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Statement on the occasion of the panel discussion:

"Precarious Producers"

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Precarity as a concept is still a little diffuse to me, because it carries two faces (at least): one face representing the insecurity and suffering connected to life without money, without rights, without community, and so forth. A life experienced mainly by people that are not in this space now; migrant workers, youngsters trying to enter the labour market, etc. But the other face of precarity represents a potential: a potential to take control over our lives and the way we spend our time, a potential to refuse the rhythms of capital that in general are touching most aspects of life. In precarity can be found the freedom to do wage-labour when you need the money and a possibility to maintain a certain level of autonomy from the cynicism of capitalist production. I have myself been working part-time as a luggage handler at the Copenhagen Airport for 10 years. I did that for the money so I could be free to do what I really cared for. Since then I have been able to combine what I really care for and my economy. But emergence of these two faces of precarity are both results of developments within the global system of capitalist production, as far as I see it.

Many artists and artworkers are usually balancing somewhere between these two versions of precarity, but one of the risks around the use of the notion of precarity is when it is being used to describe an individualised life situation. So a discussion about precarity should not unfold without a discussion about possible actions; a discussion of precarity should include a discussion of possible paths of unionising to counter the dark side of precarity.

I was invited here to talk about the process that led to the foundation of the Young Artworkers' Union (UKK) in Denmark in 2002. Processes of unionising happen usually as reaction to repression, the feeling that your working and living conditions are unbearable. That happened to us, younger artists, art critics, curators, etc, when the new right wing government was elected into office in Denmark in November 2001. The reason that artists and artworkers began to react was due to the fact that the new government started an ideological crusade against all institutions that supported progressive and potentially political artistic activities. But it was also due to the fact that the already existing artists organisations didn't protest, and if they did protest, it was not very effective. So it soon became clear

to us that no-one was speaking on the behalf of a large group of practitioners within the artistic field of production. Within the first 4 month of 2002 we had countless open meetings to shape an organisation that could contain the multiplicity of practices that characterise artistic production today. Furthermore we wanted an organisation that was able to represent two groups within artistic production: artists and mediators.

The UKK was founded in May 2002.

The organisation is based on a network of autonomous workgroups engaging in various topics: art and economy, art and the public sphere, art and the media, artists' organisations, etc. All members can freely establish workgroups and they should be open to all members. We also had an anti-war-group in the run up to the war against Iraq. Some of the workgroups have been very effective, others not so effective, and some have disappeared altogether. Even though we wanted a networked organisation, we still decided to have an executive board of 7 persons and a chairperson that could function as a spokesperson for the Union. Today the UKK has nearly 300 members.

As a final comment: I see the founding of the UKK as an organisation that represents a group of artworkers in their relationships with both the state and the market And personally I also see it as a way to break the cycle of artists increasingly being forced to become small-minded and selfish entrepreneurs, the latest form of model capitalist consumers and producers. The UKK should counter this by opening a space where the members can share experiences and knowledge about the conditions of work and life.

As another final comment: Of course the situation of younger visual artists in Denmark is rather privileged, but still I find it important that people confront the working conditions and social relations in the field that they work within. Our personal struggles as artists in an increasingly deregulated and marked-orientated world are important even though most of us don't suffer as much as fx. migrants and sweatshop workers in the third world. To face our own struggles and to start changing our own conditions is making it possible to identify with other people's struggles - and of course adding to the general struggle against the social relations of capital which encapsulate the globe.