

Visual Activism in the 21st century / Edited Anthology

Sheffield Hallam University, UK

Deadline: Nov 19, 2018

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VISUAL ACTIVISM IN THE 21st CENTURY:
CHANGE AND RESISTANCE IN AN UNCERTAIN WORLD

We would like to bring to your attention this proposal for an edited anthology of individual essays / chapters on the subject of contemporary visual activism - working title:

Visual Activism in the 21st Century: change and resistance in an unpredictable world.

Visual activism has a long history in the UK and globally, however there is a current and emerging revival of activities that are a response to shifts in communication technology, the fake freedoms associated with neo-liberalism, actual tightening of restrictions on civil liberties, the rise in populism, anxieties about migration, challenges to ideas of identity, the threat of environmental catastrophe and global warfare among other issues.

This resurgence is perhaps testament to the heightened call to citizenry in the wake of a range of urgent local and global events and crises. Indeed social and political motivation has often been the driver of visually creative activity that in other ways does not conform to general definitions of art. This anthology will seek to widen the discussion of what the term 'visual activism' captures, by exploring what it has meant and anticipating what it will come to mean, both in the ways that it has been theorized and on-the-ground through precise examples and case-studies.

This research proposal emerges from an ongoing engagement with the uneasy relationship between art practice and political discourse. Our position is not to resolve such issues but rather to sketch out a terrain of the evolving nature of visual activism, especially in the context of the networked image and newer visualizing technologies that engender divergent modes of seeing, interaction and citizenship. At the same time we are operating within a culture of what might be termed the exhausted image – the distribution and circulation of images at speed and in greater volume and variety – where power structures and systems of information can become obscured or hidden, how does visual activism navigate these conditions of visibility and invisibility? In doing so we again invoke the question first posed by Lenin and then later taken up by the contemporary art collective Chto Delat – 'What is to be done?'

We invite proposals for chapters/case studies that seek to interrogate the role of art and the visual in activism, and the spaces in which such activity may take place. Borrowing from Lieven De Cauter's use of the term 'subversivity' – 'a disruptive attitude that tries to create openings, possibil-

ities in the 'closedness' of a system' (2011, p.6) – we wish to consider aspects of resistance, alterity, and protest across a variety of contexts and intersectional frameworks.

We welcome general discussions on a range of topics and but we are especially interested in identifying specific case-studies to help unpack what the term 'visual activism' has come to encompass in the early 21st century. Such case-studies may be from any geographical region and on any scale, but all should be located in, or relevant to, the 21st century.

The range of activity may include the use of new technologies; repurposed objects; occupations and other heretical uses of place; space (physical or virtual) as a medium available to expression; imaginative direct action; bearing witness, publicity stunts ... and much more.

Essays may address but are not restricted to the following questions and topics:

- What is political art and what is activism?
- What is the role of visual culture in activism?
- How should we determine where political art ends and activism begins and where might they intersect or overlap?
- In what ways can it be claimed that art contributes effectively to political discourse and social change?
- Bringing about change, inciting action and acts of resistance
- Ideas and causes represented and championed
- Issues of citizenship and citizenry in a global era
- Power and appearances
- Visuality, visibility and invisibility
- Observation, surveillance, vigilance and bearing witness to a single event or chronicling an unfolding story
- Working with community archives and histories
- Bringing into visibility events otherwise unseen
- Immediate challenges or long-term ideas and hopes for the future
- Strategically planned or spontaneous
- High tech, new tech or low tech
- Still image or live stream
- Social media and peer-to-peer communication
- Performance and campaigning
- Drones and surveillance
- Pixels and computer technology
- Infographics
- Role models and exemplars: challenging orthodoxies of identity
- Non-violent or aggressive
- By a lone voice or collective and collaborative
- Networking and mapping
- Imagining change and creating changes of vision; 'visionary organizing' (Grace Lee Boggs in Mirzoeff, 2015, p.294)
- Risks and dangers: to the visual event and/or to the activists themselves
- Issues of mediation, state-control and censorship; sabotage and counter-action, ineffectualness, co-option and assimilation, arrest and imprisonment ... death.

- Precedents, antecedents and heritage - where do the visual languages of 21st century visual activism come from?
- Is there, as Mirzoeff (2015, p.297) suggests 'an alternative visual vocabulary emerging'?
- The militant image
- The exhausted image

Cross-disciplinary in our approach, we encourage proposals from a wide spectrum of subject areas: art history; photographic theory; film and media studies; cultural studies; visual sociology; ethnography; politics; visual practice and activism.

Please note that the topics and themes indicated above are not exhaustive and the editors welcome proposals that expand or challenge the scope of this field.

Please submit abstracts of around 500 words together with details of your affiliation and current CV. Deadline: 12 noon Monday 19th November 2018 – please send to D.White@shu.ac.uk and S.Hartle@shu.ac.uk using 'cfp Visual Activism' as the subject heading of your email.

We look forward to hearing from you.

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Reference:

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