

Art activism, active art

by Nynne Roberta Pedersen Pedersen

(Translation by Javier Orosco)

The fight against oppression takes place on two levels, one of *desire* and one of *action*. The plane of desire imagines a state of things where the privileged and the powerful are destituted of their power: a society without power structures, without capitalism, fascism, patriarchalism, racism or any other form of White or Western supremacy.

The plane of action requires individuals to use and mobilize the same power factors that the plane of desire wishes to obliterate: the privileged should use their power to deliver power, to privilege others.

If you have money you should give it to someone who does not; though fundamentally we are against the idea of money and money in itself as power.

If you have a powerful passport you should take it to those who cannot travel; though fundamentally we are against national borders.

If you have social capital and an *in*, you should invite those who are excluded to come inside; though we are fundamentally against status, high or low.

You act towards the achievement of the *desired*, even though the actions might mobilize structures that are unwanted within the plane of desire.

A critique of non-active art

The so-called political art and the political 'left-wing activism' have surely become positions of power, career makers and contributors to the capitalist system.

Several leftist activists write reports about the EU's repeated breaches of the Geneva-Convention, the convention for human rights, as well as other declarations and guidelines, which have been adopted to respect and protect vulnerable individuals and groups. Artists have also created works that denounce these contraventions. The problem is just that no one in Europe doubts that the EU constantly trespasses these ground rules.

In fact it is attractive to break these conventions, partly because xenophobic voters rejoice in these infractions, but also because there are cases (as seen in Hungary) where serious violations are committed, yet there is no one who shouts and points them out, since for example *who* is Denmark to scold Hungary, when Denmark constantly commits a good share of infringements. This situation takes place amongst the perfect symbiosis between violating nations that do not only breach conventions but that protect each other when doing so.

The amount of energy used in all of the documentation work should be allocated over for actions.

Quite often art that assumes itself as political and critical contributes to strengthen capitalism. For instance, Documenta 14 which took place in Greece this year is not primarily for the refugees, as much as it may focus on them.

A significant number of the Documenta 14 guests flew to Athens with RyanAir and slept in Airbnb flats, consequentially impulsing Greece's economy, at least for a segment of time. However this is the same Airbnb company that will not allow refugees to sleep in its flats, and it is the same RyanAir that does not take refugees as customers, and it is the same European economy that pays

millions and millions to humiliate, ban and kill the same refugees, that Documenta 14 so wholeheartedly focuses on.

Activism has documented on countless blogs all the countless violations that no mainstream media cares to cover. These violations must not be ignored and the documentation should be used actively.

This is why active-art must be pursued.

To search for EU art funds and use them to manufacture fake passports is active-art.

To sit in the admission committee of Europe's art schools and bring refugees into the school is active-art.

To establish pen-pal relationships for children that have been deprived of their right to make international friends, that is active-art.

To meet your new brothers and sisters without cameras or organizations is active-art.

To protect and defend your new brothers and sisters against attacks, push-backs, deportations and racism is active-art.

Many refugees are trapped in Serbia where they are stopped from travelling beyond, as violent doormen employed by the EU use their strength to prevent group displacements, maintaining EU's order to lock the borders that separate Serbia with neighboring Croatia and Hungary.

Muhammad is one of the many Afghans kept out of Europe. When the Danish musicians Milja and Oliver are asked to play for an European musical evening and ask Muhammad to play with them, then Mija, Oliver and Muhammad's work becomes active-art. Muhammad is applauded and recognized by Serbia's artistic elite, the same country that humiliates him on a daily basis. He is hired and paid for the concert, and at the same time is included in a context from which he gains material capital and social status. In addition Serbia becomes a better country with an enriched art scene, one where white european art is not the only one available.

Denmark's only political active band in 2018

Introduction by Simon Christensen

At the time of writing the Danish band GP&PLS reside in Serbia just by the Hungarian border, together with the people who wait there with the hope to enter Europe as refugees. These experiences shape their music as much as the the band's identity, as they intently transform them into a tool - a form of social capital - to invigorate their voice and actions oriented towards the debate surrounding these issues.

GP&PLS call themselves Denmark's only political band in 2018, and the album *Pro Monarkistisk Extratone* is their first release. The band's political agenda is engraved in lyrics as "the European Union buys Turkish gatekeepers", "the Mediterranean is too cold, the boats are overcrowded", "Turkish Airlines flies children to Afghanistan" and furthermore in its design. The LP includes various manifestos and manuals for everyday activism that serve as strategies for "acting from the different positions one has in society". The album is a statement but also a device for action, all the revenue it generates (not only the profits, but the complete revenue) is collected and used to help the refugees. The central purpose is to use art as a tool, a gateway to something potentially better.

According to Nynne Roberta Pedersen Pedersen from GP&PLS one can reach other people when *dressed* as an artist. The music they create could be confined within a *silly* art sphere, but in their own words they “really are a refugee organisation, disguised as a computer music rock band”. In a Western society that constantly sucks up to the art world artists have sound opportunities to be politically active, privileged by their positions they stand on better grounds than those who, hooded and pierced, operate via a leftist vein of activism. The artist has a platform, access to different arenas, more resources and recognition from the art world, these different forms of capital can be used for something else and arguably better.

The manifest above, written by Nynne Roberta Pedersen Pedersen, distinguishes between active art and non-active art. The author provided a brief example of this distinction: the piece *Soleil Levant* (hosted by Charlottenborg) was created by Ai Weiwei which used hundreds of lifejackets as its prime material; this a non-active work of art, since the lifejackets could have been used to save refugees. Back in 2016 the same artist withdrew his pieces *Yu Yi* from a planned exhibition at Aros Museum as a response to Danmark’s tightening of its asylum rules, that was an example of active art.

Nynne Roberta Pedersen Pedersen is a singer, musician and member of GP&PLS. She is also a theater director and one of the founders of Teater Tugt, she was behind the initiative Terror-Testamentet, Asyl 34 and has been involved in the movement No Deportations Without Resistance. Currently she lives in Serbia with other members of GP&PLS.

editor at passiveaggressive.dk
mail: info@passiveaggressive.dk

