

INTRODUCTION 28 of April 2007 WORKafFAIR SEMINAR

Grete Aagaard and I want to welcome all of you to WORKafFAIR. We are based in the exhibition space rum46 – where we together with the 7 other members organize projects in public spaces and in the location of rum46.

For the first part of WORKafFAIR - we have chosen this location – cultural center HUSET. For over 30 years HUSET has been filled with creativ production, open ateliers, - a place for everyone to come and have help making photography, seramics, såwing, metal, wood works and to experiment with their own ideas etc.

But the city council decided to close HUSET end of december 2007. This is only one of many locations which have been shut down recently in Denmark – you could say places that make room for alternative production – thematically very relevant to this seminar and the question of which activities that should be defined as work in the first place. We hope that HUSET against all odds will survive.

A warm welcome to the participants Jens Tonboe sociologist, DK, Karin Kasböck and Cristoph Leitner – who have been collaborating in the artist group bankleer in Germany since 1998, artist Oliver Ressler from Austria, curator Kuba Szreder from Poland – also welcome to the danish artist Kristina Ask and to moderator Tone Olaf Nielsen – curator from Denmark. A special thanks to the audience that would like to hear and discuss the important issues on workaffairs.

There are manyfolded interpretations of the title WORKafFAIR - two important references - is a general reference to the labour market and the reference to work connected to FAIR – in the meaning of rights and ethics.

We have invited the participants today, because we believe that their personal engagement, their research and/or their artistic and curatorial production, provide eye-opening perspectives; by focusing on the integration between work and free time, self-empowerment, rights, social responsibility, new forms of organisation and practices.

Our main focus is to illustrate and develop a critic of the valuebased concept of work as well as different strategies on how to improve working conditions and rights – in our ongoing search for equality and solidarity.

For all people work is a central factor in life; whether one is currently employed or not.

The concept of work is a fluid phenomenon with a content that changes and is reinterpreted over time. The value-based concept of work can be seen as a hot topic in today's Denmark and other western countries. Work is mixed with private life. And we are filled with stories where work is linked with empathy, flexibility, willingness for change, creative engagement and self-realization. All of it positively marketed under the label freedom – whilst at the same time we experience an increased demand on self-support, self discipline and more restrictions. More sociologists say that it seems as if we have moved from a common "welfare" to individualised "workfare", where the consequences are greater inequality as well as social instability. And we think it is time to have a closer look at these changes and the consequences. We are happy to introduce you to the Sociologist Jens Tonboe who will examine some of the paradoxes of work life.

As artworkers – we experience that the uncertainty connected to our own working conditions are now spread to a wide range of other professions. As art workers we survive on flexible, low-income, short-term contracts with no security (insurance, pension etc.) Most of us demand freedom and independence to work with critical projects, but at the same time we encapsulate the ideal worker of the current neoliberal society. A labor market which celebrates the life-style of the artists, who often does not make distinctions between between private hours and working hours. The artist group bankleer points to the fact that this work model is (mis)used in order to justify underpaid work and poor working conditions. It is obvious that we have to investigate how to improve working conditions and rights. Alternative forms of organisation are illustrated from several different perspectives.

From a personal point of view - Kristina Ask's presentation opens the debate on the self-organisation of the art worker together with the alternative possibilities and limitations of organising oneself across professions and also across borders.

With Oliver Ressler's "5 Factories - Workers Control in Venezuela" the focus is shifted to industrial workers in the factories of Venezuela, where new forms of "co-management" and "self management" are appearing. Where workers selforganisation get real power, where solidarity is much more than symbolic.

After these contributions we have a chance to look at initiatives that perhaps serves as a possible countermodels for or counterstrategies within Capitalism. And there are not many countermodels left:

With the loss of Communism, Socialism and perhaps even with loss of fighting for workers rights - Poland experiences a transformation towards a neo-liberal economy with great changes and an increased inequality and a record low participation in trade unions.

Curator Kuba Szreder from Poland talks about the exhibition project "Industrial town futurism". Here a number of artists, activists and researchers, amongst other things, investigated various problems connected to the changed conditions for production, labor organisation and working conditions.

We think that art production and research are contributing to create debate and critical counter publics – they definitely inspired us to ask the following questions today:

Which activities do we define as work?

What happens to the individual and the society when the line between work and spare time is abolished?

Which strategies can challenge the labour market policy of neo liberalism?

What new organisation takes place – both locally and globally?

We hope you will enjoy the day and feel free to ask questions.

By Anja Raitel