Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Age II
Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Age II:

The Territories of the Contemporary

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The radical, universal equality of “all or none” only exists if political equality is thought in aesthetic terms, from the equality of force. Political equality is an aesthetic thought.

Christoph Menke, *The Force of Art*
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There has never been cultural innovation without social conflicts and political victories.¹

Art and its context have always been intertwined. British art historian Claire Bishop regards great moments of socio-political change during the 20th century as catalysts for waves of participation and interest in the social within art.² The social upheavals that started in 2010-2011, with their profusion of protest camps, have clearly marked collective sensitivity, and have also triggered a renewed interest of the art world towards politics. With many artists relating their works to the new forms of activism, there has been much discussion on art’s relation to social movements. However, when enunciating this relationship, it is not always clear what is the object of study. This article proposes a contextual system for understanding the grey zone which stands between the two poles of the “social movements” and the “artistic institutions”, using the social movements of 2011 as a case study, in a “reading mode” that can be extrapolated to other social periods. In the present text, I present different possible points on a scale that starts from a greater proximity to the activist events, moving towards relationships with art institutions. Although I here formulate different categories for the analysis, this is a taxonomy whose lines are porous and where ambiguity is more common than certainty.

The different examples that are discussed here come mainly from three paradigmatic protest camps of 2011: Tahrir Square in Cairo (January 2011), as the paradigmatic foundational camp for the wave of activist settlements that took place during the following years; the Puerta del Sol

¹ Michel De Certeau, The Practice of Everyday Life (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 118.
in Madrid (May 2011), as the one which translated the phenomenon to the West, inaugurating a less confrontational type of camp and more closely tied to the practice of countercultural activism; and Zuccotti Park in New York (September 2011), as being the camp which brought the phenomenon to the heart of capitalism making a big impact in the media and leaving a notable symbolic imprint.

In terms of the forms of possible theorization, I propose to take as precedents the experience of the 1990s and the early 2000s, when attempts from the side of art at understanding social movements that were not tied to unions or parties started to multiply.

**The Aesthetics of Protest**

Politics is now an intentionally visual act performed on a global public stage, where political agents are acutely aware of the resonance of the image projected by this performance.3

A collage by the poet and artist Rafael Sánchez-Mateos Paniagua shows various images of the global protest, with captions that frame them in different traditions of art history, in a more or less humorous and playful way. Sánchez-Mateos affirms that “it’s about following Carl Einstein’s idea (the masses are the artist) and taking it to the end, playing with anachronism, trying to reveal a history of art by contemplating only images of the struggles of today, here and there.”4 It is certainly the case that, continuing on the path of earlier movements, the cycle of global protest which took place in 2011 showed an enormous creativity in terms of its aesthetic forms.5 It could be said that the crowds found themselves wrapped up in a vast process of collective and spontaneous creation, which had been catalysed by a political event.

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4 Rafael Sánchez-Mateos Paniagua, personal e-mail with the author, March 2, 2014.
5 In the book *Utopías artísticas de revuelta* I analyze the creativity that was produced in the 2011 camps within a genealogy that starts with the direct-action movements and moves through the antiglobalization movement. Of course, continuing this thread, the origins of this kind of activist creativity can be placed much earlier. See Julia Ramírez Blanco, *Utopías artísticas de revuelta* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2014).
Fig 1. Photomontage composition, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.
A first level of reading could be based on an aesthetic analysis of the protest itself. In that regard, we could use the theoretical reference of outsider art to analyse the creativity of people who are not necessarily “artists” and who do not have any relation with the “art world”. This non-professional creativity, which is usually anonymous, produces banners, mannequins, disguises, performative actions, and interventions in the public space.

One of the most novel manifestations of the 2011 wave of activism can be seen in the very form of the protest camp, understood simultaneously as both a political and an aesthetic entity. After the so-called “Arab Spring”, tents and precarious constructions started to appear in city centres. Taken together, these elements created scenes of small rebel cities within the larger towns. Dissidence took on an “urban form” which emphasized the communitarian dimension of social change. These settlements could be analysed from the point of view of architectonic theory, spontaneous architecture and DIY construction. Nonetheless, this type of study would have a very different meaning, depending on the place, as “urbanism” changes significantly between different cities and countries.

In Egyptian, the word “tahrir” means “liberation”. From January 25, 2011, Cairo’s Tahrir Square was configured as a kind of fortified rebel city, surrounded by barricades. At a given moment, in order to enter the square, it was necessary to pass through two controls: that of Mubarak’s police and that of the revolutionaries. Small groups dedicated themselves to breaking up paving stones, which were given to others so that they could take them to the square’s periphery, where they were hurled at the police. Nonetheless, in the style of uprisings such as the Paris Commune, subversion and the communal activities of daily life were side by side in Tahrir.

Near the entrances to the square, street sellers sold food. Field hospitals were improvised to attend to the injured, while in several places there were concerts of rebel songs. Although there was not a formal political debate, there was a continuous political conversation.

The Egyptian artist Ganzeer highlights the creativity of the music and the handmade posters6 which would become a distinctive sign of the new wave of revolt. Some messages referred to the Tunisian revolution, which immediately preceded the Egyptian insurrection. Many paid homage to those who had been killed by Mubarak’s repressive forces and turned into

6 Ganzeer, personal interview with the author February 27, 2014.
martyrs of the revolution. References to religion and expressions of patriotic dignity abounded, in what could be understood as a “community-based nationalism.”

After a demonstration in Madrid on May 15, 2011, about 40 people decided to stay and sleep in the Puerta del Sol where the march had concluded and from where it should have dispersed. The idea of camping in this central square had its origins explicitly in Egypt: during this first night, activists telephoned Olga Rodríguez, a journalist who had covered the Arab revolts, asking her about Tahrir. Following the Egyptian example, the protesters sought blankets and food. In Madrid, the existing structure of squatters’ social centres provided a ready-made means of organization based on working groups within commissions that came together in a general assembly.

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9 Olga Rodríguez reported on the Egyptian revolution for the alternative medium Periodismo Humano, which took on great relevance during May 2011, as it was the medium which covered the events in the Puerta del Sol most extensively.
At the level of urbanism, the Puerta del Sol camp was one of the most complex. The different commissions built small stands which gave them spatial presence in the square. These lightweight elements were arranged following zonal separations appropriate to town planning, and it would seem that a group of firefighters played an important role in doing this. Different maps registered the changing location of the First Aid posts, the library, the food stands and the communications tent. The construction materials came mainly from collecting trash and donated objects. Thus, cardboard, pieces of wood and tarpaulin stood out. A kind of awning provided protection from sun and rain. As a process of construction, the principle of DIY predominated.

![Maps showing the changing location of the camp](image)

Fig. 3. Location signs, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.

Some shows, from within the very framework of the social movement, have exhibited posters, banners and objects. This would be the case of the various times that a selection of the 15M Archive banners have been shown, under the amateur curatorship of the social movement itself. On a larger scale, and on a professional level, the Victoria and Albert Museum will open an exhibition on July 26, 2014 dedicated to activist design, under the title of *Disobedient Objects*. Its curator, Gavin Grindon, is an art historian and activist who, through his theoretical texts, has dedicated himself to analyzing the aesthetic elements of different protest movements, such as Reclaim the Streets.
To help with the gestation of Occupy Wall Street, various activists travelled from Spain to New York. The organization through working groups, commissions and assemblies passed directly to the New York occupation, so much so the assemblies were spoken of in terms of the “Madrid model”. Although in the US city the constructed element was smaller than that of Madrid, this did not prevent the space being taken over in other ways. Inspired by Egypt, Zuccotti Square was given the activist name of “Liberty Square”. The various commissions placed their materials on the ground, in small piles, which again corresponded to zonal separations. New York continued the work of the iconic production of extremely creative posters. Hrag Vantanian, co-founder of the blog Hyperallergic, spoke of how the slogan of “We are the 99%” came from one of these homemade posters. For him, the banners and posters functioned as a meme that broadcast the feeling of the camp across the web. Some would see the activist form of camping in the centre of towns itself as a meme which repeated itself in one city after another. The internet was very important, both as a paradigm and as a means of dissemination, and also as another public space to take over, where the production of thought and symbolism could be developed. In that sense, it would be interesting to analyse social-media images.

All these camps had a highly symbolic meaning. Vantantian recalled how in the New York assemblies almost half of those present were simply “watching”. But watching what? The philosopher and activist Jordi Claramonte tells of how, faced with the crisis of political representation,

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12 A meme is a term originally coined by biologist Richard Dawkins, that refers to units of significance which become part of a culture. The concept has been extended with the idea of an “internet meme” where images, phrases and videos are spread.

performativity comes to be a substitute for representation.\footnote{See Jordi Claramonte, \textit{Del arte de concepto al arte de contexto} (San Sebastián: Nerea, 2011).} Multiplied through the crowd, this performativity would form a very peculiar form of spectacle. Lina Khatib, head of the Arab Reform and Democracy program at Stanford University, indicates that:

[The Arab Spring] was not just a phenomenon whereby opposing political actors (states versus people) utilized spectacle as a form of critique; it was also one that produced latent images, as well as being in itself a spectacle that was simultaneously watched and emulated.\footnote{Khatib, \textit{Image Politics in the Middle East}, 117.}

Stephen Duncombe, a sociologist expert in the analysis of the political power of fantasy and desire, locates Occupy Wall Street within the category of what he has theorized as ethical spectacle, which he defines as “a symbolic action that seeks to shift the political culture toward more progressive values”. For him an ethical spectacle should aspire to be:

- **Participatory:** Seeking to empower participants and spectators alike, with organizers acting as facilitators.
- **Open:** Responsive and adaptive to shifting contexts and the ideas of participants.
- **Transparent:** Engaging the imagination of spectators without seeking to trick or deceive.
- **Realistic:** Using fantasy to illuminate and dramatize real-world power dynamics and social relations that otherwise tend to remain hidden in plain sight.
- **Utopian:** Celebrating the impossible —and therefore helping to make the impossible possible.\footnote{Stephen Duncombe, “Ethical Spectacle”, in Andrew Boyd and Dave Oswald Mitchell eds., \textit{Beautiful Trouble. A Toolbox for Revolution} (London / New York: OR Books, 2012), 230-232.}

It is a fact that the camps were struck and the strength of the activist wave diminished temporarily. For Duncombe this was because the spectacle was left without the stage which had been supplied by the squares.\footnote{Stephen Duncombe, tutorials with the author during an investigative residence at NYU, New York, May-August 2013.}
Cultural Groups that Emerged in the Camps

I’m so angry I made a sign.¹⁸

Every social movement is a cultural movement.¹⁹ Woven across the camps were commissions and working groups that were explicitly concerned with symbols and the spectacle. Beyond the various elements related to the configuration, maintenance and management of the physical space, the camps also generated a whole framework of thought and debate, which gave birth to a multitude of projects. Thus, a second level of reading could be situated in the study of the cultural groups that were constituted within the camps themselves.

All the camps had formal infrastructures dedicated to communication. During the Tahrir insurrection a group of video artists called *Mosireen* was formed²⁰ which would carry out the fundamental work of recording what the conventional communications media was keeping hidden, as well as gathering different media material from other people. The Egyptian revolution would be nicknamed the “Facebook Revolution” because of the relevance of social networks. Nonetheless, the leading role of the internet should not be overestimated: the biggest demonstration in Tahrir took place on January 28 when the government had cut communications via the web and mobile telephones. Face-to-face communication, together with affective and personal networks, played a crucial role in the whole process of uprising and change, and also formed part of the strategies of organized communication.²¹

In Madrid, from the first night of the camp a communications commission was formed, which would carry out an extensive use of the internet to convocate, disseminate, analyse and inform²² through texts.

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¹⁸ Handmade poster, Occupy Wall Street.
²⁰ *Mosireen* website, online at: http://mosireen.org.
²¹ In Egypt, for example, activists from the April 6 movement carried out door-to-door surveys of people before organizing the Tahrir protests, asking residents what would make them take to the streets. In the face of the response that people would go out to protest if “everybody” did, small demonstrations were organized in the districts to give the impression that “everybody” was indeed in the street. These small marches would then converge on Tahrir. See Khatib, *Image Politics in the Middle East*, 146.
²² See Hacksol, “Cronologia de las redes y los nodos del 15M”, online at: http://hacksol.tomalaplaza.net/cronologia-de-las-redes-el-movimiento-15m/.
photographs and videos. A group of documentary makers present in the square started *Audiovisol* and set about gathering different recordings of people to create an “audiovisual archive”. In a similar way, Occupy Wall Street’s powerful media commission assembled a multitude of recordings of the Zuccotti Park camp.

Libraries would become a recurrent element, creating spaces whose symbolism spoke of civic values and respect for culture. In Madrid, during the first week of the camp, a library was set up with a section for adults and a children’s area, and after a month it had received more than 4,000 donated books. In New York, *The People’s Library* had its own construction, a kind of awning which protected the books that were donated to be read in the square.

![Puerta del Sol, Madrid](image.jpg)

Fig. 4. Puerta del Sol, Madrid, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.

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23 Although in Egypt there was no library in the 2011 camp in Tahrir, street vendors were present, selling books, activist newspapers and fanzines that today are hard to find. Ganzeer, personal interview with the author, February 7, 2014.

24 See the website of the group Bibliosol, which continued after the end of the camp. Online at: [http://bibliosol.wordpress.com/quienes-somos/](http://bibliosol.wordpress.com/quienes-somos/).
Different arts groups also appeared in the squares. The *Revolution Artists Union* in Cairo took up an open-air space to create and display images, exhibiting a great variety of drawings and banners. In Madrid, the *Arts* group had a reserved space in the square dedicated principally to making banners. With continuous production, they made so many that a large number ended up being handed over directly to the archive commission —there was not enough physical space in the square for such a profusion of language. In Zuccotti, one of the first projects of the *Arts and Culture* commission consisted in showing on the ground, in an ordered fashion, a large selection of these handmade banners, whose number grew without ceasing. Regarding the New York example, Hrag Vantanian speaks of how there was a certain conflict between members of the group who were more professionalized artists and those who were closer to the model of the creative amateur.

Fig. 5. Puerta del Sol, Madrid, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.
A novelty in respect to earlier social movements was the appearance in the squares of activist archives that collected material of the event at the very moment that it was happening. In one way, these materials can be read as historical sources. But they can also be seen as a large collection of examples of collective creativity. The website *Tahrir Documents* gathered together a large number of scanned documents relating to the Egyptian revolution. In addition to banners, the Occupy Wall Street archives stored letters which people sent to Zuccotti park, showing subjective testimonies of solidarity from a distance. One of the most developed examples of these archives was that of Madrid, in which press cuttings, pamphlets, announcements letters, poems, acts of the assembly, organigrams, maps, and thousands of posters were stored. Among all this what stands out are the handmade banners, whose size ranges from the Post-It note to a five-meter banner.

The materials of the Madrid 15M archive are a good example of the enormous creativity that, during 2011, was applied to the making of handmade banners. The raw materials were many, the techniques varied and the handwriting infinite. Texts and drawings gave form to screams, protests, jokes, dreams of the future, proposals, subjective testimonies. A large number of posters dealt with giving words such as “democracy” or “crisis” their original significance, by proposing possible solutions to various economic and social problems. Taken together, they form an impressive exercise of collective political reflection, with thematic nodes that are repeated: the privileges of the political class, the gap between institutional politics and the citizenry, the self-interested use of the

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25 Social movements researcher Anna Feigenbaum considers that this could be the result of the demographics of these movements, where there are more educated middle-class people who see the importance of preserving materials that will allow the event to be understood after it has ended, an education which also allows them to act as archivists. Personal interview with the author, November 28, 2013.

26 *Tahrir Documents* is “an ongoing effort to archive and translate activist papers from the 2011 Egyptian uprising and its aftermath. Materials are collected from demonstrations in Cairo’s Tahrir Square and published in complete English translation alongside scans of the original documents. The project is not affiliated with any political organization, Egyptian or otherwise”. *Tahrir Documents*, online at: http://tahrirdocuments.org.

27 I was able to see some of these letters in March 2012 in the warehouse which the Archive of Occupy Wall Street archive was using for storage at that time.

economic crisis, the parasitical character of the ruling classes, and the need for a radical change. Some old slogans return, revealing themselves as previous strata of the discourse.

Fig. 6. Puerta del Sol Banners, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.

29 The engineer and cultural critic Raúl Minchinela indicates as thematic axes the denunciation of lies, the defense of thought, the opposition to the bail-out of the banks with public money, the denunciation of the effective government of financial power, and the criticism of materialism. Lecture by Raúl Minchinela, “REALISMO SUCIO: Lemas y consignas en el movimiento 15M” at ¡URGENTE!, Centre de Cultura Contemporània de Barcelona (CCCB), Barcelona, July 15, 2011.
The popular reclaiming of language not only covered the use of political terminology but also the right to use the word as a vehicle of subjectivity and poetry, enjoying the ludic-symbolic possibilities of words. These banners show a great grassroots creativity which was carried out independently of “artistic” intentionality.

In general, all these groups were shifting and fluid, and attendance was at times very ephemeral. On many occasions, the collectives responded to a very stereotyped conception of what constitutes “culture”. Nonetheless, they also produced collaborations and innovations to the extent that sometimes these groups that emerged in situ could take part in what had become known in recent years as “artivism”.

**Artivisms**

Although the relationship between art and politics is something as old as politics itself, in the final decade of the 20th Century it would develop a new terminology. Early on, the curator and theoretician Nina Felshin would talk of activist art; others would fuse both terms, referring to “artivism” as a way of speaking about the strategies of symbolic, narrative and visual creativity applied to political action.

Perhaps these new forms of naming artistic intervention have something to do with a new type of politics. In the 1990s a confluence of

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30 An example of an artist committed to political action is Gustave Courbet who went to prison for his participation in the dismantling of the Vendôme column. His self-portrait behind bars became a political allegory (*Portrait of the artist in Sainte-Pelagie, Ornans*, Courbet Museum).

31 Nina Felshin, ed., *But is this art? The Spirit of Art as Activism* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1995). Felshin’s essay serves as an introduction to a collection of texts fundamentally dedicated to politicized artists of the 1980s. These include Gran Fury, Group Material, The American Festival Project, Helen and Newton Harrison, Mierle Laderman Ukeles, Louis Hock, Elizabeth Sisco, Carole Condé and Karl Beveridge, Suzanne Lacy, Artist and Homeless Collaborative, Peggy Digs, Guerrilla Girls and WAC.

32 See Stéphanie Lemoine and Samira Ouardi, *Artivisme, art militant et activisme artistique depuis les années 60* (Paris: Éditions Alternatives, 2010). This book deals with phenomena which are difficult to grasp and which have been the object of a varied terminology. From within the social movements so-called “guerilla communication” has been theorized: a.f.r.i.k.a. autonomous group, Luther Blissett y Sonja Brünzels, *Manual de guerrilla de la comunicación* (Barcelona: Virus, 2000). Other terms refer to culture jamming, or “cultural resistance”. See also Stephen Duncombe, *Cultural Resistance Reader* (London / New York: Verso, 2002).
different social movements started to take place: for the first time in history there was an international coordination of the dissident heterogeneity. At the end of the decade, the growing synchronization of the struggles would give place to what became known as the “antiglobalization movement”.

Related to this activist environment, different groups that centered on the production of symbolism started to appear. During the second half of the 1990s, collectives of this kind started to meet each other and to collaborate within the framework of the nascent antiglobalization movement. At that time, there was an attempt to establish a common communicative language through images that could be understood in different contexts. An example of this would be the anticapitalist rave parties of Reclaim the Streets that, starting in the United Kingdom, came to block the normal functioning of cities all over the world. One of its biggest events, The Carnival Against Capital, lent its “carnival style” to the protests against the World Trade Organization in 1999 Seattle, which would make the movement headline news. In the words of the art critic and activist Brian Holmes, these new forms could function as “hieroglyphs of the future.”

Many of those who participated in the experiences of the 1990s and 2000s are still active today, providing images for present dissidence. In the 2011 camps there were multiple connections, more or less explicit, with this earlier wave of creative mobilization. Taking these “roots” into account there is a possible study in the observation of the activist art present in the camps. Different “artist” groups, situated explicitly between political action and aesthetic intervention, took part in the camps. To study these hybrid forms, the analysis also needs to be mixed, combining methods proper to sociology, political science and art history.

It seems that in the Egypt of 2011, street art stood out as a powerful form of art activism. The local graffiti scene hardly existed before the Egyptian revolution. With the advent of the protests, a multitude of individuals and groups set about painting walls, filling them with messages against the Mubarak regime. In January 2011 the interventions of the artists “Sad Panda” and “Ganzeer” would be especially celebrated. The latter declared his preference for intervening on walls beyond Tahrir

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33 See Julia Ramírez Blanco, “Reclaim the Streets! From Local to Global Party Protest”, in Third Text 4, special issue, Global Occupations of Art (July 2013), online at: http://thirdtext.com/contenturator.net/reclaim-the-streets
Square, seeking to expand the challenge to parts of the city away from the protests.

Fig. 7. Sad Panda and Ganzeer intervention, Cairo, picture by Julia Ramirez Blanco.

Sound art would also be a part of this. In Madrid, the artist and cultural manager Kamen Nedev\textsuperscript{35} recorded all the sounds of the social movement from the first night of the camp\textsuperscript{36}. The system he used was binaural: the microphones which he wore in his ears seemed to be headphones for music. Through his recordings, it is possible via the internet to listen to the first debate which took place in the square that would soon be housing constant assemblies. Nedev has posted some edited versions but, more than this, he has placed his raw archives on the web.\textsuperscript{37} This type of work connects directly to the precedent of the North American sound recorder

\textsuperscript{35} See Acoustic Mirror, online at: acousticmirror.tumblr.com.

\textsuperscript{36} In fact, Nedev went to the demonstration that gave rise to the camp solely to record its sounds. In so doing he responded to a call from the cultural activist Pedro Jimenez who proposed, via Twitter, that fellow sound artist Chinowski Garachana and Nedev recorded the sound landscape of the marches. Personal interview with the author, February 12, 2014.

and composer Christopher De Laurenti and his activity within the antiglobalization movement. Nedev, referring to De Laurenti’s presence in the Seattle protests against the World Trade Organization, tells it thus:

That November 30, 1999, Christopher De Laurenti went out onto the streets of Seattle armed with a recorder and some microphones and spent the day recording the soundscape of the revolt. That brought about a large series of pieces based on field recordings of that and other social movements.  

Fig. 8. Occupy Wall Street, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.

Those political soundscapes are framed within what is known as militant phonography. For Nedev, his recordings “do not have any end as archives, they are there so that people do other things.” Because of that, he later started his own radio program, focused on militant sound investigation.

39 Personal interview with the author, February 12, 2014.
In the case of New York, there were many interventions by artist activists. It was the “subvertising” magazine *Adbusters*, founded in 1989, which in July 2011 launched the first call to occupy Wall Street. A pull-out within its pages invited people to “flood into lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street.” The magazine accompanied the text with a montage that would become iconic: a dancer, dressed in a tutu, performing the “Attitude” ballet position on top of the sculpture of the bull situated next to Wall Street.

Within the Zuccotti Park camp, Hrag Vantanian highlights the presence of many performance artists. This connection between performance and direct action does not strike him as strange because, for him, “performers understand the power of actions in public and the fact that actions have multiple effects on society, whether they are known or unknown.”

*Not An Alternative* is an art-activist collective founded in 2003, which works from within social movements and also exhibits its work in arts centers. During Occupy Wall Street, the collective made various props and materials including banners, shields bearing texts, and stenciled sleeping bags. Creating a common visual identity for those materials, the group used a typography that was easy to reproduce on the street: letters of black strokes standing out against a yellow background. In the natural world, this combination of colors warns of danger, but in our urban environment it often indicates the zones of real-estate construction.

In fact, this characteristic typography wanted to make a direct link to Spain, with the intention of unifying the signs and symbols of a global

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40 See the call in the Adbusters website, online at: https://www.adbusters.org/blogs/adbusters-blog/occupywallstreet.html.

41 For Vantanian, an important precedent can be found in artist Zeffrey Throwell’s *Ocularpation: Wall Street* project, in which fifty people carried out daily actions totally naked, dramatizing the obligation to live a “normal” life after having been stripped of their own possessions by the banking system. Personal interview with the author, March 24, 2014. About the action: Hrag Vantanian, “50 People Get Naked For Art on Wall Street” (August, 2011), online at: http://hyperallergic.com/31223/50-people-get-naked-for-art-on-wall-street-3-get-arrested/.

42 Personal interview with the author, March 24, 2014.

43 *Not An Alternative*, online at: http://notanalternative.com/about

44 *Not An Alternative*, online at: http://notanalternative.com/node?page=5

struggle. The typography was first used in 2006 for the *V de Vivienda* [which could be translated as “H for Housing”] campaign for housing rights, by artivists who had links to the antiglobalization movement. In 2011, this image was used by a coalition of student groups *Juventud Sin Futuro* [Youth Without a Future] and then by *Democracia Real YA!,* [Real Democracy NOW!], the platform which called the demonstration on May 15, 2011 that gave rise to the camp.

![Figure 9](image-url)

Fig. 9. Adhesive tape by Ne Pas Plier, picture by Julia Ramírez Blanco.

46 Not An Alternative had used this kind of aesthetics in many interventions before Occupy Wall Street happened. During the Zuccotti Park occupation, the group decided to make an explicit connection with the Spanish activist aesthetics. Jason Jones, personal interview with the author, March 20, 2014. Also, Beka Economopoulos, conversation with the author, P.S.1, New York, June 15, 2013.

47 From May 14, 2006 large sit-in protests started to take place under the name *V de Vivienda,* a playful reference to Alan Moore’s *V de Vendetta* comic which had inspired a film of the same name released in 2005. Some artivists designed the image for this campaign, confronting the difficulty of “representing something whose identity lies in non-representation.” These people later would form part of Enmedio Colectivo, strongly related on both personal and professional levels with Not An Alternative.

48 *Juventud Sin Futuro* is a pressure group which emerged from a meeting of different student groups in Madrid in April 2011. It will be part of Democracia real YA!, a platform that calls for mobilization with the support of hundreds of blogs and organizations of anticapitalist orientation. None of these are part of a political party or union.
Using this form of typography, Not An Alternative also designed the characteristic duct tape (“Occupy Tape”). This device took up a way of marking out the public space that had been popularized in the 1990s, after the design of adhesive tape by the Ne Pas Plier group of French artist-activist designers. In Occupy Wall Street, poster art would be a particularly fertile practice. A large number of individuals and groups applied themselves to the design of images that on occasions were of high quality, resonating with tendencies in contemporary art. One example might be Rachel Schragis’s graphic All Our Grievances Are Connected, whose circularity recalls Mark Lombardi’s schemes in a sort of simplified and pop version.

For their part, recognized artists such as Yoko Ono carried out collaborations with social movements, during the camp and afterwards. All these crossovers lead us to the question of the conversations with artistic institutions.

![Image of All Our Grievances Are Connected](image)

Fig. 10. Rachel Schragis, *All Our Grievances Are Connected*.

**Relationship with the Institution of “Art”**

In her book *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop speaks of what the participative turns of art have to do with big political events:

From a Western European perspective, the social turn in contemporary art can be contextualized by two previous historical moments, both synonymous with political upheaval and movements for social change: the historic avant-garde in Europe circa 1917, and the so-called ‘neo’ avant-garde leading to 1968. The conspicuous resurgence of participatory art in the 1990s leads me to posit the fall of communism in 1989 as a third point of transformation. Triangulated, these three dates form a narrative of the triumph, heroic last stand and collapse of a collectivist vision of society. Each phase has been accompanied by a utopian rethinking of art’s relationship to the social and of its political potential –manifested in a reconsideration of the ways in which art is produced, consumed and debated.\(^{50}\)

Perhaps the protests of 2011 have inaugurated a new period of participation and repoliticization of art, whose meaning is still difficult to evaluate. Bishop indicates how the immediately preceding wave of participation in art took place in the last decade of the 20th Century. In order to speak of the relationship between museums and social movements it would be useful to go back to the experiences which took place during the 1990s and the early 2000s\(^{51}\), when the first tentative steps to “museumify” autonomous dissidence started.

In 2011, coinciding with the development of the protest camps, there was a whole series of artistic and exhibition projects which reflected the wave of activism.\(^{52}\) It would be interesting to analyze, in their diversity of approach, the relationship between the camps and the spaces of the art world.


\(^{51}\) An important precedent is the workshop “De la acción directa como una de las bellas artes”, where different activist art groups gathered at an event organized by the Museu d’Art Contemporani in Barcelona. This encounter was followed by a curatorial project called “Las Agencias” where, under the aegis of the museum, activists developed shields, protection and other materials to use in mobilizations against the World Bank which would take place that same year.

\(^{52}\) It is relevant that Egypt’s representation at the Venice Biennale in 2011 showed the posthumous installation of the artist Ahmed Basiony, featuring recordings that he made during the first three days of the protest. Basiony was assassinated by Mubarak’s repressive forces on January 28, 2011.
Perhaps the most-discussed examples have been the Seventh Berlin Biennale and Documenta XIII in Kassel of 2012. Both cases involved events that placed the social movement itself within the institutional space.

During preparations for the Seventh Berlin Biennale, a document was sent inviting different Occupy groups around the world to take part in the event. The organizers offered to give the activists the ground floor of the KunstWerke exhibition space to carry out their activities. Within the building, people from all over the world would produce banners and hold assemblies.

In Madrid, this initiative was received with great reticence by activists who felt they were being invited to form part of a zoo. Indeed, the Biennale vaguely and disturbingly recalled the 19th Century universal exhibitions where “other ways of life” were displayed in the exhibition space for external contemplation.

The Documenta example is rather different, because here the camp had not been planned by the curatorial team. Taking the name dOCCUPY, a group of artists connected to the social movement but differentiated from it, decided to camp next to the Fridericianum Museum building. This occupation of the Documenta space could be read as part of a larger story if we place it in dialog with other editions, where the encounter between the five-yearly event and the protest camps had taken on different forms.

In 1997, during Documenta X, curated by Catherine David, “some three or four dozen political activists, media activists, photographers, film directors and artists” published a manifesto entitled Kein Mensch ist illegal (No one is illegal). Kam en Nedev speaks of the total novelty at that time of seeing an activist event inside an artistic venue. The manifesto would be the starting point for a coalition of autonomous anti-racist groups defending the freedom of movement for all people. From this

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53 Internal email list and conversations with the author. Archivo Físico15M, April 11, 2012.
54 See Florian Schneider, “Hackeando la frontera”, in Paloma Blanco, Jesús Carrillo, Jordi Claramonte and Marcelo Expósito, eds., Modos de hacer. Arte crítico, esfera pública y acción directa (Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2001), 208.
56 Personal conversation with the author, January 20, 2014.
group emerged the No Border network which in 2001 started to install its so-called No Border Camps “as near as possible”\textsuperscript{57} to national frontiers.\textsuperscript{58}

In Documenta XI, curated by Okwui Enwenzor, No Border, together with a group of gypsies at risk of being deported, would stage an event called “Platform 6” in front of the Friedericianum Museum.

This time, the event was not featured in the exhibition program. On August 1, 2002, the Publix Theater Caravan, a caravan of performing and media activists\textsuperscript{59} who formed part of No Border, parked their vehicle in the square in front of the museum. Once there, the idea was to convert the space into what they called a NoBorderZone, carrying out radio broadcasts, interviewing visitors and staging performative actions.\textsuperscript{60} After several hours of these activities, the security services of the event appeared on site. In his book Liar’s Poker, Brian Holmes describes some reactions from within the art world:

Okwui Enwezor, artistic director of Documenta, phoned New York. The curator Ute Meta Bauer and other collaborators and artists supported and intervened. Thomas Hirschhorn and other artists and workers at the event passionately debated the hierarchies of Documenta and the security systems. In brief, an intense night.\textsuperscript{61}

In spite of the support of the artistic team, the activists would be forced to show their documentation to the security staff and would later be evicted. In front of the building of the Documenta in 2002, real repression opposed the supposed freedom and autonomy of the art space.

\textsuperscript{58} During the summer of 2001, a whole series of settlements was set up simultaneously in places such as the Polish border, the Strait of Gibraltar, Tijuana, and Frankfurt airport. The camps were not only protest spaces but were also configured as communitarian experiments. The one at Strasbourg was the biggest example of this kind of enclave. See Gerald Raunig, Art and Revolution. Transversal Activism in the Long Twentieth Century (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2007), 245-265.
\textsuperscript{59} The Publix Theater Caravan is a project started in 2001 by members of the activist theater group Volxttheater Favoriten, which was founded in 1994. The Publix Theater Caravan is conceived as a nomadic caravan which forms part of the No Border network, where activists practice performative actions and media interventions. See Raunig, Art and Revolution, 245-265.
\textsuperscript{60} See “Publix Theater Caravan Moves on to the Documenta 11 in Kassel”, in No Border Network, online at: http://www.noborder.org/strasbourg/display/item_fresh.php%3Fid=138&lang=en.html.
\textsuperscript{61} Brian Holmes, “Liar’s Poker”, in Unleashing the Collective Phantom 87.
In the light of these precedents, one can see what happened in 2012 as a kind of iconographic reiteration of the question of the activist camp in front of the Friedericianum. It is as if in a re-enactment the situation has been corrected, changing its outcome to one that is more politically correct. Instead of being evicted, there was now a welcome on the part of the curatorial team. The curator herself took a stand, supporting Occupy and linking it to the glorious tradition of Documenta and the mythologized figure of Joseph Beuys:

It appears to me to be in the spirit of the moment and in the spirit of Joseph Beuys who marked Documenta and its history significantly, embodying another idea of collective decision making and political responsibility through direct democracy.\(^62\)

The reference to Beuys is something conscious on the part of the dOCCUPY movement itself, which has taken as a slogan the artist’s famous phrase that “everyone is an artist.”\(^63\) Both Documenta and the Biennale, as well as having their own versions of the dissident camp, also showed a selection of political art that can be related to the recent protests. To study the influence of protest on the artists, whether as an iconographic source, subject matter or body of practice, could be an interesting project. Sometimes, this influence is more explicit and concerns the participation of the artists themselves as subjects of activism. On other occasions, it is more a kind of Zeitgeist or spirit of the times.

In any case, this is a logical phenomenon, repeated a thousand times throughout the long history of art, which speaks of how political and cultural events influence artists. In this sense, asking about the relationship between Occupy and art or, in a wider sense, between art and political action, is to ask the oldest question of all, that which concerns the movement by which art and life become united and then get separated.

Conclusions

As we mentioned in the beginning of this article, all these forms of reading the relationship between Art and Occupy are strongly related to each other and are on many occasions overlap. The art historian has a

\(^{62}\) See “dOCUMENTA (13) Artistic Director welcomes the ‘occupy’ movement”, online at: http://d13.documenta.de/#/press/news-archive/press-single-view/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=159&cHash=e26d0e1a6f7cd3f679040003eb2aeb33

\(^{63}\) Aislinn White and Amy Walsh, “Occupy dOCUMENTA: The state of dOCCUPY” (August 2012), online at: http://www.inthetent.org/research/?p=496
privileged training for understanding the symbolic sense of protests which more and more give a central role to the image. In that sense, it would be important to start to outline an iconic history of street protest, also as a precondition for examining its influence on the “Art” of the museums.

Furthermore, the greater proximity of the social movements will impose the need that the art historian gets “contaminated” by methodologies that belong to other disciplines, such as sociology, history and political theory. Extensive interviews and fieldwork in the protests themselves are in any case desirable practices for the investigation of the aesthetics of protest and its artistic consequences.

The dialog between methodologies is perhaps the only way to get close to practices which move, in a real or simulated manner, in that complex intermediate zone, between art and political action, between the thought and its consequence.
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