Emanuele Rinaldo Meschini
**Fixing a (Legal) Loophole. How a Group of Artists Used the
Venice Biennale to Improve the School System During the
Balkans War.**

Abstract

The text aims to study and question art practices in times of crisis by analysing the
case study of the Austrian collective WochenKlausur at the 1999 Venice Biennale.
The crisis that WochenKlausur's project investigated was the war in Kosovo and
the issue generated by the exodus in the nearby over-crowded refugee camps in
Macedonia and Albania. Using the Biennale's cultural capital, WochenKlausur was
able to establish a network of language schools at the border between Kosovo and
Macedonia. The text proposes a reading of this intervention through the theoretical
frame created by the curator of the Austrian Pavilion, Peter Weibel, in particular
through the concept of *Offene Handlungsfelder* (Open Practices). In light of this defi-
nition, some of the main interventions of WochenKlausur will be described below,
demonstrating how the Viennese collective has started to work through a concept
of field of action defined by urgency and by the crisis itself, in which dialogue and
long-term design has emerged as new artistic skills.

        In conclusion, through the theoretical example of Giorgio Agamben
the text offers a critical artistic re-location of WochenKlausur practices developed
in between the concept of camp and field, as a transversal action able to construct
symbolic objects and to activate a common and collective experience.

Keywords

Socially Engaged Art, Art Theory, Activism, Balkans War, Venice Biennale,
Community.

Fixing a (Legal) Loophole. How a Group of Artists Used the Venice Biennale to Improve the School System during the Balkans War.[1]

Emanuele Rinaldo Meschini

Relational and Social Engagement in the 1990s

The 1990s were an extremely accelerated decade from both a critical and artistic point of view: the ethical sphere of artistic intervention, and therefore its social implications, increasingly began to affect (even to compete) with the aesthetic quality of the work. In the same decade, a series of practices emerged and the new social, "post-political" climate, in Chantal Mouffe's definition, acted as an active sub-layer influencing the artistic choices that were previously made in the studio, clearly separating the phase of production from reception.[2] This shift from private studio to public space had been experienced previously but during the 1960s and 1970s, the artist's approach has remained authorial and the participation functional to the artwork. In many cases the creation of artworks has been guided by political ideologies that defined a priori the meaning of the work itself.[3] The concept

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During the writing of the essay, the author interviewed the founding member of WochenKlausur, Wolfgang Zinggl, about the intervention of the Viennese collective within the Venice Biennale in 1999. The video of the interview is available at this link: https://vimeo.com/578890106.

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Chantal Mouffe, *On the Political* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005). For the concept of post-political see also: Cornelius Castoriadis, *Démocratie et relativisme: Débats avec le MAUSS* (Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2010). The volume is particularly interesting because it addresses a conversation that took place in 1994 between Castoriadis and the researchers of *Revue du MAUSS* (*Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales*), including Serge Latouche, Alain Caillé, Jacques Dewitte and Chantal Mouffe.

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Within the context of the Venice Biennale of 1976, and with particular reference to the Italian practice, the exhibition *Ambiente come Sociale,* curated by art historian and critic Enrico Crispolti, had shown the possibilities of artistic participation within peripheral and provincial contexts, as also demonstrated by the previous actions *Volterra 73* and *Gubbio 76*. Due to a social lack, the interventions resulted as temporary moments of spatial redefinition or provisional reconstruction of meaning which turned out to be more functional for the artistic world than the broader social dimension, although they were at the initial phase in the artistic path towards social commitment. A well known example of this lack of dialogue between the cultural and political institution, is represented by the works of Nicola Carrino, Giuseppe Unicini, Carlo Lorenzetti, Teodosio Magnoni, Pasquale Santoro and Stefano Fiorentino inside the Nuovo Corviale public housing building in Rome. The building was started in 1975 and completed in 1984 and was supposed to be a Le Corbusier example of a self-sufficient micro-city. However, its positioning in an isolated area disconnected from the centre soon made it a synonym for social failure and ghettoisation. In this sense, the works that aimed to become, as per Crispolti's definition "a moment of appropriation and social use of the

of post-political was introduced by the pick strokes of thousands of people who broke down the Berlin Wall, which was the symbol of the last barrier of Manichean politics and the first step for real grassroots participation. As a consequence, theory and artistic practice both focused on what was beyond the wall until that moment, in particular in the redefinition of identity.[4] The cultural interest responds to this new urgency, with texts such as *The Predicament of Culture* (1988) by the anthropologist James Clifford underlining questions that could no longer be bypassed, like that of the ineffectiveness of a universal mono-cultural model. Above all, the fall of the Wall led to a new search for proximity. Marc Augé's text *Un ethnologue dans le métro* (1986), heralded the presence of the cultural other with all its disruptive force, especially for a Eurocentric, homogenous, mainly white and masculine culture. In this new context of openness it is worth mentioning exhibitions such as *The Other Story. Asian, African and Caribbean Artists in Post War Britain* (Hayward Gallery London, 1989) curated by Rasheed Araeen and the famous *Magiciens de la Terre* (Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989) curated by Jean-Hubert Martin. Among the many exhibitions which after *Magiciens de la Terre* contributed to the redefinition of the Eurocentric exhibitionary vision, was the *Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (Whitechapel, London 1995) curated by Clementine Deliss.[5] A new interest in developing urban communities began to grow and artistic practice immediately proved attentive, by grasping the influences of social science, anthropology and ethnography. Therefore, the issue was shifted to the topic of encounters and relationships with the *other*. It is departing from the theme of relationships—seen by many artists as a real urgency—that a rift of sorts developed between the American and the European responses in the 1990s. While in the US an independent agency related to federal government such as NEA (National Endowment for the Arts) decided to respond to such urgency through a structured approach and public funding, in Europe an intimist attitude was preferred: playful, still authorial, with the aim, above all, of finding themselves through the relationship with the other.[6] As the critic Roberto Pinto wrote in his afterword to the Italian translation of Nicolas Bourriaud's text, *Relational Aesthetics*:

> The situation overseas is very different: I would like to point out, for example, the Culture in Action exhibition held in Chicago between 1992 and 1993 because, although not directly attributable to the work of the French critic, it articulated the problem of the relationship with the viewer in a subtle and effective way since the entire project, curated by Mary Jane Jacob, was focused on the attempt to establish

work of art", turned out to be sculptural elements disconnected from their context. Translation by the author. See Enrico Crispolti, "Ambiente come sociale", in *Biennale di Venezia, Italian Pavillion 1976* (July 18 - October 10, 1976), exh.cat (Venezia: La Biennale di Venezia, 1976), 40; see also Enrico Crispolti, *Arti visive e partecipazione sociale. Da Volterra 73 alla Biennale 1976* (Bari: De Donato, 1977).

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In this regard it is worth mentioning the work done by the Former West project (2008-2016) organised and coordinated by BAK (Basis voor Actuele Kunst, Utrecht). Former West was a long-term transnational research, educational, publishing and exhibition project in the field of contemporary art and theory which was aimed at investigating the impact of the political, cultural, and economic events of 1989 for the contemporary condition. Former West hosted several meetings, panels and discussions: *Public Monuments in Changing Societies* by Edit Andras (19 March 2010), Claire Bishop's Lecture (30 April 2010), or *Postcolonial Critique and the End of the West* by Paul Gilroy (5 November 2009), just to name a few.

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Clementine Deliss and Jane Havell (eds.), *Art Against Apartheid, Seven Stories about Modern Art in Africa* (London: Whitechapel, 1995); Nomusa Makhubu and Carlos Garrido Castellano, "Creative Uprisings: Art, Social Movements and Mobilisation in Africa", *FIELD. A Journal for Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, no. 17 (2021), http://field-journal.com/editorial/creative-uprisings-art-social-movements-and-mobilisation-in-africa, accessed June 2021. The exhibition was developed together with five African curators, such as El Hadji Sy, a founder member of the *Laboratoire Agit'Art* group (Dakar). However, *Seven Stories* received Okwui Enwezor's critique for the lack of artists from the African diaspora and for the excessive westernisation of some of the chosen curators such as Wanjiku Nyachae who presented, according to Enwezor, a selection of works alluring for European galleries.

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For further research on public and community programmes granted by NEA see: Mark Bauerlein and Ellen Grantham (eds.), *National Endowment for the Arts: A History 1965-2008* (Washington: National Endowment for the Arts, 2009).

an active dialogue between the artists and the community in which they were called to work and with whom they conceived and carried out their artistic project. As a matter of fact, this exhibition implicitly shows that Bourriaud's perspective, as well as that of the majority of European curators, perhaps did not pay attention to the phenomenon taking place in the 1980s and early 1990s: the 'political' counter-proposal to "disengaged art that—while in Italy (and often in all of Europe) was struggling to find appropriate spaces—established itself in a solid and proactive way in the United States.[7]

In the first half of the 1990s, despite different types of artistic expressions two main forms emerged: socially engaged art and Relational Aesthetics. Although today we can see the specific differences between these two types of artistic activity—due also to the educational aspect that socially engaged art has been able to create over the years with the growth of undergraduate and masters programmes—when they were being developed the main distinction resided in the socio-political situations of their respective nations, therefore from a substratum independent from the artistic will.[8] As a matter of fact, in the United States the transition towards a socially engaged artistic practice occurred hand in hand with the reconstruction of a new approach to the public sphere, by moving from a concept of public art to one of new genre public art thanks to the redefinition of the three main characteristics of public art itself: funding, space, public. From a theoretical point of view, in this process of re-definition Suzanne Lacy's text *Mapping the Terrain* (1995) proved crucial, as well as the event *Culture in Action* (1993) curated by Mary Jane Jacob in Chicago, which was influential from a practice point of view. The work of the artist Martha Rosler was as important, particularly the project *If you lived here* (1989) which presented a visual response to the political and economic issues of urban housing, gentrification and houselessness in New York City. To complete the context of an organic theory, Grant Kester's essay *Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community* put the attention on the artistic delegation within community-based operations, by carefully examining the concept of a politically coherent community.[9]

By 1995 in the United States, new ways of social engagement were formulated, put into practice and criticised thanks to an endemically multicultural context that had built—not without problems—its plural identity in the relationship with the *other*. In Europe, in particular in Italy, there was a different social discourse under construction, especially in regard to the so-called politically coherent community, which, according to Kester, is a community not born through a process of delegation or an act of representation, but as result of a highly complex social and cultural process that serves to deconstruct those commonly accepted oppressive mores such as race, religion, class and sexuality.[10] Kester explains that this

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Roberto Pinto, "Il dibattito sull'arte degli anni Novanta" in Nicolas Bourriaud, *Estetica Relazionale* (Milano: Postmedia, 2010), 118-119. Translation by the author.

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Regarding the presence of programs focused on the theme of the socially engaged art, see the research funded by the Robert Rauschenberg Foundation (Artist as Activist Fellows) and the Compton Foundation: Alexis Frasz and Holly Sidford, *Helicon Collaborative, Mapping the Landscape of Socially Engaged Artistic Practice* (2017). See also the research *Options for Community Arts training & support* (2015) developed by the Center for the Study of Art & Community Consultant William Cleveland commissioned by the Intermedia Arts association. The Center for the Study of Art & Community Consultant William Cleveland, *Options for Community Arts Training & Support* (2015), 11.

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Grant H. Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art", *Afterimage*, no. 22 (1995): 5-11.

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Regarding the transformation of the Italian social fabric and therefore the presence of new communities of foreign residents, according to ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics), the first census in 1981 calculated the presence of 321,000 foreigners. About a third of foreigners could be considered "stable" and the rest just "temporary". In 1991 the number of resident foreigners doubled to 625,000. In the 1990s the migratory phenomenon continued to grow and, since 1993, it has been the sole reason for the growth of the Italian population. See: Maria Teresa Miccoli and Anna Pucci, *Dati statistici sull'immigrazione in Italia dal 2008 al 2013 e aggiornamento 2014* (Roma: Ufficio Centrale di Statistica, 2014).

community arises from an inner process and its consequent consensus formation. The development of this thought, in turn, evolves against the dominant culture and its systematic forms of oppression.[11] The point of interest that many of the practices of the 1990s began to seek concerned both the external dimension of the intervention and the public that would lead the art critic of the 2000s to redefine its judgment criteria. This passage, initially moving from the dichotomy between ethics and aesthetics (as in the quarrel on *Artforum* (2006) between the critics Grant Kester and Claire Bishop),[12] would arrive at its poetic formulation in the analysis of Boris Groys (*Going Public*, 2010). In the text, Groys analyses the dimension of artistic production intended as auto-poetic, which creates its own meaning in the factivity of the action by partially untying it from the reception of the publics who in turn (and regardless) draw an aesthetic experience from it. However, the realms of production and reception are not separated, as proposed in the early 2000s. On the contrary, they are so permeable as to place the artistic creation on an enlarged plan where the creative privilege loses its auratic quality but frees itself from the capitalist aesthetic judgment strictly related to consumption.

Biennale 1999 *dAPERTutto - Aperto Over All*

Given this general context, it is unsurprising that 1990s Venice Biennale exhibitions would focus on the complexity and richness of the research of those years. A first glimpse of this can be traced in Giovanni Carandente's interest around German con-temporary art production at the 1990 Biennale *Dimensione Futuro*, especially at the evocative exhibition *Ambiente Berlin* in the Central Pavilion. Another example was the 1993's Biennale curated by Achille Bonito Oliva, who offered the opportunity to reflect on the themes of coexistence and nomadism. These two terms also brought to the redefinition of space—both the physicality and conceptuality of the exhibitionary space—in transnational terms.[13] On that occasion, Hans Haacke—who represented the German Pavilion along with Nam June Paik—decided to completely dismantle the floor of pavilion in order to make visitors walk, metaphorically, on the ruins of the country. Analogous work could be found in the Russian Pavilion, where Ilya Kabakov presented "a comically small, patriotically painted shed, sug-gesting the petty rigidity and false consciousness of the old Soviet government".[14] However, it was the 48th edition of the Biennale, titled *dAPERTutto – Aperto Over All*, to mark the transition from an artistic production that is still authorial to one mainly participatory, dialogic and co-designed, presenting itself as a moment of

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"The politically-coherent community can come into existence almost anywhere there are individuals (women welfare recipients, prisoners, etc.) who have struggled to identify their common interests (and common enemies) over and against a social system that is dedicated to denying the existence of systematic forms of oppression". Kester, *Aesthetic Evangelists*, 6.

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The debate between Bishop and Kester took form on the columns of *Artforum* between February and May 2006. Regarding Bishop's first article, see: Claire Bishop, "The Social Turn: Collaboration and Its Discontents", *Artforum* 44, no. 6 (2006): 178-183. The entire quarrel between the two critics is reported in: Gabi Scardi (ed.) *Paesaggio con figura. Arte, sfera pubblica e trasformazione sociale* (Torino: Allemandi, 2011).

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In her text: "Towards a Contemporary Venice Biennale: Reassessing the Impact of the 1993 Exhibition" *OBOE Journal* 1, no. 1 (2020): 78-98, Clarissa Ricci reports that "With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, Europe and the world fundamentally changed, and some of the old national pavilions became politically problematic. Despite the fact that only a few pavilions were attuned to the concept, the introduction of 'transnationality' transformed the understanding of national representation. The 'transnational' being something of a cliché in Italian politics and it wasn't used often by Bonito Oliva. Rather, it was mostly implied as the practical result of the concepts of 'nomadism' and 'coexistence'. Nevertheless the term allowed the following exhibitions to adopt a more critical approach to 'national representation': 96.

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Thomas McEvilley, "Venice the Menace", *Artforum* 32, no. 2 (1993): 102-104.

spreading creativity. That edition, as well as the following one in 2001, was curated by Harald Szeemann.

The *zeitgeist* of the 1990s began, alongside the new spirit of the Biennale, where a fluid language and a participatory and dynamic attitude was preferred to divisions, thematic sections and classifications, especially national identifications. In fact, that was the spirits of Oreste, a group arose from the urgency of creating a non hierarchal space for network, communication and exchange between artists. Oreste was presented inside the Italian Pavilion close to the Giardino Scarpa and has represented perhaps the operation that most of all managed to collect the most interesting Italian artistic production of the 1990s in its anarchically relational version.[15] At the Giardini, not too far away from the main exhibition building, in the Austrian Pavilion, the curator Peter Weibel presented the exhibition *Offene Handlungsfelder* (Open Practices) where among the invited artists, was presented the work of the Viennese group WochenKlausur (hereafter WK) which transformed its concrete intervention and direct political action into aesthetic impact by conceiving the relationship in a programmatic way.

WochenKlausur. Intervention to Establish Language Schools in Kosovo, 1999. Image courtesy: WochenKlausur.

Peter Weibel's *Open Practice* and the Concrete Intervention of WochenKlausur

The title of the 48th edition of the Biennale *dAPERTutto – Aperto Over All*, set the basis for the opening of meaning, the absence of a pre-established hierarchy and the contemporaneity of the message between sender and receiver. Peter Weibel, curator of the Austrian Pavilion from 1993 to 1999, decided to decline this expression through the reinterpretation of Umberto Eco's "*opera aperta*" (open work).[16] The direct reference to Eco was enriched by a new context in which the viewer was not only the decisive piece of the final reception of the work, but became the subject in

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For a further analysis on Oreste project see: Caroline A. Jones, "Event Structures and Biennial Culture: Oreste at the Biennale", *OBOE Journal* 1, no. 1 (2020): 7-25.

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In the previous editions curated by Weibel the works from the following artists/collectives were presented: Biennale 1993, Andrea Fraser, Christian Philipp Müller, Gerwald Rockenschaub; Biennale 1995, Coop Himmellaub, Peter Kogler, Richard Kriesche, Constanze Ruhm, Peter Sandbishler, Eva Schlegel, Ruth Schnell; Biennale 1997, Die Wiener Gruppe.

full transformation towards the dimension of today's technological user, and also in terms of the dematerialisation of work.[17] Weibel saw in the practice of WK an arena of action that made possible to transform the concept of the closed and self-referential system of the aesthetic object and of artistic discourse itself into a plurality of fields of action. Although the concept of field, drew its most direct reference from the theories of Pierre Bourdieu. Weibel's choice found a perfect fit with the practice of WK, starting from the concept of generative practice that since 1993 the group had implemented in the form of direct and concrete intervention. Weibel, anticipating Groys's theories about auto-poetic artistic production,[18] clarified his statement and his definition of art as a non-ontological variant, extremely practical and able to reformulate the existing in the coincidence of the levels of production, reception, intention and aesthetic effect, so that art could break free from the conceptualisation of the interpretative level as a separate moment:

> I propose a variant of the definition of art that is not a statuisation, certainly not an ontological statuisation of art, but rather denotes its production, reception, intention, and effect-aesthetic dimensions, and that presents, among other things, the aspects of operativity, processuality, dynamism, and activity. This definition corresponds ideally to the practices of contemporary art, in that they use time and structure as material instead of the objects that until then limited the field of art, and create existential dispositifs.[19]

In his new form Weibel inserted the dimensions of time, processuality and dynamism to explain the work of WK that, after all, starting from their name, had made temporal dynamics one of their operative refrains.

WK, which can literally be translated as a week of cloister/closure, is a group formed in Vienna in 1993 starting from an initial idea by Wolfgang Zinggl regarding the effectiveness and value of art within social dynamics. Initially, the number of weeks required to complete a specific intervention was added to the name of the group. The first intervention took the name of *11WochenKlausur* and laid the foundations for what Weibel defined as "disrupt existing relations in surprising ways".[20] As a matter of fact, WK's operating mode immediately stood out not only for its actual effectiveness, in terms of realising concrete improvements for specific social situations, but also for its redefinition and alteration of the normal operating schemes of the social and political world. The work of WK at the time was known also in Italy and this can be deduced from the meeting on the European scenarios of public art that Oreste hosted in its space. The speakers were the collective *a.titolo* together with the critic Alessandra Pioselli and the title of the speech was *Public Art: European Experiences and Projects*.[21] On that occasion, WK's work is described as a European case study:

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In addition to WochenKlausur, Weibel invited the artists Ecke Bonk, Peter Friedl, Rainer Ganahl, Christine and Irene Hohenbüchler and Knowbotic Research. These last presented a collaborative digital project entitled *IO_lavoro immateriale*, in collaboration with the Italian group Luther Blisseth. The project, which was inspired by the Italian research of authors such as Maurizio Lazzarato and Toni Negri during the 1970s, involved the theorist Michael Hardt who published with Negri the text *Empire* in 1999.
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"[…] contemporary art should be analysed not in terms of aesthetics, but rather in terms of poetics. Not from the perspective of the art consumer, but from that of the art producer", Boris Groys, *Going Public* (Berlin: Sterneberg Press, 2010), Kindle position 123.
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Peter Weibel, "Offene Handlungsfelder", in *Biennale di Venezia, Austrian Pavillion 1999* (June 13 - November 7, 1999), exh. cat. (Venice: La Biennale, 1999), n.p.
20
Weibel, "Offene Handlungsfelder", n.p.
21
The speech was held in the Oreste space on October 3, 1999. The text is reported in a.titolo, Alessandra Pioselli, "Arte Pubblica: esperienze e progetti Europei", in Giancarlo Norese, Emilio Fantin and Cesare Pietroiusti (eds.), *Oreste alla Biennale* (Milano: Charta, 2000), n.p. *a.titolo* represented an important and problematic moment for public art in Italy, especially because it was the first non-profit organisation to activate, in 2001, the French programme *Les Nouveaux Commanditaires* aimed

WochenKlausur is a group of artists with a varying number of members, which acts through concrete activities, believing in the social responsibility of art. They work with local institutions and experts on problematic situations, such as unemployment, immigration and prostitution. In this way WochenKlausur compensates for the frequent absence of civil service with the invention of a new procedure.[22]

Like WK, Italian experiences of the Wurkmos visual arts laboratory and artists Adriana Torregrossa and Paola Di Bello were presented, alongside the works of the English collective Project Environment and the German artist Stephen Kurr. It was an important moment in the discussion, both for understanding the difficult social role played by art in relation to a lack of state policies, and for the latter's possible co-optation by local government. However, a sort of endemic distance emerged in Italian socially engaged practice which, in the face of programmatic disinterest from the institutions, attempted to conceal the political intervention by setting up more aesthetic and indirect forms. On the other hand, the work of WK is defined as extremely political in a context unaccustomed to forms of social welfare. The first intervention—WK do not usually give titles or names to their projects except for timing indicators—was conceived in 1993 for the Vienna Secession. There they put in action a series of practices that would become the constants of their interventions, such as the use of the cultural capital of the host institution, the identification of a specific problem encountered after a preliminary period of research, the fundraising operation, negotiation, dialogue, implementation and operational handover.[23]

All these activities were often coordinated by and resumed into an "anti-aesthetics" visual element—according to Boris Groys "every 'anti-aesthetics' is obviously merely a more specific form of aesthetics"[24]—given by the construction of neutral spaces for dialogue and discussion that often took the form of a wooden garden house standing in public spaces and places of attraction. In some cases, the space of dialogue was an already existing element/place, to which a new function was given. Thus, in 1993 responding to the invitation of Adolf Krischanitz—president at that time of Vienna Secession—WK decided to propose a concrete exterior intervention instead of an installation inside the building. Therefore WK, after previous fieldwork in the neighborhood, realised that one of the most urgent issues was the one related to the absence of a health system dedicated to homeless people.

As a first step, WK decided to activate a network—the field of action described by Weibel as a form of operativity, processuality, dynamism, and activity—formed by exponents of politics, health, culture and private individuals. In order to compensate for the lack of care for the homeless—which, even if such a process existed, would be made bureaucratically difficult if not impossible in by the Austrian health system—the group initiate a mobile assistance system which led, first of all, to the acquisition of a van and its transformation into a mobile clinic. After initial research, it became clear that a medical vehicle equipped with all the

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at the production of public artworks as means for social integration and urban regeneration. If the pioneering attention is to be recognised in the vision of *a.titolo*, on the other hand the authorial role that dominated in artistic works must be problematised, as well as the reduction of public art as a service in a market logic of demand.

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a.titolo and Pioselli, *Arte Pubblica: esperienze e progetti Europei.*

23
The notion of cultural capital was coined by Pierre Bourdieu in his essay "The Forms of Capital" (1985) and was later developed and analysed by many scholars, such as the American sociologist Robert Putnam. The theories expressed by the two represent the opposite poles of the theme. Bourdieu describes cultural capital as a person's education (knowledge and intellectual skills) that provides advantage in achieving a higher social-status in society. According to Putnam, on the other hand, cultural capital is meant as a public good, the amount of participatory potential, civic orientation and trust in others, available to cities, states or nations. See Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).

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Groys, *Going Public*, Kindle position 51.

necessary tools was out of budget. The total cost for the transformation from a van to a mobile clinic was 55,000 euros, which was raised thanks to local businesses, banks and other generous donors. Thanks to the help of these external funds, WK were able to equip the van with all the required medical tools.[25] Moreover, to emphasise the collaborative fundraising process, they decided to customise it with the logos of all the sponsors. To guarantee the sustainability of the project, WK got in contact with Caritas—the ecclesiastical and international charity organisation which provides support for the homeless—to discuss its future management. Once the roles were defined it had been established that the municipality of Vienna would guarantee the salaries of the doctors necessary for staffing the van.

    This was followed by a period of long negotiations with local politicians and ministers, who failed to make any effective decisions. Michael Ausserwinkler, the then Minister of Health, decided to support the WK plan by granting them funds. However, the allocation of that money was contested by Ingrid Smejkal, councillor at the time for social policies in the municipality of Vienna. WK decided to overcome this standstill by going to the media, who had been giving great attention and coverage to the intervention. Consequently, the correspondent for the German newspaper *Der Spiegel* was called to set up a fake interview with Smeikal. The article was intended to focus on new ways of performing socially conscious artistic interventions and to outline how the city had supported the project for a mobile clinic for homeless people. However, the councillor did not want to appear in the German press as the cause of the failure of the project. She was then *forced* into allocating a fund, initially for one year, to the nurses and the medical staff of the mobile clinic for homeless people. After the press conference at the end of the project, the municipality decided to give more funds to the project: since that time the clinic has served more than 700 patients per month up to the present day. A second, larger van replaced the first one in 1998. Over the years Caritas has taken over the project and the mobile clinic named *Louise* has become a permanent institution.[26] The mobile clinic also takes care of foreigners who have no insurance and therefore do not have access to the health system. The first Louise van now serves in Sofia, Bulgaria. This first intervention gave the operative line to the following projects of the group. In 1994 WK conceive what the American critic Grant Kester has defined "boat colloquies", a series of meetings held on a boat off Lake Zurich to convince the various political representatives of the city to build a foster home for women.[27] These talks, attended by 60 participants among the secretaries of the major Swiss parties, members of the city council, specialists in the field of medicine, prevention and therapy, led to the creation of the ZORA centre in February 1995.[28] The centre was directed by Isabella Schaetti and remained active until 2000. During this period of time, it was financed by cantonal and state funds and by private donations. By working in an absolutely fluid way that merges activism, field work, legal world and artistic practice, in 1995 WK managed—at the invitation of the director of Sterischer Herbst in Graz—to be involved directly in state regulations on immigration. In 1995 the Austrian laws on immigration and labour were significantly distinct. Illegally resident immigrants could have access to public health and education services but no access to the formal labour and the

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For further details see Wolfgang Zinggl (ed.), *WochenKlausur. Sociopolitical Activism in Art* (New York and Vienna: Springer, 2001).

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All the information about Louise vans—places and time in which the bus operates in the city of Vienna—is available on Caritas' website: https://www.caritas-wien.at/hilfe-angebote/obdach-wohnen/mobile-notversorgung/medizinbus-louisebus, accessed June 2021.

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In this regard see Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley [CA]: University of California Press, 2004).

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Further information about the project ZORA is available on WK website: https://wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=4, accessed June 2021.

housing markets.[29] Furthermore, immigrants could not apply for unemployment benefits and jobs for those who came from non-European areas were fixed annually at a rate of 9% compared to Austrian workers. The starting point for WK was a special provision in the Austrian immigration code that allowed foreign artists to remain in the country without a special permit (Bewilligung) as long as they could prove that they lived from their artistic activity.[30] This article left an opening for the inclusion of artistic production in the labour market thanks to the figure of a patron or a body willing to invest in a liberal way. Therefore, WK *transformed* seven asylum seekers into artists by finding commissions from galleries and having them present their work with the status of *artists* within the Sterischer Herbst festival. Thanks to this change of status, asylum seekers were able to extend their stay in Austria.

In 1996 WK created their first wooden garden house: the main purpose was to organise a series of meetings aimed at improving conditions within the CIE (Identification and Expulsion Center) in Salzburg. Sixteen meetings were held inside the wooden house with the participation of many politicians, members of the community and journalists, joined also by the Minister of the Interior, the police and human rights associations.[31] After the initial resistance, the police chief agreed to the creation of a coordination network for social services within the centre, coordinated by the Evangelische Flüchtlingsdienst (Evangelical Centre for Services to Immigrants). The centre continued to be active for thirteen years (2009), until the Ministry of the Interior asked for it to be interrupted.

WochenKlausur. Intervention to Establish Language Schools in Kosovo, 1999. Image courtesy: WochenKlausur.

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At that time there was—in regard to illegal immigration—a series of laws approved in 1992. The Aliens Act signed in 1992 contained some traps of illegality, abolished then with its amendment in 1997. In this regard see National Contact Point Austria within the European Migration Network (ed.), *Illegal Immigration in Austria* (Vienna: International Organisation for Migration (IOM), 2005), 11.

30

The law's article is reported in *Bundesgesetzblatt für die Republik Österreich*, 1992, §1 Abs.3 Z5

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Further information on the Salzburg Project see WK's website: https://wochenklausur.at/projekt.php?lang=en&id=8, accessed June 2021.

The Intervention at the Biennale: Alternative School System During the Balkans War.

In 1999, signs of an impending war on the nearby Balkan front started to appear. If the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) had seemed to be politically solved—after the Dayton Peace Agreement (1995) which has defined Bosnia and Herzegovina's structure of government—at that time the most worrying situation was in the Kosovar front.[32] The pavilion of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia—which in its name reflected the State formed in 1992 by the union of the republics of Serbia and Montenegro including the autonomous regions of Voivodina and Kosovo—to the present date still represents a cryptic choice in terms of emotions that were hitting the Balkans, or perhaps it already represented its first poetic abstraction. The exhibition entitled *Todor & Terra* (1999) curated by Radislav Trkulja, then-director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Belgrade, presented a theme focused on planetary mythology, a sort of re-calendarisation with many references to Byzantine art which, if on the one hand promised the search for a new man, on the other recalled a universal brotherhood that the latest frenetic events had forgotten. This humanitarian expectation could be read through the lines of the initial quote from Dostoevsky's Karamazov Brothers: "Timurs and Jenghiz Khans raced across the globe not knowing that they were heading towards utter unification".[33] Trkulja's Pavilion, as the name suggests, was divided into different spaces with pictures by the artist Todor Stevanovic and artworks created within the *Terra* sculpture symposium. Held for the first time in 1982, it has since then been housed in a former brick factory in the city of Kikinda in Serbia. The five sculptors of the international Symposium were: Marijana Gvozdenovic, Borislava Nedeljkovic Prodanovic, Mladen Marinkov, Slobodan Kojic and Milorad Damnjanovic.

Returning to the socio-political context, after the escalation of the conflict between the then Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the new-born Kosovar Republic, on March 24, 1999 NATO began its bombing campaign against Yugoslavia. In the mission, mainly airborne, Italy was involved too: it gave support with the use of the Aviano air base in the province of Pordenone, less than an hour away from Venice. The conflict (whose reasons and means cannot be discussed in this paper) ended on June 12, 1999, exactly one day before the official opening of the Biennale. According to estimates reported by the Humanitarian Law Center association, which in 2011 wrote the *Libër Kujtimi i Kosovës* (Kosovo Memory Book), the number of deaths and missing people caused by the war in Kosovo from January 1, 1998 to December 31, 2000 was 13,549, starting from Abazaj Besa (1985-1999) up to Zižić Zorka (1925-1999).[34] Obviously, the conflict brought up, also in Italy, the issue of all the refugees coming from the war zones. Different associations stated that their number ranged between 700 and 900 thousand. Many of them were welcomed in neighbour Albania and Macedonia camps built quickly and that ended up being overcrowded. As a consequence, basic human rights and primary assets were suspended.

From a political point of view, with the then Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema, Italy started the emergency relief assistance mission Missione

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The Bosnian war was 'aesthetically' addressed in Marina Abramovic's performance *Balkan Baroque* at the 1997 Venice Biennale, and in the collateral exhibition *Artisti per Sarajevo* organised in the spaces of the Querini Stampalia Foundation. For the text of Dayton Peace Agreement see the link: https://www.osce.org/bih/126173, accessed June 2021.

[33]
Radislav Trkulja, "Todor & Terra", in *Biennale di Venezia, Federal Republic of Yugoslavia Pavillion*, 1999 (June 13 - November 7, 1999), exh. cat. (Venice: La Biennale, 1999), 2. For the consultation of the catalogue I want to express my gratitude to the Biennale Library-ASAC Fondazione La Biennale di Venezia that during this period of lockdown provided the scanned material in a very short time.

[34]
For the full list see: http://www.kosovomemorybook.org/db/kkp_en/index.html, accessed January 2021.

Arcobaleno (Rainbow Mission): about 5,000 Kosovars were transferred from Yugoslavia to the former NATO base in Comiso in Sicily where they were lodged in the former quarters used by American soldiers during the Cold War. The Mission aroused several controversies since Italy simultaneously participated with logistics and direct intervention, both in the war and in receiving the refugees affected by it. The WK intervention—incidentally, the Austrian Pavilion was situated next to the Yugoslavian—was born within this context and from the identification of a specific problem, an attractor that in Weibel's words would have served "as the target point of its dynamics [the intervention], which specifies the state of order to be striven for and against which the actions converge".[35] The attractor was identified within the lack of a school system in the camps where there was a high rate of refugees of school age. Even under such conditions, the Macedonian government managed to guarantee the continuation of studies for children up to 12 years of age. However, from this new emergency school system, children between 12 and 18 years old were left out and, given the precarious condition, could not even be trained for jobs or practice any sports. The school created by WK was not a continuation of what was lost with the war but rather a constructive thought for the future. As a matter of fact, the intervention aimed at creating several language schools to offer a perspective to those children who would have probably never returned home but would have emigrated with their families to foreign countries, since a third of the Kosovar population lives out of the country, especially in Switzerland and Germany.[36] If we consider the camp as theorised by Giorgio Agamben in his *Homo Sacer* "as a paradigm of political modernity to the extent that juridical categories and the idea of sovereignty have served as a justification for abandoning *enemy bodies* to zones outside strict legality"[37] we can see how the *place* of the WK intervention prefigures a future condition more than a specific physical place, by showing the phenomenology of a problem such as the reception and regulation of bodies, which would become paradigmatic in the years to come.

The first step put in place by WK was a preliminary fieldwork in order to get in direct contact with local and international organisations. Two members of the group visited the war zones and made a first contact with the Macedonian civil-rights organisation ADI (Association for Democratic Initiatives) which then became their operational partner.[38] Later the group formed for the occasion by six members Ana Artaker, Licia Dragotto, Pascale Jeannee, Katharina Lenz, Stefanie Pitscheider, Wolfgang Zinggl—was split into two, with headquarters in Vienna and in Venice. Here, inside the pavilion—as happened during the first intervention in Vienna—the operations' centre was created in order to manage the network that connected the Biennale to Kosovo and to the camps set up in Macedonia. The exhibition space was then transformed into a real office—a bureau in line with the one organised by Joseph Beuys *Office for Direct Democracy* at documenta 5 in 1972—with computers, maps, printers and everything needed to manage the intervention from a distance. A third mobile office was added. A van—sponsored by the Munich film production company PPM—was brought to Macedonia in June, where it was given to Ardit Musliu, the Albanian coordinator hired to manage the project. Seven spaces were then identified and rented along the border between Kosovo and Albania. Schools were established in the Macedonian province of Polog

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Weibel, *"Offene Handlungsfelder"*, n.p.

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For further details about the Kosovar diaspora see: http://www.kosovodiaspora.org/, accessed January 2021.

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Vik Kanwar, "Book Review of Giorgio Agamben *State of Exception*", *I·CON International Journal of Constitutional Law* 4, no. 3 (2006): 577-585.

38
During the Kosovar conflict ADI created a database of refugees, which allowed many families to quickly reunite. For further details see Stefania Pitscheider, "Intervention to Establish Language School in Kosovo", in Zinggl (ed.), *WochenKlausur*, 93-99.

(an Albanian-majority area) in the villages of Dobridol, Raven, Forino, Govistar and Tetovo. In Kosovo, not yet independent, schools were established in the cities of Gnjilane, Mitrovice and in the future capital Pristina. As of July, the languages taught were English, German, French and Italian.

WochenKlausur. View of WochenKlausur's Office in Vienna, 1999. Vienna. Image courtesy: WochenKlausur. In front of the office it was possible to see all the materials donated by different associations, schools and universities, ready to be shipped to Macedonia.

The work of the two offices also included the logistical organisation and acquisition of school materials, as well as furnishings for the new classrooms. The classroom furniture was donated by the Vienna City School board and by Italian schools. In this way, 500 desks, 300 chairs, 16 blackboards, a photocopier, 20 lockers, and 20 computers donated by the Venetian Universities of Ca' Foscari and Iuav were recovered, and of course, almost two tonnes of teaching materials including books, audio/video material and CDs. A special transport to Macedonia was then organised in the summer, financed by the Austrian and South Tyrolean Caritas. Once the materials had been collected, WK through ADI, took care of the
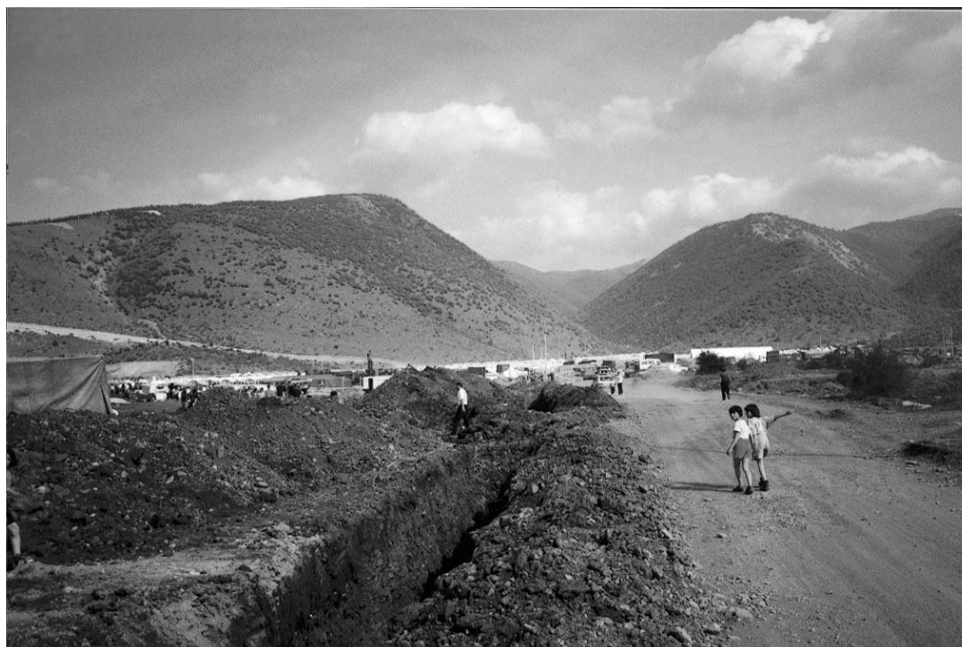
WochenKlausur. View of WochenKlausur's Office at the Austrian Pavilion, 1999. Venice Biennale. Image courtesy: WochenKlausur.

recruitment of language teachers. Since ADI is an association recognised by the Macedonian government, the certificates issued at the end of each course had legal value in all respects. Furthermore, Jean Armer, teacher and visitor to the Biennale, spontaneously decided to join the project and teach in refugee camps in Macedonia. Once the teaching staff were selected, WK had to find the money to cover salaries and rent costs. Organisations such as KulturKontakt, Rotary Club Vienna and Women's Initiative Against War, as well as the *Veuve Cliquot* along with other private sponsors, contributed a total of 48,000 euros.

In order to increase the budget, WK organised a lottery inside the pavilion. Thanks to the support of several Italian and Austrian organisations and businesses, WK created about 1,500 surprise bags at a price of 20 euros each. In each bag, you could find products such as olive oil, wine, ski passes, restaurant coupons, gondola rides, art books, museum tickets, travel vouchers and magazine subscriptions. All the bags were sold, making it possible to pay the annual salaries of four teachers as well as the rent of two facilities. Despite the difficult reconstruction of many cities, in the newly formed but not politically recognised Republic of Kosovo, the stay of the refugees in the camps was shorter than expected and in the first months after the end of the war many families decided to return to their hometowns. This quick return represented a sudden readjustment of the humanitarian plans.[39] There was no longer a real urgency such as at the beginning, but that did not mean that the language schools set up by WK ceased to exist. In fact, the courses in Macedonia lasted until the end of the 1999/2000 school year, while the courses in Kosovo—two English courses in Pristina, one German course in Gnjilane and one French course in Mitrovice—lasted until 2001. In conclusion, the Venice Biennale worked as an open field of action capable of offering an infrastructural framework and a cultural capital that could be put together into a direct action. This especially brought into play the value of the cultural institutions that was then used beyond the self-referential dimension of artistic promotion. From this new semantics, the role of the artist also changed, by declining his *static* exhibitionary side in favour of a more dynamic one.

WochenKlausur. Refugee Camp in Macedonia, 1999. Image courtesy: WochenKlausur.

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Missione Arcobaleno paid for this unexpected change of situation, ending up in a legal trouble regarding the tonnes of goods stowed in the 1,250 containers prepared by the Italian *Protezione Civile* (civil protection) that were not used and remained between Bari, Durres and Tirana almost five months after the emergency and over two months after the end of the war. To learn more about the topic, see https://web.archive.org/web/20120607232807/http://archivio.panorama.it/home/articolo/idA020001007622, accessed January 2021. To read the answer of the Prime Minister of the time, Massimo D'Alema, see: https://www.repubblica.it/online/fatti/arco/ris/ris.html, accessed January 2021.

Assessing a Practice of Camp

The practices of WK, during the last thirty years, has demonstrated how civil action, social engagement and political commitment could have its own symbolic and aesthetic form in a continuous balance between the universal reasons of the art word and the specific ones of the community. More than that, the methodology of WK has revealed a new form of interaction and collaboration between artist and cultural institution. In the specific case of the intervention at the 1999 Venice Biennale, this collaboration has been shaped through a semantic difference—especially apparent in the English language—of no small importance. That is, the distinction between the terms *field* and *camp*, in the light of scholarly work about camps carried out at the turn of the 2000s, in particular starting from Giorgio Agamben's analysis of homo sacer and the state of exception as a transformation of temporary moment of crisis into a form of government.[40] Therefore, the discourse articulated here is that WK's interventions are *instituent practice* of the crisis.[41] This definition came precisely from Gerald Rauning: "instituent practice as a process and concatenation of instituent events means an absolute concept beyond the opposite of institution: it does not oppose the institution, but it does flee from institutionalisation and structuralisation".[42] These practices, in Rauning's theory, are referred especially on the "event of instituting" and not on the institution itself or its distribution of power. This vision allows the access and the possibility for collectivity and participation. Thus, a civic collaboration, as the one between WK and the different cultural institutions they have collaborated with, could institute a specific demand or condition despite the place and the political agenda. In this collaborative climate the instituent practices work on a level of causality facing and representing the social disengagement and losing faith in public institutions started since the 1990s.[43] These practices act as a possibility of reaction and in the crisis, in the exceptional nature of the camp, WK has created a method of intervention and a new praxis through a transversal approach. In their intervention at the Venice Biennale, WK moved within a liminal space of indeterminacy between Peter Weibel's theoretical construction of the open field of action and the concrete action within a refugee camp in Macedonia.[44] Field and camp then become the two opposite poles of action that reveal the possibility of action, movement and creation, as well as the impossibility of personal choice, transience and uncertainty.[45] Both terms, camp and field, are applicable and valid to explain WK's ways of engaging. In fact, WK have used the open field of action guaranteed by a cultural frame, such as that of the Biennale, to move within the static impossibility of refugee camps in Macedonia.

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[40] Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 11.

[41] Gerald Rauning, *Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2007).

[42] Gerald Rauning, "Instituting and Distributing. On the Relationship Between Politics and Police Following Rancière as a Development of the Problem of Distribution with Deleuze", *Transversal*, (September 2007), https://transversal.at/transversal/1007/raunig/en, accessed June 2021.

[43] Tall Beery, "Instituent Practices: Art After (Public) Institutions", *Temporary* (January 2, 2018) https://temporaryartreview.com/instituent-practices-art-after-public-institutions/, accessed June 2021. See also Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.

[44] For the Weibel's theorisation on art as open practice see Weibel, "Offene Handlungsfelder".

[45] See also the notion of artistic field analysed by Pierre Bourdieu as a structure of objective relations between positions in which a struggle for specific symbolic capital occurs. Hans van Maanen, *How to Study Art Worlds. On the Societal Functioning of Aesthetic Value* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2009), see in particular the chapter "Pierre Bourdieu's Grand Theory of the Artistic Field", 53-81.

The camp, in Agamben's theories, is not a fact, but rather the consequence of a series of juridical-political distortions that have made its exceptional nature institutionalised, rendering it an "executive" model beyond the state of crisis and emergency.[46] As the sociologist Paul Gilroy wrote, quoting the theory outlined by Giorgio Agamben, camps are understood as the institutionalised exception that have deprived the city from its traditional role in politics by becoming the main political institution of our anxious era.[47] Within the two antipodes of field and camp, the practice of WK is implemented through the transversality that is played on a line of non-distinctiveness between sovereignty and the homo sacer, to use Agamben's paradigms. This blurred line of action was one of the reasons why, socially engaged art, initially struggled to find its critical place, as demonstrated by the quarrel between two critics such as Claire Bishop and Grant Kester in the columns of *Artforum* in 2006.

It is no coincidence that the interpretative difficulties of WK's operations, and, more generally, of socially engaged art, initially concerned their services addressing social inequality, as well as excessive Good Samaritan acts towards all those *sacri* without rights. For this reason, in the intervention realised in Graz, the WK acted within the sphere of actual law, within a legal loophole, in order to give substance to the presence of otherwise invisible asylum seekers. The same can be said for the 1993 Vienna project of a mobile clinic for the homeless as well as the 1994 Zurich foster home for woman project. Here, the paradigm of spectatorship is not only overturned but cancelled. These practices have no spectators because they don't happen in public. In fact, the refugee camp in Macedonia is neither presented nor represented in exhibition terms within the space of the Austria Pavilion, just as the various political meetings organised by the WK in their projects lacked visibility since they took place in a cloistered wooden house or a boat off a lake. This is because the camp cannot be taken outside its own dimension but is offered up to socially engaged transversal/cross practices—with the possibility of placing themselves on the threshold of the two worlds of the field and the camp—to instituting new ways for a precarious coexistence.

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[46]
Giorgio Agamben, "The State of Exception as a Paradigm of Government", in Agamben, *State of Exception*, 1-32.

[47]
Paul Gilroy, *After Empire. Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (London: Routledge, 2004).

Author's Biography

Emanuele Meschini Rinaldo is an art critic and art historian. PhD in History of Contemporary Art at University Ca' Foscari (Venice). From 2014 to 2019 he has collaborated with the magazine *Contemporary* for which he conceived and edited the section Arte Sociale. Specialised at the University of Siena, he deepened the topic of artistic activism at the Crispolti Archive in Rome. He was curator in residence at Node Center and ZK / U in Berlin and curated the series of exhibitions *Declinazioni di Comunità* at the Luigi Pigorini Ethnographic Museum (Rome, 2015). Since 2016, together with the artist Luca Resta, he has created the AUTOPALO project with which he investigates the techniques and methods of social participation through projects related to the world of football. In 2020 he was awarded with a grant to support his research on Italian public art from the Ministry for Cultural Heritage (MIBACT) as part of the Italian Council program.