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Magazin für Kunstkritik

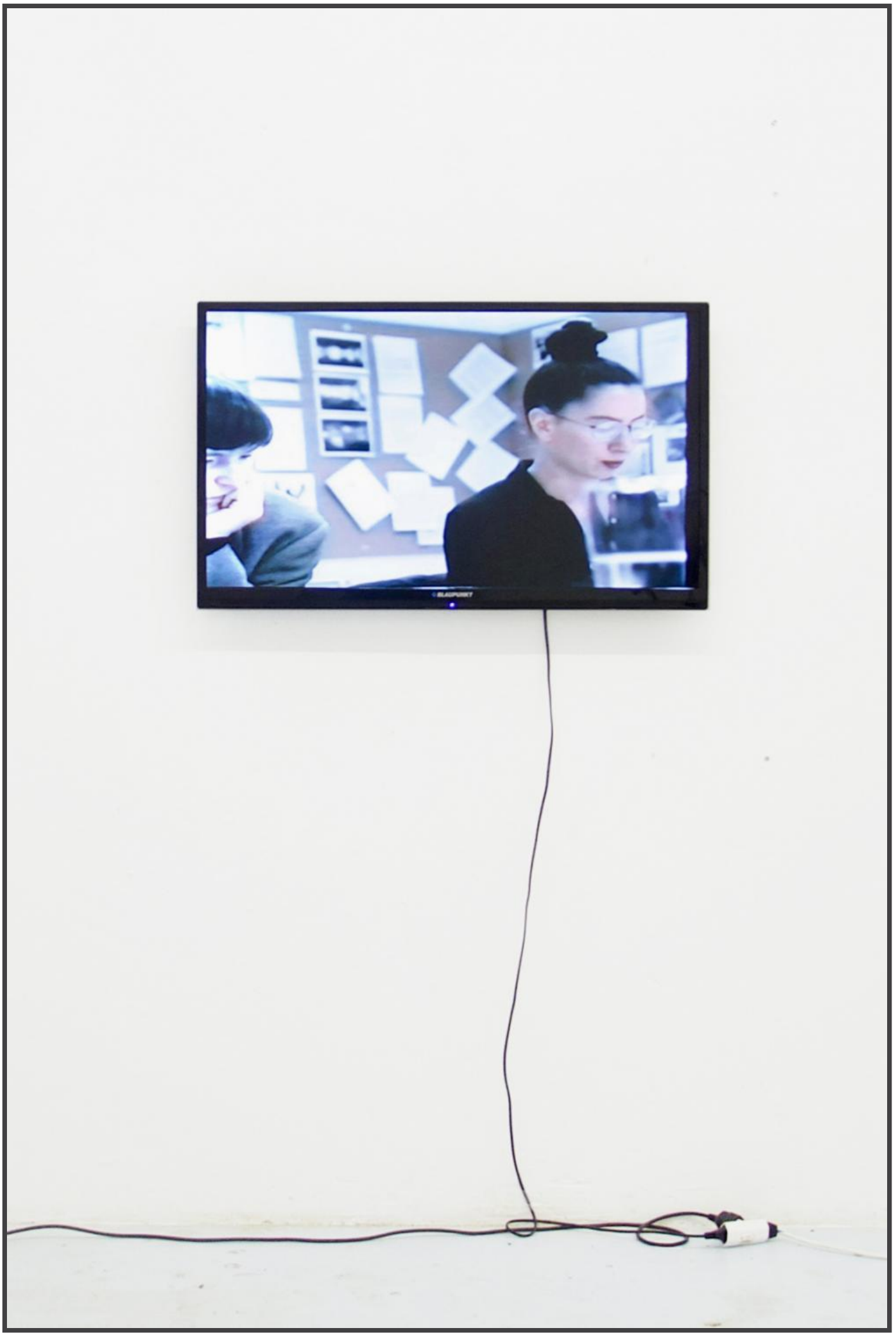
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# Scenes about services and capitals

Hans-Christian Dany, Marc Hunziker, Ramaya Tegegne, Stephan Dillemuth

Picking up on Andrea Fraser & Helmut Draxler's *Services*, which addressed questions of labor in the art field, Ramaya Tegegne invited Stephan Dillemuth, one of the participants of the working-group meetings inaugurating the 1994 project, to take part in a public discussion about current perspectives departing from this event. This conversation took place on November 10th, 2017 in the framework of the exhibition *Szenen über Services und Kapitalien* by the two artists at Up State in Zurich, as well as the initiative *Wages for Wages Against* carrying forward the debate on fees in return for artistic services within Switzerland.



«My motive for initiating *Services* came from the complications and conflicts I experienced as a result of entering into relations with curators and organizations which were not regulated by accepted standards of professional practice, as well as from the frustration of working full time and for very prestigious exhibitions yet still not being able to make a living.» Andrea Fraser (*How to Provide an Artistic Service: An Introduction*, Depot, Vienna, 1994)

Ramaya Tegegne: What was the context of the project *Services: Conditions and Relations of Project Oriented Artistic Practice*, which took place in 1994 at the Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg?

Stephan Dillemuth: At the beginning of the 90's a shift occurred in the art world. The commercial art market was in recession. I was involved with some friends in a network of autonomous spaces similar to Up State. The idea behind self-organization was that artists would take things into their own hands: exhibitions, writing and publishing activities, as well as the Internet (which was in its early days at the time). This slowly became an attitude many artists became interested in and could identify with. Some strategies devised in these fields, were taken up quite quickly. Artists started to critically reflect on the new economical relationships such as globalization and neo-liberalization. Of course, the transition happened already in the 80's and even the 70's, but in West Germany this new order suddenly became more apparent than before, if you paid attention. For instance, some representatives of industries invited to talk shows on TV started to openly blackmail: «Global competition exists, so if you don't reduce wages, we will just relocate our factories to places where labor is cheaper.» As a result, various strategies and analytical tools were developed in order to understand the new shape of our economy. That is when what was called «institutional critique», spearheaded by figures such as Mark Dion and Andrea Fraser, spread from the United States to West Germany and became quite influential. And Fraser's collaboration with Helmut Draxler led to the idea of *Services*.

RT: One of the intentions of *Services* was then to understand how these new economic models manifested themselves in the context of art. In this regard, it was identifying «project work», such as site-specific, post-studio or public art activities, as under- or even un-compensated and unrecognized labor versus product-related art, right?

SD: The new regime of neo-liberalism has changed society into a service society. It encouraged people to see their own agenda as a service, and jobless people to invent their own so-called «Ich-AG», a ‹one-person stock corporation› as it was officially named in Germany. Fraser and Draxler's suggestion was to consequently consider everything artists do as service provision, including selling a painting to a museum. This then raised the question of the nature of the exchange? Not necessarily the exchange with the institution, but also beyond it, with the audience, with communities, with other artists, and so forth.




Exhibition view of *Grauepanther* at Friesenwall 120, Cologne, 1990

RT: Why were you invited to participate in the project? What was your contribution to it?

SD: Every participant was asked to describe her or his own practice. At that time, I was running Friesenwall 120 in Cologne in collaboration with Joseph Strau, Nils Norman, Kiron Khosla and Merlin Carpenter. It was a storefront artist-run space to some extent similar to the one we are sitting in right now. We were not really putting up exhibitions of our friends and colleagues but rather doing weird shows. The first one was just showing piles of car tires, another one was giving the space away to the Gray Panther Organization (a senior's association), another show was a collaboration with Roberto Ohrt about the Situationist International. So it was more about trying out different approaches, experimenting with exhibition-making, and playing with possible definitions of the space. FW120 created a certain social situation. It increasingly became a space for part of the art community. We had a videotape archive. People came to watch films or brought their own and showed them. There was an exchange going on.

RT: What kinds of videos were in the archive?

SD: They were videos from an archive some friends of a more autonomous spectrum started in Munich. In the 70's, the idea of counter-publics emerged. These people were collecting videotapes from secret sources or stole them from the world of industry, such as advertising for tanks. The videos also included footage about strikes or squattings. What was important was that our activities created a social scene. We didn't see ourselves as the only ones running FW120. The audience in turn also contributed to the space. We were open to suggestions and participations. So the exchange was mutual if we talk about services now. Probably the same thing is happening here at Up State.

RT: So the unedited video recordings of the *Services* event you've brought for the exhibition today was for your archive?

SD: Yes, exactly, it was for the archive. Video devices and tapes became really cheap at that time. That's why people would take the camera along wherever they went and bring back some footage, so the others could see it.

RT: Did you give the tapes to the organizers?

SD: No, there was also a professional recording of the event with a good camera. I mean, it took place at a university. Lüneburg was actually one of the first schools to offer cultural studies. And as part of the curriculum they were running the Kunstraum. So the students were doing the camera, setting everything up and other things. In fact, the students were used as service providers, but that was not really something that was addressed in the discussions. (laughs)

RT: You told me earlier the students were also doing a counter-space, right?

SD: Hans-Christian maybe you could join in? Heike Munder was one of those students, right?

Hans-Christian Dany: Yes, the students started another space and tried to do something else, something more… fresh. It was, for some reason, rather market-oriented, less about discussions. They wanted a space where you could see things.

SD: And they named it Halle für Kunst, even though in the beginning it was in the garage of their shared flat. It's funny the students already did a counter-space. And now Heike Munder is running the Migros Museum für Gegenwartskunst. But, then, I'm a professor now, what can I say. (laughs)



Unedited footage by Stephan Dillemuth of the working-group prior the to exhibition Services: Conditions and Relations of Project Oriented Artistic Practice at the Kunstraum der Universität Lüneburg, 1994

RT: The *Services* project took place in 1994. Today artists are providing services to institutions and still struggle to make a living from their artistic practice. So what has happened in the past 25 years? Why are we again discussing the issue? What is the problem and why can we not solve it?

SD: We are not sitting here again to discuss this, but again AND again. The main achievements in the field, at least in Central Europe, occurred in the late 60's and 70's. The German Association of Visual Artists (BBK) established reforms such as cheaper health insurance for artists and a copyright system for artists as well as writers. Kunst am Bau, or Art in Architecture, was introduced as well, a program ensuring that a certain percentage of the construction budget of new public or corporate buildings will be given to an art fund. But this percentage kept going down and down, so did artists' fees. At the beginning of the 90's, a lot of these achievements were almost lost. Others, of course, were taken for granted, at least in West Germany, but probably not in the U.S. or other countries. That's probably why we felt a need to discuss this in the early 90's and again today.

RT: What is your experience with artists' fees? Do you regularly receive them?

SD: Well, they decreased substantially. Nowadays, I'm used to amounts around 300 euros per show, which, of course, doesn't even cover expenses. It means you would have to do at least 10 shows a month to actually make a living (laughs), and that's impossible. But at least it's a gesture, I would say. And there are so many other things that come into play. I mean, having a larger budget for a show makes me happier than being paid a fee.

RT: Maybe because you have the possibility to support yourself in a different way?

SD: Well, right now I'm living on my income from the academy of fine arts rather than on artist fees or sales.

RT: I was wondering, what would be your contribution today to an invitation to talk about artistic services?

SD: Probably something similar to what I said then. It's important for artists to organize themselves, in spaces like Up State for instance. I'm more interested in a word like ‹bohemia› and what it evokes, searching for ways of exchange different from wages or commodity sales systems. Of course, these other worlds exist and we are interacting with them. Therefore, artists should ask for fees, for production money and so forth. Nowadays ideas such as «Universal Basic Income» enter the equation too. In German, it's called «Bedingungsloses Grundeinkommen», which means something slightly different, «unconditional» rather than «universal». In other words, you would receive it no matter what activity you pursue.

HCD: To return to the question what has happened over the past 25 years, I think things have changed quite substantially. The concept behind *Services* actually evolved into something problematic: a professionalization of artistic work from a neoliberal perspective. Every request made and achieved has been turned into the exact opposite. Based on that experience, I think we should think twice when raising again the question whether artists should ask for wages. Isn't it affirming the neoliberal agenda over and over again? How do you see this in retrospective?

SD: I am now a professor. Becoming State employees has for a long time already been a usual career step for artists. And I don't necessarily feel like I am on the bandwagon of neoliberalism. As an artist, the two options of either selling commodities or providing services wouldn't sustain me at all. If I didn't have my professorship, I would have to either make nicer works (laughs) or accept a different job.

HCD: This is somehow saying it's an unsolvable problem. I mean, can there be any kind of solution in the given system? That would rather be the question.

SD: Perhaps there are several solutions. The artist and activist Jakob Jakobsen, for example, co-established an artist union in Denmark that became quite successful. Lots of people joined and many of their demands were met by the government. But a union may not be enough. Also the field is split into several sub-categories such as market-artists, project-artists, etc. There are different ways to survive.

Public: Today's situation is interesting. I mean, I would like to ask the Up State team what they think of discussing wages in a squat? With regard to how this space is operating and to the conditions of their work. Isn't it somehow going beyond the wage?

Marc Hunziker (Up State): It relates to what Stephan was calling bohemia, the idea of a self-sustained economy that operates by a different logic. And it is common sense in a squat that there isn't any wage for the labor you provide. This is a legacy of the history of the 90's scene here in Zurich. It's a different form of organization, I would say.

Public: But it's also kind of a luxury.

MH: Yes, for sure it's form of privilege. I would like to come back to the limits of demanding wages for artistic work. From what I understand, this campaign is asking for fees when working for non-profit art institutions in order to move towards other forms of production and presentation as well as circumvent the art market.

RT: Yes, to find ways to sustain your practice outside the rules imposed by the commercial market.

MH: So it's an attack on speculation and a desire to create conditions of production removed from the pressure of the market. But then this somehow leads to demands for a more radical transformation. The webpage of your campaign features this quote from Silvia Federici «They say it is love, we say it is unwaged work» from her 1975 essay *Wages Against Housework*. The demands of *Wages for Housework* groups were going beyond remuneration for domestic labour. They were actually taking it as a revolutionary perspective, as a strategy towards a more radical re-organization of society, to subvert the role to which women have been constrained.



Discussion at Up State Zurich during the duo show *Scenes about services and capitals* by Stephan Dillemuth and Ramaya Tegegne, 2017

RT: The name of our campaign, *Wages For, Wages Against*, actually comes from there. And we are using this quote to draw a parallel between housework and artistic work, while being mindful of the limits of such a comparison. The demand for wages for housework was intended to reveal or proclaim that housework is, in fact, work. And because it is not paid for the sake of love or passion, it has no value and therefore hasn't been considered as work. We use this reference to exemplify that unpaid artistic work is work as well.

HCD: As mentioned, this text is from the 70's and a lot has happened since then. Many things people were usually doing for free are now seen as work. People no longer give lifts, they are driving a Uber. People no longer offer rooms, instead renting them on Airbnb. Many of these forms of interpersonal relations are now commercialized. I think the Marxist discourse of calling everything work is extremely problematic. As you said before, Marc, doing things for free comes from a tradition, as in the case of the squat projects. I think it's really important to reflect on those monetary-free zones where money has no rule, no power. We have to keep that in mind. Of course, it is completely understandable that everyone has to make his or her living. It is nonetheless problematic that Marxism has become a perfect basis for neoliberalism. I mean all those people who built up the system, they all read Marx, or they were Marxist before, for example one of the organizers of this conference in Lüneburg turned out to be, a perfect agent of neoliberal education. I try to distinguish for myself between the rules of survival and the rules of living. Unfortunately, there is always a dark shadow lying over those strategies of survival. I mean, most of us somehow are trying to survive, but we should keep on fighting for a better living as well.

Public: It's kind of interesting to think of survival. You mentioned Airbnb, but today many artists in New York, for examples, survive because they rent out their rooms and stay with their boy- or girlfriends. It's a dilemma, I mean. Also, I'm assuming that Stephan is not speaking for free here tonight?

MH: He is actually doing it for free, that’s how it is.

SD: I also helped to scrape the posters off the wall, to wipe the floor, and to wash the dishes. (Laughs) But I thought that’s part of a contract here, to engage in the exchange structure. I’m still very happy. (Laughs) But I can afford it.

HANS-CHRISTIAN DANY

Artist and writer based in Hamburg

STEPHAN DILLEMUTH

Artist and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts, Munich.

MARC HUNZIKER

Marc Hunziker finished his studies at the University of the Arts in Zürich in 2016. Current solo and collaborative exhibitions include *Lumpen Headache*, DIANA, Los Angeles (with Chantal Kaufmann, Rafal Skoczek, Matthias Ringgenberg); *Leisure Time Fantasy*, The Green River Project, Hillsdale, New York (with Chantal Kaufmann); *Do You Think Im Dressed? Because Im Not!*, Taylor Macklin, Zürich; *Let The Hand Grasp It*, SSZ Süd, Köln. Current group exhibitions include *Speak Lokal!*, Kunsthalle Zürich; *Is There Anything You Want Before We Go?*, Forde, Geneva; *A Form Is Social Gatherer*, Plymouth Rock, Zürich.

RAMAYA TEGEGNE

Ramaya Tegegne is an artist and cultural organizer living in Geneva. She initiated the campaign *Wages For Wages Against* for the systematic remuneration of artists within Switzerland.

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doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.13930258