

From the Atelier Populaire to Artivism. Situationist Strategies Reimagined.

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Abstract

The following paper examines the progression of *artivism* by tracing the visual strategies employed by the *Atelier Populaire* during the May' 68 protests, tactics influenced by the *Situationist International*, and investigates their relationship to contemporary *artist* practices, particularly in the field of digital media art. The article focuses on the legacy of these strategies and explores the trajectories of Richard Hambleton, Blek le Rat and Banksy, emphasizing their contributions to social and political discourse through art. It highlights the prioritization of message over aesthetics, the democratization of public space, unsigned drawings, stencils, and other low-cost techniques, direct as well as symbolic imagery. The study concludes by examining the current relevance of *artivism* across various platforms, including digital media, and investigates how these new mediums reshape and amplify the scope and modalities of *artivism* in the contemporary context.

CCS Concepts

• **Applied computing** → Arts and humanities; Media arts.

Keywords

Artivism, Atelier Populaire, Situationism, May' 68, Digital Media Art

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1 INTRODUCTION

The modern-day *avant-garde* is characterized by artistic productions that blur the boundaries between life and art, between public and private, and that privilege political engagement and criticism of consumption [7].

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The term *artivism* was first introduced in 2008. It was coined by Chela Sandoval and Guisella Latorre in an article, as a neologism. It aims to articulate a connection between art and activism, prioritizing political consciousness and critical positioning over aesthetics. *Artivism* employs artistic practices as tools for political and social intervention, operating either individually or collectively, and often subverting conventional frameworks. It provokes ruptures by proposing alternative modes of creation and reception, incorporating multiple languages and continuously redefining itself. It engages with alternative imagery, metaphors, irony and humour to challenge dominant narratives [2] [28].

This phenomenon, however, has endured since the late 19th century, when art began to be regarded as a powerful instrument for social movements, particularly in countries subjected to heavy censorship, where such methods represented the only viable means of expression [18]. The origins of what is now understood as *artivism* can be traced to the artistic *avant-gardes* of the early 20th century, including the Dadaist, Surrealist and Futurist movements. These movements culminated in the 1960s, with actions led by groups such as Fluxus, which sought to disrupt the idea of art as a commodity by removing it from elitist spaces such as museums and galleries, and democratizing access through interventions in public and urban spaces. This shift gave rise to practices that were not easily commercialized, like video art, body art, performance, happenings and conceptual art. These expressions have, according to Valdivieso, “the dematerialization of the artistic object” as their core feature [29, p. 7].

2 THE SITUATIONIST INTERNATIONAL AND THE MAY' 68

Founded in 1957 in Cosio d'Arroscia, Liguria, through the union of three different groups, namely, The Lettrist International, The International Movement for an Imaginist Bauhaus and the Psycho-geographical Association of London, the Situationist International (SI) was an organization that brought about a revolution not only because of the questions it raised, but also because of its management structure. It was extremely critical of class society, and its actions were predominantly carried out in capitalist countries, where the rejection of this economic system was fundamental. It was an international organization, with operations in France, Germany, Scandinavia, Belgium, the Netherlands, England, the United States and Algeria [6] [19].

At first, there was an emphasis on the fields of art and culture, and it was considered “an attempt to organize professional revolutionaries in culture”, as Guy Debord himself indicates in the first issue of the magazine. However, according to *Baderna* [6], Debord preferred that the SI no longer resembled an *avant-garde* art group but rather a political organization, which led to the departure of most of the group’s members. This phase was marked by the introduction of Vaneigem and became more focused on theoretical writings, which resulted in the iconic situationist books: *The Society of the Spectacle*, by Debord, and *Treatise on Living for the Use of Young Generations*, by Raoul Vaneigem.

In *The Society of the Spectacle*, Debord appropriates Bertolt Brecht’s vision of spectacle and the distancing effect in theatre. By exposing the tricks of theatrical illusion, Brecht made the spectators critically aware of what they were watching. However, Debord aims higher when he proposes that the illusion belongs to the entire society, which sees itself as alienated in its own representation. In a world mediated by images, the individual becomes a spectator, rather than an actor. He stops being a subject to become an object, an image to be contemplated [35]. In 1966, a pamphlet titled *On the Poverty of Student Life* was disseminated throughout universities, triggering an uprising at the *University of Nanterre-Paris*, which led to the events of May ’68.

The first requests came from students, who sought to change the strict dormitory rules. Male and female students were not allowed to interact in dorm rooms, and women were required to return to their student residences before 11 p.m. These restrictions, combined with broader dissatisfaction regarding university administration and calls for educational reform, ignited a larger movement that spread to the *Sorbonne*. The demands included increasing spots at universities and greater student participation in governance and decision-making. The protests soon escalated into nationwide strikes involving workers, as several labour disputes broke out across key sectors, notably in the automobile industry and railways. Political tensions between the left and right intensified, with many activists identifying with anarchist movements. These developments unfolded against the backdrop of economic instability in France, marked by high inflation and rising unemployment. Additionally, widespread opposition to the Vietnam War and France’s support for U.S. military intervention further fuelled the unrest. Artières and Zancarini-Fournel [5] state that it was a profound social movement that affected the entire country. It led to the largest general strike of the 20th century. Inside the factories, the unions’ imperative was to establish democracy, break free from the monarchic hierarchy, and call for better wages. For several days, there was a clash between police and protesters, until Charles de Gaulle yielded to pressure and gave workers a 35% raise. Nevertheless, he did not lose the elections. Instead, he resigned in 1969.

In a publication by the British group *Solidarity* (2003), a testimony states that it is no coincidence that the Sociology and Psychology faculties of *Nanterre* were the birthplace of the revolution. Students felt that what they were being taught was not useful for understanding or improving society, but rather a tool for control and manipulation. It also emphasizes that there was an attempt to downplay the power of the student struggle by portraying it as

adventurous, and that it only gained significance after the participation of the working class. However, he reiterates that it was the students who took direct action, thereby influencing the workers. The student groups, sympathetic to Marxism, Trotskyism, and Maoism, were influenced by various events from other countries, such as the *Prague Spring*, the armed struggle against dictatorships in South America and revolutions taking place in Africa, in favour of decolonization [21].

The posters were produced at the time by artists, students and workers who organized themselves at the *Atelier Populaire*, in the *School of Fine Arts*, in Paris and they are closely linked to the collective memory of the events of May’ 68. The first posters contained only text, but later they combined text and image. There were several sources of inspiration. From Maoism, the arrow, the fist and the slogan *The fight continues*¹, elements commonly seen on wall newspapers in China. From Trotskyism, the *United Front*² and the word *Union*³, brought primarily by architecture student activists. Themes inspired by Cuba, South America, Germany and the Soviet Union were also incorporated. A Latin American community present at the *Atelier* was responsible for many of the models. It was not in May’ 68 in France that the extreme left began interacting with art, but this is one of its most emblematic moments [4].

Political messages should come before any aesthetic concerns. By submitting individual ideas to the collective, there was a rupture with a form of creation that originated in the Renaissance and reached its peak in modernism, while the property system was being challenged. For the same reason, the drawings were not signed, in opposition to individualist *bourgeois* creation. Drawing, lettering and the use of stencils had to be done by different authors. Even though the artists are known today, the majority remain unpaid for the image copyrights in order to preserve the spirit of the *Atelier*. There is opposition to its use for commercial purposes. Many proposals were presented, but only a few made it to the streets. There were different styles, sometimes very elaborate and colourful, but the preference was for the most effective ones: those that had a direct and symbolic image (Figures 1 and 2). The objective was to create simple designs, which could be easily outlined with flat gum arabic and without halftones. Each poster should have a monochromatic design. They used symbolic imagery based on non-spectacularization and proposed the deconstruction of traditional components, reducing abstraction. They also needed to be produced quickly and at a low cost, which is why lithography, the technique originally used, was replaced by screen printing [11] [17] [18]. According to a statement by the *Atelier*, the posters were intended for the struggle and should be associated with it, never to be used as decorative elements or serve as objects of aesthetic interest. Their legitimate place was to be on the walls of factories or in the streets, in other words, the centres of conflict. They should not be seen as the final goal, but as a call to action, to fight [23]. The posters from May’ 68 are intrinsically linked to the movement and continue to be emblematic today, influencing art and design.

In addition to posters, other formats were included. Students and artists also used graffiti, writing slogans and messages on walls, buildings, and other public spaces, often using stencils or spray. It

¹At the original: La lutte continue

²At the original: Front uni

³At the original: Unité



Figure 1: *La lutte continue*. Ecole nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts et Atelier populaire, 1968. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. (Bibliothèque nationale de France)



Figure 2: *Mai 68 début d'une lutte prolongée*. Atelier populaire, 1968. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

allowed the movement to spread its message beyond the limits of traditional media and to reach a broader influence. Some artists used performance, challenging the status quo. Theatre and other forms of public performance disrupted the daily routines of urban life and questioned the authority of the state and other institutions. Producing their own newspapers, magazines and alternative media, the activists communicated their messages directly to the public. These publications often featured artwork and visual elements alongside articles and essays, helping to foster a sense of community and shared purpose among the movement's supporters.

3 GRAFFITI AND STREET ART

In the 1980s, two artistic movements emerged on the streets: graffiti and street art. Both share the fact that they appear in urban spaces, but there are key differences between them. Herrero argues that graffiti is more focused on individual affirmation [20]. Street art is a protest movement that aims to provoke reflection, incite political criticism and social struggle, question ownership, appropriate



Figure 3: *Shadowman*, Richard Hambleton, 1981-1982. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Allan Molho.

public space and denounce established systems. It uses irony as a tool and carries a challenging component. Despite the diversity of themes and the search for specific techniques that distinguish them, some common characteristics must also be considered. Urban artists refer to these as guerrilla tactics, as they allow for speed and ease during the production of the works. Abarca highlights that in urban art, property boundaries are blurred, expanding the limits of action, no longer constrained by the divisions imposed by money, even raising questions about these very limits and their arbitrariness [1]. It is as though matter and space reverted to their primary state, that is, when everything belonged to everyone and, in reality, no one owned anything at all.

3.1 Richard Hambleton

In the 1970s, Canadian artist Richard Hambleton gained widespread notoriety and became one of the precursors of street art by drawing, in low-crime areas, a silhouette with the symbol commonly made by the police to demarcate a murder, and painting blood-like stains around it in the work *Image mass murder*. *Shadowman* (Figure 3) is his most famous work and has been reproduced in several countries. These works were created using manual techniques but already contained the characteristic social critique of urban art [20].

3.2 Blek le Rat

French artist Xavier Prou, better known as Blek le Rat, is a pioneer in the use of stencils in street art (Figure 4). On his website [8] he justifies that Rat is an anagram of Art and that rats are the only animals that will survive the apocalypse. In an interview with Steven Sulley [36], he states that he was greatly impacted and influenced by what he saw on the streets of New York. Ten years later, in the 1980s, he started drawing his rats on the walls of Paris. However, it was when he saw Hambleton's work that he realized he needed to do "something bigger". He began creating characters, such as the Irishman, inspired by a newspaper image showing a man shouting at a soldier who had his gun pointed at a civilian.



Figure 4: Riot police at Blender, Blek le Rat. Melbourne-Australia, 2011. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

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According to the artist, “when you leave an image on the streets it takes on different meanings, which is very interesting, because people have their own interpretation”. Blek le Rat adds that it is very challenging to exhibit street art in a gallery. It is a form of art where the surrounding environment is crucial, adding different meanings and layers to the image. On the other hand, a gallery allows the preservation of the memory of the original work. In his manifesto he affirms that, for the evolution of art, it is essential for the work to be taken to the streets. “I would like to take the characters out of the museums and give them back to the people of the city” [9, p. 1]. He influenced an entire generation of artists.

“The streets of Paris afforded us ample space to work in, and the practice of graffiti was completely unknown at that point, so the roaming police rarely disturbed us unless they wanted to know what we were doing and whether our agenda was political. We answered: “No it’s art”, and the game was won.” [8]

In an interview with Jacobi [22], he justifies his choice of the stencil, because it is a technique that does not depend on luck, it is ideal because it is fast, allows for infinite reproduction and results in beautiful and clean images. Furthermore, it has the advantages of low cost, being able to be applied to a variety of surfaces, being combined with other techniques and being durable, giving the work a long life. However, there is a limitation in what can be designed, it requires unique colours and requires pieces with little detail, with synthetic ideas [20].

3.3 Banksy

The identity of the British artist is still shrouded in mystery. He is the most influential figure in this movement, having elevated street art to a privileged paradigm (Figures 5 and 6). His messages reach a massive audience. In 2010, TIME magazine [15] named him one of the hundred most influential people in the world. Numerous



Figure 5: Banksy art on Brick Lane, East End, London, 2004. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 6: Banksy on Thekla barge, 2008. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons. Photo by Confusedmiked.

theories and jokes surround his identity. The mystery further amplifies the attention given to his work, which has been carried out in unlikely locations, such as the Gaza Strip.

“He is a contemporary poet who transforms words and images into works that invite you to participate in a critical discourse. Never before had an artist interacted so forcefully with the city and its inhabitants. His incredible interventions, some of them almost performances, and a constant active presence on the internet expanded his fame like wildfire. He even named himself the Robin Hood of the 20th century. His objective is to return humanity to the inhabitants of big cities through poetic, harsh and utopian interventions, with the contradictions of the world as protagonists” [20, p. 166]⁵.

⁵Translation by the authors. Original quote: “Es un poeta contemporáneo que transforma las palabras e imágenes, en obras que invitan a participar en un discurso crítico. Nunca antes un artista había llegado a interactuar de una forma tan contundente con la ciudad y sus habitantes. Sus increíbles intervenciones, algunas casi performances, y una constante presencia activa en Internet han expandido su fama como la pólvora. Él mismo se ha erigido como el Robin Hood del siglo XXI. Su objetivo es devolver la humanidad a los habitantes de las grandes ciudades a través de intervenciones poéticas, duras y utópicas, con las contradicciones del mundo como protagonistas”.

Banksy cited that Blek le Rat is his greatest influence, and he reinterpreted many of his works. The artist himself has stated that whenever he comes up with an idea, he remembers that le Rat already did it better twenty years ago [12]. Herrero [20] analyses and compares the works of both artists: they use stencils and create almost real, life-size images, with political-social themes and critiquing consumption, war and xenophobia. Certain elements recur, such as the rat, images of children and soldiers and the reinterpretation of iconic artworks. For him, graffiti is a form of guerrilla warfare that provides individuals with the opportunity to challenge those in power. His works subvert many conventional artistic norms, such as authorship and the appropriation of public spaces. His works address social and political issues, highlighting urgent topics [2]. In 2009 he directed the film *Exit through the gift shop*, dubbed the “first street art disaster movie” [27].

4 DIGITAL ARTIVISM

In the 21st century, changes in communication methods have given rise to different experiments and new modes of expression [2]. As noted by Carvalho, the advent of the internet and the growing accessibility of digital technologies further amplified the reach of artistic production, contributing to the greater dematerialization of artistic objects and exhibition spaces [10]. Artistic expressions gained renewed spaces and formats, expanding beyond galleries to occupy the streets, unconventional venues, and virtual environments. Online environments also fostered new modes of audience engagement, marked by interactivity and participation [28].

Contemporary *artivism* appropriates strategies from the SI and the May’ 68. Veiga reaffirms this heritage and adds the influences of 1970s punk, do-it-yourself (DIY) and hacktivism:

“From the *détournement* of the SI to the current meme, the culture of opposition to established power has led to the renegotiation of artistic perceptions, giving rise to ideas of the momentary concatenation of the outdated and the prospective, of organisation and spontaneity, of the studio and the street, of presence and ephemerality, of art and politics. Taking advantage of the media convergence that the digital environment favours and stimulates, and the ease with which messages can be disseminated on social networks, artivism has a growing impact on people’s lives, both through its participatory characteristics and its exposure to a wide audience” [30, p. 105]⁶.

Forms of media-related activism, *mediactivism*, have diversified, introducing new ways of confronting institutional power in the field of communication, influenced by counterculture collectives and movements as well by the hacker ethic [16]. Digital tools have become essential, especially for young people, though not exclusively [26]. In the present times, protests occupy hybrid spaces,

bridging the streets and the internet, which plays a crucial role in democratization. This capacity has been crucial for contemporary mobilizations, such as *Occupy Wall Street* and the *Arab Spring* [18]. Notable instances of *artist* expressions include Tactical Media, *Culture Jamming* and *Subvertising*.

4.1 Tactical media, culture jamming and subvertising

In 1993, Amsterdam hosted the first edition of the N5M festival, an event dedicated to showcasing and debating politically engaged audiovisual works from the latter half of the twentieth century. Originally focused on the idea of tactical television, the festival quickly expanded its scope to include tactical media. This concept refers to the subversive and non-commercial use of media, utilized either by individuals or by marginalized or oppressed groups. Instead of merely reporting events, such approaches express a critical perspective [16].

The concept gained prominence and was embraced as the central theme of the festival’s 1996 edition. However, tactical media can also incorporate the use of older technologies, such as low-power radio transmitters and the distribution of videos created with digital cameras. Currently, even for established artists, such practices have extended beyond the gallery spaces, taking place in the streets, unconventional venues, and across social media platforms. In the realm of visual arts, tactical media’s application goes beyond artivism, including experimental, conceptual, and poetic forms of expression.

Culture jamming emerged as a means of opposition to the media exploitation carried out by major companies, which increasingly encroach upon public areas with intrusive and aggressive advertising campaigns. These actions aim to subvert commercial messages by blending art, media, parody and an outsider attitude [14]. The first time the term Culture Jamming was used was by the collective *Negativland* – an experimental art and music group, in 1984. The purpose was to describe methods of media sabotage, such as altering billboards. The word *jamming* is an American slang used among amateur radio operators to refer to the “illegal practice of interrupting radio broadcasts or conversations between fellow hams with lip farts, obscenities, and other equally jejune *hijinx*” [3] [13]. *Subvertising* is a type of *jamming*. The term merges “subvert” and “advertising”. It consists of using advertising pieces and subverting their original significance, changing existing images or reinterpreting slogans [26]. The goal is to provoke a feeling like the original one while revealing the underlying messages found within commercial marketing. In Figure 7, an intervention at Billboard, *Buy Shit!*, draws attention to excessive consumption.

There are also other tactical media manifestations, such as performance or guerrilla theatre, artistic vandalism, *hacktivism*, video artivism, video art, street art, direct actions, radio, urban art, manifestos and demonstrations, or civil disobedience. Due to its symbolic and aesthetic essence, *artivism* questions, provokes, raises awareness, and elaborates on facts and issues related to specific social and historical conditions, with the purpose of fostering resistance and transformation. It proposes new forms of expression, triggering both artistic and social ruptures. In the digital realm,

⁶Translation by the authors. Original quote: “Do *détournement* da IS ao atual meme, a cultura de oposição ao poder instituído implicou a renegociação das percepções artísticas, surgindo ideias de concatenação momentânea do ultrapassado e do prospectivo, de organização e espontaneidade, de ateliê e rua, de presença e efemeridade, de arte e política. Aproveitando a convergência mediática que o meio digital favorece e estimula, e a facilidade de disseminação das mensagens nas redes sociais, o artivismo tem um impacto crescente na vida das pessoas, quer por via das suas características participativas, quer pela sua exposição a um público vasto”.



Figure 7: Subvertising. *Buy Shit!* by Sr. X, street art intervention Billboard, 2017. [Public domain], via Wikimedia Commons.

countless possibilities emerge, as numerous technologies have radically transformed the ways of protesting. In fact, this change is pervasive, affecting the way we communicate and relate to one another [28].

These diverse manifestations demonstrate how art has adapted to technological innovations. These practices seek to appropriate the means of communication, challenging hegemonic narratives, further blurring the boundaries between art and activism, and proposing engagement with the urgent needs of today. By incorporating a mode of resistance that reclaims agency in the face of mass communication systems, they reaffirm the political potential of art as a disruptive and transformative tool.

It is possible to observe that some criteria proposed by the *Atelier Populaire* are employed in artworks created by digital artists, such as the prioritization of political messages over aesthetics; direct and symbolic imagery; simple design and the use of limited colours. The following examples demonstrate this proximity:

4.2 Bijari

Composed of designers, architects, photographers, videographers, and visual artists, *Bijari* is a Brazilian collective known for its numerous interventions in urban spaces. The artists make use of technologies such as video mapping, 360° video, and live image projection. Their research into urban intervention and public art has inspired the creation of political and poetic territories that reestablished connections between the public sphere and the art system, while also extending beyond it [34]. In the artwork *Carro Verde*, they transform abandoned vehicles found on city streets into garden green spaces that emerge organically from the metal frames (Figure 8).

In 2016, the group started a set of works featuring graphic aesthetics, with saturated colours. Titled *Vocabulário Combativo*, it aims to reinforce progressive agendas that were under threat due to the coup in Brazil. The images were projected onto buildings and widely shared on social media (Figure 9).

4.3 Naziha Mestaoui

Through technology, Belgian artist Naziha Mestaoui sought to raise awareness about the impact that every action or decision has on the world and nature. One of her works is the installation *One*



Figure 8: *Carro Verde*. Bijari, 2007. (bijari.com.br)



Figure 9: *Vocabulário Combativo*. Bijari, 2016. (bijari.com.br)

heart, one tree. Through a mapping projection and a downloaded application, anyone can grow a tree on the Eiffel Tower. For every virtual tree created, a real one is planted. Participants can follow the growth of their trees for three years. It is an invitation to act for the environment (Figure 10). “However ephemeral this artwork may seem, it gives weight to the decisions you make today, by engaging in an action that will have a lasting impact on all of us and on the world we live in” [25].

“I really mix physical, tangible experiences with immaterial worlds. What I wanted to do is create an artwork that would combine art technology and humanity so that we could understand that we are totally interconnected with nature, because we are part of nature, we are not separated from nature. But I also wanted to show that our technologies, that also symbolize our future, can help us reconnect with nature and that is in fact how the inspiration for the project *One heart one tree* came to me.” [33]

4.4 Krzysztof Wodiczko

Polish artist Krzysztof Wodiczko is known for projecting large-scale videos and slides onto monuments and architectural façades [31]. In *Sans-Papiers*, from 2006 (Figure 11), four immigrants are seen sitting on the roof of the *Kunstmuseum Basel*, talking to one



Figure 10: *1 Heart, 1 Tree*, Naziha Mestaoui, 2015. (unfecc.int)



Figure 11: *Sans-Papiers*, Krzysztof Wodiczko. Projection onto the Kunstmuseum Basel's façade, 2006. (krzysztofwodiczko.com)

another and singing in their own languages. However, their faces remain unseen. The work draws attention to the invisible, undocumented people living in Switzerland, known as *sans-papiers* [32]. Wodiczko uses public space as a political and aesthetic medium, transforming architecture into a means of resistance and collective visibility. *Homeless* was a projection onto a theatre building, where participants became spectators (Figure 12). Presented at *Théâtre Maisonneuve*, within *Place des Arts* in Montreal, in 2014, the work offered homeless people a space to share their stories and experiences, as well as to express their fears and desires. "Giving voice to marginalized persons, the artist included their narratives in the city's public discourse" [32]. The projection was part of *La Biennale de Montréal*, co-produced by the *Musée d'art contemporain de Montréal*, the *Quartier des Spectacles*, and the *Phi Centre*, in collaboration with St. Michael's Mission.



Figure 12: *Homeless*, by Krzysztof Wodiczko. Projection onto the *Théâtre Maisonneuve*, Montreal, 2014. (krzysztofwodiczko.com)

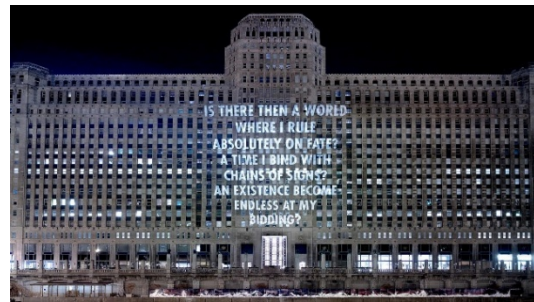


Figure 13: Light projection on the *Merchandise Mart*, Chicago. Jenny Holzer, 2008. (Photo by John Faier)

4.5 Jenny Holzer

The conceptual artist Jenny Holzer was born in Ohio, U.S. She creates LED electronic sign sculptures that display phrases that function as verbal meditations on power, trauma, knowledge, and hope. She uses minimalist and textual language, often with monumental light and typography.

"Celebrated for her inimitable use of language and projects in the public sphere, Holzer creates a powerful tension between the realms of feeling and knowledge, with a practice that encompasses both individual and collective experiences of power and violence, vulnerability and tenderness." [37]

A light projection on the *Merchandise Mart*, Chicago, in 2008 with the text *The joy of writing*, from *View with a grain of sand*, by Wisława Szymborska, translated into English by Stanisław Barańczak and Clare Cavanagh (Figure 13). In *For the City*, she features *Hymn*, from *Blackbird and Wolf*, by Henri Cole. It was projected onto New York Public Library, in 2005 (Figure 14).

4.6 Rafael Lozano-Hemmer

Lozano-Hemmer was born in Mexico City and creates platforms for public participation through works situated at the intersection of architecture and performance art. *Border Tuner* connects the cities of El Paso, Texas, and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, through spotlights that create a blanket of light (Figures 15 and 16). There are six interactive stations, each with a microphone, a speaker,

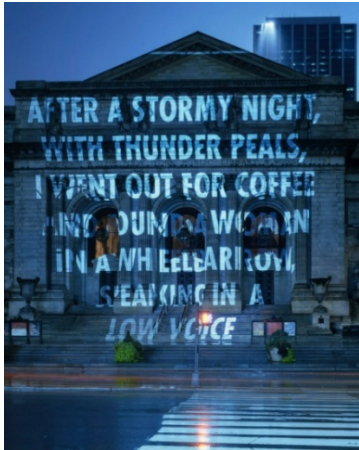


Figure 14: *For the City*, Jenny Holzer. New York, 2005. (Photo by Atilio Maranzano, newyorker.com)



Figure 15: *Border Tuner*, by Lozano-Hemmer. Border between Texas and Chihuahua, 2019. (lozano-hemmer.com)

and a large wheel or dial. Visitors can manipulate this dial, which projects a light that follows their movement. When two “arms of light” meet in the sky and intersect, a two-way sound channel automatically opens, connecting people at two remote stations. The brightness is modulated in sync with speech, resembling a flicker in Morse code [38].

“The community leaders selected to coordinate various topics have committed to connecting their existing networks on both sides of the border for these topic-specific conversations, in addition to the spontaneous conversations that the public will generate each evening” [24]⁷.

5 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The posters created during the events of May’ 68 influenced, and continue to influence, the way art is conceived and produced. They were well structured and grounded on the ideas proposed by the SI. The designs, crafted not only by artists, but also by students and

⁷Translation by the authors. Original quote: “Los líderes de la comunidad seleccionados para coordinar varios temas se han comprometido a conectar a sus redes existentes en ambos lados de la frontera para estas conversaciones de temas en específico, además de las conversaciones espontáneas que generará el público cada noche”.



Figure 16: *Border Tuner*, by Lozano-Hemmer. Border between Texas and Chihuahua, 2019. (lozano-hemmer.com)

workers with no formal training in arts or communication, were highly functional and focused on their greater purpose: resistance. They repeated formulas that have already been proven effectively in political propaganda.

Street art, with aims to provoke social and political discourse, effectively adopts many of these principles. The works of Richard Hambleton, Blek le Rat and Banksy share many similarities, both in techniques and in the themes they address. The option for unique colours and easily recognizable drawings, prioritizing a single, clear message to avoid ambiguity, with intention placed above aesthetics, from a social and political perspective, are characteristics found in the posters of the *Atelier Populaire* and echoed in the work of contemporary artists, as *Bijari*; Nazih Mestaoui; Krzysztof Wodiczko; Jenny Holzer and Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. Digital artworks can be produced meeting nearly all the criteria set forth by the *Atelier Populaire*. Currently, the primary difficulties may be the costs of production, given that digital art depends on costly tools and technology. It is crucial to acknowledge its naturally elevated production expenses in comparison to other art forms. Another challenge is the struggle to uphold anonymity in a society that is under constant surveillance. For *Bijari*, as a collective, the focus is not on individual artists’ names, though their identities remain recognized.

In the face of the climate crisis, ongoing wars, rising rates of femicide, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, and other forms of alterophobia, it is urgent to find ways to draw attention to these issues and *artivism* stands out as a very powerful instrument. Understanding the enduring power of these posters contributes to the development of *artist* strategies across diverse artistic expressions, going beyond aesthetics and becoming a tool for awareness and change.

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