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Art as Action: The "Activist" Turn in Participatory Art

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Abstract

In the process of morphological iteration, contemporary art has continuously incorporated "action" as a dynamic element, serving as a crucial dimension for expanding art's function of public participation and forging novel relationships between art, society, and politics. With the rise of participatory art and relational art, the modes of presentation and performance in contemporary public art have undergone new transformations. Art as action has increasingly evolved into a transmedia platform that accommodates diverse identities and cultural identifications, enables the expression of various social issues, and ultimately converges under the rubric of "art activism." Its impact far exceeds the boundaries of culture and art, representing the latest phenomenon in the mutual integration and evolution of contemporary art and 21st-century civic movements.

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Art as Action: Centering on the "Activist" Turn in Participatory Art

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Abstract

In the iterative evolution of contemporary art forms, "action" has been continuously introduced as a dynamic element, serving as a crucial dimension for expanding art's public participatory functions and constructing new relationships between art, society, and politics. With the rise of participatory art and relational art, new transformations have emerged in the exhibition modes of contemporary public art. Art as action has increasingly become a cross-media platform that accommodates diverse identities and cultural recognitions, enabling the expression of various social issues, ultimately converging under the

思潮 of "art activism." Its impact extends far beyond the cultural and artistic sphere, representing the latest phenomenon in the evolving integration of contemporary art and 21st-century civic movements.

Keywords: art action; participatory art; relational art; art activism

I. "Action" as an Artistic Element: Reasons for Its Prominence and Evolutionary Trajectory

After modernism established flatness and medium specificity as core concepts opposing mimesis and reality, painting and sculpture continuously advanced toward pure formal simplification, culminating in the extremes of pure conceptual art and minimalism. However, under this trend, artworks became increasingly closed-off existences. Avant-garde art, originally intended as a form of oppositional expression, gradually acquired the elitist label of "high art," losing its potential to critique institutions and comment on contemporary issues, thereby deepening its alienation from audiences. Consequently, artists attempted to break through the limitations of materiality, concepts, and rules, employing novel methods and materials to attract and actively invite viewers to participate in the creation and exhibition process, hoping to stimulate viewers' senses, inspire full-body experiences, and enable diverse interactions with artistic objects, thereby achieving complete dissemination of artistic concepts. Against this backdrop, performance art evolved from sporadic experiments into a sweeping trend across the art world.

Performance art, prevalent in the 1960s, took up the banner of resistance from conceptual art, asserting that "the medium of art is merely the concept." It emphasized that art could exist without physical objects (opposing the commodification of art) and could occur anywhere (resisting organized institutions like galleries and museums). Through the live nature of artistic events and their irreproducible contingent effects, performance art combated the increasingly developed and marketized art world, thereby maintaining art's autonomy. The rebelliousness of performance art not only similarly invited viewers to reverse their roles from passive to active but further blurred the boundaries between various art forms and traditional art education's emphasis on specific media. Artists such as Vito Acconci, Bruce Nauman, Marina Abramović, and Yoko Ono mostly traversed different domains like literature, theater, music, and dance in their works, or integrated various media such as painting, slide projectors, film, and video into their performances, increasing the difficulty of defining performance art.

The transformation of viewing modes from pre-modern to modern times also changed the forms of artistic participation constituted by audiences. Broadly speaking, this represents a directional shift from traditional passive reception (reception), or a contemplative aesthetic model, toward audiences actively intervening, collaborating, and even cooperating to complete the artwork. On one hand, the proportion of art forms such as activities, events, processes, and per-

formances has continuously increased in contemporary art, with artists increasingly inclined to complete their artistic creation in dynamic exhibition spaces. On the other hand, this shift includes changes in social consciousness embedded within the transformation of artistic concepts, with this art aimed at promoting community connection and shaping public space permeated with greater political significance. These two interconnected shifts in social thought and aesthetic forms were manifested in avant-garde movements of the first half of the 20th century and continued in a series of social movements in the latter half, typified by the Situationist movement surrounding France's "May 1968" events, a series of art expressions related to the communist system in Eastern Europe, community art emerging in Central and South America, community art popular in European and American communities in recent decades, various art biennials belonging to institutional art curation, and other art forms with educational reform and community participation purposes.

This turn stems from both the internal logic of art's evolution and is directly related to certain external cultural and social factors. The museum skepticism proposed by avant-garde art represents one such factor, gaining increasing recognition among artists as a perspective questioning art exhibitions.

As an intermediary institution connecting art and life while spatially demarcating the boundary between them, museums can maintain a certain distance between the two yet cannot completely separate them. The emergence of art as an autonomous domain occurred in 18th-century Europe, dependent on two main prerequisites: the emergence of a unified concept of art and the establishment of related institutions, such as museums. In Foucault's view, the museum is a "heterotopia" that spatially separates artworks from the world of everyday life. In this space that maintains distance from the outside world, artworks are systematically displayed by theme and era, thereby constructing a functional domain for art's self-regulation and maintaining art's independent status relative to other social subsystems. Without the space of exhibition and collection provided by museums, artworks could not be separated from daily life, and art could not exist as an independent domain. Because museums serve as buffers between art and life, one of their responsibilities is to distinguish which objects are artworks that can be collected and which are not artworks and must be excluded. Moreover, when artworks are moved into art museums, they are severed from their original contexts—in other words, museums preserve "old objects" rather than "artworks" that should maintain organic connections with social life. However, museums also have more positive significance: they provide (and even impose) a new way of viewing old objects, particularly by displaying objects from various eras chronologically, implying that art has a single linear development. In fact, this chronological display method, beginning at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries, remains the basic mode of museum permanent exhibitions to this day, mirroring the chronological structure of general art history.

Since the late 20th century, the issue of "display" has become not only a con-

cern for museum scholars but also a topic art historians are eager to explore, because "display" involves not only spatial arrangement, lighting design, and viewer experience but also, for art historians, how museums display their collections implies specific considerations about what kind of art historical narrative is being constructed. If we see from the history of collecting and the art market how art transactions, circulation, and collection shape "art" and "art history," then what historical changes have the spaces accommodating these art collections undergone? In fact, the salon exhibition is widely regarded as the prototype of modern European public art display activities. Since the French Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture (Académie Royale de Peinture et de Sculpture) began regularly holding "Salon" exhibitions in 1737, the Salon became the representative official contemporary art exhibition in France, with issues such as its mechanisms, cultural politics, and art criticism becoming hot topics in art history research. In Thomas Crow's description, the Salon was a public space in formation—"a public sphere for discussion, debate, and free exchange of views once again became something extraordinary. It appears that those things not done for the first time are no longer objects of awe for brilliant cultural distant observation, which has no place in this culture; the part of Salon audiences freely expressing opinions, encouraged by self-centered critics, will actively question existing hierarchical arrangements." The Salon was not "a spectacle composed of passive viewers but an opportunity for active viewer participation and judgment," and its aesthetic value should no longer be defined from the perspective of despotism.

Although the 1851 London Great Exhibition did not include painting displays, subsequent world expositions basically all had art categories and even dedicated art exhibition halls. Also in 1851, London saw the first international art exhibition, "General Exhibition of Pictures by the Living Artists of the Schools of All Countries." Thereafter, from the late 19th century, other European cities successively developed independent international art exhibitions, such as the first Munich International Art Exhibition in 1869 and the inaugural Venice Biennale (La Biennale di Venezia) in 1895. Entering the 20th century, exhibitions became necessary activities and events for modern and contemporary art, even constituting an important driving force for their development. Not only did various artist groups or schools publish artistic manifestos through exhibitions, but galleries and museums also promoted modern art and even shaped art through exhibitions.

The historical transformation from salon to museum did not stop there; breaking through the threshold of museum exhibition space became a major trend in contemporary art. The questioning of museums' authoritative status not only spawned a series of art destruction and confrontational actions but also led artists to attempt to display art in broader public spaces. In fact, this continued the Enlightenment dream of civic political participation—once people could freely discuss art and even politics in public space, then building a public sphere where all citizens could widely participate in dialogue and freely discuss politics seemed not far off. It can be said that contemporary artists have revived the

Enlightenment promise, believing that art can serve as a resource for discussing free public values and become a bond for communication between individuals and groups.

The transformation of museums originated from the will and demands of modern artists, who viewed existing museums as representational systems built upon art historical classification work. As an interdisciplinary disciplinary activity that reproduces social reality, museum collection and display were too hierarchical, where representativeness, replaceability, and exemplarity constituted a complete set of procedures symbolizing social regulatory mechanisms. They had no intention of threatening existing art museums but wanted to be like previous owners of "cabinets of curiosities," gathering objects in containers of varying sizes based on their own sensibilities or chance encounters with them, establishing their own personal museums, conducting exhibitions with existing hardware and software facilities, and coexisting with them. The creative method of collecting certain scattered objects and shaping "personal museums" (musée personnel) based on the model of "anthropological museums" attracted many artists to follow, becoming a trend. Through comparison between the two types of museums, the public could also access voices "screened out" by museums and see other messages forgotten in the outside world.

Once museum scholars conducted theoretical discussions and subsequently proposed the concept of new museums, the greatest impact was naturally on contemporary artists' creative concepts and artistic expression forms. Consequently, artists either installed their works in ruins and ruins, stood in public places (such as parks, gardens, stations, squares) to "dialogue" directly with audiences, or integrated personal creation with museum architectural structures to become "museum-art live situations." Additionally, many artists gathered personal collections of certain objects, intending to control every aspect from collection and classification to display, aiming to create private museums.

Historically, Marcel Duchamp's creation of "ready-mades" was the origin of this great transformation. Ready-mades, like stones and wood, were regarded as materials for artworks, and the distinction between artworks and real objects gradually disappeared. On one hand, this meant that "objects" (object) transferred from their background roles into artworks, possessing the possibility of conveying "art" to audiences and resonating with them. On the other hand, "objects" were part of the living environment, and their transformation into artworks meant that "artistic dialogue" (communication between artists and viewers) would expand into the living environment. Artists searching for artistic expression materials and venues for displaying their creations in living environments made possible the "outdoorization" of museums and the "integration of living environments as a whole." Duchamp's creative concepts continuously inspired later generations. His method of incubating his personal museum through suitcase boxes and having them collected by art museums was emulated by numerous followers.

Evidently, in contemporary art's series of reflections on "objecthood," aided by

the material abundance of consumer society, materials for artistic creation became more diverse, and art exhibitions moved beyond closed spaces. Exhibition activities mobilized various forms of energy, replacing static viewing with the dynamic movement of materials, making random, contingent behaviors, events, and interactive kinetic installations the mainstream of art. The traditional concept of art being sealed for preservation after completion, influenced by French theories of "rupture," "implosion," and "sacrifice," combined with the nuclear threat shadow of the Cold War in the 1960s, gave rise to "self-destructive art" that is destroyed immediately after creation. Artists' breakthroughs in "objecthood" could subvert and expand the possibilities of artistic creation. Moreover, the prominence of action elements in art aligned with conceptual art's pursuit of "de-materialization." The understanding of "objecthood" further determined the difference in creative thinking between traditional art (relying on material elements such as frames, pigments, exhibition spaces, and preservation environments) that appeals to perception and sensation and conceptual art, particularly minimalism. Attempts at "de-materialization" in various ways, as Lucy Lippard stated, represent "a practice that reduces the importance of material characteristics… what matters is not how much materiality a work contains, but what the artist does with materiality."

However, after the 1960s, as Thierry de Duve stated: "Today, the general public has lost all interest in contemporary art; in it, they see nothing but the reign of 'whatever,' while the established forces in the art world strive to prove to the public, or perhaps to themselves, that this 'whatever' is not 'anything goes.' As for the feeling toward this 'whatever,' it is now rarely constituted by fear and anger; in most cases, it is constituted by indifference." Artists' creations were increasingly influenced by other disciplines and discursive thinking, with various political theories and political demands becoming important constituent elements in art. Artworks carried more implicit political elements, which were manifested in relational art and participatory art.

II. The Distinction Between Relational Art and Participatory Art

It can be said that participatory art gained its clear contours through a series of debates with other art criticism, among which the argument with relational art is particularly important. "Relational art" is a term coined by French art critic, historian, and curator Nicolas Bourriaud, who proposed this concept in his eponymous essay collection published in 1998. He used relational aesthetics and relational art to describe art creation and exhibitions from the 1990s that emphasized "social consciousness." Bourriaud, drawing from his practical experience as a curator and the insights of a frontline art practitioner, promised to redefine the agenda of contemporary art criticism because he believed these works could no longer be viewed through the traditional understanding of 1960s art history and its values. In the popular post-1960s continuous art vision, emerging artistic phenomena (ranging from installation art to ironic painting

and large-scale public architecture) were all non-political celebrations of social surfaces, complicit products colluding with the spectacle constructed by capitalist consumer culture.

In Bourriaud's theoretical presupposition, art as a common event occurring in public space, through alternative social "interstices"—like the mode of production Marx defined as escaping the normal operation of capitalism—connects originally unrelated social levels, thereby generating alternative social realities. Moreover, art functions like an alternative social service, allowing originally isolated social realities to enable perceptual form interactions among different groups within an artistic framework, achieving openness at the social level. Bourriaud calls this artistic communication activity occurring in public space "relational form," where subject agency is brought into the preset framework of art. The display or creation of relationships occurs among audiences, participants, and artists, with these different participating subjects connected by the seemingly invisible work themes of art. At this level, Bourriaud expanded the boundaries of traditional aesthetic research, incorporating and making analyzable and discussable the destabilization of artworks and the eventfulness of artistic processes. Bourriaud believed that as a "relational" form that can directly represent social and cultural attributes, the "micro" and "macro" network connections in social processes can be clearly presented and examined in artistic activities.

Relational art formally emerged in the 1990s. With the popularity of the internet and virtual network concepts, artists strove to communicate diversely with audiences by creating participatory installations and activities. Such artists refused to produce traditional art objects, instead choosing to attract audiences and promote connections among participants by setting up different interaction methods, creating game settings, and sometimes even requiring interpersonal interaction. The main participants in relational art as defined by Bourriaud include Thai artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, Liam Gillick, Carsten Höller, etc. Simultaneously, the concept of relational aesthetics, through the publication of its eponymous monograph, brought public attention to participatory art to another peak. In what is considered an iconic case of relational art, in 1992 art dealer Gavin Brown helped artist Tiravanija transform the 303 Gallery on Greene Street into an operational kitchen for an exhibition titled "Untitled (Free)." The artist cooked a pot of Thai green curry on-site and invited visitors to eat it with white rice in the gallery, establishing a redefinition of the accidental and open relationship between public (gallery) and private space (kitchen), and among artist-artwork-viewer from both the artist's own performance and the invitation for audience participation. In this perhaps most-cited relational art case, Tiravanija moved all items from an art gallery's storage room and office into the exhibition space and staged his work in the back room; the art included cooking Thai food for his audience. The audience became active participants, first finding the secret room, then consuming the food, and engaging in conversation with the artist and each other.

Art scholar Claire Bishop criticized certain aspects of these art projects labeled "relational art," arguing that artists like Tiravanija and Gillick did not democratize art but merely reinforced their pre-existing, closed art world, thereby ignoring its implicit class politics. In Bishop's view, relational artist Thomas Hirschhorn provided an alternative by emphasizing potential social antagonisms. At the 11th Documenta in Kassel, Hirschhorn collaborated with locals from nearby low-income immigrant communities to build a temporary structure serving as a community debate venue for the writings of French philosopher Georges Bataille. Participants from the community could express their views on Bataille in a temporary television studio, thereby becoming part of the art while viewing it.

Currently, combining art's social practice and environmental issues with the excavation of local cultural values has become a popular international art trend. Bishop analyzed and compared the community art movement that emerged in the UK since the 1970s, selecting the "Artist Placement Group" (APG), which aimed to democratize amateur creation, as a comparative research object. These artists generally possessed multiple social identities. Beginning in the 1960s, they attempted to be placed in public institutions and government departments such as radio stations, airlines, and railway bureaus. By emphasizing artists' social and political attributes and moving the site of artistic creation to production lines, business offices, and public service spaces, they created so-called "art in context," attempting to make artistic creativity and processes exert influence and transformative power on factories, enterprises, and governments, and even changing the consciousness of those working in these institutions. Bishop believed that compared to the grassroots nature of community art movements and their characteristic of not requiring professionalism (anyone can participate), APG, starting from the creativity of contemporary artist groups, placed more emphasis on the process of artistic creation than on completed works. As a social practice, it was obviously more elitist, with distinct New Left progressiveist ideology in its ideology. Summarizing its overall goal with one of its artistic slogans, it was "participation-production-propulsion." However, these movements provided exemplary references for later artists—especially practitioners engaged in socially participatory art—and also expanded art's boundaries, challenging traditional definitions of art.

In summary, regardless of whether these arts are named "relational" or "participatory," they generally share several basic characteristics:

4. The creator's complete artistic conception requires feedback from the audience's bodily senses to be finished;

Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship*, London and New York: Verso Press, 2012, pp.163-191.

5. Acknowledging the importance of "site specificity";

That is to say, inverting the oppositions between individual/collective, author/viewer, active/passive, real life/pure art, but not completely dismantling them. For example, Bourriaud believed that art in the 1990s took "the sphere of human interaction and its social context as its theoretical horizon, rather than a claim to an independent and private symbolic space." In other words, relational artworks attempt to establish intersubjective encounters (whether literal or potential) in which meaning is collectively elaborated rather than in the private space of individual consumption. This means the work stands opposed to the goals of Greenbergian modernism.

In this regard, relational art is not an independent, movable, trans-contextual artwork but is instead a product "overdetermined" by contingencies of environment and audience. The collective constituted by art participants is conceived as a community: unlike the one-to-one relationship between artwork and viewer, relational art sets up a situation in which the audience becomes nodes in topological structures that are not closed and self-sufficient. Instead, they frequently encounter conflicts, ruptures, and recombinations, thereby generating, flowing, and transforming into a heterogeneous "assemblage," thus distancing itself from substantial constructivist thinking and extending generative connections to other social complexes.

The problem is that not all participatory art conforms to "Relational Aesthetics." Compared to participatory art's "deconstruction"—its critique of art institutions and expansion of art's definition—relational aesthetics' "construction" is based on social interaction generated by art exhibitions, oriented toward "creating a world of interpersonal relationships."

When defining artworks within the horizon of relational aesthetics, Bourriaud invoked Marx's term "social interstice"—"all artistic creation is a social interstice (L'œuvre d'art comme interstice social)." He believed relational art emerged from the highly marketized and alienated production relations of the post-industrial era, escaping from uniform and homogeneous gaps and expanding these gaps into anti-site "heterotopias" separated from real society. Artists, like architects, through exhibitions, invite viewers to flip diverse social identities together and rebuild a direct experience of the present. Under relational aesthetics' value orientation that emphasizes social effects over artistic forms, it stresses changing specific spatial layouts and functions, theatricalizing public space, and activating connections among various participants and actors within it through the temporariness of events.

However, the openness of relational aesthetics simultaneously leads to ambiguity in social meaning and aesthetic standards. In her essay "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," Bishop questioned: "(In relational aesthetics) what kind of social relations are created? For whom? And for what purpose?" to point out that relational aesthetics lacks a critical system of self-reflection. Specifically, Bishop questioned artists like Tiravanija and Gillick, whom Bourriaud

cited as examples, arguing that the "relations" reflected in their works were often reproductions of existing social relations, while art practice in these artistic agenda settings merely functioned as an amateurist or do-it-yourself activity that maintained art's separation from social reality. Bishop pointed out that corresponding artists like Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra achieved an oppositional state to original social relations in their artistic designs—displacing illegal immigrants and laborers into exhibition spaces or having audiences visit slums. These "social relations" constructed through art that make "the invisible visible" constitute a series of political actions antagonistic to originally "neutralized" social operations.

In this argument, Bishop explicitly questioned the precise meaning of "participation" as a "political project" in relational aesthetics: Who qualifies to participate (and who cannot)? What exactly does so-called "participation" refer to? How can one join the participation? And who initiates and leads the participation? Moreover, would the logic of originally socially repressed politics be reproduced through this "relationship"? Is the essence of "participation" actually the surrender of authorial power by the creative subject or the cancellation of the "author" concept? However, isn't Bishop herself trapped in the direct appropriation of political theory into art? Through discursive deployment of Laclau and Mouffe's political philosophy (particularly their discourse on radical pluralist democracy requiring "antagonism") and Rancière's concepts of "distribution of the sensible" and "politics of dissensus," Bishop found a theoretical entry point for participatory art to construct community relations. However, the social relations created by populism that advocates "everyone coming together" must rely on a more radical democratic process to reconstitute a substantive people's subject; otherwise, it merely replicates existing social ideology. The receding authorial identity in participatory art seems to suggest the exit of old authority, but in the end, how can viewers, as new agents and participants, generate new revolutionary political subjects from their already-shaped sociality?

Critiques of relational art and participatory art ultimately converged on questioning their so-called "participatory" and "activist" qualities. In response, these artists aimed to answer through artistic action, raising the banner of what they call "art activism" (Artivism).

III. Effects and Impact—The Rise of Art Activism

Since the 1990s, the art world has increasingly emphasized the importance of "action" and "happening" as constitutive elements of contemporary art, thereby spawning a gradually warming and developing activism trend. Curator Peter Weibel observed this trend and in 2013 curated an exhibition titled *Global Activism* at the ZKM Museum of New Media in Germany. This exhibition documented and presented in documentary form what he called "performative democracy"—various action plans and practical strategies, particularly through images disseminated via mass media, painting a picture of global activism. Weibel subsequently proposed the concept of "art activism" (Artivism)—" 'Art

activism' emerges from the combination of activism and art, perhaps the first art form of the 21st century." Extending from this lineage, the term "artivist" was also coined. Here, art creators replace object production and exhibition with fields of action, which include verbal performance or performative actions. In other words, the actor is the combination of people and affairs, while the original artwork-as-object is replaced by open-ended events, installations, processes, games, concepts, action principles, and environments, and passive viewers are replaced by participants and co-creators.

The mechanical, strictly limited viewer role type that stands in opposition to cognition and behavior is also what art activities with activism as their theme intend to challenge. In traditional views, audiences typically represent a small group gathered in a specific venue to receive information as recipients of a sermon, speech, or theatrical performance. However, this passive recipient model has been replaced by the concept of the "mediatized audience"—a homogenized audience spread across the globe, shaped by commercialization and mass media—who have become the objects participatory and activist art attempts to improve and even liberate. Contemporary art hopes to free audiences from static, passive, structured viewing forms and transform them into more active interactive subjects. In Rancière's words: "Emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting." Thus, open works become the fulcrum of contemporary art aesthetics and intermediary objects awaiting audience participation to complete together. Through art's mediation and transition, audiences smoothly extend this organic relationship established among "viewer-artwork-artist" into society.

In the vision of art activism, various art museums and galleries are no longer static art display spaces of the past but are performative domains that can connect communities, citizens, and artists and transform concepts into action practice. By establishing workshops, many artists are committed to transforming museum spaces into stages for political movements, while works by NGOs, community college groups, and others are also exhibited for the first time at museum biennials. These attempts demonstrate curators' desire to incorporate civic movements—what Weibel refers to as "performative democracy"—into the scope of exhibition practice discussion, ultimately allowing the public to view performative activities as platforms or communication media for discussing public issues.

One example is the *Floating Piers* designed by artists Christo and Jeanne-Claude. In 2016, they created a temporary installation in Lake Iseo, Italy, consisting of a series of floating walkways covered in bright yellow fabric, connecting the mainland to the islands of Monte Isola and San Paolo. This installation allowed visitors to walk on water, experiencing the landscape in a new way, while the vibrant color of the fabric contrasted with the natural colors of the lake and surrounding mountains. The installation was temporary, dismantled after 16 days, leaving no permanent impact on the environment.

This type of creation related to environmental art and earthworks, concerning

community connection and living environment discussion, ultimately points to civil engagement. It not only demonstrates the characteristics of social aesthetics inherent in community art and relational art but also, compared to the disturbances or political critique and intervention brought by radical social movements and avant-gardism in art history, appears more moderate on the surface while still originating from the essence of activism. The questions it critiques and interrogates belong to this era's issues, can evoke civic action that transcends individual identity, and expresses itself in creative ways, returning to the most basic questioning of community life and environmental problems. Through various artistic activities, it sensibly calls for community connection and civic participation. Through this process, participating individuals or communities contemplate a lifestyle more caring for the environment and practice it in their lives. Reports on these activities, events, and viewing of performances also impact others, creating spillover effects—not only more delicate care for one's own community life and living environment but also connecting collectively to resist capitalist manipulation and jointly invest in co-creating and sharing a vision for a better future life while fulfilling responsibilities as citizens. At this practical level, Weibel believes that global activism is constructed under the foundation of global citizenship. New global citizens recognize the fact for all humanity: survival threats and concerns for all current political issues are not limited by national boundaries; they simultaneously point to local (such as environmental pollution and destruction) and global (climate change) problems.

Meanwhile, American curator Nato Thompson also proposed connecting art with activism. In his 2015 book *Seeing Power: Art and Activism in the 21st Century*, he traced the intersection and practice between art action and political action in the United States since the 1990s, which he called art activism, resonating with Weibel's global activism proposed in continental Europe.

Thompson further pointed out that art activism has two trends that provide important information for many political art practices; he distinguished them as so-called social aesthetics and tactical media. Social aesthetics focuses on people, emphasizing the nature of social interaction, while art activates such social activities and interactive processes. It can also serve as a catalyst for civic activities, not only transcending the spatial domain of traditional art museums or galleries but also being immaterial and accessible, bringing a language understandable in daily life from the art world into the real world, creating and delivering in real society potentially transformative revelations. Social aesthetics can be considered a form of indirect activism, while tactical media can serve as a tool, usually challenging power and fully embracing overt activism, proposing a hybrid technology combining art and activist to create various symbols and meanings to evoke action. Thompson believed that both indirect and direct forms of activism share a common interest—"bringing art into the whole (real) world and speaking a language that ordinary people can understand." Whether it is social aesthetics focusing on current relational connections between people or tactical media, both orientations of art activism share this accessibility of con-

necting with daily life and thus eagerly respond to and participate in ubiquitous reality.

In the activist vision, human perception of the environment presents itself as multisensory and immersive field experiences, compared to perception focused on natural or man-made objects (such as artworks). The artistic process calls for direct bodily intervention to focus on connections between people, creating ritualistic and participatory dialogue and exchange, and forming embedded relationships with local humanistic and environmental contexts, thereby transcending mere appreciation of artistic performance. Art activism's concern for environmental issues, together with other community and local arts, shares common problem consciousness, all pointing to the question of what our lives will look like in the post-Anthropocene era. In this regard, French philosopher Michel Serres emphasized: "In modern life, humans have abandoned environmental connections outside social systems. We cannot perceive the relationship between the flow of time and climate change. We have discarded the bonds that keep social sciences in continuous dialogue with physics and geography, law and nature, weakening nature's voice and blurring the contours of all things' existence. In other words, humans have taken an overly active position beyond proper limits, losing balanced interaction with the environment. We can no longer ignore this situation." Therefore, eco-humanism, as an emerging field emphasizing interdisciplinary cooperation, seeks to establish a network of mutual dependence and two-way feedback among three different ecological dynamics: environment, social relations, and human subjects, to reverse the Enlightenment-era view of the natural environment as rational and passive and the unidirectional development and plundering carried out in the name of progress. The impact of these artistic intervention programs on specific communities often extends beyond raising awareness about the natural environment to include care for ecological, humanistic landscapes, collective memory and identity, and socio-cultural issues, thereby condensing local consciousness through artistic practice and bringing about concrete transformative power.

These art forms that attempt to integrate into local community daily life under specific controversial issues are essentially dialogic and educational in nature. How can socially participatory art and local public art activities achieve harmonious relationships between environment and people and promote the revival of community connection expected by relational aesthetics? In these programs, artists are not regarded as "instruments" for promoting community regeneration and change. Artists and audiences (including local residents and external visitors) share creative authorship. Therefore, under ideal circumstances, all participants should benefit from these art activities.

However, in his essay "On Art Activism," Groys considered activism as contemporary art's pragmatic reflection on its own usefulness, with its core being "analyzing the exact meaning and political function of the word 'aestheticization' " — negation of that kind of fully institutionalized, non-political contemporary art that moves toward aestheticization, but consequently flowing into design rather

than art. Here, activism no longer faces the question of how to "emancipate the audience." Why is sitting in seats or viewing static displays in a certain sequence "aesthetic obedience" and "acquiescence to domination," while moving one's body within a limited scope in the name of "art" is "political liberation"? In fact, in recent years, influenced by the "political correctness" trend, Western intellectual circles have generally turned leftward. However, this turn, together with increasingly polarized politics, has fallen into the chaos of overcorrection. Whether the concepts of so-called "post-critique" or "post-contemporary art" both centrally reflect Western left-wing intellectual circles' dissatisfaction with the kind of critical practice formed since the 1960s that superficially maintains a deconstructive and negative posture toward mainstream values while simultaneously being institutionalized and normalized in its own radicality by the system. This cycle of "negation-institutionalization-re-negation" has repeatedly played out in Western modern art history, and the process of art's activation is the latest instance, with its subsequent effects continuing to shape the forms of contemporary art.

Note: Figure translations are in progress. See original paper for figures.

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