



ARTivism

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Video Activism is a movement facilitated by digital technology. That is, the matrix of 0-1 0-1 impulses; the invisible subtext to our environment wherein we move, love, work or study. The non-place of the digital has stretched to become the effective place of the communicative aspects of our life. Moving from the technological to the social aspect of the 'digital revolution', we must ask ourselves to what extent media activism can influence our existence, and if it does, in what direction it points.

Video activists act in a quasi-reporter style; embracing the camera in the guise of a gun, moving quickly throughout territorial spaces, and reshaping an imaginary time scale. Unlike other video approaches, it means acting politically: shooting the 'here and now', but reminding the viewer of the causes of the past and the ones to think of for the future. Participating emotionally in what they do, never detached from what they see, each digital bullet they shoot belongs to a committed and personal point of view, a defined position that is reconstructed on a computer screen and put into circulation.

The motivation for such a personal involvement, different from the an objectivity prized by journalists and social scientists, might be to attempt to cut through the glossy surface of commercial branding, slogans and media communication in order to draw attention to the effects of consumerism. It could be to highlight a different use of time – killing time in order to escape the rigid boundaries of acceptable and productive behaviour laid down by our society. Most video activism is not carried out on financial motivation. Rather it springs from a certain worldview, which has the need to surface regardless of financial satisfaction.

Video Activism is, by its critical nature, economically un-sustainable for its practitioners. That means a growing number of people (professionally as well as occasionally) dedicate themselves to a non-paid or hugely underpaid environment. Regularly these producers, as well as those who distribute and sustain their work, ask themselves why on earth they're doing what they do, and for what aim. There's no straight answer. When asked, most of them would reply that it is worth it. What we could aim for is to narrow the gap between an activity which is worth doing but for most people not sustainable, and one that's economically rewarding AND where it still makes sense to do it. Here comes in the agenda of cultural institution and decision-making. That means, back to politics.

We might define the subject acting in this context, the video-actor who is behind and not in front of the camera, as an ordinary citizen performing according to her/his consciousness – an individual with a mission, but this is clearly too narrow. Performance always comprehends the subject acting, the matter acting (the object dealt with and the context in which the subject moves) and ultimately the spectator, who is acting too. Contrary to the common definition of work and viewer, there is no dialogical pattern between the (art)work and its user; rather a dimension of experience, which embeds everything and everyone, including the source of the process, the performer.

Taking a camera and shooting videos on political, personal and social issues entails a participation in a worldview that wants to close the gap, to bring down the barrier, or whatever expression of 'social justice' you want to adopt. It entails a politics of citizen responsibility. This speech-act, shaped into the digital dimension of video, presumes that the video activist is not alone but is acting on behalf of the society to which she/he belongs.

The works in this category, be they grand performances (Thierry Geoffroy/Colonel and Rosa Marie Frang), thoughtful television or film collages (Predrag Pajdic and Diane Nerweh), revealing candid camera (Katrin Hornek and Căcilia Brown), or dry juridical text (Andrea Frank), all question the current political and social status quo, and ultimately aim to be a catalyst of change. At best, it will short-circuit the politics loop, or part of it. Clearly this (video)activist approach is not a mission, and videoactivists are not to be immolated on the altar of civic values. Rather, it is a confession of uncomfortableness which we might lend a piece of ourselves for some minutes.