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I WANT CHANGE



(Fig. 1)

Proposed question for Independent Project (Part One in Independent Project in Year Three)

By
Sarah Grounds

I WANT CHANGE



(Fig. 2)

"Narrate for us in your vivid style or in your fervent pictures the titanic struggle of the masses against their oppressors; inflame young hearts with the beautiful breath of revolution."
(Kropotkin, 1885)

How can art create social change? This is a question I ask myself a lot. Studying Documentary photography and Visual Activism, I have discovered countless, amazingly talented artists who have created deep and powerful work about the inequalities and injustices in our modern society and how we might live differently with each other. But nothing seems to have changed, the structure of our society has been fundamentally the same for hundreds of years. (Graeber, 2021) So why is this? How has art tried to create social change and why does it not seem to have worked? Is there a way art can create fundamental change? I propose to explore these key questions in my dissertation, concentrating on the relationship between art and social change. I will start to explore this using three keywords, Social Change, Class and Idea.

Social Change

Social change means 'a structural change in our society of behaviours, values and social organisations'. (Britannica, 2022) In this work I will be narrowing down the idea of Social Change to the Anarchist meaning of social change. A fundamental change to the structure of our society without a hierarchical government. (Chomsky, 2005)

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon is viewed as the first person to call themselves an anarchist. From this very birth of Anarchism, art was seen as fundamental in the spread of anarchist ideology.

Proudhon said, "The task of art is to warn us, to praise us, to teach us, to make us blush by confronting us with the mirror of our own conscience." (Mattern, 2015)



(Fig. 3)

Proudhon was very good friends with the painter Gustave Courbet who led the Realism movement in the 19th Century. He painted Proudhon many times (Fig.3) and they debated and moulded each other's ideologies. This culminated in Proudhon writing a book on Courbet, his art and politics, *Du Principe de l'Art. Miserable*. But Proudhon died before it was published. (Pearce, 2021)

The art world has been greatly influenced by anarchist ideas. Art movements such as Dada and The Situationists were born from radical roots. (Anarchist Federation, 1996) I will explore this more by reading 'Dada Turns Red: Politics of Surrealism' (1990) by Helen Lewis and 'The Situationists and the City' (2010) by Tom McDonough.

The Arts and Crafts movement had one of the most famous anarchist artists helping drive it, William Morris, yet most people do not know of his radical reasons for designing pretty wallpaper. (MacCarthy, 2019)



(Fig. 4)

I will further research Morris's ideology behind his art by reading 'Anarchy and Beauty: William Morris and his Legacy 1860-1960' (2014) by Fiona MacCarthy and 'Anarchist Seeds Beneath the Snow' (2006) by David Goodway.

Other interesting books that I have found are 'Anarchy and Art: From the Paris Commune to the Fall of the Berlin Wall' (2007) by Allan Antliff. Which spans 140 years of anarchist art history, hopefully giving me a more rounded view of this not often talked about history. And 'The Art of Protest' (2019) by Joanne Rippon, which looks at protest art from the early 20th Century to the 1960s-70s. This book looks at all protest art, not just art about anarchist ideals and will help me

place the art movements I am looking at within the overall political art being created through the twentieth century.

Class

'A system of ordering society whereby people are delivered into sets based on perceived social or economic status.' (Waite, 2012)



(Fig. 5)

Class differences in the art world is something I am becoming more and more aware of whilst I am studying my degree. My own background and especially my financial status now, is radically different to most of the working artists I have researched at university. I was already aware of the problem that leftist politics has of educated middle/upper class people telling working class people how they should live. (reference) But I was not fully aware of what a big class divide there was with the art world and the rest of society.

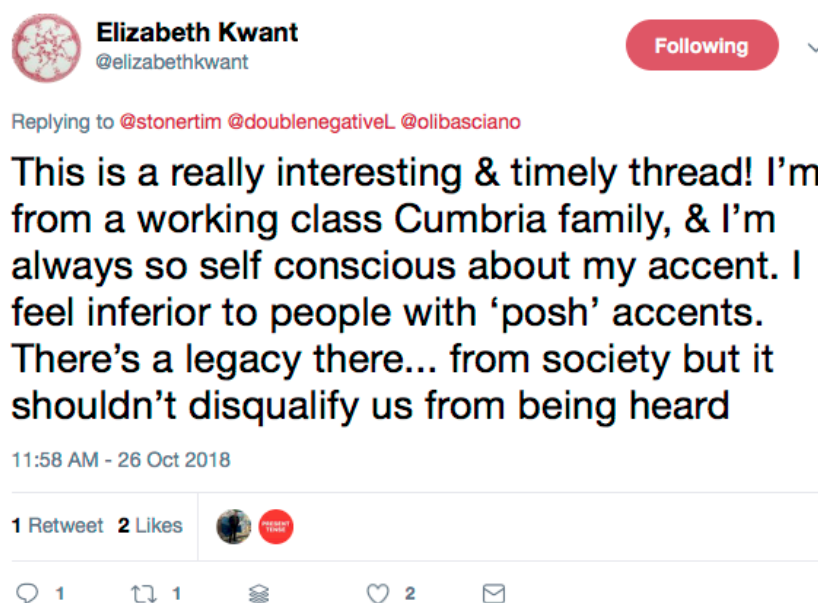
For me, art and culture are about ideas. If you control ideas, you control everything. If only a narrow stratum of society controls the ideas, only their views and experiences will be reflected in systems of communication and power. (Taylor, 2018)

An academic paper was commissioned by the Barbican Centre in 2018 called 'Panic! Social Class, Taste and Inequalities in the Creative Industries' Which reveals worrying tendencies of elitism and privilege in the arts, isolating and hindering the working class.

In terms of social class, social mobility has been a longstanding problem for the sector, meaning that it is currently dominated by those from affluent social origins. There was also no 'golden age' for social mobility within the cultural sector. (Brook, O'Brien, Taylor, 2018, P2)

The research found out that only 18.2 per cent of people working in the arts had a working-class background. (Brook, O'Brien, Taylor, 2018) This research instigated other groups to start looking into the class divide in the arts, such as the independent art paper 'The Double Negative' which released a series of articles under the title 'Class IS a Big Deal'. Which evoked a lot of responses from working class artists sharing their experiences of the art world.

(Pinnington, 2018)



(Fig 6)

I am very interested in looking at this problem from a political art perspective and whether this is one of the reasons why radical art has not created social change. Is it because most of this art is being produced by people of a different class to the masses?

"The fine art world can be perceived by many as an intimidating sphere of high culture that everyday people are apprehensive to approach.". (Rafferty, 2020)



(Fig. 7

I am finding it hard to find work about this specific question. I can barely find any work about the working class and the art World, echoing what I have read that this is a subject that is not talked about enough. I have found other academic papers looking at Class in the art world, but I cannot find many books on the subject.

I am going to read 'People's Art: Working Class Art from 1750 to the Present Day' (1991) by Emmanuel Cooper. But the 'Present Day' here is 1991, so not very current.

Just this year, 2022, the first translation of 'Art and the Working Class' by the Russian Socialist, Alexander Bogdanov was released. Bogdanov was in a group of Bolshevik radicals trying to rethink the position of the 'worker' in Marxist theory. Believing Marxism sacrificed the working

class for the Party, by concentrating on the 'culture' in a God like way which did not give the 'worker' the chance to express themselves. (Krementsov, 2012) Even though the book was written a hundred years ago, it does seem to analyse the symbiosis of art, politics and the working class and I think will be a very useful book for me to look at for my dissertation.



(Fig. 8)

Idea

'A thought or suggestion as to a possible course of action' (Waite, 2012)

My last keyword is Idea and specifically how an artist can take a political idea and present it to the public in a meaningful way. In Bogdanov's article 'The Worker's Artistic Inheritance' which appeared in The Labour Monthly in 1924. Bogdanov talks of the 'Artistic Idea' and how it has two senses. The first sense being the artists coherent vision for a different way of living and the

second sense, how that can be translated to a particular community. If the first is not accomplished then there is no art and if the second is not accomplished, then the art is meaningless to everyone but the artist who created it. (Bogdanov, 1924)

This is a concept that is now becoming very popular in documentary photography with photographers such as Anthony Luvera, who works collaboratively with homeless people across the United Kingdom. (Grain, 2021)



(Fig. 9)

I want to investigate if maybe this is the best way to present political art too. I researched to see if there were any examples of art being created by artists in communities that were experiencing radical change. There were a lot of examples out there.



(Fig. 10)

The Zapatista's are a movement that formed in the 1980s in south-eastern Mexico. Indigenous communities had been displaced from their land to make way for nonindigenous people to grow coffee and raise cattle. These people moved to the forests where the soil was much poorer, which made growing food much harder. This community was then joined by revolutionary guerrillas fleeing from the army, together they formed the Zapatista community. (Christ, 2020) The Zapatista National Liberation Army occupied several town halls in the cities in the region of Chiapas on the 1st January 1994. They made their demands of ending marginalisation of indigenous people, fighting against corruption in local politics and demanding an end to the NAFTA trade agreement between Mexico, the United States and Canada. This is when Zapatista art started to emerge, with a large mural representing Zapatista ideals appearing at a meeting the ZNLA held for journalists. The murals take inspiration from the tradition of murals in the Maya, an ethnic minority in the community. Also, the Guerrillas came with ideas of art production inspired by Cuban Guerrillas. The murals started appearing

all over land occupied by the Zapatistas, mainly painted by women and created communally. The murals depict the hopes of the Zapatistas and express acceptance for all, indigenous and non-indigenous people. (Laquebaila, 2022)

In places where high levels of marginalization and illiteracy exist, such as in Chiapas, images play an important role in educating and raising consciousness and self-awareness. Historical and contemporary events are "told" using pictures, often more effectively because of their permanency on the public surface. (Laquebaila, 2022)



(Fig. 11)

I will further my reading about the Zapatistas by reading 'The Fire and the Word: A History of the Zapatista Movement' (2008) by Gloria Munoz Ramirez. I have also contacted Duke University Press who have released an open access online book titled 'Dancing with the Zapatistas' (2015) by Diana Taylor and Lorie Navak. The links on their website to the book no longer work but they have kindly sent me a direct link to the work. This book is a collection of essays looking at all the arts being created by the Zapatistas.

Another example of art emerging with a social movement is the Occupy movement.



(Fig. 12)

Occupy was first started by Canadian activist group Adbusters who organised the first protest site in New York's Zuccotti Park on the 17th November 2011. They were protesting the inequalities in our society, corruption in government and corporation power. These protests spread all over the country and beyond, resulting in thousands of protest sites. The protest lasted until the 15th November and in that time a lot of people's outlooks on the World were changed. (Nathanson, 2021) During the occupy protests the Arts became very important, an Arts and Culture Council was formed and organised spoken word and poetry readings, dance and pop-up exhibitions, all being instigated by artists at the protests. (Elam, 2011) There was a lot of protest art created in the form of flyers and posters which was then made available as free downloads on the Occupy website.

What was exciting about this explosion of art was that it was being created by people involved in the movement. From people with different racial and class backgrounds with different political concerns, from different places, so the work, collectively, represented a large mass of people, united with their desire for change. (Boucher, 2011)



(Fig. 13)

Noam Chomsky, political activist, and philosopher said of Occupy, "Occupy was different than other movements. By its nature, as a tactic, it brought people together to construct a community ... It was an educational experience, which for many people changed the way they think of what life could be." (Nathanson, 2021)

To further my knowledge about occupy and its art I will read 'Strike Art' (2016) by Yates McKee, which looks at the art of Occupy and the aftermath of Occupy for artists creating political art. I will also read 'The Art of Protest: What a Revolution Looks Like' (2021) by De Nichols which looks closely at graphic art and the meanings behind colours, typography, and symbolism in political art.



(Fig. 14)

Conclusion

For my dissertation I will explore how art was fundamental in the evolution of Anarchism, how that was practiced and how we can move forward as artists interested in instigating social change. I will start this by looking at Pierre-Joseph Proudhon and the birth of Anarchism and how art was so important to this new movement. I will follow the evolution of Anarchist art through history and focus in more detail on William Morris. Morris is an artist who is still a household name today but his political ideology has been diluted with the passage of time . I will research whether the impact of political art has been hampered by the class divide of the art world and the general public. I will then explore the ideas of Alexander Bogdanov of creating political art for specific communities. Exploring what he meant by that and how that could be practiced today. I will then focus on examples of this happening by looking at the

Zapatista Communities and Occupy Wall Street. How the art for these movements evolved and became crucial as an identity for these communities. I will follow on by looking at the long-term impact of the art created for these movements. On the people involved and on people outside of these communities. I will then conclude with positive ways with how I, as an artist, can get involved with social change.



(Fig. 15)

I decided to do a degree in photography, hoping that in some way, I may be able to use my skills, which are not very useful in 'normal' life, to do some good. I have spent the last two years confirming my thought that there is nothing I can do, the arts have made no radical difference to our society. But I refuse to accept this, and I hope that my dissertation will help me find a direction for my own work.

How Can Art Create Social Change?

Is a question I ask myself every day and will be my main question for my dissertation.

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