

Introduction

Artivism: Art and social engagement in a digital world

Artivismo: Arte y compromiso social en un mundo digital

Guest-edited special issue:

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This thematic issue of “Comunicar” is intended to deepen into a phenomenon that is not new to social life, and yet, is attracting the attention of social researchers and communication experts across the planet. Artivism is a real enigma for all the academic experts who study conventional art, and also for sociologists, anthropologists and experts in the innovative conformations of social life. We wanted to focus in detail on this creative mystery that is producing new social impulses.

Artivism defines the way in which the new impulse towards the transformation of society has been carried out throughout artistic means. Differing from simple political art, and alien to the legitimating processes of contemporary art in its circles of critical and academic recognition, artivism always presents itself in nascent, unique, unclassifiable and striking forms. It is a disruptive phenomenon, which dismantles absolutely any established semantic construction of spaces, contexts and protocols of art communication, and which appears with crucial questions about justice, freedom or humanity, in our societies and in our cities.

Artivism is a collection of creative phenomena that arise in all formal possibilities of artistic expression and is characterized by strong anchors and roots in the “here and now” of the present life. It always generates an innovative relationship with its receptors, encouraging them to participate and to interact with their provocative message, about changing those aspects of social life linked to nonsense, injustice, poverty, and corruption. Innovative, but at the same time, authentically original, it can very well respond to the definitions of the latest critics in artistic avant-gardes, and at the same time to the affirmations of the everlasting creators, about the true essence of art. The poet César-Vallejo (1992), almost a century ago, affirmed that “the object or matter of transforming thought lies in the things and facts of immediate presence, in the tangible and surrounding reality. The revolutionary intellectual always operates close to life in flesh and blood, in front of human beings and surrounding phenomena. His works are vital. His sensitivity and his method are terrestrial (materialist, in Marxist language), that is, of this world and not of any other, extra-terrestrial or cerebral. No astrology or cosmogony. No abstract masturbations or office wit. The revolutionary intellectual displaces the messianic formula, saying: “My kingdom is of this world”.

Studies on artistic creation have always tried to label and encapsulate, for their careful study, the intrinsically revolutionary phenomena of art. And they have not been able to do it, because as John Berger, one of the authors who has taught us the deepest way to look at things, affirmed, “art is not found in the frame, but rather in the space between the object and the observer, where our values, prejudices and hopes refract and divert our gaze like fragments of glass” (Berger, 2008; González, 2017). Artivism rediscovers art as an authentic communication system that constantly refresh the relationship between the creator and the viewer. Between reality and our existence. There is nothing established, neither property, nor discipline, nor order, nor canons. Artivism is always situated in a

Introduction

mobile and undefined field: it forces the viewer to question how he finds the meaning of things, why he sees some things and not others. It highlights the fabrication of that sense as something conventional, unique and provisional, that our intervention can change. It is a revolutionary idea because, as the great British creator affirmed, "the relations between what we see and what we know are not fixed" (Berger, 2008; González, 2017).

We are therefore facing a challenge. The challenge posed by the establishment of a new language, whose operations are presented as unique specimens, each



of them recomposing again the relationships that each individual and each community establishes with its environment and with the ideas that contribute to making it more human and more livable. A language that breaks other languages, and that makes each intervention an act of freedom and freshness. How to study and define something like that? Disturbing our capacity of social scientists, disturbing our academic categorization of reality, activism brings us freedom to think and rename things. That is why it is accepted, and welcomed with passion, by youngsters.

The contributions that compound this thematic issue reflect to a large extent these concerns and interests. The analysis of Sedeño & Mateo on "Videoartivism: Poetics of symbolic conflict" are the work of academic and creative experts related to artivism. They lead the selection made, and delve into the conceptual richness of this phenomenon, tracing its socio-political potential and linking it with human realities in today's world and contemporary Spanish society.

Several of the selected papers are focused on the surprising symbiosis between artivism and education: the formative nature of the experiences shared with artists is the basis of the research carried out by Mesías-Lema, «Artivism and social commitment: Transforming teacher training from sensitivity». The author extracts from long educational experiences with artivism a synthesis of the abilities that this language gives to the professors to substantiate a greater communicative ability with the students. His description of "micro-utopian" professors, liberating, reliable, empathetic and open, who have been able to absorb the creative fluidity that artivism proposes, is of great interest in the studies on the instructional capacity of artivism. A similar line of analysis is developed by Aladro, Bailey & Semova in their text on artivism as a new formative language, delivering reflections on the semantic originality of artivism that fit well with the integrating literacy and creative co-responsibility that this phenomenon induces in the students.

An equally rich approach is the study by Orosa-Roldán & Carlos-López-López, researchers from Ecuador, whose text “The post-drama culture in Ecuador and Spain: Methodological development and comparative study” inform us of the worth and fecundity of activism collaborative theater in the countries of the Hispanic area. They present us a line of cultural activities in areas enriched by the indigenous creative substratum, which has been merged with the participative, dynamic and face-to-face modes of activism to generate results of great interest in the reflection on what constitutes progress in social creation. So we have to think that activism is diluted and transformed into social creation per se, abandoning the sumptuary value, of *rara avis*, of elite, to embrace the uses and contaminations of the actions of citizenship.

This selection, which wants to give a most varied view of the range of interests around activism, is completed with the research on “Activism and NGO: Relationship between image and ‘engagement’ on Instagram”, by Carrasco-Polaino, Villar-Cirujano & Martín-Cádaba. The study analyzes the degree of connection that certain creative strategies produce in the communication of NGOs. As several leading researches of this moment are pointing out, the use of creativity has become an engine of communicative dynamism in the digital society. Users of digital social networks are involved and participate with much greater engagement in activities that really have to do with the creative phenomenon and the artistic vision of social life. In the XXI century, creativity is the communicative source of social evolution. And these analyzes confirm us from another diverse methodology.

All the contributions described alert us to the birth of a new impulse in social creation. The languages, the practices of activism are not valuable because they constitute a twist to the vanguards. Nor because they freeze the revolutionary spirit in pieces of a museum, in sacred stones of a sanctuary. Proust (1927) affirmed: «do not sacrifice men to stones, because their beauty comes precisely from having fixed, for a moment, human truths». Activism uses as its cornerstones, from its ephemeral sanctuaries, men themselves. Its objective is human truths. Let's not lose sight of it because it takes us into a new era.

References

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