

Mediaculture

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Week 7: Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, Feminist Media Strategies for Political Performance

We live in a media centric world bombarded by the media images twenty four hours a day. It is so powerful that we often cannot distinguish the ‘ reality’ from the mediated reality. Media makes use of images around us to convey this very different articulated meaning. This often interludes with the notion of the people who control the media; which can either be the proprietor or dominant groups through force or coercion that control the opinions. These viewpoints are the factors that determine the news values, of the modern media, which often tend to trivialize or sensationalize the issues, according to the ideological stance.

Feminist Media Arts have formed as a resistance to this distorted media views, to convey the ‘ undistorted reality’ to the public. It’s more than an information campaign and the same time new mode of protest to decry the ugly stories media told about women. The feminist media work as the activists say ‘ has three ultimate purposes: first, to interrupt the incessant flow of images that supports the established social order with alternative ways of thinking and acting; second, to organize and activate viewers (media is not the only, nor necessarily most effective, way to do this); third, to create artful and original imagery that follows in the tradition of fine art, to help viewers see the world in a new way and learn something about themselves in relation to it.

’ The authors in their essay point to the ways to attract the media to their campaign and force them to present their viewpoints. The authors say that ‘

to understand how media operates, observe it -with detachment -and be pragmatic. It doesn't matter what you think the media should cover, the object of the game (and it is a game) is to get them to play it your way. Mass media time is not a public service; it is a highly valuable commodity that is purchased by corporations and individuals who promote products, ideas, attitudes and images. The stakes of this game are high, and as artists the best we can hope for is a kind of guerrilla foray into that system.'

Here it would be wise to note the contributions of the Glasgow University Media Research Group (GUMG) and Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), engaged in research in the process of news production and the relationship between ideology and representation. The research of the GUMG has been very controversial since the publication of *Bad News* in 1976. *Bad News* was concerned with the television coverage of industrial relations in 1975. The GUMG's analysis of television news led it conclude that the viewers had been given a misleading portrayal of industrial disputes, a portrayal that distorted the 'real' situation. The descriptions attached to management were such that they persuaded the audience of the rightness of the management position against the demands made by the unions.

Thus, it has become the inherent nature of the media to manipulate things. In 1973 Galtung and Ruge analyzed foreign news in newspapers and found that for any event to become a 'news item', and therefore considered 'newsworthy', it had to pass through a selection process. If it conformed to a particular set of criteria, the news staff judged it newsworthy. Galtung and Ruge calls those criteria as 'news values'.

The essay tells different methods to persuade the media for the political performance. But the question remains, if the media conforms to certain pre-determined news values, how can these campaigns succeed, despite the systematic efforts by the activists.

Week 8: Jesse Drew, The Collective Camcorder in Art and Activism.

The essay attempts to portray the role of the video makers' collectives, in many resistance movements. The invention of the video camcorder has in fact changed the course of history. These movements and the developments in technology when coupled with the ideology of post modernism, took art and activism to new heights. From the efforts of independent artists to the collectives such as Paper Tiger and the Independent Media Center, the revolt has spread to resist the images presented by the mainstream media and culture. So the environment was all set for a departure from the art-video, and experiment something new that reached the people.

As the essayist says, television is, after all, at the heart of our popular culture, the culture of the everyday, and dominates the media landscape. Video, when all is said and done, is a form of television, 'a media device that conveys information. It is natural that video artists cross the boundaries of art and activism, and frequently choose to 'subvert the message, not just exploit the form. This artistic jujitsu, using the weight of television to fall upon itself, emerged as a popular strategy among video collectives. Increasingly, video artists in the 1980s and 1990s embraced the necessity to reflect on, intervene, and challenge the contested terrain of television, mass media, and popular culture, and leave the art-video aesthetic behind.'

As Strinati called it ' post modernism is skeptical of any absolute, universal and all embracing claim to knowledge and argues that theories or doctrines which make such claims are increasingly open to criticism, contestation and doubt. The mass media are central to the post modern condition because we now take as real, is to a large extent what media tell us is real. We are bombarded from all sides by cultural signs and images in all aspects of media. According to Baudrillard, we have entered the world of simulacra. These are signs that function as copies or models of real objects or events. In the post-modern era, simulacra no longer present a copy of the world, nor do they produce replicas of reality.

Today..... social reality is structured by codes and models that produce the reality they claim to merely represent.' From the 1960s onwards there was a revolt against the modernists. The post modernists thought believed in the breakdown of the distinction between culture and society, the break down of the distinction between art and popular culture, the confusion over time and space, and the decline of the meta narratives. The pop art of the 1960s demonstrates this clearly, for example, Andy Warhol presented soup tins and cola bottles as art, as well as challenging the uniqueness of Da Vinci's portrait of the Mono Lisa by silk screening her image thirty times – Thirty are better than one. In fact post modernism has helped them to drift away from the so called artistic beliefs.

In the words of the essayist ' video artists in the 1980s and 1990s embraced the necessity to reflect on, intervene, and challenge the contested terrain of television, mass media, and popular culture, and leave the art-video aesthetic behind. The convergence of these new political, cultural, social,
<https://assignbuster.com/mediaculture/>

technological, artistic, and economic developments' provided the impetus to the establishment of the counter movements like the Paper Television, and subsequently the Independent Media Center.

In fact, video art has surpassed all other art forms in interpreting history.

Week 9: Carole S. Vance, *The War on Culture*.

The essay follows the great discussion in the world of art whether a self-censorship is inevitable when it comes to sexual images. Vance quotes instances where public ire overlooked the 'artistic value' when morality was questioned. Vance says that 'the fundamentalist attack on images and the art world must be recognized as a systematic part of a right-wing political program to restore traditional social arrangements and reduce diversity.

The right wing is deeply committed to symbolic politics, both in using symbols to mobilize public sentiment and in understanding that, because images do stand in for and motivate social change, the arena of representation is a real ground for struggle.' He says that it is high time that a vigorous defence of art and images should be made. The author has given a new dimension to the culture war.

This is not isolated with art or artistic movements. Representation of sexuality in media is more complex than in art, for example, counting the number of times that women appear on the screen because we cannot immediately identify a person's sexual orientation in the way that we can identify markers of sex and race.

Observations by Dyer on gay behavior can be more illustrative here on the representation of sexuality in media. He says ‘ a major fact about being gay is that it doesn’t show. There is nothing about gay people’s physiognomy that declares them gay, no equivalent to the biological markers of sex and race. There are signs of gayness, a repertoire of gestures, stances, clothing and even environments that bespeak gayness but these are cultural forms designed to show what the person’s person alone does not show: that he or she is gay’.

There are signs of gayness, for example gestures, accents posture and so on, but these markers of sexuality are socially constructed and are both historically and culturally specific. Media texts often rely on stereotypical narratives to indicate that characters in a story line are gay. These may include childlessness, loneliness, a man’s interest in arts or domestic crafts, a woman’s in mechanics or sports. .. each implying a scenario of gay life.’ Both lesbians and gays have been to use Tuchman’s term ‘ symbolically annihilated’ by the media in general. The representation of these two groups has been particularly limited on television.

The media has been very careful on such sensitive issues, but has not been so. Media has been overtly criticized primarily on its representations, but when coming to issues of morality, media tended to be very much conservative, and there of course has been a lot of self-censorship.

As the essayist says ‘ symbolic mobilizations and moral panics often leave in their wake residues of law and policy that remain in force long after the hysteria has subsided, fundamentalist attack on art and images requires a

broad and vigorous response that goes beyond appeals to free speech. Free expression is a necessary principle in these debates, because of the steady protection it offers to all images, but it cannot be the only one. To be effective and not defensive, the art community needs to employ its interpretive skills to unmask the modernized rhetoric conservatives use to justify their traditional agenda, as well as to deconstruct the "difficult" images fundamentalists choose to set their campaigns in motion.' Artists can of course look at the way media behaves in this respect.

Week 10: Kester Grant, A Critical Framework for Dialogical Practice.

Revolt, is word usually associated with the art movements and the biographies of artists themselves. Thus a shift from the galleries to community based installations is a natural course of the artistic history. The author explores these transitions as an inherent revolt that pervaded the artistic community.

When the artists themselves began to question the gallery itself as an appropriate site for their work. At a time when scale and the use of natural materials and processes were central concerns in sculpture, the comparatively small physical space of the gallery seemed unduly constraining. Further, the museum, with its fusty, art historical associations, appeared ill equipped to provide a proper Context for works that explored popular culture or quotidian experience.

Many artists saw museums, with their boards of wealthy collectors and businesspeople, as bastions of snobbish elitism in an era that demanded a more accessible and egalitarian form of art. There are many ways to escape <https://assignbuster.com/mediaculture/>

the museum. In some cases artists chose to work in sites that were empty or depopulated (e. g., Gordon Matta-Clark's "cuttings" in abandoned buildings, Michael Heizer's or Robert Smithson's land art projects in nearly inaccessible locations), suggesting a certain anxiety about the social interactions that might occur upon venturing beyond sanctioned art institutions.

One strand of this work is represented by the agitational, protest-based projects of Guerilla Art Action Group (GAAG), the Black Mask Group, and Henry Flynt in New York. Drawing on the energies of the antiwar movement and the traditions of fluxus performance and situationism, these groups staged actions outside mainstream cultural institutions (Lincoln Center, Museum of Modern Art, etc.) to call attention to the complicity of these institutions with broader forms of social and political domination.'

A different approach, and one more directly related to dialogical practices, emerged in the collaborative projects developed by artists associated with the Woman's Building in Los Angeles during the 1970s. Artists, fueled by political protests against the Reagan administration's foreign policy (especially in Central America), the antiapartheid movement, and nascent AIDS activism, as well as revulsion at the market frenzy surrounding neoexpressionism, with its retardaire embrace of the heroic male painter. A number of artists and arts collectives developed innovative new approaches to public and community-based work during the 1980s and early 1990s.

The late 1980s and early 1990s witnessed a gradual convergence between old-school community art traditions and the work of younger practitioners, leading to a more complex set of ideas around public engagement. This

movement was also catalyzed by the controversy over Richard Serra's Tilted Arc in the late 1980s,

Community art projects are often centered on an exchange between an artist (who is viewed as creatively, intellectually, financially, and institutionally empowered) and a given subject who is defined a priori as in need of empowerment or access to creative/expressive skills. Thus the "community" in community-based public art often, although not always, refers to individuals marked as culturally, economically, or socially different from the artist.

References:

1. Suzanne Lacy and Leslie Labowitz, *Feminist Media Strategies For Political Performance*
2. Jesse Drew, *The Collective Camcorder in Art and Activism*.
3. Carole S. Vance, *The War on Culture*
4. Kester Grant, *A Critical Frame work for Dialogical Practice*