

HABEN UND BRAUCHEN (to Have and to Need) STATEMENT

at Artist Organisations International at HAU Theater
Berlin, January 11, 2015

Sonja Augart, Tatjana Fell, Alice Münch, Ina Wudtke and Inga Zimprich formed a temporary working group to represent Haben und Brauchen¹ (to Have and to Need) at the Artist Organizations International conference, which took place at HAU, a theatre in Berlin in January 2015.² We wrote this statement to voice our anger at a curated and costly symposium, which pretended to be an attempt at organising an international movement of solidarity amongst artists. We read our statement from amidst the audience.³



Haben und Brauchen, sound check, 2015. Photo credit: Arne Sattler

Spoken by Sonja

1.000 artists and cultural producers in Berlin signed an open letter.⁴ This was the starting point of to Have and to Need in January, 2011.

Spoken by Alice: I was one of these artists.

Spoken by Sonja

With this letter to Have and to Need positioned itself against the exhibition project 'Based in Berlin' which was initiated by the former mayor Wowereit. To Have and to Need protested against the instrumentalization of artists for neoliberal image policy and city marketing. To Have and to Need demands cultural policy that adequately responds to the specific needs of the thousands of artists living and working in this city and their institutions.



Haben und Brauchen, performing the statement a HAU, 2015. Photo credit: Arne Sattler

Since then to Have and to Need functions as an independent platform for political and cultural debate. To Have and to Need tries to generate an open structure of participation. Currently about 20 people are actively engaged – they vary according to the issues and questions at stake. As to Have and to Need we reflect on the complex shifts and changes of living- and working conditions for artists and cultural producers in Berlin. At the moment we're working on three main topics, these are labour, city space and concepts of art.

Spoken by Ina: I am one of these artists.

Spoken by Inga

Of all artists only five percent can make a living of their work. I can't. I was tired living from one precarious project to the next which we eventually often do without even paying ourselves. Most of us work in side-jobs, often being assistants to other artists, working in galleries or building up exhibitions and fairs. Many of us are supported by our partners, families, friends, or live off the unemployment office with all the pressure that comes with it. Still, though this affects most of us, it is hard to openly address our working realities within the art world. Just like most other sectors of society the art field is based solely on competition and on the fact that only very few of us can make it. And even now as I speak we compete. We're competing for the few resources, for contacts, opportunities, for visibility and an occasional fee like the one today that we had to split by five.

Even if we demand obligatory artists fees for publicly funded exhibitions, these demands cover only a tiny fraction of what artistic labor and cultural work really involves. If I'd add up all the time that goes into researching, analyzing, planning, organizing and producing work, I don't even want to think about what I'm actually paid per hour. Many of us also do political work as artists, care for our contexts, sit in endless meetings, run self-organized spaces.

We stand behind the demands of W.A.G.E. for Work, Carrotworkers' Collective, Precarious Workers Brigade, the BBK Berlin and other initiatives. We need to understand that changing our situation as cultural workers requires commitment, effort and persistence.

Spoken by Ina

The 1990s surplus of space which made the establishment of numerous low cost project spaces, studios and rental flats possible has turned into a shortage of space today. Artists, cultural producers, welfare recipients and other precarious workers are harassed and evicted by upscale real estate projects and privatization of neighborhoods.

Spoken by Sonja: I am one of them.

Spoken by Ina

As a consequence of growing commercial infrastructure, private galleries, art initiatives and artists have played their role in the process of expanding the gentrification throughout the city.

Spoken by Tatjana: I am one of them.

Spoken by Ina

Parallel to this development we witness a construction of national history in the city center. Reactionary historic and spatial lines are reinstalled and cemented. It is planned to exhibit German, Prussian colonial heritage unquestioned in the middle of Berlin, while contemporary art is employed to rehabilitate this looted art from ethnographic collections.

In the future scenarios developed by the City Senate, in 2030 the self-organized, participatory, artistic practices generated during the Berlin of the 90s, will be entirely replaced by creative industries.

Spoken by Alice

An event named Artist Organizations International alludes to the Communist Workers International and the International Workers Movement. This event today pretends to create a solidarity of art workers internationally. It seems like an attempt at organizing collectively to fight for better working conditions on an international level.

But the leading protagonists are missing: Where are labor unions, artist unions, FAU, ArtLeaks, W.A.G.E. for work, Carrotworkers' Collective and other groups that aim to empower precarious workers? Does an event that assembles a small number of art projects want to distance itself from those real efforts to unite? How can we prevent that our participation in this event devaluates the work of countless initiatives that do practical political work? How can we value the hard and invisible labour to organize ourselves?

(pause)

Spoken by all: We came as a group of five persons.

Spoken by Tatjana

We who are here today stand for the questions which we share within to Have and to Need. To Have and to Need as well speaks with many voices. At the same time we address our general questions related to the possibility to organize internationally.

Spoken by all: We came as five women.

Spoken by Tatjana

As a matter of fact the art-field contains a high percentage of women. The main share of structural care-taking, reproductive work and invisible labor is done by women. The work of women is often underpaid, payed unequally or not payed at all. We find women sitting in meetings – writing protocols, working from home under precarious conditions, forming the backbone of every project. For many of us, our middle-class family background allows us to work in this precarious field.

Spoken by all: We came as a group representing a group.

Spoken by Tatjana

Our wish to work equally in groups implicates the resistance to a logic of selection, a selective determination of single representatives, like the most sovereign person, the most eloquent speaker, the most well-known person, the male offensive speaker. What degree of trust and reliance do we need to encourage each other? Which needs do we want to articulate publicly? How can we negotiate within our group how to follow invitations sent out to single individuals? How can we pled to work as a group in contexts like this? Who decides who will be a representative?



Haben und Brauchen, performing at HAU, 2015. Photo credit: Arne Sattler

Spoken by Inga

You have purchased a ticket for 33€ to watch the performance of political art initiatives throughout three days. What's missing for you? What's missing for us? What do we gain by re-staging our work in a theatre? Who takes the credit for our efforts to organize and unionize? Who will put his name under our work?

Creating solidarity would mean for us an equal right for all to attend and for all to speak.

Creating solidarity would mean creating a learning situation, a situation in which we all listen to each other.

Creating solidarity would mean for us that we meet in self-organized spaces and in places without curatorial invitation policy.

If we want to create solidarity, the entrance to our meetings is free.

If we want to create solidarity we facilitate what makes participation possible: translation, accommodation, joint meals, child-care and we try to reach beyond our networks.

Creating solidarity would mean for us to acknowledge all forms of labor that each event requires: the care work in our social contexts, the maintenance work for spaces and infrastructures as well as organizational work that brings us here.

Creating solidarity on an international level means for us to abolish event-based productions like this one and to acknowledge existing local infrastructures instead. It means to familiarize ourselves with the work that other local initiatives already do, also outside the art field.

Creating solidarity would mean for us to learn from activists and unionists how to rethink our practices and to rework our field in order to establish more fair forms of working together.

The long-term, tedious and unspectacular labor of creating solidarity with each other takes place outside the theater and outside of spaces that are foremost geared at presentation.

Haben und Brauchen [to Have and to Need] is an informal platform for discussion and action founded in 2011. It advocates the recognition and preservation of a self-organised artistic practice that has grown out of the specific historical conditions in Berlin. Haben und Brauchen's manifesto goes beyond individual artists' interests and makes connections to debates around the commons, precarious economy, urban development and housing policy as well as the shifting notions of labour in contemporary society.

Endnotes

1 A recording of this statement can be found at <https://vimeo.com/118486462> (from min. 23 on).

2 To Have and to Need is an open platform for discussion of cultural policy in Berlin.

<https://www.habenundbrauchen.de>

3 Artist Organisations International has been an event curated by Florian Malzacher, Jonas Staal, Joanna Warsza at HAU (Hebbel Am Ufer), Berlin and supported by the Hauptstadtkulturfonds with 100.000€ <https://www.artistorganisationsinternational.org>

4 Haben und Brauchen's initial public letter, published to protest against the exhibition project, can be found here: <http://www.habenundbrauchen.de/en/category/haben-und-brauchen/1-open-letter>