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Filmkritik



LEBEN UND ARBEITEN
INNERHALB UND AUSSERHALB
DER FERNSEHANSTALTEN

Cover of *Filmkritik*, August 1975,
which includes Harun Farocki,
"Notwendige Abwechslung und
Vielfalt" (Necessary variation
and variety).

Necessary Variation and Variety

HARUN FAROCKI, FREELANCER

TRANSLATED BY TED FENDT

“Hoohooh!”

—Anita Pallenberg in *One plus One*

For the past thirteen years, I have earned my money as a freelancer for broadcasters—radio and television. How does this work?

Broadcasters call a freelancer someone who is not a salaried employee. He receives a contract concerning a one-time service. In some cases, this service really is one-time only, and one appears in the books as a freelancer because one was interviewed in the street or provided some atmosphere by drinking a beer in the background of a shot. On a movie set, people demand, and broadcasters pay, quite a bit of money for small services. (I’m not concerned with “austerity measures”; I’m concerned with the similarity to prostitution. The latter is similarly delivered with efficiency and contemptuously grabbed.)

On the other extreme of freelancing: people who do not earn their living from a broadcaster but make a television report the way an officer in the past would a play, or a lady a libretto—I cannot write because I’m foaming too heavily at the mouth to see straight.

Then there are freelancers who are actually full-time, for whom there is employment but no established position: producers,¹ film editors, unit production managers, assistants, cameramen. There have been court cases about permanent employment; all were won, the courts not only deciding these *full-time freelancers* must become salaried but declaring employee status retroactively, which is important for social security and pensions. The criteria for this decision were economic dependency on one or more broadcasters (although 30 percent of money from a broadcaster already sufficed), steady employment, and the degree to which they were subject to directives from their employer.

What’s left are two groups of freelancers on the job market: those employed for the length of a production and temporary staff. Actors and directors belong to the first group, writers to the second. The writer is thus another category, because he does his work at home and accordingly freely determines where and when. More

on the logic behind this later.

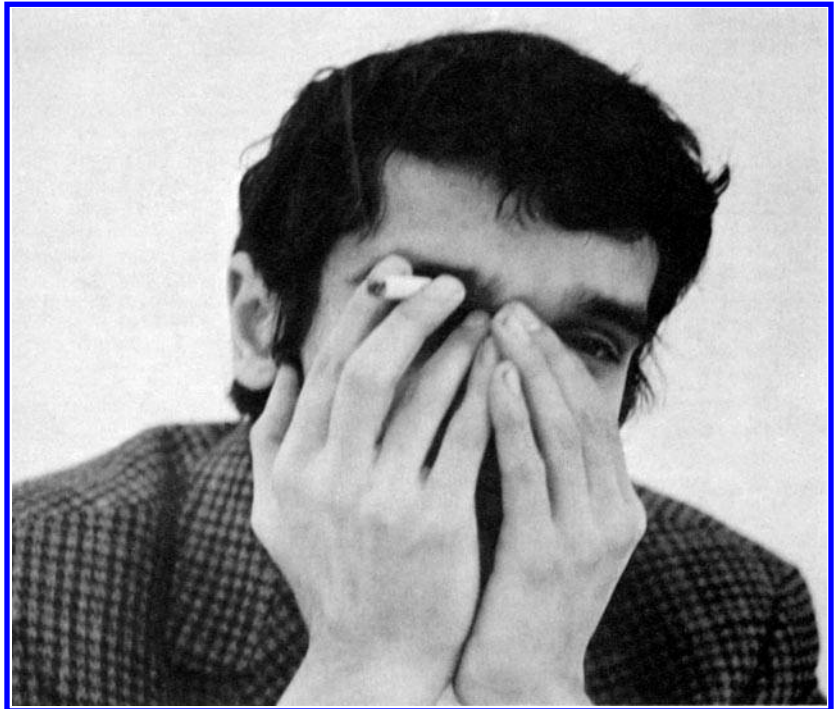
The RFFU² is currently leading negotiations for both of these groups to settle a labor contract with the institutions. The negotiations came about because of a federal law that made collective bargaining possible for freelancers last year. The framework for fees that has been in place up until now (see *Filmkritik* 1/74, 2/74) did not emerge from negotiations between labor partners; it came out of “talks.” Future contracts will specifically and bindingly list the payment of the services. The union wants to incorporate a provision for vacation and sick pay. Nothing will change about the ad hoc nature of work relations; the contracts will apply to periods of employment, and nothing will apply during unemployment. And nothing will change about how freelancers are *self-employed* per financial law.

The AOK³ pamphlet from May '75 can contribute to a better understanding of how the freedom of employees is conceived.

“For the fulfillment of their public tasks alongside salaried employees, radio broadcasters . . . employ freelancers to a considerable extent who often return frequently, but always enter into exclusively short-term employment relations. The court’s statement recognizes that the tasks of radio broadcasters regarding the necessary variety and variation in the shows cannot be fulfilled with a limited circle of permanent employees. In this respect, the position of radio broadcasters is different from the position of commercial production companies or other service providers, since freedom in programming and the necessity for variation require radio broadcasters to have to be able to call on employees for creating and participating in individual programs.”

Freedom and variation, they can hardly be separated anymore. The AOK then lists who, if he works for the broadcaster, does this in private self-employment (therefore is not “compulsorily insured,” has no right to insurance).

“Arrangers, authors, writers, choreographers, moderators, interview partners, commentators, composers, copy editors, game show hosts, news producers (if the copyrighted share of the service predominates).” This list goes on, but it is already clear that those mentioned are no invention of television but free-living specimens of the cultural race. It would humiliate them were one to claim they are socially dependent on television; any doctor’s note would block their independent creativity. The parenthesis after *news producers* is also important. When an author signs a contract with a broadcaster, he does so as the copyright holder of his existing or future text. He does not enter the contractual relationship as laborer but as someone possessing labor power. Creation of original content is equivalent to a self-employed activity, to jobs for a broadcaster with one’s own company or personnel.



Not on the AOK negative list, not among the tradesmen can the director be located. For a news producer—someone who, for example, shoots a news segment, oversees the editing, and writes the text—this explicitly means he must be insured, is therefore not free, if the *copyrighted share of the service* does not *predominate*. With words, the freedom of the word is still valid for the paid hack's most suffocating line; speaking in the language of images has no value. Social jurisdiction makes yet another bow to reality when it recognizes that one cannot really convince a reporter that he is the creator of copyrighted words. (A journalist who is active as a reporter, for example, is not removed from the group of people who must be insured on the basis of no. 6 in the negative catalogue because, according to a ruling of the Federal Social Security Court, reporters are employees of radio broadcast companies who must be insured.) What the broadcasters themselves now think of this consequential copyright story can be read on any contract.

Front side:

It is agreed that through the fulfillment of your contract you are/were active as a freelancer and not as an employee.

Backside:

The WDR⁴ is . . . exclusively entitled itself and/or through a third party . . . to film, translate into another language or in another way change, adapt, and modify the work in its entirety or in part, to use it in this form as well as to exploit translations (dubbed versions) and other adaptations or modifications of the film work in the same extent as these.

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I came into this industry through the servant's entrance. Thirteen years ago in an apartment where I lived in a furnished room, I met a poet whom I asked about the possibility of earning money through radio. He had just made 800 marks selling

something, taken up lodgings with a pretty girl in the room next door, and bought champagne. I knocked; he gave me the advice to offer a book review to a certain man. I stood in the hall at the radio station and didn't dare to knock. I smoked another cigarette. Inside, I said I was attending night school and, superfluously, I wrote poems, some of which I left. He kept the poems and immediately said I should stay in school. Because I was wearing a so-called snow coat, he gave me a book by Kerouac to review with the word "bums" in the title. Although this is probably not true, I remember him having a beret on his head. He only corrected the spelling of the poems; I received 80 marks for the review. To my friends, who had to earn extra money delivering beer, I said that I had connections. They instantly hated me and admired me; it never really became any different. Back then we called what one should not become *arriviert*.

At that time, everything took a turn for the worse. I thought one had to behave like a news jobber. I was always on the hunt for opportunities and connections; even worse, I defined myself this way. For current events or local news, I would have been right, but for the culture section I was completely wrong. I had to enter without knowledge or experience, which is not to say theater scholars and publicists had any. What I did not manage was to express the legitimacy of being able to work. I undertook every attempt at work like an attempt at fraud and would promptly be caught red-handed at least every second time. My competitors—almost all of whom are today well-known leftist literary figures—acted the same way. One promised to pass books along to me he did not have time to review; then he could not bring himself to do this and sent them back to the publisher. He acted no differently from how I imagined myself, but he still managed to look like an intellectual.



Now I will divide into three classes those who write texts or make television programs as freelancers.

Class A is there to fulfill the production model and nothing else. One who delivers local news segments and reports on exhibitions in the culture section. He may also make big things, *even* TV shows; he makes them so closely according to a model, which has come about through thousands of constraints and acts of laziness, that he merges entirely with the production apparatus. Even if he works for many broadcasters, he cannot be distinguished from a full-time employee.

Class B is there to confirm to the broadcaster that the production model is

meaningful. A known author, whose name need not be known by the public, but must be known to the apparatus. His task is to give the producer, as well as the many entities behind him, the feeling that the apparatus is an instrument of communication. (I am describing here what exists, not what I'm imagining. I am opposed to the word *living* being linked to *name*.) For B, it counts that he sticks to the rules and regulations of the department but that he nonetheless acts out of his own interest—feigned or true. He himself, and usually no one else, can distinguish what should be done.

C is the one who is independent from the medium, not only in terms of insurance. The remnant and reconstruction of the autonomous, middle-class artist. At the most, the notorious *society* has a big influence on him. If one is lucky, then what he has made can, as the text of the contract states, be “exploited” quite well; this luck will be compelled by both sides. This super-author is an event in himself. He belongs to the allegedly existing world that the medium can take as an opportunity to report on.

For B, it applies that he despises A and aspires to a C or C-like condition. C does not at all share the amazement B cherishes above all for himself. A is most like an employee, least like an artist. If A goes about it correctly, then he is really hauling in a lot of dough.

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I started as an A man, for whom there is no real role formula in culture. After about five years, I worked my way up to a B man; how it happened, I can't entirely explain. Most important is probably that I was able to define myself as a minor intellectual through my work outside the broadcaster. (Broadcasters distrust house intellectuals a lot.) Today, it is expected of me that I produce programs *about something*⁵ with authorial expression. (Expression—not utterance.) My voice should emerge from the apparatus as my voice out of the apparatus.

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In 1971, I was eager to talk about how I was now desperate enough to kill someone in order to be able to do what I intended. Instead, Bitomsky and I sent a dozen proposals to even more places, offering ambitionless information segments. At the time, we did not understand at all why we were not allowed to carry any of them out. We had transgressed the rules, had acted like B men for A jobs. The producers

weren't stupid. It only makes for extra work if one gives everyday jobs to people with big ideas. They also feel threatened. One person, when I meet him at the station, gives me the feeling of the tragic injustice of this world that does not want to list me as a C man. It's as bad as with those doctors who in hard times had to break stones.



That every notion of quality is connected to status and ostentatious authorship completely confuses me. Not too long ago, a job that was already approved and that I am sure is politically important and that I could communicate through television, was canceled. Another editorial department that knew about it⁶ asked me if I would be ready or wanted to go to a festival and do a ten-minute report on it. While I was there, I found the films impossible, feeling at the same time that a report about the impossibility of the films would turn out too similar to them. I called the editorial department; the crew was called back. I received a cancellation fee of 500 marks; the flight had already cost 280 and the hotel 50. I felt pangs of remorse for having wasted three days, got in touch with the editorial departments of two radio stations, and wrote two not identical articles for them. I needed another two days for that and did it for 350 marks; for the television piece, I would have received 1,500. As I hacked the films to pieces in writing, I felt like someone skinning animals. Conscience hither and conscience thither. The worst thing about this wretched story is that, shortly after, I knew how I could have reported on the festival in a very decent manner. That it hadn't occurred to me was less because I am too good for the production model and more because I would like to be too good. As I delivered the radio pieces, I met an editor from my Class A time. He tried again as he had before and asked why I used the word *film* twice in a row (probably instead of *flick* and *celluloid*). But I only had to furrow my brow in order to prevail. So that had changed.

In a garden café near the SFB,⁷ a cameraman said to me: television is not Antonioni, television is the camera that is pointed at the running clock. Someone who had dropped out said he wouldn't have any films to show; he had only made a few shots. Although—and in this way I am a Class B freelancer—I am commissioned to produce articles with my byline, I have already succeeded in making anonymous things that are good. Of course, I had to feel like someone who cleans his apartment with a toothbrush after a long sickness in order never again to lose the overall view. Dreams of production in the sign-factory, media factory worker.

During a visit to the editorial department of the *St. Pauli Nachrichten*, I was allowed to write the caption to a nudie pic. A desk at which one can sit and write the captions to hundreds of photos of nude girls in a series.

In '66, I entered the film school in Berlin. After my expulsion and its multiplication through news coverage and a few films that one could call representative of the student movement, I acquired a second life with a different value for the TV production and distribution apparatus.

Bitomsky and I were able to show two films on TV that spoke about economic and political questions without the whole wriggling through the usual TV prohibitions and taboos. However, the TV showed these films not as a program but as films by us. Insofar as we were something *political*, we were put on the same level as artists. We made guest appearances and after the 1968 *revolution* did its service for the middle class—namely, redeployment in the service sector—we were thrown out the door.⁸ We were offered asylum in the teleplay department. We couldn't think of anything to say to fit this production scheme. We failed to look like people suitable for the repertory. We also failed to look like people pursuing our own work.⁹ I heard everyone would only have one chance. In 1974, then, I had to reject two chances to break into category C (over *big* films).

Sometimes one realizes that, apart from the norms set by the job market, other standards exist.

H. Färber wrote that there are good films that are made with the apparatus and ones that are made without the apparatus. The writing in our magazine mainly substantiates how quality can only be imagined as something made without, and therefore against, the apparatus. The question of how one should address the contradictions in actual production is hardly addressed. It has already been shown in other businesses besides broadcasting that if one is more than a representative—in a worker's council, for example—then one already has a conflict of interest with the staff. Should one try to become a manager to prevent something worse? In the end here all that comes to mind is pushing *a work* through via a good position in the supplier market.



And Bitomsky says: there is only adaptation to the apparatus or resistance out of coquetry. Nothing is more embarrassing than when an addict stops paying attention to his own addiction. If I were to name names here, I would only be signaling for whom I can no longer work or where I no longer need to.

Portrait of a Scumbag¹⁰

There's a story about a guy who asked the head of programming what plans he was in favor of. He then traveled to where the head of programming was also spending his vacation. Coincidentally ran into him. Recited what the head of programming wanted to hear. He then became head of the department and during a so-called approval screening acted out what I had heard in disbelief from him. Only in retrospect did what he was doing strike me as the calculation of a scumbag; as it was happening, everything proceeded as smoothly as at the teller station of a bank that is not being held up. The senior department head had come and was looking at my program on the editing table. In the event it was no good, the then-absent producer would be responsible. The department head in question was the boss of the absent person, who had had the worst objections to my program; only out of his tolerance had he allowed his subordinates (who were never called as such but were addressed only as colleagues who didn't know better) to do it. Now during the inspection, he precisely did not come at the beginning of the film, but after the first ten minutes of the discussion that must follow this kind of screening. He checked out how the conversation was going and noticed that the producer and his senior department head found the program nice. He got involved in the discussion, used *you*, *I*, and *we* interchangeably, and this soon went so far that it became his film. Before the conversation had even finished, he was running through the building to spread the word that he had made something really nice that this time his boss also liked. On another occasion his department had money, and the producers were in favor of me receiving it. He had no objections to my project; he simply *forgot* about it and out of impersonal reasons gave the money to his wife, who had married him for love. He was also flushed into the broadcaster in '68. Even he finds it embarrassing that his role is cast by someone so trivial and how much he vulgarized the level of the discussions.

Otherwise, everything is much more convoluted in my relationship with the people who are in control of my economic existence. I already have an almost ten-year-long professional relationship with one of them. Before he accepts something from me, he always forces me—as part of my private relationship with him—to submit to him. Sometimes I only need to hint at the business during a phone call; my resistance lies in the fact that, against all pragmatic reasoning, I delay the moment of submission every single time.

After I have submitted, I reproach myself for not having contributed to rationalizing the situation. For example, that after a rejection, I don't feel like also hearing the explanation and having to acknowledge something in it. I prefer experiencing

this as a defeat. In this way, I can always celebrate the projects I do land as victories. That thrilling tension when one has sent something away and the letter from the broadcaster will soon come. Reproaches: the complicity is so blatant and the joint guilt so powerful for freelancers that it is better just to lay it on others.

There were producers who turned me down for a job on the grounds that I earned too much, while I was earning half as much as them in the course of the year. They then gave the job to people who earned three times as much as them. But they had expected more from me than from themselves. They needed to punish me because I reproached them for having allowed them to expect something from me.

One person took this to an extreme. When I was working on something, he became interested in it on a purely intellectual level, and when I wanted to pack part of it in a film can to sell he would indignantly refuse this. He then made me the offer to take on something else for which my incompetence was clear from the outset. That's how he remained the dispenser of mercy.

There are also two people, however, who hired me like the Nature Theater of Oklahoma hires job seekers.

And if there is still advice to be given in this industry, if you have no work, don't deregister your car, don't apply for a rent subsidy, don't follow a retraining program, don't drive a truck, don't take the teaching qualification test. Because those who regulate whether or not one has money will not tolerate that one questions their 2-, 3-, or 4-thousand-mark existence (sometimes the wife even *contributes*) to the extent that one can live worse for a lesser degree of alleged or actual parasitism. They will never want to have anything to do with such a person again. If you stop, you are out of the market, and then the solidarity of the middle bourgeoisie will not come to the rescue.



And the reasons why one can or cannot do something remain entirely in the dark.

It is always about how something had already been done, it didn't belong where I left it for the past two years, it was not the right time now, and so it wasn't convincing; even if a producer had accepted something once and it was moved through the official channels, the producer had to request an adjustment, filled me in that he had added something for tactical reasons and omitted something for strategic reasons—even then, when only approval could come or even a rejection *in writing*, there came only an explanation such as: wrong department, contract form is



unusual, currently too much. Not once does one receive the gratification of a beggar when he is told he shouldn't let himself be seen here again.

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These are but abstractions, and my working life does not look like this. Currently, I have personal relationships that cost 2,000–3,000 marks per month.¹¹ To earn this money, I must make 4,000–5,000 marks per month through jobs, since there is still lost time between jobs. I have access to television programs that pay 7,000–10,000 marks for script and direction and radio broadcasts that pay 2,000–3,500 marks per hour of writing. If I do not manage the completion and preparation of the jobs so that the monthly average is met, I must supplement my income with short texts that are faster to create and faster to place. Others are much better off; one work continues upon another. (Development = biography = career)

Others are much worse off; their work depends on the vicissitudes of the apparatus.

Company-like Conduct 1:

I am attempting a compound system of my work [*einen Verbund meiner Arbeit*] following the model of the steel industry, where every waste product flows back into the production process and barely any energy is lost. I am financing the basic research about the material through a radio broadcast, I discuss certain books, which I studied in relation to my research, in radio programs about books, and much of what I view during this work is incorporated in TV broadcasts. If I am successful with this composite method, I can achieve more than usual. For a program about history books, driving to an archive, and inspecting a furnace; but still less than is necessary.

Company-like Conduct 2:

Approximately half of the money is paid upon delivery, the rest upon broadcast, and even then at least fourteen days later. Without the interest that is received on fees paid late, every broadcaster would have one floor less.

Due to this situation, I must reserve money for the next months or acquire *sufficient extra assignments*. I must be sure about my future; while I am working I must always resecure the future for myself. I make phone calls in order to con-

firm while speaking that there is a future without which there is no present.

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Sending a letter with a synopsis or a proposal. Having an iron in the fire. Receiving a rejection and telling oneself that one could have anticipated this. Receiving a rejection and telling oneself that everything is now over. Approval, a money transfer, and payday are marked as in the past with champagne in the room next door. Calling a producer to ask if it has really worked out. He's on his lunch break and should call back at four. He doesn't call back because he is in a conference; today is Friday. On Tuesday, I call again; he hasn't been able to deal with it yet. Those were then three days in which the present was absent. The desire to be confirmed through reactions out of the apparatus becomes ever more insatiable. Sometimes I was in a delirium of accumulation, collecting more projects than I could undertake.

At the port in Hamburg, there were spots where the unemployed without papers gathered. A man with assignment sheets would come; everyone shoved and shouted, "Me, Mr. Ehlers, me!" Mr. Ehlers would always look the people in the eyes first, even if he had more sheets than there were people. Some managed to snatch two or three assignment sheets for the same shift.

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There were times when I was making multiple productions in multiple cities and planned the texts or tasks for the coming days in the TEE¹² or JET.¹³ There were even times when I read through the libraries during five months for a fee of 1,000 marks. I was really excited with myself until I realized that I only wanted to put myself into a situation in which I had to accept everything, in which I could *no longer really afford to have scruples*.

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This has nothing to do with biography (if there is one). This is about the description of work relationships.

Notes

Originally published as Harun Farocki, "Notwendige Abwechslung und Vielfalt," *Filmkritik* 224 (August 1975): 360–69.

1. *Redakteur* in German, a position akin to a producer in the American TV industry or to a commissioning editor in the United Kingdom.—*Trans.*
2. Rundfunk-Fernseh-Film-Union (Radio-Television-Film Union).—*Trans.*
3. Allgemeine Ortskrankenkasse, an association of health insurers.—*Trans.*
4. Westdeutscher Rundfunk (West German Broadcasting Company).—*Trans.*
5. The system and dogma of bourgeois evidence. The apparatus needs opportunities to raise its voice. Someone asked the Nazis if the fascist Romanian ambassador could deliver a speech *on the radio*. Answer: that's not possible, but he can deliver a speech around here and we can *broadcast* it on the radio. TV news still only exists because someone said something, but he said it *in front of* certain people so that it is an *opportunity* and not an *opinion*. The press department does nothing else than invent opportunities about which one can give one's opinion. Even I am dependent on opportunities in my production. I stand between those (A) who ostensibly only echo what is and those who therefore create the opportunity that they are (C).
6. Consolation, humiliation, compensation?
7. Sender Freies Berlin (Radio Free Berlin).—*Trans.*
8. I am following the conception of history according to which the dates of the bourgeois revolution were 1848 (economic), 1919 (political), and 1968 (cultural).
9. G.P. Straschek provided a good description of how this happened in issue 8/74.
10. Yet another line from the contract: "The contracting party is especially responsible that the work, including the title, contains no references to persons or experiences that are undisclosed to the WDR."
11. Sustenance for a four-person family split between two apartments, two cars, two phones, and so on due to marital breakdown.
12. Trans-Europ-Express.—*Trans.*
13. An airplane.—*Trans.*