

The Eternal Coexistence of Art and Politics

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Abstract

In this article, the relationship between politics and art is discussed, through a pertinent literature review. Functions of art are described and ways of promoting political ideas are delineated. Art has served regimes from the beginning of the existence of human societies and still does. It facilitates political discourse, but, it also provides us with new interpretations of reality, poses questions, judges and controverts governing ideas. Besides, art suggests solutions for present social troubles like environmental issues or refugee crisis. Art can serve propaganda or even bring communities together. Capitalistic oppression, colonization, human exploitation and expansive policy have been fought through art. Art inspires, leads, guides and supports every novel and radical movement worldwide. In this piece of writing, the contribution of art in political movements and revolutions of 20th and 21st centuries is analytically described. Options that refer to the frame of artistic creations and to the epoch they belong to are considered. Opinions of scholars are discussed and contradictions are depicted in order to shape an integrated view about the association among politics and art. Readers will gain knowledge of how to form a critical opinion and to avoid being only customers or consumers of art. But, we should also be co-formulators of social conditions, politics and our life in general, through the art, with the assistant of artists, and with the support of Official State.

Keywords: authorities, culture, influence, manipulation, revolution

Introduction

Is it possible to detach art from politics? To disconnect art from social life? It might be impossible. During the past, art has often been found, even though not exclusively, to serve upper social class. Art has performed before, and still does some times, political functions. At this point, we don't have to regard especially political art, that means the firm connection between art and authority in the framework of dictatorships and oppressive regimes.

Nevertheless, politics, in a broad sense, means the function of public architecture of sculptured monuments and of painted decorations in public places, especially the art of state orders. The character of art is also political and public, when it intends to endorse, to confirm the power and the value of a leader, to criticize institutions and customs, under direct or indirect governmental guidance. In modern countries, art has stopped to hand round authorities directly. Artists do not anymore serve royal “yards” or rich politicians. The wish of many artists but also of several public agents is declared and sure and this is to destroy any relation of dependence between art and politics. However, artistic production keeps including political content, in a wide sense of intervention and of views that record, deposit, criticize, and compare everything that happens around us. On the other hand, even though officially state mechanisms and persons don’t intervene neither control artistic creations, we have to admit that a series of institutions, like state scholarships, public Schools of Fine Arts e.t.c. construct a frame of support of artistic life under some terms. We could imply that all these people have the ability to interfere and a new, inevitable relationship between politics and art is affirmed in such way. Anyway, art has never stopped to co-exist with politics and it could be a means of dispute but also of praise of political ideas or politicians (Iliadi,2009).

Methodology: In this article, the relationship between art and politics is analytically discussed through an applicable literature review. Articles from scientists who are adjacent to radical ideology are mostly used, but also opposing opinions are depicted. The extension of this research could be a qualitative study that would include interviews, focus groups and other ways of collecting data that would help us to clarify the topic and draw safe conclusions about the interaction between art and politics.

The relationship between art and politics-political functions of art

There are a lot of scientists who believe that art has a direct effect on social and political issues, but artists have to stay away, to be neutral or at least they should not adopt specific political approaches. In an article of Demirel et. al. (2012) where the researchers ask from subjects to express their point of view about the relationship between art and politics, the participants praise the role of the art in the procedure of emergence of issues of freedom or change of social structure but they seem to separate it from politics. It is really very strange, because most of views today favor the relation and interaction between these two fields: art and politics. Furthermore, art usually serves political interests, by will or unwillingly.

Is really art independent from politics as many intellectuals argue? The truth is that such neutrality does not exist. Even artists who claim that they are detached from politics reveal their beliefs through their attitude of distancing. Furthermore, art is performed under the commends of state authorities, so nonpartisanship is difficult to be accomplished. The collective volume named “The Routledge Companion to Art and Politics” (2015) describes and discusses such issues of involvement between art and politics. If art remained neutral or just a reflection of social events, without interfering, we may would have excellent decorations and romantic poems and stories but this would degrade art and separate it from

its real functions and purposes. Politically engaged art could lead us to a better, or even ideal future or, on the other hand, serve marginalized conceptions which will never be spread and be applicable. Often, issues of representation arise, since there are not clear limits and it is not sure who the artist represents. Him/her self or social groups and other people in general? For example, vulnerable groups of people or political parties. We should also bear in mind circumstances and present technological innovations which give artists the ability to present their work not only in galleries, churches or libraries but also in Social Media and other means of communication. Consequently, ordinary people have more opportunities to live experiences related to art and also to criticize works of art and their creators. In addition, the definition of art has changed, since industrialization of science, art, and design are factors that enlarged artistic exposition, so we wonder what is art and what is not. Our society is characterized from inequality and art has to confront such issues not just by describing them but also giving solutions and why not, starting revolutions. Art has its own theory, its own politics, practices and occupies its own space in social field. Art is tightly linked to economy. It uses economy in order to distribute its products, it increases consumption and provides income. It gives jobs but also can influence economical proceedings through changing present situations or proposing new politics.

For example, we can see in various articles, the emphasis given to the versatile relationship between art and politics and the highlighting of different options of their interaction. Art not only contributes to political dialogue, often supporting status quo, but also, many times it gives different interpretations of reality, asks questions, criticizes and questions dominant notions but as well proposes solutions about current social problems like environmental issues or refugee crisis. Art can serve propaganda or even assemble communities with the help of projects which aim to the reviving of relationships between citizens and to the finding of solutions about social problems (Mesch, 2014)

Socialist realism was dominant in the countries of former Soviet Union aiming to serve the regime, to distribute socialistic ideas and to present an “ideal” situation of the nation, to the citizens, but also abroad. Consequently, the moral of proletarians would be reinforced and the purposes of the governors could be fulfilled.

Picasso and other artists of his epoch created works that were obviously against war, confronted colonial and capitalistic oppression and favored socialistic prototype. Art works like Guernica intended to demonstrate the horror of war, to awake consciences and to contribute to the change of paradigm. If we try to review pre- and post- war art of 20th century, we can easily observe that a kind of art not engaged to political purposes is difficult to be found. Most of the artists of 20th century serve the purposes of anti-war movement or the aims of socialistic revolution or the defense of human rights (Mesch,2014) However, we must not omit some exceptions like German romantic artists of the beginning of 20th century who followed the prototype of detached artist and were searching for beauty and satisfaction afar from society (Rasidaki, 2018)

Concerning socialism and communism in Africa, the truth is that the effects of Soviet Union have been obvious in several countries where we can observe the flourishing of socialist realism and other types of art that supported the specific political paradigm.

In the meantime, during the process and after the ending of DE-colonization, artists have gradually created an image of Africa, that was liberated from the colonial trammels and its cultural effects. A tremendous cultural change contributed to the independence movements in Ghana, Algeria, Nigeria, Kenya, and Zaire, among other countries. Modern art that African artists created in Nigeria, Ethiopia, Cote d'Ivoire, South Africa, and Benin, collectively rejected Western ideas of "primitiveness". African art became bit by bit a part of the repertoire of modern art. Although in various places of Africa, different sub-cultures dominate, and African continent is segregated in different types of civilization, what connects all African artists during this period is the characteristic of DE-colonization and its result that is to re-determine African subject. South-African modern artistic production confronted the local system of apartheid-an African word for segregation from 1948-1994, that reassured that white minority would keep the control of the state and the organizations. South-African artists, black and white, resisted to this unfair system and ideology and some cultural organizations did also. A characteristic example are the journalistic photos of Jantjes . They depict the massacre of Sharpeville in 1960, when 69 unarmed protesters against apartheid were murdered from the police and other 180 were wounded. Generally, after the liberation of several African countries, folkloric art flourished, local languages were in the center of the interest and various forms of art works were created including paintings, sculptures, literature e.t.c. African continent at last became the possessor of its own culture, releasing its unique spirit and distinctiveness (Mesch, 2014)

From Australia to America and from Europe to Africa, art is an important medium through which political messages are transported. The ways used differ between cultures and include not only works of art but also objects of everyday use like cloths or advertisements on labels of products or even decoration of furniture, or at the extreme edge, decoration of human body. Protests of Australian Aborigines against unfair state measures and politics, claims and fights of Africans against apartheid and numerous demonstrations around the globe often use art in order to convey their messages. Anti-colonial art, like in case of Africa, described above, also takes place in other countries and continents. Such kind of art often met the resistance of Western civilization and had to adapt, developing new forms and ways of expression. Sometimes artists became leaders who guided their people to liberation and art played an important role in the process of change from authoritarian regimes to democracy (MacClancy (editor)-1997).

A characteristic example of politically engaged art is Ken Loaches and Louis Edouard's work. In the book "Dialogue about art and politics" (2021) they explain analytically the aim of their work which is the challenge of established situation, the critique against capitalistic oppression, the awakening of consciousnesses and the promotion of socialistic ideas. In movies like "I Daniel Blake", "Cathy come home", "labor rights" and many others, political ideas and radical intentions of Ken Loach are evident. He argues that the purpose of art is not

pleasure, but, on the contrary, is to describe awful reality in a way that makes us want to change it. So, he doesn't support beauty but truth. Edouard Louis is also a “rebel”, a younger one, who challenges organization and ethics of present society but by his unique way. He fights his own battle confronting stereotypes about gay people and LGBT community. His books are not only a “coming out” but also a means of criticizing capitalistic order. Above artists confirm the ideas of followers of political engagement of art. They open “windows” for the audience in order to discover hidden truths and options of reality that capitalists know very well how to conceal it. Their works are not only pieces of art but also “valuable lessons” for us. For people who want to learn how to protect themselves from capitalistic exploitation and to explore new ways of political function and living in general.

Art describes, interprets, and criticizes. It is a kind of political dialogue or it contributes to the political discourse. It complicates our understanding and our perception of the world (Möller, 2016). However, art creations are not always political. Sometimes artists represent just themselves but often they are the representatives of other people and fight for the interests and human rights of vulnerable social groups. Frequently, art is the activator of social change and it is an essential ingredient of political procedures. But, we don't have to forget aesthetics and functions of art that intent to the pleasure. The message can be conveyed by various ways such as text, image, sound, theatrical performance and every means that is available and desired from the creator. There is a distinction between fine arts and popular art, but, in my point of view, the main differentiation we have to make is between politically engaged art and “neutral art”. Nevertheless, we must always have in mind that some times, a plain depiction of reality could turn to political art. For example, personal (taken by people who are not artists) photos could convey political messages or journalistic photos could be considered in some circumstances as art works. Art can become a description of a future utopia, without being political. Many artists embrace political parties and ideologies or movements but others communicate their messages without being attached to any political approach. Issues like those of anti-war movement have been strongly supported by various art works. But, we must not forget that art is not science. So, it cannot be considered as evidence based field. However, artists play a significant role in social change and are respected for their contributions and their efforts. And last, but not least, we must always have in mind the environment and the background in which an artist has been born, grown, developed and lived. Furthermore, his/her political views are important to know, even when they are hidden effectively. Nobody comes to earth isolated from the environment. Art works are a result of inspiration and hard work of the artist, but they are also affected from the life experience and the heritage of their creators.

Art is not only a reflection of reality, but, in many circumstances, it creates reality. How? By constructing new worlds which contain prototypes, models, scenarios, narratives and stereotypes that are spread through society and influence politics at the end of this complicated procedure. For many intellectuals like Edelman (1995) art plays a significant role in social procedures and functions providing the frame and the paths on which we build our lives. New ideas emerge from works of art and also ways of protesting, validating and finally changing reality. Mythological or historical figures like Antigoni and Prometheus

shape our concepts about resistance to authority and heroism while other forms of art guide us and shape our character and reactions in real life situations (for example, Kipling's poem "If", 1895) ".....If you can dream-and not make dreams your master, if you can think -and not make thoughts your aim, if you can meet with Triumph and Disaster, and treat those two impostors just the same, if you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken, twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, or watch the things you gave your life to broken, and stoop and build'em up in worn-out tools..." Murray's approach is a very special one because he argues that art creates, not only relates with reality. However, it is not only forms of art that influence society but also its sub-products that influence language, ethics, habits, institutions, science, and civilization as a whole. So, we have to be careful when we talk about politically engaged art because, in a broad sense, every form of art is political and not neutral or independent from social occasions and transactions.

Political extremes and the utilization of art

Except of moderate opinions, there are also views that we could dare to argue that they approach the "extremes" and are related to politically engaged art. This kind of art aims not only to influence political situation but it also should contribute to the change of the world in which we all live. In her research (2017), Tsiamoura Ioanna describes analytically the connection between art and politics through a radical approach and simultaneously criticizes this association and its effects. Apart from description and review of the progressive artistic movements of past and current centuries, she also gives directions to the reader: how we can use art as a catalyst of social change and as an instrument of distrust of every oppressive or "outdated" authority. There are numerous examples in history in which artistic work has been the "tinder" in order to light the flame of social struggles and also the originator of emancipation of whole generations which were "thirsty" for equality, justice and other political or human rights and gave fights in order to improve their life and lives of future generations. For example, art in former Soviet Union has been a politically engaged art that served the new society which was built from workers and proletarians, although it has been challenged from ideologically opponents as propaganda. May of '68, as a political movement, has been supported from literature, music and other types of art. Even today, issues like the protection of environment or human rights are in the center of the work of artists who aim to the awakening of the society or they would like to protest, or even suggest solutions about severe social troubles. In the work of Tsiamoura, the idea of coexistence of art and life is diffusible (this idea is based on political movements of past century), and also is the highlighting of this relationship as a key ingredient of the society. Art often confronts with politics but also coexists with political aims or serves them by will, by force or sometimes, unconsciously.

Rigopoulos has similar opinion as the above. In his article "Art, audience, and (political) movement in the journal "Marxism Books" (2016) he supports that the dominant social class does not only read but also creates the cultural situation. Every artist is defined from his/her life needs, from ethics and trends of his/her era and also from the mutual taste that is socially imposed even if there is a will to surpass it. Above commitments are (for some artists) a

blessing and they give them a sense of security, but, for others are a mental “prison” that oppresses them. Some of them have earnings while they serve the status quo and the current trends but others risk and resist even if they have negative consequences. According to Marx, “the art is a way of absorbing the world”. Due to Rigoroulos, a radical movement, in order to inspire, it has to absorb the ways of art.

We don't need a caricature of cultural dominance but we have to prepare the frame of original examination by which we can construct another paradigm. Cultural production “gives birth to a product for the need but also a need for the product” according to Engels. The good of pleasure that an artist gives to us gives birth to the need of his/her acceptance (from the audience). Without the presence of a cultural movement that could cancel brutality of our times, artists could be absorbed in this brutality or be lost forever.

The approach of Yanis Varoufakis, (ex minister of Economics in Greece) is also radical as the latter we have just discussed. In his article for “The Newspaper of Editors” (2018) titled “Art in our deeply class-segregated society) he argues that art is dangerous and that it intends to (due to Picasso) function as a war weapon and not a decoration. Those in power have to fear people who own means of artistic expression. Those who control culture of a country, also control society. Those who control the distribution of income also have power over cultural production. The more a society is divided into social classes the more cruelty will be used by people who are favored and turn art to a weapon of massive manipulation that is used in the field of social war. People who have the political power order works of art, they buy art, they control and guide museums, galleries, they guide Media, and enhance the anti-aesthetics. Whatever they do is performed in the frame of reproduction of power, that is a prerequisite of distribution of their dominance over culture. We have to democratize society by fighting the interests of the ruling class. We should discontinue the relation between production of wealth and production of cultural prototypes. We have to surpass selfish interventions and turn art to an instrument for protection of victims of the war between social classes and so, we will bring democracy to society. Qualitative artistic interventions are needed in our neighborhoods, in underrated public schools, and in places that are not popular. We need (according to Gramsci) to fight for qualitative, progressive and dominant cultural production. Art that is attached to a political party or movement is undervalued. It loses its quality and directedness. It is bad art. But we have to remember that art is deeply political and good art is (due to Picasso) a means of cultural war. We are dedicated not to use art for political reasons but to be inspired from it. It is important to keep in mind what art shares with progressive original political movements or social struggles. In an ideal society artist are respected as they should be and we pay to them more respect than to other professionals like bankers or members of elite in general.

Gender and LGBT issues in relation to art

Concerning other facets of reality, like gender issues and gay movements, art has played a significant role during the past, especially in recent years (after 1950). One of the first intellectuals who focused on the emergence of homosexual “culture” and the relevant

political approaches was Michel Foucault with his work “The history of sexuality”. Besides, we must not forget Sigmund Freud, the famous psychoanalyst whose work emphasized on the repression of sexuality. Furthermore, Neo –Marxist philosophers like Marcuse claimed that sexual repression was a negative effect of advanced capitalism in industrialized society. Homosexuality took on particular if marginalized importance in theories of sexuality put forward by Western Marxism in the postwar era. Where mainstream or canonized surrealists such as Andre Breton were generally “homophobes”, other surrealist thinkers like Cesar Moro considered the movement to be a vehicle that could forward notions of homosexual desire that fused with revolutionary goals that is with socialist and political liberation.

Many gay artists were afraid to uncover their true nature because of stigma and biases that were spread in society. Others used art in order to serve gay or queer movements .1969 Stonewall riots gave a boost to the “revolution” of gay people in order to restore their place in social order and fight prejudices and disgrace. We are able to remember lots of names. Among them are Andy Warhol and Jasper Johns, who were pioneers in the highlighting of homosexuality in art. Earlier twentieth –century artists had also dealt with gay culture. Marsden Hartley and Charles Demuth are among them. Scholars, artists and politicians who supported feminist movements followed and 21st century welcomed homosexuality issues with open mind initiating new paths of expression and artistic creation. LGBT rights are supported by movements and individuals. Music, literature, theater and other kind of arts give homosexuals a step to express themselves and governments have begun to be more friendly and supportive to social groups of LGBT, homosexuals, queer e.t.c. Nevertheless, there are still many obstacles, due to prejudices against those social groups. AIDS epidemic has been an occasion that enhanced the appearance of homophobic ideas and actions. However, troubles were surpassed and society can be proud about the progress that has been made concerning the issues of homosexuality, art and politics (Mesch, 2014).

An exceptional example of how art assists homosexual movements and claims is “feminist “her story” theater”. An initiative that aimed to promote issues of inclusion, to fight discrimination against the group of women/LGBT+ soldiers, and to enhance visibility and empowerment of this special category of professionals. This special kind of event took place in Army at the Fringe, an unusual theater located in Army Headquarters in Edinburg’s Hepburn House Army Reserve centre. Through performances and acting of traditional, but also controversial roles, participants managed to stir up issues concerning discrimination in the army forces where unfortunately men’s culture dominates and women soldiers have to fit in their behavior with the mainstream culture, neglecting their own needs and dreams. Such efforts should be repeated in order to face problems relating to LGBT issues and are paradigms of how art involves in social and political issues and how much important is the participation of art in society (Dolan & Danilova,2022).

Conclusion

From all the above, it has been evident that art and politics are strongly attached. During past centuries art has served oppressive regimes several times but also has been a catalyst for social revolutions and positive changes. Some artists support political movements more overtly but others' ideas are concealed in their work and we have to be careful in order to discover hidden meanings. Each work of art is a result of its epoch and we have to “read” its messages through the right lenses and filters that help us to understand circumstances of every period. Furthermore, every artist is a special individual whose experiences have shaped his/her ideas and worldview, consequently his work. We can never appreciate a work of art excluding its frame. Moreover, we have to bear in mind that politics are a form of art, the art of persuading and shaping social reality. So, politicians could use any means of influence, like art creations for example. Art provides us with pleasure, awakens consciences, opens new windows in order for us to discover hidden facets of reality, creates new ideas and enhances social change, gives alternative interpretations of our surroundings, gives us a step to express ourselves.

As citizens we have to support art and artistic creation and generate those conditions that enhance seamless artistic expression. Art could be a vehicle of change but also an instrument of manipulation. So, we have to be careful and try not to be prone to every cultural product that is provided to us but we have to be open-minded and critical, so we can be benefited to the utmost grade from art. Art could be considered as a “gift” given to humanity in order to beautify our lives but also serve our purposes. Let's get advantage of this “gift” with the best ways we could.

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