

Do what you love, or: About precarious living and working conditions in the comics industry

Katharina Brandl and Anne Elizabeth Moore

In November 2014, Anne Elizabeth Moore designed a survey in cooperation with The Ladydrawers of Chicago, Illinois (US) and Femicomix Finland at Villa Salin (FI) to research the working and living conditions of people engaged in the comics industry. The survey design focused on effects of gender, race, sexual orientation, child-rearing, and health and disability on respondents' access to opportunities to publish work or be hired on contract jobs. Between November 2014 and April 2015, the survey was translated from English to Finnish, German, Latvian, Spanish and Italian. (It has since been translated into Swedish.) In 2015 and 2016, the survey was distributed internationally; and in July 2016, with the support of Kone Foundation (FI), the data (of the 260 respondents) was analysed and narrated in more than 50 pages of comics that were produced by an international consortium of comics makers, writers, and researchers at the Saari residency in Finland (Katharina Brandl, My Eklund, Saskia Gullstrand, Laura Keninš, Verna Kuutti, Hanna-Pirita Lehkonen, Sheika Lugtu, Anne Elizabeth Moore, Ylva Oknelid, Johanna "Roju" Rojola, Elke R. Steiner, Fran Syass).

For our contribution to the 13th Annual Conference of the German Society for Comics Studies, we propose to (1) present the design of the survey based on the theory of *con-ricerca* (co-research) as coined by the Italian operaists of the 1960s who worked in the tradition of Karl Marx' "Fragebogen für Arbeiter" (2) to critically reflect on the effects of certain named markers of exclusion in the comics industry. (3) We additionally propose to present selected excerpts of the comics that were produced based on the survey. The comics (and therefore also the results of the survey) have only been published to date in part. For example, the data set on censorship in comics in September 2016 was published by PEN America. The results of the survey have been accepted for publication in *CLOSURE* – Kieler e-Journal für Comicforschung. The survey comprises questions on socio-demographics, as well as on readership, community engagement, creatorship, economics and working conditions, publishing (self-publishing and beyond), censorship, and exclusion/visibility.

Based on the gathered data, we will discuss issues of compensation (for example, almost 70% of the respondents do not feel fairly compensated for the work they have put in the comics industry; 58% of our respondents even indicated that they never earned more money back than they have put into the community) and about the markers of difference that will enable you to subsist, break even, or thrive in the comics industry.

Kurzbiographie

Katharina Brandl (University of Basel) studied political science (Mag.) and art history (BA) at the University of Vienna, as well as critical studies (MA) at the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna. She has worked in research funding & communications and as researcher, writer, curator and manager in the arts – for example as researcher and managing editor for the Austrian contribution



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to the Architectural Biennale in Venice in 2014, as manager for an international studio- and residency program and as tutor at the Department for Art History of the University of Vienna. Besides her work in the arts and in academics, she co-founded the NPO "Sorority" and was the executive co-director of the feminist festival "Business Riot". She is currently working on her PhD at the University of Basel as a fellow of eikones – Zentrum für die Theorie und Geschichte des Bildes.

Anne Elizabeth Moore is an award-winning journalist, best-selling comics anthologist, and internationally lauded cultural critic. She is the author of *Unmarketable* (2007), *Cambodian Grrrl* (2011), *Threadbare* (2016), *Body Horror* (2017), and others. Moore was the founding editor of Houghton Mifflin's Best American Comics series, and co-publisher and editor of independent bimonthly magazine *Punk Planet*. Moore was educated at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and currently teaches Visual and Critical Studies at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago and the College for Creative Studies in Detroit, Michigan. Her comics journalism series on Detroit for *Truthout* was recently granted an NEA award.