Opera-Fanìa

On The Ostensive Conditions Of Contemporary Art

OBOE

Journal On Biennials
and Other Exhibitions

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Artwork's *Fanìa* as an Essential Act of Art

Angela Vettese

Editorial

What is the first cell of an exhibition, or rather of any exhibition event? The simple manifestation of the work, even of a single work. This is an unconditional first step in order to talk about art. Among the few characteristics of art that can be defined and shared, and that makes art as such, is the communicative act. Art's proposition to the viewer, that is, its *fanìa* (greek term for appearance), is essential. If the artwork does not lean outwards, it should be considered a diaristic act, a solipsistic tale that fails in its function of mediation and in establishing a common ground between people. Art is language, that is, an instrument for exchange and an opportunity for the intertwining of two poles, of those who make it and those who receive it. It doesn't matter where this manifestation takes place: it can happen in the artist's studio, as happened for years in Picasso's *Demoiselles d'Avignon*, or in large museum installations, prepared in a site-specific way; or at a random and unscheduled moment. The work can be presented as a fragment or as a finished whole, it can also be in the middle of a process of change, as happens for land art, for performances and for all works that involve time. The author can accompany it and regulate its fruition, as in the case of the rules with which some Pierre Huyghe films must be seen or in other cases the author can let it go, as something that has legs to walk on its own, such as some blackboards or notice boards that Joseph Beuys gave to collectors at the end of a performance, or the author can suggest that we live it with him, like the works of Bruce Nauman centred on his, as well as on our, perceptive faculty. The work can appear in a volumetric, tactile fragrance, present as a vital body, but it can also manifest itself through a photograph or film diaphragm, in other words, with a technological filter that returns only the appearance suitable for the eye and not the aspects that other senses could grasp. The work can show itself in the ideal conditions so that its internal logic can be read, but it can also appear fleetingly, as if it were a clue to itself, leaving traces and fragments only in the memory. A notable point of the issue lies in the counterpart, in those to whom the work is addressed to. What is the public? How does it react? Is there a way in which the work itself manages to guide its own public or to choose it? Who is the spectator *par excellence*? Is there something already implicit in the response that will elicit its exhibition? The articles in *OBOE*'s second issue offer multiple answers.

Those who perceive a complex artistic operation, with a vast background of internal rules and devices, can learn about the processes by which it works. This is often the case with the works orchestrated by Philippe Parreno accounted by Monica

Amor. In the essay Amor highlights how the public reacts to the work as if it is a novel that has multiple levels of reading: there is the reader who appreciates the writing, the one who follows the plot, the one who penetrates even hidden or implicit devices of the narrative and can come to a thorough appreciation. Indeed, to fully appreciate an artwork's meaning, we should never forget that most artworks, contemporary or ancient, follow an underlying narrative that might be informed by mythology, theology, natural sciences or by a palimpsest of cultural references that should be known. The translation of a feeling into an artistic phenomenon is, in fact, always a migration of meaning, through procedures that imply premises mediated in an intellectual way even when, as in some apparently impulsive art, it would seem that there is no gap between work and instinct. The public should always start from the idea that, as in opera or classical music, relying solely on the immediacy of taste rarely leads to full enjoyment and broad understanding. The ideal audience is that to whom the work appears as something that asks for and receives full attention; an attention so profound that it pushes the viewer to want to fully understand the entire process of conception of the artwork or exhibition. When this does not happen, especially if an institution fears hosting exhibitions that demand too much effort, the public ceases to be challenged but also properly stimulated: a failure of audacity in communication. Hence, exhibitions can lose courage and flatten themselves on easier tastes, as has happened, as Jens Hoffmann states in his text—the first in our newly launched column of critical reflections titled "Echoes"—for the most recent iterations of the Whitney Biennial.

However, something else can also happen; something which engages the audience though more than just simple knowledge, on a more participatory level. Recent art, committed to this relational and participatory trend, tends to transform its audience from a group of observers into a community of co-authors, who contribute to the very creation of the work. Lorenzo Balbi's article goes on this direction and discusses the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* project and the transformation of the MAMbo Museum into a place where the processes of creation and realisation of the work by the artists in residence are made visible to the public. Meschini's essay—which focuses on the Austrian group WK's work and their cultural activism, in relation to precedent exhibition moments such as the presence of the Gruppo Oreste at the 1999 Venice Biennale or the activity of the collective of art critics *a.titolo*—leads us to confront ourselves with the possibility that the artwork does not have mere spectators, but proper co-authors; and transforms the dimension in which the value of "how much public" is lost and replaced by "which public". In Miriam De Rosa's essay, devoted to an artist's residency, she reveals how in this case the public ceases to be a public and becomes the subject of a gift and the protagonist of a living together, of a confidential exchange, of a mutual giving between guest and host. Arnon Ben-Dror's contribution focuses on Dutch artist herman de vries' *sanctuariums*, site-specific artworks where nature is allowed to grow uninterrupted. These become an unexpected stage for interaction with local publics that attempt to experience them or engage with them directly in limitless ways. From taking actions to defend the works from the municipality, to vandalising them, the public transforms these installations from sites of curiosity addressing the lack of human-nature relationships into ever-evolving entities. Marco Bertozzi's review on the 2020 Cinema Festival in Venice, reflects on the changes in the audience, not only after the pandemic and the technological revolution that came with it, but also the ones that came with the transformation of cinema habits which moved from a collective experience to an isolated one—domestic—through the use of a computer rather than through the big screen; and that even in its most refined productions, tells us of an increasingly less collective and coral embedding of the audience itself. At the same time, however, it shows us a private and thus enlarged dimension of cinematic perception, as if, having brought the experience to the domestic walls has freed it from the need to go to a collective and widely social place to enjoy it.

In all these cases, the audience becomes an entity that collaborates to the making of the work, rather than passively witnessing it, so that its appearance becomes a

process triggered by the artist, but that develops collectively. Indeed, the subtext to the work, in this case, does not need to be known beforehand by the spectators, because it is something the spectators themselves will realise and contribute to create, especially now that they have become accomplices of the apparition itself.

       The phenomenology with which an artwork presents itself, whatever role is intended for the public, is in any case, anything but unitary. The ways in which the work reveals itself to us, are as numerous as the images in a kaleidoscope, for which we would have trouble in establishing which ones are right or wrong, fertile or sterile. The same work of art can appear to us in such different physical, contextual and historical forms that it can never be said to be definitive or ideal. Each appearance offers itself to a different result, that could be even one of rejection and distancing. For this reason, drawing attention on the *fanìa* of the artwork opens up a vast discourse, on which we have followed only a few steps in this issue, but which we must indicate as a ground for further investigation, perhaps potentially infinite as well as inevitable for any reflection on exhibiting.

Mónica Amor
**From Plasticity to Elasticity: Philippe Parreno's Permanent
Revolution**

Abstract

This essay focuses on French artist Philippe Parreno's 2013-2014 Palais de Tokyo
exhibition *Anywhere*, *Anywhere*, *Out of this World* to explore how the artist utilizes
the exhibition format to produce an aesthetic imaginary concerned with intermedi-
ality, collaboration, spectatorial attention and distraction. It examines the forms of
object and image dissipation that Parreno and his collaborators mobilised through a
digital network that activated ghostly environments in the spatiality of this unique
exhibition space. Utilising the exhibition as a controlled dispositif that interfaced
with viewers, *Anywhere* repurposed the normative structure of the exhibitionary
complex to stage alternative relations between objects and subjects within the spec-
tral conditions of the digital. The exhibition, rather than a framework that contains
art, was used by the artist to stage relations and query contemporary rituals of
artistic integration. The essay concludes that Parreno's techno-environment and its
anti-instrumentalising itinerary, posed, but didn't resolve, recurring concerns with
agency and publicness under intensified regimes of biotechnological integration.

From Plasticity to Elasticity: Philippe Parreno's Permanent Revolution.[1]

Mónica Amor

> *There's always for me the pleasure of taking an object and not reinventing it but renegotiating the way it becomes public. Which is what I think the idea of the exhibition is all about. It's the negotiation that allows a form to become public.*
> Philippe Parreno, 2013.

> *Constructing on a large scale means moving toward vulnerability; thus, synthesis requires courage—the audacity of the frail [...] I would like to make a construction at the limits of fragility, since relations are sometimes extremely labile, extremely unstable, often living or turbulent like breaths of wind.*
> Michel Serres, 1990.

A translucent trapezoidal device lit with light bulbs lingers over the entrance to the famed Palais de Tokyo in Paris (hereafter PdT)—the contemporary art center which occupies the west wing of the 1937 building constructed on the occasion of the *Exposition Internationale des Arts et Techniques de la Vie Moderne*. Originally meant to house two separate museums of modern art, the Palais de Tokyo, as it was already known at the time, is a stark, mammoth building with two distinct wings adjoined by a central patio framed by a colonnade. The effect is distinctly monumental, a clear reminder of the pompous architecture that would be privileged by the pre-WWII nationalisms that populated Europe in the late 1930s and against which architects in postwar France would voice their objections.[2] The luminous elegant object exudes an aura of high-end design and could belong at the entrance of one of the many luxurious buildings that populate Paris' 16th arrondissement. But for those entering the Palais de Tokyo any day between October 23, 2013 and January 12, 2014, the stylised shape might have been recognised as one of Philippe Parreno's marquees—his own version of those projecting canopies over the entrance

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I want to thank the *OBOE* editors for their invitation to submit a text for publication and Larry Busbea for his reading of the text. His work is a source of constant inspiration.

2
It is important to note that despite these formal similarities the Palais de Tokyo was itself realised under the aegis of the left wing Popular Front government in place between 1934-38. It was designed by the architects Jean-Claude Dondel, André Aubert, Paul Viard and Marcel Dastugue.

of theatres which display the titles of a play or a movie and the names of the main performers. Parreno's 2013 marquee jutting out onto the steps that lead into the PdT looks little like the traditional (and these days almost extinct) objects. Around eighty marquees bear Parrenos' name as author, while his actual name, or anything resembling a signature, is absent. This accords with a number of other transformations that the conventional marquee undergoes in Parreno's work: size, material and shape all divert from functionality and specificity to signify mainly by virtue of their location. Following this logic *Marquee* (2013) [fig. 1] announces another kind of show, one which overlaps with theater and film in many ways but which, despite the collaborative endeavor that produced it, remains Parreno's own and is rooted within a certain French plastic tradition and a reflection on modern techno-spatial configurations that date back to the 19th century. Or so, I will suggest by associating the artist's 2013-14 experimental approach to the form of the exhibition with efforts to produce a synthesis of the arts which aimed to interject emerging technological horizons, while rejecting normative models of object production, display and spectatorial interaction.

fig. 1
Philippe Parreno, *Marquee*, 2013. Exhibition view: *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World*. Palais de Tokyo, Paris 2013. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

It was precisely the 1937 expo that gave impulse to the notion of a synthesis of the arts which most famously materialised in Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's *Pavillon des Temps Nouveaux*: a 1500 m² tent structure that featured murals and photomurals by Fernand Léger and Roberto Matta—aided by the young Asger Jorn—promoting modern technology and urban culture. This prototype for a museum of contemporary art, which the pavilion exemplified, aimed to bring together architects, painters and sculptors, following the theme of the "integration of urbanism, architecture, and art in modern life"[3] proposed by the 1937 event. Several elements of this highly heterogeneous historical project are of interest when thinking about Parreno's own intermedial practice. To supporters of the collaboration between artists and architects, such as architectural historian Siegfried Giedion and Léger, such an endeavor would counteract the extreme specialisation prompted by the 19th century while at the same time acknowledging and being shaped by recent developments in technology, science, philosophy, and culture at large (it would also reinvigorate the decayed notion of monumentality by positioning centre stage the civic relevance of large-scale collaborations between artists and architects in public space).[4] In 1937 Jeanneret and Le Corbusier's structure would explore this through the idea of a temporary exhibition space and their attention to the interrelation between the constitutive elements of the Pavilion and the spectators. The initial building, to be made of panels, was replaced by canvas—a material Jeanneret had been working with and that is associated with ephemeral architectures. A visual constellation of images (involving urbanism, sculpture and painting) was developed for the interior. It incorporated artworks, images, text, graphic elements, and a dynamic use of colour. The exterior, in the meantime, like a cinematic screen, caught the shadows of the surrounding trees, adding to the overall transient effect.

Fast-forward seventy-six years. We cross the entrance of another, more static effort at a synthesis of the arts: the PdT itself with its mythological architectural decoration and static sculptural program. Inside, however, the rather dark reception area contrasts with the luminous panel behind the ticket desk against which the bodies of staff and visitors stand out—almost like black silhouettes in an animated film. We have entered the elusive world of images that has guided so many of Parreno's projects. His is not a synthesis of the major arts, as Le Corbusier proposed in a text reprising the 1937 theme of an integration of architecture and art published in the French resistance paper *Volontés* in December 1944—then rooted in an epochal desire for post-war reconstruction whose catchwords were harmony, community, monumentality and collaboration.[5] Yet collaboration as a strategy of artistic production has indeed become a trademark of Parreno's practice almost as much as his defiant marquees. *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of This World*, as the 2013-14 PdT monumental installation-cum-exhibition, occupying the 22,000 m² of the institution, was entitled, was precisely an interdisciplinary tour de force that involved artists, musicians, architects, and lighting, sound and set designers. This accords with an early tendency to co-produce and co-sign works with a generation of artists sceptical of conventional notions of authorship and raised alongside a proliferation of cultural templates of re-mixing facilitated by the internet, digital

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Danilo Udovicki-Sleb, "Le Corbusier and the Paris Exhibition of 1937: The Temps Nouveaux Pavilion", *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 56, no. 1 (March 1997): 42-63.

4
Jose Luis Sert, Fernand Léger and Siegfried Giedion, "Nine Points on Monumentality" [1943] in Sigfried Giedion (ed.), *Architecture, You and Me. The Diary of a Development* (Cambridge [MA]: Harvard University Press, 1958), 49.

5
Collaboration had gained momentum in France with the formation of the Union for Art (1936). This was mainly thanks to the work of Algerian-born French artist André Bloc, founding editor of *L'Architecture d'Aujord'hui*, who more than anyone rallied untiringly around a collaboration between painters, sculptors and architects. See Joan Ockman, "A Plastic Epic: The Synthesis of the Arts Discourse in France in the Mid-Twentieth Century", in Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen and Esa Laaksonen (eds.), *Architecture + Art. New Visions, New Strategies* (Helsinski: Alvar Aalto Academy, 2007), 35. Collaboration also resonated with the socialist agenda of the French Popular Front (led by Léon Blum) in power between 1936 through 1939.

technologies and the entropic nature of reproducibility and appropriation.[6] At PdT, collaboration is subsumed under the directorial skills of Parreno and the large scale of the architecture, which becomes the integrative element around which a series of visual and sound elements, objects and images coalesce. Organised with the help of choreographer Randall Peacock, as a number of scenes, each encompassing its own image or object, sound and space, the exhibition featured works by other artists, including a large piano by Liam Gillick entitled *Factories in the Snow* (2007). The latter, along with three other Disklavier pianos situated across the building, played Igor Stravinsky's *Petrushka* (1910-11), the musical score of one of the most famous Ballets Russes productions. It tells the story of three puppets, brought to life by a charlatan during a folk festival, one of which kills Petrushka after duelling for the love of the ballerina. Petrushka returns as a ghost only to undergo a second death. This intersection of phantom, puppet, and spectacle, firmly rooted within the enchanted technological environments of the 19th century and related forms of entertainment, looms over Parreno's vast scenario. Indeed, Stravinsky's score, in dialogue with a central computer, generates the digital programs to which lights, soundscapes and the appearance of images, or the behaviour of objects, is set. Accordingly, contributions by sound designer Nicholas Becher, or dialogues with landscape designer Bas Smets, while shaping the *parcours* of the show, are fully integrated into the spectacle and not appreciated as individual elements or categorisable as specific works.

The issue of integration versus synthesis has been at the centre of 20th century debates concerning the dialogue between art and architecture. In theory, synthesis suggested autonomy within unity, but in practice, it tended to relegate painting and sculpture to a supplementary status. In contrast to integration, this vision sustained the idea of competing mediums. In 1956, Pierre Francastel's *Art et Technique* aimed instead to theorise "plastic thought" in terms of a shared "plastic valuation" between the arts. In architectural historian Larry Busbea's precise analysis, 'plastic thought' lay latent in all works of art and thus integration would not happen among the various arts but in relation to plastic values and concerns. Most importantly, integration would be shaped by the arts' affinities with advances in technology and science. "Thus", writes Busbea, for Francastel, "integration is not a matter of a rapprochement between art and architecture but a more profound structural connection between plastic activity in general and the techno-scientific social base".[7] If this gave way to the "multidisciplinary 'team' mentality that characterised avant-garde collectives in the sixties", and to "interdisciplinary integration" to be realised at the scale of the city, as Busbea writes, for Parreno, at the turn of the century, collaborative practices "are made of games and desires [...] interwoven relations, transfers of strength and authority".[8] They are a way, in other words, to undermine categories and disciplinary boundaries, to undo the tyranny of centralised knowledge and bring some disorder to the abstract, virtual and algorithmic trajectories of the all-encompassing technospheres that shape everyday life. However, rather than posit *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of This World*, as an emancipatory techno-utopian landscape of ludic distraction, my aim is to explore the forms of dissipation that Parreno and his collaborators mobilised through the digital network that activated their ghostly objects and environments in the spatiality of the exhibition space. Utilising the exhibition as a controlled technique that interfaced with viewers, *Anywhere...* repurposed the normative structure of the exhibitionary complex to stage alternative relations between objects and subjects within the spectral conditions of the digital. I propose here that the exhibition, rather than a

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Early collaborators included artists Bernard Joisten, Pierre Joseph, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster but many more (Pierre Huygue, Carsten Höller, Lyam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Douglas Gordon) joined in subsequent years.

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Larry Busbea, *Topologies. The Urban Utopia in France, 1960-1970* (Cambridge [MA] and London: The MIT Press, 2007), 174-175.

8
"Interview I—Hard to Defragment Myself. Café de Flore, Paris, 2000-2002", in *Philippe Parreno. Hans Ulrich Obrist. The Conversation Series* (Köln: Verlag der Buchhandlung Walther König, 2007), 30.

framework that contains the art, was used by the artist to stage relations and probe contemporary rituals of integration. In short, Parreno's techno-environment and its anti-instrumentalising itinerary, posed, but didn't resolve, recurring concerns with agency and publicness under intensified regimes of biotechnological integration.

Architectural Shells

Thoughts on how a collaboration between the arts could best take place were considered by Le Corbusier in an unrealised project for an exhibition space aimed at testing—laboratory style—the synthesis of the arts. The Porte Maillot Pavilion, which takes its name after the south-western corner of the 17th arrondissement, was first conceived in 1949 as a permanent structure composed of "covered and semi-covered" elements that would retain the park-like aspect of the site.[9] Lack of funding and the passing of time led to a reprise of the initial idea which in 1952 consisted of a series of pavilions that would house traveling exhibitions and would encourage constant change of the material components (architecture and works) through multifarious forms of interaction with the public and a focus on the architectural promenade. The emphasis was on fluid interactions between inside and outside and a dynamic flow around the exhibition panels housed below the "umbrella-like structural system".[10] According to Le Corbusier a passive situation would be transformed into an active one through the elusive concept of "work-shops". These would provide a framework for the interactions between artists and the public, yielding works that would be sold or destroyed to guarantee constant change. They could eventually also incorporate music and dance.[11]

As Ann Koll observes, it was this version of the Port Maillot Pavilion, comprising two umbrella roof structures covering two superimposed orthogonal floors, which became Le Corbusier's prototype for a series of exhibition pavilions in the post-war period. What interests me here the most is the concept of a flexible architectural shell conducive to temporal interactions and assorted artistic activities. The Swiss architect had channeled this concept through the notion of a "box of miracles" and that of "spontaneous theatre" inspired by Brazilian carnival and street theatre in Venice.[12] A simple cubic architectural structure could be conducive to formal and conceptual flexibility, aimed here at humanist-infused forms of interactivity and creativity. In 1995 Parreno described a postmodern version of such a shell in a short book entitled *Snow Dancing* [fig. 2], which narrates the one-and-a-half hour event of the same name. Situated in a former factory building of 4000 m² in the outskirts of Dijon, the erratic and elusive party convened by Parreno lacked purpose and clarity (though it was said to be a book launch). Like the space in which it took place, the identity of the event was uncertain. "There are traces of trade exhibitions and fairs that have taken place", wrote Parreno, "outlines of things that have existed and activities that have taken place". Multi-purpose here may be an equivocal qualifier and the ephemeral community summoned by the event, exposed to aural, visual and theatrical registers interwoven with forms of advertising, promotional materials, and leisurely activities such as reading and dancing, failed to coalesce. Parreno made several allusions to the political implica-

[9] Ann Koll, *The Synthesis of the Arts in the Context of Post-World War II: A Study of Le Corbusier's Ideas and His Porte Maillot Pavilion* (PhD Diss.: The City University of New York, 1999).

[10] Ibid., 197-98.

[11] Ibid., 199.

[12] Ibid., 135.

tions and possibilities of this coming together under an undefined program and space but in the end the only gesture of resistance was a refusal of domestication: "To reinvent continually a form of the social is to avoid domestication",[13] wrote the artist in the short book. This was done through images, sounds, "and other atmospheric effects". Recalling Situationist events such as the 1959 *Cavern of Antimatter* (*Cavern de l'anti-matière*), featuring 144 meters of industrial painting by the artist Pinot Gallizio covering the walls of the Gallerie René Drouin in Paris, Parreno highlights the architectural *détournements* facilitated by these repurposed shells. At Drouin, Gallizio, with the aid of Guy Debord, produced a synesthetic environment that involved olfactory, sonic and visual elements aimed at foregrounding play and experimentation against instrumentalisation and specialisation. It was a critical response to the rhetoric of humanist harmony of the immediate post-war period represented, precisely, by the then exhausted project of a synthesis of the

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Philippe Parreno, *Snow Dancing* (London: GW Press LTD, 1995), passim.

arts. Situationist strategies, such as unitary urbanism, had rejected the fallacy of modernist functionalism and compartmentalised areas of competence that widened the gap between the fine arts and culture at large. But Parreno's generation, and Parreno's *Snow Dancing* (with its myriad participants, purposeless activities and throw-away products) seemed to be both symptomatic of and a response to what two years later the critic Sanford Kwinter would call the "efficient but one-dimensional marketplace world in which we live". One in which design is the umbrella term for a wide variety of activities destined to shape image identity into hyper-stylised products. "Together", Kwinter wrote regarding the proliferation of art directors, lifestyle magazine advertising, homepages, logos, "[these] form a seamless performative mesh, a cultural project in the fullest sense of the word, one of nonstop modulation and adrenalated *display*".[14]

Parreno's more recent displays foreground the materiality of the site, the entropic nature of images and the integrated nature of our senses with (and against) the "electronic disciplinary apparatus" that regulates our everyday routines. He often refers to factories and warehouses refurbished as art galleries as the places where he first encountered work bound to notions of site-specificity and intermediality. Le Magasin in Grenoble, where he grew up and attended art school, proves exemplary as a direct influence on the *Snow Dancing* event of 1995. The original structure consisted of a 3,000 m² industrial hall built by the Gustave Eiffel workshop for the 1900 Paris World Fair. Acquired later by a hydroelectric equipment company from Grenoble, the iron structure was dismantled and reassembled in Parreno's city where it functioned, among other things, as a warehouse. In 1986 it reopened after an architectural renovation designed by architect Patrick Bouchain, aimed to restore much of the building to its original state. The large nave of the structure, covered by a pitched glass roof and flanked by a double clerestory, is the central element of the building. Aside from large-scale, site-specific works, the space and the ensuing institution has embraced, in more recent years, a paradigm of interactivity and interdisciplinarity while seeing itself as "a generator of exhibitions, events, shows, encounters [and] performances". Workshops and a school complement the event and experience-oriented agenda of Le Magasin and resonate with Bouchain's penchant for researching the site of his projects by establishing social situations in which a network of collaborators and users inform the final result. Accordingly, a description of Bouchain's architectural practice by the website Spatial Agency, is a distant echo of Parreno's own work and that of his contemporaries, famously dubbed "Relational Aesthetics" by curator Nicolas Bourriaud:

> most of [Bouchain's] projects begin with establishing a network of interested people, collaborators, residents, local government officials, neighbourhood groups etc. Once this network is in place, the site is activated socially, usually through opening a small space that functions as a restaurant, site office and consultation area where passers-by and interested people can find out about the project, give their views, or simply watch a film.[15]

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Sandford Kwinter, *Far from Equilibrium. Essays in Technology and Design Culture*, ed. Cynthia Davidson (Barcelona and New York: Actar, 2007), 38.

15
See website: http://www.spatialagency.net/database/why/political/bouchain, accessed February 2017. It is beyond the scope of this essay to parse the debate on *Relational Aesthetics*. Instead I want to call attention to the focus on community life that Giedion, deeply attached to a humanist élan, proposed in "The Need for a New Monumentality" (1944). For Giedion, contemporary architecture, with its interest in the honesty ("naked and rough") of market halls, factories and "the bold vaults of the great exhibition buildings", led the way towards a "language of our time". He called for art to occupy public spaces and be brought back into contact with the community, for artists to build "centers of social life". In "The Need for a New Monumentality", in *Architecture, You and Me. The Diary of a Development*, 26, 31. For reasons of space I can't explore this, at times contradictory text further, yet it is highly relevant in thinking about a number of contemporary artistic practices concerned with sociability.

Additionally, "with a background in theatre, circuses and urban festivals, Bouchain approaches architecture as event, creating maximum impact through a mixture of illusion, clever use of materials and innovative programming".[16] This resonates too with the original program for a "Site for Contemporary Arts" as the PdT was conceived for its 2002 opening led by Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans. With an interest in experimentation, events, flexibility and a dialogue between cinema, music, architecture, design, fashion and the visual arts they privileged the idea of the "pavilion" as a creative laboratory.[17] Invoking the "non-stop modulation" unleashed by global neoliberal markets and the digital environments of the turn of the 20th century, such dissolution of boundaries signalled an interdisciplinary freedom alongside unsustainable collective encounters mediated by the contingency of available forms.

In the 1990s, Kwinter warned about the "comprehensive cultural system of management" and "engineering of human affect" that may be seen to have foreground the about-face the relational playground PdT incarnated in the early 2000s. "Like the coils of anaconda", he wrote, "loop after loop of the soft-infrastructural mesh is drawn daily around us, not to crush us, but merely to restrict expansion in unsanctioned directions".[18] By 2013 Parreno's *Anywhere...* would use the exhibition to stage and probe the hypermediated reality of the digital and the illusory individualism sanctioned by the vast possibilities of cyberspace. Following the entropic materiality and social dispersion of *Snow Dancing*, he reprised the question of display-cum-exhibition now under the accelerating conditions of cognitive computation. His two-fold preoccupation with reinventing the social (in order to avoid domestication) and renegotiating form (in order to make it public) manifested itself on an unprecedented scale and was more ambitious than ever in its attempt to disrupt entrenched habits of artistic and digital consumption.[19]

Time Code

In 2002 Parreno expressed renewed interest in the event-category as a substitute for the conventional organisation of the exhibition as a container of objects in order to explore "unsanctioned directions". He began to deploy the concept of the time code as "an electronic indexing method"[20] structuring the tempo of the exhibition (its various visual and aural components) as one would script or score a musical performance or theatre piece. On the occasion of a 2002 exhibition at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris the artist utilised a show controller as a centralising device that orchestrated five different sequences of the film *Alien Seasons*, a main component of the show. In rapport with these sequences the controller also determined the timing of several other elements, including the covering of windows to create a cinematic space for the film *El Sueño de una cosa* (2002) as well as a project-

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Interview with Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans, "A Site to Inhabit" in *Palais* 15, (Special issue on *The History of Palais de Tokyo since 1937* (Spring 2012): 131.

[18] Kwinter, *Far from Equilibrium*, 39.

[19] In 1943, the same year "Nine Points on Monumentality" was published, the anthropologist Margaret Mead wrote about the opposing approaches to art in pre-scientific and modern societies. The short text, which Parreno has acknowledged as influential, highlighted the integrated quality of Balinese culture and how a relational logic (between dance, design, music, etc.) appealed to all the senses: "For Art to be Reality, the whole sensuous being must be caught up in the experience". Advancing issues that would preoccupy artists in the decades following the 1960s, she added: "we need to break down the present dichotomy between the artist, the work of art, and the spectator, and realise that any patterned activity of a people—a football match, the group of bowlers in a bowling alley—is closer to an art form than a group of dubiously reverent attendants at an art gallery or in a concert hall". See Margaret Mead, "Art and Reality. From the Standpoint of Cultural Anthropology", *College Art Journal* 2, no. 4, Part 1 (May 1943): 119.

[20] Philippe Parreno, "Sitcom Ghost", in *Rirkrit Tiravanija (Tomorrow is Another Day),* exh. cat. (Rotterdam, Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, 2004), 97-116.

ed colour sequence *Mont Analogue* (2001), to be seen only from the outside of the building between 10pm and 6am. The realisation that the electronic signal could orchestrate the environment of the exhibition was reprised at Palais de Tokyo in 2013. In the monumental space, the score of Petrushka was set in dialogue with digital automation technology that structured the pace of the show with multi-sensorial effects that contrasted with the complex digital opacity (below the threshold of human perception) of the controlling apparatus. Parreno and sound designer Nicolas Becker divided the complex score into segments. Pianist Mikhail Rudy played the four scenes selected in thirty-one minutes and the entire exhibition was encrypted using these as a code: "I wanted," said Parreno in an interview, "to link each event or work in the show to the piano [...] Things happen to be in sync in an uncanny way, and you don't know why, but at the end you can feel the overall logic coming into play".[21] This intensified a conversation between the figure of the automaton, the puppet and the ghost as the organising matrix of the show and a multi-layered reflection on technology, spectacle and collectivity that has its roots in 19th century techniques of visuality and entertainment and would continue to preoccupy the likes of Giedion and Le Corbusier.[22] Moreover, this amusement-park-effect orchestrated by the time-code of Petrushka was facilitated by the architectural shell that is the PdT. Accordingly, in regards to his approach to the 2013 exhibition, Parreno declared: "I started to think in terms of architecture and landscape design".[23]

The building that was now offered to the artist was the closest analogue to an industrial park of the kind Giedion found inspirational in thinking about the "new monumentality" the post-war period called for. A 2010-2012 renovation tripled the space of the institution and led *artdaily* to call it the "dustiest"[24] contemporary arts centre in Europe. This unfinished aspect, the remnants of past uses, the "in-progress look and feel", the rawness of the walls and columns, the cavernous basement, the diversity of spaces, all contribute to a sense of endless elasticity where form can't settle comfortably as objects would on the walls of a white cube. "My wish", Anne Lacaton, from the architectural firm in charge of the overhaul, Lacaton & Vassal, told *Wallpaper* magazine, "is that after every exhibition, [the space] would become empty and then recomposed again [...] there is a real freedom of use".[25] But what if recomposition were to happen continuously within the spatiotemporal frame of one exhibition? What if its elements were recycled from previous shows? What if its identity morphed and changed due to the unstable web of relations in which elements appeared and disappeared? As if to punctuate rather than conquer this vast indomitable architectural shell, its pliant spaces and shifting vistas, Parreno marked the *parcours* of the exhibition with fifty-six flickering lamps programmed to respond to the fifty-six movements of the music. Additionally, flickering wall labels made with electronic-paper-display technology did not merely identify the works in the space. Instead, while continuously changing, they featured textual fragments from *Snow Dancing*, making one architectural spectral shell and its multiple stories inhabit another.

21
Darius Khondji and Carlos Basualdo (eds.), *Philippe Parreno. Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of this World* (London: Koenig Books Ltd; Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2014), 38.

22
Critics would take note. As Anaël Pigeat observed in an interview with the artist: "with Petrushka, you become interested in themes related to the circus and the carnival that are very present at the end of the 19th century". See Anaël Pigeat's interview "Philippe Parreno, un fantôme est un livre oublié qu'on réinvente", *Art Press* (October 21, 2013), https://www.artpress.com/2013/10/21/philippe-parreno-un-fantome-est-un-livre-oublie-quon-reinvente/, accessed january 2021. See also Mouna Mekouar, "Exhibition as Automaton," in *Philippe Parreno, Anywhere, Anywhere,* 143.

23
Philippe Parreno. Anywhere, Anywhere, 41.

24
Thomas Adamson "The Palais de Tokyo in Paris: Europe's biggest contemporary art center opens", *artdialy.com* (April 14, 2012), http://artdaily.com/news/54735/The-Palais-de-Tokyo-in-Paris--Europe-s-biggest-contemporary-art-center-opens, accessed February 2017.

25
Amy Verner, "Paris' Palais de Tokyo reopens", *Wallpaper* (April 18, 2012), http://www.wallpaper.com/architecture/paris-palais-de-tokyo-reopens, accessed February 2017.

This *mise-en-abyme* effect threaded through the overall structure of the show, not only because most of the spatial vignettes that constituted the exhibition had as a point of departure previous works by the artist, but also because most of them involved the work of others. Thus, this dual structure, in which the subject (author) and the object (artwork) is inhabited by another, is paramount for understanding their inherent instability, barely kept in check by another figure of alterity: the automaton that the time code, here defined by Petrushka, represents.

fig. 3
Philippe Parreno, *TV Channel*, 2013. Exhibition view: *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World.* Palais de Tokyo, Paris 2013. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

Or take the first work we encounter as we enter the vast gallery that serves as the proper entrance to the exhibition. *TV Channel* (2013) [fig. 3] consists of a wall-like LED screen that showed five short films produced by Parreno in the span of twenty-nine years. The LED screen, used mainly in stadiums in the late 1990s, offered definition and dissolution of the image depending on the vantage point of the viewer. It is a fitting metaphor for the volatility of the visual transformed into electronic signals. As spectators approach the screen, the images of the films disintegrate into thousands of particles scattered across the units that composed it. But immateriality comes to a halt when we find ourselves face to face with the device, laid bare, as it were, and buzzing "with the varying electronic interferences and sonic vibrations that the sounds and visuals in the film have now become".[26] Two of the films in this continuous loop could be said to bracket this confrontation between materiality and ethereality, body and technology that the work, and the overall exhibition, staged. In *The Writer* (2007), the famous 1772 Jacquet-Droz automaton from the Musée d'Art et d'Histoire in Neuchâtel (Switzerland) clumsily writes on white paper with a feather pen: "What Do You Believe, Your Eyes or My Words?". This simultaneously raises doubts about perceptual accuracy and literal representation, the automaton's words, and by default Petrushka and the show's time code, while setting in motion what the artist has referred to as the production of "machines without mechanisms".[27] What seems initially to be a reflection on a historical lineage of technological automation that today finds its apex in the total networked, task-oriented environments of the city and the fully colonised

26
"CAC Málaga presents *TV Channel*: Philippe Parreno's first solo exhibition in Spain," *artdaily.org* (July 28, 2014), https://artdaily.cc/news/71560/CAC-M-laga-presents-TV-Channel--Philippe-Parreno-s-first-solo-exhibition-in-Spain#.YQlHetMzbow, accessed january 2021.
27
Philippe Parreno. Anywhere, Anywhere, 45.

(by corporate capital) virtual identities of the digital, is also an attempt to generate excess, glitches, viscosity, doubts, and to add sensoriality to the algorithmic matrix that generates the exhibition.
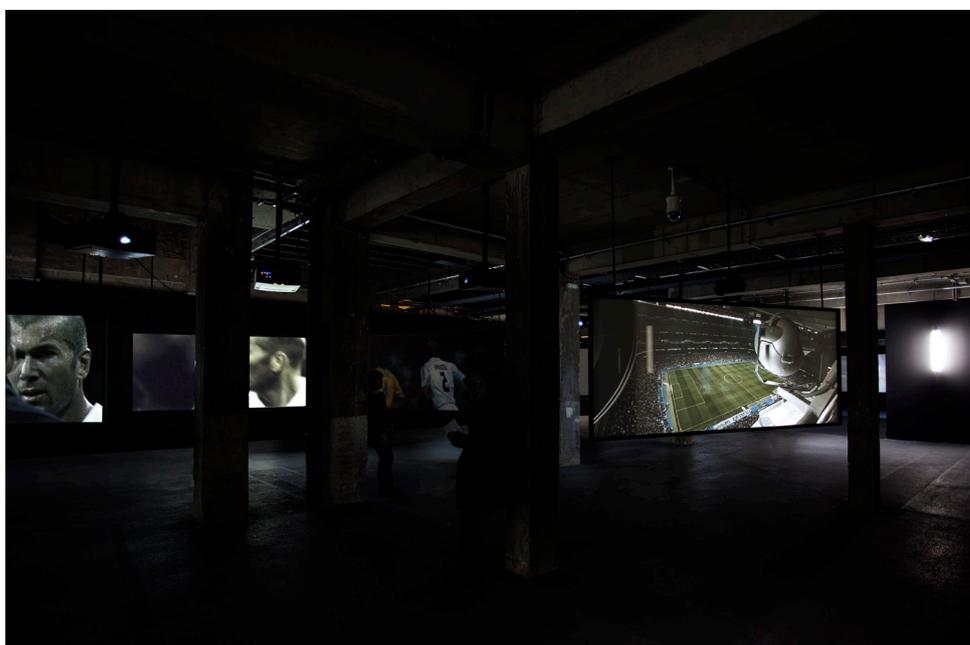
Ghosts, Automatons and Puppets

Automatons became popular in the age of Enlightenment. Produced to magically recreate human traits and to mesmerise audiences with their life-like qualities, these androids raised the issue of the powerful intersection between human and machine that looms large over modern debates on subject/object relations, art and technology. Parreno has of course been concerned with these inherent contaminations and imbrications during much of his career. The inhabitation of the subject by the ghosts unleashed by reproducibility and digital technologies, is at the core of several projects, such as the celebrated *No Ghost Just a Shell* (1999-2003), *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait* (2006), and *Marilyn* (2012). The first work, an element of which is featured in one of the cavernous small galleries that constitute the basement-level of the PdT, is a short and profoundly moving film entitled *Anywhere Out of The World* (2000). It features a manga character (Annlee)—purchased by Parreno and his collaborator Pierre Huyghe in 1999—who, under copyleft, was shared with artists, friends and colleagues to be used in a variety of artistic endeavours. At PdT, Annlee melancholically ponders the identity vacuum that, as a generic product for sale, she represents, and on the multiple spectres for which she is a receptacle. As such, she speaks to mechanisms of authorial production involving silenced methods of citation and disguised appropriation, to technologies of reproducibility and the techniques of open theft, sampling, recycling and remixing that edit-based creativity exemplifies. She also instantiates the programmed regimes of subjectivation that underpin the delusion of networked individuality. "I have no voice", says Annlee, in the short four-minute-film, and she concludes, invoking the title of the whole project: "I am no ghost just a shell". Here, architectural shells are occupied by subject shells. This is further confirmed by artist Tino Sehgal's own late contribution to filling the void that Annlee represents. At PdT, upon the conclusion of the film, we are confronted by a little girl meticulously trained by Sehgal who enacted and embodied Annlee while effectively and affectively meditating on the grand themes that the exhibition addressed, such as the nature of communications, relations, subjectivity, technology and reality. Here is Kwinter again prophetically encapsulating in the mid-1990s an epochal concern with technological progress and the perceptual and communicational regimes that it imposes on the subject: "communications, networks, computers, microprocessor control systems are socially toxic entities primarily when used 'correctly', that is, in their capacity to routinise interactions with people and processes in increasingly engineered, confined, and deterministic spaces". He continues, suggesting that there is no outside of the digital interface, that

> it is our duty and mandate to refuse this new, pseudo-material space entirely, and to follow the 'minor,' archaic path through the microchip, that is, to make the electronic world work for us to reimpart the rich indeterminacy and magic of matter out of the arid, cruel, and numericalised world of the reductionist-mechanical and the disciplinary-electronic.[28]

Optimistic but vague, Kwinter's statement puts an emphasis on 'indeterminacy', since a networked structure opposes binaries and dialectics (such as reality against virtuality) and thus clear pathways. *No More Reality* is precisely the title of that second film which brackets the theoretical meanderings of Parreno's exhibition in

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28
Kwinter, *Far from Equilibrium*, 97.

TV Channel. Subtitled "la manifestation", the four-minute video is the result of a workshop realised by the artist in an elementary school in Nice in 1999. Asked to demonstrate in favour of demands they deemed desirable (for example, Christmas in September!), the moving images and four photographs produced in conjunction with the workshop feature seven and eight-year old kids parading the school yard on a sunny day while carrying banners and posters prominently and clearly displaying the adopted slogan: "No More Reality". In the closest publication we have to a Parreno-catalogue-*raisonée*, readers encounter maddening catalogue entries (written under the strict supervision of the artist) that attest to the unstable material formats that he favours. There, this version of the work is said to allude to a 'disenchanted era' shaped by reality effects produced by television, which Parreno has signalled as profoundly formative to his work. The gesture of substituting kids for adults, the catalogue entry states, derealises further the historically charged figure of the demonstration.[29] In France, demonstration conjures May 1968 and by default—since we are dealing with images here—the imperatives of the spectacle (firmly rooted in the colonisation of leisure by capital). Filmed more than fifteen years apart, *No More Reality* and *The Writer*, set the background for a narrative of displacements in which subjects and objects are neither grounded by truth nor in reality but whose forms technology has split open and unhinged from the confines of the body and the space of the screen. Take, for example, *Zidane, A 21st Century Portrait* conceived in collaboration with Douglas Gordon in 2006 [fig. 4]. The ninety-minute-long film famously tracks the French soccer star as he moves across the field during a game between Real Madrid and Villareal, played in the Santiago Bernabéu Stadium in Madrid. The filming was done with seventeen 35mm cameras that never lose sight of Zidane. At PdT these seventeen points of view become literal as the film is projected on seventeen screens scattered across another underground, unfinished-looking gallery, which create endless replications of Zidane's image. As if in a forest of mirrors, portraiture and its representational function, as well as the presupposition of subjecthood that it implies, leak towards dissolution, making the star player a ghost untethered from his shell.

fig. 4
Philippe Parreno, *Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait*, 2006. Exhibition view, *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World*. Palais de Tokyo, Paris, 2013. Photo: Andrea Rossetti

29
Christine Macel ed., with the collaboration of Karen Marta, *Philippe Parreno* (Paris: Centre Pompidou; Zurich: JRP Ringier, 2009), 50. For an excellent essay on the idea of collectivity and spectral publics in Parreno's work see Tom McDonough, "Phantom Publics", in *The Yeast and The Host - Museo Jumex Cuadernillo* #11, 75-95.

Reference to one more film, displayed prominently in one of the main galleries and available to viewers after traversing and lingering in a space half covered with fake snow, places the spectator firmly within the realm of the spectral and the phantasmatic that haunt the technoscapes we occupy daily. The film is entitled *Marilyn* (2012) [fig. 5] and the setting in which we encounter it is more traditionally cinematic: a large dark room with seating to encourage a proper audience arrangement. In the film, the camera embodies the famed actress' point of view while her voice describes the contents of a domestic interior room—arguably her room at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel in New York, which the setting recreates. But her descriptions only match what we see sporadically, which is enough to initially convince us that these meticulous accounts are verbal representations of what is displayed on the screen. Soon after, we see a pen writing, and then doodling intensely, on the stationary of the hotel: this experience of déjà vu conjoined with manual clumsiness links Marilyn to *The Writer*. The images alternate with views of the surroundings, jumpy close-ups and smooth pans that aim to embody the soma figured forth by the film. Music plays, a storm rages, a phone rings, water drips and an unsettling repetition creeps in when the voice-over describes again an unseen closet and coat rack. Rain alternates with views (and sounds) of the clunky retracing of words by what is now clearly an automated movement. As the camera withdraws slowly, the set is revealed: cameras, cables, cinematographers populate a film setting now divested of the talented actress who, for the last eighteen minutes or so, has led us through the space. But nothing is really missing. As Parreno clarified in an interview shortly after featuring the film at the Beyeler Foundation in Switzerland, the ghostly presence of Monroe is automated, produced by a series of algorithms. He has used biometry (voice, handwriting and eye recognition) to concoct Monroe's persona while a "three-axis delta robot" (displayed at PdT in a nearby gallery recreating Parreno's own signature) simulated Monroe's handwriting.[30]

fig. 5
Philippe Parreno, *Marilyn*, 2012.
Exhibition view: *Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World*, Palais de Tokyo, Paris 2013.
Photo: Andrea Rossetti

As the unpacking of a work such as *Marilyn* might suggest, the last twenty years have witnessed an aggressive interface between the body and the screen-based techniques of cyberspace. Thanks to the escalation of biotechnology the machine has been internalised, intensifying the forms of extension that

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30
Louisa Buck, "The uncanny world of Philippe Parreno", *The Art Newspaper*, no. 236 (June 2012): 59.

Marshall McLuhan saw electronic circuits facilitating.[31] However, these are deeply historical processes, and thus, as if to foreground the above, Parreno alludes to a confluence of the cinematic and the phantasmatic that invokes certain conditions of early cinema: its supernatural dimension, fantastic registers and hallucinatory potential. In *Marilyn* he induces some of these without a concrete image. Instead, the immaterial subject that advances or halts the narrative is here defined by its absence. "Her image killed her", Parreno stated in the above interview, so as to justify the lack thereof.[32] And so the film is structured around effects rather than presence. As Tom Gunning observes, early cinema (before 1906-07) was not narrative in the sense that we associate today with feature films. Constructed scenarios, tableaux, stage effects and tricks supported the illusion rather than advanced the story: cinema was an "act of showing and exhibition". This cinema was one of "magical attractions" that favoured the production of scenes with "little connection and no characterisation." It relied on off-screen effects—a strategy advanced by Parreno when one hears the ringing phone from the film throughout the spaces of the exhibition—and exploited surprising occurrences. This could well define a crucial vector of Parreno's overall installation—more than once the artist has said that he sees exhibitions as films. At PdT soundscapes and light effects overlap, leak and connect, while the spectator panoramically perceives a space of constant transformation and jolt. Additionally, Gunning calls attention to the fact that early cinema offered "a new sort of stimulus for an audience not acculturated to the traditional arts", thereby suggesting that a cinema of attractions was closer to the fairgrounds and the amusement park than the fine arts. He adds: "I believe that it was the exhibitionist quality of turn-of-the-century popular art that made it attractive to the avant-garde—its freedom from the creation of diegesis, its accent on direct stimulation".[33] In turn, Parreno produces the exhibition as a mechanism of illusions that is revealed as an apparatus, putting the accent not on the story, but on the effect.

Interrelations

The premise that illusion is produced to be revealed situates us in ambiguous territory, which is exactly where I think Parreno wants to be. References to the *Gesamtkunstwerk* in interviews and reviews of the artist's use of the exhibition as a medium of sorts, for example, may contradict the structure of astonishment that a cinema of attractions deploys. Generally coined as a placeholder for practices that are predicated on a relaxed interdisciplinarity and/or intermediality, the term usually contrasts with the aesthetics of self-containment that characterise modernist painting and sculpture, and the cherished notion of medium-specificity. In a recent study entitled *Modernism After Wagner*, Juliet Koss warns of the ahistorical vacuum in which the term *Gesamtkunstwerk* operates. Severed from the specific context of 1849 when Wagner, in two texts written that year, advocated for a "unification of

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31
Busbea tackles this in a recent study on responsive environments in the 1970s—a context that could very well be invoked to illuminate Parreno's exhibitionary environments: "McLuhan's conception of environment would even infiltrate one of his key concepts: extension. If older media had functioned primarily by extending or augmenting the functioning of a single sense organ…the new electronic environment of networks and computation extended humanity in an entirely new way". Thus, three years after publishing *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964), McLuhan wrote: "With circuitry we have, instead of extensions of hand or foot, or back, or arm, a kind of involvement of the whole nervous system, an extension of the nervous system itself, a most profoundly involving operation". Marshal McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion", *Perspecta* 11 (1967): 166. Quoted in Larry Busbea, *The Responsive Environment. Design, Aesthetics, and the Human in the 1970s* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 38.

32
Ibid.

33
Gunning borrows the term "attraction" from Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein, to define a theatre not of illusory absorption but impact. He writes: "then, as now, the 'attraction' was a term of the fairground, and for Eisenstein and his friend Yutkevich it primarily represented their favourite fairground attraction, the roller coaster, or as it was known then in Russia, the American Mountains". See Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions. Early Film, Its Spectator and the Avant-Garde", in Thomas Elsaesser and Adam Barker (eds.), *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative* (London: BFI Pub., 1990), 59.

the sister arts", the concept of the "total work of art", she argues, has been decoupled from its revolutionary origins. Shaped by a German fascination with Greek classical ideals, Wagner had in mind socio-political transformation through the communal viewing experience of the musical drama. This viewing was to be active, political and ultimately utopian, with the *Gesamtkunstwerk* a model for the democratic culture Wagner projected for the future German nation. Instead, according to Koss, in 20th century discussions of art, "loosely associated with synesthesia, phantasmagoria, and psychedelia, *Gesamtkunstwerk* often stands for an artistic environment or performance in which spectators are expertly maneuvered into dumbfounded passivity by a sinister and powerful creative force".[34]

Parreno's allegiances to spectatorial conditions that oscillate between the poles of absorption and estrangement muddle with corresponding notions of passivity and active engagement. His intermedia environments are not interested in synthesising the arts or creating strong unitary experiences that summon a communal audience (as the proponents of a synthesis of the arts also hoped). Instead, I want to suggest that Parreno's event-oriented exhibitions foster the relational dynamics which are constitutive of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a synthesis of the arts and theatre to probe contemporary technical mediation and put pressure on the identity of forms. As Koss observes, reminding us of Michael Fried's 1967 charge against Minimalism, "beyond being merely another potential intruder in the house of modernism, theatre represented the idea of an incursion past the carefully policed borders of the individual art forms. Thorny questions of quality aside, 'theatre' would appear to be a code for the very idea of interrelation".[35]

Architectural shell, screen, time code and bodies intersected and overlapped at PdT to get interrelations going, to avoid representational stasis and to encourage unsettling tensions between attention and distraction. Accordingly, Parreno's automated environments figured the glitch, which might disrupt the flow of the time code, or imply unpredictability, to depart from smooth transitions and unified wholes. Nowhere is the potential glitch best thematised, both visually and aurally, than in one of the low-ceilinged basement galleries. At moments totally dark, the large space was illuminated by fourteen flashing marquees of different shapes and sizes, some made with white acrylic glass, some with translucent glass. The sporadic but recurrent electric buzz of these non-functional devices was accentuated by atonal electronic music. Like the flickering lights that punctuated the visitor's parcourse, they too responded to the score, but failure to operate consequently was not be detected by the spectator. Entitled *Danny the Street* (2013), the installation could be seen as an assaulting sign that conflated the worlds of theatre, cinema, and fairgrounds to produce those effects of surprise and stimulation that Gunning calls "attractions". Against the customary association with spell that cinematic diegesis and filmic black boxes encourage, the glitch, the flicker, the LED screen, the fake snow, the ringing phone, the multiple screens, and the flesh and bone Annlee all functioned as attractions, as opaque disruptions that provided thickness to the thinness of the image.

If television proved formative in the 1990s and digital technologies in the 2000s, maybe theatre (and theatricality), as a sort of nostalgic revisitation, did as much in the 2010s. Asked to stage the exhibition *Dancing Around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp* curated by Carlos Basualdo in 2012 at the Philadelphia Museum of Art [fig. 6], Parreno developed a series of display strategies, sound pieces and support devices that aimed at weaving and highlighting the shared imagery, literal collaborations and affective relations that defined the rapprochement between these artists. Parreno, who did not participate in the show as an artist, was called by Basualdo a "*metteur-en-scène*". The artist has expressed in several interviews how decisive the Philadelphia experience was for his approach to the exhibition at PdT. He refers to both as efforts to stage attention, to guide the


34
Juliet Koss, *Modernism after Wagner* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010), xii-xiii.
35
Ibid., xxiii.

viewer in a non-authoritarian way through the space of the exhibition.[36] However, in Philadelphia, asked to stage relations between the works and the artists in order to accentuate meaningful connections, the marquee, vitrines, display cases, sound pieces, and a Disklavier phantom piano playing Cage compositions, provided the interstitial, relational tissue that delivered the art works as something more than a series of discrete objects[37]

fig. 6
Dancing around the Bride: Cage, Cunningham, Johns, Rauschenberg, and Duchamp, 2012, exhibition view, Philadelphia Museum of Art. Photo: Constance Mensh
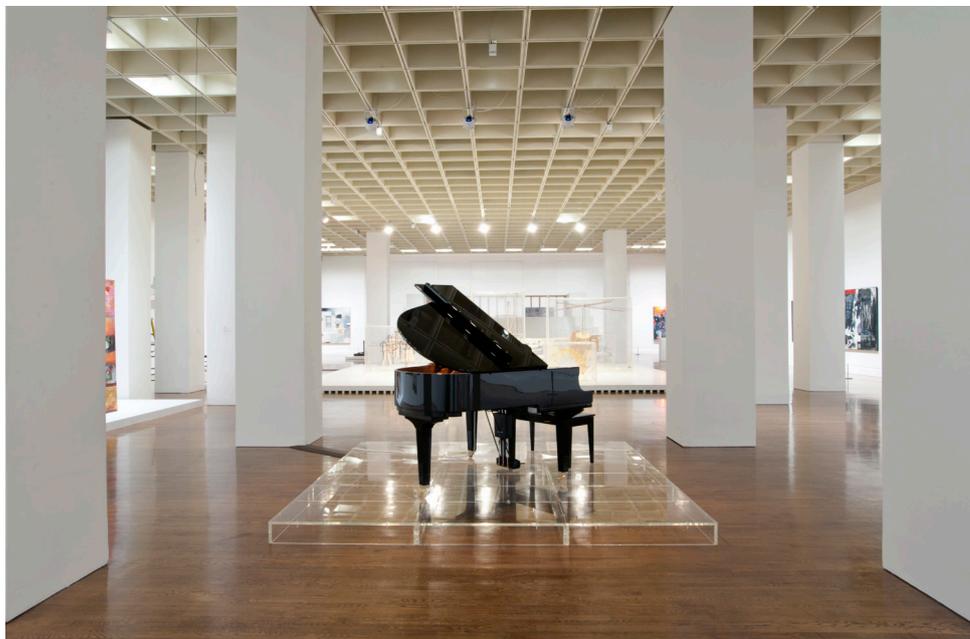
While contributing to developing and advancing the enunciative structure of the Philadelphia exhibition, Parreno engaged in operations tradition-ally associated with curatorial agency. It is this choreographing effort that Parreno imported at the PdT.[38] Hence, elements from the Philadelphia exhibition showed up in Paris as direct citations—an operation which Parreno, as observed above, is quite fond of. Take for example *How Can We Know the Dancer from the Dance?* (2012), which consists of a circular dance floor partially surrounded by curved, thick moving walls as if bracketing the empty space. Upon closer inspection we hear the footsteps of dancers vigorously activating the visual void—a pre-recorded perfor-mance of Cunningham dancers that in Philadelphia was played in the absence of the real bodies which graced the stage only at certain hours. No shell, just a ghost, the bodiless performance reverted the digital dictum that Annlee represents as if to allude to the diaphanous relation participants sustain with the real (and memory). Elsewhere in the exhibition, another thick, movable wall filled with books chosen by artist Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster (*La Bibliotheque Clandestine*, 2013) revealed, when pushed, a small gallery where Cunningham and Cage reappear. Inside the intimate and well-lit gallery, Parreno re-staged an exhibition of the composer's

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36
Céline Piettre, "Philippe Parreno's New Megashow Fills the Palais de Tokyo," *Blouin Artinfo* (October 26, 2013).

37
Carlos Basualdo, "In the Absence of a Name", in Karen Marta (ed.), *Philippe Parreno, "Anywhere, Anywhere Out of the World",* exh. cat. (London: Koenig Books; Paris: Palais de Tokyo, 2014), 19.

38
Parreno acknowledges the importance of his participation in the Philadelphia exhibition for his exhibition at PdT. See *Blouin-Artinfo*, October 26, 2013 (Cf. footnote 33); Cyril Béghin, "A Matter of Synchronization", *Mousse*, no. 37 (February 13, 2013); Emmanuelle Lequeux, "Entretien avec un maître de l'illusion", *Beaux Arts* (September 19, 2013); "Un fantome est un livre oublie que'on reinvente"; *Parreno. Anywhere, Anywhere,* 41.

drawings which took place at Margarete Roeder Gallery in New York in 2002. In that show, and equally at PdT, a Cage drawing was replaced by a Cunningham drawing every day, enacting the logic of ghostly alterity which informed the structure of the show.

Elasticity

Parreno's obsession with the split self, ghosts, automatons, shells, substitutes, ventriloquists, puppets and, one might add, collaborators, is a sustained reflection on identity, subjectivity and authorship produced by historical conditions. It takes spectators back to a 19th century imaginary concerned with modes of visuality and perception shaped by technology, reproducibility, and the urban conditions of modernity. This begins with the title of the show, shared with his Annlee film, which echoes 19th century French symbolist poet Charles Baudelaire's "Anywhere Out of This World", an 1869 ode to modern nomadism, the power of images, and the impossibility of transcendence.[39] At the core of Parreno's efforts one recognises a pressure on boundaries, the probing of a synthesis destined to willingly fail, to never attain wholeness or unity—thus, what his exhibition-environments underline is modulating forms that foreground the fluid intersections between subjects and objects, bodies and machines, images and reality. In fact, as early as 1997 Parreno had written that the object was "more or less a complex situation which can be transformed into another. By deforming it, by pushing it to its limits, we discover its affinities with what exists outside of it, in situ". Placing emphasis on "in-scription", he insisted on displacing attention from object to event: "and we accompany it never at its origins but always along its trajectory".[40] In the process, rather than productive mechanisms, Parreno's electro-tempered exhibitions resist the "reticular domination" that computational regimes impose on users, to explore alternatives to the forms of affect launched by the cycles of perpetual modernisation and consumption to which the privileged subjects of the experience economy are exposed.

Contra normative museological, cinematic, and theatrical structures of display, *Anywhere* was conceived as an interface in which a multisensorial environment countered the characteristic instrumentality of the digital apparatus around which the whole spectacle revolves. The overlapping materialities of this environment were predicated on the opacity of digital technologies, but yielded complex optical, aural, tactile and perceptual sensations that scoffed at the centrality of one sense over another, as well as the stubborn emphasis on object production and disciplinary restrictions. Perceptual refraction and the dispersal and disjunction of form were deployed to undo the limits between work and exhibition, while mobilising technological enchantment as a crucial historical vector that shapes our relationship to the bewitching flows of data that glide through our screens. The singular entity is nowhere to be found in these spaces where the time code's main objective was to replace rationality with relationality. Parreno thus cannibalised the role of the curator whose job is precisely to establish relations in space.[41] And relations in time that undo visions of linear progress. As Jonathan Crary proposes at the end of his study on 19th century painting and visual culture, at

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Baudelaire himself had borrowed the title from the English poet Thomas Hood, who in his poem "The Bridge of Sighs" (1844) tells the story of a woman who commits suicide and describes her plunge into death, as an *Anywhere, Anywhere, Out of the World*. Parreno borrows the original doubling of the word "anywhere" which disappears in Baudelaire's title and may allude to a double absence of location and consciousness which accords with the figure of the puppet and the automaton.

40
Philippe Parreno, "Evidences to be submitted to the free time litigation", in Pierre Huyghe, *The Trial*, exh. cat. (Munich, Kunstverein Munchen / Zurich, Kunsthalle Zurich Vienna, Secession / Dijon, Le Consortium), (Munich: Kunstverein, 2000), 5-9.

41
As Cyril Béghin observed in a recent interview with the artist: "This is how you have learned to think about objects, and films in particular with this elasticity—the possibility of their changing in the context of display". Béghin, "A Matter of Synchronization".

the turn of the century new technologies delivered flickering images projected on façades-cumscreens in public piazzas, defying classical monumentality long before an architectural postwar concern with the same term. Although foretelling "spectacular society" these new environments of images and mediatory devices were not totalitarian. Instead, their "fluctuating effects", observes Crary, allowed for constant collective and individual reconstitution within the "spellbound" conditions of image proliferation.[42] Accordingly, Parreno's aesthetic kernel puts the emphasis on pliancy:

> To get back to the idea of elasticity, it is as if the object rested attached to something it has produced and, at the same time, has not completely emerged from its shell [...] This is the thing that interests me the most: to produce diffractions of the object that will develop, to become its pollution, its project, its screenplay without ever ceasing to change [...] The permanent revolution[43]: if you stop, you die.[44]

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[42]
Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception. Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge [MA] and London: The MIT Press, 1999), 370.

[43]
The "permanent revolution" is a term associated mainly with Leon Trotsky's multi-step, global and heterogeneous class and political platform for achieving socialism. It was developed in essays published in 1905 and in book form in 1929.

[44]
Béghin, "A Matter of Synchronization". This idea has recurred in interviews with the artist. In 2007 he told curator Hans Ulrich Obrist: "Art schools ask their students to resolve their ideas into a form. Whereas to me, it's exciting when the content overflows beyond the form or the other way around. It's the irresolution that is interesting. The dynamic of fluids is interesting because they question equilibrium". Hans Ulrich Obrist and Philippe Parreno (eds.), *The Conversation Series*, vol. 14 (Köln: Walther Koenig, 2007), 10.

Author's Biography

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Arnon Ben-Dror
Nature in Context: A Situated Study of herman de vries's
Sanctuaries

Abstract

Since the early 1990s, the Dutch artist herman de vries has installed several works in public space with the title *sanctuarium* (or sanctuary)—empty plots of land, surrounded by a fence, where nature is left to grow uninterrupted. For the artist, these sanctuaries communicate a consistent universal plea: that of rediscovering and reconnecting with nature in its pure, unspoilt form, from which modern life has alienated us. By resituating the sanctuaries in their actual environments and looking at their evolutions throughout the years, this paper shows how the ideas and affects instigated by the sanctuaries are actually contingent, and differ significantly from one place to another. These works are continuously reshaped, both physically and symbolically, by ongoing negotiations between the "object", its (social, environmental, and geographic) context, and varied interventions by local actors. This brings to the fore a couple of broader issues as well: first, the impossibility of perceiving the human–nature relationship merely in phenomenological and universalistic terms, since this relationship is always locally embedded. Secondly, the understanding that, from a semiotic perspective, a work of public art is a radically dynamic entity—owing both to its installation in the politically charged public space, and to the possibility of local publics to experience and interact with the work in a myriad of spontaneous ways.

Nature in Context: A Situated Study of herman de vries's *Sanctuaries*[1]

Arnon Ben-Dror

Since the early 1990s, the Dutch artist herman de vries (b. 1931) has erected several sculptures in public space with the title *sanctuarium* (or *sanctuary*)—empty plots of land, surrounded by a fence, where seeds brought in randomly by the wind and by insects are left to grow uninterrupted. Three of these sanctuaries will be discussed in this paper: in Stuttgart, Germany (1993), in Münster, Germany (1997), and in Zeewolde, Netherlands (1999–2001).[2]

The artist and art scholars alike commonly treat these sculptures as different versions of essentially the same work, whose meaning, endowed by the artist, remains more or less the same wherever it stands: a site for people to contemplate nature in its pure, wild form, protected from the human obsession to shape it.[3] Can the meanings and effects generated by a public work of art, though, remain unchanged when it moves across borders and times? When it is placed within various geographical, cultural, and, most importantly here, environmental contexts? Can nature really evolve in isolation from the social habitat? Outside of the sterile environment of the museum, with its "protective" hermeneutic contextualisation, these public sculptures, as we will soon see, find themselves in a turbulent semiotic field.

And what of these sculptures' audiences? As Bryson and Bal famously stressed, every work of art "enters networks of semiotic transformation as

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Throughout this paper I comply with the artist's wish that his name, the titles of his works, and all texts related to them, be spelled in lowercase letters only, to avoid the hierarchies he associates with the practice of capitalisation.

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As this paper focuses on the relations between the works and their publics, I will focus on sanctuaries that are located in urban public areas. Accordingly, the recent *sanctuarium* erected in the HEART Museum in Denmark (2017) will not be addressed. Neither will similar works by de vries which are located in the wilderness or which differ from the round sanctuaries in significant formal aspects. These include: *le sanctuaire de la nature* (Museum Gassendi, Digne, France 2000), *sanctuarium: natura, mater* (Venice Biennale, Italy, 2015), *hortus liberatus* (Merzig-Saar, Germany, 2000), *wynfrith me caesit, herman me recreavit* (Düsseldorf, Germany, 2002), *the meadow* (Eschenau, Germany, 1986). Documentations and descriptions of all works by de vries mentioned in this paper are available in the comprehensive catalogue on the artist's official website. See "catalogue", hermandevries.org, http://www.hermandevries.org/timeline.php, accessed January 2021.

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herman de vries, "sanctuarium", in *Contemporary Sculpture: Projects in Münster 1997*, eds. Klaus Bussmann, Kasper König, Florian Matzner, exh. cat. (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 1997), 434.

volatile and as tangled as the glances of a crowd in any given minute of its life".[4] If one then wishes to study a work of art from a semiotic perspective, one should not be satisfied with the ideas put forward by the artist nor by the impressions left by "official" critics. Instead, one should pay attention to the myriad of "empirical", non-professional spectators, whose voices usually remain unheard.[5]

Nikos Hadjinicolaou, cited by Bryce and Bal, goes so far as to say that these different instances of reception actually transform the work. He thus offers a relational definition of art:

> We must put forth another conception that sees the work of art as a relationship [...] between an object and all the ways it has been perceived through history down to the present day; ways of perceiving that have untiringly transformed the work in a thousand and one ways. The work of art we have before us is the history of its consumption [...].[6]

Nowhere is this assertion more pertinent than in the realm of public art. Instead of the highly conventionalised spectatorial choreography museums demand (read the wall caption, step back, observe, reflect, say something to your companion, take a picture, continue walking), the possibilities of engaging with a public work of art are almost limitless. This normative void opens the door for a myriad of personal ways of appropriating and repurposing the work. In this sense, public art is interactive almost by definition.

My analysis, therefore, puts great emphasis precisely on these "histories of consumption". It pays close attention to actual manifestations; to the relations between the works and their specific contexts and publics; to the "actual traces left by actual encounters", to quote Bryce and Bal once more.[7] I have been able to trace such encounters by visiting the projects in person, conducting interviews with local actors, looking at vernacular documentation, going through local press and blog entries, and studying the eco-political specificities of each locale.

The aim of this paper is thus to examine how each sanctuary is constantly being reshaped, both actually and conceptually, through ongoing negotiations between the work, its social and geographical contexts, and the actions of the public and local authorities. I shall ask: What happens in the dialogue between artistic intentions and human interventions? How do environmental histories interlace with aesthetic forms to create site-specific significations? And more specifically, what happens to the ideal of "pure" nature when it travels from one locale to another?

I will start by presenting de vries's own approach to nature and his conceptualisation of his sanctuaries, which, as we shall see, is often echoed in the readings of his work and of those particular sanctuaries offered by art scholars and curators. Then, through a close analysis of each of the sanctuaries, we shall see how local contexts as well as varied ways of interacting generate site-specific significations that expand, or even subvert, the dominant understanding of these works.

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[4]
See Mieke Bal and Norman Bryson, "Semiotic and Art History", *The Art Bulletin* 73, no. 2 (1991): 187.

[5]
Bal and Bryson make the distinction between these living, "empirical" spectators, and the "ideal" spectator, which is an abstract entity. See ibid.: 185.

[6]
Nicos Hadjinicolaou, "Art History and the History of the Appreciation of Works of Art", in *Proceedings of the Caucus for Marxism and Art at the College Art Association*, no. 3–4 (1978), 12–13. Quoted from Bal and Bryson, "Semiotic and Art": 185.

[7]
Ibid.

Sanctifying Nature

Born in Alkmaar, the Netherlands, in 1931, herman de vries's was invested in nature from a young age. He studied horticulture and worked as an assistant researcher in the field before turning to art practice in the mid-1950s. In the early 1960s he joined the Dutch artists group Nul (a branch of the international Zero movement), whose members rejected the subjective trends in post-war expressionist art, and often integrated everyday materials into their works.[8] Nul's impersonal style has remained a staple of de vries's practice throughout his career, but unlike his fellow Nul members his focus turned, in the 1960s, almost exclusively towards natural matter and phenomena.

Since then, for more than half a century, de vries has been creating works of art made from materials taken directly from nature and used in their rudimentary state, sometimes as complete ready-mades. At the Venice Biennale of 2015, for instance, he represented the Netherlands with an installation that included a series of rubbings of earth from different locations (*from earth: everywhere*), as well as stones collected by the artist in nature (*the stones*), and a pile of tiny roses arranged in a perfect circle (*108 pound rosa damascene*). "Nature is art",[9] the artist asserts, and thus all that is left for him to do is to *present*, rather than *represent*, it. "I have nothing to add, nothing to change, only respect".[10] His practice, thus, comprises in many instances of merely *reframing nature as a work of art*, rather than creating something new from natural substances. In the sanctuaries, this frame becomes physical—a fence.

de vries's approach towards nature could be regarded as romantic and universalistic. Nature is nature, humans are humans, and the fundamental relation between the two is thus understood in essentialist phenomenological terms—a certain "being-with-nature"—which also entails an existential resonance. The artist orchestrates physical encounters with nature, whether in the gallery or outside of it, in an attempt to raise awareness of the primary significance of nature to human life,[11] an awareness we have lost in modern life, according to him. Natural reality, he asserts, precedes cultural reality.[12] This approach sets de vries's body of work apart from much of what we call today ecological art, which addresses more specifically to politically charged "ecological emergencies", as T.J. Demos puts it.[13]

This holistic phenomenology is also what different art scholars and critics often stress in their analyses of de vries's work. Art historian Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, for instance, focuses on the experiential immediacy of the artist's site-specific installations in nature, describing them as possessing primordial physical

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[8]
de vries served as co-editor, together with artist Henk Peeters, of the group's journal, *la revue nul = 0* (1961–64). For more on de vries's involvement with Zero, see Mel Gooding, *herman de vries: Chance and Change* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2006), 10, 27–29.

[9]
de vries repeats this dictum often. See, for instance, Cees de Boer, Colin Huizing, "here & everywhere", in *herman de vries: to be always to be*, eds. Cees de Boer, Colin Huizing, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Valiz, Mondrian Fund, 2015), 19; and herman de vries, "je deteste l'art dans la nature", in *herman de vries* (Arceuil, Paris: Anthese, Galerie Aline Videl, 2000), 18.

[10]
herman de vries, "the world we live in is a revelation", in *Nature*, ed. Jeffrey Kastner, *Documents of Contemporary Art* series (London and Cambridge [MA]: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2012), 163.

[11]
herman de vries, "what, why, wherefore", in *Public Art: A Reader*, ed. Florian Matzner (Ostfildern-Ruit: Hatje Cantz, 2004), 81–82.

[12]
For more on de vries's ideas on nature's superiority over culture, see Birgit Donker, "Foreword", *herman de vries: to be always to be*, eds. Cees de Boer, Colin Huizing, exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Valiz, Mondrian Fund, 2015), 10. de vries stresses that while human-made things can be significant for human life, elements like plants, water and trees "are of more general significance because they form part of our primary reality, nature". See de vries, "the world", 163.

[13]
See T.J. Demos, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology: An Introduction", *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (2013): 1.

qualities, which restore something of the unity humans once had with nature.[14] Art critic and curator Cees de Boer connects de vries's creations with the bodily phenomenology of Maurice Merlau-Ponty.[15] Art historian Mel Gooding talks about his works in terms of an "exemplary enactment of being-in-the-world",[16] which again enables us to reconnect with our physical environment.[17]

In the sanctuaries as well, the sense-based encounter with nature—mainly visual, in this case—is supposed to lead, according to de vries, to existential "reflection, revelation and contemplation",[18] where one asks oneself: "what am I? what am I part of? what is my life?"[19] The perfect circular form of the sanctuaries is meant to evoke in the viewer the feeling of the "the essential unity of existence".[20] This notion of a universally applicable experience of nature, unmediated and holistic, is one that I will problematise throughout my analyses in the following paragraphs.

de vries is highly critical of several attitudes towards nature he regards as reificatory. For instance, the scientific attitude, which approaches nature as an object of study through the mediation of language or numbers; or the aestheticising attitude, which strives to reshape nature to fit human tastes. To highlight the contrast between what he calls "domesticated", designed nature, on the one hand, and wild nature, on the other, he places his sanctuaries in public parks, which he defines as "nature impoverished by culture".[21] He wants to help us "imagine how things would look if wild growth were to take possession of [parks]", and tamed nature no longer existed.[22] We will soon see, however, how both the scientific and the "cultural" attitudes creep into the sanctuaries through the backdoor.

For de vries, in any case, the sanctuaries are utopic constellations, and therefore essentially replicable in different geographical locations. They function like microcosmic heterotopias—enclosed counter-sites which project a utopic vision.[23] The following ode de vries wrote for the inauguration of the sanctuary in Stuttgart, reflects this arcadian sentiment:

14

Anne Moeglin-Delcroix, "Proximité dans la distance: l'art et la nature chez herman de vries", in *le point: herman de vries* (Lyon: Fage éditions, Musée Gassendi, 2009), 22, 24. Moeglin-Delcroix frames de vries's criticism of mediated relations with nature and his championing of direct experience instead, within an anti-Cartesian philosophical discourse. See ibid., 14–20. All translations in this paper are my own.

15

Cees de Boer, "herman de vries: my poetry is the world", *Antennae*, no. 51 (2020): esp. 102, 174–182.

16

Gooding, *herman de vries*, 84.

17

Ibid., 130.

18

herman de vries, "chance & change", interview by John K. Grande, in *Art Nature Dialogues: Interviews with Environmental Artists*, ed. John K. Grande (Albany [NY]: State University of New York Press, 2004), 232.

19

de vries, "sanctuarium", 432.

20

Gooding, *herman de vries*, 20. One of the paradoxes of de vries's oeuvre which deserves more attention is that while the artist always speaks passionately about wild nature, his installations almost unequivocally apply rigid order and symmetry in the tradition of Minimalist aesthetics. It is thus difficult to accept that de vries only "presents" natural materials without changing or adding anything. Rather, he meticulously organises these materials to conform with an historically specific aesthetic language.

21

herman de vries, "what, why", 82.

22

de vries, "what, why", 82. He adds: "if nobody interferes […] the area would become a forest: forest—the most complicated living community that once almost completely covered our earth. a park: a culturally impoverished nature." See Gooding, *herman de vries*, 125. de vries choice to introduce nature into the city and work within the context of international survey exhibitions can be seen as characteristic of the shift, described by art historian Suzaan Boettger, by which nature-based art has moved from the wilderness to the cityscape and to more institutionalised exhibitions. See Suzaan Boettger, *Earthworks: Art and the Landscape of the Sixties* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 238–39.

23

This concept is developed in Michel Foucault, "Des espaces autres", *Empan* 2, no. 54 (2004): esp. 15.

[...] new life would grow on left-over rubble, blackbirds and nightin-
gales sing evenings and mornings, butterflies and wild bees are there,
we hear frogs and toads croaking from the damp ruins of cellars.
freedom has returned. the scent of flowering elderberry bushes
penetrates houses through open windows, inviting us to realism:
the television is tuned off, superfluous. terrain vague is the future of
cities; new worlds of experience, which guide our consciousness to a
different order, away from the chaos of planning. the terrains vagues
are the avant-garde of nature.[24]

The sanctuaries then serve, for the artist, as shelters, but also as visionary, eman-
cipatory sites, with an almost religious significance. de vries likens them to places
of worship, where free-evolving nature is protected, contemplated and venerated.[25]
"[T]o sanctify", he writes in this context, is "to make inviolable through religious
consecration".[26] Moeglin-Delcroix sees the sanctuaries in similar terms, comparing
them to holy altars. In both, she writes, "the sacred demands separation, which
distinguishes and protects it from the profane".[27] The use of Latin for the work's
title *sanctuarium* obviously serves to magnify this "aura" of sanctity. The kind of
contemplation de vries wishes to instigate can thus recall specifically Christian
"contemplation"—a deep, silent prayer in which the believer is able to "see" the
divine with his inner eyes and to raise their awareness to the presence of divinity in
all that surrounds them.[28] This awe-laden devotional attitude towards nature runs
the risk of missing, as will shortly be established, the more grounded significance
"nature" holds for different communities and individuals.

A certain spirituality also underlies de vries's profound interest in the
principle of randomness, another strategy that comes to the fore in the sanctuaries.
For the artist, randomness is the core principle of the natural world, to which the
work of art should be subjected.[29] Influenced by Eastern philosophies and religions
that call for self-attunement with nature's rhythms,[30] he adopted, in the 1970s, the
creative motto "chance and change".[31] In the sanctuaries, indeed, the variables of
nature—direction and speed of the wind, bee pollination times, bird feces, tempera-

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24
Gooding, *herman de vries*, 125.
        25
See de vries, "sanctuarium", 431. In Münster, this religious connotation would have been made more
conspicuous had de vries implemented his original plan to place this *sanctuarium* in front of a Church
in the city. See de vries, "what, why", 82.
        26
de vries, "sanctuarium", 431.
        27
Moeglin-Delcroix, "Proximité," 23. Indeed, the Latin term "sanctuarium" relates both to a shelter and
to a sacred place.
        28
Moeglin-Delcroix also notes that the word "contemplation" derives from *templum*, a sacred space
from which one must stay at a certain distance in order to become absorbed by the sublimity of a
higher power. See Moeglin-Delcroix, "Proximité", 31.
        29
"Chance", of course, was one of the tropes of the avant-garde, and especially the neo-avant-garde,
explored in such works as Marcel Duchamp's *3 Stoppages étalon* (1913–1914), Daniel Spoerri's *An
Anecdoted Topography of Chance* (1966) or John Cage's *Music of Changes* (1951). The classic text on
the subject is George Brecht's *Chance-Imagery* (New York: A Great Bear Pamphlet, 1966). For a recent
brief anthology of key texts discussing the use of chance in art, see Margaret Iversen, ed., *Chance,
Documents of Contemporary Art* series (London and Cambridge [MA]: Whitechapel and MIT Press,
2010).
        30
For more on the influence of Eastern philosophies on de vries's thought, see Gooding, *herman de
vries*, 19–29, 172. Multiple neo-avant-garde artists were influenced by Eastern thought, particularly
with regards to the notion of chance, most famous of whom was John Cage. The relation between
chance and Eastern philosophies in his thought and art is explored in Margaret Iversen, "Introduction:
The Aesthetic of Chance", in *Chance*, 12–15. For more on Cage's interest in chance, see Marc J.
Jensen, "John Cage, Chance Operations and the Chaos Game: Cage and the I Ching", *The Musical
Time*s 150, no. 1907 (Summer 2009): 97–102.
        31
See Gooding, *herman de vries*, 49.

ture, precipitation—change the work incessantly. The sanctuaries are, we could say, somewhat oxymoronically, "monuments of change". But are these changes only botanical? Can "sacred" processes (in nature) truly be separated from "profane" ones (in culture)? Can a *terrain* really be *vague*—vacant—from the traces of the social context that surrounds it? And how does de vries's romantic poetics of nature translate into real life encounters and materialisations? By resituating the sanctuaries in their *actual contexts* and examining their *actual relations* with their publics, I will try to provide some answers to these questions.

Stuttgart: The Spectre of Institutional Eco-Vandalism

de vries's first *sanctuarium* was commissioned by the city of Stuttgart in 1993 for the International Horticultural Exhibition (IGA).[32] Its fence is made of 2.85 metre-high steel stakes with golden spearheads, which allow complete visibility to the inside (initially, at least). The militant spearheads emphasise that nature is being guarded here against unwelcome intruders. They form a golden ring around nature, like an *aureola* surrounding a saint's head.[33]

This sanctuary is located on a far and isolated corner of the Leibfriedscher Garden, crushed between two bustling roads at the city's entrance. The main audience of the work are thus the drivers—quite fitting for Germany's city of cars, home to Mercedes-Benz and Porsche. de vries wanted this *sanctuarium* to provide "a shelter for the manifestation of nature in an extreme environment [...] even in this toxic atmosphere".[34]

This sanctuary had grown beautifully for 25 years [fig. 1], until in March 2018, without any notice, the Maintenance Department of the city of Stuttgart wiped out the microcosmic "forest". The mature trees, which had already far outgrown the fence, were now completely gone. The incident instigated strong reactions and made headlines, even nationally. de vries insisted that he had never authorised any trimming, called this a "cultural crime",[35] and considered legal action. He was particularly disappointed that this had happened under the reign of Mayor Fritz Kuhn from the German Green Party.[36] The head of the Maintenance Department claimed that essentially his department had done nothing wrong, as the agreement with the artist allows the city to cut the plants when they block the view to the road,[37] a claim de vries denied by referring to the original IGA catalogue. "If I had wanted something to be done inside, then the fence would have a door", he said.[38] The environmentalist political faction SÖS/LINKE-PLuS filed an

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[32]
As part of this large exhibition, German and international artists and landscape architects were invited to create site-specific works in the Leibfriedscher garden. Eleven of those works became permanent installations, including works by Dan Graham and Hans Luz. For more information on the different projects, see Helga Panten ed., *IGA Stuttgart Expo 1993* (April 23, 1993 - October 17, 1993) exh. cat. (Stuttgart: Zentralverband Gartenbau, 1993).

[33]
The word *aureola* comes from *aurea*, which is Latin for golden.

[34]
de vries, *texte—textarbeiten—textbilder*, c. 175.

[35]
Marcus Woeller, "Stuttgart rodet Gartenkunstwerk von Herman de Vries", *Welt*, April 6, 2018, https://www.welt.de/kultur/kunst/article175226463/Stuttgart-rodet-Gartenkunst-von-Herman-de-Vries.html, accessed January 2021.

[36]
See Susanne Müller-Baji, "Trauer um die Kunst", *Stuttgarter Zeitung*, April 18, 2018, https://www.stuttgarter-zeitung.de/inhalt.sanctuarium-in-stuttgart-feuerbach-trauer-um-die-kunst.aae8a9f9-fd56-4ecb-8d2b-9409b4221627.html, accessed January 2021.

[37]
Schriner bases his claims on a plan made for the IGA Exhibition 1993 by the landscape architects Luz+Partner, who were responsible for the new design of the Leibfriedscher garden. According to this plan, the trees should be trimmed when they overgrow the fence, so that the view to the Heilbronner Strasse would be preserved. It is still unclear why the trimming, however, was not done more delicately. See "Herman de Vries: Sanctuarium, 1993", *Stuttgart.de*, stuttgart.de/item/show/350945, accessed July 2020.

[38]
Müller-Baji, "Trauer".

fig. 1
herman de vries. *sanctuarium*,
1993. Steel, gold leaf, earth, Ø12
× 2.85m. Stuttgart, Germany.
Photo: Wolfram Freutel (2014).

official request for clarification with the city council for this "ruthless" action,[39] and finally the mayor apologised and promised it would not happen again. Only members of the conservative Christian Democrats said that the work "screamed" for this cut and that it actually did the artist a service by increasing his market value.[40]

The legal aspect, however, is not what I wish to focus on here. More relevant for this study is the response of the local community. First to react was local art historian Andrea Welz, who, after hearing about the incident, led a group of art lovers, loaded up with new seeds, which they threw into the *sanctuarium*. de vries, nevertheless, deemed these "bombings" unproductive, considering them equivalently interventionist acts, even if well intentioned ones.[41]

A more notable protest was initiated by two local artists, Anna Ohno and Justyna Koeke. After having filed a police complaint against the head of the Maintenance Department on account of vandalism of art, they approached de vries with the idea of arranging a performative protest on site where the public would be invited to participate. It was a way for them to show that "there is another, beautiful side of Stuttgart".[42] de vries was willing to cooperate, and even laid out the script for a "funeral to nature". On the day of the event, a few dozen local residents, art students, and environmental activists arrived at the *sanctuarium*, dressed in black. As live sombre chamber music played, the participants circled around the work and tied black ribbons onto the stakes. Memorial candles were left on site, along with a note telling the city of Stuttgart: "Shame on you!" Finally, de vries decided that the ribbons would stay as a permanent part of the work, as a reminder of the destruction of nature [fig. 2].[43]

39
"Kahlschlag statt Kunst—Sanctuarium auf dem Pragsattel wurde zerstört", *SÖS/LINKE-PLuS*, March 28, 2018, http://soeslinkeplus.de/2018/03/kahlschlag-statt-kunst-sanctuarium-auf-dem-pragsattel-wurde-zerstoert, accessed January 2021.

40
Elke Rutschmannund and Jan Sellner, "CDU gefällt gestutztes Sanctuarium", *Esslinger Zeitung*, 24 April, 2018. https://www.esslinger-zeitung.de/inhalt.em-dummytext-ortsmarke-der-kahlschlag-des-kunstwerks-am-pragsattel-spaltet-den-gemeinderat-kuhn-entschuldigt-sich-fuer-gartenbauamt-cdu-gefaellt-gestutztes-sanctuarium.9b358d3a-54e8-460a-a868-d65b2d6bc91c.html, accessed January 2021.

41
Woeller, "Stuttgart rodet".

42
Müller-Baji, "Trauer".

43
Justyna Koeke, interview by the author, July 6, 2018.

To understand why this vandalisation by the local authorities was met with such outrage, we need to realise how the issues that lie at the heart of the sanctuary—as an intervention in nature—relate to the local socio-political context. Local residents have been growing more and more outraged in recent years with Stuttgart authorities' mishandling of the environment and their adoption of pro-vehicle policies. The biggest issue at stake is the controversial project "Stuttgart 21", a comprehensive plan to replace the aboveground terminus station in Stuttgart with an underground transit station, which includes the construction of dozens of additional kilometres of railroads and tunnels. Construction works started in 2010, followed by weekly demonstrations. The protesters raised many environmental concerns: the disruption to the city's "green U" of natural parks, the uprooting of trees, the endangerment of mineral water resources, and the inconsideration of pedestrians and cyclists, among others. The watershed moment came in September 2010, when protesters arrived to protest against the uprooting of old trees, and were met with excessive police force, including the use of water cannons, pepper spray and batons.[44] Hundreds were injured in what later became known as "Black Thursday", for which three police officers were later found guilty of serious battery.[45] The day after this incident, more than 50,000 demonstrators flooded the streets. It was on the wave of this local unrest that Stuttgart elected a mayor from the German Green Party in 2012—the first major German city and state capital to do so.[46]

We now see how the trimming of the *sanctuarium* by the local Green government touched a raw nerve, and how this action symbolised much more than a simple quarrel about creative rights. As one local newspaper put it, since Black Thursday "one has become particularly sensitised to the rude handling of nature, which is, incidentally, exactly what the sanctuary had already prophetically

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44
David Gordon Smith and Josie Le Blond, "Germany Shocked by 'Disproportionate' Police Action in Stuttgart", *Spiegel*, October 10, 2010, http://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/the-world-from-berlin-germany-shocked-by-disproportionate-police-action-in-stuttgart-a-720735.html, accessed January 2021.
45
"Stuttgart 21: Strafbefehle gegen Polizisten nach Einsatz", *Welt*, August 27, 2013, https://www.welt.de/newsticker/news1/article119429014/Stuttgart-21-Strafbefehle-gegen-Polizisten-nach-Einsatz.html, accessed January 2021.
46
See "Stuttgart 21", *Wikipedia*, last modified December 4, 2020, https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diskussion:Stuttgart_21, accessed January 2021.

denounced".[47] The reaction was that of "Not again!" says Koeke. "This act by the Maintenance Department was symbolic of how the politicians treat not only art but nature in the city", she explains, noting that "The government did not foresee the people's reaction and the embarrassment its actions would draw".[48]

Koeke, who is originally from Poland, sees the trimming as characteristic of the prevalent handling of nature in Germany: "Everything here has to be so tidy, even small plants or weeds in the street are immediately trimmed".[49] She is not the only one who connects the vandalisation of the work with broader cultural tendencies. One local newspaper wrote that the operation was carried out with a "Swabian thoroughness",[50] and a SÖS/Linke-plus representative called the act a "complete Swabian shave".[51] Another local resident said it reflects the fact that "Stuttgart cannot do anything with nature. The fact that you are unable to let nature grow on a little piece of earth has something to do with the German sense of order".[52]

Local art historian Andrea Welz, who co-edited a book on one hundred years of public art in Stuttgart,[53] notes that the 1993 IGA exhibition, for which the *sanctuarium* was commissioned, was the last time Stuttgart acquired major public art works, after many decades of great investment in this field. It was also as part of this exhibition that Stuttgart's Green-U was built. The IGA was, therefore, a historical high point in the city's commitment to both nature and art. Twenty-five years later, it seems, the authorities in Stuttgart have "no respect towards nature and no respect towards art",[54] Welz concludes.

What I wish to stress here is that the reception of the Stuttgart sanctuary is deeply embedded within and preconditioned by a polemical local history concerning the human–nature relationship, which is site-specific and time-specific. When the *sanctuarium* was built in 1993, this relationship was much less contentious, but as years went by and Stuttgart became a focal point of environmental battles, the work gained new pressing resonances. The interventions by local authorities and publics, which together alter the work's appearance, contribute further to this process of semiotic renegotiation. This sanctuary, we see, does not merely interact with its *natural* surroundings, as curator Jean-Hubert Martin for instance reckons,[55] but also with its *social one*.

Münster: Appropriating against the Grain

Nothing as violent or radical as that which happened in Stuttgart has occurred in Münster, where de vries made his second *sanctuarium* in 1997, as part of the third edition of Skulptur Projekte, the international public art exhibition held in this German city every ten years. But here we find more traces; more varied ways of

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47
Müller-Baji, "Trauer".
48
Koeke, interview by the author.
49
Ibid.
50
Woeller, "Stuttgart rodet".
51
Rutschmannund and Sellner, "CDU gefällt".
52
Silke Arning, "Naturkunstwerk—abrasiert", *SWR2*, April 5, 2018, https://www.swr.de/swr2/kultur-info/kunstwerk-sanctuarium-von-herman-de-vries-in-stuttgart-abrasiert/-/id=9597116/did=21452092/nid=9597116/6vmw0b/index.html, accessed January 2021.
53
Bärbel Küster, Andrea Welz, Wolfram Janzer, *Skulpturen des 20. Jahrhunderts in Stuttgart* (Heidelberg: Kehrer, 2006).
54
Andrea Welz, interview by the author, August 25, 2018.
55
See herman de vries, "dialogue", interview by Jean-Hubert Martin, in *herman de vries: to be always to be*, eds. Cees de Boer, Colin Huizing (Venice Biennale, May 09 - November 22, 2015) exh. cat. (Amsterdam: Valiz, Mondrian Fund, 2015), 234.

appropriating and experiencing the work, by individuals that seem reluctant to take the role of passive observers and admirers of free-evolving nature. The proliferation of interactions is probably down, at least in part, to the highly accessible location chosen for this sanctuary—a popular spot in Schlossgarten, a park in a residential area of the city.

de vries went one step further here in blocking the public, moving from vertical stakes to a brick wall, measuring 3 metres in height and 14 metres in diameter, topped by a ring of local grey sandstone.[56] Perhaps the artist had felt that in such a central spot of the park, more protection was needed. In any case, one is immediately struck here by the fortified, hermetic appearance [fig. 3]. Unlike the transparency of the Stuttgart sanctuary, here only four oval holes, situated at eye-level, allow people to peep inside, meaning that only from a very close distance one can fully appreciate the vegetation inside—an experience for pedestrians rather than drivers. Inscribed above each hole is a sentence in Sanskrit, quoted from the ancient Hindu *Upanishads*. It translates as follows: "om. this is perfect; that is perfect; perfect comes from perfect; take perfect from perfect and the remainder is perfect".[57] Like the Latin in the title *sanctuarium*, the use of the ancient liturgical language of Sanskrit contributes to the air of sanctity and primordiality.[58] Again, we see how de vries alludes to nature's immanent immaculateness, from which humankind must be kept at a safe distance—as viewers only.

fig. 3
herman de vries. *sanctuarium,* 1997. Brick, sandstone, gold leaf, earth, Ø12 × 2.85m. Münster, Germany. Image courtesy of LWL-Museum für Kunst und Kultur, Westfälisches Landesmuseum, Münster / Skulptur Projekte 1997. Photograph: Hubertus Huvermann (2017).

56
Skulptur Projekte, *Skulptur. Projekte in Münster, 1977–1987–1997* (Münster: 1998), brochure.
57
See herman de vries, "sanctuary Münster", hermandevries.org, http://www.hermandevries.org/digital-catalogue/1997/1997-00-00-1100.php, accessed October 2020.
58
Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary: Etymologically and Philologically Arranged with Special Reference to Cognate Indo-European Languages* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2005 [1870]), 1120.

Like in Stuttgart, the ideal of non-intervention was violated—in this case, right from the get-go. Only a few months after the construction of the sanctuary, a "seed attack" occurred: some people threw a mixture of wildflower seeds over the fence, and "designed", as de vries would put it, the first sprouts that grew out from the soil.[59]

We know of these "seed bombings" only because the vegetation inside this sanctuary has been tracked right from the start by a group of volunteer researchers from a local branch of NABU, Germany's largest nature conservation organisation. Once a year, they look inside the sanctuary, document exactly which plants have emerged and which have vanished, and arrange the corresponding data in clear graphs. This research project was initiated by a professor at the local University of Münster, with the aim of gathering as much information as possible on the local biotope. It operates completely independently of de vries.[60] The detailed information NABU researchers have gathered thus far offers a comprehensive analysis of the botanic development of the site. We know, for instance, that in 2003 there was a record amount of forty plant species, mostly types of weed, but soon after the first trees appeared and caused many plant species to disappear (as trees and shrubs are stronger than weeds) [fig. 4].[61] This current state of affairs is expected to remain relatively stable, according to NABU, unless some unpredictable incident, like a falling tree or a human intervention, takes place.[62]

fig. 4
A graph by NABU Münster showing the number and types of species in the sanctuarium by year. Image courtesy: NABU.
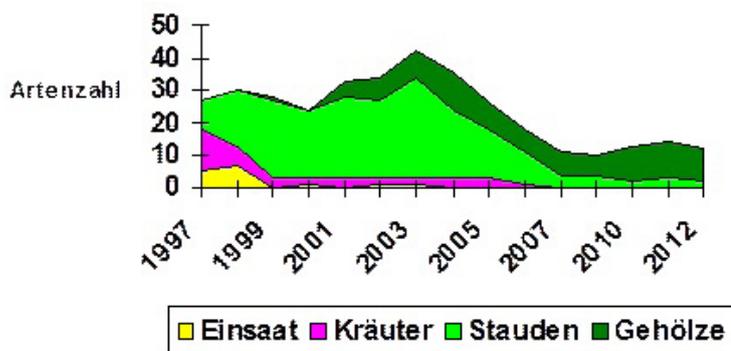
What is especially striking about NABU's appropriation of the work for their research purposes is how it precisely embodies an attitude towards nature which de vries tries to counteract with his sanctuaries—a scientific approach that treats nature as an object of study through the mediation of numbers and graphs. Instead of *being with* nature and *sensing* it, these researchers *analyse* it. Instead of *feeling*, they *track* and *calculate*. In their research, nature is once again an *object* of study, an *objectus*—that which "lays before" or "in opposite" to a subject (to cite the Latin origin of the word). Hence, the logic of the work is subverted here not only by the early horticultural interventions—those "seed bombings"—but also by secondary procedures of tracking, identifying, categorising, and quantifying. In fact, only in such a unique condition of a "terrain vague", of a cleared-up and protected piece of soil, can such research take place in the first place. de vries's utopic vision is thus

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59
Gerhard H. Kock, "Münsters größter Blumentopf", *Westfälische Nachrichten*, October 16, 2017, http://www.wn.de/Muenster/Kultur/3024047-Naturschutzbund-betreut-seit-20-Jahren-das-Sanktuarium-von-Herman-de-Vries-Muensters-groesster-Blumentopf, accessed January 2021.

60
The group tried to contact de vries and invite him to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the *sanctuarium* back in 2017 but got no response from the artist. I received this information from my interview with Thomas Hoevelmann, August 20, 2018.

61
"Natur als Kunst: das sanctuarium", *AG Botanic*, NABU, https://www.nabu-muenster.de/ag-botanik/sanktuarium, accessed September 2020.

62
Kock, "Münsters größter".

turned on its head. The "wilderness" becomes the perfect controlled laboratory.

NABU's ongoing and independent involvement in the project also reflects the close attention to nature and its preservation in the city of Münster. The local branch of NABU has over 100 volunteers, a significant number, and the city has been declared Germany's most sustainable city for 2018.[63] The current head of the botanical section of NABU in Münster, Thomas Hoevelmann, explains that "Münster is very good in protecting the environment, and it also has to do with the fact that we are home to one of Germany's largest universities, which means that the local population is pretty educated and knowledgeable about the importance of protecting the environment".[64] The vandalism that took place in industrial Stuttgart, he stresses, could never happen in the environmentally conscious Münster. Two German cities; two very different relationships with nature.

And still, Münster has its vandals as well, or at least this is how many deem the graffiti artists whose spray paintings cover the sanctuary today. The LWL Museum, the owner of the work, has cleaned up the graffiti several times in the past—a rather expensive operation—but not since 2007, when de vries advised to just leave it as it is.[65] For one local newspaper, the graffiti shows exactly what de vries intended—that nature needs to be protected from human beings.[66] Similarly, NABU's official website explains that "the now wildly proliferating graffiti on the outside underline the contrast between human nature and nature".[67] A visiting blogger felt the same fracture between inside and outside, nature and humans, beauty and the beast:

> Inside the sanctuary, nature has indeed created a beautiful wonder garden without any human intervention. The exterior is a completely different story [...] It is a pity that these graffiti artists apparently only saw a wall, and did not look any further.[68]

The introduction for the work on Skulptur Projekte's website emphasises the same friction, by pointing to the garbage thrown into the sanctuary, which has to be removed occasionally by local authorities. This illustrates, according to the text, "that the utopia of unspoilt nature has to capitulate before the reality of our throwa-way society".[69]

These accounts teach us that the reception of this sanctuary is far from being harmonious, or from being perceived as harmonious. In reality, in fact, this sanctuary serves as a self-fulfilling prophesy: it presupposes an antagonism between human beings and nature, and thereby reproduces this very antagonism. The brick wall is no longer perceived only in generalised symbolic terms, as a barrier against the human race in toto. Instead, the wall turns into a very concrete barrier against the residents of Münster. The divide between humans and nature is not bridged by the work, but only seems to grow.

63
"Deutscher Nachhaltigkeitspreis geht an Münster, Eschweiler und Saerbeck", *Deutscher Nachhaltigkeitspreis*, August 2, 2018, https://www.nachhaltigkeitspreis. de/news/news/deutscher-nachhaltigkeitspreis-geht-an-muenster-eschweiler-und-saerbeck/?tx_news_pi1%5Bcontroller%5D=News&tx_news_pi1%5Baction%5D=detail&cHash=12e2ce268a8a81105bb256eef5c89cc0, accessed January 2021.

64
Hoevelmann, interview by the author.

65
Based on my conversations with Thomas Hoevelmann from NABU and Katharina Neuberger from Skulptur Projekte Archive.

66
Kock, "Münsters größter".

67
NABU, "Natur als Kunst". Translation by the author.

68
See Holly Moors, "herman de vries, Sanctuarium in münster, na twintig jaar", *Moors Magazine* (blog), https://www.moorsmagazine.com/hollys-hoekje/fotoseries/mapping-the-streets-of-Münster/herman-vries-sanctuarium-Münster-twintig-jaar, accessed July 2018.

69
Eckhard Kluth, "sanctuarium", Skulptur Projekte Archive, https://www.skulptur-projekte-archiv.de/en-us/1997/projects/12/, accessed January 2020.

This divide is vividly felt on the ground. On my last visit to this sanctuary, a few groups of youngsters were enjoying an afternoon picnic in this popular spot of the park. Right beside them stood the *sanctuarium*: bricked, fortified, unapproachable, with a huge skull looking back onto the park—certainly not a place inviting existential contemplation and revelation [fig. 5]. There was something almost violent, certainly defiant, in the way the massive wall obstructed the casual openness of the park. de vries claims that "nature itself is public space", and that therefore "when we do introduce art into nature, it must be done with great sensitivity",[70] but this seems out of sync with the heavy barrier he erected in the midst of this park. While the artist plays down the importance of the barrier in his sanctuaries, insisting that the art only happens inside,[71] in this case at least the wall becomes the most salient aspect of the project, and the main locus of meaning and affectivity. Standing in the park, the graffiti covering this separating wall felt like an act of protest—a protest on the part of those who were treated like unwelcome intruders in their own home by an "intruder" himself. Their act is one of reclaiming, which raises the question of agency: Who has the right to shape the public space in Münster—internationally recognised "startists" or local street artists?

fig. 5
herman de vries. *sanctuarium*, 1997. Brick, sandstone, gold leaf, earth, Ø12 × 2.85m. Münster, Germany. Photo by the author (2018).

If in Stuttgart de vries's universal ideal of non-intervention was charged with site-specific political potency, in Münster we encounter various vernacular appropriations that subvert the very principles that underlie the work, repurpose it, and reshape its affectivity. Local residents design nature by "seed bombing", scientists "objectify" nature by tracking and quantifying, and graffiti artists infuse the work with a sense of confrontational urgency—a far cry from de vries's ideal of harmonious, meditative contemplation. Moreover, while in Stuttgart

70
de vries, "what, why", 82.

71
See de vries, "sanctuarium", 433. This problematic distinction appears also in an earlier text by de vries about Stuttgart's *sanctuarium*: "[...] art is not the first priority in the design of the steel fence and its execution. That is the frame. The most important thing takes place within this fence". See herman de vries, *to be: texte—textarbeiten—textbilder, auswahl von schriften und bildern 1954–1995*, ed. Andreas Meier (Stuttgart: Hatje Cantz, 1995), c. 175.

an image has emerged of the public as a friend and protector of the sanctuary against the authorities' violence, in Münster the roles are reversed: it is the local public that is deemed the vandal, after whom the authorities must clean up.

Zeewolde: Free or Colonized Nature?

In the third and final *sanctuarium* I discuss, the "outside" infiltrates the "inside" in a less obvious, but no less crucial, way. Here, the sanctuary is semiotically saturated by the unique environmental history of the place and context of its presentation. Completed in 2001, this *sanctuarium* is located in the small Dutch lake-town of Zeewolde. It sits on the shore of Wolderwijd Lake, right beside the promenade. It is much larger than the previous two sanctuaries I have discussed, measuring 30 metres in diameter. The fence here is made of simple latticed wire, around which de vries planted rosebushes, a surprising choice for a devout non-interventionist. With time, these bushes have formed a thick layer of vegetation, which today makes it nearly impossible to even peep inside the sanctuary. There is only a single point from which one can observe, very partially, the jungle that has matured inside over the past 20 years—a faux gate composed of vertical golden-headed spears pressed by two perpendicular concave brick walls [fig. 6]—a double reference to the earlier sanctuaries in Münster (bricks) and Stuttgart (golden-headed spears). We move then from an open view in 1993, to a few peeping holes in 1997, to a single, very limited angle in 2001—a growing exclusion not only of human bodies, but also of their gaze.

fig. 6
herman de vries. *sanctuarium*, 1999–2001. Earth, brick, steel, gold leaf, Briar rosebushes (*Rosa canina*), stone, Ø30 × 3.3 m. Zeewolde, Netherlands. Photo: Esther Didden (2020).

Just in front of the opening lies, almost secretly, a small, flat rectangular stone, reminiscent of an entrance rug, on which the artist engraved the words: "to be"—one of his favorite existential mantras, typical of his laconic use of language and his primary philosophy of pure presence: simply "to be" with nature (how can one "be" with nature when one is so thoroughly barred from it? This is one of the problematic paradoxes of the sanctuaries, but its consideration exceeds the scope of this paper). Art historian Claudio Pizzorusso finds a parallel between de vries's simplified lingo to the teachings of Saint-Francis, who conveyed his

devotional ideas with as few and as simple words as possible.[72]

But let us try and look further beyond these devotional connotations. As in Stuttgart and in Münster, the particular town and the particular location within the town where the sanctuary stands play a crucial role in the symbolic meanings the work assumes. Zeewolde is the youngest municipality in Flevoland, which is the youngest province in the Netherlands (officially inaugurated in 1986). This province is composed of two polders built by the Dutch government during the 1950s and 1960s when reclaiming about 1,000 square kilometers of land from the Zuiderzee (Southern Sea). It is one of the largest projects of land reclamation in world history, and still serves as a symbol of the Dutch ethos of technological ingenuity in the face of natural hardships. Since the late 1970s, Dutch and international artists like Robert Morris (*Observatorium*, 1977), Marinus Boezem (*The Green Cathedral*, 1987) and Richard Serra (*See Level*, 1996) have been invited to erect gigantic permanent constructions in nature in Flevoland, as a way of celebrating this great human achievement. Other public art initiatives followed, and the new province of Flevoland became famous as a hub of monumental art in nature.[73]

I am recounting this history in order to stress that there is a very particular dynamic at play in Flevoland between nature and public art, one which already frames this sanctuary in a certain manner. Public art here is closely intertwined with notions of domination, colonisation and design of nature; of the subjugation of nature to human needs. The monumental sculptures spread throughout the polder stand as monuments to the subjugation of nature. A visit to this sanctuary reveals that just a few metres from it lies one of the artificial dikes whose role was once, quite literally, to block off the sea. One can hardly think of a place more contradictive of de vries's ideal of free-evolving nature.

More specifically, the ARTificial Natural Networks programme, which commissioned the *sanctuarium* alongside ten other public art works for the town of Zeewolde, had for its theme the link "between nature and technology", between the organic and the artificial.[74] It was inspired by Kevin Kelly's 1994 techno-utopian book *Out of Control*,[75] which explores themes of artificial intelligence and future dedifferentiation between cybernetic and living things. The whole atmosphere that surrounded the commissioning of this sanctuary, then, and that still pervades the trails of Zeewolde today, is that of a certain technological hubris.

Does de vries's critique become ever more poignant within this context? Or rather, does the fact that the work partakes in this celebration of human mastery over nature pull the rug from under its very *raison d'être*? Whatever answer we choose, it is already framed by this regional history. The human–nature relationship in Flevoland means a very different thing, and kindles very different collective memories and ideals, than in Münster or in Stuttgart.

This sanctuary also urges us to rethink the full scope of one of de vries's main aesthetic principles. Instead of culture conquering nature, like we find in Flevoland's history, de vries tries to create in his sanctuaries a situation where nature conquers culture—represented here by the fence.[76] He relates this to the

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72
See Claudio Pizzorusso, "herman de vries et la religion de la nature", *Rivista di letterature moderne e comparate* 70, no. 4 (2017): 407–18.

73
For more on ARTificial Natural Networks, see Trudy van Riemsdijk-Zandee ed., *Artificial Natural Networks: 11 Projects on the Web, in the Forest, along the Dike, in the Water and in the Village of Zeewolde* (Zeewolde: De Verbeelding, 2001).

74
The other artists who participated in ARTificial Natural Networks were: Roman Signer, Krijn Giezen, Atelier van Lieshout, Tobias Rehberger, Annette Weisser-Ingo Vetter, Henrik Håkansson, Mark Dion, N55, Ulf Rollof and David Kremers.

75
Kevin Kelly, *Out of Control: The New Biology of Machines, Social Systems, and the Economic World* (New York: Basic Books, 1992).

76
de vries, "dialogue", 236. In two works that resemble the sanctuaries—*le sanctuaire de la nature* (Digne-les-Bains, France, 2000), and *sanctuarium: natura mater* (Venice Biennale, 2015)—de vries delineates areas where human-made ruins are in the process of being overgrown by wild nature to illustrate how nature ultimately always wins.

principle of entropy,[77] which designates, for him, the slow, inevitable dissolution of every human trace by the forces of nature.[78] Zeewolde's *sanctuarium* is the youngest of the sanctuaries discussed in this paper, but it is the one that best fulfills this entropic vision. The vegetation here has completely taken over the fence and will soon merge with the nearby forest, if local authorities will let it [fig. 7].

fig. 6
herman de vries, *sanctuarium*, 1999–2001. Earth, brick, steel, gold leaf, Briar rosebushes (*Rosa canina*), stone, Ø30 × 3.3m. Zeewolde, Netherlands. Photograph by the author (2018).

This quick growth must be related to the fertile land, but also to the complete lack of intervention by the local municipality. This, ironically, is a result of the failures of public art in Flevoland, not its successes. Curator Martine van Kempen, co-founder of the Land Art in Flevoland organisation, explains that many residents of Zeewolde were displeased with the large-scale installations which suddenly took over their town as part of the ARTificial Natural Networks programme. Sculptures in public space were constantly being vandalised. This tension with the local community, in addition to some budgetary issues, were the reasons for the shutting down of De Verbeelding, the organisation behind ARTificial Natural Networks. The public artworks were left to decay, with no funds found for their maintenance.[79] A website dedicated to art and cultural heritage in Flevoland decries the fact that "[t]he works of art are no longer being maintained and slowly the sanctuary is being overgrown by nature".[80]

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[77]
The principle of entropy is, of course, almost synonymous with the thought and work of Robert Smithson, who elaborates on this principle in Robert Smithson, "Entropy and the New Monument", in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley and Los Angeles [CA], London: University of California, 1996), 10–23. Especially relevant to our discussion of the sanctuaries is *Partially Buried Woodshed* (1970), in which Smithson installed a woodshed in Kent State University, Ohio, piled earth onto it, and waited for the shed's slow process of decay over the following decades.

[78]
John K. Grande points to the similarity between de vries's and Smithson's notions of entropy in works like *the oak* (1992), where de vries presents a log in the process of decomposing. See: de vries, "chance & change", 228.

[79]
Martine van Kempen, interview by the author, September 10, 2018

[80]
"sanctuarium", Flevoland Erfgoed, last modified August 24, 2018, https://www.flevolanderfgoed.nl/home/kunst/zuidelijk-flevoland/zeewolde/sanctuarium.html, accessed January 2021.

What this writer fails to realise, clearly, is that while other public artworks in Zeewolde have, indeed, been damaged by this neglect, the *sanctuarium* only profited. It ensures that no municipal intervention, like the one we saw in Stuttgart, will take place here. The *economic entropy* of a cultural institution ensured the *material entropy* of the sanctuary. The principle of "chance and change", this reminds us, not only governs the organic domain, but also the socio-economic one. And the processes of the former can never be truly isolated from those of the latter.

Conclusion: Towards Reterritorialization

We have seen how the contacts between herman de vries's sanctuaries and their local environments and publics dramatically affect not only the physical appearance of the works, but, even more crucially, the ideas and affects they instigate. Local environmental histories and sensitivities, locational specificities, the actions of local publics, as well as those of local authorities, the status of public art in a particular region—all of these different factors, and others, contribute to an ever-evolving process of semiosis, which is always site-specific and time-specific.

The sanctuaries should thus not be understood as different versions of the same work, which preserve their immanent meaning bestowed by the artist—like "the universality of nature"[81] or "the essential unity of existence".[82] Instead, they should be read as porous constellations, whose aesthetic and ideational effects are contingent and shaped no less by their consumers and their environments than by their creator.

The sanctuaries have also turned out to be far from merely "place[s] for looking",[83] where one just needs "to be" with—or, in face of—nature, as de vries sees them. Their audiences refuse to adopt the role of passive onlookers. Instead, they turn the sanctuaries into places for creating, thinking, appropriating, reclaiming, protesting, painting, performing, decorating, documenting, researching. It is not just about "*What will nature do here?*"[84] as de vries frames it, but also about: *What will people do here?*

What also becomes clear from this research is that a "terrain" can never be truly "vague". There is never a cultural vacuum, never a natural *tabula rasa*. Even in purely botanic terms, the seeds that fall inside the sanctuaries are only there as a result of centuries of human cultivation, and there is no way of reversing this process.[85] But more importantly for this paper, we have seen how social, political and economic processes invade the organic processes of nature and alter meanings and fields of possible relatings. The feminist theorist Donna Haraway has tackled the inability to rigorously differentiate nature from culture by using the term "natureculture",[86] which functions as "a synthesis of nature and culture that recognises their inseparability in ecological relationships that are both bio-

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[81] "The nature sanctuary—herman de vries", Musée Gassendi, https://www.musee-gassendi.org/en/home/collection-of-contemporary-art-in-the-digne-area/works/herman-de-vries, accessed September 2020.

[82] Gooding, "chance and change", 20.

[83] de vries, "sanctuarium", 432.

[84] Ibid., 431.

[85] As Kate Soper notes, the nature we find in our cities and villages "is a product of human cultivation, often over centuries, and would be very different without impact of that management". And there is no way of returning to any "original" nature. See Kate Soper, *What is Nature?* (Oxford, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1995), 182.

[86] Haraway introduces and develops this term in Donna Haraway, *The Companion Species Manifesto: Dogs, People, and Significant Otherness* (Chicago: Pirckly Paradigm Press, 2003).

physically and socially formed".[87] Each articulation of natureculture is, according to Haraway, dependent on "[h]istorical specificity and contingent mutability". Art that acknowledges this understands that "history is composed out of the polyform relatings of people, animals, soil, water [...]", and always takes into consideration "agencies both human and in-human, animate and inanimate".[88]

Most of the "official" written material about the sanctuaries, whether by the artist or by art scholars and curators, has failed to give attention to these aspects, and often over-emphasised authorial intention over actual manifestations and semiotic specificity. Most readings adopt de vries's romantic notions of nature and his perception of the human–nature relationship in phenomenological, existential, and universal terms—a decontextualising and depoliticising stance. It was only through local press materials, blogs entries, interviews and informal meetings with locals, trips to the sanctuaries, etc., that I was able to trace these vernacular "histor[ies] of consumption",[89] which provide a fuller picture of how each sanctuary *actually* operates—how it affects and how it is being affected. A picture that reminds us that the human–nature relationship is never universal, but always situated.

To conclude on a broader note, I wish to make a few comments on the notion of site-specificity as it emerges from this paper. In her influential book on the subject, art historian Miwon Kwon identifies a shift in the notion of the "site" in art since the early 1990s—from a physical site to a deterritorialised "discursive site".[90] The reception of site-specific works of art, she claims, is no longer reliant on the *actual location* of their unfolding, but rather on the *discursive location* of their circulation: a "field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate". This new site, thus, "is not defined as a *pre*condition. Rather, it is generated by the work (often as 'content')".[91] This change entails, according to Kwon, the "reemergence of the centrality of the artist as the progenitor of meaning".[92] These claims are at least partial. As my analysis has shown, meaningful and intensive encounters will still unfold in actual sites, and the ideas and affects instigated in these encounters are still very much preconditioned by local contexts, no less than by the artist's discursive intentions. At least in the realm of public art, so it seems, "place" still has a major place.

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[87] Nicholas Malone and Kathryn Ovenden, "Natureculture", in *The International Encyclopedia of Primatology,* ed. Agustín Fuentes (Chichester and Hoboken [NJ]: John Wiley & Sons, 2017), https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/9781119179313.wbprim0135, accessed January 2021.

[88] Haraway, *Companion Species*, 23. Here Haraway discusses in particular the work of the artist Andrew Goldsworthy.

[89] See footnote 6.

[90] This idea of a "discursive site" is developed in the first chapter of her book: Miwon Kwon, *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge [MA] and London: MIT Press, 2002), 11–32.

[91] Ibid., 26.

[92] Ibid., 51.

Author's Biography

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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.

2
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.

3
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).

4
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.

5
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.

6
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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7
Roberto Pinto, "Il dibattito sull'arte degli anni Novanta" in Nicolas Bourriaud, *Estetica Relazionale* (Milano: Postmedia, 2010), 118-119. Translation by the author.

8
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.

9
Grant H. Kester, "Aesthetic Evangelists: Conversion and Empowerment in Contemporary Community Art", *Afterimage*, no. 22 (1995): 5-11.

10
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 contemporary 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, suggesting 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.

12
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).

13
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.

14
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.

16

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:

17
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.

18
"[...] 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.

19
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.

[22] 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).

[24] 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).

26
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.

27
In this regard see Grant H. Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley [CA]: University of California Press, 2004).

28
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.

29

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.

37
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.

39

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.

Miriam La Rosa
New Start: the Marrgu Residency Program and the Future of Showing

Abstract

This paper addresses the ontology of residencies, interrogating artist residencies in relation to the ostensive, that involves the act of showing, displaying, exhibiting and demonstrating something. By focusing on a digital project curated by the author for the Marrgu Residency Program—an Indigenous-led initiative developed by the Durrmu Arts Centre in Peppimenarti (Northern Territory, Australia)—La Rosa employs a practice-led rather than purely theoretical methodology. In parallel, and through a discussion on the current developments of the Marrgu digital residency, the paper addresses the future of showing for regionally based artists of non-Western heritage, in a globalised digital world. It ultimately advocates for an innovative understanding of ostension framed as a hosting practice: an act of connection rather than display.

New Start: the Marrgu Residency Program and the Future of Showing

Miriam La Rosa

Regina Pilawuk Wilson attending a Zoom meeting at the Art Centre, while making a syaw (fishnet) work. Durrmu Arts Centre, Peppimenarti (NT), Australia. October 2020. Image Courtesy: Durrmu Arts.

L'ostensione rappresenta il primo livello di significazione attiva, *ed è l'artificio usato per primo da due persone che non conoscono la stessa lingua.*[1]

1. Introduction

Like many initiatives in 2020, artist residency programs were profoundly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic—no doubt because the inability to travel seemingly affects the ontology of residencies. Prior to 2020, the act of being 'in residence' demanded the often-necessary step of physical travel: an activity with a meaning and

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For the English translation see page 70 and footnote 46. (Emphasis in original). Umberto Eco, *Trattato Di Semiotica Generale* (Milano: Bompiani, 1975), 294.

value of its own in relation to a residency, and a crucial element for its definition. Whether one decides to follow the conventional narrative on residencies—which places their origins in the 17ᵗʰ century and within the geopolitical contours of the European world—or seeks alternative routes to understand them, their history is intrinsically related to that of migration and mobility.[2] What can be left of a residency when travelling is no longer an option?

The urgency of this question has been addressed in recent international forums by residency-specialist organisations such as Res Artis and Arquetopia Foundation.[3] Driving these discussions was mainly a desire to find solutions rather than examine the nature or ontology of residencies. The proposed answer has, predictably, been the virtual residency. Although communication technologies and more recently digital technologies proliferated well before the Coronavirus crisis took place, their possibility in residencies and the wider arts industry had remained relatively unexplored, largely confined to rethinking the archive and some experimental art practices.

In this paper I will address the ontology of residencies, interrogating artist residencies in relation to the ostensive—that which involves the act of showing, displaying, exhibiting and demonstrating something. By focusing on a digital project I am curating for the Marrgu Residency Program—an Indigenous-led initiative developed by the Durrmu Arts Centre in Peppimenarti (Northern Territory, Australia)—I am also employing a practice-led rather than purely theoretical methodology.[4] In parallel, and through a discussion on the current developments of the Marrgu digital residency, the paper will address the future of showing for regionally-based artists of non-Western heritage, in a globalised digital world. It will ultimately advocate for an innovative understanding of ostension framed as a hosting practice: an act of connection rather than display.

Long before the Marrgu Residency Program, my personal and professional journey with artist residencies had begun in 2015, with a six-month program I co-curated at the Window Space Gallery in London.[5] Travelling per se was not at stake then, since the artist involved, Charlotte Warne Thomas, was London-based. However, a requirement was for her to relocate her studio inside the Window Gallery—a vitrine—hence tackling the idea of residing as quite literally

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A concise history of residencies has been circulated through residencies web directories such as Res Artis and Transartists. A 2019 anthology, edited by Taru Elfving, Irmeli Kokko and Pascal Gielen is the first attempt to expand upon this Western-centric narrative by giving a voice to different programs, art practitioners and academics from different regions as well. However, the latest annual conference organised by Res Artis (February 5 – 8, 2019, Kyoto, Japan) showed that a comparative methodology, in which eastern and southern programs are presented against the traditional northern, more established examples, is still in place to discuss artist residencies. Taru Elfving, Irmeli Kokko, Pascal Gielen (eds.), *Contemporary Artist Residencies. Reclaiming Time and Space* (Amsterdam: Valiz, 2019). For a concise account of the history of residencies see also: Miriam La Rosa, "Introduction", in *In Transition: The Artistic and Curatorial Residency*, eds. Margarida B. Amorim, Alejandro Ball, Miriam La Rosa and Stefania Sorrentino (London: CtC Press Ltd, 2015). In his Doctoral research project at the Edinburgh College of Art, Pau Cata Marles has written—what he names—an alternative proto-history with a focus on the Arabic region. Pau Cata, "Moving Knowledges: Towards a Speculative Arab Art Residency Proto-History" (Edinburgh College of Art, Scotland, 2021), https://aneventwithoutitspoem.com/, accessed 11 April 2021.

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Between September and October 2020, Res Artis: Worldwide Network of Arts Residencies and IASPIS, the Swedish Arts Grants Committee's International Programme for Visual and Applied Artists, with the support of Creative Victoria, presented a free series of five webinars titled *Residencies in Challenging Times*. Available at: https://resartis.org/2020/08/27/residencies-in-challenging-times/, accessed January 2021. From June 3 to July 27, 2020, Arquetopia Foundation run *The End of the Grand Tour? Virtual Symposium on Artist Residencies: Future, Place and State*. Available at: https://www.arquetopia.org, accessed January 2021.

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The Marrgu Residency Program: https://www.durrmuarts.com/marrgu, accessed January 2021.

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The program was entitled *LIMITACTION* and comprised a series of monthly events addressing the space's limitations through four installations: accessibility, privacy, freedom and space. The events were followed by a roundtable discussion at the Whitechapel Gallery (June 2015) and the launch of a publication on the topic of artistic and curatorial residencies. See *In Transition: The Artistic and Curatorial Residency*.

inhabiting a space. The results of this project, a series of exhibitions and a publication, later led me to formalise my curiosity for the subject within the framework of a doctoral research project.[6] The first digital residencies I encountered, and briefly discussed elsewhere, functioned as platforms for a virtual showcase of art.[7] These examples targeted artworks realised through digital processes and technologies but also raised questions about the engagement between resident artists, audiences and hosting contexts (how can the virtual host?), as well as notions of conviviality and reciprocity, which are other key features in the characterisation of the residency phenomenon.

2. Marrgu

Running since 2018, Marrgu provides creative practitioners with an opportunity to engage with Ngan'gikurrunggurr artists and community members on Country. This program was established by Durrmu Arts to encourage intercultural exchange, knowledge sharing and relationship building between remote and urban communities, local and international artists, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural practices. The word *Marrgu* means "knowledge sharing" as well as "new start" in Peppimenarti's Ngan'gi language.[8] With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Marrgu has adapted to a virtual format that uses technology to connect participants.

I began working with Durrmu Arts in 2019, on the occasion of a cross-cultural exchange I co-curated with Kade McDonald (then Executive Director of Durrmu Arts and current CEO of Agency[9]) through residencies and a public program of exhibitions and events, between Sicily and two Aboriginal territories in Australia, Gippsland and Peppimenarti. Marrgu was one of the hosts of the project that involved Sicilian artist Giuseppe Lana, Gunai and Monero Nations artist Steaphan Paton and Ngan'gikurrunggurr woman, senior artist and Cultural Director of Durrmu Arts, Regina Pilawuk Wilson. Following the positive response to this endeavour, I was asked to be involved once again in the development of another project, this time occurring online. The current residency takes the form of an artistic exchange between Wilson, Yindjibarndi artist Katie West and Malaysia-born, Aotearoa-raised and Australia-based artist Fayen d'Evie.

The associations between their practices are not obvious, although West and d'Evie have an ongoing artistic collaboration.[10] Wilson's art, based around painting and weaving, is a contemporary expression of her ancestral cultural practices, whereas West and d'Evie experiment with different mediums to realise large-scale, textile installations (West) and works that investigate touch, movement, language and sound (d'Evie). What connects them in this context is an interest in tactility and history and the use of materials that derive from their surroundings—be they stories, objects or, for Wilson and West in particular, natural

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My PhD is based on a curatorial project—a cross-cultural exchange residency between Sicily, Gippsland and Peppimenarti—I developed in 2019 to investigate notions of gift exchange and host-guest relationships in the context of the artist residency, with the South as a geopolitical focus (The University of Melbourne, School of Culture and Communication, Art History department, 2018-2021).

7
These examples include: x-temporary and the Digital Artist Residency (DAR). Miriam La Rosa, "Moving Outside Fixed Boundaries: ... 'in Residence'?", *Digimag Journal* (2017): 35-45.

8
Regina Pilawuk Wilson, 2020. https://www.durrmuarts.com/marrgu, accessed January 2021

9
Agency is an organisation that "celebrates and promotes Indigenous art, culture and people on a local, national and international scale through the initiation and facilitation of ethical and sound investments into Indigenous-led projects and partnerships", https://agencyprojects.org/home, accessed January 2021.

10
D'Evie and West are currently collaborating on the project Museum Incognita, which "revisits neglected, concealed, or obscured histories, activates embodied readings, and archives ephemeral artworks and practices", https://www.museumincognita.space, accessed January 2021.

fibres and colours. In other words, their work shares a committed engagement with the places that host them. Their regional location and transcultural formations, Western and non-Western cultural inheritances, are other significant points of relation. In fact, although they do not necessarily address identity politics in their work, these artists' relationship with and interpretation of locality and Country play a role in positioning their contribution within this exchange. Lastly, but no less relevant, is the will and desire to spend time together. On several occasions, when asked about the aspect of the residency they most appreciate, they have all referred to the opportunity to stop and slow down—to sit in front of their screens and meet, away from the multiple commitments of daily life.[11]

Most initiatives born in the current pandemic are entirely online-focused. A remarkable example is the mentorship program Artists for Artists (AfA) conceived by a collective of artists, curators and academics as online masterclasses built upon the guiding principles of "peer-to-peer exchange and radical care".[12] The Marrgu digital residency follows the same principles of mutuality and interchange in a virtual setup, but it equally emphasises the physical space inhabited by the three artists—who are based in different Indigenous Countries and States of Australia: Wilson in Ngan'gikurrunggurr Country, Northern Territory; West in Noongar Ballardong Boodja, Western Australia; and d'Evie in Dja Dja Wurrung Country, Victoria. As part of the project, they were asked to share images of their daily art practice, videos and field/voice recordings of their walks in a virtual diary, whilst also sending materials from their *bush studios*, postcards and small gifts to one another through the postal service. Walks and postal deliveries have become striking elements of lockdown and life in isolation, even after restrictions were partially lifted. The residency experiments from out of these facts. It takes inspiration from Mail Art, a precursor of internet art, or net.art, to address alternative forms of connection in the time of coronavirus, challenging the current expansion and shrinking of time and space.

Mail Art is a relevant practice for this project since it embodies the twofold purpose of communication, through travel, and connection, through art. Art historians have outlined its chronology in distinct periods.[13] Deemed to originate in works by Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters and the Italian Futurists, Mail Art gained momentum in the 1960s when artists like Ray Johnson and Edward M. Plunkett began to employ the mail service as an official form of artistic correspondence. However, in a text published in *Art Journal* in 1977, Plunkett notes that the art of correspondence goes back to primordial times, crediting queen Cleopatra as the first one to inaugurate it when she wrapped herself into a rug to be sent as a surprise to Julius Caesar.[14] Following his line of thought, further prehistoric instances of this will to travel, trade and exchange can be dated back to the Palaeolithic age, with the over two hundred Venus figurines retrieved throughout Europe and Asia. The materials and visual characteristics of the little statues suggest that they might have been objects of trade or, at least, subject to travelling.[15] To return to an

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11
This statement comes from an interview I conducted with the three artists in December 2020 at Bus Projects, Melbourne, during a podcast recording session on the current developments of the Marrgu digital residency.

12
Artists for Artists: https://www.afamasterclass.org/about, accessed January 2021.

13
Laura Dunkin-Hubby, "A Brief History of Mail Art's Engagement with Craft (C. 1950-2014)", *Journal of Modern Craft* 9, no. 1 (2016): 35-54.

14
See the link: https://artpool.hu/Ray/Publications/Plunkett.html, accessed January 2021.

15
Olga Soffer, James M. Adovasio and David C. Hyland, "The 'Venus' Figurines : Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic", *Current Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (2000). See also: John Noble Wilford, "'Venus' Figurines from Ice Age Rediscovered in an Antique Shop", *The New York Times,* February 1, 1994. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/1994/02/01/science/venus-figurines-from-ice-age-rediscovered-in-an-antique-shop.html, accessed January 2021. There have been several studies on the purpose and function of the Venus figurines. In 2020, a discovery concluded that they might have helped pre-historic Europeans to survive the Ice age. Garry Shaw, "Voluptuous Venus Figurines May Have Helped Prehistoric Europeans Survive the Ice Age", *The Art Newspaper* (December 3, 2020). Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/news/voluptuous-venus-figurines-may-have-helped-prehistoric-europeans-survive-the-ice-age, accessed January 2021.

Australian context, there are accounts of pre-colonial Aboriginal art being taken on tours. As Aboriginal artists responded to the colonial demand for their art, anthropologists and later tourists functioned as couriers to distant markets.[16]

Perhaps Plunkett's awareness of the deep time genealogy of travelling art gave him the confidence to challenge normative, museum-specific, contemporary art practices by creating *The New York Correspondence School* (also referred to as Correspondance), which was active until 1975.[17] In the 1960s, George Maciunas and the Fluxus artists also used the post to send ideas, thoughts and artistic prompts to each other, creating an international network at a time when the internet was not an option. The trend was then revisited in the 1990s. British curator Matthew Higgs established Imprint, a project in which emerging artists including Jeremy Deller, Martin Creed, Peter Doig, Chris Ofili and Fiona Banner mailed provocative works to critics, curators and other individuals associated with the artworld.[18] Art historian and artist Laura Dunkin-Hubby has furthermore identified what she names a latest *era* (ca. 2000-2014), where Mail Art is still operating, and coexisting with the internet age.[19]

In the altered (art)world's structure that the pandemic has created, some artists have again begun using the postal service as a means for their work to move in a portable format.[20] However, the practice of art travelling in place of people, and through shipping, had already been adopted pre-pandemic by artists struggling with socio-political restrictions imposed by authoritarian governments. A significant example is the work *Airmail Paintings* by Eugenio Dittborn, developed in the 1970s during the dictatorship in Chile as a series of paintings that could be folded and sent abroad.[21] The scope of the project was to reach out to the outside world, in the manner of a message in a bottle. Similarly, a few decades later, the South Korean artist Kyungah Ham began smuggling designs into North Korea, through helpers based in Russia and China, to be translated on to embroidery made of silk by a group of anonymous artisans. The finished works, which were large scale representations of chandeliers, were then trafficked back out of North Korea and displayed at galleries worldwide.[22] These stories reinforce the point, core to this project and discussion, that (travelling) art holds an incredible connective power among individuals and cultures. Beyond the desire and need for communication, this connective power especially manifests when people experience conditions of remoteness and isolation or when they live under enforced measures that restrict their freedom of movement and expression—or simply want to challenge normative site-specific practices of established art centres.

16
Ian McLean, *Rattling Spears: A History of Indigenous Australian Art* (London: Reaktion Books, 2016).
17
William S. Wilson, "NY Correspondence School", *Art and Artists* I, no. 1 (1966). Available at: https://www.warholstars.org/ray-johnson.html, accessed January 2021.
18
In 2016, The Whitechapel Gallery, London, has proposed an archival exhibition on the history of this endeavour, entitled *Imprint 93* (March 19—September 25, 2016). See the link: https://www.whitechapelgallery.org/exhibitions/imprint-93/, accessed January 2021.
19
Dunkin-Hubby, "A Brief History of Mail Art's Engagement with Craft (C. 1950-2014)".
20
Nanette Orly, "How Artists Turned to the Postal Service", *Art Guide Australia* 2020. Available at: https://artguide.com.au/how-artists-turned-to-the-postal-service, accessed January 2021.
21
Sociologist and critic Nelly Richard has written extensively in this regard. See Nelly Richard, *The Insubordination of Signs: Political Change, Cultural Transformation, and Poetics of the Crisis* (Durham [NC]: Duke University Press, 2004).
22
David Segal, "An Artist Unites North and South Korea, Stitch by Stitch", *The New York Times*, July 26, 2018. Available at: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/26/arts/design/kyungah-ham-north-korea.html?login=email&auth=login-email, accessed January 2021.

In our residency, an interest in the possibilities of Mail Art was raised in relation to *Museum as Bureau of Communication* (2020), a project devised by artist Olaf Nicolai for MACRO, Rome, where the museum functions as a mediator between two people who wish to share a message through postcards. D'Evie brought it to my attention, prompting me to incorporate post deliveries in the structure of the residency. Thus far, the materials exchanged in the context of the Marrgu residency have comprised two postcards painted by Wilson for West and d'Evie, alongside strings of *merrepen* (sand palm) and berries harvested in Peppimenarti. D'Evie has responded with a series of embossed papers—cutouts from one of her publishing projects that Wilson has in turn reacted to, by painting over them.

Regina Pilawuk Wilson painting postcards for Fayen d'Evie and Katie West. Durrmu Arts Centre, Peppimenarti (NT), Australia. October 2020. Image Courtesy: Durrmu Arts.

Regina Pilawuk Wilson painting over embossed paper sent via mail by Fayen d'Evie. Marrgu digital residency, Durrmu Arts, Peppimenarti (NT), Australia. December 2020. Image courtesy: Durrmu Arts.
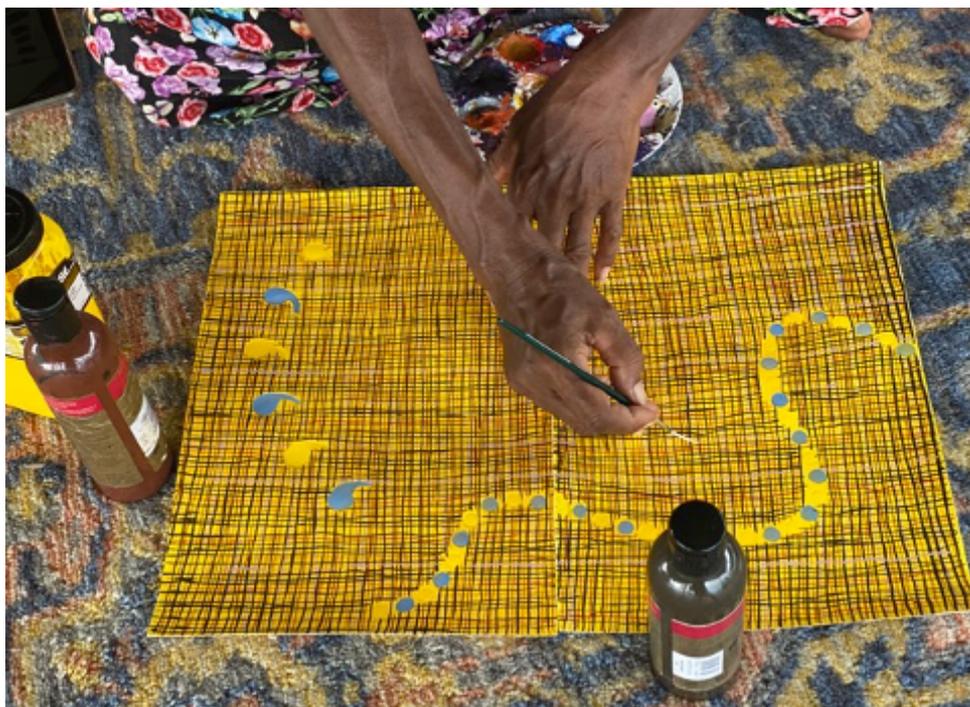

The process of running the residency digitally is not effortless. There is a lot of coordination involved (since each artist resides in a different time zone), tasks that need to be set in advance and patience required from all fronts. Moreover, and contrary to the usual understanding of online connection as fast-paced if not hyper accelerated, this project has embraced slowness. Meetings occur with a loose, rhythmic cadence and often involve the participation of plus ones, be they assistants on site or family members, especially in Peppimenarti, where access to the internet is available only at the Art Centre.

A priority at the commencement of the residency was to hold studio visits to set the grounds for the exchange. In the virtual setup, these talks consisted of presentations with images: PowerPoint, sound and videos delivered via Zoom about updates in the artists' work and the history and stories of their locations. Through this approach, d'Evie and West learnt about Wilson's community and their harvesting, weaving and painting techniques in a series of pre-recorded videos that Wilson produced especially for them, while working with the *merrepen* fibres she mailed them. Connecting through touch—using and manipulating materials selected and offered by the participants for their exchange, while attending their meetings online—holds a special significance at a time when engaging with others and the wider world in tangible ways has been almost completely forbidden.

In response to Wilson's studio sharing, West showed the group digital outcomes of archival research and fieldwork she has been doing in Western Australia. D'Evie then presented digitally recorded performative experiments made during lockdown of herself dancing on Country, alongside field recordings of sounds from the bush and further images of in-progress work. Showing, displaying and 'pinpointing'—what in this paper I call 'ostension'—have therefore become core features of the exchange. One may object that the act of presenting is a common trait of any residency project, but I will prove otherwise and suggest that the shift to online engagement leads to a more complex degree of ostension, which I aim to analyse in depth in the following section of this text.

Studio visit with Katie West: looking at materials and colours. Zoom, October 2020. From top to bottom: Miriam La Rosa (curator), Regina Pilawuk Wilson (artist), Kara Rodski (Durrmu Arts, Project Coordinator), Fayen d'Evie (artist), Katie West (artist). Image Courtesy: Durrmu Arts.
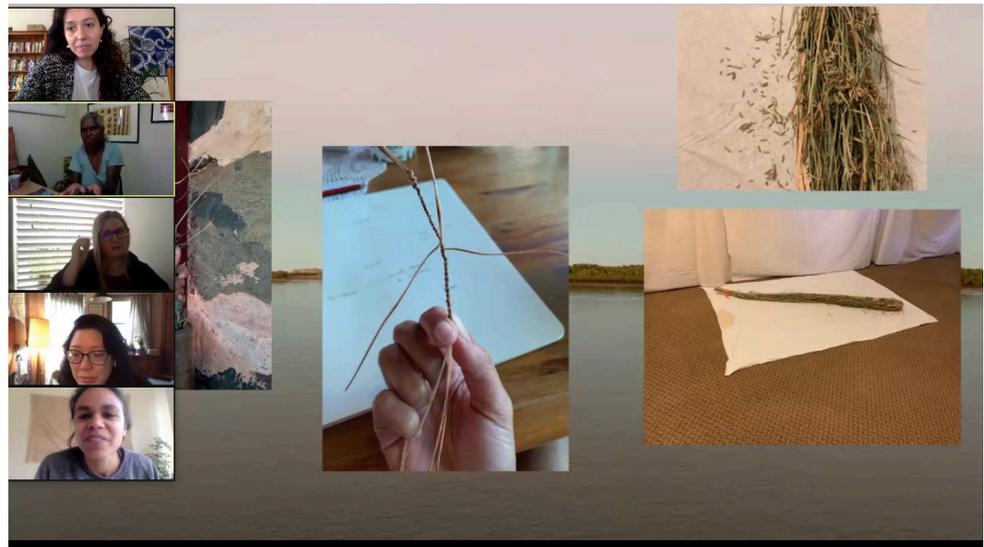
Studio visit with Fayen d'Evie: recording and dancing in the bush. November 2020. From top to bottom: Miriam La Rosa (curator), Regina Pilawuk Wilson (artist), Fayen d'Evie (artist), Katie West (artist). Image Courtesy: Durrmu Arts.

3. The Ostensive in Residence

Today the field of residencies is extremely wide and diversified, with programs proliferating in the most disparate locations—from public and institutional venues to private and experimental settings.[23] Assumptions that tend towards homogenisation are not possible, nor are they useful. Yet we will agree that for many artists, a 'residency' is often understood as a research and/or production phase within their practice, and is not necessarily geared towards the display of art. If the latter occurs, it does so as a consequence and result of the residency experience.[24] The Marrgu online residency began with the same purpose, to focus on research rather than display. However, the participants also found themselves engaged in a compulsory process of demonstration and *exhibition* that is both dictated and mediated by the nature of digital connection and the surface of the screen. Virtual infrastructures such as Zoom, Google and Instagram serve as instruments for artists to realise their exchanges. These tools are inherently based on the ostensive condition of art: the

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(live) exhibition of concepts, images and in-progress works, unfolding alongside an equally *curated* presentation of identity and sense of place.

The notion of ostension is employed in communication theory to address the intention to transmit something. It has been widely discussed in the fields of philosophy and linguistics by, amongst others, Ludwig Wittgenstein and Umberto Eco and it has also been applied to folklorist studies by John H. McDowell, for instance.[25] The latter frames ostension as a counterpart to iconicity (representation) and a vehicle to generate what he names "a narrative epiphany", which provides "a virtual encounter with experience".[26] Whereas an icon represents—as it symbolises and stands for—something else, a narrative epiphany *presents*. It offers a virtual encounter with the experience in the sense that it evokes and creates the illusion of ostension, of the experience itself—including audiences as participants in the event rather than spectators of it. From a semiotic perspective, though, one can argue that everything is perceived as a sign. As Jacques Derrida would put it, we are always imagining that moment when a foot leaves its print on the sand but all we are left to look at is the print, the trace, on the sand.[27]

Speaking of ostensive definitions, Wittgenstein refused the idea that the meaning of a word can be conveyed by the action of pointing at, displaying, or showing the thing a word refers to. For the philosopher, a pre-existing knowledge of the meaning of the thing itself is mandatory in order to understand any example that is being provided. It follows that meaning is given by the experience of something. Hence, the understanding of a word's meaning succeeds the experience of the thing the word stands for. In other words, showing cannot connect to reality but it is, at most, an association between written and spoken word.[28] The use we make of language, then, can affect the perception we have of reality.

To exemplify this point, I will borrow from John Berger's *Ways of Seeing*, whose driving message is that the act of seeing precedes words—while showing the opposite, that we see with signs. As the art critic highlights, language and narrative have the power to frame reality in exclusive and exclusionary ways. In support of his claims Berger brings forward different case studies: the history and meaning of the nude—the representation and presentation of women in art, which subtends a male-centric view of the world; the tradition of oil painting as the medium to embody and signify possession; and the role of advertising in depicting the ultimate neoliberal desire.[29] In art terms, these considerations suggest a double implication. On the one hand, exhibitions are agents that can either reinforce or challenge a world one is already familiar with. They are like a work of fiction in that they create counter-worlds, which can only be understood when referred to the reality we live in and, therefore, know. On the other hand, they can also be used in demagogic as well as subversive ways. Think of the impact of mega exhibitions such as biennials, triennials and documenta in the definition of contemporary art, and in shaping the collective view of history and power; or think of collection displays—almost all museum displays in 20th century Europe and the United States—that have privileged a merely Western perspective on the world. Think then, as a counterpart, of exhibitions that have attempted to re-write history by proposing previously overlooked and suppressed narratives such as the 22nd Biennale of Sydney | *NIRIN* (2020). With its unprecedented representation of Indigenous practitioners from

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The earliest use of the phrase "ostensive definition" can be found in the 1920s, in the work of logician William Ernest Johnson.

26
John H. McDowell, "Beyond Iconicity: Ostension in Kamsá Mythic Narrative", *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 19, no. 2/3 (1982): 127.

27
Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

28
Ludwig Wittgenstein and G. E. M. Anscombe, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1963).

29
John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London and New York: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 2008).

across the globe, it exemplifies the ostensive recognition of otherwise marginalised voices.[30]

How do such considerations inform the theme of residencies? By being based on, and defined by, the experience of sharing *while* being in a place, residencies are platforms that establish meaning and do not function in an ostensive way. They do not present an experience of art but are rather experiences of art in a set space and in real time. To be a resident means to reside, live in and actively engage with a place. When unrestricted travel was possible, the peculiarity of these projects often consisted in elevating the journey as an integral part of the event, one that would ultimately inform the research and practice of the artists involved. A digital residency, however, initiates a necessary relationship with the ostensive for the politics of displaying are deeply entrenched within the structure of virtual connectivity. Showing is an imperative of any online activity, where the participant has to choose and select—in other words, curate—those aspects of the self they intend to emphasise. Returning to Berger, at the time he wrote his book and delivered his art lectures through different TV stations—the BBC and Channel 4—the most powerful form of media was television. Although the latter was labelled as a "cool medium" (with increased involvement and decreased description), there was still no option for spectators to question statements and propositions live.[31]

Now, and in the digital residency, the possibility of open-source curation (or an illusion thereof?) is instead at stake. New media art has been dealing with this potential for a long time. Consider the work of artists such as 0100101110101101.org, Evan Roth or Rafael Rozendaals, to mention but a few (a comprehensive list is too long to be reported here). Or think of the curatorial approach of Domenico Quaranta: open-source processes, i.e. publicly accessible art for anyone to see, modify and distribute, are nothing new to them. However, in the age of enforced isolation, all art and its fruition have (temporarily?) gone online, and all curating potentially becomes open source. In other words, whilst *digital* sharing, presenting and exchange have previously occurred in both the residency and curatorial field, after the pandemic the great majority of these interactions have become exclusively so.[32]

An online encounter with art demands a different level of curatorial action than a physical one, whereby, complying with the digital language, artists present their work in combination with their inclinations, inspirations, political views and personal beliefs. Social media platforms are indeed built upon the principle of curation: a carefully filtered display of self-image, identity and opinion. The distinction between private life and public persona is softened and often nullified. This concept may especially resonate with those of us who, during lockdown, have translated both social and professional commitments to the domain of Zoom meetings. We have experienced physical detachment as much as a form of unprecedented intimacy, with work coming directly into our homes. By means of comparison, digital connectivity demystifies and re-mystifies art: it takes it down from the pedestal and desacralises its meaning. Simultaneously, it challenges the depth of

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The 22nd Biennale of Sydney | *NIRIN* (March 14—September 6, 2020): https://www.biennaleofsydney.art/archive/22nd-biennale-sydney-nirin/, accessed January 2021.

31
The categories "hot media" and "cool media" were coined by Media scholar Marshall McLuhan to refer to media that, respectively, engage one's senses totally (e.g. radio and film), hence decreasing the level of audience's involvement, and less completely (e.g. television, speech or comic books) requiring a higher deal of involvement to decode content. The internet, of course, is a category of its own, whereby the relationship between provider and audience is way more complex and in simpatico, becoming the "extension of ourselves" that McLuhan himself had alluded to. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* [1st ed.], (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).

32
In stating this, it is important to mention that during lockdown, some artworks remained blocked inside studios and galleries with no audiences to visit them, not even online. Sartre would argue that this art is *not there* with no one being able to experience it. He would also say that through the act of seeing and experiencing art, visitors would somewhat take it away, steal it, with their memory. See Carroll Mark, "'It Is': Reflections on the Role of Music in Sartre's *La Nausée*", *Music & Letters* 87, no. 3 (2006). Is this another form of travelling art?

the experience of art. Not all art is suited to, or originally developed for, an online presence.

What is more, and to focus again upon our main topic, digital residencies complicate McDowell's notion of virtual ostension. They create an illusion of experience—in the case of our three resident artists the illusion is that of visiting one another—whilst an experience itself *is* taking place, albeit digitally. Virtual and real-time events mingle. What does this dichotomy mean for the broader understanding of a residency? And how does it manifest in the specific context of the Marrgu digital residency?

The digital gives the ostensive the possibility to occur in multiple registers at the same time, that is with different screens and audio/video channels, which complicate the meaning of the work of art involved in the act of showing. Since the artists cannot be physically present in the same place and at the same time, they provide extracts—examples of their experience—in order to allow their fellow participants to partake in them. Thus, post-2020, travel no longer concerns the mere image of the work of art—which can *travel* through reproduction—but the experience of art itself that, with digital travel, is challenged to redress the impediment of physical movement.[33] This new understanding of the capacity of digital connectivity that we have gained has affected the definition of contemporary art, since it has dramatically changed our relationship with the world we live in. If the expression 'a new normal' has to be interpreted in a far-reaching way, a 'new contemporary art normal' also applies. A statement released in 2010 by artist Oliver Laric reads: "my Web site is not a space of representation but of primary experiences. You are viewing the real thing. And when the work travels to other sites, it is still the real thing".[34] Laric's argument was prescient back then and it is extremely pertinent now. Though, whereas a decade ago it reflected the exclusive condition of art developed with digital technologies and new media processes, today it needs to be thought of in relation to the experience of art as a whole.

If we pause for a moment to look at the etymology of the word (from the Latin verb *ostendo, ostendere, ostendi, ostensus*), we will notice not only that ostension means pointing out, making clear, displaying, exhibiting, revealing or showing, but that it also signifies (from the same root, in the Latin noun *ostium, osti(i)*) concepts such as river mouth, doorway, entrance to the underworld, front door, and starting gate.[35] We can observe an etymological proximity between ostension and hosting, with the host being a gatekeeper—a door opener to the guest in their own home. Hence, through the act of presenting, in the Marrgu digital residency each artist welcomes the other into her own art practice and world. This action is powerful for it leaves great space and autonomy to the presenter-participants to curate their own contribution, directing the narrative of their own story. It also allows them to develop a relationship that is based on, and thrives from, proximity—where the latter is not intended in geographical terms but conceptually—as a long-term rapport of friendship.

The history of hosting is not necessarily a peaceful one. It unfolds through an often-conflicting clash of identities, given by the encounter among *others*. Whilst varying in different societies and cultures, the practice of hospitality has been approached by contemporary critical discourse as a tension and a game of power between hosts and their complements—the guests. In the Marrgu digital residency, these dynamics are disrupted due to the seemingly equalising action of digital connection and the principle of the gift that is exchanged among the participants. I have already mentioned how the artists agreed to send postcards, organic

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[33] On the significance of reproduction in art see: Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* [1935], (London: Penguin, 2008).

[34] Domenico Quaranta, "The Real Thing/Interview with Oliver Laric Oliver Laric", *Artpulse* (2010). Available at: http://artpulsemagazine.com/the-real-thing-interview-with-oliver-laric, accessed January 2021.

[35] Online Etymology Dictionary: https://www.etymonline.com/word/ostensive, accessed January 2021.

materials and other objects to each other through the postal service. Yet, their gift is also immaterial—it is the time they dedicate to one another and it is the knowledge they offer, offline as well as online. The theory of the gift is used in philosophical and anthropological studies to frame relationships of reciprocities between individuals and groups, described by Marcel Mauss as a form of alternative economy to capitalism.[36] However, as I argue elsewhere, in the hospitality game, the gift is often mistakenly restricted to an exchange occurring between two fixed parties (moving from the host to the guest), and as a bonding relationship that requires a directional comeback (expected from the guest by the host).[37]

Marrgu's gift instead flows within a dynamic binary—or rather ternary—structure. It moves in and out of a system that draws from the principles of openness, slowness and generosity rather than restriction, fast returns and expectation. The artists involved are three and their exchange is multidirectional, since it affects their individual practices as well as the relationships they are building with one another and within the group. West and d'Evie, for instance, have discovered additional research trajectories in each other's practice that had not emerged before, despite their existing collaboration. Inspired by Wilson's stories and methods, West has begun experimenting with painting. After listening to d'Evie's sound-based work, Wilson has taken advantage of a podcast episode we realised in collaboration with Bus Projects, Melbourne, to coordinate the recording of sounds, music and spoken words from Peppimenarti. We are also considering the possibility of involving a further party, an art institution, as active participant—an enticing prospect in relation to the discourse on the ostensive condition of contemporary art. In fact, what could a museum gift to the artists beyond the promise of exhibiting their work? With the pandemic having created a crisis of ostension, should the institutions formally dedicated to the exhibition of art revaluate their mission and scope? In other words, what is the future of showing for contemporary art?

Studio visit with Katie West: showing results of archival research and fieldwork. Zoom, October 2020. From top to bottom, left to right: Regina Pilawuk Wilson (artist), Miriam La Rosa (curator), Kara Rodski (Durrmu Arts, Project Coordinator), Fayen d'Evie (artist), Kade McDonald (Agency CEO), Katie West (artist). Image Courtesy: Durrmu Arts.
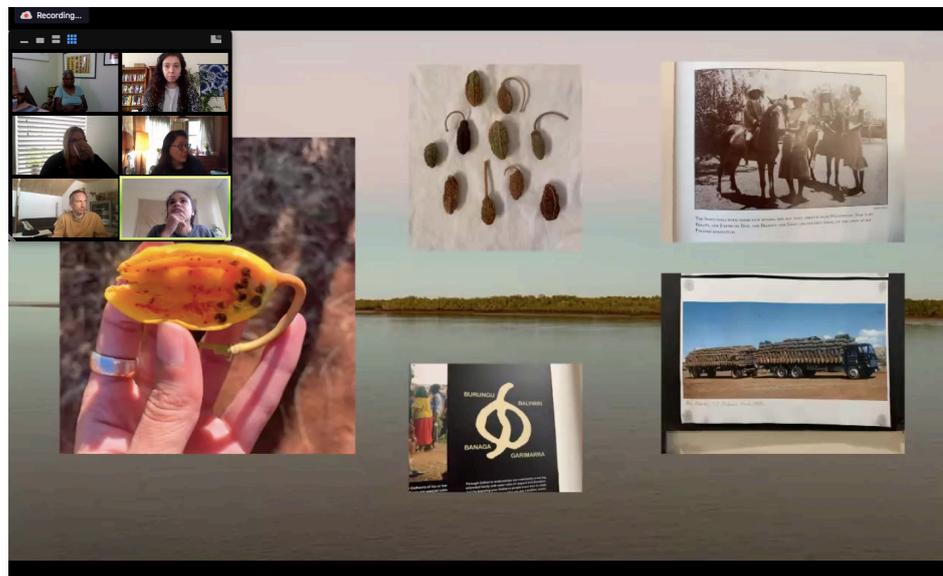

36
Marcel Mauss, *The Gift* (London: Routledge, 1990).

37
A comprehensive discussion on the gift would require a deeper analysis, which exceeds the context of this paper. Crucial references are the thought of Jacque Derrida and the publication *The gift* by Lewis Hyde. While the former addresses the aporia of hospitality occurring between host and guest, the latter looks at the gift as the creative spirit of the artist, to be understood as a circular and open form of exchange—rather than a one-to-one relationship of reciprocity. Jacques Derrida and Anne Dufourmantelle, *Of Hospitality, Cultural Memory in the Present* (Stanford [CA]: Stanford University Press, 2000). Jacques Derrida, "Hostipitality", *Angelaki* 5, no. 3 (2000): 3-18. Lewis Hyde, *The Gift. How the Creative Spirit Transforms the World* [1979], (Edinburgh: Canongate Books Ltd, 2012).

Studio visit with Fayen d'Evie: presenting ideas for a project on sign language. November 2020. From top to bottom: Miriam La Rosa (curator), Regina Pilawuk Wilson (artist), Fayen d'Evie (artist), Katie West (artist). Image Courtesy: Durrmu Arts.
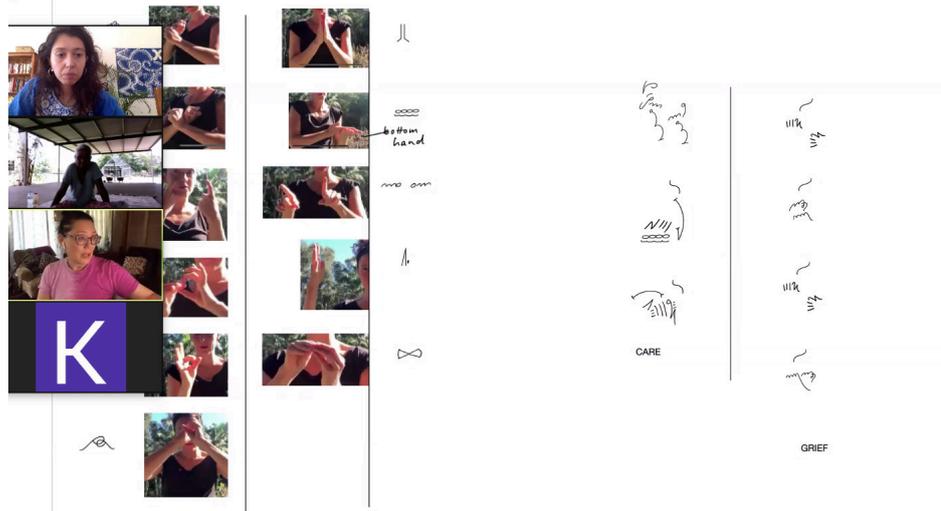
4. The Future of Ostension: Cross-cultural Showing and Collective Action

The pandemic, as well as social issues such as the Black Live Matter (BLM) movement, have made discussions on the future of museums more fervent than ever. In art institutions across the globe, significant appointments of professionals from minority groups have followed resignations from people in longstanding leadership positions. The International Council of Museums (ICOM) is a case in point, with directors leaving their posts in signs of protest or solidarity, and the development of a lengthy process to rethink the definition of the museum.[38] Likewise, the most powerful ostensive machine for contemporary art—biennials—has been challenged in all corners of the world due to lockdown measures and travel restrictions.[39] Museums, at best, have responded by turning themselves into containers for virtual exhibitions that, unfortunately, often look like SketchUp renderings or multiples of the Google Art Project. In the art market, collectors have begun to desert the vision of art as asset. As Michael Moses from ARTBnk argues, this trend has increased the divide between the "super-wealthy and everyone else", with the latter investing in red-chip names, brought to light by their social media presence, rather than blue-chip artists.[40]

Where art galleries were reopened with controlled attendance, blockbuster exhibits have been partially replaced by projects that attempt more intimate and subjective responses to the events of the past year. Should ostension be traded with action? I am thinking here of another 2020 tendency that followed the BLM revolts: the widespread removal of historical monuments, titles and names that were remnants of colonialism, and their substitution with new symbols of black identity and de-colonisation. But when I mention 'action' I am also thinking of that needed to put into practice, and sustain, the ideology of upheaval. As others have said before me, it is not enough to represent minority groups in art institutions by hiring new members of staff and diversifying exhibitions and collections.[41] This is only the much-needed first step of a longer journey that will require deep structural changes concerning the complexity of all aspects of daily life.

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[38] ICOM, Museum Definition: https://icom.museum/en/resources/standards-guidelines/museum-definition/, accessed January 2021.

[39] Many biennials scheduled for 2020 and beyond have been postponed. Examples include Manifesta in Marseille and The Venice Biennale.

[40] Scott Reyburn, "Blue-Chip Artists Move over, Here Come the Red Chips", *The Art Newspaper* (January 8, 2020). Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/analysis/the-rush-for-red-chip-art, accessed January 2021.

[41] Robin Pogrebin, "For Diversity Leaders in the Arts, Getting Hired Is Just the First Step", *The New York Times,* January 17, 2021.

With these considerations in mind, I turn back to the residency. In a recent online lecture, art historian Claire Bishop addressed the difference between activism and dissidence—the former manifesting in democratic societies and the latter in authoritarian states. What she calls "intervention" is an expression of dissent where the possibility of action is denied. "Intervention", Bishop says "cannot be curated as it is uninvited".[42] This implies that invitation—which is at the basis of the residency I theorise, as a mandatory feature for hospitality to take place—is instead an activity that can be institutionalised and organised (in other words curated) even if the process is ultimately driven by the artists' needs. Residency, I reiterate, is about inhabiting a context as much as taking an active part within it. Residents are not those who are merely *from* a place but also those who actively engage with that place's culture and society.

Revisiting the responses from and interactions amongst our three artists now, it is striking how the year 2020 proved particularly fruitful. Current events have not dramatically affected life in Peppimenarti and, as a consequence, Wilson's work. However, prior to the pandemic, the community used to periodically receive visitors and Wilson was busy travelling both nationally and overseas to deliver workshops and lectures, and to exhibit her work. The artist found herself able to finally concentrate on her art without the impediment of compulsory travel outside of the Northern Territory. In the case of d'Evie, lockdown meant she was no longer required to commute daily from her home in regional Victoria to Melbourne, allowing her to re-organise her routine around a stronger engagement with Dja Dja Wurrung Country through regular walks, home schooling and art-making in the bush. Likewise, West relocated to Western Australia, an occasion to dive into local archives to retrieve and study the history of her homeland.

Projects like Marrgu favour connection between geographically, socially and politically distant places, including remote areas, therefore giving further opportunities to artists located outside of urban centres for their art to be present and to be presented. In the case of Indigenous art, and senior artists like Wilson, this is a meaningful achievement. It means that Wilson can potentially participate in various activities without renouncing to her obligations on Country. Indeed, alongside being a practicing artist, Wilson runs all cultural events at the Art Centre, manages the local club and performs her traditional and ceremonial duties as a matriarch in the community. For d'Evie and West these types of projects can open up further avenues for cross-cultural connection and on-site artistic experimentation, away from the urban art contexts they are used to engaging with. Marrgu therefore reinforces the thought that art does not need to be brought *out of the bush* to a museum in order to be seen and acknowledged.

More widely, I propose that the future of ostension for non-Western artists and practices in a globalised digital world can benefit from the new understanding we have gained of online connectivity. Whilst the value of physical travel and in-person exchange cannot ever be replaced, the pandemic has forced us to explore the capacity of virtual interaction at a higher, and hopefully more effective, level. Online displays bear the advantage of enhancing minority representation and working in a ubiquitous mode. However, there are also downsides. Access to the internet and digital technologies is not equal everywhere. In the case of Australia, this problem is especially evident. Art Centres located in remote areas have very poor connectivity and often rely on the presence of non-Indigenous art workers to accomplish tech-based tasks. Wilson, for instance, can connect to the internet only at the Art Centre—which requires her to walk from her home, often under unpleasant weather conditions. She also needs assistance to join Zoom meetings, does not post on Instagram by herself and is still reachable mostly only by phone. So, is the 'new contemporary art normal'—where the digital is inevitable and no longer a mere artistic potential—just another instance of the 21st century's pathways to exclu-

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42
Claire Bishop "Interventions: The Art of Political Timing", in *Archipelagic Encounters: An online symposium* produced in collaboration between McNally School of Fine Arts, LASALLE College of the Arts, Singapore and the Centre of Visual Art, University of Melbourne, Australia (November 5, 2020).

sion and polarisation? In posing this question I am not alone. In "XR Review", *The Art Newspaper*'s column on Art and Technology, artist Gretchen Andrew advances similar concerns. "Meaning is always added and lost by the digitisation process" she claims, and "This impacts the moral rights of artists".[43] Her statement speaks to the vulnerability of practitioners who are now suddenly expected to engage with digital technologies to make art accessible, when physical travelling for their work is not possible. In the case of non-Western art and ancestral cultural practices, the switch to the digital is not always an easy route. With some exceptions—the Mulka Project in the community of Yirrkala, in Arnhem Land, is one of them—the vast majority of Art Centres in Australia still experience digital isolation.[44] Wilson is part of the advisory committee of Agency, an organisation that fosters ethical investments to promote Indigenous-led projects, both locally and across different countries.[45] Agency is developing remarkable initiatives to generate a lasting impact for the sustainability and growth of the Indigenous art industry. Yet, their work also shows that the support and investment needed in this direction continues to be vast, and demands cooperation between different types of institutions, including government and the private sector. Once again, the route to equity is tortuous and requires a collective effort and sustained, organised action.

So how will we deal with, and define, the impact of enforced digitisation in the new ostensive condition of art? Can we begin to understand ostension as the act of hosting rather than showing? The Marrgu digital residency—with its approach in favour of an art that can travel, slowly, across cultures, that is taken down from the pedestal and turned into a more familiar and family-oriented symbol of exchange—is an attempt to deal with these questions. As much as I would like to further deconstruct the issues raised in this paper, I am also aware that the temporal distance is currently not enough for me to analyse what is occurring in a comprehensive way. Considerations and statements, at this stage, still partly function at the level of prediction. I wonder whether the present needs to become history in order to meaningfully *present* itself to us. Undoubtedly, though, cross-cultural exchange and collective action have to take place to challenge those systems and structures, which belong to a limited vision of the past and, as such, no longer serve us.

5. What conclusions?

Writing a set of concluding remarks for a project that has not yet reached its completion is an arduous task. The Marrgu digital residency started in September 2020 and does not have a fixed end date. Parameters and goals are unfolding, slowly, in respect to participants' needs and desires, which are in a state of flux. With no surprise, this tendency reflects the spirit of the time, which does not allow for fast forward planning and instead asks us to be considerate of what and when we can *project*. Throughout this paper, I have attempted to provide an overview of the changing relationship with contemporary art, and its display, in the new normal conditions of the pandemic age. Taking Marrgu as a case study, I have addressed some of the challenges that the post-2020 artworld is being presented with. Among (if not on top of) these challenges, there is a crisis of showing: a dramatic change of scenario whereby all art forms and mediums are migrating somewhat to the land

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43
The Art Newspaper's XR Panel "Disembodied Behaviors: An Ultra-Real Virtual Art Show that Sears the Mind-Haze of 2020's Unending March Back to a State of Clarity", *The Art Newspaper* (January 15, 2020). Available at: https://www.theartnewspaper.com/review/disembodied-behaviors-review-the-art-newspaper-xr-panel, accessed January 2021.

44
The Mulka Project: https://yirrkala.com/about-the-mulka-project/, accessed January 2021. Indigo Holcombe James, *Coronavirus: As Culture Moves Online, Regional Organisations Need Help Bridging the Digital Divide* (2020), https://theconversation.com/coronavirus-as-culture-moves-online-regional-organisations-need-help-bridging-the-digital-divide-135050, accessed January 2021.

45
Agency: https://agencyprojects.org, accessed January 2021.

of the virtual. Whilst this place may appear—even promise—from a distance to be one of equality and union, it bares the danger of perpetuating those dynamics of division and exclusion that exist in, and permeate, the land we once knew as *the real*.

So I will go back and borrow from the quote reported at the beginning of this text by Umberto Eco, which in English reads: "Ostension represents the most elementary act of *active signification* and it is the one used in the first instance by two people who do not share the same language".[46] This sentence encapsulates the essence of the ostension I have tried to imagine and theorise here. Going back to the roots for me, a Derrida lover, also requires us to deconstruct the world through the words we use to describe it, looking at their journey: where they are now and where they came from. Hence, I have framed ostension as a potential relative of hosting, proposing it as an act of connection rather than one of display—as an art that travels—between peoples (in our context, artists) located in different corners of the globe and therefore speaking different languages (culturally as much as in their art). I have wondered whether, through the digital, a new ostensive condition of contemporary art could function as an avenue for showing more substantially, and for better representing non-Western art and art that derives from ancestral cultural practices. Ultimately, I have hoped for ostension to become synonymous with action. By now we will agree that my conclusions may function, more effectively, as questions. So I will end these remarks by asking: has the pandemic challenged the ontology of residencies to the point of confronting the very purpose of art? Is it not the scope of art to probe, shake and interrogate? Let's not set this aside when we try to display it.

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[46] Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 225.

Author's Biography

Miriam La Rosa is an independent curator and PhD Candidate at the University of Melbourne. Her research looks at notions of gift-exchange and host-guest relationships in the context of the artist residency, with the South as a geopolitical focus. As part of this research trajectory, in 2019, she co-curated a cross-cultural exchange project through residencies between Sicily (Italy), Gippsland and Peppimenarti (Australia). She is a Graduate Fellow of the Centre of Visual Arts (CoVA) and Treasurer of the International Association of Art Critics (AICA) Australia. She has contributed to projects in the Education, Public Program, and Exhibition departments of institutions including Whitechapel Gallery, London (for the 2015 exhibition *Rivane Neuenschwander: The Name of Fear*), Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam (for the 2015 exhibition *ZERO: Let Us Explore the Stars*), and Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven (for the 2013 exhibitions *Sheela Gowda: Open Eye Policy and Piero Gilardi – Samen Werken*).

Echoes

Lorenzo Balbi
The *Nuovo Forno del Pane,* a Possible Model for a Museo Reale

Abstract

Contemporary museology confronts us with a radical rethinking of the functions
and responsibilities of the contemporary art museum which, from a place of con-
servation and enhancement of artistic heritage, becomes today a center of cultural
production open to citizens. Looking at the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, the new project
of MAMbo - Museum of Modern Art of Bologna which offered working spaces to
local artists, the article traces the characteristics of a new proposition: the museum
presents itself as a site of creative processes, and as a home for the artistic commu-
nity and promoter of its growth.
The points through which the new contemporary art museum model is described
are driven from what Cesare Pietroiusti defines as the *Museo Reale* (Museum of the
Real). In his manifesto, presented in the form of a work / poster on the occasion of
his retrospective *A certain number of things* at MAMbo, Pietroiusti assembles a num-
ber of reflections which are taken as fundamental principles for the construction of
the museum of tomorrow.

Keywords

Museology, Contemporary Art, Museography, Relational Aesthetics, Cesare
Pietroiusti, Artist's Studio, Future of the Museum

Translated by
Finking srl

Echoes

The *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, a possible model for a Museo Reale

Lorenzo Balbi

The museum has been the object of Institutional Critique,
today it must find a way to become a subject of it as well.
Gianfranco Maraniello[1]

I have always thought that dedicating a space to artists' studios, or—more generally—making a space available to artists specifically for the purpose of facilitating their creation and access to tools and skills to produce new work, was a sound development and a fundamental addition to the museum's activities.

The global context of the pandemic has confronted us with the need and the possibility of thinking about alternative models for the museum, which is now required to take a clear position and take responsibility for the needs of the community it represents by sharing its resources and spaces.

From these prerogatives the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* was conceived, a possible new model of museum: no longer a home for works of art but a production space for artists, a forge for new works, an incubator for new projects through which to experiment with a more radical and direct museology. As represented in the logo of the project created by Aldo Giannotti, it was a *toolbox* available to everyone.

The 2020 exhibition program has therefore been partially interrupted to put the Sala delle Ciminiere—the main exhibition space of the museum, dedicated to large temporary exhibitions—and surrounding spaces at the disposal of the artists of the territory, creatives and cultural associations—to restart together.

On October 3, 2019, during the opening of Cesare Pietroiusti's solo exhibition *Un certo numero di cose* at MAMbo,[2] the audience in attendance was surprised by a strange noise, akin to hammering or pickaxing coming from behind a wall of the exhibition space. The public soon moved inside the room from which the strange noise came, and it became more and more intense and closer, making the works exhibited on the walls and in the cases vibrate. After the first cracks and the fall of some rubble in the wall, a hole was created from which one could see the figure of

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1
Gianfranco Maraniello, "Il Museo all'opera", in Stefano Chiodi (ed.), *Le funzioni del museo: Arte, museo, pubblico nella contemporaneità* (Firenze: Le Lettere, 2009), 199.

2
Cesare Pietroiusti, *Un certo numero di cose / A certain number of things*, exhibition curated by Lorenzo Balbi at MAMbo – Museo d'arte Moderna di Bologna (October 4, 2019 – January 6, 2020).

the artist who, armed with a hammer and chisel, had created a gap. I like to think that with that gesture, which physically connected the space of the exhibition with a technical room, an inside and an outside, a public place and an inaccessible place, my idea of the museum was realised—one that I had already tried to evoke by opening the windows between the Sala delle Ciminiere and the permanent collection, or the large window under the porticoes of Via Don Minzoni through which anyone passing by can see what is happening inside MAMbo[3]: an open place, without compartmentalisation, in constant dialogue with the outside, with the city, with its various publics.

Quoting Pietroiusti's own words: "Historically, the museum represents an attempt to give a home to the works, that is, to define (and make publicly viable) the place of art. But it also represents an attempt to define an 'inside' in terms of the social and cultural legitimacy of art. In this sense, the museum of contemporary art, in its ambivalence of being both directed towards production and towards history, seems to represent the hinge, the junction, of the so-called art system".[4]

Video still from the video realised during the opening of Cesare Pietroiusti's exhibition *Un certo numero di cose / A certain number of things* in the context of the workshop *E molte alreu cose*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna, thanks to the support of Italian Council, 2018

The project of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* is based on three cornerstone-concepts, intended to unhinge the canonical framework of museum action and propose a trademark[5]—a model distinct from the canonical one—which revolves around more open exhibitions and collections, with artists and spaces at the centre of the creative process:
1) the production of art as an operational and research tool;
2) the construction of a community of reference;
3) self-training as a shared practice of growth and the provision of equipment and skills.

3
These structural operations to open the spaces were carried out on the occasion of the exhibition *That's IT! Sull'ultima generazione di artisti in Italia e a un metro e ottanta dal confine,* exhibition curated by Lorenzo Balbi, MAMbo – Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (June 22, 2018 – January 6, 2019).

4
Cesare Pietroiusti, "Essere un po' fuori. L'artista e il museo", in Chiodi, *Le funzioni del museo,* 89-90.

5
On this subject, read Daniel Buren's fundamental text *Function of Museum* (1971) which speaks of how "the museum leaves its 'mark' and imposes its 'framework' [...] on whatever it exhibits, in a profound and indelible way" and does so because "everything the museum displays is produced and evaluated according to the perspective that will be placed in it". See Daniel Buren, "Function of the Museum," in *Theories of Contemporary Art* (Upper Saddle River [NJ]: Prentice Hall, Inc: 1985), 189-190.

In the first instance, this model foresees a shift from the idea of the museum as an expositive institution to a productive one, an aspect that foresees a necessary re-engagement of the public in different ways, in line with the theories and experiments of various scholars and museums in recent decades. As Stefania Zuliani well summarises: "either the work is in its own space, the studio, and does not take place (for the public) or it is in a situation that is not its own, the museum, and only then does it take place (for the public)".[6] This appears to be a paradoxical and inevitable condition which, however, finds a possible solution precisely in the transformation of the studio, that is, in its continuous regeneration through a rigorous on-site practice, a strategy which, as we know, the artist has been consistently pursuing for over forty years (and the site, and therefore the studio, can be as much a physical place, a square or a museum, as the ether or the web). A site-specific dimension that today has become a widespread practice and that has been fully absorbed by the museum as well, which has become not only a client of works created in its rooms but also a space of public residence and production for artists.

The second structural objective of the project is the direct creation of a community, of a comparison group that can grow and develop into a privileged and direct interlocutor of the museum. We often talk about this decisive role of the public museum, but it is always relegated to the proposal of contents through exhibitions and paths or to the activities of the educational department. In this model, instead, we start from the direct involvement of the artists, of their researches and different attitudes in a space (physical and mental) of confrontation. These skills and dispositions determine our own institutionalisation as members of the art field. They achieve what Pierre Bourdieu called *habitus*: the "social made body", "the institution made mind".[7]

View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021). Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.
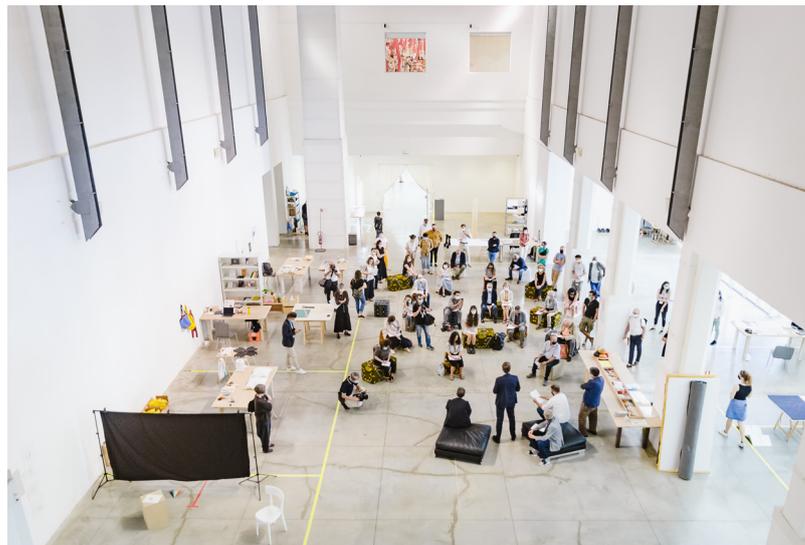
As Michael Asher argued, the art institution is not only institutionalised in organisations such as museums and objectified in exhibitions and collections. It is also internalised, incorporated, and represented by people. It is internalised in the skills, conceptual models, and perceptual patterns that allow us to produce art, understand it, write about it, or simply recognise it as such, whether we are artists, critics, curators, art historians, dealers, collectors or museum visitors.[8]

6
Stefania Zuliani, "Post studio? Produzione ed esposizione dell'opera nel grobal art world", in Stefania Zuliani (ed.), *Atelier d'artista. Gli spazi di creazione dell'arte dall'età moderna al presente* (Milano: Mimesis, 2014), 182-189.

7
Pierre Bourdieu, *Il dominio maschile* [1998] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2014), 15.

8
See Michael Asher's reading of Andrea Fraser, "Dalla critica delle istituzioni a un'istituzione della critica", in Chiodi, *Le funzioni del museo*, 83.

Self-education in this context becomes a shared tool for growth in which each actor can be educated and educator at the same time, proposing content for collective growth and using those spaces and skills of the institution that are difficult to approach from the outside.

After six months of activity and experimentation, of visits, meetings, collaborations, new works and public programmes, the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* has become a model that other institutions are also looking at and thanks to its ability to think about the future, I am aiming to establish it into a fixed activity of the museum—an additional department to which an exclusive location can be dedicated. This seems the possibility to develop what Pietroiusti has defined as the *Museo Reale* (Museum of the real).[9] This sort of museum is described by the artist through eight points that outline a possible museum model that, just as happens in all the artist's research, is open to a constant rethinking of itself, questioning the traditional characteristics on which it was built. Just as the artist and his or her work are reconsidered from a community and relational perspective, the museum can be reshaped starting from a fundamental openness to the *other*, becoming a space that can be inhabited and crossed by a multiplicity of experiences and stories. According to Pietroiusti, contemporary art museums, having been built as museum-objects with a great architectural identity and considerable economic weight, remain *structures* that do not become *real*. For the artist, the reality of a museum becomes the ability "to turn towards the inapparent: the hidden, the marginal, the invisible, the precarious; that which escapes the radar of the spectacle, the media and the market economy; that which we would tend to ignore".[10]

I would now like to retrace the eight points that outline the characteristics of this museum, using the experience of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* and the institutional program of MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna as the sources of the sustained reflections, with the aim of showing the real possibility of realisation of the model proposed by the artist.
        The first characteristic of Pietroiusti's Museo Reale concerns hospitality and the double meaning of the word *ospite* (guest) in Italian: (the one) who welcomes and (the one) who is welcomed:

1. Hospitality. The real museum is hospitable. It welcomes both those who are already there, and who therefore open it up, *and those who come from outside, and hence* enter it. *In order to be hospitable, this place will have to be inviting, and make both those who open it up, and those who enter it, feel at home, not as visiting strangers but as* ospiti, *which in Italian means both hosts and guests.*[11]

From this point of view, it is interesting to note that the first thirteen guest artists of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* project, despite this era of pandemic and its restricted possibilities of movement, came from the most disparate geographical contexts and only two had Bologna or its province as their place of birth. Selection followed the principles of hospitality and reciprocal exchange: while the chosen artists were all domiciled in Bologna they originated from Mongolia, Rwanda, the USA, Colombia and all regions of Italy. Perhaps this diversity of origin—so characteristic of the city in which the museum operates—has rewarded the sense of community of the occupants of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, in accordance with the second characteristic of the Museo Reale:

9
On the characteristics of the Museo Reale, read, *Un certo numero di cose 1955-2019* (Roma: NERO, 2019), 223-224. A manifesto that, in the form of a work/poster, was set up on the exterior walls of MAMbo on the occasion of the artist's exhibition in 2019.

10
Cesare Pietroiusti, *A Certain Number of Things 1955-2019* (Roma: NERO, 2019), 48-49.

11
Ibid. Empasis added by the author, here and in the following points.

2. Residentiality. The real museum does not propose a model of separation, but of integration among people: living together *is a concrete option, an opportunity for exchanging knowledge, experience and affectionate feelings.*[12]

I have already talked about the concept of self-education and how one of the fundamental criteria on which this experience is based is the fact that each artist is called upon to have a clear idea of what they can bring and what they want to take from the group. But now I'd like to focus on the architectural model and the division of spaces: if at first we thought of single spaces, divided by walls and compartments, then a model able to guarantee the integration among people won, with many united spaces, delimited only by yellow lines on the ground (for anti-Covid reasons) and a big central common area, on which all the spaces face, in which to meet, in which to dialogue, in which to host other people, rehearse performances or works.

3. Usability. The real museum is an organisation that welcomes the projects of those who work there, and makes its tools available to them. It adapts to their planning needs and avoids restricting the artist's intervention to the logic of the site-specific work. The artist does not adapt to the museum, but uses the museum.[13]

When we speak of *tools* made available to the museum, especially in relation to the experience of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, we must not only think of the technical equipment. Obviously, the spaces of MAMbo, the technical office with all the instruments, the warehouses and all the empty spaces have been made available to the artists for their purposes, but also—and above all—the professional structure of the museum, with the various colleagues who have made available their specific skills, their knowledge, their experience in the field. In addition to this, the network of relationships and connections with professionals, other institutions, artisans and workers, the museum that becomes a *facilitator* for processes of new relationships. By hosting productive dynamics, the museum loses its value as a white cube or as a space that, as a receiving place, tends to modify the form of the work, transforming itself into a laboratory of tools for the artist, from the material to the intellectual.

4. Productivity. Just as in the library of Alexandria books were not only collected and read, but also conceived and written, in a museum, works and actions are not only collected, preserved and looked at, but conceived, made, transformed, and discussed.[14]

This characteristic lies in the very idea of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, the transformation of the museum space from an exhibition centre into an art production centre. It was interesting to observe how the public, between one lockdown and the next, perceived this change by observing the artists at work through the large windows that from the second floor—that of the permanent collection—give onto the great Sala delle Ciminiere. A museum that puts itself on the line, that tries to redefine its role in a context of global crisis, becomes a productive museum: not only for works but for ideas, for new relationships and possibilities.

5. Poly-sensoriality. Freedom from the predominance of sight. This might sound obvious, but we are still very far from experiments and practices that really enhance the other senses, including kinaesthesia, as much as possible, and thus allow us to explore a place with the same olfactory sharpness of, say, a dog..[15]

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[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid., 49.

View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021). Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.

View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021). Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.

The large number of applications received (219 for 12 places available—a remarkable number if you think that the call was reserved only to artists living in the metropolitan area of Bologna) allowed us to create an amalgamated group during the selection phase, in which each artistic practice had its own uniqueness and complementarity with the others. A group in which sensitivities—and sensoriality—could mix to emerge but also, and above all, to refine, enrich and find new expressions.

From another point of view, the theme of poly-sensoriality, if updated to our narrower contemporaneity marked by crisis brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, is also linked to the need to create an alternative response to the growing spread of online content that, while expanding the audience thanks to digital platforms, increasingly reinforces the primacy of sight, impoverishing the viewer's experience. Rather than adapting the museum to the new habits of fruition and involving it in the incessant climb towards *viewing* that includes everyone from individual users to large corporations, the Museo Reale promotes a sensory reconstruction, based on the sharing of real relationships, in which digital tools are used to disseminate artistic activities through a creative narration. It offers an opportunity to expand the social sphere of each of us, proposing an active habitation of the museum space that is not limited to the visit, but involves us in programmes of education and spontaneous aggregation.

6. Permeability. A real museum cannot but involve, by definition, the people and stories who inhabited, and most importantly, still inhabit that particular place. For instance, it could work on the places next to it and consider the buildings (offices, businesses...) around the museum as possible exhibition venues.[16]

As previously mentioned, one of the first actions that I carried out as artistic director of MAMbo was to open the large window that from the Sala delle Ciminiere allows one to see the external portico and vice versa. A simple gesture but, in my opinion, full of meaning. As a public space, the museum *opens up* to the outside world: it eliminates partitions and becomes permeable. Following this same principle, large windows were soon restored from the second floor to provide visual communication between the permanent collections and the temporary exhibition's area. The exhibitions and the works began to *invade* the *other* spaces such as the cafeteria, the bookshop, the reception and the immediate environs of the museum. All of this was done in order to pursue the idea of the permeability of spaces, the absence of physical partitioning, of the institution that thinks and works as an entity in direct connection with the city and the outside world. In this sense, the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* has marked another significant step with artists from the local scene who form a community within the museum and then leave it to become an active connection and privileged interlocutor.

7. Lightness. The real museum should be physically light, given that a bulky structure limits the number of possibilities, instead of increasing them; it should be organisationally light, since a rigid or redundant structure generates obstacles and inhibits its so-called human resources, instead of empowering them; and it should be light from the point of view of politics and mass media, because too much attention tends to annihilate the development of meanings and research.[17]

The method of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane* was simple: there's a worldwide pandemic, we have no way to open to the public, and we have no resources. We start from the only certainty we have left: space. Without partitions or superstructures: we put the (public) space of the museum at the disposal of the artists in order to start over together. From the point of view of communication, we have instead decided to establish—as the main method of dissemination of our content—a radio inside the museum, a method of communication apparently less visible in an era where the image is predominant, but that can recover meanings and attention to the word too often segregated to a secondary role.

8. Multidisciplinarity. A return to the place of the Muses*: regardless of their number and field of specialisation (there are several different versions and hypotheses on this), the Muses embody multiplicity, the idea that knowledge is a totality, and that the variety of its many facets is inherent in it, as well as inevitable. As the house of such multiplicity, a real museum can embrace different disciplines, languages, methods and approaches, and find precisely in diversity, and not in specialisation, its essence as a museum.*[18]

Diversity of knowledge and a sense of community were the driving forces behind this project, which ushered in a new way of engaging museum audiences and rethinking itself as an institution. In the words of Anne Pasternak, director of the Brooklyn Museum, in response to András Szántó's question, "What do museums need to unlearn to be successful in engaging deeply with their communities?" she says, "They need to let go of this obnoxious idea that they are the authority on all

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[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

View of the *Nuovo Forno del Pane*, MAMbo - Museo d'Arte Moderna di Bologna (July 14, 2020 - February 28, 2021). Photo: Valentina Cafarotti, Federico Landi.

things, and start to listen more. They need to let go of their arrogance. Museums also need to look and feel different. You and I grew up in a world where, no matter where you went, all museum installations looked the same, featured the same artists, told the same fake version of history. There must be a radical rethinking of how we tell stories and what it feels like to go to a museum".[19] Pasternak's position is exemplary for reflecting on a museum vision that continues to question itself, abandoning conventional narratives and opening up to new approaches of investigation. This propulsion comes primarily from an active confrontation with the artists who live in the museum, in order to transform them into activators for future reflections. Today, it is important to recognise a particular method in artistic research which is characterised by a disciplinary freedom that creates continuous connections without ever arriving at unitary and linear visions, offering instead imaginings and constellations of meaning. From this indisciplinarity—beyond disciplinarity, operating freely between disciplines—today's museum takes its cue.

19
Anne Pasternack, "We Should Aim to Be The Pillars of Society", in ed. András Szántó, *The Future of the Museum. 28 Dialogues* (Berlin: Hatje Cantz, 2020), 69-70.

Author's Biography

Lorenzo Balbi is a curator, art critic, and teacher. Since 2017 Balbi is Head of the Modern and Contemporary Art Area of Bologna Musei (Italy), and he is in charge of the artistic direction of MAMbo - Museum of Modern Art of Bologna, Villa delle Rose, Museo Morandi, Casa Morandi, Museum for the Memory of Ustica and the Sandra Natali artist's residence. Previously, he held the position of curator at the Sandretto Re Rebaudengo Foundation in Turin, where he was also responsible for the Residence for Young Foreign Curators program and lecturer at Campo (Course in studies and curatorial practices). His texts have been published in numerous journals in Italy and abroad. Since 2018 he is the artistic director of ART CITY Bologna. He teaches at the University of Bologna, at the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna, and at IED (Istituto Europeo di Design) in Florence.

Echoes

Jens Hoffmann
Institutional Certainty and Curatorial Ambiguity: The Whitney Biennial

Abstract

The rise of more critical and radical political debates has made museums intensely risk-averse such that self-regulation, self-censorship, and most importantly pure self-preservation have become the foundations of museum operations. Whereas the 1990s and early 2000s were broadly seen as a period of bold, critical, and unflinching curatorial undertakings, especially in the context of biennials, the last decade has witnessed clear shifts toward benign, almost anodyne programming for fear of being perceived as offensive or insensitive.

      This essay considers the Whitney Biennial as a case study, tracing an arc from the lauded 1993 edition to the projected 2022 edition, which may be curated entirely by algorithm so as to please the broadest possible swath of the public. Stops along the way consider various controversies that have befallen the biennial despite its efforts otherwise: Donelle Woolford in 2014, Dana Schutz in 2017, and Warren B. Kanders in 2019.

Keywords

Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, Algorithm, Curating, Donelle Woolford, Joe Scanlan, Dana Schutz, Warren B. Kanders

Echoes

Institutional Certainty and Curatorial Ambiguity: The Whitney Biennial

Jens Hoffmann

When the German sociologist Max Weber published his noted essay "Bureaucracy" in his 1921 book *Economy and Society*, he was proposing to make working conditions more humane and efficient. In Weber's eyes, bureaucracy would bring order to the workplace by setting rules and norms toward a more intelligent, organised, and rational workflow. But of course bureaucracy, as we popularly invoke the term today, is about the exact opposite: unnecessary regulations that are obstacles to efficiency, let alone imagination, creativity, inventiveness, or ingenuity. Bureaucracy is perhaps the last thing we would imagine encountering in conversations around art and exhibitions. Yet over the last decade, we have seen a widespread institutionalisation of the art world, in particular in museums, resulting in the supreme reign of red tape.

But why? In great part because museums have become risk-averse, indeed frightened, by the spectre of radical political debate, and thus ultimately concerned with projecting a progressive and thoughtful public image that directly translates to how much money can be raised. As a result, self-regulation, generally in the form of self-censorship, is the name of the game. Negative publicity is the last thing any museum wants, yet negative reviews of exhibitions or programmes are hardly what I have in mind here. The danger rather revolves around whether an artwork, an exhibition, an idea, or an acquisition could cause offense to anyone.

I would assert that it is only in moments when we risk offense—when an artist or curator dares to push buttons about established opinions or popular beliefs—that actual dialogue ensues. Yet the internal politics of museums have become minefields in which no buttons may be pushed, ever. Pleasing administrators and bureaucrats, especially those who control the exhibition budgets, is a relentless truth of every museum curator's existence. Although timid museum programming has been with us for a very long time, particularly in the United States, where museums fear being too experimental and thereby losing patrons, donors or sponsors, now they must constantly dread being "canceled" and losing their public.

Whereas the 1990s and early 2000s were broadly seen as a period of bold, critical, and unflinching curatorial undertakings, especially in the context of biennials, the last decade has witnessed clear shifts toward benign, safe, almost anodyne programming for fear of being perceived as offensive or "toxic." Institutions now prioritise control and certainty over every aspect of their public offerings, which of course stands in total contrast to the idea of artistic, curatorial, and creative experimentation and ambiguity. Large museums work with focus groups to glean

information on what people want to see—or not see. Some are even considering using algorithms to curate new exhibitions based on visitor feedback from previous shows. The 2022 Whitney Biennial is toying with the idea of being entirely curated like this. Following inputs such as the social background, age, race, gender, preferred medium, and home base of previously exhibited artists, a curatorial algorithm would be developed to produce the "perfect" biennial. It would even formulate the show's installation. Nothing would be left to chance.

There was a time when participating in or organising the Whitney Biennial was a career highlight for any artist or curator. The invitation only came to those artists who had demonstrated consistent relevance and excellence in their field, and had made remarkable contributions to art's discourse over an extended period. The chosen curators were likewise firmly established and highly respected: Louise Neri, Francesco Bonami, Donna de Salvo, Larry Rinder, Thelma Golden, Lisa Phillips, Chrissie Iles, Elisabeth Sussman, to name a few. And while this already sounds like a relatively safe and conservative formula, the recent Whitney Biennials have taken a very different tack that is far more calculated and controllable.

The 2014 Whitney Biennial (the last one to be presented in the iconic Breuer building on Madison Avenue) [figs. 1 and 2] was a significant turning point from the traditional format of the previous decades in that the curatorial team was comprised exclusively of outside curators: Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms and artist Michelle Grabner. And indeed, the resulting exhibition was very disjointed; each curator was given one floor of the museum, which effectively resulted in three mini-biennials. While individually solid exhibitions, one had to wonder if the decision about three smaller group shows was intentional. It effectively turned the focus onto the individual shows and their respective curatorial ideas, and consequently the presented art felt deemphasised.

fig. 1
Whitney Museum till 2014 designed by Marcel Breuer (1964-66).

fig. 2
Current Whitney Museum designed by Renzo Piano (2015).

Except, of course, for the infamous situation with black female artist Donelle Woolford, which overshadowed the entire event. According to the Whitney press release, she was born in 1977 in Conyers, Georgia, and part of the section overseen by Grabner. As it turned out during the show's run, Woolford was the invention of Joe Scanlan, a white male artist born in 1961 in Columbus, Ohio. Woolford had publicly appeared as an artist as early as 2005 and was incarnated by black actors coached by Scanlan for her various public speaking engagements. It is hard to say if the Whitney knew going in about Scanlan being behind the Woolford character. Still, one could argue that this particular work was a perfect match for what the exhibition set out to do, which, in the words of the curators, was to present the "profoundly diverse and hybrid cultural identity of America today".[1]

1
Stuart Comer, Anthony Elms and Michelle Grabner (eds.), *Whitney Biennial 2014* (New York: The Whitney Museum of American Art, 2014)

When the news came out, a relatively mild scandal (by today's standards of outrage) erupted. The YAMS collective, participating in the exhibition under the name *HowDoYouSayYamInAfrican*, dropped out of the show, calling Scanlan's work "conceptual rape" given that Woolford's art centred on "a troubled model of the black body".[2] For better or worse, Scanlan had hit a nerve. He brought in ambiguity and criticality by having his invited persona participate in an exhibition that was anything but diverse—less than a third of the featured artists were women, and only nine out of 109 were black (and that's counting Woolford).

The Scanlan commotion barely made it beyond the borders of the art world, yet it was enough for the institution to change gears thereafter. The idea of curatorial teams had a history in the Whitney Biennial, but in iterations before 2014, each show was spearheaded by one senior curator acting as artistic director, heading up a group of co- or assistant curators. From here on, the exhibitions would be officially curated by a collective team of emerging curators, with the upper curatorial level at the museum only overseeing and, in some cases, pulling strings in the background. Another remarkable shift at this moment was that the Whitney Biennial was now marketed as a discovery exhibition of young artists, lesser-known older artists, or artists belonging to marginalised or underrepresented groups. No longer could it be regarded as a showcase of proven artists (read: older white men).

On paper, all these changes seemed a noble idea: give a group of young curators the chance to organise a prestigious exhibition and have them pick from among the most talented younger or otherwise unknown artists in the United States, while at the same time directly answering an ever-increasing demand for the latest and freshest in the art world, something that the New Museum Triennial and PS1's (MoMA's) Greater New York were already doing. But the reasons behind the changes were perhaps less magnanimous. And dispute, controversy, and scandal would continue to dog the Whitney Biennial.

Under the earlier model, in which the curatorial team was a mix of in-house and outside curators, it was unlikely that any of them would have previously worked together. Tensions would build, threatening the coherence of the exhibition, but in the end, the clear hierarchy among them would prevail. One could argue that the museum created these situations on purpose, as they weakened the outside curators' position and thus served to make them more controllable. A group of young thirtysomething curators with very little name recognition and no curatorial CV to speak of can be herded much more readily than a seasoned curator such as Francesco Bonami, for example, who organised the 2010 edition with the help of in-house assistant curator Gary Carrion-Murayari.

Trustees, who are usually also collectors, love discovery shows. They absolutely relish being in the know, bragging about the latest young artists they discovered at some small Lower East Side gallery, where the work is still selling for low prices. Discovery exhibitions are interesting typologies. The general public have no idea about the difference between, say, Kerry James Marshall (established) versus Heji Shin (emerging), so they will come either way. The museum can claim they have their finger on the art world's pulse, which right now is political art dealing with racial or gender equality. The younger artists, most of them from New York or Los Angeles, bring with them a whole new audience of friends, other young artists, and so on, who might otherwise view the Whitney Biennial as old-fashioned. (An entirely different problem facing the biennial is that it feels compelled to include specific prominent names as evidence that the curators are up to date on the latest and greatest in contemporary art while at the same time perpetually fretting that there might not be enough high-calibre artists and artworks out there, even in a country as large as the United States, to mount a significant show every two years.

This may at some point become true if the curators refuse to expand their purview beyond the usual art hot spots).

2
Comer, Elms and Grabner, *Whitney Biennial 2014.*

There is always the chance that a few of the emerging artists in a discovery exhibition will later make it big, and the institution can then claim to have seen their talent all along and boast about its foresight in supporting them. Let's not forget that *When Attitudes Become Form* and *Primary Structures* were essentially discovery shows. The now-household names who participated in these exhibitions in 1969 and 1965, respectively, were hardly such at the time. And they became canonical exhibitions, which is not something one can say about any of the Whitney Biennials—apart from the 1993 edition, and in that case it wasn't only because of the artists it showed but thanks to the political position it took during that decade's wave of identity politics.

Starting in 2014, it seemed as if the position and status of the Whitney Biennial was suddenly reevaluated. Fees for the outside curators were cut, the budget for the overall exhibition was trimmed, and the publication became a small paperback with scant exciting information, maybe one step up from an art fair catalogue. Younger curators cannot make budget demands in the same way that someone who curated the Venice Biennale or documenta can. In addition, should something go wrong PR-wise, or if the show is a critical flop, the museum can blame the younger curators' lack of experience. The failure or scandal won't haunt the inside curatorial leadership, which stays publicly an arm's length away, and don't get their hands dirty.

What I've outlined here is based on my own observations combined with conversations with some of the younger Whitney Biennial curators and the artists participating in these shows. It is also grounded in ongoing discussions with senior curators at the Whitney, whom I know well and with whom I've had long, albeit civil and friendly, arguments about institutional programming.

It is astounding to me that these are the realities around which museums programme these days, and that similar conditions exist in one form or another for most museums in the United States. What looks good in public and will create as few waves as possible is the favoured path. There is minimal interest in honest discourse or education. Most museums are primarily concerned with just existing, staying alive, not stimulating or encouraging conversation. It almost doesn't matter what is actually in the galleries.

Whereas the Scanlan-Woolford scandal was relatively corralled, the 2017 Whitney Biennial made actual mainstream news thanks to several controversies over political sensibilities, the most far-reaching and profound of which swirled around the inclusion of Dana Schutz's *Open Casket* (2016) [fig. 3], a painted portrait of Emmett Till, a black fourteen-year-old boy lynched in Mississippi in 1955. Some artists and a large group of activists wanted it removed from the show.

fig. 3
Dana Schutz, *Open Casket*, 2016. 99 × 130 cm. Collection of the artist. Courtesy: Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

Then in 2019 another scandal hit: Whitney board member Warren B. Kanders, who has since left the board, faced enormous criticism for his leadership of a company that manufactures police and military gear, including tear gas used against migrants along the Mexico-US border.

For the last twenty years, the Whitney Biennial has by and large been promoted as an overview exhibition, a typology with a simple objective: to offer a summary of the latest developments in contemporary art in the United States. The museum typically adds a few other lines about political concerns, or reevaluations of the self vis-à-vis society. Long gone are the days of the 1993 biennial, a firebomb of artist-driven criticality (just think of Daniel Joseph Martinez [fig. 4], Cheryl Dunye, Renée Green, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Coco Fusco, Glenn Ligon, Lorna Simpson, and many more at that time unknown and emerging artists), which makes the Kanders controversy particularly interesting here. Only one artist, Michael Rakowitz, actually withdrew from the exhibition because his political convictions did not align with the presence of a weapons manufacturer on the museum board; he called Kanders's involvement with the Whitney "toxic philanthropy". (There is undoubtedly a whole book waiting to be written about toxic philanthropy, since no museum in the United States lacks skeletons in the closet regarding how and by whom it is funded).[3] All the other artists, including the curators, stayed on but did pen a letter of protest that most of them signed. If capitalism makes the world go 'round, hypocrisy greases its wheels. Everyone seems so accustomed to having their cake while eating it too.

fig. 4
Daniel Joseph Martinez, *Museum Tags: Second Movement (overture) or Overture con claque – Overture with Hired Members*, 1993. Paint and enamel on metal. 30,48 x 38,1 cm. Courtesy: Whitney Biennial, Whitney Museum of American Art, New York.

One always hopes that exhibitions will be more than the sum of their parts—that something collectively significant will emerge from the dialogue between the artists' works and the curatorial aims. This has sadly not been the case with the Whitney Biennial lately, and the prospects for 2022 do not promise anything different.

3
Jasmine Weber, "Whitney Museum Announces 2019 Biennial Participants, But One Artist Withdraws", *Hyperallergic* (February 25, 2019), https://hyperallergic.com/486562/whitney-museum-announces-2019-biennial-participants-but-one-artist-withdraws/, accessed June 2021.

Author's Biography   Jens Hoffmann is a writer, curator, and editor.

Echoes

Marco Bertozzi
The Pandemic Event: Notes from the Venice Film Festival 2020

Abstract

The essay aims to explore the conditions under which the Venice Film Festival was held in 2020. This is a crucial historic moment in which the international festival system sees some events converted into a completely online version, others postponed to a later date, and still others articulated in a hybrid way, depending on the evolution of the pandemic in progress. Among these emergency solutions, discussed in the impalpable digital body of online culture, what are the choices adopted by the Venice Film Festival? While the exhibition reduces the glamorous aspects to reflect on the ways of organising and showing oneself, of protecting the spectators and giving them an idea of normality, the emphasis on the *ways of doing* of this edition is the subject of unprecedented media attention. By recording the tremors of contemporary history like a seismograph, the Venice Film Festival becomes a testing ground both for the Italian 'country system', in the idea of more general rebirths, and for the most innovative trends in film curatorship, confirming its role as a privileged witness of changes, adaptations and reflections in institutional policies linked to culture and its diffusion.

Keywords

Festival During the Pandemic, Venice Film Festival, Curatorial Criteria, Festival Rituals, Institutional Cultural Policies, Cinematic Broadcasting via Streaming

Translation from Italian by
Sonia Hill

Echoes

The Pandemic Event Notes from the Venice Film Festival 2020

Marco Bertozzi

Il faut s'intéresser non aux produits culturels sur le marché, mais aux opérations qui en font usage; il faut s'occuper des manières différentes de marquer socialment l'écart opéré dans un donné par une pratique...Dès lors, il faut se tourner vers la prolifération disséminée de créations anonymes et périssables qui font vivre et ne se capitalisent pas.[1]

1. A System in Crisis

When I met Alberto Barbera, director of the Venice Film Festival, at the Teatro Cà Foscari in Venice on February 11, 2020, there was nothing to suggest that the pandemic would turn our lives upside down within the course of just a few weeks. We were at the international conference *Reframing Film Festival. Histories, Economies, Cultures*,[2] where Barbera looked happily back over memories, anecdotes and visions, explaining to the audience what goes on behind the scenes and the decisions associated with the festival. Thanks to the questions posed by Giulia Carluccio, chair of the Consulta Universitaria del Cinema, his reflections touched upon aspects such as the way cinema has changed over recent years (and the resulting changes in festivals), controversies involving the press, the arrival of digital technology, the influence of politics and markets, curatorial criteria, the Netflix revolution, the (scarce) presence of female directors at the festival and the persistence/resistance of independent cinema.

A few days later, along with some film lecturers in Venice, I met Barbera once again, this time at Cà Giustinian, the Biennale headquarters. It was here that the festival director offered us a cycle of public screenings, *Classici fuori mostra - Festival permanente del cinema restaurato* (*Fringe classics – Permanent festival of restored cinema*), asking us to take part in the presentations and share a series of recently restored masterpieces from the history of cinema with our students: an ambitious programme, with twelve great films from the past, presented by either

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1
Michel De Certeau, *L'invention du quotidien 1. Arts de faire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990), VII.

2
Curated by Marco Dalla Gassa, Federico Zecca, Angela Bianca Saponari and Andrea Gelardi, *Reframing Film Festival. Histoires, Economies, Cultures* should also have taken place at the Università Aldo Moro in Bari, on March 25 and 26, 2020, but it was indefinitely postponed due to the pandemic.

a critic, an academic or a director. The event was supposed to start on March 5, at the Cinema Rossini in Venice, but it underwent an initial postponement—under the illusory impression that it would be a fleeting epidemic—before being definitively cancelled.

Effectively speaking, after the Berlin Festival, which still had a live audience, everything underwent a rapid redrafting: numerous initiatives were cancelled, others moved online, with the archives, film libraries and subscription channels working hard to churn out audiovisual products. While work on film sets was suspended, the festival network saw a number of events transformed into 100% online versions (such as *Visions du Réel*, in Paris), while others were indefinitely deferred (such as the Bergamo Film Meeting and the African, Asian and Latin American Film Festival in Milan), and others still were cancelled completely for 2020 (Locarno, Beijing, Prague, Istanbul, Tribeca, etc.), or hybridised, as the pandemic situation evolved. These were all emergency solutions, discussed within the intangible digital body of online culture, and dictated by the extraordinary nature of a situation that hampered the concept of a festival as a community model for exploring cinema and everything it entails. There were tensions, potential sacrifices and necessary adjustments, all of which had a profound effect on the decisions relating to the Venice Film Festival scheduled for 2 to 12 September 2020, ultimately leading last year's edition to take on an exceptional role, capable of playing the part traditionally associated with the two-yearly event.

Stripped of all its most glamorous aspects, the festival was forced to focus less on the content of the individual films in order to reflect on itself instead, on ways to organise and present itself, in order to protect us, the spectators, and to offer us some semblance of normality. This was imperative, for an event that was hanging in the balance for a long time and that, along with Bologna's *Il cinema ritrovato* festival, would mark the 'relaunch' of Italy's major film festivals, after the sometimes problematic emergence of summer arenas as a potential solution to cinema's need.[3]

The focus on *ways of doing things* at last year's Film Festival was an unprecedented object of media attention, perceived by the 'countrywide system' as a testbed for more general relaunches, during a moment of apparent regression in the pandemic. While, just a few years ago, Gianni Amelio asked himself "What is a film festival for?" and answered "It's for films and their makers. It's above all for spectators who buy their tickets somewhere far away from the Venice Lido, because 'good things have been said' about a certain film",[4] this year's festival highlighted the need to amplify the goals of promoting film culture, which is the festival's real reason for being.

2. Hybrid Rituals

But let's look at things in order. During a critical period in time, such as the one we're experiencing today, both Alberto Barbera, Director of the Venice Film Festival, and Roberto Cicutto, Chairman of the Biennale, felt the need to confirm that everything would be the same as usual. Certainly, with fewer guests or American films, but featuring the same ritual of screenings, red carpets, photocalls and press conferences seen in the past. The desire for cinema persists, circulates and has to continue to grow normally among the guests, in the meetings and in the discoveries shared or discussed after a screening. As Roberto De Gaetano noted:

3
See, for instance, the article by cinema critic Roy Menarini, "Perché il cinema rinascerà soltanto all'insegna della cultura collaborativa", *Che fare?*, June 14, 2020, https://www.che-fare.com/menarini-cinema-cultura-collaborativa-post-covid/, accessed March 2021.

4
Gianni Amelio, "Tutti gli altri si chiamano Festival", in Peter Cowie, *Happy 75. Breve introduzione alla storia della Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2018), 9.

And here we come to a confirmation, if one were needed. The difference between domestic screens and cinemas—as demonstrated in such an exemplary fashion by a festival—does not so much lie in the possibility of seeing a film in a more sacredly auratic form, as in the possibility of sharing this viewing experience. This is what drives the desire.[5]

There was a need to *start up again* and the possibility of experiencing the Festival with an audience seemed to tap into the strong desire to emerge from the darkness of the first wave of the pandemic. However, the fact that the 2020 ritual was different seems evident, confirmed both by the Festival institution and by festival life experienced on a day-to-day basis. As regards the institutional decisions, it is clear that increasing the number of online seats to 2,400, with international screenings (both individual and with five-film passes) and local screenings across Italy (with subscriptions for all the films), was something special: I remember that in 2019 the online cinema comprised just seven films, with 1,000 seats. By seeking to consider the internet as a beneficial addition to the traditional offering, the Festival hoped for more than simply attracting the audience unable to attend in real life: the idea is that the official *live* programme in the cinema will increasingly be accompanied by an extended online offering, and that this will continue in the future.

There was also another organisational aspect that it will be difficult to drop: online seat booking, even for accredited members. Arriving at the cinema a few minutes in advance, avoiding long queues and having the certainty of seeing the programmed film is something priceless. All of us remember the anger and the humiliation experienced outside doors closed suddenly before our eyes, having anxiously awaited our turn to get in. However, it is worth noting that booking also means having to cancel your booking if you change your mind, so that someone else can take advantage of your seat (this was only a relative issue last year, given that there was always room for everyone in the cinema, with very few exceptions).

Furthermore, the Festival's expanded form became immediately apparent right from the onset, with the live broadcast of both the opening ceremony and film (Lacci by Daniele Lucchetti) at a series of cinemas that had signed up to an initiative agreed upon with the producers and distributors. This is an interesting aspect: once again the pandemic situation acted as an accelerator for dynamics already in place in society. In this case, the longstanding problem of the so-called release windows system, namely the sequential and chronological system for releasing films in different specialist markets.[6] In just a few words: how long does a film have to be out at the cinema before it can be distributed and watched via streaming? The exceptional nature of the pandemic situation seemed to allow those involved—producers, distributors, operators—to negotiate a momentous agreement, overcoming the reasons for which some films are only available at the cinema for several weeks while others are distributed immediately and simultaneously on different platforms.

The fate of the cinema itself and its ability to adapt to and withstand online distribution lies on the horizon of the battleground. This media readaptation process recalls the advent of television in Italy in the 1950s, and the cinema industry's fear of losing viewers to the small domestic screen. In this case too, some mediation was necessary. Indeed, I remember how the huge success of the television programme *Lascia o raddoppia*, presented by the Italian-American host Mike Buongiorno, forced numerous cinemas to interrupt their regular programming to

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5 Roberto De Gaetano, "Rinasce il desiderio di cinema. Il successo di 'Venezia 77'", *Fata Morgana Web*, no. 11 (2020), https://www.fatamorganaweb.it/speciale-venezia77/, accessed March 2021.

6 Giovanni Pascali, *Equilibri e strategie nel mercato della distribuzione cinematografica in Italia* (degree thesis, Rome, LUISS, Dipartimento di Impresa e Management, a.a. 2016/17). See also Giuseppe Richeri, *Economia dei media* (Bari/Roma: Laterza, 2012) and Jeffrey C. Ulin, *The Business of Media Distribution. Monetizing Film, TV, and Video Content in an Online World* (London: Routledge, 2013).

physically host one or more television sets on the stage and allow cinemagoers to watch the programme between one film screening and the next.

The festival responded to the explosion of the pandemic with an explosion of use; a re-adjustment policy that overcame the sacred nature of the closed festival, the fortress that keeps people inside or out. Attending last year's Film Festival made me feel like I was in a limbo governed by the certainty of an assigned seat, but also by the precarious nature of an in-between experience, capable of relaunching the question of the meaning of cinema and its existence in a given cultural system. More than ever, I feel that the question "what is cinema?" is undergoing real growth.[7] This fundamental query was raised by the legendary André Bazin and, over the last two decades, has acted as an arena for academic debates and the adoption of different positions among those who strenuously defend the idea of the traditional screening, namely on the big screen, in the dark of the auditorium itself, and those who, observing the media changes that are currently unfolding, are inclined towards a definition more open to the huge change experienced by contemporary cinema: an art capable of producing—to cite Philippe Duboir—an "imaginaire de l'image, *profond, puissant, solide, tenace, qui imprègne fondamentalment nos esprit et nos pensées, au point de s'imposer aux autres formes*".[8]

3. Preserving the Experience

Despite wars, revolutionary developments in our habits and the disappearance of film reels, the Venice Film Festival had always sought to ensure the permanence of its rituals—at most by reinforcing checks and security; or adapting its technological equipment—within a scintillating and secular sacredness. The unpredictable union between pandemic and digital revolution is now having its effect on the Festival and raises a series of questions about the future. A cartoon published by the New Yorker in 1984 showed a couple who, upon arriving in a small mountain village, exclaimed "What this place needs is a film festival". In the coming years will we find ourselves having to say "This place only needs a fast internet connection"?[9]

In the planetary jukebox of hyper-diffusion via streaming, the relaunch of the Venice Film Festival sought to preserve the liturgy of the dark auditorium, offering a gesture of real solidarity to a sector of the film industry—the cinema operators themselves—that had been so hard hit by the coronavirus crisis. Nevertheless, while the role played by the cinemas is one of social aggregation, allowing people to share the same artistic experience, elements such as the oblig-atory distancing between the seats, the assiduous presence of *masks* (with their green ray piercing spectators without a mask) and the reiterated audio recordings about remaining in one's seat, create a climate opposed to the one that is illustrated, for example, by Federico Fellini in the scenes where he recreates his experience as a child at the Cinema Fulgor in Rimini (both in *Roma*, 1972, and in *Amarcord*, 1973). The idea of iconic celebration and human mixing is tightened up by the climate of pandemic resistance, in which the aseptic condition of viewer isolation reduces the beauty and power of the cinema experience to the recollection of a mythological 20th century.

The cinema crisis has been accelerated by lockdown, but I think that when the pandemic ends it will be a pleasure to return to the auditorium, even if the experience is somewhat different. Indeed, the cinema will have to redefine

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André Bazin, *Che cos'è il cinema? Il film come opera d'arte e come mito nella riflessione di un maestro della critica* (Milano: Garzanti, 1973, [French edition 1958]).

8
Philippe Dubois, "Présentation", in eds. Philipe Dubois, Frédéric Monvoisin, Elena Biserna, *Extended Cinema. Le cinéma gagne du terrain* (Udine: Campanotto, 2010), 13. See also Francesco Casetti, *La Galassia Lumière. Sette parole chiave per il cinema che viene* (Milano: Bompiani, 2015).

9
The cartoon is mentioned by Peter Cowie, *Happy 75. Breve introduzione alla storia della Mostra Internazionale d'Arte Cinematografica* (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2018), 15.

itself and expand upon its specific offer in the face of the assault launched by home theatres, seasons and online channels, on which the most enterprising operators have already been working for some time: that which the good practices of some independent cinemas during the era of the revolution had begun, during a period of collective and individual reinvention.[10] While the pandemic has thrown us into discomfort and, indeed, into tragedy, we need to remember that it has also simply accelerated the contemporary transformation of the world. Many people have been forced to relearn things, to forget what they already know. We've all had to face something unknown, something historically unprecedented that has ensured that every one of us, artist or otherwise, has had to rethink things and, in many cases, has had the opportunity to reflect on our dreams and lives. This has led other Italian festivals, including ones with a smaller budget and during times of the year when the pandemic was more virulent, to think about their identity, trying to come up with potential responses that have varied from cancelling the event, mixed attendance, or placing the programme on web-based platforms such as MyMovies.

Francesco Francia di Celle, the new director of the Torino Film Festival, made an interesting reflection when presenting the 2020 event, using the metaphor of the garden devastated by a violent winter freeze, really putting the emerging spring plants to the test. Working towards the Festival means:

> summing up the damage caused by the freeze, taking care to identify the buds that have become confused in the heap of dry branches, investing in the slim signs of the revival of life, imagining a powerful rebirth that could be miraculous by simply allowing what is already there to grow, given that the virus has not annihilated the festival's significant cultural heritage.[11]

The considerations put forward by Vittorio Iervese, Chairman of the Festival dei Popoli in Florence, also appear prophetic, given that in early April 2020 he pictured a profusion of films about Coronavirus and expressed a hope for works that would not only be informative, but capable of going into depth, transforming our everyday lives into cinema:

> in other words, rather than instant movies we're interested in the quality of the film itself. Of course, we'll have a great need for works, and not only in terms of film, that help us to process the trauma and understand more about the changes that are taking place. Certain stories cannot be understood in full from within the eye of the storm.[12]

This is probably why there were very few films about coronavirus at the Venice Film Festival. It's as if, in order to become history, the memory of the images has to keep being pushed for, compared with other images and juxtaposed, even in anachronistic terms, with other viewpoints and paths of meaning in order to emerge from the limbo of the chronicle and to sediment the trauma in a creative fashion. This is a story that needs longer breaths: so, at least *Classici fuori mostra – il festival permanente del cinema restaurato* was salvaged and the same programme was offered again in the Arena Giardini that the Biennale prepared for the summer period, paving the way for the 77th Venice Film Festival. Every Friday and Saturday, from

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Nicola Curtoni and Emilia De Santis, *Alla ricerca della sala. Il giro (d'Italia) dei cinema* (Roma: Acec, 2018).

11
Francesco Francia di Celle, "Come si progetta un Festival durante la pandemia", *cheFare?*, May 5, 2020, https://www.che-fare.com/come-si-progetta-un-festival-di-cinema-durante-la-pandemia/, accessed December 2020.

12
Vittorio Iervese, "Intervista a Vittorio Iervese", *Mocu Magazine* (April 9, 2020), https://www.mocu.it/societa/intervista-vittorio-iervese/, accessed December 2020.

July 24 to Sunday August 30, restored masterpieces from the past were screened in their original versions, with Italian subtitles.

4. Future Challenges

The challenges linked to the pandemic raise other questions too. How can we give more visibility to experimental films, works by young producers and independent productions, which are not protected/promoted/marketed by strong institutions? This concern has always been in the minds of the directors most open to anything new. I remember the words of Alberto Barbera when he expressed the hope that the Festival could feature "a completely different series of films of every kind made in the world today, films that are not promoted or backed, and that need the Venice Film Festival for this very reason".[13] There is therefore a need to mitigate certain *obligatory* decisions—the Festival as a place for political and cultural diplomacy—in order to overcome certain institutional rigidness and amplify critical thinking about the present, with increasingly wide-ranging reflections regarding tribes, cultures and emerging social subjects. And also, what potential is there for digital film criticism, divided between a multiplicity of internet publications and a general reduction in its public authoritativeness? Criticism that has to redefine itself, changing lexicon, categories and arguments, for a cinema that has exploded to incorporate many different forms of use. It is therefore criticism as an epistemological act, able to place the film within relocated contexts of the cinema experience. Transforming the present-day gassy era into something that is not a place of agony, but a platform for potential hermeneutic relaunches.

Other questions regard the future role of the Festival. I am thinking of its buildings and its important physical impact on the area of the Lido, the urban transformations yet to come, which are absolutely physical and real. About the role played by the Film Festival, and by the Biennale di Venezia as an institution, in redefining the imagery of a city poised between a tourism monoculture and an exotic reduction in its habitat. I am therefore thinking about an important role played by the Biennale, which specifically ties it to Venice, namely the role of helping to deconstruct the order of the tourist issue: it seems a paradox, for a Festival launched in 1932 precisely in order to project the Lido into the international elite tourism market. It is naturally not a question of renouncing tourism, but of working with other institutions to contribute to emerging from the limit of a totalising gaze, exploring creative flows linked to the emotions of art and the pleasure of cultural discovery: a contemporary perspective, but one fully linked to the future, triggered precisely by the reflections imposed upon us by the pandemic, in which the role of cinema, its powerful imagery and, therefore, its Festival, is fundamental.[14] In order to escape from a monoculture that now seems to be the condition of numerous cities—visited by low-cost flights, monitored by surveillance cameras, not experienced by their inhabitants but explored by tourists staying at Airbnbs and, in short, sold to the merchants of mass tourism—it is important that the institutions reinvent ingenious and experimental ways of living. In order to ensure that Venice is not only a place of consumerism, but also of cultural production, it is fundamental that various cultural institutions—including the Biennale, Palazzo Grassi, the Venetian universities, Venice International University, SaLE Docks, Bevilacqua La Masa, M9 and the network of civic museums—make a real and imaginative effort capable of having an effect on the city of the future. Going back to the Biennale, Angela Vettese observed "how even a single event, as long as it is periodic and not episodic,

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Alberto Barbera, "Variety", August 30, 2017.
14
Angela Vettese, *Venezia vive. Dal presente al futuro e viceversa* (Bologna: il Mulino, 2017).

can have a genuine effect on an atmosphere and an economy. Not omnipotent, but incisive".[15]

A final aspect, which is no less important, emerged from the debate about the reduction in audience size at film festivals. The crisis placed greater focus on other issues, such as sustainability and accessibility. The fact that major festivals attract an audience and directors from all over the world generates a huge environmental impact. Some festival institutions are reflecting on the inclusion of a digital-first model to allow authors, critics and the audience to be able to access the screenings without necessarily having to travel. Among other things, this model also allows for the progressive democratisation of the festival experience, amplifying the possibility for it to be accessed by audiences from social groups or geographic areas that are prevented from having the festival experience. Once again, it is not a question of replacing the sacred experience of the darkened auditorium, but one of increasing the options for showing the works, especially those that benefit from less promotion by the large-scale distribution business.

To conclude, I would like to focus on how the pandemic situation can help to create unusual groupings and lateral thinking. New forms of solidarity, sometimes between festivals, and new creative actions have developed during a period of global risk. Knowledge of the risks has led us to overcome a catastrophe with the mindset that "nothing will be like before". The self-reflection induced by the global situation has forced the Film Festival to take on a public action, bigger than simply screening films, to become a place where the social sphere recognises its ability to face the current metamorphosis, looking at a potential future from an original standpoint. The axis shift, from the central role played by the films to the survival of the Venice Film Festival, saw another moment for reflection in exhibition *Le muse inquiete. La Biennale di Venezia di fronte alla storia* (*The Disquieted Muses. When La Biennale di Venezia Meets History*), exhibition curated by Cecilia Alemani at the Giardini di Venezia and open to the public during the Film Festival (until 8 December 2020). While the event dedicated to Architecture was postponed until 2021 and the one dedicated to Art until 2022, *Le muse inquiete* told the story of the Biennale's institution since its foundation in 1895 to today, marking 125 years of history incorporating wars, pandemics, totalitarianism, censorship and disputes: the muses are restless "because they pit themselves against the world outside the boundaries of the arts".[16] The six directors—Cecilia Alemani (Art), Alberto Barbera (Cinema), Marie Chouinard (Dance), Ivan Fedele (Music), Antonio Latella (Theatre), Hashim Sarkis (Architecture)—selected writings, accounts, films, photographs and works, following a path that lingered on the moments when the Venice Biennale immersed itself in the events of global history, generating institutional fractures along with new creative horizons. In greater detail, the part relating to the Venice Film Festival was developed primarily in the first room with the Festival during the years of Fascism, in room 3 with the protests and disputes of 1968 seen through the non-fiction materials in various archives, and in room 9 with scandals, controversies and censorship relating to the presentation of various films. Given the wealth of archival sources, *Le muse inquiete* explored the Biennale disciplines with the idea that the archive could act as an additional muse, capable of restoring strength to the institution as a whole.[17] Furthermore, the muses were divinities in Greek mythology, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, and they represented the

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Angela Vettese, "Tra Cultura e Turismo: la Biennale di Venezia e le sue ricadute sul territorio", in eds. Guido Borelli, Maurizio Busacca, *Venezia. L'istituzione immaginaria della società* (Catanzaro: Rubbettino, 2020), 76.

16
Cecilia Alemani, *Le muse inquiete. La Biennale di Venezia di fronte alla storia*, exhibition booklet (Venice: La Biennale di Venezia, 2020), 7.

17
For a more extensive examination of the Venice Biennale I refer to an initial collection of studies *Starting from Venice. Studies on the Biennale*, ed. Clarissa Ricci (Milano: et al./edizioni, 2010).

supreme ideal of Art. Daughters of memory (Mnemosyne), they looked to the past but they also imagined new possibilities for the future through the power of artistic creation.

During a period of global instability, it could not be taken for granted that things would go well. By recording the tremors of contemporary history like a seismograph, the Venice Film Festival has stood out not only as a place for screening the most innovative trends in contemporary cinema, but has also confirmed its role as a privileged witness of the changes, adjustments and reflections in institutional policies linked to culture and its dissemination.

Author's Biography

Marco Bertozzi is Professor of Documentary and Experimental Cinema at the Iuav University of Venice. His articles on the history and theory of documentary film have appeared in international journals. He has published *Storia del documentario italiano* (2008), which won the Limina Award for best cinema studies book of the year; *Recycled cinema* (2012); and *Documentario come arte. Riuso, performance, autobiografia nell'esperienza del cinema contemporaneo* (2018). He is also a prolific filmmaker. His award-winning films include *Appunti romani* (2004), *Il senso degli altri* (2007), *Predappio in luce* (2008), *Profughi a Cinecittà* (2012), *Cinema grattacielo* (2017). He curated *Bibliofellini*, the three-volume international bibliography published by the Fellini Foundation and the National Cinema School (2002–04), directing an international research team, and he wrote several essays on the work of Fellini, the last of which is *L'Italia di Fellini. Immagini, paesaggi, forme di vita* (2021). He has curated cinema exhibitions in Italy, France, Canada and the United States. Currently, he is part of the team that is planning the new international museum dedicated to Federico Fellini.