

How do we want to work together?

A research on forms of collaboration in the field of freelance cultural production

For years, Berlin is regarded as a Mecca of art and cultural production as well as of artists*, cultural producers*, and art spaces without stable financing. Badly-paid or unpaid work in self-organized projects, project spaces, and contexts is very common. In the past 10 years, this precarious and self-exploitative freelance work has been extensively problematized and discussed within the art and cultural scene. At the same time, it has been omitted to consider how we as freelance cultural producers in this city practically work together within self-organized and rather informal structures.

How do we *want* to work together? Asking this question shows a discomfort with the existing structural and economic conditions that characterize our work. We¹ do not want to continue facing this sad, long-burning issue of our own work and life circumstances individually, instead we want to mutually explore its political dimensions. We want to interrupt the established modes of cultural production, the production constraints and project logics connected to these as well as the workflow, politics, and economies we have internalized so well. We want to ask: How do we actually work together? And how could a fair and solidary way of working together look and be realized?

Many of our experiences as freelance cultural producers* are characterized by non-transparent structures of communication and decision-making that serve both in- and exclusions as well as the labeling of territories through names and keywords. We rarely talk or negotiate openly about the labor division, the lines of communication, the hierarchies, the payment of our work, and the questions related to "intellectual property" or funding and award criteria. Aiming at thinking about and formulating criteria and methods for solidary and fair ways of working together, we have developed a questionnaire following the example of Karl Marx' workers inquiry. We consider it as a self-reflection and participatory research, as a knowledge production and starting point for a 'militant inquiry' regarding forms of freelance and precarious collaboration within the so-called „free“ art and cultural scene. In contrast to a sociological study, there is no clear separation between participant and researcher, and the goal is not to produce significant answers. With this questionnaire and inquiry we intend to provoke an interruption: starting from our daily experiences, calling into question the seemingly self-evident and what has become our normality, supporting a consciousness-raising about our own work realities of realities of life. At the same, we want to open up a space in which we are able to critically reflect upon and move beyond the existing forms of collaborative work.

We understand this process as a primarily political one, which provokes the question how a political process can be realized within the cultural field itself without reproducing the usual production constraints, event and project logics – while moving in the same territory that we are investigating. During our workshop at Vierte Welt in December 2016, in which we were hosts and participants at once, we realized again that even a format for exchanging experiences could be traversed by the politics and economies of the established modes of cultural production. How can we as cultural producers* reflect upon our own working structures with artistic means but without stumbling into the usual marketing of investigative cultural practices such as 'mapping' and 'artistic research', and without creating a product out of these research results with which we would apply for the next funding, residency or festival?

To continue our militant research we want to share the questionnaire you find here. This is an invitation to you to participate in a mutual process of reflection, articulation, and discussion of our experiences with and in different forms of collaboration within freelance cultural production. You can ask for an online version of the questionnaire by sending an email to: wwwz@mail.de.

¹ We, Karolina Dreit, Janine Eisenächer, Aiko Okamoto, and Felicita Reuschling, have come to together last year in order to dedicate ourselves to the exploration of forms of collaborative work, informed by our individual and mutual interests, work realities and realities of life.

Questionnaire (work in process, effective 01.06.2017)

Basic conditions

1. How would you describe your form of collaboration/ working together (project group, network, collective, cooperation,...?)
2. How long have you been active in this?
3. How many people are taking part in this collaboration?
4. What is your motivation in this collaboration?
5. What would you call the product/ format of your collaboration?
6. Is there a payment for this product/ format?
7. Is this form of collaboration meant to be short- or longterm?
8. How often do you meet (physically)? How long do these meetings take?
9. What takes place online?
10. How much of your time does this collaboration take up?
11. In how many other collaborations are you involved?
12. Do you think the size of the group is suitable for working together? Why (not)?
13. Did the group constellation change over time? How did that happen?
14. Which of the working activities get paid in this collaboration? Are you paid for your working activities?
15. Can you name the tasks that belong to this collaboration?
16. For which of the work activities do you assume responsibility? For what else?
17. What do you mainly do to earn your living?
18. Did this collaboration work well regarding the product/ format? Why (not)?
19. How did this collaboration work out for you personally?
20. Would you describe this collaboration as a fair and solidary one? Why (not)?

Working modes and dynamics

21. What labor division is there in this collaboration?
22. How is this labor division negotiated and decided?
23. Are there tasks/ working activities that you mainly or always take care of? Which ones?

24. What do you define in your agreements within the group (e.g. number of working hours, deadlines, labor division, payment)?
25. Are these agreements comparable to work contracts?
26. How do agreed-upon labor divisions get changed through different time management and deadlines?
27. Which methods do you use to organize your working processes and to stay on top of these?
28. Is everyone on the same level of information and knowledge regarding the respective topics, questions or tasks?
29. How do your channels of information work? How do newcomers/ absentees get integrated in that?
30. Do you have the feeling that there are agreements within the group that are not made transparent? If yes, can you name them and say what they refer to?
31. Which formal and informal hierarchies do exist in this form of collaboration (e.g. initiator*, renown, professional competences, proximity to the applicant/ funder)?
32. How are decision-making processes put into shape in this group?
33. When do you find compromises useful or not useful (maybe you have examples)?
34. How do you as a group deal with situations where no common decision can be found?
35. Do you as a group have the ambition to work together on an equal basis?
36. Which methods do you use to work together on an equal basis?
37. In your opinion, by what is a collaboration on an equal basis characterized?
38. How much do you identify yourself with the product/ format of this collaboration?
39. What do you appreciate in this (form of) working together?

Becoming, being and staying a group?

40. What space is there in your working together to express emotions that are not directly related to the collaboration?
41. Do you have group practices/ methods to deal with emerging emotions?
42. Is there time for group processes and reflections that are not (only) related to the specific tasks or the product of your collaboration?
43. How are emerging emotions named and negotiated (as private/ political)?
44. How do you deal with conflicts in this group?
45. What kind of conflicts do occur?
46. Are there reoccurring conflicts? If so, what are they about?

47. Are they related to the labor division, too? Or to the appreciation of the respective working activities?
48. How important are recognition, loyalty, and competition within your conflicts?
49. Beyond concrete conflicts, do you as a group have forms to reflect upon group dynamics and work processes? What do they look like?
50. Do questions of community and care-taking have an explicit significance within your collaboration?
51. What are your desires or wishes related to 'working together'?
52. Within this collaboration, how important is solidarity (with whom, with what?) or a solidary acting/ doing together for you? What does it specifically relate to?
53. If you imagine a fair and solidary collaboration/ way of working together, what does it look like? What is important to you in that?