

DEAR EMPLOY- MENT AGENCIES,

LETTER BY
DELANY
BOUTKAN
RESEARCHER

EDITORIAL SERIES
SEVEN
CLICKING
INDEX
FINGERS

GRADUATES MENTIONED

- YARA SAID
- BEATRIZ CONFREY
- WILLEM SCHENK
- TING GONG
- OCTAVE RIMBERT-
RIVIERE
- LEVI VAN GELDER
- LUCIA FERNANDEZ
SANTORO
- ANNA MARIA BALINT
- LIESELOT
VERSTEEG
- MICHAEL WEBER

Dear employment agencies,

Cc: Anna Maria Balint, Beatriz Conefrey, Levi van Gelder, Lieselot Versteeg, Lucia Fernandez Santoro, Michael Weber, Octave Rimbert-Rivière, Ting Gong, Willem Schenk and Yara Said,

What shape could a department in an employment agency for a new generation of creative workers in the Netherlands take? And what if those recently graduated from art and design academies were the ones to form this department and what it means to work in a healthy work environment in their field?

Navigating work conditions within the creative industries in the Netherlands can be challenging, due to the uncertain, temporary and network-oriented nature of cultural work. Especially for those graduating in 2020 during the Covid-19 pandemic. Recent graduates from art and design academies in the Netherlands are often known to start their artistic practice while additionally working in hospitality, retail, cleaning, cultural or food services to maintain financial security in society. Unfortunately those industries are currently hit hardest by the pandemic. Under Covid-19, many graduates turned to the income supplement for the self-employed of the Dutch government to sustain themselves temporarily, but how about we start thinking through how they would navigate the labour market with the prospect of possibly losing this support?

Working in a privileged country where investment in culture is still possible, the conditions in which this work takes place are in need of constant examination. As a freelance cultural worker and recent graduate (2018) from a design academy myself, I have experienced several instances where temporary work conditions gave me tummy aches. Ways of rethinking, rewriting and speculating about what alternative forms of creative work could entail, I found with some of the recent graduates

at Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam. Temporarily relieving my tummy ache and making me curious about how they could improve our workfield.

In a hypothetical department focussed on creative work in an employment agency Sandberg graduates Yara Said and Willem Schenk could become advisors in navigating institutions, organisations and corporate companies aiming to work with the creative ‘new generation’ and ‘young talent’. With the ambition of potential employers to bring in, often diverse, ‘new perspectives’ come responsibilities to prevent the commodification and consumption of physical and emotional labor. Through her self-organised non-profit network (Salwa Foundation) Yara already hosts programmes that value abstractness, to support creatives new to The Netherlands in an art world that tends to market personal stories and categorizes collective trauma. Willem analyses how luxury conglomerates often consume creative ‘talent’ and in his self-organised events and collaborations speculates on how to make space for creatives to work with those businesses on mutually satisfying terms, by balancing out the ownership over work conditions between the artist and the commercial company. Leading to more relevant project outcomes for both parties, on a long term.

Work opportunities and collaborations some of the graduates test out, find themselves outside of the institutionalized art world and therefore rely on an alternative approach to networking. An approach that ensures relationships stay reciprocal and non-exploitative from the artists side as well. Through materialising humour and inside jokes in his graduation project, Levi van Gelder started a network in the carnival community near his hometown in the Netherlands far removed from the ‘Amsterdam art bubble’. A collaboration he aims to continue. Within our hypothetical department, Levi could become an advisor on how to establish long-term relationships in locations not formerly familiar with art graduates. Michael Weber explores similar alternatives for temporary work infrastructures. Creative young people in the Netherlands often

move to cities to make a living, as outside of those not many opportunities seem available. In Michaels' fictional scenarios, conversations with friends and through workshops however, he speculates on how to materialise short or longer term work opportunities for young people in rural areas like the countryside in ways also beneficial to farmers and other local businesses. Through his research on corporate flexible workspaces like WeWork he understood that these corporate companies should not be the only ones to decide the future of temporary work. Michael shares this fascination for communities outside of cities with Levi and Willem and could therefore collaborate on experimenting with ways to facilitate networks there.

As networks materialise, Lucia Fernandez Santoro would advise on how to approach interactions, maintain open communication and to notice skewed hierarchies between clients and employees. Younger generations are often employed as flex workers through 0-hour contracts or under unchosen freelance conditions. Positions devoid of professional development support like other contractors receive through personal year plans. Lucia's experience with the often harsh and hierarchical dance world informed her ambition to create non-hierarchical and peer-to-peer collaborations and forms of learning in an art world driven by sole-authorship. In hosting forms of communication between clients and employees in the department, Beatriz Conefrey would join Lucia. Beatriz in-depth understanding of the role a tone of voice plays in uniting, excluding or empowering within work environments can be of use in guiding constructive and open conversations. Creative work often depends on conversations and interactions with others to develop contacts for possible work opportunities. But Anna Maria Balint taught me, by not being able to respond to my email invitation for a conversation about her work as the email ended up in spam, that sometimes one does have to talk to a person to appreciate the work they do. For this perspective, hopefully Anna would also join the department.

Lastly, what does it mean to offer compensation for work in the creative industries? Some creative workers remark that not every trade can be financial, believing in alternative forms of exchange – others wish for payment on every occasion. Some aim to find a job for stable income next to their creative practice, others rely more heavily on the sales of their products or relationships with steady clients. Ting Gong's graduation project speculates on the potential of an agreement or subscription instead of a short-term money transfer. She sees potential in creating long-term forms of exchange between a product producer and customer. Ting and Octave Rimbert-Rivière would advise on alternative economies and forms of exchange in the department. Octave thinks through the emancipation of the craftsman. In his work he suggests how artists could create their own economy outside of commercial galleries by making sculptures that combine artisanal craft with mass produced objects. Lieselot Versteeg, both a teacher for children and autonomous artist interested in stock market economies, could oversee experiments in how to navigate financial stability and making space for imaginative reflection at the same time.

Looking forward to discussing how this department could become a way for employment agencies to branch out their network to support artistic work outside of the confines of the art world and for these graduates to test out their relevant perspectives on creative work.

Hoping this department could be of interest to you,

Delany

Graduates mentioned:

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/levi-van-gelder
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/octave-rimbert-riviere
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/anna-maria-balint
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/yara-said
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/lieselot-versteeg
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/michael-weber
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/ting-gong
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/lucia-fernandez-santoro
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/willem-schenk
sandberg.nl/graduation2020/final/beatriz-conefrey

Since 2019, Delany Boutkan has been developing research projects and public programs within the Research Department at Het Nieuwe Instituut in Rotterdam. At the moment, she approaches her writing and curatorial projects from a fascination with the mechanisms surrounding cultural production and the conditions of cultural work. Delany has coordinated conversations, lectures and workshops in several art and design academies in The Netherlands. She received her Master degree in Design Curating & Writing at the Design Academy Eindhoven in 2018.