AMPS PROCEEDINGS SERIES 32

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Representing Pasts – Visioning Futures
INTRODUCTION

Representing Pasts – Visioning Futures

One century ago the City Symphony was at the cutting edge of visual representation. It was the site of some of the most challenging concepts and ideas the art world had ever seen. Its ruptures in spatiotemporal representation were seen as natural extensions of the avant-garde: cubist painting in the mode of Braque, the architectural visions of Vladimir Tatlin, the spatio-sculptural works of Aleksandr Rodchenko, the photography of Moholy-Nagy and later Florence Henri, to name but a few.

The intervening 100 years have seen periodic reengagements with spatial reframing in these media. They have also witnessed the emergence of new modes of representation in the worlds of art, design, heritage, cultural studies and the social sciences more broadly. Today, artists, architects, painters, sculptors and designers from various fields can work seamlessly across a plethora of fields: video, digital photography, 3D printing, parametric architecture, algorithmic animation, projection mapping, photogrammetry, virtual reality, and more.

If we look specifically at spatial design, virtual reality is increasingly seen as ‘everyday’ for architects and urban designers. For artists, ‘the digital’ is now a typical mode of operation. If we consider film, algorithmic video editing, motion capture and image digitization are now all ‘run of the mill’ technologies. In museology, the experiential interactive installation accompanies static exhibitions. Indeed, the moving image, both analogue and digital, is now a standard area of historical study in itself – the city symphony included.

Taking the City Symphony, and its historic moment in time as a starting point, this conference seeks to explore of the past, present and future of how we visualise people, places, cities and life. It welcomes insights into the history of painting from a spatiotemporal standpoint; the influence and evolution of the photographic representation of place; the role of sculpture in exploring and integrating space. It invites filmmakers exploring city representation, architects, urban planners and designers engaged in the visualisation of buildings, cities.... and more
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THE DIGITAL AGENCY, PROTEST MOVEMENTS, AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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INTRODUCTION
The technological revolution and appropriation of internet tools began to reshape the material basis of society and the urban space in collaborative, grassroots, leaderless, and participatory actions. The protest squares’ representation on Television screens and mainstream media has been broad. Various health, governmental, societal, and urban challenges have marked the advent of the Covid-19 virus. Inequalities have become more salient as poor people and minorities are more affected by the virus. Social distancing makes the typical forms of protest impossible to carry out. Under social distancing, some state-led policies took advantage of social media to focus on the Covid-19 pandemic to silence social and political activities, censor criticism, and control the press. However, during the pandemic era, the movements for social justice have been particularly active, focusing on defending workers’ rights, mutual aid and solidarity, monitoring policymakers, and popular education. These progressive movements combined concrete practices and experiences to confront the reactionary, capitalist, and governmental actors that sought to shape and envision the world. Through different case studies of protest movements during the pandemic in Europe, the UK, and Asia, this paper argues that at the time of rising racial, social, and economic inequalities, the social activities adapted to the circumstances determined by the social distancing and the impossibility of people gathering in physical spaces. Subsequently, the people in different countries had various individual and collective responses to the support of health workers, systemic inequalities, loss of jobs, and other societal and financial challenges imposed by the governments. It means that, rather than disappearing, the social movements have adapted to the unexpected situations during the pandemic outbreak. The pandemic broke the new digital global wave of protests in this sense.

Social Activism during the Pandemic
Environmental challenges, forced immigration, pandemic outbreaks, and economic inequalities are deepening the democracy crisis across the globe. As Jeffery Hou highlights: “unsanctioned, unscripted, and seemingly undesirable activities have long appropriated urban spaces in routine and sometimes unexpected ways, bringing new meaning and unforeseen functions to those spaces. They occupy or appropriate urban spaces in routine and sometimes unexpected ways, bringing new meanings and unforeseen functions to those places. In many cities around the world, these activities are an integral part of the quotidian urban landscapes and systems of everyday life. Together, they encompass both short-term, temporary actions and lasting struggles and contestations.”
The Occupy movement of 2011 provides an example of the new wave of social unrest and protest movements. Occupy emerged in a period of crisis for Liberal democracy. One of the most visible signs of this crisis is the widespread disengagement of the citizenry from institutional political processes in developed countries. The increasing disaffection of youth with liberal politics, and voting, the rise of consumer culture, and the explosion of social media, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, can be seen as the intensifying the alienation that operates under a market capitalist ethos rather than a democratic one.

The advent of the recent Covid-19 pandemic outbreak has resulted in a profound transformation of society, with technology playing a crucial role in the way people respond to the challenges posed by the virus. The technological revolution and the appropriation of internet tools have reshaped the material basis of society and the urban space, leading to the emergence of collaborative, grassroots, leaderless, and participatory actions. As a result, the protest squares’ representation on television screens and mainstream media has been broad.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, social activism has taken on new forms and become even more important in many ways. Before the pandemic, social movements and protests were often organized in physical spaces, with people gathering in public squares, marching in the streets, and engaging in direct action. With the advent of social distancing measures, however, these forms of protest became impossible, leading activists to turn to digital tools to continue their activism. However, the pandemic has brought with its various health, governmental, societal, and urban challenges, exacerbating existing inequalities and affecting poor people and minorities the most.

Social distancing has made traditional forms of protest impossible, leading some state-led policies to take advantage of social media to silence social and political activities, censor criticism, and control the press. Despite these challenges, the movements for social justice have continued to thrive during the pandemic, with a focus on defending workers’ rights, mutual aid and solidarity, monitoring policymakers, and popular education. With large gatherings and protests being limited due to health concerns, many activists have turned to virtual and decentralized organizing, leveraging social media to spread their messages and build movements. Issues related to the pandemic, such as healthcare access, workers' rights, and systemic racism, have become key focal points for activism. Additionally, the pandemic has amplified existing social and economic inequalities, further fueling activism and calls for systemic change. These progressive movements have combined concrete practices and experiences to confront reactionary, capitalist, and governmental actors, and to shape and envision the world.

Digital Protest Movements during the Pandemic

The pandemic has inspired a wave of digital social activism, with people turning to technology to mobilize and coordinate collective action. Case studies of protest movements in Europe, the UK, and Asia show that at a time of rising racial, social, and economic inequalities, social activities have adapted to the circumstances determined by social distancing and the impossibility of people gathering in physical spaces. People in different countries have had various individual and collective responses to support health workers and address systemic inequalities, loss of jobs, and other societal and financial challenges governments impose (See Figure 1).

Although the Covid-19 pandemic has broken the new digital global wave of protests, it has not diminished social activism. Instead, social movements have adapted to the unexpected situations posed by the pandemic, proving they are resilient and capable of responding to the moment's challenges. The Covid-19 pandemic has put a tremendous strain on health workers worldwide, and social media has been used to support and advocate for their rights. The hashtag #ThankYouHealthWorkers shows appreciation for their sacrifices, while the #ProtectOurCare
movement highlights demanding better working conditions and access to personal protective equipment.\textsuperscript{10}

The recent antiracism protests and Black Lives Matter movement with the use of hashtag #BLM have reignited decentralized transnational political and social campaigns to fight racism, discrimination, and inequality. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has been one of the most significant social justice movements in recent history, and the pandemic has only amplified its impact. With the advent of social distancing measures, the BLM movement turned to social media to coordinate protests, share experiences, and mobilize large numbers of people. People used platforms like Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook to share information, coordinate protests, and call for justice and systemic change. Through the use of hashtags such as #BlackLivesMatter and #JusticeForGeorgeFloyd, the BLM movement was able to spread its message and gain widespread support, resulting in a global movement for racial justice.\textsuperscript{11}

Grassroots reactions and protests to colonial remnants in the urban landscape were as important. In Europe, one of the most prominent examples of digital activism during the pandemic has been the Black Lives Matter protests, which took place in response to the death of George Floyd in the United States. Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, thousands of people across Europe came together online to protest against systemic racism and police brutality. Through social media, people can coordinate actions, share information, and mobilize large numbers of people in a virtual demonstration of solidarity (See Figure 2).\textsuperscript{12}

In the United Kingdom, the Covid-19 pandemic has been marked by a growing movement of workers fighting for their rights. Despite the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, workers have used social media to organize and coordinate their actions, sharing information about strikes, protests, and other forms of direct action. These workers have been particularly active in defending the rights of those who have been hardest hit by the pandemic, including gig workers, careers, and those working in low-paid jobs.\textsuperscript{13}

In Asia, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the movements for social justice. The Hong Kong protests were another example of digital social activism during the Covid-19 pandemic, as people used technology to mobilize and coordinate in the face of government repression. The protests were sparked by a proposed law that would allow the extradition of Hong Kong citizens to mainland China, and quickly gained traction as people across the city took to the streets to protest against the erosion of their rights and freedoms. The Hong Kong protests were notable for their use of technology, with protesters using encrypted messaging apps and social media to coordinate and share information. The use of technology was critical in the face of government censorship and repression, providing protesters with a way to organize and communicate despite the challenges posed by the pandemic.\textsuperscript{14}
The #MilkTeaAlliance emerged as a digital activist movement, bringing together young people from across the region to protest against authoritarianism and censorship. The movement, which was initially sparked by protests in Thailand, quickly gained momentum and spread to other countries, with people using social media to coordinate actions and to share information. The Indian farmers' protests were a significant example of digital social activism during the Covid-19 pandemic, as farmers used technology to organize and mobilize against a controversial set of agricultural reforms. The protests were sparked by new laws that would deregulate the agriculture sector and remove protections for farmers, leading to widespread protests across the country. The Indian farmers' protests leveraged social media to coordinate and mobilize, with farmers and supporters using platforms like Twitter and Facebook to share information and coordinate actions. The movement also used social media to challenge government narratives and to hold policymakers accountable for their actions.\(^{15}\)

The pandemic has highlighted the importance of mutual aid and solidarity, and social media has been used to coordinate these efforts. Across the world, people have used social media to organize food and supply drives, create online communities to support their neighbors, and promote mutual aid initiatives. The hashtag #MutualAid has been used to promote these efforts and to encourage people to get involved. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on workers, with millions losing their jobs and facing economic insecurity. The workers’ rights movement has been using social media to organize, mobilize, and demand better treatment for workers. The hashtag #WorkersRights has been used to promote these efforts and to raise awareness about the struggles of workers during the pandemic.

The digital agency has proven to be an incredibly powerful tool for social activism, with the internet and social media providing a platform for people to share their experiences, coordinate actions, and mobilize large numbers of people. During the pandemic, social media has been used to support health workers, defend workers’ rights, promote mutual aid and solidarity, monitor policymakers, and engage in popular education. In addition to its role in supporting social activism, the digital agency has also provided a way for people to express their grievances and to hold governments and corporations accountable. During the pandemic, the digital agency has been used to protest against systemic inequalities, censorship, and the suppression of free speech. These case studies demonstrate the power of the digital agency and the role it can play in shaping the world and promoting social justice.\(^{16}\)
CONCLUSION

The pandemic has resulted in a paradigm shift, exemplified by the increased prominence of digital activism and the utilization of technology to organize and coordinate activism efforts. Despite the challenges posed by the pandemic, social activism has continued to thrive, adapting to the new circumstances and using digital tools to coordinate and mobilize. The digital agency has proven to be a powerful tool for social activism, providing a platform for people to voice their concerns, organize collective action, and shape the world.

The pandemic has had an essential impact on the way people mobilize and engage in social activism. It has broken the new digital global wave of protests but has not diminished social activism. Instead, social movements have adapted to the unexpected situations posed by the pandemic, proving they are resilient and capable of responding to the moment's challenges. The digital agency has emerged as a powerful tool for social activism, providing a platform for people to express their grievances, coordinate collective action, and hold those in power accountable. As the pandemic persists, digital activism remains a crucial factor in determining the trajectory of future social activism.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a significant point in social activism, inspiring the rise of digital activism and the adoption of technology to coordinate activism efforts. The digital agency and the appropriation of internet tools have reshaped the material basis of society, leading to a new wave of protest movements and social activism that is adaptable and capable of responding to the challenges posed by the pandemic. Despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic, social activism remains resilient and continues to thrive, adapting to new circumstances and utilizing digital tools to mobilize and voice their concerns. The digital space has become a crucial platform for social activism, empowering people to shape the world and hold those in power accountable.

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NOTES

3 Taylor, Social Movements and Democracy, 4. Also Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Empire (Harvard University Press, 2000).

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