

Running Against Old Ideas
About Working Conditions for Artists with Children

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TP We are glad to have this opportunity to meet today. When we started planning the magazine, we thought about how things actually work in the art world when you have children, what challenges and difficulties you face and what might have to change. It wasn't easy to find artists who were willing to talk to us about this publicly. The topic seems somehow also to be treated with fear, or perhaps with a feeling that one's own artistic work would be associated too much with family. We are more than pleased that you have agreed to join us today. Perhaps we will start with a short introduction from our speakers.

UB I studied in Hamburg at the HFBK and then went to Montreal with the Neue Kunst in Hamburg (New Art in Hamburg) scholarship. I was eventually invited to Paris for an exhibition, where I met the father of my children, who is also an artist. For three years I have also been teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in Karlsruhe. Thanks to the shared work of co-parenting with the father, I can always go to Karlsruhe in the week when the children are with him without feeling guilty, as I sometimes used to do in the past.

AW I studied in New York at the Cooper Union and came to the Städelschule on exchange, where I met my husband. We have three daughters between the ages of 4 and 17. We hung out for a while in Germany then spent time in Japan, and returned to New York, where our first daughter was born, a few months before I graduated with a BFA. She is 17 now. When I was pregnant in New York it was clear that living in that city with children would be hard, harder than life as artists in Germany, so we came back. We studied at Städelschule and traveled on various residencies with our kids. We lived in Argentina with our eldest daughter, and a few years after our second daughter was born we had a studio scholarship in New York for another year. Since then we haven't taken on massive long term residencies. I have gone on a few alone, and traveled for various exhibitions, but nothing longer than two months. Our youngest daughter is almost five.

AL I studied in Braunschweig. In 2006 I went with a group to Hamburg to found the Kunstverein St. Pauli, which we run on a project-based basis without permanent exhibition spaces, and in addition we do our own artistic work. In Braunschweig I also met my girlfriend. We have a daughter and a son, they are three and seven years old. My girlfriend is also an artist and part of the Kunstverein St. Pauli. So we have many professional ties besides only family.

UB And do you earn money with the Kunstverein?

AL The question came up latest with the second child. Recently we have been able to pay a kind of expense compensation for the Kunstverein St. Pauli. At the same time, I started working in public space myself and received commissions for art in and on buildings. For two years I have also held a teaching position at the Muthesius Academy in Kiel. The logistics of having five or more jobs parallel to the artistic work and the children was extreme. To be able to earn money with the artistic work and to get rid of side jobs has eased the situation considerably.

AW What Axel was talking about, the logistics of a project space, are not too different from what it takes to build a family, while establishing a space for oneself. You don't have secured state funding, or a designated building or space, no institution to support you. As a family you become the mechanism of support for this thing that no one else will—or should—take responsibility for. The complexity involved in supporting a family in the unpredictable, and precarious field of the arts is immense, and involves massive collaboration.

AD That's a beautiful description, I guess all of you really need to structure your everyday lives? With the jobs, being an artist, being a mother or a father?

UB The whole art system is built on exploitation and we as artists are already exploited anyway because there is never enough money, and women, especially when they have children or babies, are exploited even more. When I came to Paris, I had the good fortune to sell drawings through the gallery Art Concept. I was able to live from this income and pay nannies and assistants. Actually, I paid more for assistants and when my first son was little I sat next to them and they did my work. But I saw how many of my friends in Berlin and Hamburg had to earn money and suddenly were no longer able to make art or were with the children and then couldn't make art either. I felt privileged at that time, because I saw how all my friends gradually quit, and I think this is absolutely a matter of money.

TP Has the birth of your child and the help of the assistants changed the way you work?

UB I started to produce a lot of things that I no longer had to execute myself. So, yes, in a way, I also changed my practice. I really wanted to be with my children and not, as is usual here in France, put them in a day nursery at a very early age. Everything else came out of that.

AW I was still studying when my daughter was born so my way of working developed with her. At Städelschule she came to meetings and lectures, and had a crib in my studio until she started pre-school full time. It was an unusual place for children. There weren't any other babies around. I worked when she slept. It didn't feel like a compromise at the time—I think at 23 everything feels like radical choice you want it to be—she was always being held or played with by other artists in the studio, which was fun and made her being there not only okay, but good. It felt like a great place to raise a kid. Having a baby around brings things out in people you don't see otherwise. As soon as she started preschool a new sort of structure came into my life. My partner was working odd jobs, doing the hourly peripheral work of artists, painting walls, dry-wall, crate building, building exhibitions, all work for other people, and I had the baby strapped to my back because I was nursing and she needed to be near me. So she just came along and did what I did. I remember that having her around me while I was trying to figure out what it means to make things, was good.

UB But the other teachers or the other students, didn't they say, "Oh god, her again with the kid?"

AW Not to my face [laughter]. I have to admit that she was really calm. She was one of those stoic babies. She seemed content just being there. My other two children weren't like that, and so I don't know what it would have been like with them, but because she was a listener, having her around was no problem. As structure came into her life through pre-school, it also fell into mine, and I had to develop a process for this distinct child-free time, which translates into work time, when the hours of care fall away.

AL I was initially fascinated by this new structure. It came suddenly with the birth. As freelance parents, we could take turns. So, then I suddenly had two hours for myself and knew that I had to do this and that in that amount of time. I was surprised how much more effective and efficient one could work in production stages. For other processes, however, time slots of a few hours are not enough. You are then faced with the challenge and the question of how to organize larger time frames for the development of new work, because these processes in particular are difficult to fit into tight time structures.

TP You mean the development of new ideas?

AL Yes, and also to question this efficient structure, to give oneself the freedom to take detours that do not fit into a two-hour time window. Especially in development phases, you need time to be able to discard things constantly and you can't just work through everything.

AD Are you under pressure to be more productive when time is limited?

AL I don't know. Sometimes you're tempted to blame it on the kids, but the pressure is on anyway. I think it's more of a type thing. If you're someone who finishes everything close to the exhibition, you notice through the children that you have to start earlier now. I think the pressure doesn't come from the children. As Ulla said before, it is also a question of money. With or without a child, the question of how much money one can earn with one's artistic work will be raised at some point. Is it possible in the long run to do artistic work and different side jobs? With a family you are confronted with this question earlier. As long as you are only responsible for yourself, the answer can be postponed.

AW I have the feeling that this question, this point, is something we all arrive at with or without kids. We all continuously consider if what we're doing is sustainable, if it can be, or even should be practiced, "can I pay rent, can I afford a studio, should I spend 300 euro on paint, or film, or fill in the blank"—because whatever we do always costs us something. "Does this make any sense if there is no possibility for any of what I make to meet an audience, to sell, to help me take care of myself so that I can keep working?" I mean, more or less at some point a lot of people exit the scene because it feels purposeless and it never pays out. I don't know how much the children play a role in that, they can speed up the process, but I certainly don't feel like the responsibility of parenting is an absolute catalyst away from creative practice. Children are a nudge in whatever direction things are

heading, but nothing is absolute. There are just too many factors involved.

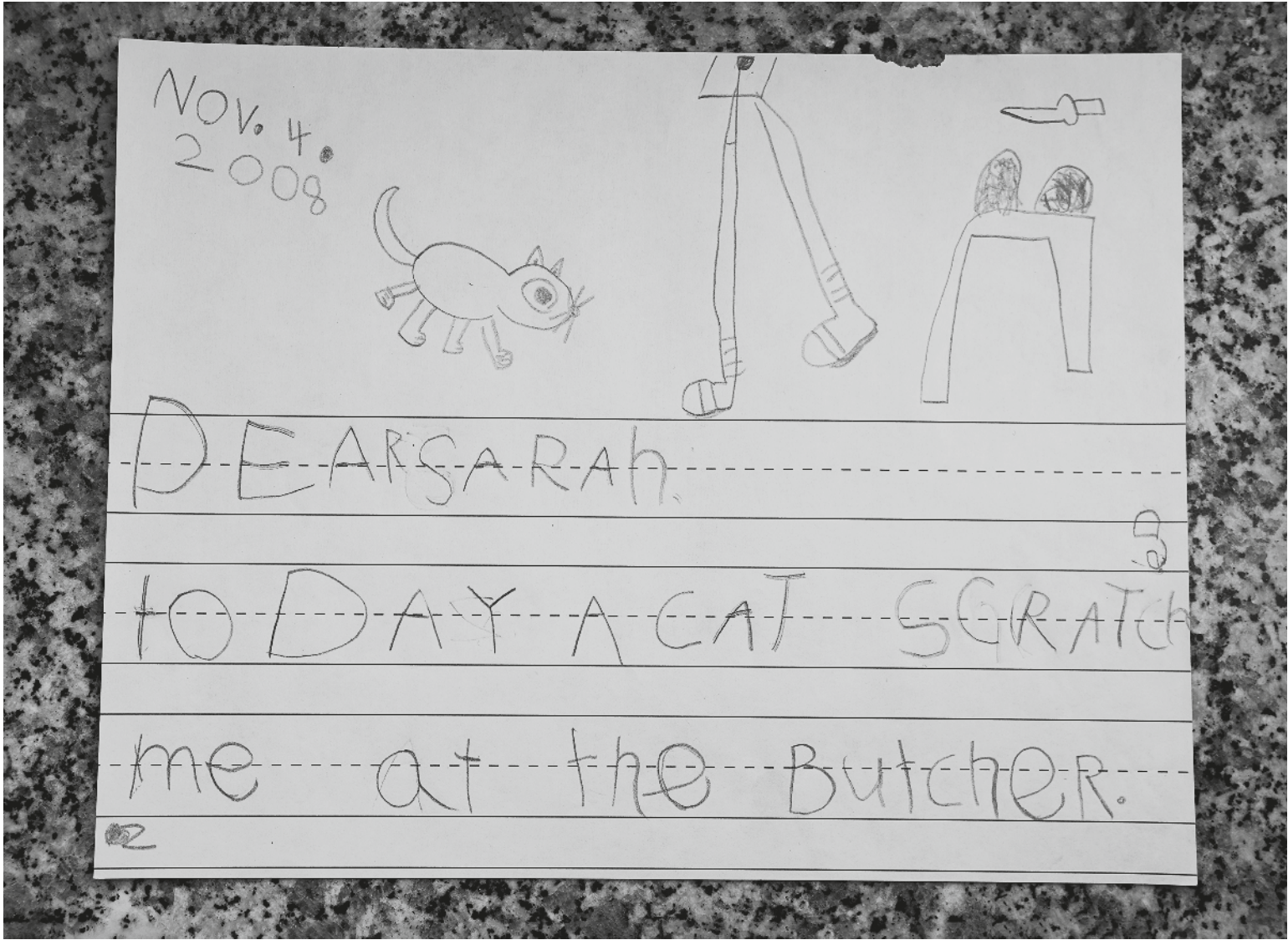
AD Adrian, you mentioned that you are also sharing the responsibility of your kids with your partner.

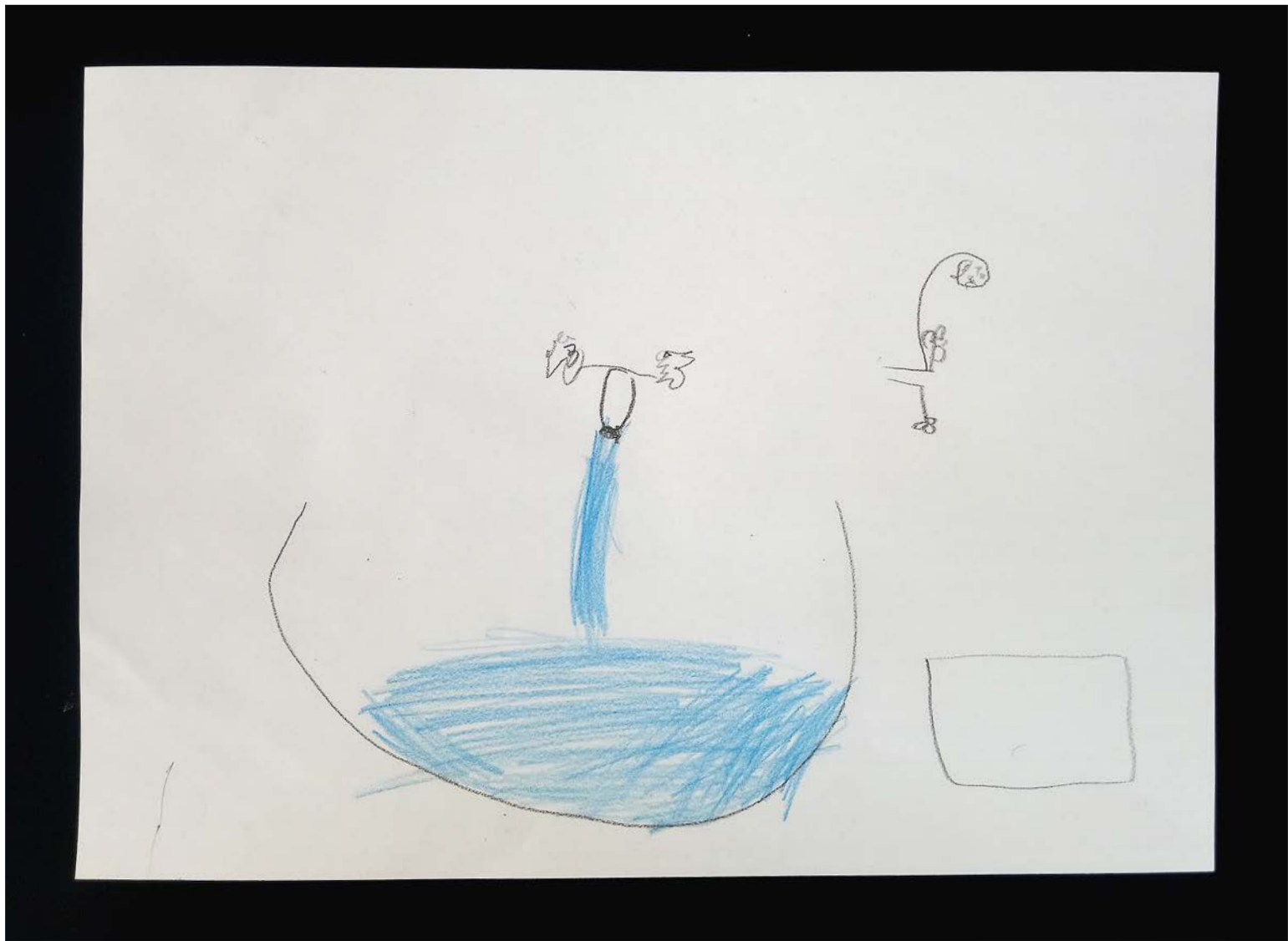
AW Yes, he is a painter. So we both have self-determined schedules, and we can decide who does what and when. I don't know how it is when one partner is an artist and the other one isn't. I think part of why you wanted to have this conversation is because there is no convention for parenting in our business. Because so much of what we do lives in the dissolve between life and work, and we don't have models to base them on. I think that was one of your questions: Who are our role models, who can we look to as examples for parenting?

UB But that's also a problem. While studying, most of my female teachers didn't have children. There were Candida Höfer, Cosima von Bonin, Josephine Pryde...they didn't have children so there was no role model and this was really hard. I am 46, and my generation was the first generation where people could imagine having children and being an artist. I remember...we were all girls, my fellow students and me, we were all around the table, and one of my professors asked us, "And who of you wants to have children?" It felt like a crucial question and we all said, "No, no, no, I don't and I don't either," because we knew that if we said "yes" our chance to participate in the art system would be smaller. It is also about exploitation, or self-exploitation: this idea of an artist's life where children just don't fit in at all.

AW As if machismo were the only way to play along.

UB Yes, it was a way for female artists to adapt. I wouldn't say it was the same for all women, but I remember this situation very clearly. The funny thing is that all the women who sat around that table now have children, even though we all said no back then. But the atmosphere at the HFBK was anti-kids and it was not cool to have children...not yet.





AW I had an art history professor at Cooper Union, everybody knew her as *the one who slept with Picasso when she was young* and one of her daughters was the child of some artist she refused to name, we assumed he was important. Her biography was full of the kind of art-world scandal that validated her lectures, and made it all feel real, and close, and urgent. I was alone with her in her office once talking about female role models in the art world. At one point she said that if there was one thing a woman artist should do, she *should*, if she feels the urge, have children. That we shouldn't let some prescriptive male-modeled industry dictate how we lived our lives. She must have been in her seventies then, she smoked in class, and she had been teaching young women in New York for forty-odd years and she watched generation after generation of women artists choose not to have children. Women that she knew came to this decision because they thought that *not* having children was the only way to be an artist. They thought that by having kids they would lose this part of themselves. I was 19 when she told me, "if you ever want to have children, just go for it, fuck the system." And I remember feeling relieved. I knew some examples from the 20th century like Alice Neil who had kids with different partners who managed to support herself through painting, or Kay Boyle, who was a writer with six kids who had been part of Montparnasse art circle in its heyday. But the few I could name off the top of my head, didn't come close to the number of women who wore the title of *The Artist's Wife*. I didn't know of or see any struggling artists who were being parents joyfully. I didn't see, or maybe I didn't recognize those examples around me. Granted, they might have been there. But nobody was talking about them. Back to the comment about the way that children, and this question of time influence our creativity; Raymond Carver said that family was why he only ever wrote short stories. He only had these small bursts of energy, these tiny frames when he could focus and complete something. For years, he was a Sunday

writer working in this little tiny window of time once a week and still, it was a chance to build and establish a practice made of small pieces. One where you're just chipping things away, bit-by-bit, in order to create something for yourself, to have a foundation to work from. For me, it has always been a relief to consider the fact that things can be achieved by working from and with small pieces.

UB I always felt that I had to hurry. I had this even before I had children, because I wanted to have children so much. But I also felt the urge to make art and I thought that I had to make it quickly in the art world so that I could have a child.

AW I had kids when I was still trying to figure out what I wanted, so the urgency was never *to arrive*, it was always a matter of keeping my head above water. It was a struggle to find a way to work in my early twenties with small children, but I didn't have anything to compare it to. Having a child in my thirties felt more difficult because in all honesty I was tired. Tired of the hustle maybe, of putting myself out there and reaching, and certainly creatively I was in a completely different place.

UB I thought you had to make a choice: either art or children. Then one day I said to myself, okay, if I have to choose, I'll choose kids. It was really important for me to set it that way so that if something went wrong in my career I wouldn't regret it, even if I wasn't offered the greatest exhibitions and that was all that mattered. Somehow sacrifice always plays a role in art. I think it comes from Christianity. You have to make sacrifices to make *good art*. In this context there are also men who say that women cannot be artists because they give birth. The real work of art is the child and women are just bodies. Men do not give birth and are therefore free of it and are the real artists. And it is still the case. In my class there are three men and 25 women studying and in the institutions the proportions are usually reversed.

AD Adrian, you mentioned residencies where you weren't invited because of the kid.

AW Yes. There are some residencies where kids aren't allowed, and you have to decide between being present with your children or taking the opportunity that inevitably leads to other opportunities. It doesn't feel like a prize when the reward comes with this condition.

What you were saying Ulla, reminded me of a situation when, even before being invited to one residency/exhibition, the curator (a woman) asked a friend of mine, also a curator (woman) if she thought I was suited for the residency because, would I "be willing to go without my kids?" My friend was in no position to judge, but she was being asked before me. I wasn't given the right of refusal, until after someone else confirmed that, yes, I should be invited. This was never a question posed to my partner. It is a question, for the time being anyway, posed to women. I don't know Axel, do people just assume that you *don't* take equal responsibility for your children because you're a man?

AL I definitely think you're right that there is a difference. To me, it often seems like people are sort of surprised when I say that I don't have time because I have to take care of our children, because they assume that my partner, the mother, could take care of them. I know it more from this side, but I think you're right. I am not able to apply for several residencies, because as a family you are not welcomed everywhere.

AW Residencies for artists families, as a place of solitude with space and funded production time, in close knit communities are sometimes what we most need as a break from the grind. Without them as a resource for all of us we just continue to push this single artist model, and the narrative Ulla sited, where sacrifice equates to art. Any fear that I had about children and career, grew out of the career. It was the work and my experience with people that brought on the fear of exclusion.

UB I was at the Villa Medici, the French artists' residence in Rome. There, you get 1,000 euros per child, which is the same amount as the monthly fee for the local school, which my son also attended. My second son was just two weeks old when I arrived there. I remember how François Hollande had welcomed us all and he made a joke that there were artists who would have purposely had children for this residency, so that they would get these additional 1,000 euros, and everyone laughed. Not me, because I knew that it was aimed straight at me.

AD A friend of mine is a curator at the Kunstverein Bielefeld. She had recently invited an artist with a child and was surprised herself that she had never before been confronted with the question of providing family accommodation, organizing the trip not for one but for three people, details which she would have taken care of and recognized as a necessity. It would be very nice if in these cases there would be more care for self-understanding and support.

UB But we are still far from that. It's been a while now, but I had several au pairs with whom I always traveled to the exhibitions or my mother accompanied me to look after the children. I always had to pay a second hotel room and the additional costs were never covered by an institution. I also had similar experiences as Adrian. For example, when I traveled to the Venice Biennial with my first baby, I met a curator who was a friend of mine. He had invited me to many different cities and countries, and we got along well. But when he saw me with my baby in my arms, he didn't even say hello to me. He simply turned around, walked away and I've never heard from him since. That hurt me...that he couldn't stand me having a child. It has to do with the fact that without a child you're a more attractive woman than a woman with a child. There is also another female curator who never invited me back with the second child. She thought the second child was a bit exaggerated and I had never heard from her again either. But that happens quite often, and I wonder if envy among women plays a certain role when women no longer invite you.

AW It is hard to stomach, to watch other people indulge in what we deny ourselves for whatever reason. I am certain that this tension does rule some choices of people in positions of power.

It's true. I've had women encourage me, too. Absolutely. Even if it was women sometimes who I felt held me back. When my first daughter was born, my former professor at Städel asked me what I was doing. I told her, "my daughter is only two months old. I think I'll take a little time off and take care of her." Then she freaked out a bit and said, "No, no way. You're bringing the kid. I won't allow it. You're coming to my class as a guest." And then she took me in. If she hadn't ordered me to come back and study again, I don't know if I would have done it. She insisted that I not let that role take over my life. And that was very important. I don't know what would have happened without her.

TP I would like to come back to the sacrifice. Ulla, you mentioned earlier that there are women in our profession, and certainly also some men, who thought they had to make the sacrifice of giving up having a family. I suppose that artists or curators are reminded of the sacrifice they have made when they meet colleagues who have chosen to have a family and who did not want to give it up, which can then lead to strong rejections.

UB Yes, I'm sure. But I also have the feeling that things are changing a little bit and that it will get better. At the beginning I said that making art is based on exploitation. For example, you were never paid for an exhibition in Germany, you never had an artist fee and that is slowly changing. The process of change doesn't happen in a bubble; emancipation is an issue that affects not only women, but also men.

TP I agree with you, Ulla, that something is changing. By 2020, most institutions have probably arrived at the point where a fee is included in the budget from the start—whether or not it is sufficient is another discussion. But there is probably still a very long way to go before the accommodation and care of children is taken into account by institutions as a matter of course.

UB It's also this image of the artist that one participates in all of this without questioning it. You don't make art for money—which is also true—and you are, so to speak, detached from all earthly realities. Because art is something noble and much bigger than poop diapers and paying rent. This is a romantic idea of art, which comes from the 19th century but is still evident. In addition, there is also this glamour aspect. Just the other day I discovered an artist in the German celebrity magazine Gala. There are more and more artists who are portrayed and reported on there. What I mean is that this glamour aspect seems to be something very important, but reality is the absolute opposite. When you have children there is so much realism and you can't go from opening to opening and drink champagne. I feel that you have to hide the real picture.

TP Have any of you ever experienced a situation in the art world where you thought that it worked really well, where people were really thinking things through, so that it could serve as a model?

All [Silence]

TP If you all say no, then we know what we have to work on. [Laughter]

UB I would say that the Scandinavian countries are a bit more advanced. During the installation phase of my exhibition at Kunsthall Aarhus, I was able to see that the employees brought their children to work. The director of the Kunsthall had often said goodbye early in the evening to look after his children at home, which surprised me because I have never seen any of the German museum directors do it.

AL From my experience it is easier to work with people who have children in their environment or children themselves. It is difficult for me to draw up a catalog of demands in which I am granted exceptional rights because of my children, since I don't want to make it something special. In a working environment where others also have children, it comes more naturally. The artist residency Künstlergut Prösitz, for instance, offers mother-child scholarships, which my girlfriend Franziska Nast

- and many of her friends were accepted for. Many residencies could certainly pick up a few things from there. The label is of course problematic and shows that there are few of such offers, and many residencies even explicitly exclude applications from artists with children.
- AW Part of the problem begins there, that life for curators doesn't lend itself to having children, then the shit filters down on us. Curators are under extreme pressure with limited work contracts and miserable salaries, to deliver; to be out, connecting, traveling, to have seen everything and know everyone. They have to bust their asses in one, or three, or five years at an institution, so they can secure a position and work in the next one. We get stuck in cycles of sacrifice and oppression, because our economic models exclude fundamental aspects of being human, and this is fatal for art.
- TP What I thought was very interesting and perhaps also a bit sad, Axel, was when you said that you didn't want to open such a catalog of demands yourself. It seems a bit strange to me to call something a demand, when it should actually be standard matter, because in the end the institutions and curators all want something from you as an artist.
- AL From my perspective, there are much deeper problems in the art system than just the child-friendly infrastructure for participating in an exhibition. In our precarious working conditions, things are already so badly off and even more difficult to reconcile with children. In our daycare and school environment, both parents are usually employed and there are also overtime hours and business trips where employers don't ask how this can be arranged with everyday family life. As a rule, however, this is then adequately compensated. It is therefore not enough just to demand additional benefits from an inviting institution, but the aim should be to improve working conditions in general. Of course, I would like art to play a certain pioneering role and it would be nice to develop new models for family compatibility.
- AD I found the aspect you just mentioned very powerful, that one would wish for such a progressive thought, especially in art.
- UB As Axel already said, it can work with curators who also have children, but I have given up trying to say that I will only participate in the exhibition when my childcare is paid for. I was always happy about invitations to exhibitions and then preferred to adapt because I wanted to be included again. I had never made any demands, didn't want to cause any problems, in order not to remain in this memory that one is the artist who always makes a lot of requests and with whom it becomes expensive and difficult to work. It's true what you said, Tobias, that the institutions want something from you and that you have something to offer, but it's not that simple.
- AW There is this sense you get, of disposability. That anyone else could take your place if you rub someone the wrong way, and we live with that threat. Sure, we each bring a unique voice to the table, but with that knowledge comes a good chance that nobody will like the sound of it. Our identities and our private lives are fundamentally tied to our work, they are part of the narrative that circulates around and moves work. We are all inescapably caught up in the narrative, navigating our histories while intersecting the histories of others. This question of identity and creative practice is at the heart of the problem because there is a taboo on anything that resembles convention, and on the other hand also vilification when we deviate from it. We want artists to both be human, and to somehow defy the aspects of life that makes us that way. It is inconvenient when our needs become other peoples' problems.
- AD But it would be nice if this fear of causing problems would not arise in advance.
- UB Absolutely! But to do that, you'd have to join forces. Just as there are already alliances of artists who fight for exhibition fees. In the same way one could say that for artists with children, a nanny and a hotel room have to be paid for, and that there should also be state subsidies. Because it is often like that: you have a

- certain budget and of course you can pay for a nanny and an extra hotel room, but it has to be paid for from the budget for the exhibition. But there should be additional money for exactly these cases.
- AW I was invited to a residency a month after my youngest daughter was born, and to do this I brought my eldest daughter to babysit while I worked. There was no funding for that assistance, so my artist fee went to buying her plane ticket and covering her expenses. My work was realized, funded by the institution, and I was glad to make it, but in the end, I walked away with nothing but the experience. The weeks and more of preparation and work culminated in a performance and installation work that left no trace, that cost me (and my daughter) time and energy, with no financial compensation. I feel like it's different when you walk away with marketable objects that gain value through exposure. But at the same time, I choose to work with experiential scenarios, so I am aware of the problem. And somehow, the nature of making time-based work raises those questions on a small scale that reflects general social values.
- TP One of the structural problems is, of course, that institutions that have to raise third-party funds are sometimes not able to charge fees to foundations. If you then tried to declare money for childcare, some foundations would probably laugh at you in the present situation.
- What do you think should be the first thing to change in the art system in order to create a better matter of fact for mothers and fathers, so that you don't feel like you are in a position of demand when you have children and these realities of life have to be taken into consideration?
- AW We are running against old ideas, because the system is based on how people perceive artists, sometimes to an almost comical degree. This changes with the stories we tell in literature and film, through our presentation of ourselves. It would be good if the artist were not considered an anomaly. The drama of the artist as a mad character is popular, Van Gogh & co., because it's extreme, and it also allows for exceptional status. But life under such conditions is unsustainable and absurd. We don't have to live up to this narrative to establish a new one. When I'm out at art functions, people seem genuinely surprised that I have a kid because it doesn't fit the story. The story will have to change in order for the us to establish a less obstructive mode of being.
- UB It has to happen at all levels, for example awareness of this issue should be raised at art academies. At my academy it is a problem when my child is sick and I cannot come to a teacher's meeting. It is immanent everywhere.
- AL I think that if you only change the parameters for parents in the system, it will only be of limited use. You can already see in some institutions that it is a matter of which artists from which nationality you could still get extra funding for. If one simply makes the rule that artists with families have to be better equipped, this could also lead to it becoming more difficult for them to be invited. I believe that there is a widespread problem with payment in the art system. I also think from the other side. At the Kunstverein St. Pauli, even as an artist, I am surprised that we make a financing plan where it is a matter of course that every technician and the DJ get a fee, but the artist is paid, at maximum, only the transport or the production costs and its expenses.
- UB On the other hand, we should change the way we see ourselves. I've tried. I said I'd always go to all the exhibition installations with my children now. I'm gonna show them all. I felt it was a declaration of war for me and it didn't work out well. Now I think it's great to set up exhibitions alone, without the children. Of course, it must also come from us as artists that we state that we will come to the openings with our children and that we will show this and deal with it strongly and not let it get us down.
- TP I have one more question. Maybe something to finish on a lighter note. Are your children interested in your work? Do they find it exciting? Do they understand? Are they involved or engaged?

- AW In our home the kids work in the studio. Our eldest daughter helps with translating and correspondence in German and English, and she's helped install exhibitions. Our second daughter assists in the painting studio: stretching and un-stretching canvases, photographing works for the archive. I just finished showing her how to work with sound files to help me with on an ongoing project. By bringing them into the studio—however interesting or uninteresting it may be for them—they're involved, and they understand the work. I don't depict them in my work, but they are certainly part of it.
- UB With me, it's similar to Adrian. I don't like to use my children in my art because I think they don't know what it's about and haven't chosen it, and only participate because they are my children. I find that difficult. But last summer, for example, we made a film together in the sea. My boyfriend and my oldest son dove in and filmed and me and my younger son were throwing objects down. I thought that was great because it was actually a family project. In the studio, I work a lot with assistants. They always come to me from Paris. Then there are often seven, eight, nine people and we all eat together. That's also a family—the extended core family. That's what I think is best anyway, when the work, the art, can break up this conventional family model.
- AL With us they are also present and integrated in many things, not so foregrounded. I find it really interesting that the children have a very self-confident and clear picture of what artists are, especially when they meet people outside of art. Just like our son recently told the neighbors that his parents are artists and can therefore do anything.
- AW When we talk about what it means to be parents and work as artists, we suggest that there is a conflict in those terms. But I don't think there has to be. We make it work because it's possible, and because it's possible—like everything we make and do—it gives us a position to work from, and that is something.