

## Invisibli

1. Indeed this project is a very curious one: first of all, could you explain what exactly you do with this “service”?

1. The Absageagentur (rejection agency) is a project from Katrin Lehnert and Thomas Klauck, providing the gratis service to send rejection letters instead of applications. Our “clients” can choose any job posting that they would like to reply to with a rejection letter via internet ([www.absageagentur.de](http://www.absageagentur.de)) or come to our office in Berlin (open 1.04. – 13.05.2005). We provide assistance in writing the letters and send them free of charge to the employers. We have developed three standard rejections but prefer clients to formulate their own letters. Our project has an open character: we do not want to dictate why people should send a rejection to a certain company and for what reasons. They should articulate their critique themselves - we just deliver the format.

2. How did the idea come out?

2. The idea of the rejection agency emerged in spring 2004. At this time, there were intense public debates concerning the reforms of the labour market in Germany, especially concerning the introduction of Hartz IV on 01.01.2005. It is the most significant intervention into Germany’s social structure since 1945, implying drastic economic and social worsening for many. Additionally to countless cuts in the social sector, unemployed now can be forced to any kind of work regardless of their qualifications. At the same time, so-called “One Euro”-jobs were established that shall “introduce” recipients of social welfare to the labour market. In reality, they destroy regular jobs and provide cheap labour force without any employee rights to the market. Considering this background, we had the desire to involve ourselves in the public debate on employment and to contribute a symbolic act against the “fetishisation” of employment. Hence, we got the idea to turn the tables and to write rejections instead of ingratiating to the unattractive job market. Our design id geared to the employment agency (“Arbeitsagentur”), since it symbolises the reforms and their enforcement to us.,

3. Why people should ask for your help?

3. The project is an experiment to us. When we started, we did not know whether anybody would write a rejection at all. Meanwhile, we have forwarded more than 70 letters. There are various reasons to write a rejection, because of the open character of the project. Maybe one could distinguish three main groups of motivations why people use our service, which often overlap. The critical group writes rejections because they refuse to base human identity upon the idea of employment and use our initiative to challenge the principle „Employment determines human value“. The second group aims to unveil certain practices of industries or employees. It has become common to hire unpaid interns or to offer under-paid jobs with increasingly bad working conditions. This is possible because there are always enough people who would still accept such a position. The proportion of freelancers, self-employed and people working in the art or cultural sector is the highest in this group of rejection writers since precarious job situations are especially increasing in those fields. The last group uses rejections to let off personal frustration about failing applications, current employment situations or pressure from the employment agency. They leave behind their defensive or resigned attitude and communicate again at the same eye level with employers.

4. Germany is also the homeland of Krisis' group theories against work. Did these ideas influence your thought? And if so, how? (see [www.krisis.org](http://www.krisis.org) for more info)

4. We do not know in detail the position and papers of the group Krisis but are partly informed about the debate on labour/employment in leftist journals and groups and, hence, are indirectly influenced by the group Krisis. We consider Krisis' „Manifest gegen die Arbeit“ (manifest against the work) an important contribution to the understanding of why employment is so highly valued in society and especially in Germany.

5. I think your project is interesting because it may be considered as a sort of educational mean. If more and more workers refuse a bad job, maybe a lack of labour will arise from. So, companies might be forced to offer better jobs and wages. Is this point of view present in your project?

6. Do you aim to a sort of rescuing from the work, or you'd simply like to obtain a better job for everyone?

5. + 6. We do not believe our initiative - can encourage the „working class“ to reject so many badly paid jobs that employers would have to offer better conditions. It would be great but is not our aim. On the one hand, because many are forced to accept any job to survive. On the other hand, because it is not our goal to foster dependent employment. Although it is important to make public bad working conditions and to reject them, it does not really attack the idea of employment-based identity and the exploitation of labour. As long as social life is structured through employment and the value of an individual is defined by the prestige of his job, people will rather work under bad conditions or without payment than not work, in order to participate in society. First of all, people need to stay true to their own demands – at least in mind – in order to claim better working conditions for everybody. The main goal of the rejection agency is to encourage people to pay attention again to their own demands and to stand for them in public. That may also imply the realisation that one does not necessarily need money and employment. We agree with the following quote of Viviane Forrester who writes in her book „The economic horror“: „ It is less the lack of jobs what is disastrous but much more the scandalous living conditions of those who are affected; the rejection, the anxiety that is forced on everybody who loses his job. And the fear of the vast majority that accepts increasingly stronger pressure out of fear to lose their jobs.“

Only if our value is not defined by employment only, the lack of jobs cannot be used anymore to enforce pressure or power.

7. What about the situation of temporary workers in Germany? Was there some difference between left-wing and right-wing policies, or not?

7. If “left” refers to the red-green federal government, we could not claim that there are essential differences concerning job or social policy. Christ conservative parties and the liberals are only somewhat more aggressive in their ideological choice of words. However, there is consensus, ranging from the extreme right (NPD) to the established parties and the PDS: Jobs for Germans first and bad jobs are better than no jobs.

8. What is your thought about the so called “basic income”?

8. We think that an existential subsistence would be the first step into the right direction, to separate work from life. Of course, there should be no obligation to work and the subsistence has to be sufficient enough to actually live a decent life. That means, leisure as well as cultural activities would have to be affordable: In order to participate in social life, it has to be financially possible to go to the theatre or cinema or to stop by a coffee shop – which is not possible for the recipients of Hartz IV.

Though, we still see the danger that people will continue to define themselves by their employment, even with existential subsistence, and a divided society of two classes would emerge: on the one side people who have work and on the other side people who get existential subsistence. As long as it is considered unethical not to work, nothing will change.

9. According to you, what can/should be done to fight job precarity?

9. We do not have a universal remedy. Basically, we consider it as crucial to criticise the value of employment, to reject bad jobs and to demand a sufficient existential subsistence without the obligation to work as first steps. Until then, the relative autonomy of precarious job conditions may be of advantage for some individuals, as long as it does not lead to economic grievance. For many it is certainly not. However, one has to consider that precarious employment in secrecy has always been a foundation of capitalistic structures. So far, women and illegalised migrants were primarily affected by precarious employment situations: They are the ones who guarantee the smooth flow of urban life, for instance, by cleaning whole offices complexes. If those people do not have a European passport they won't benefit from the existential subsistence.