in Tallinn City Gallery (2 x 10 h), submitting the exhibition application to the gallery (2 x 5 h), submitting funding application to the Cultural Endowment of Estonia – we applied for 2308.60 € and were granted with 959.10 € (2 x 6 h), further development of the project idea (2 x 141 h), finding new ways to realise the project with allocated money (2 x 10 h), installing the exhibition (2 x 64 h), de–installing the exhibition (2 x 5 h), final report to the Cultural Endowment of Estonia (1 x 4 h).

Money

www.taanielraudsepp.net/koridor

MINNA HENRIKSSON

Gallery Rent Model: Owner-Tenant Relations in Exhibiting

During the recent years in Sweden, one of the major issues discussed regarding artists' conditions has been the MU Agreement, which guarantees payment to the artists for the work done in the framework of exhibitions. This is not just an exhibition fee, but also an hourly pay for all work that the exhibition requires. In this model an artist working for an exhibition is regarded momentarily as yet another paid worker in the art institution. Of course, a totally different question is whether the agreement is being followed according to the rules, or to which art institutions this agreement even applies to. These questions have been interestingly mapped by the Reko collective and are discussed by Erik Krikortz in this publication.

In Finland, however, a similar regulation does not exist, and the situation is quite the contrary. In this contribution I include interviews with active freelance artists in the field, Elina Juopperi, Jussi Kivi, Raakel Kuukka and Marge Monko, as well as a diagram-drawing made on the basis of discussions with artist Minna Heikinaho and artist/freelance curator Jussi Koitela. My aim is to describe the problematics of the situation, whereby making an exhibition can be an enormous economic burden for the artists themselves. I will try to propose ideas how the practice should be changed in order to improve the precarious living and working conditions of artists and art workers. I do acknowledge that in these times of budget cuts of art and culture, any critique toward the structures of art is extremely risky: it can be used as an excuse to transform the existing institutions – which can be seen as remains of social democracy – into neoliberal creative hubs and clusters. In the scenario desired by the advocates of neoliberalism, public funding is reduced to the barest minimum, and strategies of the corporate world are adopted as a necessary precondition for the existence of cultural institutions. Thus, in these risky times, we have to acknowledge the good sides of the present structures, and try to do our fullest to improve them even further. This is my aim in this contribution.

The way of Finland

Traditionally Finland and Sweden have shared many characteristics of the famous Nordic Social Democratic Welfare structure that has been developed since the World War II. Ever since the mid-1990s, this model has been thrown into question and dismantled bit by bit; in fact, some argue that the paving of the road toward increasing privatisation already started in the 1970s. Nevertheless, the reputation of Finland and Sweden, as well as other Nordic countries, as countries with highly equalising social security still remains. Many people, including many artists, think that this is still the case. In Finland, the freedom of art is declared in the very constitution, which states that sufficient material conditions must be guaranteed for practising art professionals. However, art policy researcher Pauli Rautiainen explained to me in a private conversation that in 2008 private funding for individual artists surpassed the amount of public funding in Finland.[1] After having steadily grown since the World War II, public cultural funding in Finland began its first decrease in 2014. This means that private money, which is usually invested in equities, has become more significant than the public. Whereas private money is gaining more dominance in cultural funding, public money is gradually becoming complementary to that. We can only hope that private funders, who rely on profits from the capitalist system and don't have any obligation to support independent or experimental forms of art, do not get bored with it or move their support somewhere else. It is also a matter of hope that the private funding would respect some basic principles of "democracy" in terms of distribution mechanisms, not privileging only certain disciplines, contents, institutions, or even ethnicity, gender or age groups of artists who receive funding.

In Finland, the situation regarding artists' income is, and has been, less prosperous than in the other Nordic countries. According to the research by Tarja Cronberg, artists in Finland have less income than their colleagues and peers in other Nordic countries: the grant system is remarkably weaker, lacking for example long-term grants.[2] In Norway and Denmark, there is an "income guarantee," which secures a certain level of income to artists who are granted with this guarantee. In Sweden, a similar principle was also practised until the previous centre-right government abolished it, and channelled the funds into multi-year working grants instead. However, in Sweden, there are still some older artists, who have an income guarantee.

Proposals for artist salary and income levelling programme were also discussed in Finland during the 1970s, but the Oil Crisis of the 1980s halted the discussion. As a compromise, 15-year grants were introduced in Finland in 1982. However, they didn't even survive the first grant cycle — during the recession in 1994, the Finnish Parliament decided to put an end to the long-term grants of such duration. The decision was mainly justified with the argument that artists' work needs to be re-evaluated regularly, while 15 years of steady income is too long period away from control. It

was also claimed that long-term grants can result in unproductive activities, or even alcoholism.

Currently, the longest artist grant in Finland is limited to the period of 5 years. A renowned artist can also be granted with an artist pension. This so-called "extra artist pension" is granted by the Ministry of Education and Culture upon the recommendation of Arts Promotion Centre Finland. In 2014, it was given to 59 persons (from all disciplines), whereas the number of applicants was 492. According to a report by Kaija Rensujeff, published by the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, visual artists had the lowest annual average income within the arts sector in 2010: it was 16 000 euros, out of which 8 000 was grant income.[3]

When public institutions exhibit the work of an artist in Finland, they pay a copyright fee. The fees are collected by Kuvasto, the Finnish Visual Artists' Copyright Association, and distributed to the artists in annual instalments. Very often the Kuvasto fee is confused for an artist fee by the museum representatives. However, the Kuvasto fee is clearly a copyright fee for each public use of an image or artwork, but not the remuneration for the work done. Furthermore, it is quite a small fee, and comes very late, so it hardly counts as wage.

Kuvasto rates for exhibition fees in 2014:	
Performance	231 €/performance
Installation	116 €/work made in a given room or space, not solid, also land art
Video, CD-ROM	116 €/piece
Sculpture, painting, photograph	58 €/piece
Drawing, graphic print	58 €/piece
Medals	23 €/piece
The fee relates to an exhibition duration of 30 days, calculated according to the time when the exhibition was open for public. When the exhibition time is extended, the rate raises in the following way:	
Until 60 days	20% addition
Until 90 days	50% addition
Until 120 days	100% addition
When the same artist has many works in the exhibition, the exhibition fee is determined as follows:	
Minimum fee	116 €/artist
Maximum fee	1 575 €/artist

Currently the Artists' Association of Finland and the Finnish Association of Designers Ornamo are lobbying for an equivalent of the Swedish MU Agreement in Finland. In their announcement, the Artists' Association

of Finland stated that in 2012, 447 exhibitions took place in the 55 art museums of Finland, but Kuvasto fees paid to artists during that year were only 107 306 euros in total.[4] That sums up to the average of 240 euros of Kuvasto fees paid per exhibition, or to calculate it another way, of 1 951 euros of fees paid per museum during the entire year.

The situation of artists in Finland becomes even more peculiar and precarious when the gallery-rent issue is considered. In Finland, it is customary that artists and other freelance art workers are not only working without payment, while contributing to the programme of art institutions, but they even pay for it from their own pocket. Most of the contemporary non-profit art spaces in Helsinki charge rent for exhibiting. Almost all spaces, other than museums or commercial galleries function with this logic. The rent starts from 200 euros in small artist-run spaces, and can reach ten thousands euros in the bigger spaces, such as Kunsthalle Helsinki. For more details about the costs related to exhibiting in the Kunsthalle, see interview with Raakel Kuukka.

Commercial galleries in Finland do not charge rent from artists who are exhibiting. A commercial gallery in this case refers to a space, where an artist is invited to exhibit. It also often entails an ongoing relationship and long-term commitment between the artist and the gallery: the gallery represents the artist, actively aims to sell their work, and takes a certain percentage of all sales, also including the works sold from the artist's studio. The commercial gallery scene in Helsinki is very small, and the ones that somehow manage to run a profitable business can be counted on one hand. The art market is nearly non-existent and museums don't have many possibilities to collect. As far as I know, there are no public or private collectors in Finland who would have a substantial impact on the income of artists. However, Frame Visual Art Finland, an organisation that used to fund the participation of Finnish artists in important international art exhibitions, now seems to be thinking that commercialisation is the solution to problems related to artists' income. After suffering from serious budget cuts during the recent process of restructuring, Frame's primary interest now appears to be oriented at promoting Finnish galleries in international art fairs.

History behind the gallery rent

The first artist-run gallery in Helsinki was Cheap Thrills, which was run by a group of artists known as Elonkorjaajat (The Harvesters) from 1970 to 1977. The gallery was in the very south of Helsinki in a jugend-style house in Huvilakatu. During its seven years of existence, it hosted some 70 exhibitions. Among the artists exhibiting there were for example Per Kirkeby, Douglas Huebler, H. G. Fagerholm, and Olli Lyytikäinen (his first four exhibitions were in Cheap Thrills and they were each sold out). According to one member of the Harvesters, artist and art critic Jan Olof Mallander, Cheap Thrills already functioned with a sort of artist-pays logic. However, the rent was very low,

and the artists could pay it with an artwork if they didn't have money for rent. Mallander was himself living in the back room of the gallery and paid half of the rent, 200 FIM (approx. 33 euros) out of 400 FIM (approx. 66 euros). There was a sort of arte povera or fluxus attitude present, as he describes it. Mallander remembers that he once sold *London Knees*, a multiple piece by Claes Oldenburg that he owned, to the State Art Museum Ateneum in order to cover for the unpaid rent at Cheap Thrills for an entire year. This sort of flexibility in paying rent was possible, in the words of Mallander, largely due to love for art by the "civilised and humane" property owner.[5]

As I understand it, having talked with several art workers active in the field in the 1980s and 1990s, the gallery rent policy started as a kind of democratisation of the scene. Artists were fed up with the elitism of the big institutions which would only work with their favourite artists. For others there were not many opportunities to present their work. In the 1990s, artists in Finland still needed to collect points by making exhibitions in certain approved places and participating in particular annual exhibitions which were considered eligible for the ranking system. A certain amount of points opened the doors to membership in the artists' associations. It also guaranteed entry in the respected artist directory *taiteilijamatrikkeli* which functioned as a status indicator. The ranking system with its connected privileges used to be the mechanism of measuring professionalism in art. Needless to say, professionalism is a precondition for getting grants.

Thus, artists who were left out of the system, or who just did not want to follow the institutionalised path, founded their own spaces, where they could show their work independently from big institutions. Hannu Rinne writes in *Taide* (3/1995) about the founding of interdisciplinary artists' association MUU ry in 1987, summing up the purpose for the association: "most important was to create collective spirit and to give home to homeless artists, whose artworks were not necessarily even understood as art. [...] The [MUU] gallery commenced with a series of changing exhibitions and the idea was to operate as spontaneously as possible, without heavy mechanism of selection committee."[6] Thus, starting one's own gallery was also seen as a possibility to act more spontaneously. Initially, the rent was often low in these spaces, but has gradually climbed up hand-in-hand with the gentrification of "artistic" neighbourhoods. Forum Box is one of the oldest artist-run galleries that still exist in Helsinki. It was founded in 1996 as a non-profit space and co-operative for free art of all kinds, with the goal to promote Finnish cultural life. Artist Pekka Niskanen remembers in a Facebook post that during the 1990s, when the Interdisciplinary Artists' Association MUU ry's gallery was at Rikhardinkatu, the associated artists didn't need to pay rent for the space.[7] At that time, also a printed newsletter was produced. Nowadays MUU ry has two exhibition spaces, and in both they charge rent from artists. Also they co-host an art fair together with the Union of Artist Photographers, where artists pay 20 euros participation fee, and the organisers charge 30% commission of sales.

The exhibition spaces of the artists' associations as well as the independent artist-run spaces usually cover their rent expenses by charging it from artists who exhibit. Pauli Rautiainen explains the "twisted role" of the gallery rent system from the perspective of artists as a mechanism of building merit rather than selling.[8] When earlier the purpose was to collect points, more recently it has been to invest in one's career, hoping to find financial compensation for it one day. It is a vicious circle: artists need to exhibit to be able to receive grants, and they need grants in order to exhibit.

There is no doubt that running a gallery space at a prestigious address in the city centre of Helsinki takes a lot of resources, as property prices are high. All artists' associations have their gallery spaces in the very centre of Helsinki. They all function according to this logic, despite getting public funding. There also appears to be no reflection about the obvious contradiction that some of those associations define their purpose in terms of defending the professional, economic and social interests of their members. I argue that this bad policy introduced by the artists' associations has been uncritically adopted by many new artist-run spaces which mostly also charge rent from the exhibiting artists.

Some bad examples

In Finland there are five artists' associations: the Association of Finnish Sculptors, the Union of Artist Photographers, the Interdisciplinary Artists' Association MUU, the Association of Finnish Printmakers and the Finnish Painters' Union, which are all members in the umbrella organisation the Artists' Association of Finland. The artists' associations' galleries accept exhibition proposals usually twice a year, and the prices are lower for members than for others.

Prices of galleries run by artists' associations (December 2014):		
Gallery Sculptor	3 weeks	3 150 € (members 2 750 €) + 35 % provision of sales
Gallery Hippolyte	4 weeks	2 700 € (members 2 300 €)
Hippolyte Studio	4 weeks	660 €
Gallery MUU, entire gallery (front space and studio)	6 weeks	2 280 € (members 1 995 €)
Gallery MUU, front space	6 weeks	1 915 € (members 1 680 €)
Gallery MUU, studio	6 weeks	840 € (members 735 €)
Gallery MUU, Cable Factory	6 weeks	650 € (members 500 €)
TM-gallery	3 weeks	1 886 € (members 1 550 €)

The TM-gallery rent is conditional, and the lowest price compared to other galleries listed here is dependent on the state grant toward the rent costs. If funding is not granted, the rent is 2900 euros for members and 3236 euros for non-members. The argument that TM-gallery would need to raise the rent price in case their application for the state grant should be denied, can be understood as a strategic pressure that aims to secure the continuation of received support.

The Printmakers' gallery stresses in their rent conditions that a possible increase in rent prices during the exhibition period will be added to the rent price charged from the artists. Furthermore, in case that the activities of the Association of Finnish Printmakers become VAT eligible, the VAT is added to the rent price. This signals a direct equivalence between the total rent expenses of the gallery and the amount that is charged from artists. It also indicates the attitude of refusing to carry any financial risk, while transferring all uncertainties to individual artists.

It is interesting that when lobbying for the equivalent of the MU Agreement in Finland, the Artists' Association of Finland and the Finnish Association of Designers Ornamo are not mentioning the gallery-rent issue. One cannot help but wonder whether they see the link between these two issues — how is it possible to introduce an artist fee for exhibitions in a situation where artists are paying rent? Of course, Ornamo and the Artists' Association of Finland are calling for artist fees in the context of exhibitions in publicly funded institutions only. However, the artists' associations do receive direct annual (discretionary) funding from the state, and at the same time they charge rent from artists. In these cases, would the artist fee of several hundred euros then be reduced from the rent price of thousands? It is also questionable whether such scenario wouldn't just increase the gap between the big institutions, where artists usually do not need to pay rent anyhow, and the small initiatives, where most often artists pay rent. Wouldn't this gap be reinforced even more, when there is a fee for making exhibitions in big institutions, but the small spaces would still continue to charge rent? It is interesting to note that artist-members of the Finnish Association of Designers Ornamo have recently founded a small 28 m^2 gallery space on the "gallery street," the Uudenmaankatu in Helsinki. The O gallery (of artists from Ornamo) was opened in May 2014, around the same time when the discussion about the necessity of the MU Agreement was launched in Finland. It charges 1100 euros from artists for three weeks (no provision of sales is taken). The use of the gallery space is limited exclusively for the members of Ornamo or other artists' associations.

Jussi Koitela, artist and freelance curator, wrote about the problem of gallery rent in the *Mustekala* internet magazine[9], where he noted that the recently opened gallery spaces run by artists' associations (such as the above-mentioned MUU ry and the Union of Finnish Art Associations) are also operating with the same logic of "artist pays," and thus, do not even attempt to change the policy. Koitela also pointed out that the galleries

presenting mainly Finnish art in Berlin, Gallery Pleiku and Gallery Suomesta (the name of the gallery contains a cute word play in Finnish language: *suomesta* can mean both "the swamp place" and "from Finland"), also charge rent from artists. These spaces do not mention the prices on their website. In the online discussion following Koitela's well-articulated and provocative text in *Mustekala*, the people running Suomesta clarified that in fact they are not charging rent, but a participation fee. Koitela concludes that although operating outside of the borders of Finland, these two galleries remain part of the extended Finnish art scene rather than the international one — not only because they are clearly focused on presenting art practices from Finland, but also because artists from elsewhere would not agree to pay rent for making an exhibition.

Prices of some independent artist-run and co-operative organised galleries in Helsinki (December 2014):			
Myymälä2 gallery	815 € / month (exhibitions are for 3 or 4 weeks)[10]		
Forum Box, whole space	4 weeks	4 200 €	1/3 of space 1 550 €, 30% provision taken for sales (+ 24% VAT)
Huuto! gallery Uudenmaankatu	3 weeks	1 450 €	
Huuto! gallery Jätkäsaari 1	3 weeks	1 350 €	
Huuto! gallery Jätkäsaari 2	3 weeks	1 350 €	
Huuto! Jätkäsaari Kulmio	3 weeks	400 €	

On top of the gallery rent, the rental costs of audio-visual display equipment are often not included in the deal with the gallery. Art spaces prefer not to own much equipment, because the digital technology develops very fast and the equipment gets outdated in a speedy manner. Thus, artists are often required to supply the necessary equipment. In addition, some galleries have a rule (or at least a preference) that the equipment must be of the best quality, the latest technology and ultimate professionalism, which is provided by, the one and only, Pro Av Saarikko. Therefore, part of the public grant money for exhibition practice is likely to end up in the pocket of one private business. A few years ago, AVEK (The Promotion Centre for Audiovisual Culture) opened their eyes about this situation and stopped covering the expenses of equipment rent in galleries through their grants. They now try to pressure the galleries into buying their own in-house equipment.

Alongside these expenses, there can be the additional costs of printing and posting exhibition cards, or in relation to the opening expenses. In some spaces the artist needs to invigilate the exhibition, at least partly. Some spaces even require a professional translation of the press release in Finnish, Swedish and English. The artist pays!

It is needless to say that when exhibition spaces charge rent from the artists, they do not pay an honorarium to the artists. Thus, the artist needs to find grants not only for all the production and exhibition costs of their artwork, but also for the remuneration of their own working time. In the ideal situation this happens, in reality rarely.

Museums are a safer choice for exhibiting in Finland. Even if they are not always paying artist fees, they at least are not charging rent from exhibiting artists. Museums often follow some kind of artist fee principle, but usually there is no standard fee, as it depends on the overall budget. Sometimes it is only a Kuvasto fee, while on other occasions it is also a proper artist fee. But even if things look nice on paper, it is not always guaranteed that the fee reaches the artist. I can bring a personal example from the Oulu Art Museum, where I participated in a group exhibition in August 2013. For this exhibition, artists were asked to make new works for the public space within the park surrounding the museum. A fee of 1 200 euros was promised in the contract for the new site-specific work, which, from my experience, is quite generous in the Finnish context. Months later, when the work preparations were under way, the curator of the exhibition mentioned passingly in an email that the fee is also supposed to cover all material expenses that exceed the 500 euros that had been budgeted for each work by the museum. This meant that we were expected to use our artist fee to cover the production costs of temporary artworks in an outdoor exhibition which is vulnerable to vandalism and to the rainy weather conditions of autumn months. Most likely there would not be much left of these artworks after the exhibition closes – neither to be exhibited again, nor to be sold.

In recent years, I have also heard of cases when museums announce an open call for exhibition participation, such as the young artists' biennial. However, because open calls impose that artists offer their work by themselves, museums often reason that they are not obliged to pay the usual artist fees or Kuvasto fees in such cases. There might even be a small submission fee for project proposals, and no production budget offered. At the same time, the museum might charge an entry fee from the audiences viewing the artworks, and profit with it. For more reflections about the experiences of exhibiting in museums, see interviews with Elina Juopperi and Jussi Kivi.

The gallery rent model, as it is practised in Finland, is unknown in most of the Nordic and European countries, and I suspect in the rest of the world too. However, it has been well-established also in Estonia. The gallery rent prices in Estonia are more modest, but so are the rental prices in general, as well as the wages and the volume of cultural support. The impact on the art scene has been probably just as severe as in Finland. However, the situation in Estonia has recently changed quite significantly in regard to this issue. In the beginning of 2014, the Ministry of Culture introduced a new rule which prohibits galleries to take rent from artists, in case they receive (limited) support from the specific funding scheme, the "gallery programme" of the Ministry. This affected primarily the galleries of the Artists' Association,

forcing them to apply for additional rent money directly from the Cultural Endowment. Until then, the task of fund-raising for supplementary rent costs had been delegated to artists. It was eventually agreed between the Ministry of Culture and the Cultural Endowment that the rent money is granted directly to exhibition spaces, instead of circulating it through artists. Thus, the galleries did receive the funding for rent after all, but the administrative work and stress for artists was reduced. Artists still apply for support from the Cultural Endowment for production costs and working grants, but the rent of the gallery space is no longer their direct concern. Perhaps this kind of redirection of the cultural money circulation could also become possible in Finland, if attitudes were changed. In the summer of 2014, I interviewed Estonian artist Marge Monko, currently living in Ghent, about the principles of gallery rent policy in Estonia. See interview with Marge Monko.

Good examples & exceptions in Helsinki

Sinne gallery, run and completely supported by Pro Artibus Foundation, an independent organisation affiliated with the Foundation for Swedish Culture in Finland, previously charged a low rent for the exhibition space (up to 600 euros in a large and beautiful, recently renovated space). In recent years, the gallery has become increasingly active also in producing exhibition projects with international artists, while the remaining exhibition slots are distributed with an annual open application call. The practice of charging rent from the artists who are included in the programme through the open application call (mostly local), but not from the invited guest artists (mostly from abroad), became an obvious contradiction. Hence, from the start of 2014, Sinne gallery stopped charging rent from artists, aiming to give a good example to other spaces as well. Now they are hoping to be able to pay a fee to artists instead.

Helsinki City Art Museum has been running Kluuvi gallery in the city centre of Helsinki. Kluuvi has been located in beautiful premises specifically designed for displaying artworks since 1968, but on the decision of the Helsinki City Art Museum Board, the gallery will be moved within the expanded Helsinki City Art Museum in autumn 2015. The website of the Helsinki City Art Museum states that Kluuvi gallery "focuses on experimental and non-commercial works of Finnish artists, offering opportunities to projects, which would be difficult to realise elsewhere in Helsinki." There has been an obvious conflict with their exhibition policy and the fact that they charge rent from these non-commercially operating experimental (usually younger generation) artists, even if the museum has considered the rent price as modest: "The City of Helsinki sponsors the gallery financially by charging a very low lease and taking no sales commission." The rent price in the Kluuvi gallery has been 505 euros for 3 weeks (incl. 24% VAT). Compared with the total

annual revenues of the Helsinki City Art Museum, approximately 600000 euros, the rent policy in the Kluuvi gallery seems to have been a matter of principle rather than a serious contribution to the budget. Anyhow, now that Kluuvi gallery is moving to the new location within the premises of the museum's main venue, they will stop charging rent from artists.

To mention a few other good examples, I would like to point out some smaller organisations which are much more precarious than big museums or galleries run by foundations. Artist-run galleries SIC, Oksasenkatu 11 and the Third Space are among those spaces which have a clear position against charging rent from artists and would rather close the gallery than ask artists to pay for it. To elaborate through these examples, SIC gallery has developed an international "high quality" exhibition programme and has become a venue for some of Kiasma's side-projects. It has also been quite lucky with receiving significant grants from private foundations. Previously they received an annual grant of 35000 euros in two successive years from the Finnish Cultural Foundation, and for 2015 they have a grant of 50000 euros from the Kone Foundation. The Kone grant enables them not only to pay rent and realise their programme, but also to hire an executive director for the gallery. Less secure, perhaps, is their location, which is currently in an old storage building near Länsisatama harbour, next door to the construction site of a new hotel. Similarly to SIC gallery, the artist-run Sorbus gallery, which is also located in an area of the city that is currently transforming, received 34260 euros support from the Kone Foundation in 2015 for the project titled *Opening the Gallery Scene of Helsinki for New and International Artists – Gallery in Vaasankatu That is Free for Artists.*

Oksasenkatu 11 gallery is an artist-run space located in Töölö neighbourhood which is a bit more remote from the interests of the city developers than SIC and Sorbus. It is in the same location and premises as the legendary Kuumola gallery that also did not charge rent from the artists. In Oksasenkatu 11 the rent is quite low, and when there are no grants to cover the amount, the group of initiators would pay it collectively. A minus point at Oksasenkatu 11, however, is that the artists themselves need to sit in the gallery during the opening hours, although those hours can be freely defined by the artist. Another collectively organised and funded space is the Third Space at Viisikulma in Punavuori neighbourhood. The small space manages with low means. In the absence of grants, the people involved share the rental costs, including internet and water. Most of the people running the space are students of Aalto University, so they can borrow equipment from the university. The programme of the Third Space is very discursive and more event-focused than in many other spaces. Curator Ahmed Al-Nawas from the Third Space wrote to me in an email: "We have applied for a fund to pay the rent last year, but nothing. Next year we hope we would get something at least to pay the rent. But let's see. It seems that in order to get funding as a gallery here, we are forced to become an institution."[11]

Impact on the scene

The consequences of the gallery rent policy on the art scene are highly negative, as elaborated below in following points.

First, the artist takes an economic risk when committing to make an exhibition. There is a long process between the first step of submitting an application to the exhibition space and the final stage of realising the exhibition – usually it takes one or two years. During this time, the artist has to fund-raise for all the expenses, including the gallery rent, while at the same time making artworks for the exhibition. This atmosphere is far from encouraging experimentation, because the economic risk and pressure is constantly looming in the background of creative work. In a private conversation with a representative of one of the artists' association galleries, I was told that 90% of artists receive an exhibition grant which covers the gallery rent. But how do the remaining 10% cover the rent costs? And even for those 90%, is there anything left from the grant to cover the production costs and other expenses in addition to the rent amount?

Secondly, the artist, by accepting the exhibition time that they initially applied for and thus committing to the exhibition, is likely to end up in a situation of complete self-exploitation. The most pressing expense to be covered becomes the gallery rent. In the lack of funding, other costs are avoided by working for free, asking friends to help out, borrowing items, reducing the quality of the materials, and possibly even taking a bank loan.

Thirdly, the relationship between the artist and the gallery staff is regulated by a contract which offers a strict definition of what the gallery provides and what is the responsibility of the artist. In these negotiations and transactions, there is rarely space for discussion about the content of the exhibition. Often it is not seen as appropriate from the side of the gallery to do so, as the space is essentially being bought by the artist (see interview with Raakel Kuukka). The gallery staff provides certain services, and the artist takes care of the artwork, including writing the press release and theorising the work. Although many of these spaces are artist-run, the relations have professionalised to such an extent that there is not any curatorial content-related collaboration. It resembles more a relationship between the tenant and the landlord.

Fourth, the gallery rent policy is harmful for the galleries due to the simple fact that it is impossible to have a curated program, an exhibition policy, or a high quality programme, when you cannot invite artists and projects, but you just have to select from those applicants who are ready, willing and able to pay the rent. With this system it is impossible to organise exhibitions of artists from other countries where the artist-pays model is not practised. No-one is so desperate to exhibit in Finland that they would pay for it, when they can do it for free elsewhere.

Fifth, the grant givers have total power over the art scene. They not only decide which artist is getting living and production grants, but they also decide whose exhibition project is worth the support for the gallery rent.

If the gallery staff were able to exercise curatorial tasks by actively looking for new interesting productions in the scene, for example by visiting artist studios, and inviting selected artists to the spaces, the grant givers would not have the sole power of determining whose work deserves to be shown. This would undoubtedly make the art scene livelier and bring content-related discussions into it.

Lastly *sixth*, the atmosphere with the gallery rent system is not encouraging experiments. Rather than that, it pushes artists to make conventional exhibitions. It motivates the production of artworks that artists hope to sell, in order to get the invested money back at the end of the process. This even takes place in a context where the art market is almost non-existent, and where the galleries which charge rent are usually rather passive regarding selling of works from exhibitions. Moreover, the artists' dependency on grant givers inevitably influences the content of artworks as well. I would argue that it encourages forms of non-political, non-harmful, instrumental, bureaucratic and nationalist art. The gallery rent model is in conflict with the arms-length principle, where the specialists on the field are supposed to decide on the content instead of the funders.

What could be done?

One of the biggest headaches for any art organisation in Finland is that there is not enough support given to art spaces as general funding for their core functions. Instead, the cultural support is mostly given as short-term, project-based funding, ear-marked for a specific purpose. The distribution principles of cultural funding often exclude the possibility of investing it in the "walls" (i.e. the maintenance of the art space itself), and the funding is often defined by a theme, duration, medium, geographic focus, expected goals, public impact, etc. *The public funds should contribute to the general functioning of the organisations, and more precisely, directly to the rent of the spaces, so that the system of gallery rent, which exploits the artists and destroys the art scene, would become defunct.* This would leave it up to the organisations themselves to decide what kind of programme they want to realise, instead of trying to respond to the wishes of the funders.

Another option, of course, is to become more inventive in terms of finding exhibition spaces. Artists could *abandon the expensive galleries and go for alternative spaces,* such as temporarily empty shop fronts, private apartments or artist studios, public spaces, etc. However, there are several arguments against this: even in the galleries, which are in the very centre of the cities, the audiences tend to be small, often dominated by other art practitioners from the scene. Moving away from the centre is likely to make the scarce connection with general audiences even worse. The position of artists in the society is anyway very marginal, and when pushed to the outskirts of the city, it is likely to become even more so. Also, artist's work can be very solitary, and for many, the galleries are the contact zones with different publics and colleagues.

From a more critical perspective, it should also be acknowledged that artists are often motors of gentrification, taking over new spaces in the cheap areas of the cities. They help to transform areas of the city which were previously undesired. By turning these uncool areas into the "boheme," artists trigger a domino effect of rising rent prices which first forces the poorer population to move out. Eventually, once the process of gentrification is under way, the artists cannot afford to stay in these areas either.

The gallery-rent issue has been discussed quite a lot locally in Finland, but without much concrete solutions emerging from the debate. One contribution to this discussion was made by a group of students from the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki, as an outcome of a course which I was running together with Irmeli Kokko in spring 2013. In response to the suggestion by the director of the Arts Promotion Centre Finland, the students drafted a proposal to this funding body, recommending to conduct thorough research on the structural problems in the visual arts field and to develop the grant system in accordance with the various organisations operating in the scene. The proposal was very well drafted and expressed strong arguments, many of which are repeated in this text. As far as I and the students know, however, there has not been any response to this proposal whatsoever.

Many artists have addressed the issue of gallery rent. One of them was Susana Nevado who declared a "one-woman protest" against exhibiting in galleries where the artist needs to pay rent. This was written about, at least, in the *Turun Sanomat*, a local newspaper in Turku.[12] In discussion with Minna Heikinaho and Jussi Koitela (see the diagram in the end of this contribution) one of the conclusions was that young artists do not accept the artist-pays policy any more. The artists from younger generations do not necessarily relate to the galleries in Finland, but they see their work career as international. For them it is rather irrelevant how the rental galleries in Finland function.

I see it as a problem that critical discussions about art policy often take place in the semi-private contexts of social media, such as Facebook. The readership on social media is limited and old discussions disappear under the mass of new information after a while. The discussions are momentary and limited to a small circle, not addressing the ones who would have the power to change things. They do not have any official status or actual weight, operating more in the register of rumour. This is what happened to the discussion that followed the writing by Jussi Koitela in the *Mustekala* internet magazine, which started as public commenting in the *Mustekala* website. Furthermore, since the *Mustekala* website was redesigned, the comments to Jussi Koitela's writing in the *Mustekala* website are not visible any more.

Elina Juopperi is calling for more "synergy" between artists and institutions on the art scene. She says that "we should work together with the institutions for common aims, to put pressure on politicians, as we have the same goal and aim."[13] She also proposes that "the state grants should not be given any more to artists for exhibiting (private foundations do what they like anyway): not to museum exhibitions and not in gallery/rental spaces.

Instead state grants should be given to artists only for production costs and living expenses."[14] This is what was done in Estonia from the start of 2014, and it seems that it is working out just fine. Nevertheless, it is too early to estimate the influence on the programme of these galleries.

It seems that there are (at least) two registers that the art scene is constructed of, and which exist independently from each other. One of them is about doing artwork and getting the work to be shown to others. The other is related to participating in the value production of the institution and prestige. The rent policy in Finland apparently came about in reaction to the second one, out of the need to democratise the field. Should it be a rule (a bit like in the MU Agreement of Sweden or now in Estonia) *that organisations which get state funding cannot charge rent from artists?* Is there a risk that this would create a hierarchy between different galleries, where the established galleries get their rent money covered, and have artists queuing wanting to show there; while the less respected ones (which could aim to be more grassroots, alternative and interesting) still have to charge rent from the artists, as they do not get enough financial support, and this is reflected in their programme with less artists wanting to pay for showing work there?

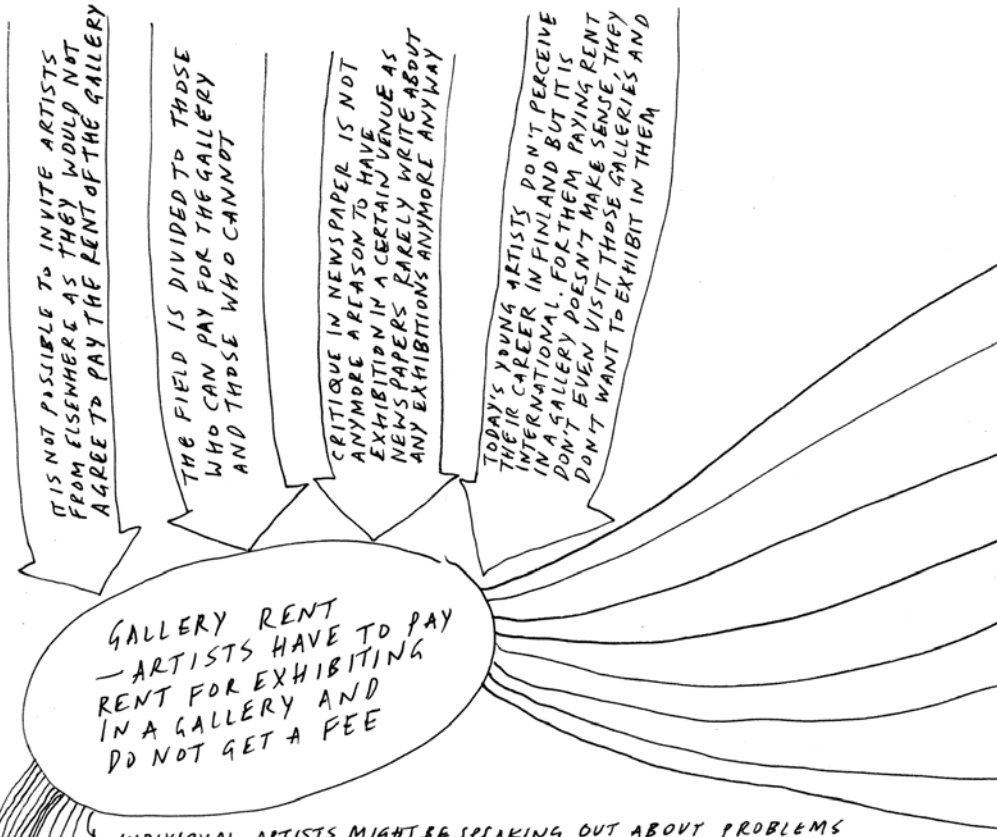
It is characteristic of the impact of neoliberalism in arts policy, that funding for some special individuals, the chosen geniuses, or the "crazy innovative ideas" is plentiful, and the rest of the scene lives in poverty. Similarly, there could emerge a hierarchy between the few selected galleries that get the support, and the rest, which do not get it. But one can also ask: isn't the whole art field constructed of similar hierarchies? The choices would become more visible and then we could perhaps begin to talk about them and about the principles that the funding of art spaces is based on.

In many ways, the current system is spreading "democratic poverty," where almost everyone faces the same costs equally. It is a paradox that it is the rent cost which is supposedly guaranteeing the democracy, as in fact some have more resources than others. If the decision about the programme selection was given completely to the galleries, and galleries were able to invite artists to exhibit, it would create more heterogeneity within the gallery field. In fact, more artists would get a chance to exhibit, even those who do not have the financial means, and who are not favoured by the grant givers. Also it would enable curated thematic programmes as well as other kind of discursive and thematic long-term programmes to be developed. Now the situation is such that the galleries are dependent on the exhibition proposals that they receive and they can only make selection within the constraints of the received applications. In other words, they have to choose from the pool of artists who are ready to pay, or to take on the task, and the risk, of trying to raise the rent money.

However, as the gallery rent policy change in Estonia proves, and the fact that the gallery rent is unknown to most art scenes, it is not so difficult to change the situation. Perhaps in the end it is a question of whether artists are in fact ready to hand over the power of decision making to the galleries and curators about who can exhibit and who cannot.

1. Private conversation with Pauli Rautiainen, 30 September 2014, Helsinki.
2. Tarja Cronberg, *Luova kasvu ja taiteilijan toimeentulo* (Helsinki: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriön työryhmämuistioita ja selvityksiä, 2010). [*Creative growth and artists' income*, Expert review by Dr Tarja Cronberg, Reports of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland, 2010].
3. Kaija Rensujeff, *Taiteilijan asema 2010* (Helsinki: Taiteen edistämiskeskus, 2014).
4. Announcement published by the Artists' Association of Finland, "Ruotsin MU-sopimus takaa kuvataiteilijalle korvauksen taiteellisesta työstä," 7 April 2014.
5. Phone conversation with Jan Olof Mallander, 16 June 2014.
6. Hannu Rinne, "Lyhyt historia: Ei muuta vaihtoehtoa," *Taide* 3/1995 [translation by Minna Henriksson].
7. Pekka Niskanen, Facebook post on Jussi Koitela's profile, 20 January 2014.
8. Pauli Rautiainen, "Suomalainen Taiteilijatuki: Historia, nykyisyys ja tulevaisuus kuvataiteen näkökulmasta," speech at Oulun taidemuseo, 4 February 2010.
9. Jussi Koitela, "Taiteilija maksaa? Kuratoinnin uhka ja muut pelot," *Mustekala*, 16 January 2014, http://www.mustekala.info/node/36031 (accessed 17 February 2015).
10. The rent in Myymälä2 gallery used to be 300 euros/week for artists. But now that there are increasingly more artist-run spaces not charging rent from artists, they are also forced to rethink their policy. The aim of the Myymälä2 gallery, where rent price is 1 240 euros/month (which is much higher than in many other artist-run spaces, such as Sorbus with 300 euros/month), is also to reach a situation with grant support, where artists are not charged the rent.
11. Personal email from Ahmed Al-Nawas, 26 November 2014.
12. "Kuvataiteilija Susana Nevado haluaa palkan työstään," *Turun Sanomat*, 23 May 2014.
13. Interview with Elina Juopperi, 6 August 2014.
14. Personal email from Elina Juopperi, 12 August 2014.

SITUATION REGARDING THE GALLERY RENT POLICY IN FINLAND AND WHAT COULD BE DONE TO CHANGE IT AS DISCUSSED WITH MINNA HEIKINAHO AND JUSSI KOITELA ON 23.JULY 2014 IN HELSINKI:



- INDIVIDUAL ARTISTS MIGHT BE SPEAKING OUT ABOUT PROBLEMS WITH THE ARTISTS' CONDITIONS, BUT THESE ARE NOT DISCUSSED BY THOSE WHO HAVE POWER
- UNIONS COMPETE WITH EACH OTHER FOR MANDATE, COMMON ISSUES ARE NOT IDENTIFIED
- ORGANISATIONS CANNOT DEAL CONSTRUCTIVELY WITH CRITICISM TOWARD THEIR PRACTICES
- ARTISTS ALWAYS FIND THE MONEY SOMEWHERE FOR EXHIBITING AS COMMITMENT TO OWN WORK IS TOTAL
- IN ORDER TO GET GRANTS YOU NEED TO HAVE EXHIBITIONS
- ART EDUCATION FEEDS THE IMAGE OF ARTIST AS EXHIBITION MAKER
- IN THE BOARDS OF ART ORGANISATIONS ARTISTS SOON TURN INTO BUREAUCRATS AND IT GETS BLURRED WHETHER IT IS THE VOICE OF THE FIELD THAT GETS REPRESENTED
- ARTISTS ARE SCARED OF LOSING THE POWER OVER DECISION ON WHO CAN HAVE EXHIBITION IN A GALLERY AND THEY RATHER PAY
- ART ORGANISATIONS ARE TIED TO PHYSICAL SPACES AND DO NOT SUPPORT DISCUSSION ABOUT ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF ART MAKING AND EXHIBITING
- THE RANKING METHOD OF THE EARLIER TIMES FOR MEMBERSHIP IN THE ARTISTS' UNION STILL INFLUENCES THE IDEA THAT IT IS IMPORTANT TO SHOW IN CERTAIN GALLERIES
- THERE IS NO VISION IN THE SCENE OF BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER FROM DIFFERENT FIELDS SO THAT EXHIBITING WOULD NOT JUST REMAIN A RITE OF THE ART SCENE STRENGTHENING THAT COMMUNITY AND ITS SEPARATION FROM OTHER FIELDS
- MAKING EXHIBITIONS CONNECTS WITH THE IDEA OF DEMOCRACY: LONGER DURATION EXHIBITIONS ARE MORE ACCESSIBLE THAN EVENTS, WHERE ONLY LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE COME.
- THE GALLERY-RENT SYSTEM SERVES THOSE ARTISTS, WHO NO LONGER ARE "AVANT-GARDE", TO THEM IT PROVIDES WITH A SAFE OPPORTUNITY TO CONTINUE WITH WORK. IT ALSO SERVES THE SEMI-AMATEURS

ARTISTS COULD BE GIVEN 1/2 YEAR GRANTS WHICH THEY COULD USE ANY WAY THEY WANT: TO HIRE A PRODUCER, TO PRODUCE WORK, FOR OWN FEES OR ANY OTHER PROJECT EXPENSES.

FUNDING SHOULD BE CONDITIONAL: IF YOU GET MONEY FROM THE STATE YOU CANNOT CHARGE RENT ANYMORE. ALSO THERE SHOULD BE VARIOUS DIFFERENT FUNDING CATEGORIES, ONE OF WHICH WOULD INCLUDE FREE-LANCE CURATORS, NOT NECESSARILY OF ARTIST SELECTION, BUT OF PROGRAMME OF IDEAS AND THOUGHTS. ALSO SOME FUNDING SHOULD BE SPECIFICALLY FOR INTERNATIONAL EXCHANGE PROGRAMME.

FUNDING TO GALLERIES SHOULD BE ORGANISED SO THAT THE GALLERY CAN PAY ITS RENT, PAY FOR PROGRAM AND PRODUCTION AS WELL AS A FEE TO ARTISTS. IT WOULD NOT NEED TO BE A PERMANENT SUPPORT, BUT COULD BE EVALUATED EVERY FEW YEARS AND POSSIBLY MOVED TO ANOTHER SPACE.

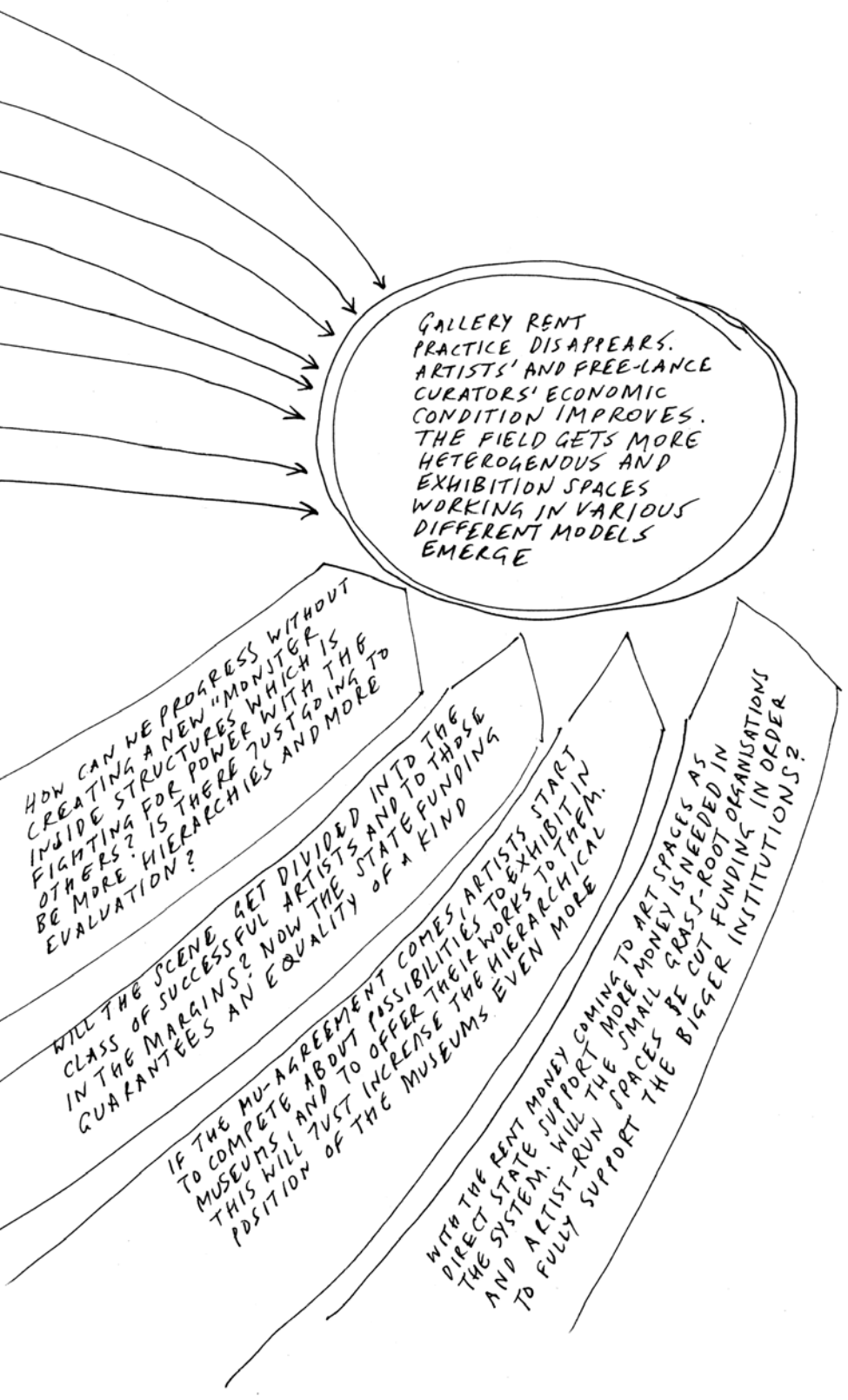
PROJECT GRANTS AND INTERNATIONAL EXPORT GRANTS SHOULD BE CHANNELED TO GALLERIES. A SPECIAL GRANT COULD BE AVAILABLE FOR SPACES WHICH WANT TO HAVE A DISCURSIVE PROGRAM.

THE RELATION BETWEEN MU-AGREEMENT AND KUVASTO SHOULD BE CRITICALLY EVALUATED. MU-AGREEMENT IS GOOD ONLY FOR THOSE WHO EXHIBIT IN BIG INSTITUTIONS

THE DIVISION TO ASSOCIATIONS SHOULD BE REMOVED FROM THE ARTISTS' UNION AND REPLACED BY JUST "VISUAL ART". THE ONLY DIRECTION WOULD BE THE CONTENT, NOT THE DISCIPLINE. ART WORKERS' ISSUES AND GALLERY ACTIVITIES SHOULD BE SEPARATED. DIRECTOR'S POSITION SHOULD CHANGE FREQUENTLY AND SALARY SHOULD BE MODERATE. THE ARTISTS' ASSOCIATIONS SHOULD FOLLOW TO DISCUSSIONS ON THE FIELD AND BE CONCERNED WITH HOW CAN THE SYSTEM CHANGE IN A CHANGED SITUATION – INSTEAD OF PROTECTING OWN POSITION AND MANDATE TO SPEAK ABOUT ART POLICY. ART-POLITICAL ACTIVITIES OUTSIDE OF THE ASSOCIATIONS SHOULD BE HEARD AS WELL.

THE QUESTION HAS TO BE MADE UNDERSTANDABLE TO ARTISTS AND ARTISTS' VOICE HAS TO ENTER THE ART POLITICS.

ARTISTS' CONDITION HAS TO BE MADE THE ISSUE OF EACH POLITICAL PARTY AND NOT JUST TRY TO INFLUENCE THROUGH SELECTED POLITICIAN.


GALLERY RENT PRACTICE DISAPPEARS. ARTISTS' AND FREE-LANCE CURATORS' ECONOMIC CONDITION IMPROVES. THE FIELD GETS MORE HETEROGENOUS AND EXHIBITION SPACES WORKING IN VARIOUS DIFFERENT MODELS EMERGE
HOW CAN WE PROGRESS WITHOUT CREATING A NEW "MONSTER" INSIDE STRUCTURES WHICH IS FIGHTING FOR POWER WITH THE OTHERS? IS THERE JUST GOING TO BE MORE HIERARCHIES AND MORE EVALUATION?
WILL THE SCENE GET DIVIDED INTO THE CLASS OF SUCCESSFUL ARTISTS AND TO THOSE IN THE MARGINS? NOW THE STATE FUNDING GUARANTEES AN EQUALITY OF A KIND
IF THE MU-AGREEMENT COMES, ARTISTS START TO COMPETE ABOUT POSSIBILITIES TO EXHIBIT IN MUSEUMS, AND TO OFFER THEIR WORKS TO THEM. THIS WILL JUST INCREASE THE HIERARCHICAL POSITION OF THE MUSEUMS EVEN MORE
WITH THE RENT MONEY COMING TO ART SPACES AS DIRECT STATE SUPPORT MORE MONEY IS NEEDED IN THE SYSTEM. WILL THE SMALL GRASS-ROOT ORGANISATIONS AND ARTIST-RUN SPACES BE CUT FUNDING IN ORDER TO FULLY SUPPORT THE BIGGER INSTITUTIONS?

“People are careful not to interfere and just do their own work. It makes any change difficult.”

RAAKEL KUUKKA is a visual artist and photographer, whose work has been shown in big exhibitions all over the world. In Finland she has experience for 30 years of mainly exhibiting in galleries where she has had to pay rent, and also the invitation cards and fund-raise for the exhibition. In 2013, together with nine other artists, she organised an exhibition in the Kunsthalle Helsinki, which also charges rent from artists. But in the recent years she has been fortunate to get invited to exhibit increasingly also in museums, where such exhibition-related expenses do not apply.

How have you collected money for the exhibitions?

By applying for grants. Often there is a certain risk involved as the exhibition has been agreed and then you need to apply for grants. You cannot know whether you get funding or not. Sometimes I have had to take a small bank loan. But I have always been very careful with that, not taking out big loans for exhibition.

So can you tell how you have usually managed to cover the exhibition expenses and to get by?

I have had to spend my personal money on the exhibitions as well. But I have become more aware of that within the last ten years. I think that earlier I spent a lot more on my work production, and it was not economically profitable. Well, it is not profitable now either, I am still in the same situation. It is good if in the end it is a plus-minus-zero-situation. If you think that you should earn a living from the work, it doesn’t happen. You might get the expenses paid and reach a zero-situation. But there is no artist salary. The Kuvasto fees are so small that I don’t consider them as salary and they come so much later as well.

However, I have had artist grants for living costs. But they are not meant for work production and gallery rent. Also I have earned money with jobs, for example teaching. Or I have tried to be active and get an artwork sold, and perhaps I have managed. But I really do not know, indeed I wonder how I have managed

economically. Somehow I always have. Maybe I have been careful. It has also affected the artworks as I have not been able to realise them with the best possible technique, because the economic situation has influenced the choice of materials and their realisation. I have not wanted to take a 10000 euros bank loan for the production costs.

Is the zero-situation such that
you get the work production expenses
covered but not a salary?

Yes. Now currently I have an exhibition in Kouvola art museum. It is great that the museum pays for the invites, the rent and insurance, my travel expenses and other costs like this. However, we had agreed that my fee corresponds to the Kuvasto fee. It is a big exhibition and it is installed for four months. I have been preparing it for at least half a year. The exhibition fee is 1 500 euros, which went towards the framing of artworks, and there was nothing left for me. When the exhibition was installed I was in a zero-situation. I think there should be a salary for the exhibition period also. I had received a short term grant of four months, but it was not even enough for the time I was working towards the exhibition. Further, you cannot rely on the income from sales. Photography is within a risk zone, as in Finland there are very few instances where someone would buy photographic art. Usually it is museums and foundations who purchase, and they have their limits. One cannot count on them at all. The museums do not function as art dealers either, so you have to be active yourself, if you want an income. From the exhibition in Kouvola nothing has come yet. [A few days after the interview Raakel received information that the Kouvola art museum will buy three pieces from the exhibition for their collections!]

It is mentally very heavy and depressive when you do a big work which receives good feedback, but economically you are ending up in a zero-situation. It doesn't lift your self-esteem. Also, here in Finland, it doesn't work so well that you try to sell your own artwork. It is difficult and humiliating. When I was working at Hippolyte, I had to sell the works of other artists. It was meaningful, as I knew the works, I could speak about them, and I knew how important it is for the artist and the gallery to sell them. But when it comes to my own works, it is really difficult and it would be better if there was someone else in between as a mediator. That someone could be a representative of the Artists' Association. But preferably not myself, as it is not nice.

The thirty years that you have held
exhibitions in galleries that cost,
can you say something about how
the situation has changed?

It is difficult to say. I think it is harder these days to get a grant for the gallery rent, because there are more artists around. It feels as if in the 1980s it was easier to get a grant. Maybe it was because I was young and an interesting visual artist, also in the 1990s. Lately I have tried to avoid galleries where I need to pay. But the *Karjala!* exhibition in the Kunsthalle Helsinki was completely up to us artists to find funding. The exhibition was first in the Joensuu Art Museum, where the funding structure was different. In the Kunsthalle Helsinki the budget was huge because the rent of the space is so big. Luckily, as we knew about the exhibition early on, we could apply for every possible grant. As we were so many, we could divide up the tasks which made it easier, and the applications were good and well-reasoned. We took a very big risk, but we were also many.

The rent of the Kunsthalle Helsinki of the exhibition period was 15000 euros, and with everything else added it was something between 30000 and 40000 euros. We were ten artists and we thought that we can take that risk. Thankfully it was a success, as we did receive funding, almost everything we applied for. We were even left with money for work productions, which is surprising in an exhibition of this scale. But it was not enough to cover all the work expenses.

What kind of expenses were there with the Kunsthalle Helsinki?

Daily rent, fees of personnel for the time exceeding what we had agreed on, design and printing of invitation cards, the transport of works, possible insurance, equipment rent... They had some kind of agreement with a company that is renting out display equipment. The Kunsthalle Helsinki recommended this company to us, and while we got a discount, we still had to pay.

Did you have any curatorial dialogue with them?

Yes in principle. We had several preparatory meetings with them. But it was a bit difficult, as we didn't have an appointed curator from their side, and so we didn't know with whom to speak to. It was difficult for them as well, that they were charging rent from us. They said that to us at some point – that it is difficult to interfere with all kind of issues, when we are buying the space from them and paying for everything. But they did write the press release and it seemed it was important for them to do it according to their protocol. The additional programme we planned together. In other words, we had some ideas and they had some ideas, and we combined these in agreement. That was good, but it was also what we got the funding for, and paid for. They offered their workers, within the limits of their working hours.

Would you organise an exhibition in the Kunsthalle Helsinki again?

Now when I know the risks and the expenses, I would really have to think carefully what kind of a project would be possible to receive funding. I am not sure if I would have the energy to apply for all the funding again. But I think that it is a really good exhibition space. It is central and important. So in that sense, I would. I am aware of the financing structure of the Kunsthalle and it is very problematic. They do not have any bad intentions, but they have to charge rent from artists. It is really strange, how it can be that way. It limits their exhibition policy, when they are dependent on applications and are not able to produce many exhibitions themselves.

What should change so that money would circulate differently in the art scene?

I think that it should be the task of the exhibition venue to produce the exhibition. In my opinion, they should have that kind of production model. I don't know why it is so passive. Is it because the exhibitions at the Kunsthalle change so fast? Often museums have only two exhibitions in a year, or in any case a lot less than what is in the Kunsthalle. They are lacking the basic funding. It is not the task of the artists to get the funding for the most basic things; for rent, invitations, insurance, transportation, etc. These aspects should be the responsibility of the exhibition organisation, and the funding

should be structured accordingly. And the same goes for the galleries of the artists' associations: there might be a lot of good-will toward the artist's work, but the associations didn't manage to arrange the funding in the way that this issue of individual artist responsibility for funding would disappear from exhibiting.

Why do you think that is?

I believe it has a lot to do with attitude, a strong will is missing. We artists have been too humble and nice also historically, at least since I have been around. We have agreed to anything in order to be able to realise our work. I think that is part of the problem. One's own attitude toward work is too humble.

Where does the gallery
rent come from?

I cannot say. I have been following the art scene since the 1970s, especially in the photography field, and I have been involved in the Gallery Hippolyte. I have also seen the other artists' association galleries and they each have a rent to pay. The same applies for Forum Box, which is run by a co-operative of artists, and there is also the principle that the artist pays rent. There has been some discussion about the issue every now and then, but it has been quite mild. And the people who raise such issues – for example when in the *Taide* magazine (*Taide* 2/2010) there was an article by Jussi Kivi about artistic work and its expenses – they easily get the label of being difficult. People are careful not to interfere, and just do their own work. It makes any change difficult. I haven't been following the discussion much, but the idea of artist fees sound really good, if they were to be budgeted in exhibitions from the start.

But I am wondering whether we can just glue on the fees into this existing system. We have to pay rent in the galleries, but in museums artists would instead get a fee. The gap between the galleries and the museums would just grow even more.

Tell me, why to have
exhibitions at all?

For me the experience of being in a space is important. It is a physical experience, it means a lot to me, and I visit exhibitions a lot.

What influence does the gallery
rent policy have on the art scene?

It is a strange money transfer through the artist to the organisations. It comes from the same source as the artist grants. The rent enables that one can run a gallery without needing to sell works, not needing to be commercially-orientated. The money has to come from somewhere.

Who should run the case to
change the gallery rent policy?

This should happen in a united front, where everyone would join in demanding for the issue to be taken into budgets. It asks for prudence and a shared will. There is always some discussion going on about abolishing the gallery rent policy, so that it would not be responsibility of artists any more, but in 30 years I have not seen a serious attempt, nothing has happened.

Of course it should be the artists' associations. Their galleries, via the Finnish Artists' Association. It should start from there. There should be some discussion event about the issue. But is there any real will to change it?

“It takes courage to promote your own cause, as no-one else will promote it.”

ELINA JUOPPERI is an artist who has lived in Paris for a long time and recently returned to Finland, to the capital region via Lapland.

Are the artist fees realised in Finland in the best possible way?

They are not realised at all. Well, I am not a very famous artist, but from the 10 exhibitions that I have had in Finland in the past three years, I only received a fee for one of them. That was in the State Art Museum Ateneum (currently known as the National Gallery), where I asked for it. When I then complained about how small the fee was, they paid me a bit more. That money was spent on train tickets from the North of Finland to Helsinki to see the space and plan the exhibition. In the end it was plus-minus-zero. All I gained from the exhibition was glory.

I have worked for years as a waitress and put money aside. Now the savings are gone. For one of the museum exhibitions I got 2 000 euros, which I applied for. First I asked the museum whether they had any budget. There was no budget in that case, so I said that I will apply for a grant, but that they should help me with that. In the end I applied for the grant by myself, as they were not even aware of that grant existing. The grant went completely into the installation structures, timber for shelves, etc. No exhibition fee was left for me. Then this museum said that I should be grateful that they are giving the space for me for free, and not charging rent for it. I was shocked and amazed. I think I sent them a bit angry email explaining that the purpose of a museum is the presentation of works; historical, cultural and art works – it is their job to have exhibitions! Why would they even ask me for this kind of gratitude? In the end it went quite conflictual, both before and after the exhibition. But they agreed to pay for the transportation of works from Rovaniemi to this place. At that time I lived in Paris and I would have understood if they said they would cover the trips from Helsinki, not from Paris. But it was completely weird that it was from Rovaniemi, when I have no connection with Rovaniemi. If I remember right I took my sisters’ car in the end and drove with that. I paid my own travels to Rovaniemi. But then they paid the per diem. Of course I was grateful for that. But I couldn’t help wondering how it is technically possible, to pay per diems but not salary (per diems are paid to employees). They also covered the hotel for the duration of the installation. Even that is not

always completely obvious in Finland. In France it would be. I ended up paying approximately 1 000 euros from my own savings, as well as 2 000 euros that I received from the Multicultural fund of the Arts Council, which was given for this particular exhibition.

I am really amazed how museums are so far apart from artists in Finland, when you compare them to France. It is as if they would have nothing to do with each other, two separate units, which are fighting against each other. Instead of artists moaning about museums taking their money, and museums saying that they cannot afford to pay artists, they should join forces in approaching the exterior "front," that is the decision makers, how is it possible to do this job, if we don't get money. I would hope for more synergy. That is why you first have to ask whether there is budget. And if there is not, you can think together how to raise funds.

But can it be that the museums
do receive money but they spend it on
something else than artist salaries?

I used to work as the museum technician at the Aine Art Museum in Tornio. The salary was very low; the working week was 36 hours, and I received 1 600 euros/month (minus tax). Museum workers' wages are quite bad compared to an average Finn's salary. Museums are doing an important work preserving the culture. Nevertheless they function with very small budgets, where all the money goes to salaries of the workers and for the maintenance of the building. The municipalities do not give money for the programmes. That is a very big problem. I demand that artists have to be paid. The Kuvasto fees (The Visual Artists' Copyright Association) are ridiculously and shamefully small. But I do understand also from the point of view of the museum, that in front of you there is sitting some politician, who couldn't care less about art, and then someone is calling and asking why you need to give more to art, when there are not enough diapers for the elderly. Quite many museum directors have to work in this kind of climate. We should join forces in fighting for art. If we would get more money to the museums, slowly we could also start to pay for the production of artworks. But it must be true that there are people in the museums, whose attitude is negative: generally being that we do not know how to do things differently, because we never did it that way before.

I heard a story from a Finnish folk musician. He went to play a concert for free, the organisers could only afford to pay his travels. But after the concert they came with an enormous flower bouquet. With this gesture they were elevating their own reputation in front of the audience. They could have given the musician those 30 euros instead, which went to the bouquet. These kinds of things could be done differently.

Quite readily museum workers
like to think that all artists are living
on grants and get their salary
from there, the same way as they have
their monthly income.

Well, not in the North of Finland, there artists are not so much on grants. But they perhaps think that it is not the concern of the museum whether the artist gets paid or not. The museum's concern is only whether they get an exhibition for free. Instead of asking the museums, why don't you pay us, we would send that letter to the heads of municipalities, and ask why

did you not include this budget line in the budget of your museum. Especially the Left and the Greens should be addressed with the question whether it is right that in their municipality there are people working without getting paid for it; that is, the artists, of course.

Is the Kuvasto fee the same thing as the artist fee?

Kuvasto is only an interest organisation. To some extent I have heard museum people cursing Kuvasto, asking where the money is going, that it is not even going to the artists, but to run that system. In these situations I have replied, that it is up to you to start paying each artist independently, whether they belong to Kuvasto or not. Artists would then not need to be part of Kuvasto if they got a payment anyhow. Nowadays a museum does not need to allocate the Kuvasto fee if the artist agrees to give their work for free to the exhibition. However, here the problem lies in the position of negotiation. It is very difficult for an individual artist to start a negotiation about anything when you are faced with a big institution. If you start a legal process, the institution has more power of influence. But no-one would start a row, we artists are just happy to get our work on display somewhere.

And one easily gets the reputation of a difficult artist, and the word spreads in the museum circles that one should not work with that artist?

Maybe there is some of that fear. But if one thing is foreign to art, that is fear. Art and being an artist should include courage, in doing your own work, but also in other issues. I am talking about an artist's responsibility. It takes also courage to promote your own cause, as no-one else will promote it.

Do you have experience of museums trying to avoid paying the Kuvasto fee?

Personally, I do not have such experience of them avoiding the Kuvasto fee. I have been thinking of joining Kuvasto, but then on another hand, the fees are so small, that I haven't bothered. Nevertheless, I always ask for an artist fee, and I think that in at least one exhibition the members of Kuvasto got a payment, but I did not, although I asked for it in writing.

Are artists in the North of Finland members of Kuvasto?

I don't know if they are. But a colleague told me that they are not, because no-one pays the fees anyway. And one artist said that they resigned from Kuvasto a few years ago, because they were told in a museum in the North of Finland that if they were part of Kuvasto, their works wouldn't be shown. Later on they joined again, because I encouraged them to. But, to some extent, I have heard talk that it is not worth joining because then you don't get invited to exhibitions.

Have you paid rent for a gallery?

No, and I will not. One has to understand the difference between a gallery and a museum. It is amazing that in Finland there can be works on sale in a museum. Works on display in a museum should be there only because the museum has wanted to exhibit some topic through the artwork. It is not a commercial exhibition. The works are there to tell about the political situation, art tendency, emotion, whatever. Purpose

of museums should be to improve the society. We have to differentiate them from commercial galleries, which earn their living by selling art, as well as enabling the living of the artist.

Have you had an exhibition in a gallery where you have had to pay rent?

A space where you pay rent is not a gallery, it is a rented space. I have not had exhibitions in rented spaces!

I have not understood why these spaces are titled galleries, as they charge rent from artists. A gallery is a space where the gallerist sells art. It means that the gallerist sells, not that the artist sells. An artist can sell works at home as well. So the gallerist sells, and the artist pays rent in the way that the gallerist takes a certain percentage of the sold works. It can be quite a lot as well, often it is half of what is left after production expenses. With the half that the gallerist receives, they pay the rent of the space, their own salary, maintenance and lunch expenses. Often gallerists are wealthy people, who are selling to their own circles. They have to possess a telephone book. It is their know-how that they can sell artworks to someone. I would not mind paying someone to make phone calls to museums and private collectors, speaking highly about my work and trying to get it sold.

Where do you position the rented spaces, artist run spaces in your idea of the art world?

I understand that they use the name gallery because it refers to selling, which is non-existing in Finland. Tell me honestly, if you apply for an exhibition slot in a gallery, and it takes place once in ten years, is there someone there who is calling around all possible people, collectors and others, trying to sell your work? Do they even know your work so well that they can sell it? What do they do there in order to sell? I have never shown in these rented spaces, so I do not know. That is why perhaps MUU gallery should change their name to MUU exhibition space, to clarify that it is a space of an association.

How do artist-run spaces in France raise the rent money if the artist doesn't need to pay rent?

There artists do not need to pay. It is basically grant money which pays the rent. But the difference is that the grant applicant is the *centre d'art* and not the artist. I think this makes a lot more sense. So, the *centre d'art* receives an annual amount. I would imagine it would also make it easier for the grant-givers, when instead of receiving a grant application from ten artists or fifty artists for the same venue, there would instead be only one application from the exhibition venue. It would then be used for the exhibitions, just as when the artists are the applicants. However, the artists would not need to apply themselves.

But can you imagine that there would be some mistrust from the grant givers toward the exhibition venues about whether the programme is high enough quality? Can it be that the grant givers want to decide in the end which artist's exhibition gets funded?

But it would be enough for the exhibition venue to say what they plan to do during the year and what is their budget. They would know the whole artist list for the year. Also the rented spaces determine their exhibition programme sometimes

1,5 years earlier, and still the artist applies for the grant. And good heavens if you don’t get one, what do you do then!?

You have committed to having the exhibition, maybe written the contract already as well…

Yes, that is why it would make so much more sense that the exhibition venue would write the application. Why to burden artists with that, do they not have enough work without this grant application hassle? If there is a paid person in the gallery, would it not be the task of that person to apply (a.) for an annual grant for the exhibitions (b.) sponsorship money?

So in France the money circulates in a different way, directly from the funders to the galleries and exhibition venues. In Finland it goes through artists.

Yes, and it burdens the artists a lot. If you do not get the money, you are screwed because you have promised to have the exhibition. It is a huge risk.

But could it be that the grant givers reason that they save money, when they do not give funding directly to the venues for all the 12 months, but instead they give it directly to artists, although not everyone gets it? So, for example, they only give funding for 10 out of 12 months, and the rest have to manage somehow.

They could give instead the 10-months’ amount to the venue as well, and then the venue would need to divide it equally among the months. So that none of the artists personally carry the risk and consequences.

"It is the artists themselves who submit to this exploitation."

MARGE MONKO is artist, who was active in the art workers' movement in Estonia in 2010–2011 and speaks out against the gallery rent system in Tallinn. She has been active in art since 2006 and is currently living in Ghent.

Can you describe how the different art galleries in Estonia function in regards gallery rent?

The situation in Tallinn and in other cities is different. In Tallinn, there is the art hall, Kunstihoone, and two galleries, Kunstihoone gallery and Linnagalerii, which are free. These are funded by the state and the city, but they receive only small amounts. Despite this, they have managed to maintain it so that you don't need to pay the rent. However, the rest of the galleries, Hobusepea, Draakoni and Hop gallery are owned by the Estonian Artists' Association, that is, the artists' union. The union is applying every year for funding from the Ministry of Culture for expenses relating to running the galleries. For a long time, the problem was that that they didn't get enough funding and therefore additionally asked rent from artists. This was recently changed – galleries that receive funding from the ministry must not ask for rent from artists any more. They now apply for additional funding directly from the Cultural Endowment, whereas earlier the rent money was channelled through artists. Draakoni and Hobusepea have very short exhibition periods, it is sometimes even less than two weeks. That is crazy. When both of those galleries were still asking rent from artists, they said that no artist is able to pay the rent for three weeks. However, I think that would be a question of reorganising. I heard recently that from 2015 the exhibition period will be extended to three weeks.

Then there are some so-called commercial galleries, which are commercially active in Estonia. For example Vaal. There you also have to pay rent. The thing is that they are working in a different way than the commercial galleries in Europe. When they are working locally they don't have a list of artists that they are only working with as representatives. They just operate by renting out the space.

In addition, there have also been galleries that operate according to a different logic, for example, Rael Artel Gallery: Non-Profit Project Space which was active in 2004–2009, first in Pärnu and then in Tartu. It was run by the curator

Rael Artel who was defining her practice precisely against the dominant model of charging rent and making exhibition programmes dependant on open application rounds. Rael's emphasis was on having a curated programme, inviting artists and curators to make exhibitions in her space, and offering basic working conditions.

Do you know how the
situation developed so that the
artists need to pay rent?

I think it began in the beginning of the 1990s when the Soviet system collapsed and the art was not really considered important, and received very small support from the state. The contemporary art in the 1990s was mainly supported by Soros Foundation. I don't have the numbers to compare, but I think that the Artists' Association got a generous support from the Soviet state. Now from the whole budget of the Ministry of Culture, visual art actually gets a rather small percentage. The problem is that visual art doesn't have so many institutions as for example the theatre. Museums, including art museums, belong to a separate section in the state household. The Artists' Association is funded through the so-called head tax which should be distributed to the members as social benefits or scholarships for projects. The union has a lot of real-estate – gallery spaces and artist studios. They have to maintain them but they don't get any subsidies for this purpose from the state.

Did the commercial galleries
and the Artists' Association galleries
exist also in the Soviet times?

No they did not. They are completely new galleries which started in the 1990s.

So there were much
less galleries,
bigger institutions maybe?

Yes I think there were even less galleries. Draakoni gallery existed, I think it was established in the 1980s. It is an interesting case as it is semi-commercial. In the back there is a room where they are selling works from the previous exhibitions. This was a very popular system during the Soviet times. Then a lot of people were buying art, but it was also very cheap.

And at the same time it
was state-subsidised?

Yes.

Were there grants?

Not grants but commissions. And not only to applied artists but also to visual artists. There was an annual overview exhibition, a kind of salon, in Kunstihoone, where most of the works were bought with actually good prices, so, as I have understood it, those who were recognised and considered good, had a more secure life.

Why do you think that artists
accept to pay for gallery?

It is a good question. When we were discussing with Airi and others from the art workers' movement, Airi was suggesting a boycott. But it was clear that there never could be a boycott as there always would be artists who just want to show their work and can pay, even if they don't sell anything. It is anyway hardly the case in these galleries, or in Estonia at large, that you can sell. It is connected to a wish to show your work. That is why you are an artist at all, and you still want to

continue, even when you are not paid and you are in such a miserable condition.

But is it also connected to the need to show to the grant givers that you are active?

Yes, of course. You need it in your CV. These spaces have a good reputation and Hobusepea is a nice space. And the main thing is that you don't have many alternatives. The other alternatives are the galleries of Kunstihoone, which are for free and are also fine. But I haven't exhibited there due to ideological reasons.

Since when?

Since the last director Karin Hallas-Murula was selected in 2011.[1] She made some announcements in the public stating that she wants more audience in the exhibitions and she knows how to do it with traditional exhibitions. She claimed that contemporary art exhibitions have pushed the audiences away and we don't want to be the scene only for feminists and sexual minorities and so on.

But there is an exhibition by Teemu Mäki starting tomorrow?

Yes probably he doesn't know about that. And it doesn't mean that they would not accept projects that are socially committed, as the projects are selected by the board and not by her personally.

Are there also many other local artists who are boycotting the Kunstihoone?

Yes there are some, but not many. The scene is so small and there are not so many alternatives, not so many spaces. There are always different ways to be active and people are trying to find those possibilities.

What is the range of prices in which the gallery rent moves in Estonia and what do you get with the money?

I'm not aware of the prices in commercial galleries but I could not imagine any artist paying 1 000 euros, it must be less. The Artists' Association galleries have been rent-free for members since 2014. Before that the rent in Hobusepea gallery was around 300 euros for a period of 2 weeks. The rent for those who are not members of the artists' union is now 107 euros for a 2 week period. When artists are applying for the production money from the grant givers, they include a budget line with the gallery rent. Mostly they get this money from the Cultural Endowment and in the end it does not come from their own pocket. But the rent-free situation is very much connected to state support, so there is no guarantee that the rent for artists will not be re-introduced, for example, if the Ministry of Culture funding to the Artists' Association galleries is denied in future. At any case, you get the space and you get the services. You can also have all the equipment that the gallery has, which in the case of Hobusepea, is quite good projectors. And they also employ people who install your work.

How many people are working in those galleries?

In Draakoni gallery and Hobusepea there is one person managing the gallery, and then one person who comes when the exhibition changes, de-montaging

and uninstalling. And of course there are the guards.

What else does the artist get, opening drinks, flyer…?

Yes, flyers. They also post them.

What about curatorial assistance or production assistance?

You have to do that yourself. They go over all the texts, the description of the exhibition, and they might ask more questions. But they don't write the texts.

And do you discuss the content of the works with them or where to place which work?

No. This would be quite impossible, every two weeks.

Have you been trying to resist the gallery rent?

Not really. It's also the question of lack of alternatives. I don't show in the commercial galleries because I don't see the point of paying the rent for them. A couple of years ago when the artists still had to pay the rent in galleries, the board of the Artists' Association was saying that if they were not charging the rent they would need to close down the spaces because it is impossible to manage only with the money they get from the government. They were saying that the financing from the Ministry of Culture was not giving enough support, because places all over Estonia are applying for the same subsidies. But anyway, the majority of support goes to spaces in Tallinn.

I have also been complaining about the short exhibition periods, that it is completely insane. As an artist, you have to work a lot and then you are just able to show your work for less than two weeks. Professional people just don't manage to see it because it is going on for too short a time. However, I heard the exhibition period will now be extended to three weeks which is much better.

It is the artists themselves who submit to this exploitation. As long as there are artists who are willing to pay the rent, it can carry on. But if we all say that sorry, it doesn't go like this, then they have to reconsider. But as I said, in Estonia there are always these artists who are ready to pay.

1. Karin Hallas-Murula resigned in October 2014 and the new director was appointed starting from January 2015.

"There is some kind of idea that the artist after all is not working."

JUSSI KIVI is a visual artist. He is the winner of the prestigious Ars Fennica prize in 2009 and was representative of Finland in the 53rd Venice Biennial 2009 with *Fire & Rescue Museum*. He wrote a lengthy text in *Taide* magazine issue 2/2010 about his experiences in Venice and afterwards with the same exhibition travelling to Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki in 2010. The text reveals how his artwork in Venice was used by Kiasma as promotion of the institution, although they did not have any share in the costs or labour of the project in Venice. Also it tells how he was paid little for his work in Venice and even less when it travelled to Kiasma. Kivi writes: "I received an email from the chief curator of Kiasma, Arja Miller, where she said she responds on behalf of Berndt Arell [the director of Kiasma at the time] that there is no artist fee reserved in the budget and it is very seldom that we would pay such, but we will see if we manage to pinch something from the budget…" Furthermore, the exhibition in Kiasma was not properly announced, and even the artist was ignored in the press conference of the exhibition by its very curator, who did not even mention his name nor his project.

JUSSI KIVI had become disillusioned about the art scene already when participating in the São Paulo Biennial in 1987.

Can you briefly tell about your experience in São Paulo?

I had idolised and mystified the art scene, and in a way you could say I was at the gates to it. There, in São Paulo I saw how petit-bourgeois and grand-bourgeois it in fact is. It's the world's third biggest city, with enormous amounts of poor people. There the upper-class millionaires are organising a megalomaniac biennial for their own amusement. The contradiction between the outer reality and the exhibition hit me there. Due to my social

background I had not been to such circles before. As an artist you have the ability to jump the class. I was not a fish in the water there, until I changed my role for the duration of the trip. My idealistic conception of being an artist came crumbling down. It was not worth the struggle. I had thought it was something intellectual, social and humane, that there was some kind of connection. But what I saw there were power positions and the purpose of art in society being about status.

The most corny thing was the party the day after the opening which one millionaire organised in his home, on a fenced off area with armed security guards. In the house there were art books scattered here and there. In the party tent in the garden there were paintings placed leaning against the sides. It was completely corny. It was as if Björn "Nalle" Wahlroos, the rich banker and advocate of neoliberalism, would make an invite for lunch.

What got you into boycotting galleries which charge rent?

I had never thought about it as a boycott. Already when on my last years at school in the early 1980s, I had thought that it makes no sense to pay rent for an exhibition, I will never do that, rather I'll stop making art. I thought that because I am bad in making money and not particularly interested in it either, I can live with other means than exhibiting in galleries where you need to pay. At that time there were not any free galleries. In the end of 1970s and early 1980s there were only the galleries of the artists' associations and the Artek gallery. The Artek gallery was more highly ranked as a gallery and I don't know what kind of policy they had toward gallery rent. But the galleries of the artists' associations had different status then from what they have today. You could say they have now slid into province. They had a bigger role in the art scene which connects with the societal issues, all organising was valued. I am part of a generation that did not like the union. I only joined the Artists' Association MUU ry some six years ago, and I only did it for practical reasons as when you apply for a studio space from the Atelier Foundation, you need to be member in the union. Those days artists' unions were dominated by power games of some artists... and some old farts. They were quite provincial and had a lot of power in the Finnish art scene, but today I understand that artists' unions have done also important work for the field. For example, we wouldn't have such a grant system without them.

Were there any alternative spaces at those times?

There was the Cheap Thrills run by J. O. Mallander, which stopped around that time. I remember it as a very interesting place with an unconventional atmosphere. I liked what was going on there. It was so different from what was taught at school and what the teachers stood for. The group Harvesters were considered as hippies and wackos. That was an alternative space which I think didn't cost. It was off-centre, at Huvilakatu. There was something connecting the people there, which was not just the gallery, but the beat-generation, fluxus, new age-stuff. The front row artists thought they were completely woo woo. In a way the art scene was very "true-finn" at the time.

Asko Mäkelä initiated the gallery at the Old Students' House in 1980. That was also free. In the beginning it was not very much noticed. The real artists were sitting in the Kosmos-restaurant and were not

interested in what was going on at Vanha. I had my first exhibition in that gallery, when I was still at school. At the time it was unusual to have exhibitions when you are still studying. There was no invigilation, which set some limits to what was possible to be shown there. So that was the starting point for me after which I would not pay to have an exhibition. It felt that it is a bit of a loser's tactics that you pay yourself into a gallery programme and for people to acknowledge your work. I could afford to think this way because I had my exhibition in the Old Students' House gallery and because I was receiving some invites. At the time the art scene was changing quite drastically after the inward turn of the 1970s and an interest toward the tradition of European and American contemporary art just started. When you were interested in it and doing something resembling something of the kind, you were in a way on top of the wave. There were not so many people making that what we think is contemporary art and it was easier probably because of that. When you were on the wave of something new it opened some doors, although the works were not necessarily so good, but rather home-made.

Have you ever paid
to have an exhibition?

There was an exhibition of the Romantic Geographic Society, group which I am member of together with Tero Kontinen and Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen, at the Huuto! gallery. It was a group exhibition of some 15 artists with the theme of Nature Romanticism. Of that we probably did need to pay. If I remember right Oliver paid it. And once I had an exhibition at the Studio of the Kunsthalle Helsinki. There I needed to pay for the invitation cards. They were around 500 Finnish markka. But I didn't need to pay rent.

A couple of years ago I was talking with a gallery owner in Germany, who could not understand that in Finland artists have to pay. What happens is that when artists pay for the gallery rent with their grants, it is a great example of outsourcing process. It is as if running a gallery would be some kind of state supported cultural work outsourced to galleries. Galleries finally get the money but it comes from the state and foundations. Why galleries cannot be supported directly but instead artists need to get it for the gallery? It is true that the galleries do not manage only with the rent money, but it does decrease the risk, which is taken by the artist. It is obscene, because the artists are among the poorest and they need to pay the rent. In classical music, at least in orchestras, there is the chair where they are playing the violin and they get paid for it. I don't know the theatre field nor its funding. In cinema there is the director, and I've understood that they also need to sacrifice, whereas the light engineer, the sound engineer and the stage designer do get paid, because they are working there. There is some kind of idea that the artist after all is not working.

Why did you write the text that
was published in *Taide* 2/2010?

With the exhibition in Kiasma, which I wrote to the *Taide* magazine about[1], my starting point had been that I should be getting the same salary as the museum technician. I was not even asking for any special copyright fee. My aim was that as I would be working there for two weeks, I would not end up being the only one in the team who was not paid. In Venice I got 3000 euros in total, and I was working approximately five months full time. I did

have a living grant at the time though, but this had nothing to do with the Venice project, it was given before that, but without that it would have been impossible to do such a laborious work for the biennial. My assistant Filippo Zambon got half of that for one month’s job. I am not the least bit bitter to Filippo about that, he did a great job and deserved his salary. And we had fun too. But it was really the treatment I got in Kiasma at the time which made me write the text to *Taide*. I asked for 2 500 euros from them, I was paid 2 000. But that followed by all kind of weird treatment by the chief curator Arja Miller, which the new museum director Pirkko Siitari did apologise for afterwards, when I sent her the text to inform what I was about to publish. Siitari told Miller to call me and to apologise for her mistakes, but I would not forgive her. There were too many well-considered mistakes one after another, I had also heard through the grapevine what she had discussed, and I had no reason to forgive her.

How were the reactions to that text?

There was a lot of positive feedback from the scene, artists were thanking me for bringing up the issue. The only critical comment that I should consider was from the lawyer of the State Art Museum, about me not knowing how much the Venice projectcost in the end. But my complaint was mainly about Kiasma not wanting to pay a fee to me and Miller revenging to me that they were forced to.

We agreed about exhibiting the work in Kiasma already before it was shown in Venice, and this was the initiation of Berndt Arell at Kiasma. When I first heard of the Venice-thing I thought that is a good thing and I went for it out of interest. But when it turned to be that kind of exploitation of the artist I thought, oh shit, not this again! I had stepped on the other side of the river and I didn’t manage with dry feet, something got me pissed off again. Never before has an exhibition organising ended up in an argument except here. I have also not earlier experienced of being particularly bullied before.

My relation with money is that unless I have an acute lack of it, I cannot be too much interested in it, and in how to get it. I have always preferred to think that I have other values than money. And this is probably how many other artists think. And that is what the whole cheating of artists is based on.

A while ago I was talking with artist-colleague Lauri Astala, we are of the same generation. We have learned not to market ourselves very much. And if each artist generation has their own myths, for us it is the van Gogh or Cézanne or Duchamp type of artist who is harvesting apples and settles for little as long as they can do their art. Today already at school you learn to market yourself and to strive for success.

Do you have a reputation
of being a difficult case because
you speak out?

When I was awarded with the Ars Fennica prize, I thought that now a lot of invitations will follow. What has followed have been a couple of invitations to summer exhibitions in the provinces. I was invited into an exhibition in the Lappeenranta Art Museum, which was to travel to Mikkeli afterwards. They wanted a specific work from me for that exhibition. I said to them that I am not a member in Kuvasto – The Finnish Visual Artists’ Copyright Association – but I would still like to get an equivalent payment of the Kuvasto fee. The person

on the other end of the telephone line got a bit confused and told me they would call me back after they found out about the possibilities. Then they called back and said that the museum cannot pay, as they have not budgeted such an expense, and also explained that it would be unjust toward the other artists, if I was paid. It was a minor sum all and all, just a few framed drawings. They asked me once again whether I still want to consider my participation, where I replied "no." It was in the very end of the negotiations, they were already about to come and fetch the work from my studio when this came up. I should have asked the person, who I think was a curator, whether they are working there for free.

Why are you not a member in Kuvasto?

Because I think it is quite complicated. My pictures are not circulating in media so I don't need it for that, no-one has asked my pictures for postcards for example. And my impression is that the Kuvasto fees are quite small, and part of it goes to running of the Kuvasto office. Also I don't exhibit that much, and often there is some kind of deal of our own, and anyway the fees do not apply to exhibitions abroad. At some point I was considering joining Kuvasto, but I concluded that it adds up to plus-minus-zero, or even a bit minus. In principle I have nothing against it.

Other experiences?

The following year in Tuusula Art Museum they did pay me for participating in their summer exhibition. And there was no hesitation at all. Then at the Helsinki Photography Biennial the Mustarinda collective, who organised the part where my work was included, had small fees for artists. But that exhibition I would have joined in any case, as I am a member of Mustarinda collective and I thought it was interesting what they were doing there. When the organisers are clearly non-profit, it is a different case, but if it is so that they are partly non-profit, partly on salaries, then it is not ok.

But I have not been invited in any more prestigious exhibitions since then, except for a couple of summer shows in regional museums. I have not been part of any higher ranking Finnish project after that. Reasons could be anything, it is difficult to speculate. I got a lot of positive feedback for my text in the *Taide* magazine. But those whose toes I stepped on, probably do still remember it, and also remind others like-minded, that he is a difficult case. When I have written such an article, it is easy to think that he must be really difficult. But I am not a difficult person, that was the only time. I don't seek for trouble and I don't have some complex that needs to come out every time after the opening. But I can imagine that in the institutions, to some extent, not to generalise, there can be people who want to play safe. And an artist who writes a story like that is clearly not completely reliable and it is safer to work with someone else.

These career developments in the art world are interesting. I have had a rocket-like rise and a similar fall. After Venice there was one show in Linz, but I could not participate in it as I was at the same time in Kiasma.[2] Nothing has followed since then. And Ars Fennica is not particularly known outside the Finnish or Nordic borders.

When the Cheap Thrills ended, there was nothing for a long time, until Huuto! and other artist run spaces started to emerge. Forum Box was founded already in the end of 90s or early 2000s, and that was a big bang at first, as there was

some sponsor and front line artist names founding it. But the rent was high. It functioned with the same logic as the artists' association galleries.

Now in Helsinki there are a few commercial galleries which do not charge rent, but they take provision of sales, of course. But selling art in Finland is not a very easy business. The scene is small and there are no markets, like in bigger metropolises. But it is good that there are those few galleries, which do not charge rent. It would be nice to have a gallerist to sell my works, and some years ago I tried to approach a few galleries, but they were not interested enough. Now after Venice and Ars Fennica my situation has changed, but in the art world they don't go and ring doorbells. And I am a bit shy and very bad in marketing my own works to gallerists.

What is wrong with
the gallery rent system?

I am against it because as an artist it doesn't make any sense as a source of living or as business. You are funding your own work, you have to have a basic income to get by, you rent a studio space, you buy all the materials and you use your creative energy and time for some artwork, and then in the end you pay a lot in order to get it shown. And even if you did sell, the money would not probably be much after all the studio expenses and others. Someone can sell well from an exhibition, but after the provision that the gallery takes anyway, and if you even have to pay rent, and all the other expenses, you are left with not much profit. It is a senseless equation. Normally people do not pay so that they can do their work, that they get their living with. What if you went to the construction site to work and you'd pay for it yourself? Compared with other creative jobs, for example in the advertising business they make a lot of money. There probably are a lot of precarious workers in other fields too. But if you have something to say, why don't you look for other channel to say it, so that you don't need to pay huge amounts just to be able to say it. And if you don't have something to say, then you might just as well do without. Then there is no necessity to say anything.

The gallerist has probably rented some expensive office shop front, and has to get paid somehow. And I believe that it is not easy to make money with art, but artist pays the rent. Also the gallerist is taking a risk, but the risk that the artist has to take is bigger. And usually the gallerists live in a completely other social class and rate of income than the artist, for some reason.

A few years ago I participated in exhibition at Oksasenkatu 11. It was the best work I have done in a while. The gallery is a bit off-centre. In the opening there were a lot of people, but after that there were 5 people a day. It was fun to do it, but I don't know if I have the energy to continue exhibiting only to friends, or for the sake of being able to realise an installation. One can do in a smaller scale just for oneself. The alternative gallery scene is a thing for the art scene and I am not very interested in it, showing just for each other. It was nice in Kiasma, because there a lot of people saw the work. At the Ars Fennica award ceremony I gave a small speech where I said that it was quite an unusual gig, when there were five guys working but only one got paid. Not that I would have split my prize money with the others. But it was quite absurd to know that someone had even taken a bank loan for their installation, as investment for their career. He must have been pissed off not winning it. I calculated that with the photo prints and frames, I spent 2000

euros for the work in the exhibition. Not a penny I got for materials. The prize could be a bit less and everyone could get some production money.

But the fact is that when you are working in a non-commercial gallery, where you don't need to pay rent, you are more free to do whatever you want. It's best if you don't have even a subconscious pressure of selling or any of those kinds of ideas. It helps you keep your focus on the content and on the questions that you think are interesting. In a way, also, by avoiding the commercial side and the big financial investments on the artworks I have guarded my own freedom – partly subconsciously – but also fully aware. Somehow quite gullibly, I have begun to grow to the myth that the most important thing for an artist is guarding one's freedom, although in reality no-one is free and independent of the relation with the surrounding world, culture, nature, etc. It's good to remember that even big names could make uninteresting and unimportant works when they fall too deep into the business and don't have any more free time to concentrate on their artistic work.

1. My intention is not to criticise Kiasma in itself, or the fact that the State Art Museum exists. My critique was directed toward the certain ways in which Berndt Arell and his close employee Arja Miller, treated me as artist when I was working with them in Kiasma. The State Art Museum is an important institution, similar to the library institution, cornerstones of civilised nation. I don't want to join the choir of people who want to dismantle the public institutions. [Jussi Kivi]

2. In *Taide* 2/2010 Jussi Kivi writes: "My work was invited from Venice to Linz in *Biennale Cuvee* exhibition, which is a compilation of the most interesting works from the different biennials held in 2009. Because the exhibition overlapped with the exhibition in Kiasma, I had to reject the invitation. But this proves that the selectors of the *Biennale Cuvee* thought I was among the best of the Venice Biennial. But now it has become apparent that by choosing Berndt Arell's Kiasma instead of Linz, I am only among the stupids."

AIRI TRIISBERG

Unwaged Labour and Social Security: A Feminist Perspective

The problem of unpaid labour in the art field is not only an issue of income. In societies where access to social security is modelled on waged employment, unpaid workers are at risk of falling outside the social security system. In this article I will discuss the difficulties that freelance art workers in Estonia face in relation to the local health care system. My analysis is based on collective research that was accumulated within the art workers' movement in Tallinn, in which I took part of myself. A more detailed account on the development of this initiative, which was active in 2010—2011, can be found in my article *Art Workers' Movement in Tallinn: The Politics of Disidentification* in this publication. In the frame of my writing here, I will zoom in on the specific issue of health insurance that was defined as a central problem in the context of the art workers' movement. I will explain how the art workers in Tallinn scrutinised the blind-spots of the Estonian social security system, and how the policy making level has responded to this critique in the recent years. Using the local particularities of the health insurance system in Estonia as a case study, I will then analyse the continuities between unwaged labour and lack of social security from a more general viewpoint. I will frame this discussion by accentuating commonalities between art and care work, and by articulating autonomist feminist Marxist perspectives on the relations between unpaid labour, capitalist production and social change.

Solidarity and contribution — health insurance system in Estonia

The health care system in Estonia is funded by the social tax contributions of the working population which are administered by the Health Insurance Fund. The website of the Health Insurance Fund declares that the health insurance system in Estonia is based on the principle of solidarity.[1] This means that the Fund covers health care costs for each working individual independently from their tax contribution, and that the tax contributions of working population also cover the expenses for health care services provided to the persons who have no work-related income. These unwaged social groups are listed as subjects of "special case" in the § 6 of the Social Tax Act which includes children, students, pensioners, and registered unemployed persons, among others.[2]

Due to the case that freelance art and cultural workers are subjected to vast amounts of unpaid labour and/or scarce and irregular incomes, they tend to fall between two chairs in the Estonian health care system. As a matter of fact, the information provided on the website of the Health Insurance Fund is not quite accurate. The health care system in Estonia is not entirely based on the principle of solidarity – rather than that, it combines principles of solidarity *and* contribution. Freelance art workers occupy an ambivalent position in that dichotomy – they are not included in the solidarity scheme, and in most cases, they also don't have access to health care through social tax contributions. This is precisely the blind-spot that was identified as a core problem in the context of art workers' movement in Tallinn. To certain extent, it is a systemic deficit which also influences other unwaged and precarious workers in Estonia who are not listed in the Social Tax Act § 6. However, freelance cultural workers stand out as an exemplary occupational group affected by this inadequacy. In that matter, the precarious economic and social situation of cultural workers is reinforced through the standards of cultural funding and corresponding income modalities. I will bring a few examples, in order to demonstrate the situation of art workers in particular.

In some cases, art workers receive government grants through the institutions of art funding system. These grants are completely exempted from taxes and, therefore, entirely isolated from the social security system.[3] In many situations, art workers are paid for selling the copyright of their work by signing a License Agreement. In legal terms, the License Agreement only applies for re-publishing or re-exhibiting existing work, whereas in reality it is often used for contracting newly commissioned work as well. From the position of the employers, Licence Agreement is the cheapest contractual option, because it is exempted from social taxes. There is a wide consensus in the art field to camouflage work relations with Licence Agreements, as these are only taxed with income tax. However, access to the social security system is regulated precisely through the contribution of social taxes. Therefore, the dominant use of Licence Agreements is a crucial factor in maintaining the situation where art workers have no access to social security system.

In less frequent cases, art workers are employed according to proper work contracts to which social taxes also apply. Nonetheless, even in such instances, access to social security is not automatically guaranteed. The Social Tax Act § 2 establishes a minimum social tax contribution which needs to be exceeded in order to be eligible for social benefits such as health insurance or unemployment subsidies. In the cultural field, where wages tend to be very low, this minimum limit is often not reached. A further difficulty is related to the irregularity and temporariness of work relationships in the cultural sector. Depending on the duration of the contract, it is quite usual to fall in and out of the security system in a cyclic manner. This irregularity has its immediate effects on the health insurance status, whereas the

consequences for other dimensions of social security, such as eligibility for unemployment subsidies or the amplitude of future pension, are not less aggravating.

All in all, it is very typical for freelance art and cultural workers to have combined incomes. These are not only a mixture of taxable and non-taxable incomes, but also include social-tax-obligatory incomes from different employers. However, the existing tax calculation system in Estonia is not sophisticated enough to deal with such complexity. For example, I have had periods in my life where my monthly or annual contribution of social taxes has exceeded the minimum limit that is necessary for gaining access to social security system. Nevertheless, this didn't change my excluded status from this system, because my tax contributions were scattered over different employers and the Estonian Tax and Custom Board lacked a mechanism for summarising tax contributions that are simultaneously channelled into the tax collection system from various sources.

I am writing these lines in December 2014, a few weeks after the Estonian parliament passed a new legislation which will soon introduce the summation of social tax contributions for individual tax payers on monthly basis. This new legislation is a response to the political pressure that was exercised by cultural workers, and particularly by the art workers' movement in 2011. However, I am very doubtful whether this new legislation will have substantial effects on the social security status of freelance cultural workers. The presumable outcome for the majority of independent cultural workers, including myself, will be irregular health insurance status for limited periods of time. In practical terms, it is very likely that such random access to the medical system will be too short-termed for getting actual medical help, since the average waitlist for a consultation with a specialist is approximately three months long. Nevertheless, if freelance cultural workers want to gain even such limited access to the health care system, it would now demand a fierce battle against the fraudulent use of Licence Agreements.

Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act in Estonia

The fact that the systemic blind-spots in the Estonian social security regulation have far-reaching consequences for freelance cultural workers as an entire occupational group is a well-known fact in the policy making level. The mobilisation of art workers' movement in 2010 was not the first collective effort that aimed to change this situation. In response to a prior cycle of cultural workers' advocacy work addressing these issues, the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act was introduced in 2004.

As an incomplete remedy to the socio-economic problems in the cultural field, the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act introduced the measure of granting funding for artistic associations which then can allocate "support for creative activity" for cultural workers – defined as "creative persons" in the legislation – who do not receive income.[4] In other

words, this support is a variant of unemployment subsidy, offering income and health insurance coverage for cultural workers whose chances of receiving regular unemployment benefits are slim because they rarely pay social taxes. Compared to the regular unemployment subsidy, the creative support establishes a privileged position for unemployed cultural workers. To provide a brief contrast: the maximum time-frame of receiving creative support is limited to 12 months and the monthly payments are computed according to minimum wage (340 euros in 2014). The regular unemployment allowance is limited to 9 months with monthly payments in the amount of 112 euros in 2014. In both cases, beneficiaries of the subsidy are additionally covered with health insurance.[5]

The initial version of Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act coupled the eligibility for creative support with the requirement that the beneficiaries are registered as self-employed entrepreneurs. The absurdity of this requirement was heatedly debated in the art workers' movement in 2010–2011. From our perspective, this requirement was unacceptable not only because it created a paradoxical situation where unemployed or wageless workers need to become entrepreneurs in order to receive state subsidy, but also because this requirement occurred as a symptomatic feature of neoliberal discourse dominating the cultural policy. Persons registered as self-employed entrepreneurs, defined as "sole proprietors" in the English version of the Social Tax Act, are required to make quarterly advance payments of social taxes which then guarantee their access to social security system. Without asking how the income for paying these taxes is generated, the suggestion that freelance cultural workers should register as entrepreneurs, in order to gain access to social security system, indicated a desire to erase the problems of an entire social group from the administrative domain of the state apparatus by simply "jumping" statistical categories. However, in the revised version of Creative Persons and Artistic Association Act from 2013, this requirement was cancelled, largely in reaction to the critique articulated by the art workers' movement.

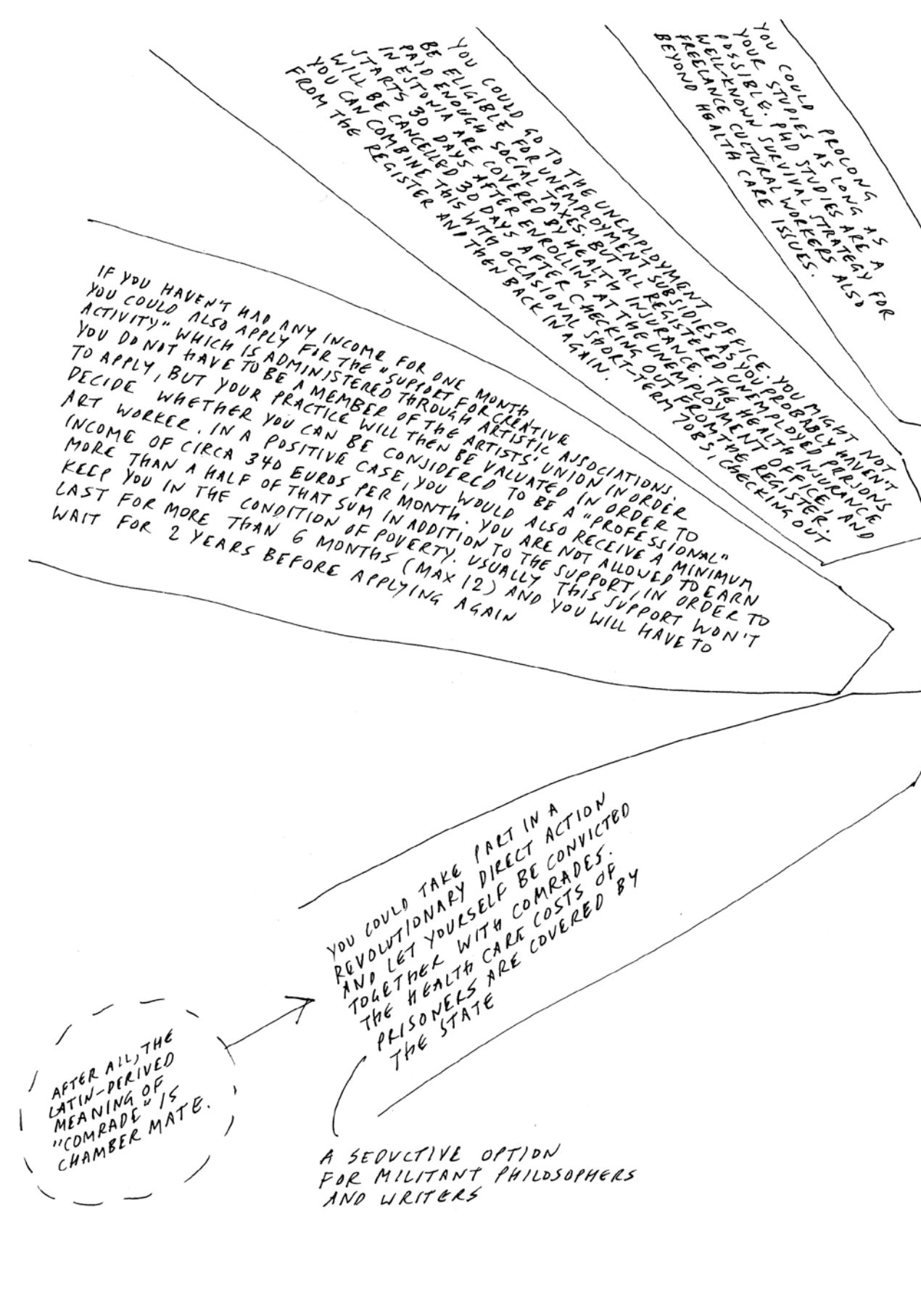
In spring 2011, after a recent government change following the latest parliamentary elections in Estonia, the Ministry of Culture called together a working group with the task to develop new legislative proposals in relation to the social security of freelance cultural workers. The working group included representatives from different ministries, the Health Insurance Fund, and a small number of practising cultural workers. The role of the art workers' movement cannot be underestimated in the genealogy of this working group, as it was formed in the aftermath of a cycle of public debates initiated particularly in the art field. The specific aim of this working group was to facilitate access to health insurance – an issue that the ministry had chosen to pick out from the variegated list of problems that had been articulated in the previous months. The palpable results of this working group have been rather cosmetic so far, mostly limited to minor revisions in the Creative Persons and Artistic Association Act, such as the de-coupling

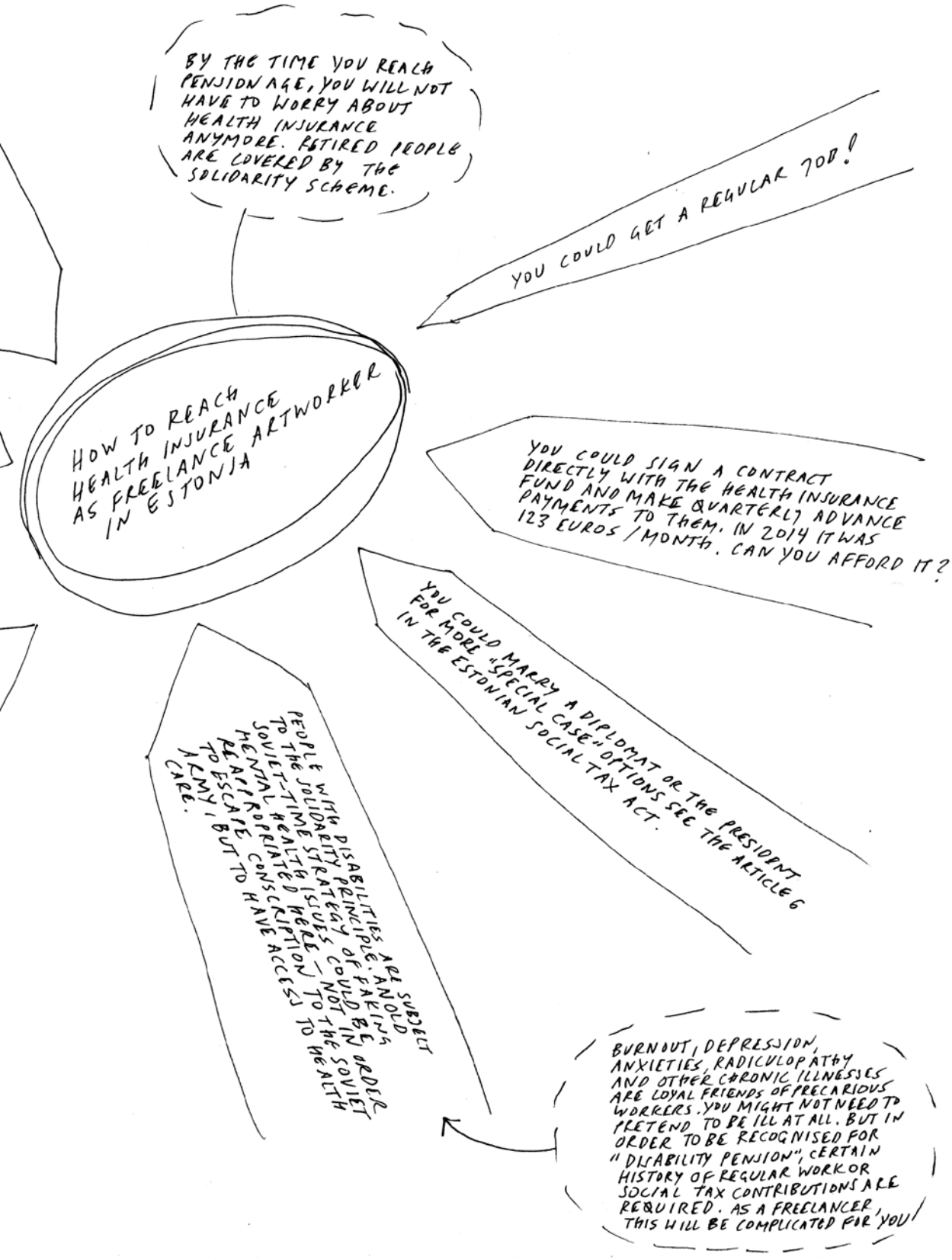
of forced entrepreneurship and state subsidies. However, the government's recent decision to introduce a mechanism for summing up social taxes should be seen as a long-term outcome of the process, and potentially, there are future changes to come.

I participated in this working group in summer 2011, contributing my knowledge on social security models applied in the cultural sector in various European countries. In frequent cases, the models I proposed as examples of good practices were disregarded with the argument that in a country of 1.3 million of inhabitants where the estimated number of professional freelance cultural workers does not exceed a few thousand persons, the establishment of artists' social security funds, such as the Künstlersozialkasse in Germany or Künstler-Sozialversicherungsfonds in Austria, is not worth the effort and the financial cost of their development.

As a matter of fact, there is no reliable statistical data on the number of freelance cultural workers in Estonia. The Ministry of Culture operates with estimations that are based on the membership in artistic associations. Paradoxically, if such data would be collected in a qualitative manner, it would most probably occur that there are only a handful of cultural workers who actually do lack health insurance. This is due to the fact that cultural workers usually find some sort of survival strategies in their precarious situation where the lack of income and social security are intertwined: for example, by getting a regular job, prolonging one's student status, registering as unemployed, or as self-employed entrepreneur indeed. Often, such strategies are used in successive manner, whereas the ones who switch the league rather frequently, are most likely to be camouflaged freelancers who do not appear as such in the (non-existent) statistics.

To recall the discussions in the working group that was initiated by the Estonian Ministry of Culture, the seemingly minuscule number of freelance cultural workers was often used as an excuse against all proposals that implied substantial administrative costs for developing policy reforms or modifications in the existing social security system. Instead, it was sometimes argued, predominantly with humour, that it would be easier to change the § 6 of the Social Tax Act, and to include cultural workers into the list of social groups who are treated according to the principle of solidarity. The humour was out when it occurred that the cultural workers who participated in the working group supported the idea quite warmly. On the second thought, even the ministry officers realised that the number of freelance cultural workers would increase quite essentially as soon as the material conditions, such as even the modest matter of guaranteed health insurance, would allow that. Thus, the bitter humour of the situation was actually manifested in a different dispute – in my view, it was in the ongoing controversy whether there are too many or too few freelance cultural workers in Estonia. In both cases, however, their pursuit of social security was considered too expensive from the perspective of state administration.


YOU COULD PROCONS AS LONG AS IT'S A POSSIBLE. PHD STUDIES ARE A WELL-KNOWN SURVIVAL STRATEGY FOR FREELANCE CULTURAL WORKERS ALSO BEYOND HEALTH CARE ISSUES.
YOU COULD GO TO THE UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE. YOU MIGHT NOT BE ELIGIBLE FOR UNEMPLOYMENT SUBSIDIES AS YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T PAID ENOUGH SOCIAL TAXES. BUT ALL RESIDIES AS YOU PROBABLY HAVEN'T IN ESTONIA ARE COVERED BY HEALTH INSURANCE. THE REGISTERED UNEMPLOYED PERSONS STARTS 30 DAYS AFTER ENROLLING AT THE UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE, AND WILL BE CANCELLED 30 DAYS AFTER CHECKING OUT FROM THE REGISTER. YOU CAN COMBINE THIS WITH OCCASIONAL SHORT-TERM JOBS, CHECKING OUT FROM THE REGISTER AND THEN BACK IN AGAIN.
IF YOU HAVEN'T HAD ANY INCOME FOR ONE MONTH YOU COULD ALSO APPLY FOR THE "SUPPORT FOR CREATIVE ACTIVITY" WHICH IS ADMINISTERED THROUGH ARTISTIC ASSOCIATIONS. TO APPLY, BUT YOUR PRACTICE WILL THEN BE VALUATED IN ORDER TO DECIDE WHETHER YOU CAN BE CONSIDERED TO BE A "PROFESSIONAL" ART WORKER. IN A POSITIVE CASE, YOU WOULD ALSO RECEIVE A MINIMUM INCOME OF CIRCA 340 EUROS PER MONTH. YOU ARE NOT ALLOWED TO EARN MORE THAN A HALF OF THAT SUM IN ADDITION TO THE SUPPORT, IN ORDER TO KEEP YOU IN THE CONDITION OF POVERTY. USUALLY THIS SUPPORT WON'T LAST FOR MORE THAN 6 MONTHS (MAX 12) AND YOU WILL HAVE TO WAIT FOR 2 YEARS BEFORE APPLYING AGAIN
YOU COULD TAKE PART IN A REVOLUTIONARY DIRECT ACTION AND LET YOURSELF BE CONVICTED TOGETHER WITH COMRADES. THE HEALTH CARE COSTS OF PRISONERS ARE COVERED BY THE STATE
AFTER ALL, THE LATIN-DERIVED MEANING OF "COMRADE" IS CHAMBER MATE.
A SEDUCTIVE OPTION FOR MILITANT PHILOSOPHERS AND WRITERS


BY THE TIME YOU REACH PENSION AGE, YOU WILL NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT HEALTH INSURANCE ANYMORE. RETIRED PEOPLE ARE COVERED BY THE SOLIDARITY SCHEME.
YOU COULD GET A REGULAR JOB!
HOW TO REACH HEALTH INSURANCE AS FREELANCE ARTWORKER IN ESTONIA
YOU COULD SIGN A CONTRACT DIRECTLY WITH THE HEALTH INSURANCE FUND AND MAKE QUARTERLY ADVANCE PAYMENTS TO THEM. IN 2014 IT WAS 123 EUROS / MONTH. CAN YOU AFFORD IT?
YOU COULD MARRY A DIPLOMAT OR THE PRESIDENT FOR MORE "SPECIAL CASE" OPTIONS SEE THE ARTICLE 6 IN THE ESTONIAN SOCIAL TAX ACT.
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES ARE SUBJECT TO THE SOLIDARITY PRINCIPLE. ANOLD SOVIET-TIME STRATEGY OF FAKING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES COULD BE IN ORDER TO ESCAPE CONSCRIPTION — NOT IN ORDER TO HAVE ACCESS TO THE HEALTH CARE.
BURNOUT, DEPRESSION, ANXIETIES, RADICULOPATHY AND OTHER CHRONIC ILLNESSES ARE LOYAL FRIENDS OF PRECARIOUS WORKERS. YOU MIGHT NOT NEED TO PRETEND TO BE ILL AT ALL. BUT IN ORDER TO BE RECOGNISED FOR "DISABILITY PENSION", CERTAIN HISTORY OF REGULAR WORK OR SOCIAL TAX CONTRIBUTIONS ARE REQUIRED. AS A FREELANCER, THIS WILL BE COMPLICATED FOR YOU

I have to admit that my own participation in the working group by the ministry was quite strongly marked by a pig-headed insistence on the choice of including cultural workers in the Social Tax Act § 6. I was doing it with a political stomach ache, as I would have preferred to defend the idea of universal health insurance instead. Nonetheless, in the pragmatic atmosphere of this task group, it was clear that the Ministry of Culture would be the wrong addressee for proposing a broad social reform. It was also quite bluntly stated by the ministry officers that as long as the neoliberal Reform Party runs the government, there is no prospect of any social reform that would be founded on the notion of solidarity. Thus the idea of including cultural workers in the Social Tax Act § 6 was seemingly an indecent proposal both from the neoliberal and the socialist perspective. I would now like to rehearse this proposal from a somewhat different position, using it as an entry point into feminist Marxist analysis on the political ramifications of unpaid labour.

An unexpected encounter — the case of nuns

In April 2011, the Estonian daily newspaper *Postimees* published an article reporting on the problems that nuns of Pühtitsa convent were facing in relation to health insurance.[6] This newspaper report caught some attention within the art workers' movement in Tallinn. To find the core problems of the Estonian health insurance system manifested in a newspaper article about nuns signified an unexpected encounter — we saw it as a hilarious metaphor for our own situation.

In its essence, the story of nuns was very simple. Nuns have no financial income and they are not listed as special case in the § 6 of the Social Tax Act. Thus, they represent one more occupational group that falls between two chairs in the Estonian social security system. Recognising this blind-spot, the government had found a technocratic solution by annually allocating money to the convent directly from state budget in order to cover the health insurance costs for the nuns. In the middle of the financial crisis in 2011, only half of the usual amount could be allocated, leaving the nuns without health insurance for six months. The nuns wrote an appeal to the President which then started circulating through different ministries. The newspaper article in *Postimees* reported on this process.

In the context of the art workers' movement, the newspaper article touched a nerve, because it provided concrete evidence for the argument that there is a blind-spot in the Estonian social security system in the first place. However, I would now like to argue that there is more to this analogy than just the unfortunate situation of lacking access to health insurance. In order to flesh out the full potential that the example of nuns represents, I want to frame it as a nodal point that accentuates re-occurring motifs within discourses of art, precarious labour and care/domestic work. I will build my discussion on three questions: What do art workers, nuns and care workers have in common? How can these commonalities be conceptualised

from the perspective of feminist Marxism? How would such conceptualisation open up transversal perspectives for social movements struggling against precariousness?

Framing art and care – a labour of love and devotion?

When searching for proximities in the social situation of nuns, art and care workers, there is one common pattern that catches attention – it is the persistent obsession with the idea of *devotion*. For example, the newspaper report about nuns accentuated devotion as a decisive feature that characterises the subjectivity of nuns. "The purpose of the lives of convent residents is not to gain profit or to satisfy personal wishes and needs, but to serve god," the newspaper underlined when explaining why the relationship between the nuns and the convent is not regulated by work contracts.[7] Thus, the particular status of nuns in relation to wage-labour relations and social security system apparently results from the doctrine of devotion, which, remarkably, also holds a significant position in the contexts of art and care work.

In the realm of visual art, the imperative of devotion can be associated with the genealogy of modern art. The sphere of modern art was largely formed in the nineteenth century, when the rising bourgeoisie class in Europe manifested its economic wealth by creating new spaces for the presentation and consumption of art. These new art institutions facilitated the dissociation of art from the state and religious institutions. As a result of this process the role of artists in society was no longer limited to the status of servant vis-à-vis their religious or aristocratic patrons. It was now expanded by the possibility to create art for art's sake, to work autonomously, according to artistic vision and inspiration. Thus, the bourgeoisie class contributed substantially to the production of social conditions that would set the stage for the figure of artist who is selflessly devoted to creative practice, even though the origins of this ideal can be traced back to Renaissance and Romanticism.

As much as the discourse of modern art remains a dominant framework for conceptualising art practices until today, the social imaginary of selflessly devoted artist is obviously still going strong. In that matter, Hans Abbing's book *Why Are Artists Poor?* is a useful resource for exploring commonplace assumptions that link the concept of devotion to visual art practices.[8] In his critical inquiry about the "exceptional economy of art" he browses through a variety of *topoi* that indicate the co-existence of modern as well as pre-modern features in contemporary conceptions of art. For example, he refers to the understanding of art as something authentic and sacred, offering a romantic alternative to the routine of everyday lives; or as something innovative and rebellious, challenging social canons and taboos; or as something magical, provoking sublime experiences in its audiences. These beliefs are often accompanied by the idea that artistic talent is a gift which needs sacrifice and absolute devotion from its bearers, or by the assumption

that there is a clear distinction between artistic quality and the economic conditions of its production. In Abbing's view, it is precisely the belief system about art as something remote, sacred and magical that contributes to the denial of economy in the arts. Accordingly, the persistent belief that artists are predominantly motivated by their passion and devotion, taking little interest in economic security, appears to be a relic of the resonating genius myth.

Historically, the issue of devotion has also been heatedly debated in feminist politics. Feminist Marxist theory of the 1970s was very much engaged in efforts to rethink housework as a particular type of physical, emotional and sexual labour that is disguised under the notions of love and devotion. Contesting the naturalisation of domestic work as a realm of women's biological destiny, feminist Marxists argued that by denying housework a wage and transforming it into an act of love, "capital has killed many birds with one stone."[9] To elaborate, the naturalisation of domestic work as an attribute of women's subjectivity was not only criticised as an oppressive mechanism that allows capital to make profits out of unpaid reproductive labour, but also as one that prevents women from struggling against it. For example, feminist Marxist author Silvia Federici, whose writings form the theoretical foundation of my analysis here, argued in 1975 that it is precisely the unwaged condition of housework that has reinforced the common assumption that housework is not work, which in turn guarantees that instead of refusing such exploitation, women have internalised the desire to perform as good housewives.[10]

Gendered ambiguities between work and non-work

To allude to this line of argumentation within feminist Marxist thought, I would now argue that the ethics of devotion is more than an incidental commonality characterising the subjectivity of nuns, art workers and housewives. As feminist Marxist analysis demonstrates, it is an issue with far-reaching material consequences, which are apparently not completely voluntary even in the case of nuns. By revealing the hidden social labour that has been masked under the disguise of women's supposedly innate affiliation with tasks related to care and reproduction, feminist Marxist theory has shown that the domestic work of women is not a private activity that resides outside the capital. On the contrary, women's housework is conceptualised as a key resource of capitalist accumulation that produces and reproduces labour power.[11] Therefore, a significant problem that can be abstracted from this reasoning is related to the contradiction that the "labourers of devotion" are *socially not recognised as workers.*

In relation to the health insurance system in Estonia, the nuns and the art workers share a similar position of ambiguity in that matter. For example, the newspaper article on the situation of nuns reported on their earlier attempts to advocate for the inclusion of convent residents in the Social Tax Act § 6. Instead, the government decided to allocate financial support for

the convent, so that this could register the convent residents as employees and pay social taxes for them in the same way as any other employer would do. This is a very significant move from political perspective – whereas the nuns are officially not recognised as subjects of the solidarity principle, the establishment of a contribution-based relationship between the nuns and the social security system represents a concealed procedure of exercising solidarity. The purpose of such exceptional arrangement is quite evident – it is meant to protect the neoliberal social order from any attempt to extend the current definition of solidarity principle as such.

Furthermore, as one of the nuns stressed in her statement quoted in newspaper *Postimees*, the nuns do not identify as workers of the convent. Nevertheless, the outcome of the agreement between the convent and the government imposed that the nuns were registered at the Health Insurance Fund *as if* they were waged workers. The majority of freelance art practitioners, on the contrary, would describe their artistic activities as work. However, the government-supported cultural funding system, from which art workers heavily depend, often implies income models resulting in the situation where the social security system regards them *as if* they were not waged workers. As I have argued in this paper, both scenarios reveal a blind-spot in the health insurance system of Estonia, explicating how the solidarity-based system reaches its limits when faced with the working poor who fall outside the normative conceptions of wage-labour relations.

In addition to that, it is important to underline that the two cases I have exemplified here, are neither specific to the particular legislative system in Estonia nor exceptions that only affect narrow occupational groups such as art and cultural workers, or the clergy. In societies where the relationship between waged employment and social security is organised according to similar principles, the reproductive sector is affected from analogical consequences. Silvia Federici has summed up this issue in a witty formulation, stating that, paradoxically, "the more women care for others the less care they receive in turn," because they spend less time in waged employment which determines access to social security benefits.[12]

To add one more dimension to the discussion about the gendered patterns of capitalist exploitation, it is also worth noting that, according to my experience, the gender composition within the art field is increasingly becoming more feminine. Therefore, my aspiration to theorise affinities between art workers' struggles and feminist politics, is far from being an academic innuendo. On the contrary, I see it as a political urgency which is also connected to my observation that the recent wave of art workers' collectives, emerging to struggle against precarious working conditions internationally, has been strongly driven by women.[13] At the same time, it seems to me that contemporary art workers' initiatives prefer to employ a rather universal language, scandalising the exploitation of unpaid labour as a phenomenon that affects all art practitioners equally. This adoption of a universal mode of address resonates with Joan Acker's analysis how work

is conceived as an abstract category that is assumed to be gender neutral and disembodied. Acker argues that the notion of a disembodied individual is the underlying assumption within workplace logic where the idea of an abstract worker is modelled after a male body who is dedicated to his full-time job. Furthermore, by referring to Carole Pateman, she adds that also the liberal democratic concept of a universal citizen, who represents anyone and everyone, is a political fiction that is based on the omission of difference and embodied experience.[14] Thus, when seeking to find commonalities in the gendered modalities of art and care work, my aim is to overcome the apparent isolation between art workers' struggles and feminist politics. While striving to accentuate entanglements between these two strands of political struggle, I wish to articulate political imaginaries that are founded on feminist analysis of unpaid labour.

Transversal struggles in the social factory

In order to add fuel to this aspiration, I would now like to interlink political horizons that bring together historical radical feminist efforts to identify unwaged reproductive labour as productive and the social movements mobilising against precariousness in the beginning of 21st century. It is interesting that one of the most prominent demands formulated by the recent social movements, such as EuroMayDay, has been the call for unconditional basic income, a concept which has a substantial genealogy within the feminist strands of Marxism. Whereas not expressed in identical formulation, this political imaginary was implied in the autonomist feminist Marxist politics of the 1970s. For example, the Wages for Housework campaign, founded in 1972 in Padua to connect feminist activists from different parts of the world, stressed that the struggle of unwaged domestic workers must not be trivialised as a request for the pay-check.[15] As Silvia Federici addressed in her writings of that time, to struggle for wage in sectors where work is not socially recognised as such, is not simply about formulating one demand among others, but also about establishing a political perspective that opens a new ground for social struggle. Thus, Wages for Housework campaign was not oriented at demanding access to conventional wage-labour relations: quite the opposite, it was based on the understanding that women were already part of such relations. In spite of striving for the recognition of women's hidden social labour through wage, winning a wage was not considered to be the revolutionary goal. Rather than that, demanding a wage was considered as revolutionary *strategy,* one that undermines the role that is assigned to women in the capitalist division of labour.[16]

Federici's differentiation between revolutionary strategies and aims is in line with the fundamental operaist argument that wage is not just a pay-check but a political means of organising society.[17] In the context of feminist struggles, this knowledge guided the efforts to expand the location of working class struggle beyond its privileged site of the factory. For

example, Mariarosa Dalla Costa and Selma James called out in 1972: "If we fail to grasp that precisely this family is the very pillar of the capitalist organisation of work [...] then we will be moving in a limping revolution."[18] In terms of spatial metaphoric, such calls corresponded with the newly developed concept of "social factory" that emerged in operaist theory in the 1970s. Developed by authors such as Romano Alquati, Mario Tronti, Antonio Negri, and other regular contributors to the journal *Quaderni Rossi*, this concept denotes a stage in capitalist development where: "social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society."[19] When suggesting the immanence of capital to all social relations, the concept of social factory resonated with feminist efforts to conceptualise fordist mode of production as a social system that reaches far beyond the walls of factory, also including the unwaged workers of the capitalist society.

Similarly, when contemporary social movements demand a universal basic income, this demand is founded on the understanding that precarious workers are entitled for payment due to the fact that capitalism needs us to work in unwaged and precarious conditions, making money "out of our cooking, smiling and fucking,"[20] as Silvia Federici has aptly described the nature of value-production in the social factory. Thus, rather than seeking admission into the conventional wage-labour relations, the demand for basic income is essentially a more radical one, demanding the re-organisation of capitalist social relations at large. But here again, the radical dimension of basic income is not constituted in "struggle for capital" but in "struggle against capital."[21] This difference between *for* and *against* is the crucial element that distinguishes operaist and post-operaist struggles from the trade unionist politics of wage negotiations. Furthermore, it is the conceptual nucleus of the political perspective that *autonomist* Marxism has to offer for workers who strive for autonomy from both the capital and the state.

Considering the vast amount of attention that I have dedicated to art workers' troubled attempts to gain health insurance coverage in this paper, I would now like to conclude my reflections by invoking an affinity between art workers' attempts to redefine the § 6 of the Estonian Social Tax Act — a paragraph that succinctly describes the distribution of waged and unwaged labour in Western capitalist societies —, and a feminist political imaginary that is being offered at this very moment in the social movements that are mobilising under the slogan "Carevolution!" Politically originating from the autonomist feminist spectrum of radical thinking, these movements strive to anchor the foundation of non-capitalist politics in the sphere of care. This partly alludes with ideas that were developed by the Socialist Patients' Collective in the 1970s, viewing illness as a condition created by capitalism and the sick as a revolutionary class who can be radicalised for struggle against oppression by "turning illness into a weapon."[22] What is implicated

in this concept is the idea that virtually everyone experiences the condition of being ill at some stage of their lives and, thus, can develop a revolutionary subjectivity from this experience. In a similar manner, the care movements depart from the assumption that human existence is defined by caring for others and being cared for by them. Therefore, the dependencies and interdependencies of caring are not only discussed as a potential starting point for mobilising mass resistance against the neoliberal destruction of solidary social security principles exercised by contemporary states, but also as a foundation for self-organisation and commoning, for developing care practices that are independent from the state and the capital. Thus, considering the Tallinn art workers' movement's preoccupation with the issue of health care – unless it wouldn't have disintegrated by now, it could have well found a foothold in the radical politics of care revolution. When placing the art workers' struggles in the light of this imagination, two potentialities come to my mind: the first one is about discovering new allies beyond the bizarre affiliation with nuns… and the other one about exploring new alleys that would privilege political autonomy rather than artistic one.

To set up potential affinities between art workers' struggles and radical feminist social movements has marked my mode of analysis in this article. In juxtaposing the art workers' struggle in Tallinn with bits and parts from the history of autonomist feminist Marxist politics and the present-day of radical social movements, I have been seeking to highlight continuities and entanglements between struggles that do not appear adjacent in space and time. When configuring these proximities, I have demonstrated how the feminist Marxist conception of care and domestic work as a realm of hidden social labour offers a starting point, and a revolutionary perspective, for envisioning social struggles that are constructed from the experience of unwaged and precarious workers.

1. Eesti Haigekassa [Estonian Health Insurance Fund], "Health Insurance in Estonia," http://www.haigekassa.ee/eng/health-insurance-in-estonia (accessed 12 August 2014).
2. Sotsiaalmaksuseadus [Social Tax Act] (2000), https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/521012014007/consolide (accessed 26 July 2014).
3. There is one exception to this rule, the "support for creative activity" subsidy allocated according to the principles stated in the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act, to which I will return later in this article.
4. Loovisikute ja loomeliitude seadus [Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act] (2004), https://www.riigiteataja.ee/en/eli/518062014008/consolide (accessed 15 August 2014).
5. In addition to the regular unemployment allowance in Estonia, there is also an alternative modality of unemployment subsidies in which the amount of allowance is calculated in correlation with previous income. This modality applies for a limited period of time and only in cases when the unemployed person has been laid off from a regular job. I will not elaborate on this modality here, because it is irrelevant for freelance workers.
6. Merike Tamm, "Pühtitsa nunnad paluvad riigilt ravikindlustust" [Pühtitsa nuns are appealing to the state for health insurance], *Postimees*, 7 April 2011.
7. Ibid.
8. Hans Abbing, *Why Are Artists Poor? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2002).
9. Silvia Federici, "Wages for Housework" (1975), re-published in Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero. Housework, Reproduction and Feminist Struggle* (New York: Autonomedia, 2012), p. 17.
10. Ibid, p. 16.
11. Silvia Federici, *Precarious Labour: A Feminist Viewpoint* (2006), http://inthemiddleofthewhirlwind.wordpress.com/precarious-labor-a-feminist-viewpoint/ (accessed 6 February 2014).
12. Silvia Federici, "On Elder Care Work and the Limits of Marxism" (2009), re-published in *Revolution at Point Zero,* p. 123.
13. For example, it is perhaps not so well-known that the W.A.G.E. collective in New York initially had their main mobilisation platform within the local lesbian and queer-feminist scene, or that the Precarious Workers Brigade in London has been primarily a women's collective for many years.
14. Joan Acker, "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations," *Gender & Society*, 4(2) (1990), pp. 149–151.
15. Silvia Federici, "Counterplanning from the Kitchen" (1975), re-published in *Revolution at Point Zero*, p. 30.
16. Ibid, pp. 30–39.
17. Silvia Federici, "Introduction" in *Revolution at Point Zero*, p. 7.
18. Mariarosa Dalla Costa, Selma James, *The Power of Women and the Subversion of Community* (1972), http://libcom.org/library/power-women-subversion-community-della-costa-selma-james (accessed 6 February 2014), p.19.
19. Mario Tronti 1962, cited in Harry Cleaver, "The Inversion of Class Perspective in Marxian Theory: from Valorisation to Self-valorisation," in Werner Bonefeld, Richard Gunn, Kosmas Psychopedis (eds.), *Open Marxism, vol.2, Theory and Practice* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), p. 137.
20. Silvia Federici, "Wages for Housework" (1975), re-published in *Revolution at Point Zero*, p. 19.
21. Silvia Federici, "Counterplanning from the Kitchen" (1975), re-published in *Revolution at Point Zero*, p. 29.
22. SPK [Sozialistisches Patiententkollektiv], *Aus der Krankheit eine Waffe machen. Eine Agitationsschrift des Sozialistischen Patientenkollektivs an der Universität Heidelberg* (München: Trikont Verlag, 1972).

Krisdy Shindler, *Can Art Manipulate Money?*, 2010.

II. Forms of Organising and Labour Struggles

CORINA L. APOSTOL

Art Workers between Precarity and Resistance: A Genealogy

On present-day and historical stakes

Backstage of art fairs, biennales, shows, before artworks are exhibited, sold, collected or gifted, there are artists, interns, assistants, handlers, curators who research and plan. They acquire working materials and the necessary tools to draw, to write, to build, to rehearse, or to film, as well as publicise and invite audiences via social media. Performances, graphics, installations, films, sculptures, documents or paintings are all the result of artistic labour and of creativity. Despite this reality, on today's global art market, artistic labour goes unrecognised while the focus falls solely on the tangible results of this labour. As a result, conditions of artistic labour are summarily dismissed as unimportant, frequently among the upper echelons of the art management, and sometimes even among artists themselves. In some cases, when members of the art community do decide to speak out, they face the danger of being excluded from an exhibition or a project, or blacklisted from working in certain institutions.

This critical state of affairs however, is not a *sine qua non*. The widespread belief that artists are far too independent and focused on their own work to self-organise and participate in social movements, is easily contradicted by a substantial amount of historical examples when artists came to work together in unions, communes, associations, guilds, syndicates or collectives. Many of these started in the mid-19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. What is also important is that these artists were not just seeking better pay, legal rights, life securities, but also aligned themselves with workers' movements that challenged the dominant status quo. Since the second half of the 19th century, when the terms artist, art worker and activist were used interchangeably in the context of the Artists' Union inside the Paris Commune, artists have occupied a precarious and consciously in-between position within the class stratification of society. This lineage of self-reflection and resistance can be traced through the international avant-garde movements that followed. Within these groups, which I discuss later in this text, artists and art theorists opposed the notion of "art for art's

sake" and attempted to embrace a working class identity, even though they widely disagreed about what exactly this entailed. In this sense, we can conceptualise the historical development of engaged art workers as a dialectical relationship between artists and society, wherein the transformation of one cannot occur independently of the other. As I show through my selection of the following case-study examples, that are neither encyclopaedic nor exhaustive, collective actions at the macro- and grassroots-level could not exist in separation from one another.

The artist as art worker and activist: nineteenth century beginnings

In the second half of the 19th century, reactionary appeals to an art for art's sake clashed with principles of an emerging avant-gardism. During the revolutionary period in France, artist Gustave Courbet penned the famous Realist Manifesto (1855)[1], immediately after Marx's famous Communist Manifesto (1848). While the extent to which he participated in major historical events has been put into question, Courbet's bold confidence and passionate belief in the artist's role in changing society – broadly conceived towards a liberated and socialist future – were strongly shaped by these events. Those were turbulent times of class and political conflicts, from the moment the working class entered the scene as an autonomous political force – which was brutally suppressed by the bourgeoisie – to the French workers' brief, yet powerful Commune.

In 1871 Courbet called on Parisian artists to "assume control of the museums and art collections which, though the property of the nation, are primarily theirs, from the intellectual as well as the material point of view."[2] Courbet's statement responded to the paradigm shift of the economic framework, wherein the transfer of capital accumulated by capitalist organisations created a new class. This bourgeoisie had accumulated economic means and invested heavily in the salon art production to flaunt their power. Emerging as new spaces for the presentation and enjoyment of art by the bourgeoisie, the salons of the 19th century operated autonomously from the church and the monarchy; while self-fashioned as disengaged from everyday production, they at the same time built themselves as powerful, independent entities in the field of art. Courbet challenged the salon system and the political classes it upheld through his infamous monumental canvases depicting labour, sex workers and peasants, as well as his support for the communards' removal of the imperialistic Vendôme Column in 1871, and his role as commissar of culture in the Commune committee.

The transformation of the artist's subjectivity as art worker and activist during the latter half of the 19th century, spearheaded by the Realist movement, was an initial landmark moment that continues to define the relationship between art and social movements today. Courbet's appeal was one of the first instances when artists' aspiration for social change led them to align themselves with a wider workers' movement and break

with the bourgeois institutions of art and the monarchy. Transgressing from artistic praxis into political action, artists could be considered as a counter-power, occupying political functions in a new order, no matter how briefly this lasted.

Art workers, avant-gardes and new social movements

In the following case studies, I show how artist groups from around the world sought affinities and alliances to various degrees with members of the organised Left, in order to frame the concept of "art worker" as a form of recurring artistic subjectivity under which members of the artistic community mobilised in different contexts and using different strategies, from artistic interventions to direct actions. Thus my analysis of these groups does not rely on historical causality from one cycle of protest or one movement to another, but rather it builds the ground for a comparative study of both continuity and change, overlap and dissonance within them.

While its participants did not express a specifically socialist position, the Dada movement opposed the values of bourgeois society, political conservatism and the senseless World War I. Dada inaugurated a specific, rebellious attitude towards artistic production, and expressed a set of discontents with the institutionalised nature of the art world. Some members of Berlin Dada sought to identify, at least in theory with the working class, presenting themselves not as artists in service of capital, but rather artists of the working class — art workers.[3] As Helen Molesworth has observed, "Dada's perpetual return is due to the constant need to articulate the ever changing problems of capitalism and the role of the labourer within it."[4] Unlike their 19th century predecessors, Dada was mainly a cultural movement spearheaded by artists who had been displaced and disillusioned by WWI, and who used various forms of creative expression to express their anti-war position. Due to this, there was an affinity between the various Dada movements and the Left political parties, especially in Berlin, although, rather than expressing a socialist position, Dada remained heterogeneous and anarchic. Dada's importance is that the movement sparked an awareness that an artist's role in society could no longer be considered according to the antiquated and deeply problematic nature of high bourgeois society.

Just a decade later, in Mexico City, the ground-breaking Syndicate of Technical Workers, painters and sculptors demonstrated alongside the local proletarian social movement with creative enthusiasm. Even though Mexico had hard won its independence in 1821 from the Spanish Empire, the economic divide between the rich and the poor, and the social gap between the Spanish and Amerindian descendants were glaring, sparking a decade of civil wars in the country. In their 1922 Manifesto, the Syndicate grasped on the general socialist zeitgeist and addressed to "the workers, peasants oppressed by the rich, to the soldiers transformed into hangmen by their chiefs and to the intellectuals who are not servile to the bourgeoisie."

They wrote: "we are with those who seek to overthrow an old and inhuman system, without which you, worker of the soil, produce riches for the overseer and politician, while you starve. We proclaim that this is the moment of social transformation from a decrepit to a new order." Their goal was "to create a beauty for all, which enlightens and stirs to struggle."[5] Many members of the Syndicate, which functioned as a guild, joined the Mexican Communist Party (MCP). Their activities were invested both in a new type of collective artistic language, which found its expression in the large-scale educational public murals sponsored by the state, and defending artists' rights and interests.[6] However, over the course of the decade, the Syndicate members grew increasingly dissatisfied with the government and began criticising the post-revolutionary realities in Mexico. The government terminated the muralists' contracts, expelled them from the Party, and the Syndicate gradually dissolved as some of its founders such as Siqueiros emigrated.

Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo march with artists on May Day demonstration, Mexico City, 1929. Photograph by Tina Modotti. Courtesy of Reinhard Schultz, Galerie Bilderwelt.

Within the same time-frame, but further north in New York, the Harlem Artists' Guild was founded in 1928. Its first president, the artist Aaron Douglas,[7] together with vice-president Augusta Savage and prominent members of the Harlem Renaissance movement (Gwendolyn Bennett, Norman Lewis, Charles Alston and others) agitated for the end of race-based discrimination and for the inclusion and fair pay of African American artists in arts organisations. Although an Artists' Union existed in New York at the time, these artists felt the necessity for an organisation based

on the needs of the Harlem artists' community, that would more effectively represent and lobby for their views and values. The guild's constitution stated that "being aware of the need to act collectively in the solution of the cultural, economic and professional problems that confront us" their goals were first to encourage young talent, to "foster understanding between artist and public thru [through] education" and through "cooperation with agencies and individuals interested in the improvement of conditions among artists," and finally to raise "standards of living and achievement among artists."[8] The guild played an influential role in helping artists attain the recognition necessary to qualify them for the Works Progress Administration (WPA) work projects.[9] With the assistance of the Harlem Artists' Guild, and the WPA, African American artists succeeded in gaining employment despite the hard times of the 1930s.

Artists' Union Rally, ca. 1935. Photograph by Irving Marantz. Gerald Monroe research material on the American Artists' Congress, the Artists' Union, and the WPA, Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution.

Re-adaptations and new cycles of struggle after the World War II

In the post-WWII reactionary period in the United States, the Artists' Equity Association was established at a time when unions were being dismantled, factories purged of women, and the government's hostility towards the artists left them with very little prospects. The Association[10] faced

considerable opposition, as the idea of organised artists was looked on with suspicion by conservative critics and lawmakers. This was due to a lingering antipathy to the activism of previous groups, such as the Artists' Union and the Harlem Artists' Guild, but also because of the ideological Cold War mistrust of socialist values. The Association ended up duplicating some of the activities that concerned its aforementioned predecessors, putting in place its own grievance committee. It functioned as a collective working platform which agitated for improved economic conditions for visual artists, and for the expansion and protection of artists' rights. Even though it did not endure for more than a decade, the Association was a national endeavour, bringing together artist leaders, museum directors and critics to discuss issues around the visibility of the artists and their financial conditions.[11]

In the turbulent 1960s and 1970s artists were once more among the first to self-organise, identifying with the workforce under pressure to accept pay cuts, pension cuts and to disband unions. In 1968 France, artists, workers and students – pent up with anger over general poverty, unemployment, the conservative government, and military involvement in Southeast Asia – took to the streets in waves of strikes and demonstrations. Factories and universities were occupied. Atelier Populaire (The Popular Workshop), an arts organisation founded by students and faculty on strike at the École des Beaux Arts in the capital, produced street posters and banners for the revolt that would "give concrete support to the great movement of the workers on strike who are occupying their factories in defiance of the Gaullist government." The visual material was designed, printed anonymously and distributed freely, which were then held up on barricades, carried in demonstrations, and plastered on walls all over France. The Atelier intended this material not be taken as "the final outcome of an experience, but as an inducement for finding, through contact with the masses, new levels of action, both on the cultural and the political plane."[12] Unlike its predecessors from the Realist movement, Atelier Populaire did not seek to become a political party or power, but functioned as a critical cultural frame around the social movement in France at the time.

The following year in 1969, as part of the same turbulent socio-political global climate, an international group of artists and critics formed the Art Workers' Coalition in New York. Hundreds of art workers participated in the AWC's open meetings. Its function was similar to that of a trade union, engaging directly with museum boards and administrators who had become the façade of the commercial art world. The group which began around demonstrations at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, presented museums with a list of demands. The group invoked its avant-garde predecessors in posters, flyers and banners, referring for example to the toppling of the Vendôme Column in Paris by the communards in 1878 as an inspiration. They also sought inspiration in the Artists' Unions of the 1930s that organised themselves similarly to industrial unions, as well as artists' guilds in Holland and Denmark, demanding subsidies

"The police post themselves at the School of Fine Arts – the Fine Arts' students poster the streets," Atelier Populaire, May 1968.

for universal employment, rather than support from private capital from wealthy patrons.[13] In their famous list of demands, the AWC called for the introduction of a royalty system by which collectors had to pay artists a percentage of their profits from resale, the creation of a trust fund for living artists, and the demand that all museums should be open for free at all times, and that their opening hours should accommodate the working classes. They also demanded that art institutions make exhibition space available for women, minorities and artists with no gallery representing them. In 1970 the AWC formed an alliance with MoMA's Staff Association

and by working simultaneously from both inside and outside institutional boundaries, their coalition of art-activists and the staff members were able to establish PASTA (The Professional and Administrative Staff Association) in 1970. This was one of the most significant official unions of art workers in the United States, as it joined together the interest of the artists with those in similarly precarious conditions who are involved in different aspects of artistic production. Although the Art Workers' Coalition folded after three years of intense activities, their legacy of re-imagining artistic labour and challenging the unjust and discriminatory institutional models in the United States endured. More recently, with the involvement of the artistic community in social movements such as Occupy, questions of artistic subjectivity and class composition, artists as workers, protest politics, and the role of art and artistic institution in the age of the art market have become once again paramount.

Contemporary challenges and new beginnings

Today, it has become clear that artists are pressured to conform to the logic of the art market, even becoming the symbols of the new neoliberal creative economy. As cultural critics such as Gregory Sholette[14] have correctly observed, by co-opting the desires and demands of the 1960s and 1970s cultures of protest, businesses and policy makers have transformed the office into more flexible, less hierarchical forms of control, which are increasingly difficult to disentangle and oppose.

Simultaneously, some artists' groups who lead a precarious existence continue to identify as workers, at a time when traditional industries have almost disappeared in many Western economies, where there is no longer the safety net of the near extinct welfare state; or in the case of some countries at the periphery of the European Union, where the state has altogether ceased to mediate between the working population and the corporate empire. While the 1% enjoy their prosperity, it is by now abundantly clear that the majority have not gained any advantage from the trickle-down effect.

In the art world, even blue-chip artists deal with constantly changing occupations, travelling from one art fair to another biennale to another major exhibition, with exhausting networking and publicising. While even the successful artists struggle, there are also many artists whose production is invisible, yet completely necessary for the art world to go on spinning. Young art students and recent graduates from academies and universities have to deal with not being able to afford a studio, scrambling for teaching positions, and having almost no health benefits. For the most part, these artists end up as manual producers, whose skills such as painting, welding, casting, and designing are employed by the knowledge producers. This labour hierarchy illustrates the widening divide between the very few artists who are successful, and the many that are not privy to the wealth of today's art world. The latter, like other precarious workers

continue to struggle to get to the right side of (art) history, to escape their condition of have-nots. In such difficult times, collective political organising has become once again necessary. Against the backdrop of social movements which are tackling the side-effects of the so-called financial crises around the world, the destruction of educational and cultural structures together with the rise of right-wing and nationalist sentiments, some art workers' groups also began engaging with the artistic equivalent of the military-industrial-complex.

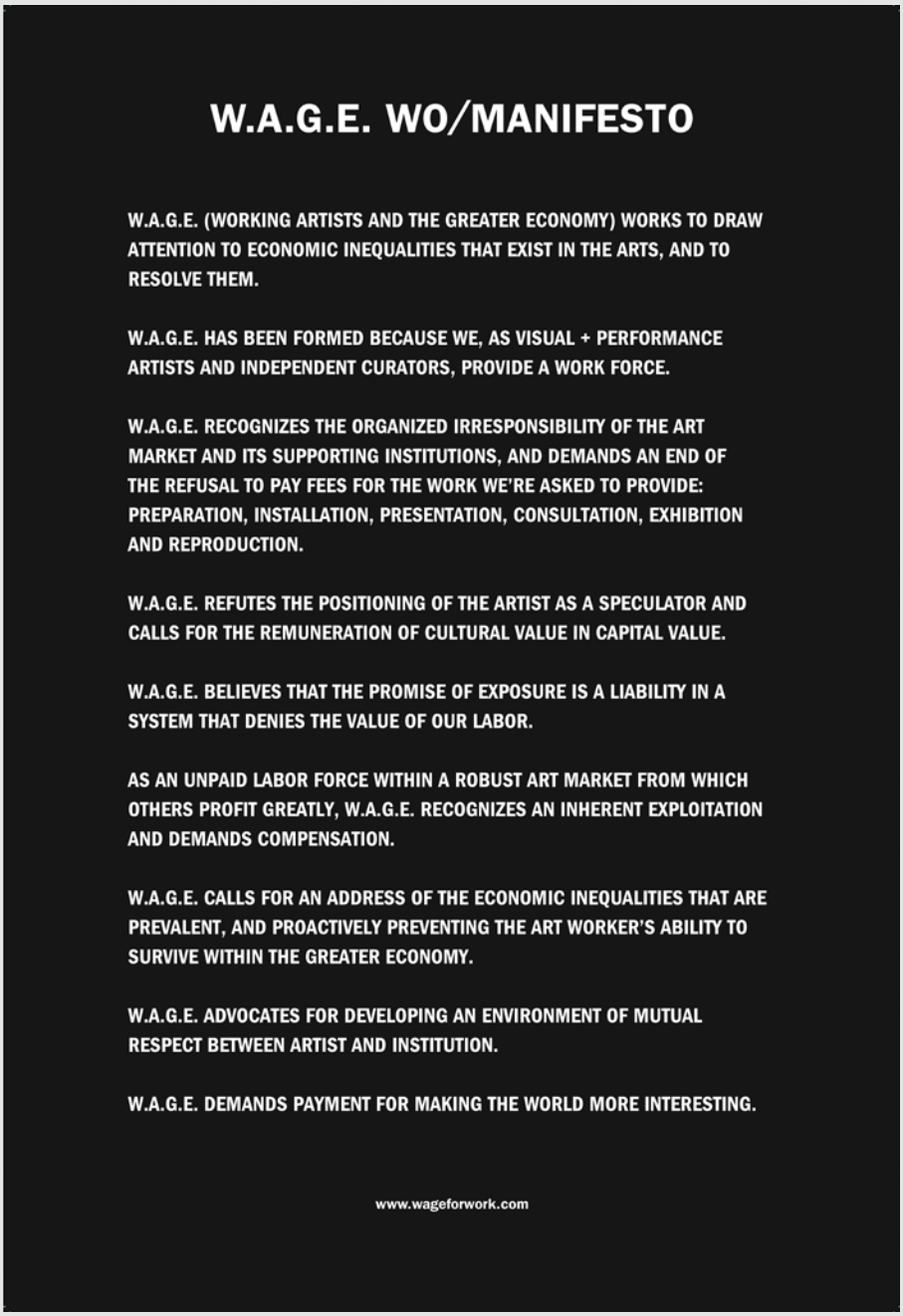
Currently there exist international self-organised coalitions, collectives, brigades, forums, assemblies, a loosely united, international art workers' front working to disentangle the problematics around the tightening mesh of power and capital gripping art and cultural institutions. These groups are tackling issues around precarious conditions, the corporatisation of the art world, the privatisation of public spaces, (self)exploitation, abuse, corruption, and so on, that affect not only the artists in the exhibition spaces, but also those anonymous many who invisibly labour to keep the art world working, those who clean exhibition spaces, guard galleries, build art fairs, underpaid or unpaid interns. These initiatives have managed to demonstrate that art workers are not bound to atomised, agent-less subjectivities, and that there is still a genuine desire for significant change in the art world.

In the United States, the New York-based group Occupy Museums was born out of the Occupy movement in 2011, criticising through direct actions inside museums the connections between corruption in the high finance establishment and a tamed high culture. Occupy Museums continues to target important private museums in Europe and the United States, and attempts to hold them accountable to the public via means of horizontal spaces for debate and collaboration. Also coming from New York, the group W.A.G.E. is dedicated to drawing attention to economic inequalities that are prevalent within the art world, developing a system of institutional certification that allows art workers to survive within the greater economy. In London, the group Liberate Tate have engaged in a continuous wave of creative disobedience against Tate Modern, urging them to renounce funding from toxic oil companies. In the same city, the groups Precarious Workers Brigade and Ragpickers have come out in solidarity with those struggling to survive in the so-called climate of economic crisis and enforced austerity measures, developing social and political tools to combat precarity in art and society. In Russia, the May Congress of Creative Workers, established in 2010 in Moscow, have acted as an organisational framework fulfilling the need to research the motivations, urgencies, approaches and strategies of cultural workers for survival. This activity is done in the context of the tenuous production conditions in Russia and Ukraine – characterised by different levels of oppression, abuses of authority and even physical violations. Between 2010 and 2013, the Congress functioned as a tool of exercising the power to formulate grievances

Precarious Workers Brigade at the Fund Our Future Demonstration against cuts to higher education in London, November 2010.

about particular working conditions, and working towards establishing structures and alliances to improve them. More recently in February 2014, during the Maidan Revolution in Ukraine, a group of artists and activists decided to occupy the Ministry of Culture in Kiev and launched the Assembly for Culture in Ukraine, demanding ideological, structural and financial restructuring of this important organisational body. While not all its members self-identified as art workers, the assembly continues to work in the same building as an ongoing meeting of citizens who are concerned with how cultural processes in Ukraine are structured. They are intent on transforming these structures and pressing the Ministry of Culture to shift the vector of influence on culture from government ideology to the masses, who are the recipients and creators of cultural products and processes.

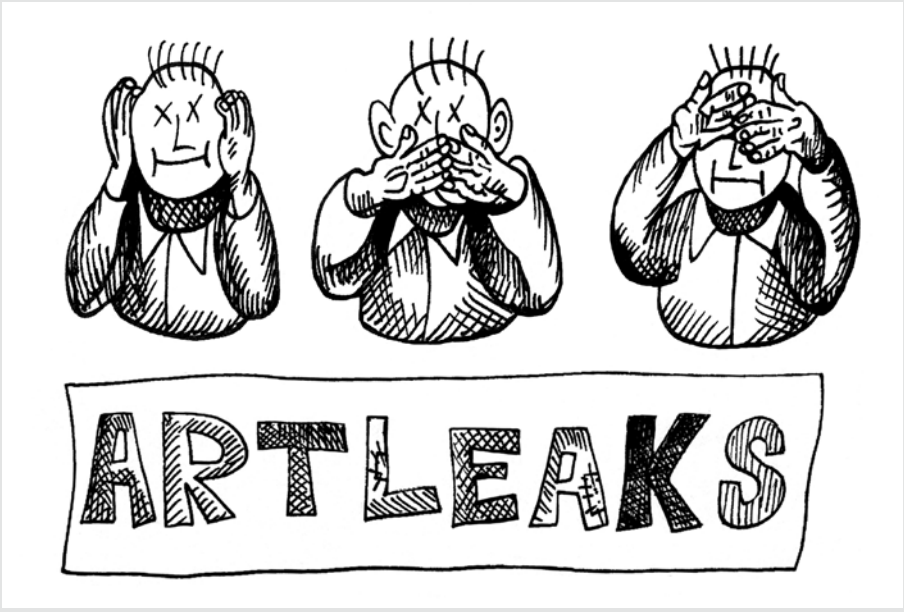
When ArtLeaks[15], the organisation I co-founded in 2011 was launched, it was done so in the larger context of social movements and the establishment of several of the aforementioned activist initiatives. Unlike many activist groups, which function under an anonymous, collective identity, it was important to us to use our real names and make concrete demands, to take responsibility and not make it a leaderless project, which could provoke suspicions. The platform has maintained an international scope, while its goal has been to unite not just artists, but also curators, critics, philosophers around issues, problems and concerns in different contexts, using diverse strategies from "leaking" to self-education, unionising, and direct actions. Similar to our online case archive, Bojana Piškur, of the Radical Education Collective[16] in Ljubljana, together with Djordje Balmazović, a member of the Škart Collective, Belgrade, have put together a research investigation



W.A.G.E. wo/manifesto, 2008.

based on Marx's *Workers' Inquiry*, entitled *Cultural Workers' Inquiry*,[17] concerning the position of a handful of cultural workers in Serbia in 2013. The publication, which is freely accessible online, contains straightforward testimonies of censorship, corruption and discrimination given by the respondents.

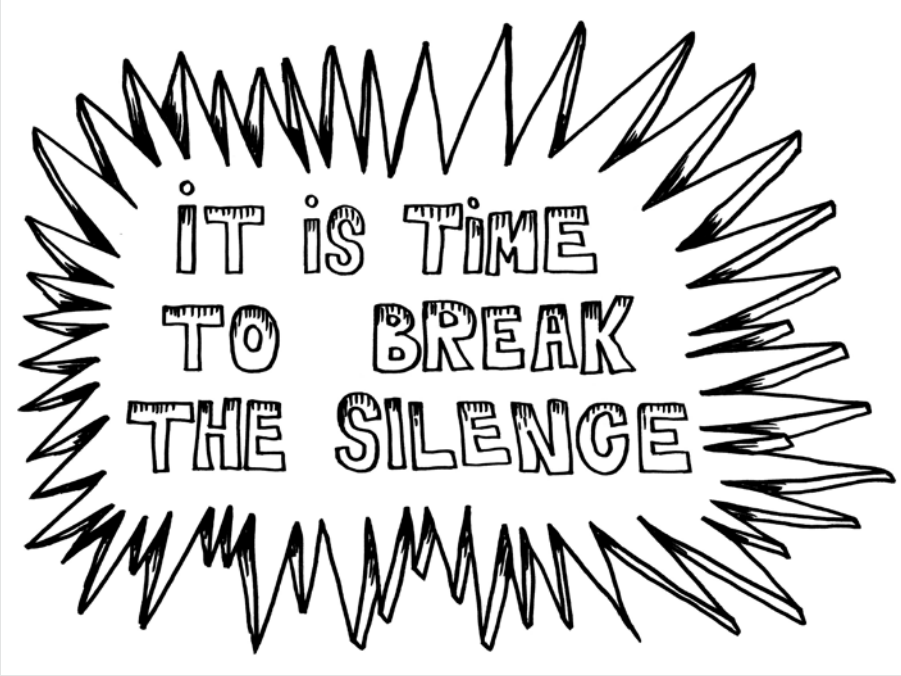
Activist groups engaged in similar struggles and activities to ArtLeaks, such as the above-mentioned Precarious Workers Brigade[18], Occupy Museums[19], Liberate Tate[20] and the May Congress of Creative Workers[21] have maintained fluid membership and loose hierarchical structures, with the ambition of making a difference without institutional support or funding. This does not mean that these groups don't have any resources, especially when thinking of resources not just as capital, but also as key people, experience, activist know-how, organisational knowledge, etc. They are reacting against the limits of institutions and the need to re-think them, re-write their missions, as well as fighting against proliferating repression and tacit abuse — the cultural side-effects of neoliberalism.



Visual motif used by ArtLeaks, 2011. © Vladan Jeremić / ArtLeaks.

These networks do not necessarily imply a consensus over the self-identification of art workers as part of a similar class with common grievances and a common agenda, but rather they are grounds for alliances between cultural workers and cultural communities across national borders. Through these alliances, art workers can and do support each other during the creative process and their professional endeavours which often unfold in highly

unsound, or in some contexts, even dangerous circumstances. The art workers' models of organisation which I have been discussing here, are not the only means by which to precipitate socio-political transformation. Rather, its importance, in my opinion, is that it embodies the idea of a collective, self-organised, politically-concerned project that can lead to the transformation of a society. The concept of "art worker" is a moniker that helps us recognise the possibility of such a transformation, in a historically conscious way.



Drawing published in *ArtLeaks Gazette* 1, 2013. © Vladan Jeremić / ArtLeaks.

The future of art workers' movements

One of the biggest challenges these groups face is a yet-to-be-defined overall strategic vision and the precarious ways in which their activities exist, a condition that is also visible in the current fragmentation of socially-engaged, politically-committed, activist practices. Categories such as activist art, interventionism, social practice, institutional critique and relational aesthetics are not cohesive in their tactics or demands, neither are they explicitly affiliated with a broader social movement from which to formulate strategies of social transformation. Arguably, this is in itself symptomatic of the effects of neoliberal ideology: heightened individualism, entrepreneurship, privatisation, a do-it-yourself attitude. As a counter-example,

early 20th century avant-garde movements found a common ground with the organised, revolutionary Left, while the post-war neo-avant-garde was brought together by the oppositional strategies of the New Left.

And yet, some of activist art workers' groups are beginning to look back to the late 1960s and early 1970s, and even further to the mid-19th century, as moments of inspiration for the fight for art workers' rights, reclaiming cultural institutions, art and/as labour in a global context. Indeed, today's art workers need more of that do-it-together spirit, a greater common interest, a more developed strategy and plan for transformation. Although the genealogy of engaged art, avant-garde movements and institutional critique has been historicised, it still holds relevance and inspiration for many activists, for whom the museum and the exhibition space are still battlegrounds for struggle and conflict, which they do not escape from, but engage with, challenge, transform into spaces for the common good. Undoubtedly, by remembering and relearning from past endeavours, be they successful or not, current generations of art workers — in the broadest sense of the term — can better imagine their own collective evolution and emancipation.

1. Gustave Courbet, "Realism," preface to the brochure *Exhibition and sale of forty paintings and four drawings by Gustave Courbet*, 1855, republished in T.J. Clarke, *Image of the People: Gustave Courbet and the Second French Republic, 1848–1851* (Greenwich, CT: New York Graphic Society, 1973).
2. Gustave Courbet, "Letter to artists of Paris, 7 April 1871," in Petra ten-Doesschate (ed.), *Letters of Gustave Courbet* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).
3. See Brigid Doherty, "The Work of Art and the Problem of Politics in Berlin Dada," *October* 105 (2003), pp. 73–92.
4. Helen Molesworth, "From Dada to Neo-Dada and Back Again," *October* 105 (2003), p. 180.
5. David Siqueiros, et al., originally published as a broadside in Mexico City, 1922. Published again in *El Machete* 7 (Barcelona, June 1924). English translation from Laurence E. Schmeckebier in *Modern Mexican Art* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1939), p. 31.
6. David Siqueiros and Xavier Guerrero, some of the founding members of the Syndicate edited a newspaper associated with the organisation, *El Machete*, which included articles by Diego Rivera and others.
7. Through his political activism and artwork, Douglas revealed ideas and values exemplified during the Harlem Renaissance, an artistic movement founded on the ideals of racial pride, social power, and the importance of African culture. During the 1930s, African American history and culture was represented and celebrated through the arts. See: Mary Campbell, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis, Deborah Willis Ryan, *Harlem Renaissance: Art of Black America* (New York: Abrams, 1897).
8. Republished in: Patricia Hills, "Harlem's Artistic Community," in *Painting Harlem Modern: The Art of Jacob Lawrence* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2010), pp. 26–27.
9. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created in 1935 to provide economic relief to US citizens during the Great Depression. The Federal Art Project was a division of the WPA which provided employment for artists, creating over 5 000 jobs for artists and producing over 225 000 works of art. See the documentary film *The Works Progress Administration* in the TV series *Surviving the Dust Bowl* from 1998, available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riSYCweh5U (accessed December 2014).
10. Yasuo Kuniyoshi was the founding figure of the Association, which he began to conceptualise in 1946 together with like-minded friends.
11. For more information on the Artists' Equity Association, please see David M. Sokol, "The Founding of Artists' Equity Association After World War II," *Archives of American Art Journal* 39 (1999), pp.17–29.
12. Quoted in Kristin Ross, "Introduction," in *May 68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), p. 17.
13. See Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).
14. Gregory Sholette, "Speaking Clown to Power: Can We Resist the Historic Compromise of Neoliberal Art?," in J. Keri Cronin, Kirsty Robertson (eds.), *Imagining Resistance: Visual Culture and Activism in Canada* (Waterloo, Canada: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011), pp. 27–48.
15. More about ArtLeaks on our website: http://art-leaks.org.
16. More about the Radical Education Collective in their online archive: http://radical.tmp.si.
17. Bojana Piškur and Djordje Balmazović (eds.), *Cultural Workers' Inquiry*, published online, 2013: http://radical.tmp.si/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Workers-Inquiry_English.pdf.
18. More about PWB on their website: http://precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com.
19. More about Occupy Museums on their website: http://occupymuseums.org.
20. More about Liberate Tate on their website: https://liberatetate.wordpress.com.
21. More about the May Congress of Creative Workers (in Russian) on their website: http://may-congress.ru.

FOKUS GRUPA

I Sing to Pass the Time

A selection of 13 drawings, 2011 – ongoing

I Sing to Pass the Time by Fokus Grupa is a series of drawings that derives its title from the work of Croatian singer-songwriter Arsen Dedić whose song expresses disbelief towards the effectiveness of political music. Alluding to this theme, the drawings by Fokus Grupa explore the relations of art and political action. The imagery used in the drawings is based on historical photographs and documents, re-articulating moments of politicisation in art history. In this publication, a selection from the series is presented, displaying images that emphasise links between art and workers' struggles in particular. This text provides some background information about the events that the drawings refer to.

One of the most widely reproduced images by Kazimir Malevich is used to refer to something much less known – the fact that Malevich drafted one of the earliest documents dealing with artists' rights. The document titled *Artist's Rights Declaration: The Artist's Life* was published in *Anarchy* in June 1918. It defined legal and economic guidelines to be considered after the artwork leaves the artist's studio.

The drawing referring to the German Kunstlump debate from the 1920s addresses the question of solidarity between artists and workers. During a workers' protest in Dresden in 1920, a bullet fired by the police pierced the painting titled *Bathseba at the Well* by Peter Paul Rubens in the nearby Zwinger Art Gallery. Oskar Kokoschka, who was at the time working in Dresden Art Academy, wrote a letter, urging Dresden workers to move the conflict away from museums and galleries in order to protect cultural heritage. The letter was published in most of daily newspapers in Germany. In reaction to this, John Heartfield and George Grosz wrote a pamphlet, titled *Kunstlump*, in which they violently opposed Kokoschka, stating that: "We greet every bullet that strays to galleries and museums, instead of workers' quarters." These two texts started the Kunstlump debate in which many positions were articulated about the role of art in society and in relation to revolutionary politics.

The history of the establishment of the Club of Female Artists in Zagreb refers to the transnational links between the women's suffrage movement and broader issues related to women's participation in society and the labour world. Croatian artist Nasta Rojc who initiated the Club of Female

Artists in 1928, was influenced by the suffrage movement and the Women International Arts Club in London.

One of the most powerful chapters in the history of artists' labour organising originates from USA where artists employed by the state-funded Works Progress Administration projects formed the Artists' Union in 1933. The artists in that Union were literally wage labourers and organised themselves like the industrial trade unions. They were active participants in aiding strike lines in New York City, agitating for workers' rights and demanding better pay. Among other things, they advocated for permanent funding for art, demanded rental fees from museums, and established municipal art centres in urban and rural areas.

The anarchist Black Mask group that was founded in New York in the 1960s intervened in the art, politics and culture of the time. Influenced by the Situationist International, the group carried out subversive actions such as issuing a warning to close down the Museum of Modern Art. MoMA went on alert and called the police which in effect closed it down for a day for security reasons. Ben Morea, a Black Mask member allegedly put a sticker that wrote "CLOSED" on the door.

Lucy Lippard visited Argentina in 1968 and met the Rosario group, which for her represented one of the most coherent attempts to merge art and politics in the context of labour. Lippard has described this experience as crucial for her later involvement in the Art Workers' Coalition. In this case, as in many others, the image drawn by Fokus Grupa does not depict literally the event which it refers to – this is often impossible due to the lack of available imagery. In that sense, the work of Fokus Grupa aims to find "visual carriers" precisely for those political moments that have little visual representation. Here the image captures one of the most paradigmatic examples of political art in Argentina, the street action *Tucumán Arde* (*Tucumán is Burning*). In 1968, a group of artists, journalists and sociologists in Buenos Aires and Rosario carried out various actions in order to expose the causes of the economic crisis in the province of Tucumán, where the economic measures introduced for the sake of diversifying agriculture resulted with the destruction of historical sugar industry, and the crackdown of the local trade union movement. *Tucumán Arde* was designed to raise awareness of the situation among a broader public, providing counter-information to official propaganda.

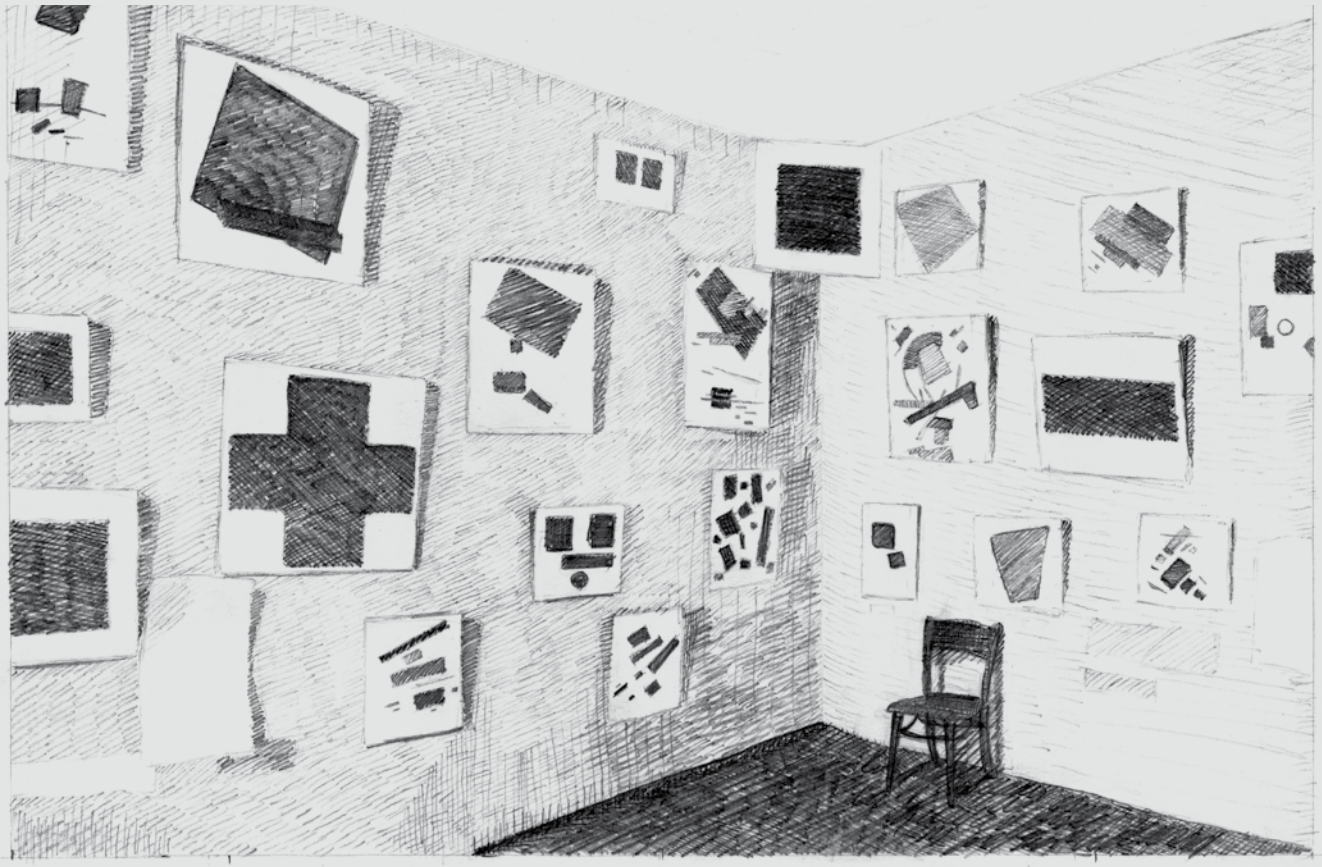
A number of images featured in the series *I Sing to Pass the Time* are re-articulating the visual legacy of Art Workers' Coalition which is one of the most well-documented examples of art workers' organising in the history of contemporary art. Art Workers' Coalition was formed in the aftermath of the conflict between the artist Vassilakis Takis and the New York's MoMA. On January 3, 1969, Takis marched into MoMA and removed his work *Telesculpture* from the exhibition. Although the museum owned this work, Takis had not agreed to show it in the exhibition.

Takis's protest against exhibiting his work without his permission became a catalyst for the constitution of Art Workers' Coalition. On April 10, 1969, the group held an open hearing in the New York School of Visual Arts, titled *An Open Hearing on the Subject: What Should Be the Program of the Art Workers Regarding Museum Reform and to Establish the Program of an Open Art Workers Coalition*. Some three hundred artists and members of the New York art community attended the hearing, adopting a platform of 13 demands that became a point of debate and departure during the next years. One of the most radical statements at the hearing came from Lee Lozano: "For me there can be no art revolution that is separate from a science revolution, a political revolution, an education revolution, a drug revolution, a sex revolution, or a personal revolution. I cannot consider a program of museum reforms without equal attention to gallery reforms and art magazine reforms which would eliminate *stables* of artists and writers. I will not call myself an art worker but rather an art dreamer and I will participate only in a total revolution simultaneously personal and public." Somewhat resonating with this call, the question of museum reforms and artists' rights was soon complemented with other activist concerns in the Coalition, such as articulating resistance against the ongoing Vietnam War. In addition to that, many of the Art Workers' Coalition's protests and activities focused on the art world's racist and sexist exclusions. In the frantic process of politicisation, several smaller groups grew out from the Art Workers' Coalition. One of such offsprings was the Ad Hoc Women's Art Committee which was problematising the under-representation of women, and particularly women of colour. In 1970, the Committee led a protest which demanded that 50% of the artists exhibited at the Whitney Annual be women and non-white. The image linked to the Ad Hoc Women's Art Committee features Lucy Lippard protesting with the slogan "50% BLACK WOMEN ARTISTS." A further example of the wide-reaching influence of Art Workers' Coalition was the formation of Professional and Administrative Staff Association (PASTA) by MoMA staff in 1971. It is said to be the first labour union formed in a private museum.

In 1979, the Yugoslavian artist Goran Đorđević mailed invitations to many people in the international art world, inviting them to participate in the International Strike of Artists. He received approximately 40 responses to the circular letter. Goran Đorđević writes: "The majority of artists were expressing their reservations to the idea, or doubt about the possibility of its realisation, but there were positive answers as well. Under present circumstances, the idea of the international artists' strike is probably a utopia. However, as the process of institutionalisation of art activities is being successfully applied even to the most radical art projects, there is a possibility that this idea could one day become an actual alternative."

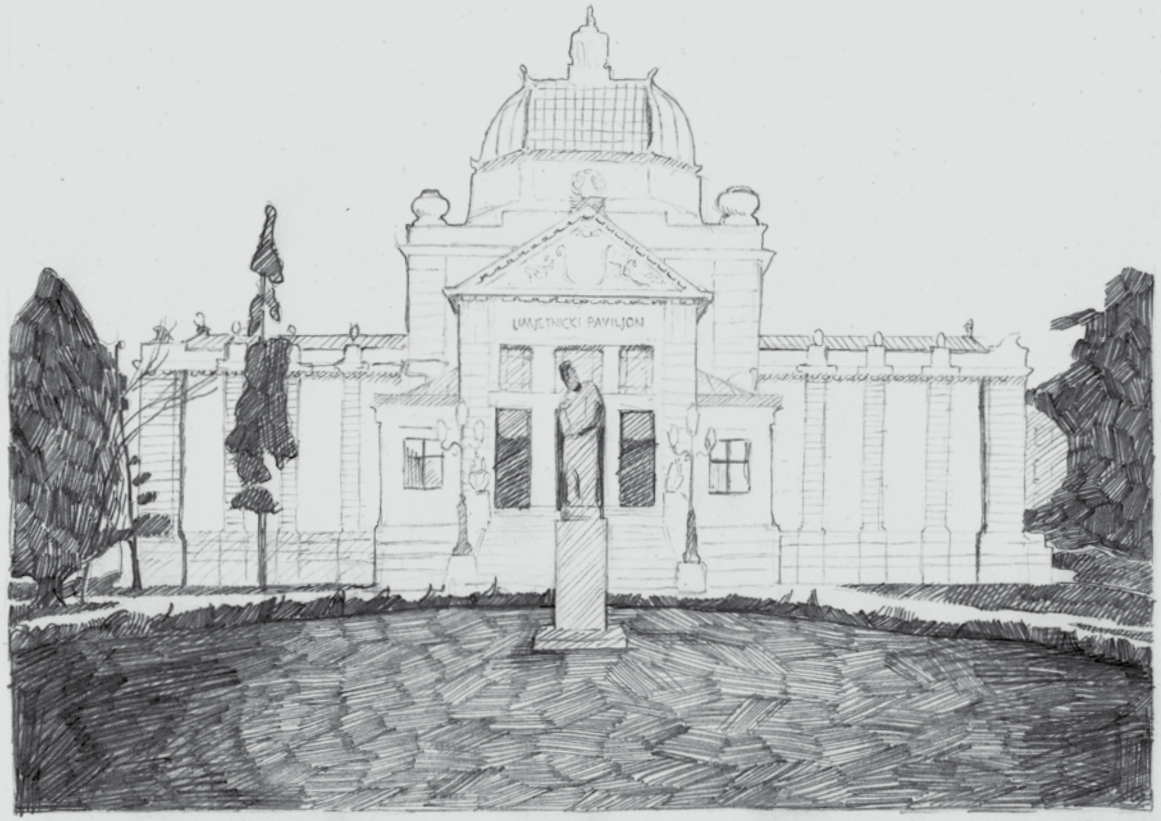
In 1979, artists Sanja Iveković and Dalibor Martinis drafted a so-called *Agreement* [Ugovor] in the context of the Working Community of Artists

with which they tried to define and protect the position of artists in socialist Yugoslavia. The caption on the drawing writes: "I am for the implementation of the Freelance Artists' Act. 1979 RZU (Working Community of Artists) Zagreb, *Prvi Broj*." The Agreement was intended to manage and maintain the relationship of artists and state institutions (museums and galleries). It was imagined as a standard contract that could be used by all artists, regardless of their medium and political or aesthetic affiliation.

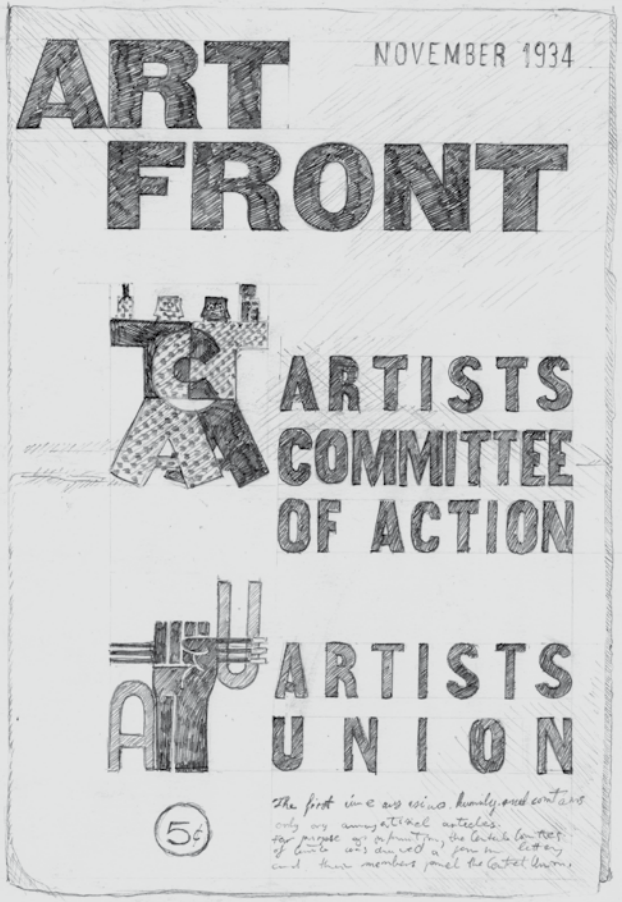


KAZIMIR MALEVICH DRAFTED ONE OF THE EARLIEST DOCUMENTS DEALING WITH ARTISTS RIGHTS ENTITLED "ARTISTS RIGHTS DECLARATION : THE ARTISTS LIFE" PUBLISHED IN "ANARCHY" IN JUNE 1918.

AFTER THE POLITICAL CONFLICT AT MARCH 15, 1920 IN DRESDEN, A STRAY BULLET PIERCED A HOLE IN A PAINTING TITLED "BATHSHEBA AT THE WELL" BY PETER PAUL RUBENS IN A NEARBY ZWINGER GALLERY.
OSKAR KOKOSCHKA WROTE A TEXT INVITING THOSE INVOLVED IN THE POLITICAL CONFLICT TO PRESERVE CULTURAL HERITAGE, THUS PROVOKING A REACTION THAT WOULD GROW INTO THE FAMOUS "KUNSTKRIEG DEBATE".



PO UZORU NA LONDONSKI WOMENS INTERNATIONAL ARTS CLUB NASTA ROJC U ZAGREBU INICIRA OSNIVANJE KLUBA LIKOVNIH UMJETNICA KOJI POČINJE DJELOVATI 1928.



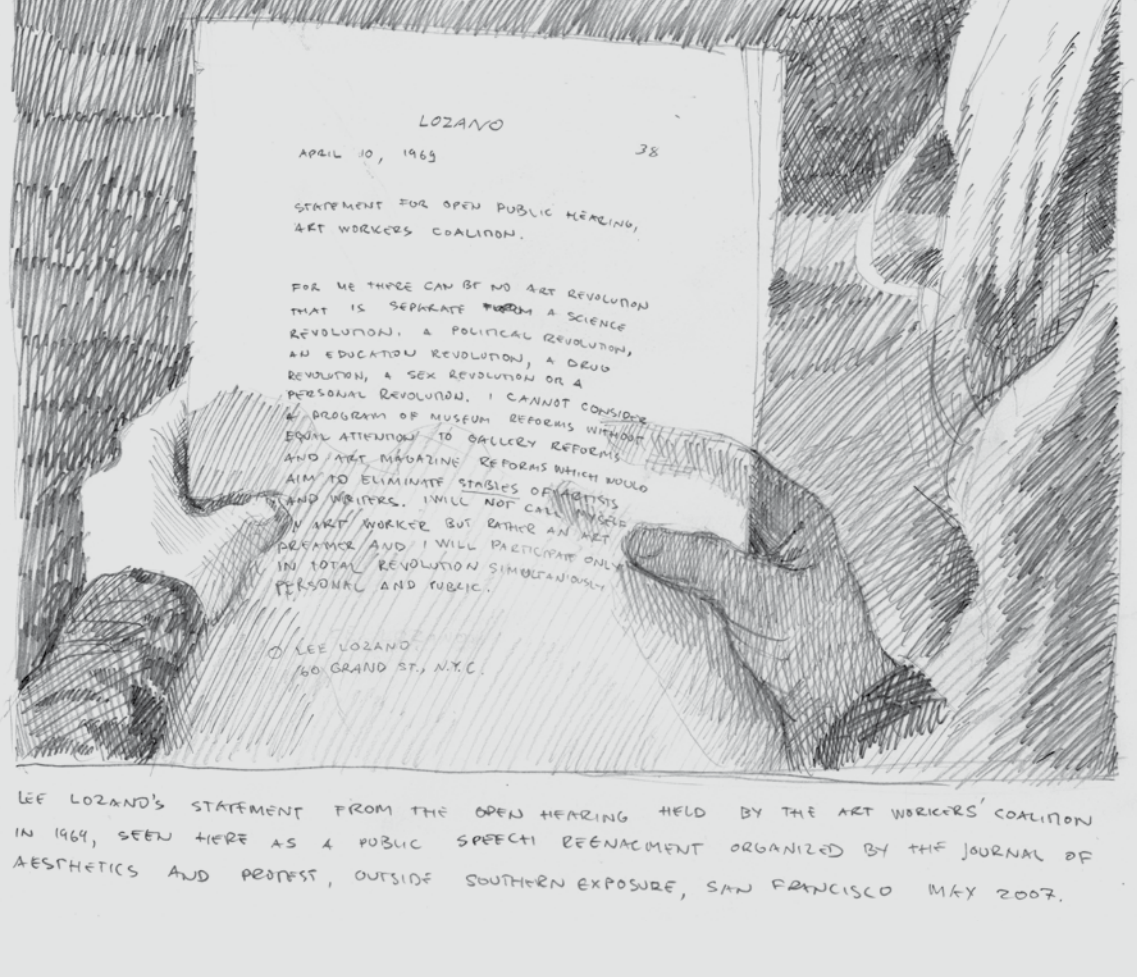
"ART FRONT", THE MONTHLY JURNAL OF THE "ARTISTS' UNION", RAN FROM NOVEBER 1934 TO DECEMBER 1937

NOVEMBER 29, 1936 ARTIST'S UNION LEADING A PICKET LINE IN NEW YORK CITY

OCTOBER 10, 1966 "OUR STRUGGLE CANNOT BE HUNG ON WALL" BLACK MASK

LUCY LIPPARD VISITED ARGENTINA IN THE FALL OF 1968 AND MET THE "ROSARIO GROUP". THE "ROSARIO GROUP" PRESENTED ONE OF THE MOST COHERENT ATTEMPTS OF ANY ARTISTS' GROUP IN THE 1960S TO MERGE ART AND POLITICS WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF LABOR. LIPPARD EMPHASISES THIS EXPERIENCE AS CRUCIAL FOR HER LATER INVOLVEMENT IN THE CREATION OF AWC.

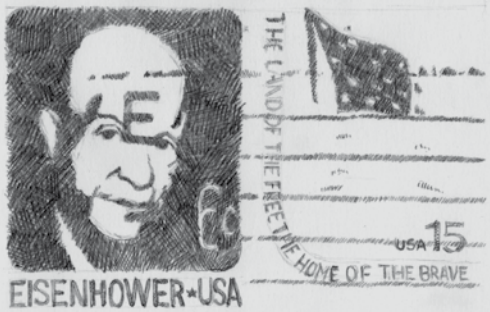
"TAKIS VASSILAKIS CARRYING HIS PIECE, JAN, 04, 1969"



LEE LOZAND'S STATEMENT FROM THE OPEN HEARING HELD BY THE ART WORKERS' COALITION IN 1969, SEEN HERE AS A PUBLIC SPEECH REENACTMENT ORGANIZED BY THE JOURNAL OF AESTHETICS AND PROTEST, OUTSIDE SOUTHERN EXPOSURE, SAN FRANCISCO MAY 2007.

IN 1970 THE AD HOC WOMEN'S ART COMMITTE, WHICH INCLUDED POPPY JOHNSON, BRENDA MILLER, FAITH RINGGOLD, LUCY LIPPARD, LED A PROTEST AGAINST THE PREDOMINANTELY MALE WHITNEY ANNUAL.

PASTA (PROFESSIONAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF ASSOCIATION) DEMONSTRATING IN FRONT OF MOMA , AUGUST 30, 1971



DETAIL OF A LETTER BY CARL ANDRE, SENT TO GORAN DORDEVIC AS A RESPONSE TO HIS INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN "INTERNATIONAL STRIKE OF ARTISTS' MAR 1979.

GORAN DORDEVIĆ
III BULEVAR 106/15
11070
N. BEOGRAD

YUGOSLAVIA

"JA SAM ZA PRIMJENU NOVOG ZAKONA O SAMOSTALNIM UMJETNICIMA"
1979. RZU (RADNA ZAJEDNICA UMJETNIKA) ZAGREB, PRVI BROJ NOVINA

AIRI TRIISBERG

Art Workers' Movement in Tallinn: The Politics of Disidentification

This text aims to revisit a cycle of struggle that politicised a spectrum of art practitioners in Tallinn and Estonia during 2010–2011. The struggle played out as a collective process of self-organisation, addressing issues related to unpaid labour and lack of social guarantees in the contemporary art sphere. Looking back at this period from the perspective of an activist who was involved in that initiative, I have two objectives when writing this article. First of all, I believe that this short-lived episode of mobilisation represents a significant event in the contemporary art history of Estonia. However, in the heat of self-organisation, very few written documents were produced about the political aims, strategies and activities of the movement. When discussing some key issues that held a central place in our struggle, I wish to fill that gap by contextualising its development. On the other hand, I am also interested in revisiting the process from a critical perspective, reflecting on the challenges that we faced when trying to find political agency in collective action. As I am writing this report from the position of an activist who took part in the collective process, I am aware that my account is a subjective one. Nonetheless, it is important for me to reflect on that experience from the political perspective that I am most affiliated with – even if it is for the sake of setting a frame that can be contested and challenged in the future.

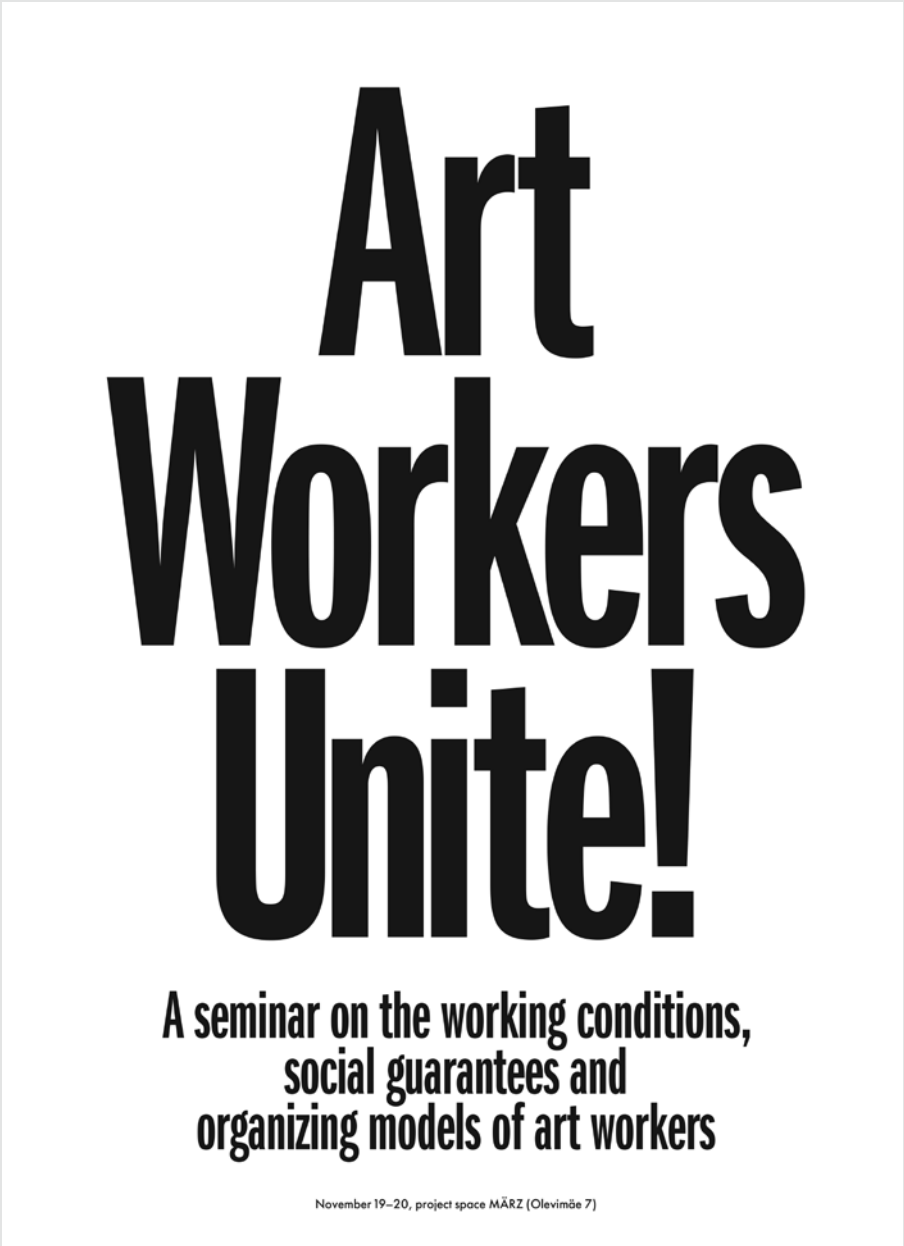
The art workers' movement and its forms of organising

The self-organisation process among art practitioners in Tallinn was triggered by an exhibition that was held in Tallinn Art Hall in winter 2009/2010. The exhibition *Blue-Collar Blues*, curated by Anders Härm, was coined as a critical reaction against the new labour legislation in Estonia which had been set in force earlier that year in order to flexibilise the labour market. Within the informal circles of the art field, the exhibition was accompanied by a critical debate, focusing predominantly on the fact that many artists didn't get paid for producing their work. Whilst critically scrutinising the neoliberal changes in the world of labour, the exhibition failed to address the economic conditions of its own production. This obvious contradiction became a catalyst for a wider polemic that problematised precarious working conditions in the contemporary art field.

The event that ultimately sparked off the mobilisation process was a seminar held in the frame of the *Blue-Collar Blues* exhibition in January 2010. After the end of the seminar, a spontaneous gathering took place in the cellar bar of the Art Hall, in order to discuss issues for which the seminar had offered little space, i.e. the particular position of art workers in relation to precarious labour relations. Approximately 20 art practitioners took part in the first meeting where it was decided to form an alternative artistic association that adopted the name Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit (Union of Contemporary Art). In the following months, the group started meeting regularly in bi- or three-weekly rhythm, and more people gradually joined the initiative. However, the alternative artistic association was never formally established. In reality, Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit operated as an informal network that was essentially doing militant research – we were primarily mapping and collectivising knowledge about working conditions in the art field, while at the same time politicising ourselves in the course of discussing and analysing these conditions. Occasionally, the network also carried out public interventions, such as writing public letters. Further activities of the network included the seminar *Art Workers Unite!* in November 2010, the newspaper *Art Workers' Voice*, which was published as a special insert in the Estonian cultural weekly *Sirp* in February 2011, as well as several meetings with the representatives of trade unions, artistic associations and cultural policy makers. In support of those activities, a series of related panel discussions were organised in the frame of *EKKM Theory Club* in winter 2011, somewhat utilising the fact that it happened to be pre-election time in Estonia.

When placing this informal network within the power dynamics of the local art field, it must be noted that, from some perspectives, it may have been perceived as an advocacy group initiated by a small group of like-minded friends and colleagues. Indeed, the main mobilisation ground for Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit was a very particular discursive community, primarily involving younger generation art practitioners who take interest in political art practices. However, as the initiative gained more visibility, it slowly attracted a more diverse spectrum of accomplices. This process was exhilarated especially after the foundation of a Google Groups mailing list in May 2010. Starting out with 20–30 members, the number of subscribers eventually grew to 103, also including art practitioners from other cities than Tallinn. The creation of the mailing list also stimulated a significant shift in the modalities of communication and organising – after an intense cycle of gathering in assemblies in the winter and spring 2010, online debates became more central in the following year. The mailing list, as well as the initiative itself, has been virtually inactive since the second half of 2011. Nonetheless, the mailing list has occasionally still been used for initiating petitions or open letters, mostly addressing issues that are not directly related to the problem of precarious labour any more.

In my view, Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit was neither a failed attempt to establish a new institution nor an isolated advocacy group. I find it much more operative



Poster for the *Art Workers Unite!* seminar which was organised in the context of art workers' movement in Tallinn. Graphic design by Indrek Sirkel, 2010.

to conceptualise this initiative through the vocabulary of social movements, interpreting it as a collective process of politicisation. Therefore, I prefer to think about Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit as an art workers' movement that was constituted in a particular cycle of struggle which sought to achieve social change in the realm of precarious labour. Whereas it can be debated whether the movement managed to achieve concrete changes in the economic and social situation of art workers, I do believe that its impact was quite far-reaching in terms of changing the discourse how artistic labour is discussed in Estonia.

Mobilisation against unpaid labour within exhibition practice

The initial context, from which the art workers' movement emerged, also set the major tone for its agenda. When collectively mapping material conditions in contemporary art practice, a special attention was turned towards exhibition making. In Estonia, there are only a few art institutions that regularly commission work from artists. As a result of that situation, the task of maintaining the continuity of exhibition practice is largely delegated to artists who take initiative by proposing exhibitions to the programme of non-profit galleries and searching finances to realise those projects. In many cases, the public funding allocated for such exhibition projects only covers the material costs. In virtually all cases, public project funding is not sufficient for covering the labour costs of artists who produce these exhibitions. Ironically, artists occur to be the only players in the exhibition economy who systematically receive no payment for their work. Considering the central role that exhibition making holds in the operating modus of the contemporary art field, this seems to suggest that it is precisely the exhibition practice that should be conceptualised as the key battleground where labour struggles of artists should be anchored and localised.

Many initiatives that have recently emerged in order to struggle against precarious working conditions in the art field, have adopted strategies that are rooted in the working reality of artists. For example, the Reko collective in Stockholm and the W.A.G.E. collective in New York are both largely occupied with monitoring art institutions, in order to advocate for the payment of artist fees. This is a strategy that exercises pressure on the very grassroots level, aiming to trigger a domino effect by forcing art institutions to adopt a different attitude towards contracting artistic labour. In its essence, it is an approach that is largely oriented towards wage negotiations from the position of artists. However, artistic income originates from other sources than exhibition making as well. When placing all cards on wage negotiations within exhibition practice, there is a risk of neglecting other dimensions of the art economy that are also relevant for artists, such as issues related to grant models and social security, or cultural funding and its distribution mechanisms in general. Moreover, in contexts where artists themselves are the dominant agents who initiate, organise and produce exhibitions, the

strategy of wage negotiations implodes. Precarious Workers Brigade has succinctly formulated this paradox in their *Bust Your Boss Card*, which is also printed in this publication, stressing that the "boss" of a precarious cultural worker can often be the cultural worker itself. This situation seems to set some limits on the strategy of confronting exhibition houses, suggesting that the politics of wage conflict must allow confrontations with funding institutions as well.

That is what essentially happened within the art workers' organising process in Tallinn, even if the mobilisation process sparked off from a situation that could have potentially resulted in a direct confrontation with art institutions that maintain the practice of exploiting unpaid labour. In retrospect, it can be speculated whether such conflict was avoided because some institutional curators joined the organising process from the very beginning, arguing that exhibition budgets depend on funding institutions that regularly refuse to allocate money for expenses that are related to the labour costs of artists. This is certainly true, along with the fact that some art institutions and curators do not even budget artist fees in their funding applications, already assuming that these expenses will not be covered by project funding. All in all, the newly formed initiative in Tallinn overleaped the division of labour that is somewhat more implicit in the working logic of initiatives such as Reko or W.A.G.E. where artists pressure curators and institutions, so that these would pressure cultural policy makers and funders in order to change the material conditions of art production. As an alternative to that, artists and curators in Tallinn tried to identify conceptual locations of struggle from which they could articulate a wage conflict together.

To argue that the avoidance of direct confrontation with art institutions in Estonia was only connected to the objections expressed by institutional curators, however, wouldn't be quite accurate. In the occasional meetings where the strategies of withdrawal, boycott or strike against art institutions were discussed, it was commonly agreed that these strategies would appear powerless in the local situation. The strike scenario was dismissed primarily because the perspective of organising a massive withdrawal from exhibition practice seemed unimaginable due to lack of solidarity among artists themselves. Moreover, when speculating about this scenario in a hypothetical manner, some further challenges arose — for example in connection with the temporality of strike actions that are usually staged within a limited time-frame. In the context of exhibition making, this would mean that in a specific moment of time, only artists who happen to be scheduled in the exhibition programmes at that particular moment can withdraw or refuse to exhibit, whereas others can support the strike action by doing exactly the opposite — by gathering in assemblies and protest in order to demonstrate their solidarity. The idea of initiating a strike action in the context of exhibition practice thus interestingly seemed to conflate with the strategies of occupying and demonstrating (in fact, some plans for direct action or demonstration were debated indeed, but eventually not

realised). Another concern was related to the legal and financial dimensions of going on strike – whereas an artists' strike against the exploitative working conditions within exhibition practice would be directed against institutions such as exhibition houses or galleries, the act of withdrawing from an exhibition project would usually imply legal ramifications originating from the side of funding institutions such as the Cultural Endowment of Estonia. This discrepancy results from the fact that even if galleries or art institutions are commonly seen as the employers of artistic labour, there are rarely any formal wage-labour relations, or even written agreements, between the exhibition houses and artists. The cultural funding allocated for exhibition practice is heavily channelled through artists, thus also delegating the responsibility for cancelling a funded exhibition precisely to the artists who have signed the contract with the funding institution. However, the relationship between funding institutions and artists is not conceived in terms of wage-labour relations. In addition to that, the legislative frameworks regulating the right to strike are closely associated to the modalities of full-time labour and membership in trade unions. As artists have no strike fund from which to compensate the penalties that the funding institutions would potentially require for committing a breach of contract, the idea of strike seemed not only powerless but also very risky. The alternative possibility of boycotting institutions that don't pay artist fees by refusing to exhibit there in the first place, without going into the process of fund-raising or contract signing, was dismissed with the argument that this would mean a speedy end to one's career as an artist. It was assumed that saying no to unpaid labour would result in the outcome of being disinvited from exhibitions rather than getting paid for one's work.

The organising process among art practitioners in Tallinn was largely kicked off by scandalising unpaid labour within the context of exhibition practice. However, the economy of exhibition practice was not the only issue that was debated in the emerging movement. In the course of collectively mapping the material conditions in the contemporary art field, the income structure of freelance art practitioners was analysed more broadly. This process required a close inspection of legislative frameworks relating to cultural funding, labour rights, tax and social security systems in Estonia. When familiarising ourselves with existing policy and legislative documents, examining the principles of the tax system or scrutinising the differences between various types of work contracts, it caught our attention that freelance cultural practitioners in Estonia are subjected to income modalities which seem to administer them into a social category that is incompatible with the notion of the working population. A central demand that emerged from this mapping process was thus formulated in the punchline that artistic labour needs to be recognised as such. While increasingly identifying ourselves as workers, we were hoping to find forms of collective agency in the strategic arsenal of workers' struggles.

Trade unions and the challenge of organising

One of the first action plans that emerged in the process of art workers' mobilisation in Tallinn was the idea to form a new artists' union. This ambition was somewhat indicated in the name that the initiative adopted at the very first assembly – Eesti Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit (Estonian Union of Contemporary Art). However, the mailing list founded a few months later carried the name KKL (Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit, or Union of Contemporary Art), evicting the nationalist adjective. In order to elaborate the context from which this name emerged, it is important to explain the "inside joke" that the initial proposal was transporting. An organisation called Eesti Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit would have carried the acronym EKKL, representing another instance in the process of hijacking the names of existing art institutions by adding an extra K for *kaasaegne* (contemporary). In 2006, for example, EKKM, Eesti Kaasaegse Kunsti Muuseum (Contemporary Art Museum Estonia), had been established as a counter-institution defining itself against EKM, Eesti Kunstimuuseum (Art Museum of Estonia). Following the same logic, EKKL would have been formed as a counter-organisation to EKL, Eesti Kunstnike Liit (Estonian Artists' Association) which is an umbrella organisation uniting several associations of artists and art historians. Established in 1943, the organisation initially functioned as a trade union. Acting in the largely symbolic manner, that was characteristic for trade unions in the Soviet Union, the Estonian Artists' Association provided health care, studios, flats, vacation vouchers, pension and, not least importantly, status insignia for its members during Soviet time. After the collapse of the Soviet system, it has been rather helpless in terms of re-orienting its practice and political significance. Similar organisations also exist in other cultural sectors and their legal definition is stated in the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act in Estonia. Whereas the function of these artistic associations does include trade unionist elements, their legal status is a different one and their operating principles are designed exclusively for the cultural realm.

The organising process in Tallinn never took the shape of formally establishing a trade union or a new artistic association. This was largely due to the fact that the Estonian Artists' Association already existed, even if its passivity in defending the social and economic rights of art practitioners caused a great deal of frustration among the younger generation of art workers mobilising under the umbrella of Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit. Nonetheless, in addition to the pragmatic considerations on the futility of doubling the work of an already existing organisation, it is important to stress that there were other, and more structural, reasons why the organising process in Tallinn couldn't result with the establishment of a trade union. For example, in May 2010, the small group of art workers met with the head of the Estonian Trade Union Federation and learned an important lesson in civil education – in order to find political agency in the trade unionist approach of practising collective wage negotiations, one needs an employer.

A peculiar hide-and-seek game started when art workers set off to locate their employers. First of all, it was clear that the issue of trade unionising within the art field is complicated due to the fragmentation of work relations in space and time. In the specific constellation of freelance artists, curators and art critics that came together in order to constitute a new artists' union in Tallinn, some major employers were in fact identified. For example, many of us had experiences with short-term teaching jobs at the Estonian Academy of Arts, or with producing artistic, discursive and curatorial work for the major exhibition institutions, or with publishing texts and images in the state-funded cultural media. When thinking back at those work experiences, there was much criticism to articulate. However, similarly to the discussions around the strategy of strike action, several challenges emerged when trade unionist strategies were being considered. In temporal terms, it occurred to us that we are rarely employed by those institutions simultaneously. Therefore, it seemed hopeless to initiate a collective conflict at the very moment when the wage-labour relationship takes place. From that perspective, the strategies of lobbying and advocacy work seemed more effective, such as exercising public pressure to the most significant art institutions by searching dialogue with directors, curators and decision makers. Another, and supporting strategy, could have been the formation of a guild-like organisation that unites art workers who have agreed on minimum tariffs below which they refuse to work. The idea of minimum tariffs was discussed on the example of the theatre field where such agreements exist among actors and seem to be quite effective. However, in the context of the art workers' movement, the suggestion for establishing minimum tariffs was put aside due to hesitations whether there would be enough solidarity in the visual art sphere, where people often feel that they cannot afford to refuse badly paid jobs. A related complexity was discussed in relation to the temporalities of cognitive labour which cannot be easily quantified in universal tariffs and rates.

In addition to that, things turned even more complicated when the fragmented nature of our work realities was considered in spatial terms — not only that the perspective of starting simultaneous wage negotiations with the broad variety of art institutions that irregularly employ our work seemed energy-consuming and challenging, but we also identified a certain discrepancy between the institutions that employ our work and the ones that pay for precisely that work. This doesn't only apply to exhibition practice, as outlined above, but also in many other cases — for example when an art history journal or publisher commissions a text and the payment comes directly from the Cultural Endowment in the form of a grant. On the other hand, a close inspection of the distribution of financial resources in the art field revealed that even if art practitioners' work relations to particular employers are intermittent, fluid and fragmented, the relationship to public funding remains constant. Drawing a logical conclusion from this evidence, it was tempting to argue that the art workers had already been *hired* by the

society, and paid from the resources that the society puts on public disposal through the tax collection system administrated by the state. However, such a conclusion imposes certain ramifications on the issue of art workers' organising in political terms, suggesting that the strategy of initiating collective wage conflicts in the trade unionist manner would miss the core problem. If art practitioners are workers of society, wouldn't it mean that their precarious working reality can only be changed by transforming the very social relations that define the political and economic conditions in the "social factory," rather than targeting singular employers in trade unionist manner?

In the ongoing debate about modes of organising which formed a dominant issue in the beginning phase of the art workers' mobilisation in Tallinn, the majority of art workers preferred the model of artistic association, even if there was no consensus on the two competing strategies of forming a new association or joining the Estonian Artists' Association, in order to change it from inside. When juxtaposed with the alternative scenarios of forming a trade union or experimenting with new and perhaps counter-institutional forms of organising, this preference indicated a pragmatic desire to step into the existing legislative frameworks that grant political representation for freelance art workers. However, what seemed to escape our critical scrutiny at that time, was the fact that the model of artistic association, as it is defined in the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act in Estonia, is an institution which is modelled to maintain the ambiguous position of art practitioners vis-à-vis their social status as workers. Accordingly, our demand that artistic work needs to be recognised as such, remained closely associated with the specific interests of "professional art practitioners," defining artistic work as a particular type of social labour and art economy as an exceptional economy which demands exceptional regulations from the state.

Becoming art workers — a process of disidentification

Looking back at the art workers' movement in Tallinn from the distance of three years, there are only a few practical achievements to declare. For example, the Creative Persons and Artistic Associations Act was revised in order to facilitate cultural workers' access to the state subsidies distributed by artistic associations, and the tax collection regulations in Estonia are about to change in order to make the health insurance system more accessible for freelance workers (for a more elaborated analysis on these issues, see my article *Unwaged Labour and Social Security: A Feminist Perspective*). Also the situation, where artists are required to pay rent when exhibiting in non-profit galleries, is gradually changing in Estonia, as discussed by Minna Henriksson and Marge Monko in their contributions to this publication. However, even if these changes were introduced in direct response to the demands articulated by the art workers' movement, they are too microscopic in order to have a far-reaching impact on

the precarious working realities in the art sector. Therefore, I would argue that the impact of the art workers' movement was actually much deeper on discursive level, shifting the framework how art, labour and economy are discussed in public sphere. In many ways, the self-organisation process in Tallinn was centred on awareness raising and collectivisation of knowledge about the economic structures and problems within the art field. These problems were then addressed in public contexts, initiating discussions with art practitioners, art institutions, cultural administration and policy makers. In the following paragraphs, I would like to reflect on the significance that the term "art workers" held in that process. I will discuss the self-identification as art workers by referring to the concept of "disidentification" which is defined by queer theorist José Esteban Muñoz as a political position located between identification and counter-identification, as a strategy that works both "on and against the dominant ideology."[1]

At the time of 2010, the term "art worker," or *kunstitöötaja*, was a neologism in Estonian language. Derived from English, its origins are often traced back to United States, where this term formed an essential dimension in the formation of Art Workers' Coalition which is one of the most well-known examples of art workers' mobilisation in the history of contemporary art. However, as Julia Bryan-Wilson notes in her book dedicated to the history of Art Workers' Coalition, the term was not completely new in the late 1960s — it had also been in use by Arts and Crafts movement in England in the late 19th century, as well as by the Mexican muralists in the 1920s.[2] In recent years, the notion of art workers has witnessed a certain revival in the Western art world where self-organised initiatives struggling against precarious working conditions have actively taken it in use again as a battle-cry. The self-identification as art workers in Estonia thus indicated a certain intellectual and political affinity with this current cycle of struggles.

When analysed from the perspective of power dynamics within the organising process in Tallinn, the identification as art workers functioned as an inclusive strategy that helped to overcome some symbolic and economic hierarchies that are characteristic to the art field. For example, a re-occurring conflict line within the movement was connected to occupational identifications as artists or curators which were sometimes set in opposition to each other, for instance when the question of unpaid labour within exhibition practice was discussed. However, as the movement brought together a variety of art practitioners, the self-identification as art workers was quite operative in terms of transgressing such divisions — after all, it was agreed that there are many problems that freelance art practitioners have in common. Nevertheless, the movement was initiated and dominated by artists, curators and art critics. These are occupational groups within the professional field of art production, belonging to the upper ranks of the symbolic hierarchy. They are the authors whose names appear in exhibition and publication titles, art history or cultural media representation. Therefore, even if the self-identification as art workers indicated

towards the possibility of creating new political affinities also with the "backstage" workers of the art sector, such as technical assistants, editors, pedagogues, archivists, janitors or exhibition guards, this potential was not lived out to its full extent.

In the context of public discourse, the self-identification as art workers represented a dissociation from two assumptions dominating the commonplace conceptions about the economy of art — the belief that art making is a hobby that serves the purpose of self-expression and is not supposed to be a source of stable income, and the somewhat contrasting idea that art practitioners are entrepreneurs who are selling their products in the market. The latter idea had recently gained considerable momentum on cultural policy making level. A few years prior to the emergence of the art workers' movement, the Estonian Ministry of Culture, governed by the neoliberal Reform Party, had actively started to promote and support creative industries, thus encouraging the commercialisation of cultural practices. Resisting this pressure of becoming entrepreneurs in the newly invented economic sector of creative industries, the counter-identification as art workers emphasised the art practitioners' subjectivity as *workers*.

In order to contest the widespread assumption that art is a non-utilitarian activity practised by a group of "bohemians" whose desire for self-expression neglects economic security, the art workers in Tallinn were inspired by post-operaist notion of "immaterial labour." Most famously conceptualised by Maurizio Lazzarato, immaterial labour is defined as a type of work that does not produce physical commodities but informational and cultural contents of the commodity.[3] Thus, immaterial work describes activities that are normally not recognised as work, highlighting specifically the affective and communicative modalities of post-fordist labour. In the art workers' movement, the notion of immaterial labour was recognised as a useful tool for conceptualising the modalities of creative and cognitive labour. In the light of this concept, it was possible to demonstrate how the activities of reading books, visiting exhibitions and exchanging ideas at conferences or exhibition openings are not leisure-time activities, as they are perhaps intuitively perceived in conventional conceptions of work. Instead, the concept of immaterial labour allowed to re-signify such activities as central features of creative working process which is essentially a cognitive and communicative type of labour, founded on the activities of assembling, rearranging and mediating knowledge.

Keeping in mind that the notion of immaterial labour is first and foremost a critical concept, its meaning is evidently not limited to offering a positive definition for activities that are commonly seen as the opposite of work. The art workers in Tallinn also appropriated this concept in order to scrutinise the precarious dimensions of cognitive work, such as the indistinct borderline between formal and informal work relations, the excessive commitment and personal investment, the spatial and temporal limitlessness of workplace and work hours. Reconceptualising these blurry boundaries between work

and non-work as corner pillars of immaterial labour constituted another element in art workers' strategy of counter-identification, aimed at challenging the dominant ideology that denies to art workers their status as workers.

When conceptualising the process of disidentification, José Esteban Muñoz stresses that it is a reworking of subject positions which does not annul the contradictory elements of any identity.[4] Thus, disidentification is not only to be discussed in terms of counter-identification, but as a strategy of working both "on and against." Hence, the identification as art workers in Tallinn was a dialectical process that also involved affirmative dimensions. For example, in many ways, the identification as art workers was complementary to the existing occupational identities as artists, curators or critics which were sometimes also perceived as antagonistic to each other. Furthermore, it was occasionally debated whether the self-definition as "professional art practitioners" should be preferred in public discourse, in order to underline the particular class position of artists which, in my interpretation, is discursively situated within the modern concept of artistic autonomy that originates from the 19th century. If the adoption of the term art workers would have been founded on active non-identification against the dominant modes of conceptualising artists' role in society, one of its potential consequences could have been identification as workers. In the process of organising against precarious working conditions, such identification would then have required that collective agency is searched by forming alliances with other precarious workers in society, and practised by targeting general social policies and labour rights. This didn't happen.

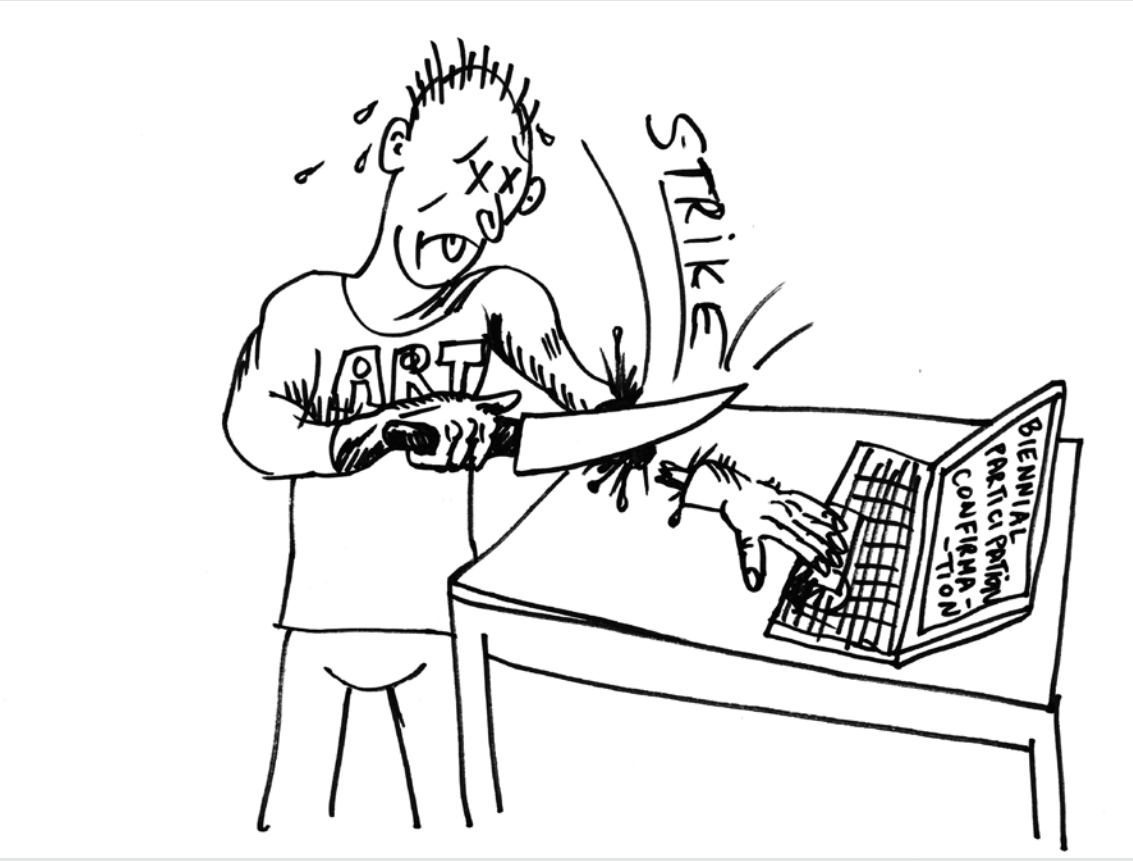
The discourse developed within the art workers' movement in Tallinn remained strongly anchored in the modern conception of art which reserves a specific social status to art and cultural workers. Rather than addressing the conflicts in neoliberal labour market economy at large, the art workers in Tallinn preferred to demand improvements in the particular sector of cultural work. For example, instead of demanding health insurance as a universal right, this issue was addressed solely from the perspective of cultural workers, even though it is not *specific* to the cultural sector. In doing this, the art workers in Tallinn conformed to the dominant conception of artists' unique status in society, mobilising their efforts towards strengthening the privileges that had already been established in existing policy documents, rather than resisting the subjectivation mechanisms implied in the political discourse that frames freelance art practitioners as a social group that does not quite fit into the category of working population.

Kaasaegse Kunsti Liit in Tallinn was apparently not among the most radical ones in the kaleidoscope of self-organised art workers' initiatives struggling against precarious conditions in the cultural sector. However, I believe that the notion of disidentification offers a useful tool for conceptualising a fundamental political problem that demands critical reflection in the context of art workers' organising more generally – as much as it seems

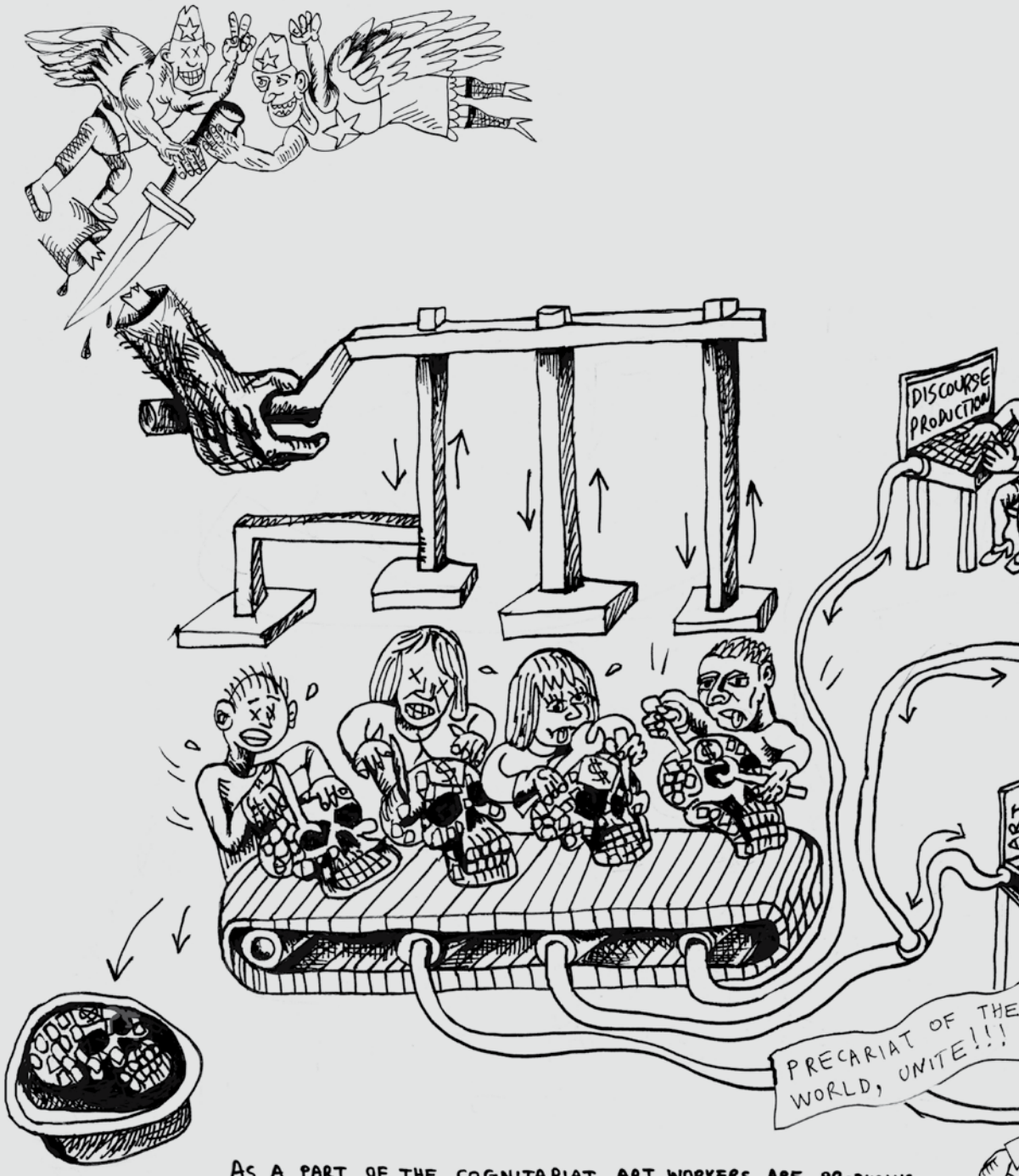
urgent to organise within the particular labour sector of art and culture, there is also a crucial necessity to form transversal alliances with "other" precarious workers in society. In fact, the recent wave of art workers' struggles, emerging transnationally throughout the last decade, should be placed into the wider context of contemporary social movements mobilising against precarious labour. From that perspective, recent art workers' movements can be framed as a line of conflict within the broader spectrum of anti-capitalist struggles, linked with examples such as the transnational EuroMayDay movement which gained considerable momentum in the beginning of 2000s, or the more recent movements of Occupy, M15 and Blockupy which have constituted themselves in the context of the current financial crisis. In the context of Estonia, the continuities between art workers' struggles and anti-capitalist struggles are perhaps not that self-evident: in the situation where radical social movements do not have much presence locally, it is easy to perceive the art workers' movement in Tallinn as an isolated one. Nonetheless, this is certainly not the case in other local contexts where art workers do align themselves with fellow precarious workers in a more radical and transversal manner. The Precarious Workers Brigade in London, which is also interviewed in this publication, can be named as one of such examples. In my view, the most exciting dimension in the current cycle of transnational art workers' struggles is precisely the aspiration toward transversal forms of organising, suggesting that there exists a radical desire to re-imagine social relations and resistive practices in the cultural sector as well.

1. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p.11.
2. Julia Bryan-Wilson, *Art Workers: Radical Practice in the Vietnam Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), p. 14 & 27.
3. Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor" (1996), http://www.generation-online.org/c/fcimmateriallabour3.htm (accessed 17 August 2014). [Originally published in: Paolo Virno, Michael Hardt (eds.), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (Minneapolis, London: University of Minnesota Press)].
4. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications. Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, p.12.

Zoran Popović, Answer to International Strike of Artists (initiated by Goran Đorđević), 1979. © Zoran Popović.



Drawing published in *ArtLeaks Gazette* 1, 2013. © Vladan Jeremić / ArtLeaks.



The Production Cycle, a drawing made for the event *Parasites and Prophets* at tranzit gallery, 2013, organised by ArtLeaks and tranzit, Bucharest. © Vladan Jeremić / ArtLeaks.

THE PRODUCTION CYCLE IN NEOLIBERAL CAPITALISM

THE EXPLOITATION OF THE PRECARIOUS ART WORKERS IN THE ART INDUSTRY AND A PROPOSAL HOW TO BREAK IT

THE WAY TO BREAK THIS EXPLOITATION IS TO CUT OFF AT TWO MAJOR POINTS:
FIRST, TO FREE THE REVOLUTIONARY POTENTIAL OF THE RESERVE ARMY OF LABOR (TO DRILL INTO THEIR IDEOLOGICAL BALLOON) AND SECOND, TO CUT OFF THE HAND OF STRUCTURAL REPRESSION.

Conversation with TEREZA STEJSKALOVÁ,
co-initiator of the campaign
Call Against Zero Wage in Prague

Call Against Zero Wage: Art Workers' Organising in the Context of Eastern Europe

AIRI: At the time when the art workers' organising process in Tallinn took place in 2010 and 2011, we were searching contacts with other self-organised initiatives addressing precarious working conditions in the art and cultural sector. We wanted to learn from their practices and strategies, however, it wasn't easy to find such initiatives in Eastern Europe at that particular moment in 2010. We heard of recent cycles of politicisation that had already come to its end in Slovenia, or about networks being formed in Poland and Serbia in order to make interventions into discussions about cultural funding, but we managed to find only one initiative that was explicitly focused on questions around precarious labour conditions – the May Congress in Russia. When I came in contact with the Call Against Zero Wage initiative in Prague in 2012, the art workers' movement in Tallinn had already dissolved. Nevertheless, I found this encounter very intriguing because it felt like looking into a mirror. Not only because the art workers' mobilisation in both contexts had a similar starting point in terms of springing off from issues related to unpaid labour within exhibition practice, but also because I sensed a number of commonalities that originate from the particular socio-political constituencies of Eastern Europe. Some of these

commonalities are related to the institutional structures of the local art worlds, shaped by the recent histories of post-socialist transition. Some are more connected to attitudes which are typically attributed to post-socialist subjectivity, such as the almost normative rejection of collective forms of action. Mobilising art workers in a peripheral location in Eastern Europe is thus a somewhat different challenge than in the big metropolises of the Western art world, where people are often already politicised and somewhat skilled in matters of self-organisation. Nevertheless, in addition to the similarities related to the social context in which the art workers' organising in Prague and Tallinn took place, I also find it interesting to reflect on the political and theoretical proximities of these two initiatives. For example, both initiatives share a certain political affinity with post-operaist theory — which, again, is sometimes seen as a Western product, and therefore double problematic, as it is also a Marxist strand of political thought that is very easily dismissed as illegitimate in the post-socialist region. And most of all, it has been interesting to observe the commonalities and differences in relation to the strategies that were adopted in Prague and Tallinn. It is rather thought-provoking to ask which strategies worked well in both contexts, which ones failed, and where did things develop completely differently. Tereza, would you please explain how did the Call Against Zero Wage campaign in Prague start, and how it has transformed over time?

TEREZA: The campaign started in November 2011 with an article titled *Zero Wage* in *A2* cultural bi-weekly, a Czech journal covering both culture and politics. It was written by me, the artist Pavel Sterec, and the curator and critic Jiří Ptáček. Inspired by the ArtLeaks initiative, we

articulated for the very first time the traumatic fact that artists are not paid for whatever program they provide for art institutions. We also criticised the lack of solidarity among artists, and the need for an initiative that would tackle the problem. The article caused quite an uproar. A number of artists and critics approached us and they

Logotype used by the initiative Call Against Zero Wage, designed by Jan Brož, 2012.

suggested we do something collectively about "zero wage" and other problems. So we started to meet from time to time. In the end, we published *Call Against Zero Wage*, addressed to the directors of art institutions, and signed by over one hundred and fifty artists, curators, critics, writers, art students, etc. In it we asked the state

institutions to fully cover the costs of projects they commissioned, and to pay artist fees. It sparked a real debate within the art scene not only about fees but also about the social identity of artists. Some reactions were very hostile. Yet, the directors of two important state institutions, the Moravian Gallery Brno and Gallery of Fine Art in Cheb, sent us their reply indicating they were open to discuss issues voiced in the call. We organised a number of lectures, participated in round tables and discussions, but in the end the initiative dissolved. We did not have the time and energy to put systematic pressure on institutions. Also, we did not have a clear idea how artist fees could actually be paid. We disagreed upon, for instance, whether something like a minimum fee to participate in a show, should be demanded or whether this ought to be something decided by the institution based on its budget.

However, other actions followed, initiated by the same group of people. We took an active part in demonstrations against cuts in culture in the winter of 2013, and later in spring 2013 we organised a protest occupation of Mánes Exhibition Hall to criticise the privatisation of this previously public art space. After that we realised that these ad hoc actions were insufficient in themselves and that we need to self-organise systematically. In the beginning of 2014 we decided to form an artists' union called Skutek (The Deed) to deal with social, political, and cultural issues of the artist community in the Czech Republic. The question of zero wage was unfortunately somehow eclipsed by other difficulties mainly related to strategies and ways of self-organising. After all, none of us had any experience with it, and there was no one to learn from. The problem of the value of artistic work is now more popular as a theme of exhibitions and artworks than as a social problem. However, my hopes are that the newly founded artists' union will deal with this question as well. At the moment

only a few artists have the guts to ask for a fee, and only few institutions offer it. However, even that can be considered progress. Before our article appeared, it had been simply a taboo.

I believe the initiative was the first political initiative of the Czech art community since 1989. I think to a certain extent the sudden boom of activism that began with the Call Against Zero Wage had to do with the arrival of a new generation of artists and critics born in the 1980s, who did not suffer from the "post-communist condition," refused to take things for granted and were loud in their criticisms. The generation born in the 1970s were also very much involved. But it was people in their late twenties and early thirties who started the discussion in the first place.

Generally speaking, the "Velvet Revolution" generation who are now in their fifties remained reluctant to join any such struggle. The "post-communist condition" manifested itself first of all as a prejudice against any sort of political mobilisation. In the first two decades after the revolution the freedom of not having to engage in political affairs was considered very valuable. It was a reaction against the communist regime which demanded "proper political attitudes." However, it led to a situation where artists remained powerless in their relationship with the institutional structures, be they private or operated by the state. This is something the new artists' union wants to change.

AIRI: The generational aspect was relevant in Tallinn as well, but I can also see interesting parallels in terms of politicisation that the debate about the economic conditions of art practice brought along. In the context of Estonia, there have been some earlier moments when questions of income and social guarantees have been addressed, for example in the 1990s and early 2000s. However, very few traces have remained from those discussions in

the collective memory of the art field. There have also been some other political issues that have galvanised the art field, such as the opposition against the proto-fascist design of the War of Independence Victory Monument which was heatedly debated in 2008. Nevertheless, when I think about the political significance of the art workers' mobilisation in Tallinn, I would also say that it constituted an exceptional episode in the recent political history of contemporary art. For me, it is also important to acknowledge that the movement in Tallinn was quite unprecedented in its organisational form — we created an open platform which was quite different from the dominant mode of political representation where the task of defending art practitioners' social and economic rights is delegated to art organisations, policy makers and experts. Thus, I am much more inclined to think about this process through the vocabulary of social movements — conceptualising it as a cycle of struggle that was rooted in self-organisation and collectivity. This type of political organising is currently not very common in Estonia, and definitely not in the art field. Therefore, we were sometimes also hopelessly clumsy in our lack of experience, not knowing how to facilitate meetings, how to create transparency within the process, how to channel information so that the discussion wouldn't lapse back to the very beginning every time when a new person comes to the assembly. Thinking back at this time from a few years of distance, I would say that political education was somehow the hidden curriculum of the whole process. Whereas we came together in order to express dissent against precarious working conditions, we largely ended up in the process of self-education, mapping and sharing knowledge about the mechanisms of art funding, the social security system, tax regulations, cultural policy legislations, and the general political system. I would be curious to know what were the conflicts and challenges that you faced in the process of organising?

TEREZA: I totally agree with your comment that it was a way of self-education. I think we were all taken by surprise about what we actually don't know and how not ready we are to push an agenda into the public sphere collectively. We had to do our research as well. The Zero Wage initiative also dissolved because the people involved could not find time for meetings and we did not know how to mobilise new people. It is not easy to work on precarity issues together with those who suffer from it. How are people spending their time working at jobs, taking care of small kids, and realising their art projects supposed to find time for activism? In the end it was only two people doing it — I was one of them. We just became tired because we felt lonely and kind of abandoned in our "struggle." The other initiatives I mentioned like the occupation of the Mánes Exhibition Hall suffered from gender imbalance and communication breakdowns. There were exceptions but you would mainly find men debating and deciding things, and women doing the invisible, unattractive work — sending emails, managing social networks, etc. The movement unconsciously mirrored the problems of the general society. There was also a schism between "radicals" and those who preferred a more consensual approach. The "radicals" actually wanted to take over the institution by force disregarding the disagreement of the majority of those involved. Decisions were taken without people knowing about it and so on. Also the Mánes initiative dissolved quite soon.

AIRI: What about the constitution of the new artists' union that you mentioned?

TEREZA: The new artists' union Skutek emerged out of all these problems. We also wished to attract new people including those who were not politically active before. We wanted to start a discussion across generations, with

the artists/curators/critics in their fifties and sixties, or even older, as well as students of art schools. In the beginning we did not have a clear goal in mind; we only wanted to create a platform for meeting and debating. We hoped the art community itself would articulate its needs and aims. Skutek has existed for a year now and a lot of time was spent on trying to figure out the structure of the union so that it is genuinely democratic (promoting gender equality for instance) and decentralised (not based in Prague only). The union is open for anyone who agrees with its statement stressing democracy of art, collective spirit, social concerns, and a refusal of the creative industries rhetoric. Members pay fees and elect a board that represents them. There are general assemblies and working groups dealing with different problems — there is one, for example, that is working on setting up a D.I.Y. nursery to help young artist parents. I just wish that the union will deal also with the problems the previous initiatives fought against, this time more efficiently. First of all, however, it is necessary to persuade the art community that competition and individualism lead nowhere.

AIRI: One interesting parallel between the initiatives in Prague and Tallinn is connected to the use of political language. For example, you also adopted the term "art workers" which was new in Czech context at that time. How was this neologism perceived and which connotations were attached to it?

TEREZA: The hysterical reaction which followed the Call Against Zero Wage was partly caused by the vocabulary we used. As I mentioned above, some of us were aware of the discussions held in the West. We simply translated terms like "art worker" or "wage" without giving it much thought. However, in the Czech society such terms recall

the spirit of collectivism ordered from above, associated with the former communist regime. We were asking state institutions to grant us a fee and cover our production costs. Yet, many people from the art field, especially from the older generations, felt that a fee from art institution automatically limits one's freedom as an artist. During communism official artists indeed received a salary while their artistic freedom had to be compromised. People suspected that the call is an attempt at the restoration of the former rules. They feared that by paying artists, the state will again control the content of the art work. How can you be independent from the state, subversive and at the same time ask for its money? Our aim was quite different, however. We wanted to challenge the socially accepted identity of artists as entrepreneurs who "advertise" their work in art institutions, and then sell it on the market. We wished to spark a discussion on the social role of public art institutions and their relationship with the artist. We refused to see the cultural workers as entrepreneurs, though this is how we are perceived by the ruling discourse. We didn't look at state institutions as enemies but as partners, as spaces free from the pressure of the market where we could experiment. If we are not paid by the institutions for our projects, the pressure to make one's work marketable becomes stronger. While we were more concerned about the market, our adversaries were more sensitive about the role of the state. However, nowadays when institutions receive less and less funding from the state, and often struggle not to become dominated by their corporate sponsors, that did not make much sense in our view.

Naturally, the term "worker" recalls certain leftist ideologies about which a number of people did not feel comfortable. Artists were not "workers," many felt. We were criticised for the "economisation" of culture

by those who saw culture as an autonomous field which should not be dirtied by money issues.

AIRI: I would like to zoom in a bit on this East-West divide that you addressed when referring to the origins of your political vocabulary. I find it very interesting to hear that your source of inspiration was ArtLeaks. Although they publish in English and partly report on problem cases related to Western art institutions, ArtLeaks is mainly run by art workers based in different localities of Eastern Europe, such as Bucharest, Belgrade, St Petersburg, etc. They have taken a very transnational approach to the agenda of giving visibility for the precarious material conditions of art production. In that sense, I think that ArtLeaks is a good example of how the East-West divide pretty much implodes in the context of art economies.

When I think about the differences between East and West, I can't help recalling an anecdotal moment from the art workers' organising process in Tallinn when I was approached by a cultural ministry representative who asked me to point out good examples of how issues around cultural workers' income and social security have been organised in other countries. I suddenly realised that she was expecting me to bring out the evergreen argument of saying: "Look how things are done in the West!" But I had to admit that the art workers' situation is also precarious elsewhere and the visual art sector tends to be even more precarious than other cultural sectors. This was a tricky situation because when the conditions are not substantially better in the West, it is very easy to argue that it is too ambitious to expect improvements in Estonia, a country which is still struggling to "catch up."

However, when I think about the recent wave of self-organised art workers' initiatives that have emerged in the international art world, I see a lot of commonalities in

terms of activist strategies and forms of resistance. Even if many of these initiatives are strongly rooted in their local contexts, such as the ones in Prague or Tallinn, I find it very important to acknowledge that these are not isolated struggles. They are connected through activist networks, often borrowing tools from each other, adapting and transforming them along the way. Furthermore, they are also interlinked through an affinity to certain political concepts, such as identification as "art workers" which occurs to be a battle cry that is appropriated in different contexts, while at the same time constituting an umbrella term that demonstrates proximities between those local initiatives. Keeping those entanglements in mind, I would like to ask: What have been your inspirations and networks? Which initiatives do you follow, from where have you learned, or to whom have you passed on the knowledge and experiences derived from the struggle in Prague?

TEREZA: You are right, though the allusion to "the West" kind of works in our context. I believe in neighbouring Germany artists are more aware of their rights, and institutions are more inclined to pay feesz for example. Yet I have often thought that it is crucial to draw on our own resources and traditions. For example, there is a tradition of the Czech avant-garde of the 1920s and 1930s, though almost exclusively male, who were very engaged in public affairs and organised themselves frantically. We should research whether there are lessons one could learn from this history.

It is interesting that at the time of the Zero Wage initiative similar discussions were going on in Poland, for instance. In May 2012 Polish artists, in collaboration with art galleries, organised an art strike to open a debate on the social security of artists. Recently, they have also founded an artists' union and have persuaded several

important institutions to sign an agreement to pay fees to artists. However, there is not much communication between the art communities in Czech Republic and Poland which is a pity, and I hope this will change in the future. As I said before, our main inspiration was ArtLeaks and their *No Fee Statement*. But the idea of the artists' union has come from Hungary and the Studio of Young Artists in Budapest. While the already existing Czech artists' unions have grown old, the Studio is an organisation that has been around for more than fifty years, and it is still an important part of the Hungarian art scene.

Precarious Workers Brigade: Transversal Articulations of Art Workers' Organising

This interview was initiated by TEREZA STEJSKALOVÁ and BARBORA KLEINHAMPLOVÁ, and first published in the Czech cultural journal *A2*, issue 2, January 2014.

TEREZA & BARBORA: What are your main strategies in fighting precarious working conditions?

PRECARIOUS WORKERS BRIGADE: We focus on educating ourselves, through collective processes such as mapping, together with others affected by precarity and instability in work and private lives. We are proactive in contacting institutions offering unfair internship programmes. We engage with students and graduates through workshops and occasional talks, organise direct actions and support similar actions carried out by other groups, within and beyond education, culture and the arts sector, such as the Latin American Workers Association (LAWAS). Most of all, we support each other in figuring all of this out.

T&B: What kind of people do you manage to attract?

PWB: Our group is mainly people who work within or around education and the arts, but also students, and current and past interns. People usually find us because they have experienced exploitation, are trying to understand what is happening to them, and want to fight back.

T&B: Do you focus only on people active in culture and education or are you trying to establish connections to other groups of precarious workers (service sector, migrant workers, etc.)?

PWB: We do, as mentioned above. We organise around the problem of precarity to precisely allow these connections to be made. Most recently we have been working together with LAWAS on joint initiatives around UK Border Agency raids on migrant workers (there is a "bust card" that you can have a look at on our website). We have also attended actions in solidarity with cleaners of cultural institutions, and for example, Boycott Workfare.

T&B: What groups are most affected by precarity in London for instance? And how do you take it into account in your practice?

PWB: All groups, with the exclusion of the obvious well-off strata of society, are affected in one way or another. All labour is precarious although some sectors (e.g. the food industry or migrant workers) more than others, and now, due to the "crisis" and "austerity," this is even more so. We start our work from within the sectors we find ourselves in, but again, as above, we reach out where and when we can.

T&B: What obstacles have you encountered in trying to organise freelancers/interns and other precarious workers?

PWB: Rather than trying to "organise" others, we try to encourage people to join with us and to organise themselves. For example, we have been talking to students and staff at colleges where we have done "de-professional development" workshops to try and tackle issues of internships and work placements within the colleges. Even in working this way, of course, there are many obstacles.

The thing we are fighting — precarity — produces conditions that are also the main hurdles: a lack of time, energy, money, multiple work commitments leaving little time for meetings or even travelling to meetings, burn-out, health issues, including mental health, forced migration, visa issues, care duties — all make it very difficult. These conditions can be linked more generally of course to any attempt at organising a dispersed, urban workforce who work more in a "social factory" than at a factory production line.

We don't separate the pedagogical and organisation aspects of our work, we try to de-naturalise the situation we are in. Internships, for example, as they exist now are a relatively recent phenomena — it was not always this way, even though the rhetoric surrounding internships implies they are something everyone has had to go through. We point out that cultural workers earn less than the median wage in the UK. But perhaps most importantly, we try to work with the dilemmas people really inhabit — to acknowledge the desires, the romance and the idealism that often fuels us to carry on in this sector.

We believe it's important to start from where we are — to not defer our politics to elsewhere. We often hear people in our sector say that the real politics happens elsewhere — somewhere else, and to other people. But we think it is important to start from where you are (as an artist, a cultural worker, a teacher, and so on) and make links transversally, first to broader systemic issues, and then to other struggles and groups. We make support structures and shared spaces to re-think how our desires, which are currently directed into individualised, competitive, hierarchic modes of being, can instead be oriented toward other forms of common culture and work-based education. Even when it is difficult, people are dispersed and energies are often low, we maintain bi-weekly meetings and keep things moving so people can come in and out of the process as their lives permit.

T&B: You seem to be raising consciousness about a problem. Nowadays, however, even if people know there are problems, they don't do much about it. Have you considered some, perhaps more radical, or simply other means of pushing people into changing their attitudes?

PWB: Yes, consciousness raising is a part of what we do — and this is about changing attitudes. Even though people may know

there are problems, being able to voice them and see them as part of a systemic social issue, rather than as an individual one, is the first step towards action. It can also help to get a better picture of how the systemic issues around precarity operate, build solidarity, and determine what kind of actions are needed. We work from traditions of militant research, co-research and practices of feminist consciousness raising, which precisely do not separate the production of knowledge from action. So instead of having a ready-made diagnosis of exploitation for instance, we work together to really understand what it is that we experience, what are the current mutations in our society that produce these conditions. From there we develop strategies and tactics such as direct action, letter writing and naming and shaming organisations with bad labour practices, as well as linking actions to broader social movements.

T&B: Does the artist differ in any sense from other figures of precarity (PhD students, interns, migrant workers, service class, manual workers)?

PWB: Not in so far as the general conditions of precarity are concerned. All the groups you mention face different issues specific to their own situation and context. There is something, however, about the idea of cultural work (and to some extent intellectual work in general) that seems to promise a kind of freedom and self-actualisation in a way that working in, say, the service industry may not. Similarly, the artist is a symbol of someone led by a vocation, a calling, for whom creative work is more than "just a job." The desire to do something that you love can leave you open to being exploited. If you are willing to do anything in order to carry on making artwork (and the training as an artist is to put your artwork first before anything else) can mean that you actively seek out short-term contracts, part-time work, work in the service industry in order to create time and space to do artwork as well as to support yourself. In fact, these identities are never pure – especially after the withdrawal of arts funding – many artists will be members of many of the groups you mention simultaneously, working as artists, interns and service workers. How you frame the complexity of these working lives and the identities they produce is really important.

T&B: More and more artists address the issues of precarity in their art works. Do you think this can be also an effective tool for fighting precarity?

PWB: Precarity and broader political themes have become fashionable in the art world again. However, at the moment of being addressed, precarity often isn't examined within the institution and the "project" and so often it is actually reproduced all over again. The radical content of an artwork is not enough for the piece to become an effective tool – there is a need to address the material conditions of production of the piece/event. We receive many invitations to take part in exhibitions where our work might appear like an artwork. We generally turn down these invitations, however, and have developed an open working code of ethics that allows us to make these decisions and keep us focused. When we do publish or take part in public events in the art context, we always address the material conditions of that situation by making sure that an info-box detailing the economies of production in a given case are made public.

T&B: Do you believe in the emergence of the precariat (precarious workers as the emerging revolutionary class)? If yes, what are the major obstacles in its coming to existence?

PWB: Our jury is out on this one. We can see that naming the precariat as a class might have strategic and analytic use at times, and in certain contexts (the ILO e.g.), but it also has its potential dangers and limitations. Precarity describes a condition that is to do with work, but also housing, and our lives – how we understand our futures and so on. It cuts across so many sectors, forms of life and work that it might actually lose its usefulness if it is pinned down in this way.

T&B: There is pleasure and desire that is often involved with precarious work. People value their independence/freedom a lot and are willing to sacrifice a lot in order to keep it. Is it something that should be criticised as false?

PWB: We are all aware of the banners in 1970s Italy that called for precarity against the discipline of the factory. The thing they and we are fighting for, however, is precarity on our terms – not the governments', not the corporations', not the markets'. It doesn't make sense to code precarity morally "good" or "bad." This is something that we speak to students about a lot when we go into colleges. A major concern for us is that there is always a danger that questioning and taking apart the "system" can leave people paralysed and demoralised. As above, we need to acknowledge what motivates people to keep going in the sector but also include information of other ways of working, other spaces, economies, etc.– and encourage people to devise practical modes of mutual support.

T&B: Do you cooperate with labour unions and what is your perspective on their current activities in Great Britain?

PWB: We have often taken part in actions in solidarity with trade unions and have talked to some of them about issues around internships. Some of us are of course members of trade unions also and we support union activities and encourage people to join one if they can. One of the issues is that as a precarious worker or freelance worker there may not be a union that you are able to join, especially if you're not based in any particular physical location. Also, if you have multiple jobs/identities it can be difficult to identify with a particular union.

T&B: What do you think about the unconditional basic income? Do you think it would solve some of the issues of precarious labour force?

PWB: As a collective, we are generally in favour of basic income as an idea and an attempt to rethink relations between labour and income. The phenomenon of free labour tells us that the wage is no longer a guaranteed way of distributing wealth in our societies. And as feminists have always known, the demand for the wage is always interim – we want to be paid, but we also know that wage labour is inherently alienated. The debates around the unconditional basic income get at some of these issues, but we are a long way off being able to put this into practice in the UK at least.

T&B: If strike and labour union negotiation were the main tools of workers' protection, what could be such tools for precarious workers?

PWB: This is the big question of course, a question that we can only figure out the answers to through committed collective experimentation. There is no point in relying on older tools that don't correspond to the realities of our working lives today. We have been involved for example, in discussions about a "creative strike" and what this would mean, and debated the possibility of an intern strike in London, and we immediately hit all the barriers that such actions call up. There is so much fundamental work to be done to constitute ourselves first as a collective – even just a society that could imagine getting off the competition merry-go-round – one that could develop forms of mutual support that would allow us to strike, to make such a claim. That is where we are at right now.

T&B: What according to your perspective lies beyond the world of precarious work? What could come after it? What kind of work and what kind of life?

PWB: Well, we can recall the early Marx with a half-day at work and an afternoon's fishing with philosophy reading groups in the evening! More seriously, we and many people we work with simply want a life with more dignity, with less harassment from the market, the bosses, the privatised unemployment office, the credit card company, the landlord. We want power and autonomy over our lives. Enforced austerity has closed down many of the gaps we could operate in before – the squats, the dole, the grant for a year here and there: so we feel this harassment, this lack of freedom, this withdrawal of dignity more acutely than ever now. Struggles against precarity are often led by this ethical charge for "a better life," where we are not all competing for meagre resources and forced to hang on by the skin of our teeth. A life and form of work that is not geared towards enriching and further entrenching the power of the wealthy would be a start.

T&B: Do you imagine collaborating with (or even founding) a political party that would struggle to solve some of the issues of the precarious workers?

PWB: We have no interest in founding a political party. "Single issue" political parties are not particularly effective and the UK has perhaps one of the least democratic political systems in Europe – the "first past the post" 2-party system leaves no space for smaller parties and succeeds in moving steadily rightward each year. And that is before you look at the legal corruption of the revolving door political and corporate classes, the return to power of the traditional upper ruling classes, the dominance of right wing media ownership, and so on. Having said this, there is a debate in Spain, Greece and other countries right now about how we shouldn't perhaps turn our backs entirely on representational politics, how we need to fight for that space too, and stop the bleeding in the short term. As above, however, we feel that our task is the more basic work of building constituencies, understanding who "we" are, what we want, and how we can fight with others for more dignity and equality in our lives and work. The Zapatistas said once

that in order to sit around a table of government they would have to first build that table together. That is perhaps closer to our aspiration right now.

T&B: Revolution or reform of the system?

PWB: This is an old question that we would need to spend a lot of time taking apart before answering! Obviously tinkering around the edges of the system we abhor as it exists is not enough; but why is it right now, that even the post-war concession of the welfare state seems like an impossible utopia? Debates in the 1990s around the "making" of power (John Holloway et al.), versus the "taking" of power (in the sense of storming the Winter Palace and so on) were important in that they emphasised the importance of pre-figuring the kind of society we want to live in the present, in the way we organise ourselves today in the here and now. There is no point in deferring justice, equality and so on until "after the revolution." In our organising and collectivity, we have to build another society already today in how we relate to each other, how we act in the world. The micro-politics of this must go hand in hand with macro-political strategies, alliances and social movements. It is always two step, everyday reform and revolution.

BUST YOUR BOSS!*

card for freelance art and cultural workers

During a negotiation about work you have the right:
not to remain silent about money
not to subsidise the production from your own pocket
not to accept a change of agreed conditions without a renegotiation
not to take this job on the promise of a future!

* Warning: In the cultural sector your boss may not look like a boss - they could be your friend/drinking buddy... It might even be you!

In solidarity - Precarious Workers Brigade
www.precariousworkersbrigade.tumblr.com

BUST YOUR BOSS!

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASK:

What's the budget? How much am I getting paid? How much are YOU getting paid? When am I getting paid? Do I get paid sick leave and holidays? Will my pay cover a living wage for the period of the project? What union can I join? Are there separate budgets for production, expenses and pay? When shall we agree the terms of the contract? What is the compensation fee if the work gets cancelled? Has all the money for the project been raised? What is the maternity/paternity and pension provision? Where is the money for the project coming from and what degree of involvement do funders have in my work? etc..

Precarious Workers Brigade, *Bust Your Boss Card*, 2011. This card for artists and cultural workers borrows the format of the "bust card" that is handed out at protests, giving legal information to activists and demonstrators.

Conversation with basic income activist LOTTA TENHUNEN

As with Culture So with Money: It All Belongs to All of Us

AIRI: I am interested in discussing the concept of basic income from the perspective of art and cultural workers. One of the dominant problems in this publication is related to the issue of struggling against precarious working conditions in the art field. In the light of this question, art work is often framed as a very specific type of labour that occupies an unconventional position in relation to wage-labour relations. Such conceptualisation can perhaps be explained when looking at the modalities of public funding from which the art economy is heavily dependent. In many ways, the public funding schemes put art and cultural workers in a privileged situation, making them eligible for grants, state subsidies or tax reductions. However, paradoxically, it occurs to be precisely the public cultural funding system that also denies art workers their subjectivity as workers.

This aspect becomes evident when the dimension of social security is considered. For example, in societies where social security benefits are computed on the basis of taxable waged employment, art workers often fall outside the social security system because their work relations combine a mixture of waged and unwaged employment.The unorthodox position of art workers in relation to wage-labour relations thus occurs to be connected to the dominant idea of conceptualising wage as the dividing line between

work and non-work. If we now think about the idea of basic income and its recent conceptualisations within discussions about precarious labour, perhaps this situation is not at all specific to art workers? How is the relationship between wage and labour configured in contemporary capitalism?

LOTTA: It isn't news any more that changing labour relations have significantly changed the profile of workers in the last 20–30 years. The historical subject of white male factory workers with temporally unlimited contracts is vanishing, whereas diverse modalities of flexible, mobile, part-time work gain dominance. The new profile of workers is most often young, migrant and/or feminine, but most importantly precarious. In parallel, the European post-war welfare systems are crumbling down, limiting access to health care, education, housing and social benefits. The result of such processes is not only the precariousness of labour relations, but a precarisation of life itself. As Universidad Nómada from Spain, one of the earliest groups addressing this issue, put it over a decade ago: there is a crisis of three classical distinctions upon which the conceptualisation of labour was founded in the 20th century. Today we are witnessing a vanishing division line between the workplace and the living quarters, between production and reproduction, and between wage and income. In this context, basic income enters the discussion in order to guarantee the continuity of life, both in relation to production – no more exclusively thought in terms of wage labour – and reproduction – no more accepted by women as an unpaid activity done out of love.

By definition, basic income has nothing to do with incentive money schemes or new social benefits for the poorest of the poor. The politics behind it is based on the understanding that the relations of labour and wage are not settled in

capitalist production. There is always surplus labour, as well as unpaid reproductive labour, which is necessary to maintain the labour force. In capitalist economy, the labour time is never fully remunerated. This discrepancy is one of the core arguments for basic income. It also involves a conceptualisation of money as commons. Moreover, basic income can and should be defended as a new right which connects the question of social equality with radical changes in the productive model.

During the last years, debates around basic income have been dominated by a certain rivalry between different but equally rigid, pre-established implementation models. For example, in Finland, most political parties have taken a favourable stance towards *some* type of basic income model. The neoliberal National Alliance Party and the Green Party have argued for a low-amount basic income, in order to stimulate employment and entrepreneurship. The Left Alliance defends a higher amount of basic income, but still frames it as a poverty aid and support mechanism for flexible labour market. Some of these proposals are based on the reduction or elimination of already existing social welfare models, suggesting the implementation of a weak, non-universal basic income instead of them. None of these models defend wide tax reforms including additional taxation of the biggest stock companies, fearing that these would emigrate from the country. Such proposals should be under very critical scrutiny. Most basic income campaigns organised by associations and organisations are focused on convincing politicians and other public icons to support the idea of basic income "in general."

I would here wish to defend another kind of basic income that is constituted through a different process — a basic income that takes its parameters, its institutionality and distribution methods, its strength to become universal and unconditional from the social struggles. Just like the

demands for free movement should be defined in the struggles for it and by the ones who migrate, the demand for basic income should be defined by the ones who organise in precarious labour conditions, who struggle against debt governance, who defend the old and demand for new rights. This is the only way to demand a basic income that acknowledges the power relation from which its current non-existence depends. It is precisely that power relation that basic income seeks to change.

The idea that cultural workers have a more legitimate position to demand basic income than workers from other labour sectors, is somewhat misleading. In contemporary capitalism, there are many new diffuse forms of production, where value from productive activity is captured without remuneration. The production chains are global and formed by individual workers who are external to the coordination of the labour process, or by small teams converted into an entrepreneurial chain of clients and service providers. Working during leisure time is a rule rather than an exception. Immaterial labour also takes the form of producing profits for multinational corporations like Google or Facebook, when endless quantities of information, relationships and communication are produced in peer-to-peer social networking platforms. However, it is not the peers, but the shareholders of the company, who profit from such production. What is true, is that cultural work is a paradigmatic example of the new labour conditions in two senses. Firstly, because the workers of creative sectors have never enjoyed strong labour rights. Secondly, because observing cultural work as a production model which diminishes the distinction between traditional notions of work and non-work is easy to perceive. Nonetheless, when we look at the production mechanisms in other sectors, we see the same pattern repeating itself in different forms.

In the political thinking of the Italian *operaismo*, there is an assumption that the historical transformation of capitalism is following the initiative of labour force, whereas the capital only reacts to workers' struggles and practices of resistance. From this perspective, we can see how the desire for freedom expressed in the workers' uprisings of the post-war decades has been captured by capital, in order to turn the struggle against full-time wage labour into precarity. If you look at the European labour market policies from, say, the beginning of the 1990s, you can already see indications for the current precarisation. It was the prime minister of Denmark, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, who first started to talk about flexicurity: flexibilisation of the labour market to guarantee social security, even though the latter part has since then been forgotten. From then on starts the development of neoliberal labour policies, resulting with cases such as the Hartz reforms in Germany which introduced the concepts of part-time and low-wage "mini-jobs," the "one-euro-jobs" that supplement welfare by offering, and sometimes imposing, virtually unpaid jobs to unemployed people, and the "Ich-AG" (Me, Inc.) that was created to push unemployed persons into self-employed entrepreneurship. The Spanish government copied the mini-jobs scheme in 2012, having previously passed a set of other catastrophic labour reforms. In Italy, labour market flexibilisation has taken place in many cycles, such as the most recent Jobs Act from 2014, or a few years earlier the Monti government's labour reform in 2012, or Berlusconi's *legge 30* from the early 2000s, and these are just a few examples. With the 2008 financial crash and the following scheme of memorandums, austerity and a state bond market, precarity has become far more general and profound. There are savage processes of primary accumulation taking place in Europe, especially in the PIIGS countries, adding up to the precarisation of the living conditions.

In the Nordic countries, there is one important dimension to be added to the flexibilisation of European labour market policies: the so called "workfare." This concept, which is mocking the legendary Nordic welfare system by its very definition, represents a new scenario of labour force subordination. Workfare means that the cutting of social benefits is accompanied with an intensified control over the life of its beneficiaries. The resulting model could be pictured as a process of resetting the subjectivity of the unemployed in order to install employability. In order to receive social welfare benefits, you need to attend an employability course where you will be taught things like brushing your teeth or cutting your hair before a job interview. The Finnish social security reform from 2014 imposes participation in "rehabilitational work" if you do not find employment. This workfare model mixes up social politics with labour politics: work is used as a way of supposedly rehabilitating pathologised individuals who are perceived as outcasts of the society due to unemployment and poverty. It's very perverse. We are in recession, the labour market is jammed and there are no jobs being created, but social policies take pride in forcing people to work on a 1 € wage or without any remuneration at all.

You say that art workers don't have a workers' subjectivity. It seems to me that very few subalterns have a workers' subjectivity these days. Even fewer social movements are currently built on a workerist assemblage. In times of mass unemployment and poorly paid part-time jobs that do not guarantee a substantial living wage, perhaps it is not a surprise that the subjection to wage labour does not unite people in common struggles. The subject of "mass worker," which was very central for the Italian *operaisti*, seems to become increasingly marginal. Post-operaist analysis of labour relations was first based on the concept of "social worker," invented by Toni Negri to

mark the shift from factory to metropolis. Later on Yann Moulier-Boutang has conceptualised the mutations of capitalist economy by comparing it with a bee hive whose role in the pollination process produces every year incalculable amounts of value on the agricultural market. While the bees make honey for the next generation of bees, pollination happens for free as a side effect of the reproduction of life in the bee hive. In this sort of an economy of exchange and contribution, basic income would come in as remuneration for this continuous value creation that is pollination.

Struggling for basic income in this hive-society of diffuse value creation corresponds to the historical wage struggles within the fordist organisation of production. Where there is no common subjectivity around work, and wage labour has lost its significance in terms of mobilising and interconnecting struggles, it seems to be the shared experience of the multiple forms of indebtedness and enforced entrepreneurship that can create a potent assemblage. During recent years, the most common enunciations of oppression, exploitation and radical desire, even the seemingly individual ones, spring from the recognition of subjectivation and control that combine a mixture of forced individual risk-taking and shame. The new successful organisational practices in Europe during this decade have to do with figuring out how this production of capitalist subjectivity works, and attacking the debt governance that it forces upon us. Maybe a new wave of basic income movements could take the issue of debt as a starting point, and develop forms of direct action from there. Expropriating basic income in the form of student, mortgage and start-up loans is an option.

AIRI: When I think about various self-organised art workers' initiatives, whose practice I have been following in

the recent years, it seems to me that many of them have started from the impulse of forming a trade union. However, trade unionism doesn't seem to be able to address the complexity of economic models that characterise the art field. As I already suggested above, the economic activities of art workers cannot be solely conceptualised in the modality of wage-labour relations. In some contexts, art workers also operate on the market, trading and selling the commodities of art and culture. In other contexts, art workers are beneficiaries of state subsidies, and their precarious situation often seems to result from the ambivalence of constantly jumping ships between the status as workers, entrepreneurs, and unemployed or unwaged workers.

Then again, this situation is also not at all specific to the realm of art or cultural work. In a neoliberal economy, there is a growing tendency to force workers into becoming entrepreneurs, for example by replacing waged employment positions with contracting self-employed entrepreneurs. This development poses new challenges in trade unionist politics, because it sets massive obstacles on the path of forming and articulating collective agency from the subject position of workers.

Do you think that the struggle for basic income could be one possibility for reforming or rethinking trade unionist strategies? Or would you see basic income as a political struggle that stands separately from trade unionist politics? I am here also thinking on the issue of strike action which has historically been one of the most powerful strategies in the history of workers' struggles. In recent years, the concept of social strike has been increasingly re-invoked in reaction to the dispersed and precarious composition of labour relations — it is based on the idea that if society at large has become a site of production, it should also be conceptualised as a site

of resistance. Do you think that social strike could be a relevant strategy in relation to the struggle for basic income?

LOTTA: The demand for basic income was present in the anti-globalisation movement of the 1990s where it was brought onto the agenda by the Italian Ya Basta and the Spanish Movement of Global Resistance. Later it became a central demand in the EuroMayDay mobilisations during the 2000s. Even though EuroMayDay didn't last as an organisational form, it was the first articulation of a deepening crisis and an attempt to create an assemblage of multiple struggles against precarity. Already back then it was transnational from the start, radically European, etc. The questions posed by the EuroMayDay movement in early 2000s concern more and more people today, especially young people, young families and migrants who occupy a less privileged position in the two-tiered labour market where they have no access to the old social pact with its unemployment benefits, pension or public health care.

I am referring to the recent history of social struggles because the demand for basic income needs to be sustained and fortified by a process of social pressure and re-appropriation of basic income by a counter-power. A social movement that struggles for basic income knows that there is no exact amount for a just basic income. There is a power relation, and when you are stronger, you can push for more income, better services, and better quality of life. In that sense, I think that basic income is much more a beginning than an end of social struggles. Unless there is some way to sustain life, it is impossible to organise, and the war between the poor abounds. If you have the minimum security that you or your kids won't starve after two months of unemployment, you can turn down all the jobs that are dangerous and ill-paid. You can

try to build collective negotiation power and interconnect labour struggles in different sectors.

However, I am not quite sure whether a massive workers' mobilisation will be the cause of social change in the near future. There are too few examples of fully transnational workers' unions with global structures, such as the Service Employees International Union in which almost two million service sector workers from 100 different countries are organised. Moreover, such formulas don't seem to work in places with 60% of youth employment, like Spain, from where I am writing. Instead of re-thinking the politics of trade unionism, the Left parties and major trade unions seem to be much more concerned with their efforts to call out for the traditional national workers' subject. Too often these attempts at resurrection contribute to neo-nationalisms rather than emancipation: when reaching out to the white hetero suburban middle-class male who is the remaining beneficiary of the old trade union politics, it is done at the cost of migrant working force.

The transversality of the struggle for universal basic income means that it is important for social struggles in every sector. Basic income makes it slightly more possible to organise in precarious conditions, but also to expand the notion of labour struggles into the realm of health care, education, public transport, etc. For example, when you say that art workers are excluded from the health care system, I say it is better to struggle for an inclusive, universal health care rather than reduce such struggle to one labour sector. Basic income is a frame that enables the articulation of this sort of universality.

Here it might be handy to refer to the notion of social unionism which was first coined in the labour and social justice struggles of the so-called developing countries during the 1980s and early 1990s. Social unionism is not only concerned with workplace issues, but seeks a wider

frame of political struggles for human rights, social justice and democracy, thus addressing intrinsic challenges of political organisation in the times of global exploitation chains and a fragmented labour market.

It is interesting to contrast these forms of organisation with the Tides and La PAH (Platform for the Affected by Mortgage), two novel, recent and/or actual Spanish experiences that count as laboratories of social unionism. However, what possible strike action is there for such new unions, when the notion of strike seems to refer to old labour struggles? Somehow the idea of social strike is a paradox in itself, because instead of stopping the social productivity or refusing to take part in the reproductive capacity of the society, it should be about reclaiming the right to decide how social production is organised and what for. A social strike would have to address questions like: What sort of health care institutions do we want? What kind of education do we want? How do we prefer to organise our economies? Thus, social strike is quite different from merely pressuring for more jobs, higher wages, and better working conditions in particular labour sectors. It is more qualitative, and it also makes clear that a day of mobilisations — however transversal it is in terms of engaging various sectors, however potent in making visible the issue of precarious labour, and however destructive in the sense of causing economic damage — it is not enough.

A European social strike was one of the central ideas debated in the recent meeting of the Blockupy coalition in Frankfurt. Nonetheless, there seems to be a growing gap between the political imaginaries of current European social movements, and those of post-15M Spain, where a cultural, political and subjective earthquake preceded the birth of the Tides and the transversal development of La PAH. The key practices in the organisation of the

White Tide, or *Marea Blanca* (for a universal health care), the Green Tide, *Marea Verde* (for the right to education), the Blue Tide, *Marea Azúl* (for water as a common), and La PAH point towards reducing ideological arguments to the minimum, negotiating pre-existing activist identities; and preferring a mix of low-risk direct action campaigns which are sustained in time rather than mobilised for brief moments in order to demonstrate strength. In the light of these recent experiences, the concept of social strike that was discussed in Frankfurt is much more activist and antagonistic. My main fear is that it doesn't easily translate into the creation of new forms of institutionality. What is now needed, is the politicisation and full participation of "people affected by."

AIRI: Your reflections on the notion of social unionism resonate strongly with my arguments when insisting that art and cultural workers should defend the idea of basic income. I am here thinking of two aspects in particular. Firstly, because the concept of basic income offers a perspective for good life particularly for those social groups whose work reality is located in the grey area between waged and unwaged labour, and who are thus inevitably subjected to precarious living conditions in contemporary capitalist economy. And secondly, because the struggle for basic income opens a political horizon for transversal struggles that go beyond isolated struggles within one or another narrow labour sector.

LOTTA: Yes, exactly. I think that social unionism is important transversally, as is culture. Culture is too often understood to be merely what happens in galleries, theatres and concert halls. The understanding of culture as an isolated and/or only professionally managed realm conforms to the capitalist logic of blocking connections

between a certain area of production, and its economical-political contexts. The conceptualisation of culture as an isolated category is a way to protect the continuity of exploitation, to reduce culture to a commodity, and to guarantee the accumulation of symbolic capital, which is so essential to the functioning of an art market. It is crucial to think about the right to culture in a broader sense, and I don't mean this in the form of free theatre tickets to everyone. I mean a right to define culture, a right to situate it politically and economically, and to open up new experiments in cultural production that is not based on the consumerist model. The right to culture should be posed as a transversal question, inside which the cultural workers organise.

I find it great that cultural workers want basic income, but why should they want it only for themselves? What about the rest of the precarious workers? My impression is that the Nordic discussions about remuneration of cultural work are lacking a reflection on the complex relations between (cultural) production, social rights and income. I sometimes can't help wondering whether art workers reject the politicisation implied in the struggle for basic income due to the subjectivation fostered in art schools. Why on earth are the art workers so persistent on thinking about themselves as a privileged social group despite being actually broke all the time? Maybe because if everyone would be entitled to pursue those activities that are currently defined in occupational terms as "art" or "cultural" work, there would be no special status attached. So a specialised professional artist might become extinct. But even more importantly, something else might also happen. The categories of music, painting, literature, poetry, dance, performance, storytelling and singing would vanish in their commodified form in order to become recomposed and enriched as forms of existential, social and

political expression. The isolation of these cultural categories has its reasons in the logic of commodification of culture. When culture is not a commodity for consumption, its potential as a tool for emancipatory politics is revealed — not in the sense of agit-prop — but in the sense of defending life and expressing the reality of precariousness and exploitation. Moreover, culture can be a space for creating new forms of life, for imagining and joyfully sharing disobedient practices, and for constituting new realities.

AIRI: What you are saying about the transformation of cultural work, reminds me of the political visions of feminist Marxist theorist Frigga Haug who imagines social change through the idea of redistributing labour time. She proposes a four-in-one compass for egalitarian society which is founded on and empowered by basic income. Her compass suggests a social model where each individual would equally share their time between wage labour, reproductive labour, personal interests and political work. For example, she proposes to reduce the time dedicated to wage labour to half, while at the same time allocating more time, and more recognition, for hidden forms of social production, such as reproductive labour. But her compass also suggests a time-regime where everyone can afford to take part in political life, and, therefore, the occupational group of politicians would become obsolete… which is very similar to your proposition about the de-professionalisation of cultural work.

But now that we have already stepped into the realm of imagination, I would like to pose my next question from a similar perspective. If we imagine a society where basic income exists, how would such society differ from the one that is known to us now? What kind of effects would basic income have on capitalism? How would it change social relations at large?

LOTTA: When thinking about how basic income would affect social and economic relations, we need to keep in mind that much depends on the amount. A low-amount guaranteed income stimulates innovation and enables the continuity of the exploitation of underpaid labour. The defendants of a market-stimulating minimum income, or a "weak basic income" which is compatible with neoliberal principles, are fully aware of that. In my opinion, it is a major strategic error to defend a basic income which is only partial and does not provide even minimum income for sustaining life. The stronger the basic income in terms of quantity, inclusion and territorial distribution, the more strength it gives — and the more strength it requires in order to be reached. The more money it transfers from above to below, the more it distributes power, the more possibilities it opens for political and cultural experimentation in society.

All I know for sure is that the persistent litany heard from conservative right-wingers and die-hard-socialists about how basic income would destroy the society, is ungrounded. It is moralist, when not directly of class interest. If some want to stay home with basic income and do nothing, it should be OK. The essential idea of basic income is to reclaim the material possibility to say no to underpaid jobs. Some will do more, some will do less. *De chacun selon ses facultés, à chacun selon ses besoins*. Normally the people who are afraid that the wheels would stop and the reality would freeze if free money were to be distributed are people who have not had to work, who have gotten money for free, and don't want to renounce that privilege. They fear their wheels stop, that their world would freeze.

AIRI: How should we struggle for basic income?

LOTTA: I do not believe that defending basic income is justified only when you can present budget calculations, or once you have convinced the political elites about the rationality of implementing it. It is important to keep in mind that in order for it to be unconditional and universal, basic income needs to include everybody. It should also include the rich, even though it gets taxed away. When basic income is for everyone, there is no stigmatisation around it, nor any possibility to control poor populations through the distribution process. In that way, basic income cannot be turned into poverty subvention. It is also important to think about basic income as a transversal issue which is connected to social movements. We should organise mobilisations, practice lobbying, and use all possible strategies that social movements have at their disposal. Currently the most central actors defending basic income on extra-parliamentary level are strongly focused on knowledge production and debating different models. For example, one of such actors is BIEN, the Basic Income Earth Network. The current discourse is largely defined by experts. There is a certain lack of political pressure, and of voices defending it from the radically personal perspective.

AIRI: I am here also thinking about the existing discussions about basic income that often take place in national contexts — this is a tricky issue, because such scenarios are bound to produce very problematic exclusions. How to think about basic income without framing it as a political idea that is based on exclusion?

LOTTA: When posed as a radical demand from below and not as a technocratic reform from above, basic income has the potential to attack the entanglements of neoliberal politics on local, national and transnational level. In today's Europe, in a deep economic and political crisis, it can be

a tool which responds to the urgency of constituting an open social union that is based on common welfare and social rights. It can also be an incentive for debating a real fiscal union which would prevent the competition in the public debt market.

Obviously, if basic income is backed up with migration restrictions within the EU, the South-North division of unemployment and debt deepens. If it is applied only for citizens and requires an even more brutal EU border regime, we can only say no thanks. The abolishment of the internal borders and the demilitarisation of external EU borders must be compatible with basic income.

The Swiss example demonstrates the problematics of discussing basic income within nation state context. The upcoming referendum in Switzerland has been preceded by passing legislations "against mass immigration," "against the construction of minarets" and "for deportation of immigrants who commit a crime" (all approved by the slimmest majority of votes, with a voter turnout barely over 50%). Moreover, the model of basic income that has been proposed in Switzerland deserves criticism as well. It is based on a financial model that doesn't include taxing the richest part of the population more than today. Therefore, whereas it would potentially reduce absolute poverty, it would not necessarily affect relative poverty.

A good way to think about national and/or local basic income proposals is to ask whether they strive towards widening and deepening the scope of basic income in the sense of territory, amount and universality. When we set basic income struggles in the context of Europe, we could think of Europe as an open dilemma. That is why I would like to finish this conversation with posing the following questions: Could basic income be effectively guaranteed in a confederation of relatively autonomous and radically democratic, self-governed territories? If so, how can we

recognise the relation of interdependency between such territories, in order to guarantee that no territory is left to misery, and so that there is no possibility for others to convert into tax heavens for the elite?

Images and text by MICHAEL BAERS

IN THE END IT'S NOT A VERY FUNNY PROBLEM: SOME FUTURE SCENARIOS ABOUT ARTISTIC WORK AND LIFE

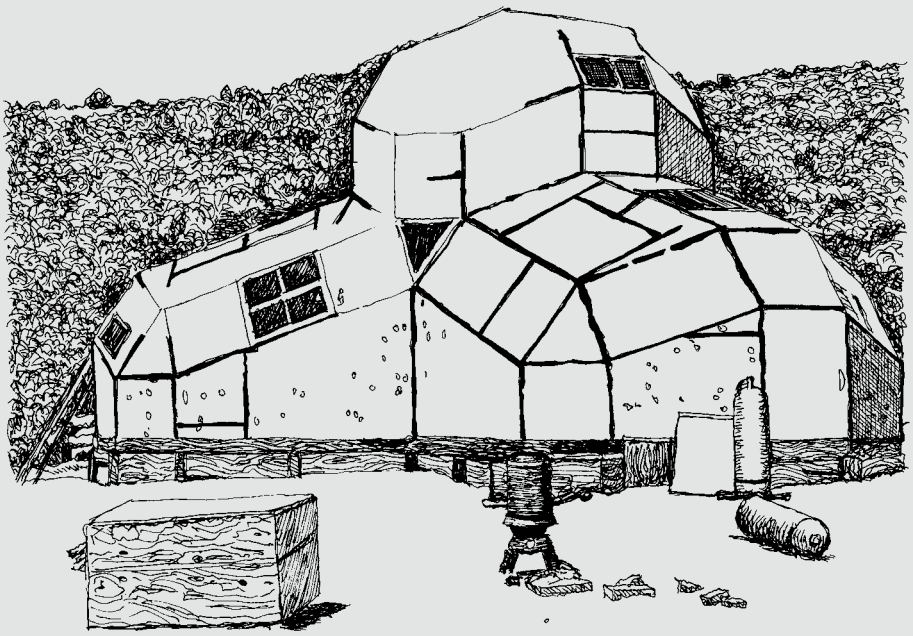
In September of 2014 I was contacted by Erik Krikortz who proposed I develop several scenarios concerning how artists operate in the future as a project for the publication you now hold. The timing of this proposition was in some ways fortuitous as I had only recently published a work in which I had interviewed architects, social theorists and activists about how Stockholm would be effected by climate change, a kind of preliminary conceptual labour for developing a science fiction scenario about Stockholm in the year 2040, and I was eager to continue exploring this topic. The scenarios I was to devise for this publication, as Erik and his co-editors made clear, should concern how artists might respond to the precarity of their professional situation and how the former might be linked to present day struggles for greater social equity – such as the basic income movement. In our several face-to-face meetings and Skype conferences, in which Minna Henriksson and Airi Triisberg also participated, I sought to clarify what was being asked of me, especially how the task of artists working to improve their own working conditions in the future related to re-imagining the social role of artists or to the broader issues all societies will face – not only the continued erosion of the social welfare system but to

climate change and the many different types of conflict and disruption it was likely to occasion. This was one question. Another concerned the manner in which social equity proposals in the northern European countries – which I came to understand was one of the core concerns of the project – related to labour conditions in the developing world. The basic proposition of globalisation is one where, as Fredric Jameson has written, "we can say that if individual experience is authentic, then it cannot be true; and that if a scientific or cognitive model of the same content is true, then it escapes individual experience." Thus, in a world where the economy of one region increasingly is dependent on the overall world situation, and where prosperity in developed countries remains built on a foundation of exploitative labour practices elsewhere, how do attempts in the First World and the former Soviet bloc to construct a more just economic and political regimen take into account or seek to ameliorate the iniquitous conditions upon which their economies are based?

A lateral question also came to mind: how will the disruptive effects of climate change alter not only the horizon of expectations upon which social movements are based, but artistic activity as such? This was a question that increasingly occupied my thinking: what would change in society in general and cultural production in particular when the ecological future of the planet seems increasingly uncertain. Might this uncertainty redound upon the psychological perspective of artists, or the artistic field's self-conception of what the proper role of art is, our unstable telos further destabilising artistic activity? After all, the social role of artists has not been fixed since time immemorial but came into being in the late eighteenth century when artists were freed from the patronage of the church, aristocracy, and state. Why should the long

shadow cast by the development of autonomous art be a permanent condition? Why should the role of artists or the types of activities they are engaged in not change in the future to accommodate new developments, especially considering how artists in the last forty years have persistently sought to expand the terrain of artistic practice?

At the conclusion of our preliminary discussions, I proposed a structure where I would set out three scenarios to which Erik, Minna and Airi could respond, and in this way we might develop them together dialogically; a structure where the limitations of our respective positions and our prognostication strategies might be made evident. The editors agreed to this proposition. The resulting text is based on this dialogue.



Peter Rabbit's Launch Pad, an architectural instantiation of a rhombicosidodecahedron, Drop City, Colorado, 1969.

3 November 2014

Dear Erik, Airi and Minna:

Somehow in the last days there was a lot of psychic interference, but recently I've had some time to set down the future scenarios you requested. Hopefully these can be the basis for a fruitful conversation about what possible futures might be envisioned for artists and artistic activity in the social contexts we spoke of previously.

Scenario one: self-organised groups/trade unions

MICHAEL: In this scenario, a group of artists have decided to leave their professional milieu to work as labour organisers within the broader society. Perhaps they are doing this within the service industry – fast food, some kind of retail, hospitality, janitorial, call centres, and so on. This is likely to put our hypothetical artists in contact with a diverse range of people – immigrants, young people, old people, people with a high level of education and people with little to no education. Of course, the specific composition of these sub-groups will vary from city to city and country to country.

I think in this scenario, the question of what kind of artistic means are brought to bear in organising is an interesting question; one which I would refer to Thomas Hirschhorn's statement that he does not make political art but art in a political way. As a corollary, we might conceive of these artists as "doing" organising in an artistic way, approaching labour organising as an art form. Certainly they are infiltrating different industries in order to organise, and by working alongside others, disappearing into the labour force – a second way their activities possess an aesthetic dimension. After all, acts of radical negation have a long

history in art practice. One might consider these prior negation strategies as a continuation of artistic practice through strategies of withdrawal: as Judith Butler says – following Hegel – negation effects a "positive reality" being born.

I would like to suggest here that these artists are not necessarily all so-called political artists. Perhaps counted among them are successful gallery artists who have had some kind of revelation about their "real" ideological position within society, and therefore have chosen to leave the artistic field to pursue a desired social end. But maybe, with their more varied resources, these artists are also attempting to organise across national contexts, building confederations in different cities that would increase the potential of staging labour walk-outs, etc.

Of course, some problems and questions immediately spring to mind, to wit: where would extant labour conditions suggest this as likely to take place and how will it relate to the future development of capitalism, with its potentially more destabilised and erratic economic behaviour. Most likely, in all these countries there will exist an expanded surplus of unskilled labour (Marx's reservoir of Lumpenproletariat), as production moves to those markets where it is least subject to constraint. In northern Europe, the situation for unskilled labour will be one in which workers operate under ever more onerous conditions while remaining incapable of competing with labour markets in the Third World.

Secondly, what kind of new industries will there be that we could imagine our hypothetical artists infiltrating? There are, of course, the remaining heavy industries. But I think it is also likely that municipal services will continue to be privatised, so jobs that were once secure

and offered decent pay to people lacking higher education will become more precarious and exploitative. So, for instance, workers in municipal transportation – train drivers, bus drivers, and so on – might be one sector that is focused on.

MINNA: But aren't artists often already part of the reservoir of Lumpenproletariat? I think they constitute a special category of workers who, while possessing a degree, work in a field where income is erratic. Many artists are forced to seek employment outside their professional competence, and this often means jobs in the service sector. Maybe it would be interesting to imagine a scenario where artists don't infiltrate the broader society and labour market, but become conscious of

Unidentified workers at a Polish steel mill plan an industrial action in 2006.

Unidentified activists engage in a wildcat art strike some time in the late 1970s.

themselves as constituting a particular group of underpaid workers, and this at a time when politicians increasingly emphasise "creativity" as an economic resource.

Here it could be interesting to discuss basic income proposals, both in relation to artists' wages and the solidarity artists might demonstrate with other fields of labour or oppressed groups. Of interest to us is how methods common within these other fields of organising might be brought to bear on struggles within the artistic field – for example, strikes. And perhaps it's unfruitful to categorise artists into political artists and commercial/gallery artists. Nowadays, these categories are often mixing and overlapping. It is possible to be both, and being political has even become a marker of value within the commercial art world. The question is maybe more about the level of engagement with issues rather than whether one is a political artist or not.

MICHAEL: I was thinking in this first section about Walter Benjamin's text, Author as Producer, and the traditional role of artists/writers as "ideological patrons" who eschew identifying themselves as members of the proletariat, preferring to assume an arm's length position from the sidelines of class struggle. I was thinking also of Günter Wallraff and his undercover journalism work as a possible template for how artists might choose to act – another way to avoid ideological patronage. But I agree that acknowledging the artist's real role in cultural production would be a first step, and demanding from institutions real compensation as opposed to symbolic fees might have the effect of producing the artist-as-labourer. But the (often) exorbitant time necessary to produce artistic work is a problem here, since artists frequently have a different conception of time than wage labourers, and this perhaps should remain as a necessary problematic – the time of art work (thinking of Arendt's differentiation between work as life-supporting and intrinsically meaningful and labour as intrinsically alienating) versus the time of labour. An Arendtian take on this question might posit artists supporting the abolition of labour in favour of a return to work. Let's put it like this: on the one hand, artists might contribute to class struggle through their specialised training, or artists might use their innate sensitivity to, like Wallraff, "experience" labour conditions and thus remake labour from the inside. But I am most likely cleaving to a utopian position in this formulation. Probably some jobs and some sectors of the economy are intrinsically alienating, and this has been a consistent formulation in both Arendt and Adorno, that reconciling social iniquity also means reconciling the means-ends logic upon which capitalist societies are based.

A composite made of two undated photographs of Hannah Arendt and Walter Benjamin.

AIRI: I have to admit a certain worry over your notion of art workers completely abandoning their professional milieu and going into labour organising in different fields of precarious labour. This may bypass the core theme of our publication, which takes as its starting point the issue of labour conditions and models of organising within the art field. Personally, I don't believe that the trade union model would be very effective if isolated only to the cultural realm. Given this, the question the trade union model raises is certainly connected to cross-sector organising, but I would find it important to address the working conditions within the art sector as well. At the same time, I think an interesting aspect of this scenario concerns the general issue about how trade unionising might operate in the realm of precarious work, where labour relations are fragmented and provisional, making it difficult to find spaces of condensation from which collective agency might emerge. Some art workers' initiatives, such as the Precarious Workers Brigade in London or W.A.G.E. in New York, do

use trade unionist strategies, but in that context it is also interesting to ask what are the actual potentials and challenges related to it. To me it seems that the trade unionist model works in a rather narrow spectrum: it addresses the art workers' subjectivity as workers (for example, when working for various art institutions that commission their work), but fails to address the fact that as independent contractors most art workers do not rely on a single type of remuneration. They may occasionally receive remuneration from institutions or sell their artwork, and they also receive state subsidies in the form of grants, tax breaks or special social security schemes. But these are often insufficient. Most people working in the contemporary art field have combined incomes and a lot of their economic and social problems are related to the issue of falling between two or three chairs.

From a group photo of the Carrotworkers' Collective, a London-based group of current or ex interns, cultural workers and educators affiliated with the Precarious Workers Brigade.

ERIK: And in fact, when it comes to remuneration within the artistic field, most artists have very low incomes indeed, where maybe 50 to 90% of their money is derived from "bread jobs." Some artists make a decent living from art and/or teaching, and another group have very good incomes and maybe even enjoy a jet-set lifestyle. How might these groups develop affinities in spite of these differences, and how might they then come to organise based on propagating a sense of solidarity? What do they have in common?

MICHAEL: Again, I think the question of organising within the artistic field is made complicated by the present conditions of artistic production you have each referred to. It is true artists often fall between several chairs, as you put it. In fact, artists often have to maintain a certain flexibility in order to meet their professional obligations, and this means artists must rely on precarious labour regimes – part time jobs or jobs which they can start and stop at will – in order to continue working in their chosen profession. Artists are not in the same position as wage labourers who are tied to a single industry. Thus they have no definite or stable economic identity around which to mobilise, being forced to rely on serial part-time work or on teaching jobs which, while offering better compensation than most wage jobs, are still highly insecure. Another problem is that many artists don't recognise the disparity between their social and economic position. The vast majority of artists are at an income level that would place them in the lower strata of society, and yet still identify with bourgeois values and make art from a bourgeois perspective. This is a perverse situation. On the other hand, there are also many artists who come from privileged backgrounds and don't need to rely on wage-earnings at all, and there are successful artists who are avowedly political in their work while in terms of property relations and

consumption patterns behave identically to the average upper middle class individual. In each case, there is a structural issue concerning class identification, which inhibits poor and wealthy artists alike from linking political values to concrete social affinities, property relations and personal economic conduct.

Having said this, there is still another question I have regarding the political and social function of artists in contemporary or future societies, and this has to do with how artists relate on an economic level to cultural institutions, and what sort of political role cultural institutions in fact play in society. Are cultural institutions politically neutral, are they redoubts of progressive politics – little pockets of left wing identity within the prevailing climate of neoliberalism – or do institutions that are publicly funded in some way even legitimise the broad economic deterritorialisation apparent in contemporary societies to the extent they operate and produce programming as if a broader social crisis does not exist? If that is the case, when artists organise for better working conditions while working within state-funded cultural institutions, do they not in effect solidify their role as "state" artists? By merely advocating limited and pragmatic demands, they actually keep the whole ideological structure that organises art's relation to society in place. Maybe the work of reimaging artistic work is intrinsically tied to reimagining art's institutions.

So, the kernel of the question can be restated like this: when artists put themselves in the service of the broader society, how do they enact this while still retaining their specialised function? I timidly propose they do this by adopting radical, collective forms of everyday life. Thus, everyday life becomes an important artistic construct.

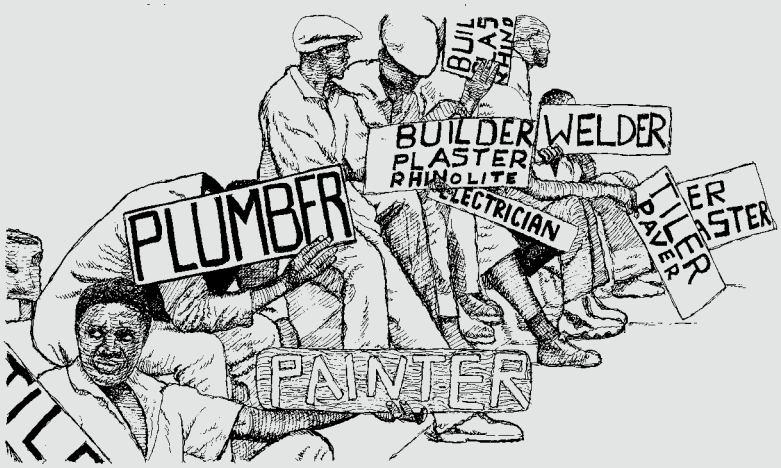
Another option for a possible, micro-scenario: I can imagine the possibility of a successful artist who has identified with the established art system suddenly finds this identification lacks intrinsic value, experiencing the antinomies in their situation and from this revelation setting off down a different path, which might include negating the social and artistic identifications that formerly made their lives meaningful. What do they do about it? For me, programmatic proposals for transforming the relation art workers have to labour, to society and to production have to anticipate the ontological status of the artist and the relation between ontology and social reproduction – which has been, traditionally, a question addressed to material culture, to "ways of doing."

AIRI: I think this is the main challenge of organising in the art field – how to find strategies that would address all these modalities simultaneously? And this, of course, relates more broadly to organising in the field of cognitive labour. But it also relates to organising in the field of precarious labour, indicating that forms of trade unionising are in need of being reformed or reinvented in order to operate in the context of contemporary capitalism where the classical (Western) model of wage labour as we know it from twentieth century industrial societies has lost its broad social applicability.

In relation to the trade union scenario I would be interested in imagining trade unionist politics from the perspective of unremunerated, precarious and unemployed workers. You will recall in our first face-to-face talk that I also proposed a scenario based on the idea of art workers turning their backs on trade unionising in the cultural sector. Rather than forming a trade union and demanding a paycheck within this arena, I proposed a scenario based on

the idea of politicising art workers' subjectivity as unpaid workers. Instead, art workers might develop alliances with the unemployed and other unpaid workers, in order to struggle for a solidarity-based distribution of social resources. Such a scenario might also be linked to the idea of basic income. I find this idea quite appealing as it takes into consideration all the modalities that characterise artistic labour without being limited to the cultural sector alone. Basic income, as a reformist idea offering economic and social security for art workers independent of their income level, would mean the gallery artists could still operate in the market, the biennial artists could position themselves more strongly as workers, the anti-institutional artists would be free to withdraw from both art institutions and the market, while those artists who work in all of these contexts could continue to operate in all three modalities. But basic income can also be thought in more radical terms – as a political perspective that changes social relations, and consequently, transforms the nature of artistic labour as well.

MICHAEL: In this respect, the idea of leaving art for union organising might be a bit archaic, although the obverse situation does come to mind – one where industrial workers themselves might voluntarily leave their field if they believe the industries they work in are environmentally unsustainable or socially deleterious, and might work to formulate more radical forms of economic sustenance and everyday life. As for myself, I would wish for basic income to be a solution to social alienation rather than an attempt to ameliorate the worst excesses of market capitalism – over-production and exploitation of the most vulnerable workers in the world. Could basic income be tied to global labour solidarity and ecological remediation as well?



From a photograph of African workers found on the website of the Equal Life Foundation, a basic income advocacy group.

Scenario two: communes and separatist communities

MICHAEL: There are two types that are likely to exist in the future: rural communes where carbon neutral farming is practised, with a possible survivalist aspect, and urban scavenger communities. The former might include artists who band together and use their diverse skills (welding, pottery throwing, carpentry, weaving, etc.) to create a self-sufficient, sustainable community. Of course, what kind of relationship they would have with adjacent rural communities or neighbouring farms is potentially problematic. Are they merely interested in living off the grid, so to speak, or are they taking a more active role in their adopted rural milieu by actively promoting organic or biodynamic or permaculture practices? These are open questions. Also, have they done this out of a fear for imminent social breakdown or are they more sanguine about the future and simply prefer to live more independently? In either case, there would be some kind of intention to recreate a culture from the ground up, practising a self-consciously tactical appropriation of various crafts and technologies from across a spectrum of world cultures – a syncretistic approach to organising communal living.

A member of the Rozbrat Roweronia squat in Poznań, a collective dedicated to carbon-free transportation among other things, fixes a bicycle.

The urban scavengers are probably more radicalised, or radicalised in a social way. Perhaps this model would be based on a more extreme version of groups such as Food Not Bombs or the Diggers – socially conscious anarcho-punks who make feeding the homeless and marginalised a life's work – advocating for the precarious in urban regions, having taken a voluntary vow of poverty like the early Franciscan monks. How they would organise their squats and what kind of artistic skills they bring to dumpster diving and other forms of scavenging is an interesting question. Somehow I envision a polyamorous community, living in a space that is nominally off the grid (for instance, in abandoned industrial buildings), or otherwise maintaining some kind of front to conceal the nature of their activities. Maybe alliances develop between the rural and urban communes, who support each other, with the rural communities supplying produce for the soup kitchen

run by the urban communes, and the urban communities supplying the rural groups with scavenged goods. They might also be people who work on social equity issues, trying to maximise their rightful government benefits and teaching others to do the same – like Airi's friends whom she mentioned when we met at my apartment. In any case, I imagine these groups practising a principled refusal of the capitalist lifestyle, perhaps going so far as sharing all property, and/or acting out of a steal-from-the-rich-to-give-to-the-poor ethos. Maybe in their former guise as artists, they knew collectors, or even worked in art institutions, and practice some kind of specialised form of larceny.

MINNA: In this scenario, the commune structure is only loosely connected to securing the possibility to work as

Graphic employed by United States chapters of the anarchist group Food Not Bombs.

From an undated photograph of the Scott Street Commune, a Digger-affiliated collective in San Francisco, gathered in the backyard of the Redevelopment-owned Victorian which they occupied from 1971 to 1974.

artists. But I like this idea of imagining a structure outside the system or as a parasite to it. This could be developed further to imagine specifically how artists could operate in this kind of in-between state and how it could be beneficial for them. Maybe these artists will make use of their skills in order to forge famous artworks and sell them, earning a living that way, or practice social solidarity by making fake documents for paperless migrants? Maybe they even turn their art towards sabotage or terrorism.

AIRI: I like the idea of imagining separatist communities but I don't think that these communities should be imagined as artistic communities. I even find this idea somewhat alarming. Perhaps when artists form separatist communities, the artistic identity of such communities would dissolve quickly because everyday life in a self-organised community simply demands a profound form of de-specialisation?

And what about other existing and future kinship relations? When artists join a separatist community, do they disconnect themselves from the rest of their existing social network or do they bring along their partners, friends, comrades and relatives? And what kinds of kinship models are being practised in those communities? Will these communities organise family life as something other than romantic couple relationship and "biological" parenthood models? I find it more interesting to speculate about such communities as heterogeneous ones and then ask what kind of creative tools and strategies artists might contribute.

Secondly I find it interesting to speculate on how such communities would relate to or depend upon the capitalist system. The infamous Friedrichshof commune founded by Otto Muehl comes to mind, which even ran

Otto Muehl and unidentified Friedrichshof Commune member, 1975.

a school that gained official recognition in Austria. They were able to fund their activities because some members of the commune were living in big metropolises and worked in capitalist enterprises where their salaries were substantial enough to support both the commune and themselves. In contrast to this, many members of today's radical communes in Western Europe are dependent on unemployment subsidies. But it's not just a question of where the money comes from (for example, I like Minna's idea of forging artworks, although it implies complicity with the market economy), but how to imagine non-capitalist practices in capitalist contexts, regardless of whether they're urban or rural.

What I find interesting to think about is how communal practices sustain themselves through a mixture of non-capitalist, capitalist and borderline practices. Let's take food as an example: how would our imagined separatist communities produce or consume food?

ERIK: I had friends living in collectives in Dresden who I've visited on occasion. Some of their practices speak to this question. These radical housing collectives relied on a mixture of practices. Where food was concerned, a broad variety of practices were employed: members of the collective engaged in dumpster diving, collected fruits and herbs from urban parks and nearby forests, participated in a food cooperative – exchanging food for money but also contributing to the process of sustaining the community by growing food themselves. Everything was conducted with egalitarianism in mind: when the food was distributed, everyone took what they needed, there was no measuring by weight. And not all the food purchased or exchanged stayed in the house – some of it was redistributed. The leftovers from the coop delivery and nearby organic food shops were processed for the weekly Volksküche, as well as some food from dumpsters and nearby common gardens, etc.

Here you have ecology and localism, cooperation and solidarity embodied in concrete practice.

However, notions of quality, health and privilege were also involved. When they could, the collective's members bought organic and fair trade food from other self-organised collectives (fair trade coffee, oil, fruits and vegetables from local farmers, some products from Greek factories where workers have taken control after the owners went bankrupt), partly they purchased food from mainstream commercial organic food retail sellers such as Bode, but they also shopped at Kaufland since they could not afford to buy only local, organic or fair trade food.

But despite this conscientious approach to everyday life, the lure of capitalist daily life still exercised a certain

Two unidentified Copenhagen residents try their luck dumpster diving in a Netto Supermarket dumpster.

pull. People sometimes related that they went to McDonald's when they felt depressed, indulging in the kinky pleasure of doing something they have actually chosen to refrain from for political reasons.

AIRI: When I think of my own experience in communal contexts, my recollection is these communities are always negotiating between normative and alternative economic practices. On the one hand, there is the desire to constitute practices that go against the grain of capitalist society; on the other, some choices are also motivated by the desire to enjoy the privileges of living in an urban capitalist society. I think this dilemma relates to discussions about precarious labour in the art field as well, since artists are precarious because they have chosen to deviate from normative capitalist wage-labour relations. And in our networks, at least, some other political considerations are certainly at play. At the same time, art workers' aspira-

tion for social and economic security also connects to a desire to take part in consumer society on equal terms with the working population. J.K. Gibson-Graham write that in order to imagine other worlds and alternative economies, we need to imagine ourselves as the "condition of their possibility," training our bodies and minds to develop new affective relations to the world and each other. Perhaps this is also something to consider in this scenario: how do separatist structures ramify upon how one "spends" time, and what are the relations of dependency or autonomy to the capitalist system? How do we need to change ourselves and our desires in order to imagine social change? I know quite a lot of artists who have joined self-organised care collectives and/or communal housing projects and as a consequence have undergone a rapid disidentification as art workers.

From an undated photograph of Katherine Gibson and the late Julie Graham who published under the pen name J.K. Gibson-Graham.

ERIK: This reminds me of how the hegemonic portion of the art world links consumption with artworks. Today museums are housed in landmark buildings that inevitably contain not only a fancy gift shop, but also an upscale eatery. These amenities implicitly connect art with a socially produced desire for luxury and status. Even in more alternative or peripheral parts of the art scene, one finds the same mind-set. I recall feeling really out of place when we, the incoming students, were supposed to celebrate our first day at the art academy by drinking champagne. Many artists or culture workers feel that exclusivity is a positive aspiration, and the structure of the art world reinforces this. The ideology upon which the art sector is predicated – one that few art workers manage to avoid – corresponds to the way in which the capitalist system creates distinctions. This is in sharp contrast with the progressive, egalitarian ethos many people in the art scene imagine they possess.

Scenario three: underground secret societies

MICHAEL: In the event of repressive totalitarian regimes coming into power, or situations where overt political organising work has become dangerous, perhaps artists maintain a normative artistic identity and begin to make work that, out of necessity, contains a coded form of social critique. This might be reminiscent of the situation in the late eighteenth century when Freemasonry was instrumental in circulating revolutionary literature and organising military and political support for the liberal revolutionary ideologies of the period, or when the project of proselytising for the Protestant Reformation fell in part to sympathetic printers who clandestinely published work by Reformation authors, sometimes at considerable danger to themselves. I am also reminded of groups from the 1970s and 1980s, like Denmark's Blekingegadebanden, who emerged out of a context in which solidarity work with Third World revolu-

tionary groups like the PFLP and Marxist Eritrean rebels had widespread acceptance. The Blekingegadebanden split off from more mainstream groups out of impatience with their grassroots funding tactics, such as selling used clothing at flea markets (in fact, they split from a group called Clothes for Africa Løgstør [TTAL]). Perhaps in this scenario, artists appear to have adopted a quiescent approach, but in reality work clandestinely, thus assuming a covert role. What they are doing in actuality is using the art system as a means of fostering networks to provide mutual aid and funding across borders, making exhibitions into occasions for radical cells to meet and coordinate in person. This might become more important if monitoring of Internet and mobile phone communication increased in Europe. This was standard practice in the Mafia – sensitive discussions only took place face-to-face, preferably in situations where bugs or other types of audio surveillance could be frustrated. Secret societies are not only rendered secret by adopting cloak-and-dagger strategies, but through operating in

Blekingegadebanden member Torkil Lauesen is led into court to answer charges of killing a post office employee in 1990.

plain sight, using different social contexts as camouflage. The art system actually provides a lot of opportunities for this.

Of course, there is a danger in attempting to resuscitate strategies that do not match contemporary conditions. And yet, as the examples of WikiLeaks and Edward Snowden make clear, being secretive is sometimes not only prudent but necessary. Among the most radical grassroots groups at work today are clandestine hacker groups. Maybe one could imagine hacking groups who raise money through bank and wire fraud, and perhaps other commissioned hacking jobs, or maybe a fourth scenario might look at artists with programming skills, who use these skills to help fund the people working in any of the three scenarios above.

MINNA: This scenario calls to mind the stereotypical notion that "banning" only exists in Russia and elsewhere in the East but not in Western democracies where dissidents don't need to go underground. But there are different strategies current in the "free" West that make labour organising very difficult – not through outright prohibition but blackmail and other types of pressure. And a characteristic of the capitalist system, as was mentioned previously, is the presence of huge reserves of workers, placing recalcitrant or independent-minded labourers at great risk since they are easily winnowed from more docile workers.

The fourth example you mentioned is more attractive to me than the secret society prototype. It connects especially with the second scenario and "Robin Hood" strategies in general.

AIRI: As for scenario three, I have some issues similar to Minna. The problem with considering totalitarian situations stems from the difficulty in gathering accurate information from the outside. I think this scenario only makes sense if

it prognosticates for a very specific context. However, what I do find interesting is the proposal to use contemporary art as a buffer zone for political activism, because the liberal democratic notion of artistic autonomy opens the possibility for that.

MICHAEL: In any case, the purpose of our dialogue is to indicate that to the extent that whatever scenarios are put forward, it is within the context of their various problematics. For me it is a question of engaging in the process of conceptualising their defects.

AIRI: Agreed. But to reiterate, I am most interested in thinking about how ideas concerning a "good life" and social change could be constructed from within the ambiguous position that art workers inhabit in the context of present-day labour relations – falling between chairs by having to adapt to different employment schemes. It is not about ascribing a special position to art workers, it is more about constructing political imaginaries from a specific experience that is not necessarily limited to the art field. For example, Marina Vishmidt suggests that due to their ambiguity in present categorisations of labour, artistic practice and domestic space could both be considered as potential sites for concepts and practices that anticipate post-capitalist social relations.

ERIK: I agree with this, although I think it could be a mix of the two. But, as Airi writes, one focus should be on working and living conditions for artists, since this is the focus of our publication.

MICHAEL: I think imagining the "good life" is basically the political question. What do we imagine the hypothetical artists are doing if they are not proposing in one way or another a model for how they wish reality to be? To the

London-based writer Marina Vishmidt from an undated photograph.

extent art is utopian it is due to retaining this possibility as a line of flight alongside other practices, like critiquing the present social order – a parallel strain of thinking which might even be considered the affirmative project to imagine new social realities' flipside. In both cases, what is brought to bear on the future is not only the contingent present, but the historical past. The future is always imagined from within the trajectory of past time – what Benjamin termed the "dialectical image," a notion corresponding to Paul Klee's Angelus Novus.

One thing I am pretty sure of, whatever we imagine will be a function of the context in which we imagine it happening – political, economic, environmental. And this brings up a paradox that I advance with some trepidation. In confronting our possible futures, whether for artists or for the broader society, there is a negotiation I continually find myself making between an anticipated and a hoped-for outcome. The problematic is this: on the one hand, no one who really thinks about it would advance chaos and social disintegration as a desirable future. On the other hand, there are so many aspects of present-day society that are patently unsustainable that I find in myself a resistance to positing their continuation as desirable. Capitalism is like a drug addiction: it produces pleasures, but these carry with them enormous costs. If I am to hazard a prediction, it would be the oscillations between economic growth – upon which market capitalism is based – and concomitant market contractions attending growth will become more frequent and more severe, and this will exacerbate the social displacement produced by climate change.

So, how will this paradox shape the world in which our future scenarios take place? For me, the questions we've asked about the possibilities for artistic labour, activity and organising are intrinsically connected to the contingent

and the everyday; more specifically, a sort of everyday in need of radical rethinking. The ideas of degrowth advocates such as Serge Latouche might then find broader social acceptance and be adopted, perhaps as a last resort. But will such a transformation – which is at once ideological and practical – take place in the absence of conflict or repressive interventions on the part of nation states? We haven't yet talked about a specific time in which our scenarios take place, situating them in some nebulous immediate future. I envision our scenarios occurring in an in-between time when – imagining whatever we imagine as taking place within the horizon of expected economic uncertainty and flux – considered attempts by small groups to discover alternative (low carbon, more self-sufficient) ways of living will become increasingly common. In this regard, artists might bring their varied skills to bear, making life under difficult conditions into a kind of Gesamtkunstwerk. In any case, it won't be up to us. I am reminded of the conclusion of Godard's film, Le gai savoir, where the protagonists, having reflected upon the question of what exactly constitutes a revolutionary cinematic practice, conclude it will emerge dialectically, an invention of others. We are somehow in the same boat. The practices we are discussing will emerge out of a collective enunciation.

Still from Jean-Luc Godard's 1968 film, Le gai savoir.

CORINA L. APOSTOL is an art worker based in Bucharest. She is the co-founder of ArtLeaks platform and co-editor of the *ArtLeaks Gazette*. Currently she is PhD candidate in the Department of Art History at Rutgers University – New Brunswick, where she is writing her dissertation *Dissident Education: Socially Engaged Art from Eastern Europe in Global Context (1980–2014)*.

MICHAEL BAERS is an artist based in Berlin. He has been making dialogical comics since 2004. Baers' work has been exhibited at the Van Abbemuseum, Künstlerhaus Graz, Vancouver Contemporary Art Gallery, and many other venues. His comics and writings have also been published in many journals and print initiatives. In 2014, his first graphic novel, *An Oral History of Picasso in Palestine*, was published online by the Haus der Kulturen der Welt.

FOKUS GRUPA is an artist collective based in Rijeka. Borrowing their name from a contested research method, which is used equally for independent research as for PR purposes, their practice points to the social, economic and political frames of the art field. Their practice is collaborative and interdisciplinary, and they work across art, design and curating.

MINNA HEIKINAHO is artist and participant in the Doctoral Studies Programme at the Academy of Fine Arts in Helsinki. In her artistic practice she often works with long-term community art projects. She has been active on the boards of various artists' representative organisations in Finland. In 2006–2013 she was member of the Fine Art Department and Media Department of the Arts Council of Finland, and in 2010–2013 she was the chairperson of the board.

MINNA HENRIKSSON is an artist and art worker currently living in Helsinki. She is interested in exploring the capacities of art for critique and political influence. For her, art is interesting as a field where ideologies become detectable. Her artworks have been relating to topics such as nationalism, racism, economy, the politics of rewriting or erasing the histories of leftist struggles, and the power structures in the art world.

VLADAN JEREMIĆ is a Belgrade-based artist and cultural worker who collaborates with Rena Rädle since 2002, exploring the overlapping space between art and politics. They are making artistic interventions and installations that combine documentary video, photography and drawing. Vladan Jeremić is also an active member and co-founder of the ArtLeaks platform.

ELINA JUOPPERI is a visual artist. After studying and living in Paris for a long time, she has recently returned to Finland, to the capital region via Lapland, where she was working for a while as museum technician. She is exhibiting her works internationally, as well as in Finland. She aims at rethinking the custom of exhibiting in Finland; and advocates for the introduction of good practices from elsewhere.

JUSSI KIVI is an artist based in Helsinki. His work often uses the method of explorations, during which he produces notes, documents, objects, photographs, drawings and texts. He received the prestigious Ars Fennica prize in 2009 and was representative of Finland in the

53rd Venice Biennial with *Fire & Rescue Museum*. In 2010, he wrote a critical text in the Finnish *Taide* magazine about his experiences in Venice and the same exhibition travelling to Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art in Helsinki, which created discussion in the art scene.

BARBORA KLEINHAMPLOVÁ is an artist living and working in Prague. In her artistic practice, she takes interest in addressing the paradoxical relationship between the seemingly contradictory logics of art and economics. She has been active in the initiative Call Against Zero Wage.

JUSSI KOITELA is a curator and visual artist based in Helsinki. As a curator, he is currently focused on artists' reactions to economic discourses and realities. In his artistic practice Koitela works with media art and participatory projects.

ERIK KRIKORTZ is an artist based in Stockholm and Berlin. He works primarily with participatory art in the public sphere, and has an interest in cultural politics. Erik Krikortz co-founded the project Reko, which surveys the working conditions for exhibiting artists at public art institutions in Sweden.

RAAKEL KUUKKA is a visual artist and photographer living and working in Helsinki. Her work, often portraying members of her family and close community, deals with questions of identity. She has been showing work in big exhibitions all over the world. In Finland she has 30 years of experience with mainly exhibiting in galleries where she has had to pay rent. In the recent years she has been fortunate to get invited to exhibit increasingly also in museums, where such exhibition-related expenses do not apply.

MARGE MONKO is an artist based in Ghent. She works mainly with photography and video. In her earlier works she has been exploring psychoanalysis and gender representation. In most recent years her focus has shifted towards the study of labour issues. She was active in the art workers' movement in Estonia in 2010–2011.

ZORAN POPOVIĆ lives and works in Belgrade. He was one of the leading artists of the Belgrade conceptual art movement together with Marina Abramović, Gera Urkom, Neša Paripović, Goran Đorđević, and others. He has made several influential films about conceptual art, among them *Struggle in New York*, 1976. Together with Jasna Tijardović he has published articles in *The Fox*, a journal edited by Art & Language.

PRECARIOUS WORKERS BRIGADE is a London-based group of precarious workers in culture and education. Their collective practice is engaged with militant research in the field of culture, combined with visual production and activist practices such as interventions in public space and cultural institutions. Precarious Workers Brigade is developing creative methods, tactics, strategies, formats and tools that are easily shared and applied.

TAANIEL RAUDSEPP and SIGRID VIIR are visual artists based in Tallinn. They both studied photography in the Estonian Academy of Arts and have collaborated frequently since then. Their most well-known joint project is the artwork enterprise Visible Solutions, established

together with Karel Koplimets in 2010. Visible Solutions operates at the intersection of the economic and artistic fields, configuring economy as art, and art as trade or production. Raudsepp and Viir were also active in the art workers' self-organisation process in Tallinn during 2010–2011.

KRISDY SHINDLER is an artist and art worker based in Vancouver with close ties to Glasgow where she received her Masters of Fine Arts degree in 2006. Her recent video works and paintings examine the practice of art labour and the relationship between the artist and the artists' assistant. Her work has been exhibited in Canada, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Spain, the Netherlands, Israel, Puerto Rico, Los Angeles, and across the UK.

TEREZA STEJSKALOVÁ is a curator and art critic based in Prague. In 2011, she was the co-initiator of the initiative Call Against Zero Wage which raised issues about the economy of art production in the context of Czech Republic. She is also contributing editor of the journal *A2larm.cz* which offers analyses of contemporary politics, society and culture.

SUMMER STUDIO is the collaboration of graphic designers and typographers Minna Sakaria and Carolina Dahl. The duo met at the Visual Communication course at the Royal College of Art in London, and is currently active both in London and Sweden. They work with print, editorial and identity design, taking interest in the craft as well as the visual rhetoric of the design field.

LOTTA TENHUNEN is a precarious freelancer and activist based in Madrid. Recently she has been active in La PAH, the Spanish movement for the right to housing. She has studied basic income initiatives particularly in Finland.

AIRI TRIISBERG is an art worker based in Tallinn and Leipzig. Her affinity with struggles against precarious labour originates from the art workers' mobilisation process in Tallinn during 2010–2011. Her practice is also addressing issues related to gender and sexualities, and often situated at the intersection of contemporary art, political education and activism.

Edited by:
AIRI TRIISBERG,
ERIK KRIKORTZ &
MINNA HENRIKSSON

ISBN 9789163779466