

Activism as a Platform for Modern Art

Marie-Pier Thomas

Department of Fine-Art University of Waterloo, Canada

Email: mariepiert12@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This article is on Activism as a platform for modern art. Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society. Forms of activism range from mandate building in the community (including writing letters to newspapers), petitioning elected officials, running or contributing to a political campaign, preferential patronage (or boycott) of businesses, and demonstrative forms of activism like rallies, street marches, strikes, sit-ins, or hunger strikes. Activists can function in a number of roles, including judicial, environmental, internet (technological) and design (art). Historically, most activism has focused on creating substantive changes in the policy or practice of a government or industry. Some activists try to persuade people to change their behavior directly (see also direct action), rather than to persuade governments to change laws. Current discussions about art are very much centered on the question of art activism that is, on the ability of art to function as an arena and medium for political protest and social activism. The phenomenon of art activism is central to our time because it is a new phenomenon quite different from the phenomenon of critical art that became familiar to us during recent decades. Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself. Art activists try to change living conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions, and so forth. After going through the process of writing this thesis, I don't really feel that I know more about arts and activism than anybody else - at least in terms of having answers.

Keywords: Activism, Platform, Modern, Art.

INTRODUCTION

Activism consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society. Forms of activism range from mandate building in the community (including writing letters to newspapers), petitioning elected officials, running or contributing to a political campaign, preferential patronage (or boycott) of businesses, and demonstrative forms of activism like rallies, street marches, strikes, sit-ins, or hunger strikes.

Activism may be performed on a day-to-day basis in a wide variety of ways, including through the creation of art (artivism), computer hacking (hacktivism), or simply in how one chooses to spend their money (economic activism). For example, the refusal to buy clothes or other merchandise from a company as a protest against the exploitation of workers by that company could be considered an expression of activism. However, the most highly visible and impactful activism often comes in the form of collective action, in which

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numerous individuals coordinate an act of protest together in order to make a bigger impact.[1] Collective action that is purposeful, organized, and sustained over a period of time becomes known as a social movement.[2]

Historically, activists have used literature, including pamphlets, tracts, and books to disseminate or propagate their messages and attempt to persuade their readers of the justice of their cause. Research has now begun to explore how contemporary activist groups use social media to facilitate civic engagement and collective action combining politics with technology.

Types of activism

Activists can function in a number of roles, including judicial, environmental, internet (technological) and design (art). Historically, most activism has focused on creating substantive changes in the policy or practice of a government or industry. Some activists try to persuade people to change their behavior directly (see also direct action), rather than to persuade governments to change laws. For example, the cooperative movement seeks to build new institutions which conform to cooperative principles, and generally does not lobby or protest politically. Other activists try to persuade people or government policy to remain the same, in an effort to counter change. Activism is not an activity always performed by those who profess activism as a profession [3]. The term "activist" may apply broadly to anyone who engages in activism, or narrowly limited to those who choose political or social activism as a vocation or characteristic practice.

Judicial and citizen activism

Judicial activism involves the efforts of public officials. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. - American historian, public intellectual, and social critic - introduced the term "judicial activism" in a January 1946 Fortune magazine article titled "The Supreme Court: 1947". Activists can also be public watchdogs and whistle blowers, attempting to understand all the actions of every form of government that acts in the name of the people and hold it

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accountable to oversight and transparency. Activism involves an engaged citizenry.

Internet activism

Further information: Internet activism, Hacktivism, Online social movement, Anonymous (group), Digital rights, Category: Internet activism, and Activism in the tech industry

The power of Internet activism came into a global lens with the Arab Spring protests starting in late 2010. People living in the Middle East and North African countries that were experiencing revolutions used social networking to communicate information about protests, including videos recorded on smart phones, which put the issues in front of an international audience. This was the one of the first occasions in which social networking technology was used by citizen-activists to circumvent state-controlled media and communicate directly with the rest of the world. These types of practices of Internet activism were later picked up and used by other activists in subsequent mass mobilizations, such as the 15-M Movement in Spain in 2011, Occupy Gezi in Turkey in 2013, and more [4] [5] [6]

Internet activism may also refer to activism which focuses on protecting or changing the Internet itself, also known as digital rights. The Digital Rights movement consists of activists and organizations, such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation, who work to protect the rights of people in relation to new technologies, particularly concerning the Internet and other information and communications technologies.

Activism in literature

Activism in literature (not to be confused with literary activism) includes the expression of intended or advocated reforms, realized or unachieved, through published, written or verbally promoted or communicated forms.

Economic activism

Economic activism involves using the economic power of government, consumers, and businesses for social and economic policy change. Both

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conservative and liberal groups use economic activism to as a form of pressure to influence companies and organizations to oppose or support particular political, religious, or social values and behaviors [7]. This is typically done either through preferential patronage to reinforce "good" behavior and support companies one would like to succeed, or through boycott or divestment to penalize "bad" behavior and pressure companies to change or go out of business [8].

Brand activism is the type of activism in which business plays a leading role in the processes of social change [9]. Applying brand activism, businesses show concern for the communities they serve, and their economic, social, and environmental problems, which allows businesses to build sustainable and long-term relationships with the customers and prospects. Kotler and Sarkar defined the phenomenon as an attempt by firms to solve the global problems its future customers and employees care about.[10] Consumer activism consists of activism carried out on behalf of consumers for consumer protection or by consumers themselves [11]. For instance, activists in the free produce movement of the late 1700s protested against slavery by boycotting goods produced with slave labor. Today, vegetarianism, veganism, and freeganism are all forms of consumer activism which boycott certain types of products. Other examples of consumer activism include simple living, a minimalist lifestyle intended to reduce materialism and conspicuous consumption, and tax resistance, a form of direct action and civil disobedience in opposition to the government that is imposing the tax, to government policy, or as opposition to taxation in itself.

Shareholder

activism involves shareholders using an equity stake in a corporation to put pressure on its management. The goals of activist shareholders range from financial (increase of shareholder value through changes in corporate policy, financing structure, cost cutting, etc.) to non-

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financial (disinvestment from particular countries, adoption of environmentally friendly policies, etc).

Visual Activism

Design Activism locates design at the center of promoting social change, raising awareness on social/political issues, or questioning problems associated with mass production and consumerism. Design Activism is not limited to one type of design. Art Activism or Artivism utilizes the medium of visual art as a method of social or political commentary.

Fashion activism was coined by [12] [13]. Fashion activism is a type of activism that ignites awareness by giving consumers tools to support change, specifically in the fashion industry. It has been used as an umbrella term for many social and political movements that have taken place in the industry. Fashion Activism uses a participatory approach to a political activity.

Craft activism or Craftivism is a type of visual activism that allows people to bring awareness to political or social discourse.

It is a creative approach to activism as it allows people to send short and clear messages to society. People who contribute to craftivism are called "craftivists".

Science activism

While scientists have been traditionally less likely to be politically active as scientists yet aware of the need to better communicate the benefits of science, perception of increased politicized discrediting of science has motivated some scientists and science advocates to embrace an activist approach, such as that demonstrated in the March for Science. Some see activism as a way to get "out of the lab" and enhance communication efforts. Approaches to science activism vary from more aggressive protests to suggestions that such activism should also include a more psychological, marketing-oriented component that takes into account such factors as individual sense of self, aversion to solutions to problems, and social perceptions [14]

On Art Activism

Current discussions about art are very much centered on the question of art activism that is, on the ability of art to function as an arena and medium for political protest and social activism. The phenomenon of art activism is central to our time because it is a new phenomenon quite different from the phenomenon of critical art that became familiar to us during recent decades [15] [16]. Art activists do not want to merely criticize the art system or the general political and social conditions under which this system functions. Rather, they want to change these conditions by means of art not so much inside the art system but outside it, in reality itself. Art activists try to change living conditions in economically underdeveloped areas, raise ecological concerns, offer access to culture and education for the populations of poor countries and regions, attract attention to the plight of illegal immigrants, improve the conditions of people working in art institutions, and so forth. In other words, art activists react to the increasing collapse of the modern social state and try to replace the social state and the NGOs that for different reasons cannot or will not fulfill their role. Art activists do want to be useful, to change the world, to make the world a better place but at the same time, they do not want to cease being artists. And this is the point where theoretical, political, and even purely practical problems arise [17].

Art activism's attempts to combine art and social action come under attack from both of these opposite perspectives traditionally artistic and traditionally activist ones. Traditional artistic criticism operates according to the notion of artistic quality. From this point of view, art activism seems to be artistically not good enough: many critics say that the morally good intentions of art activism substitute for artistic quality. This kind of

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criticism is, actually, easy to reject. In the twentieth century, all criteria of quality and taste were abolished by different artistic avant-gardes so, today, it makes no sense to appeal to them again. However, criticism from the other side is much more serious and demands an elaborate critical answer [18]. This criticism mainly operates according to notions of "aestheticization" and "spectacularity." A certain intellectual tradition rooted in the writings of Walter Benjamin and Guy Debord states that the aestheticization and spectacularization of politics, including political protest, are bad things because they divert attention away from the practical goals of political protest and towards its aesthetic form. And this means that art cannot be used as a medium of a genuine political protest because the use of art for political action necessarily aestheticizes this action, turns this action into a spectacle and, thus, neutralizes the practical effect of this action. As an example, it is enough to remember the recent Berlin Biennale curated by Artur Żmijewski and the criticism it provoked described as it was by different ideological sides as a zoo for art activists [19].

In other words, the art component of art activism is often seen as the main reason why this activism fails on the pragmatic, practical level on the level of its immediate social and political impact. In our society, art is traditionally seen as useless. So it seems that this quasi-ontological uselessness infects art activism and dooms it to failure. At the same time, art is seen as ultimately celebrating and aestheticizing the status quo and thus undermining our will to change it. So the way out of this situation is seen mostly in the abandoning of art altogether as if social and political activism never fails as long as it is not infected by art viruses [20].

CONCLUSION

out of this project with more questions than I started with. This is not a bad thing; it's often how things seem to go in the field of art. What I gained from this project was knowledge of a lot of

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resources - writings from artists and critics, relevant articles and books, interesting organizations, and grant foundations. I also got the experience of communicating with all different kinds of artists, and collected a substantial amount of primary research in the form of the interviews. One of the main things I noticed in the process of conducting the interviews was that there are a variety of approaches to making socially conscious art, and that different artists conceive their work in very different ways that sometimes contradict each other. Each artist is coming from a different set of experiences, and each of their views is based on what they have found to make sense according to those experiences. It is interesting to see how people who may be in close sympathy in terms of their social and political views and their field of work can arrive at such different conclusions about how to work based on where they are coming from. The experience of interning at Art for Humanity in South Africa was another thing I gained immensely from. While I do not refer to it explicitly in my thesis writing, many of the ideas that I discuss were formulated, challenged, and developed during the time that I was working there. Aside from providing lots of good food for thought about human rights, art, expression, empowerment, democracy, and global culture, it also gave me practical firsthand experience in organizing art projects on an international scale, as well as grant writing for 80 non-profits. These are important skills that I hope will become of service in exciting future projects. In terms of my own art, I have been bringing

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environmental activism into my studio practice by striving to use as eco-friendly materials as possible, a challenging commitment that means the vast majority of commercially-produced art supplies are off limits. I am still in the process of trying different things, but so far it has been immensely rewarding to have a cleaner conscience about my craft. In terms of my own personal activism, I have realized that my area of contribution is in visual culture, and knowing this has relieved me of feeling obligated to perform other activist rituals that were sucking life out of me. Because of having developed a network with activist artists all over the country and world, I am now able to facilitate cultural exchange in the areas of art, activism, and visual culture (however loosely or distinctly one may want to draw those lines). For instance, this semester I was able to help facilitate two groups, the Beehive Design Collective and Bread & Puppet, to visit my local community. Neither of these groups had been to Bowling Green before, and both events were pretty unique for a lot of the people here to be exposed to. In the future, I hope I can continue to facilitate more events of this nature. Having one foot in the fine art world and the other foot in the grassroots activism world means that as time goes on I can hopefully be of service in helping make connections between the two, and facilitate exchange between people on the frontlines of justice movements and people on the frontlines of fine art and cultural production, since both things are so crucial and close to my own heart.

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