

DEAR SOCIAL- ECONOMIC COUNCIL,

LETTER BY
**DELANY
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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 Social Economic Council,
Dear Graduate students of the Sandberg Instituut,

Petitions are signed, labor unions initiated, digital panel discussions with politicians organised. However, when it comes to conversations around the Covid-19 pandemic's financial impact on cultural work and the creative industries in The Netherlands I have not heard many voices of my own generation amplified; artists, designers and creatives recently graduated from their master studies in art and design academies and those under thirty years of age. Perhaps it is time for a seat at the table. Yet, a seat at the table where policy is debated and advised upon, does not necessarily allow for a voice to be heard.

I am sending you this letter as part of a group of writers, invited to contribute to the annual graduation publication of Sandberg Instituut Amsterdam (Masters of Art and Design of the Gerrit Rietveld Academie) with a letter to a public institution or employment sector. As an alumni from an artistic academy in the Netherlands myself (Design Academy Eindhoven, 2018), and as a freelance cultural worker, I would like to discuss with you an idea for a youth shadow council and how to potentially propose a form of this together to the Sociaal Economische Raad SER (NL) / Social Economic Council (EN). The SER advises the Dutch Government and Parliament on social and economic policy. It also facilitates agreements. I imagined the shadow council to focus primarily on unsolicited advice to policies that might affect future cultural work conditions.

Even prior to formally completing their studies, the media has already deemed those graduating in 2020 'the lost generation.' Referring to youth's decreasing future chances on the labour market, increasing unemployment or employment as flex workers; through 0-hour contracts, forced freelance conditions, short-term contracts, or being the last employed with a company and therefore the first to be disregarded.

Often recent alumni from art and design academies start their artistic vocation while additionally working in hospitality, retail, cleaning, cultural or food services in order to maintain financial security in society. Industries currently hit hardest by the pandemic. Many articles released in both Europe and the US over the course of the pandemic, address how this 'class of Covid-19', as they become economically disenfranchised, lose confidence in public institutions and don't feel listened to.¹

But how will institutions listen? Listening is often understood as a rather passive state as part of the receiving end of a conversation, dialogue or monologue. In contrast, Sandberg graduate and artist Yara Said refers to listening as an active action. Yara's statements about the way she works with audio in her graduation films reminds me that watching a film and listening to someone speaking, hold inherent similarities; often asking questions *during* a screening defies the purpose of watching the film, as it does not allow for the storyline to unfold in front of you in the way the director intended it to. Similarly the storyline and voice of a generation can get lost when predominantly discussed and not being listened to, as seen with the 'class of Covid-19'.

Sandberg graduate and artist Beatriz Conefrey's thesis on the voice as a muscle, an object, a tool, and an instrument describes how voices of power often take up much space and concentration in a conversation or monologue. In her thesis she also mentions that the voice of power, due to its authority or superiority, has the capacity to change a situation and can empower other voices. Consequently, this letter serves as an invitation for Sandberg alumni to join their voices and for the SER to actively listen and give those voices space to exist.

We could perhaps change the media narrative accordingly; this class of 2020 is less a generation of lost futures but essentially a generation of lost

voices, unheard by those determining the policies that shape their future. "Yet, where do voices go when they are dismissed?" is what a friend, Tiiu Meiner, asked me when I discussed this letter with her.

These voices often initiate different conversations about potential futures for cultural work. Sandberg graduate and cultural strategist Willem Schenk in his collaborations, for example, examines alternative scenarios for how the creative industries could operate. In these scenarios social art and design practices converse within corporate locations and conservative communities in a series of events, imagining creative work in unlikely locations and arenas. Some alumni imagine creative work as events in alternative places, others also reimagine their time scale. Ting Gong, for example, proposes to see an artists' graduation project not as one confined to the one year of graduation, but instead extends the duration of it twenty years into the future. Making the cultural work end in 2040, and not in 2020 as current governmental announcements and news items want us to believe about this generation.

I have written this letter not with the aim to become 'the voice of *this* generation' but much rather as 'a singular voice *in* a generation' instead. With this letter I would like to welcome this year's Sandberg Instituut graduates and the Dutch Social Economic Council (SER) to a conversation about what shape a potential shadow council could constitute according to the graduates.

I would be delighted if some of the graduates and a representative of the SER (Social Economic Council) would consider accepting this invitation and join me in visiting the final graduation exhibition at the end of October to, next to the aforementioned alumni, potentially visit art practices that: Combine the artisanal and the commercial in a chaos of unlikely gatherings (Octave Rimbert-Rivière); Bring forward the role of fiction and roleplay in creating spaces

for conversation (Levi van Gelder); Study spaces for individual storytelling and the potential of fictionalising everyday life (Lucia Fernandez Santoro); Reflect on personal ways of working as an artist, through the individual act of perception (Anna Maria Balint); Find an interest in tools and power symbols, learning techniques and working with younger generations (Lieselot Versteeg); Bring forward the immaterial workers current condition and the move from labour as a state of accomplishment and utility to joy as the labour production-tool (Michael Weber).

I look forward to hearing from you.

Warmly,

Delany Boutkan

Footnote:

1. Alter, Charlotte. "COVID Will Shape the Class of 2020 for Their Entire Lives" Time Magazine. May 21, 2020. <https://time.com/5839765/college-graduation-2020/>

Graduates mentioned:

sandberg.nl/graduation2020/draft/yara-said
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