

(2025 January 29) The public sphere, the local, political action - clip from a thread (nettime)

The old maxims "All politics is local" and "Change starts at the precinct level" are pertinent today, and reflected in this nettime post from Allen Siegel which refers to Hannah Arendt's (and Habermas's) discourse on the classical agora and the public sphere.

I don't have time to go into it now (working to get an energy efficiency grant going before Trump's heavy-handed blockage takes it away), but am reminded again of Deleuze's rhizome metaphor (which I easily transpose to lichens working on granite and Antonio Negri's vision of how individual, apparently unconnected nodes of action within the Multitude create enough chinks to over time bring down the hegemonic great wall (think Gramsci's state as the American capitalist way of life in the fantasy-form of Wachowskis' Matrix).

Persistent resistance, little bit here little bit there.

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Today's Topics:

1. So what's the use of art, theory, activism? OR the public sphere? (allan siegel)

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Message: 1

Date: Wed, 29 Jan 2025 13:40:24 +0100

From: allan siegel <allan@allansiegel.info>

To: nettime-l@lists.nettime.org

Subject: <nettime> So what's the use of art, theory, activism? OR the public sphere?

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Hello all,

\*Louis\* mentions, "I'd suggest that how we are assembling our worlds around "art" and "activism" and especially "theory" are probably not serving us the way they use to. For whom? To whom?" and \*Brian\*, "I am now an elder, who must turn experience - even the experience of failures - into something valuable for present and coming generations. Resistance happens in the streets, but not only." \*Felix\*, says, "The political center abandoned the notion of the public sphere in the 1990s." \*Andreas\*, provides another vantage point, "I believe that there is a connection between the political organization of postwar democracies and

the way in which their public spheres were structured (for instance through large-scale public and private media monopolies)."and back to \*Stella's\* item that, "Strong local units are able to materially and discursively resist the imposition of authority from outside."

?Working backwards from Stella's point: It seems to me that THE LOCAL is an intrinsic starting point for political activism because the local is a critical discursive zone where people, a public, are able to discuss and act, most directly, on the issues and conditions that impact their lives. The local in this sense is a nascent form of the public sphere.

?In the classical realm, which Hannah Arendt discussed, the local realm is the agora, a model of the public sphere. A multi-functional social space that was ?the space of appearances? where people came together to discuss and also if necessary to act. For Arendt political discourse and action seem to be inseparable. If we look globally, and closely, at postwar social movements (a long list) this connection between discourse and action enabled often inextricable and profound social and political changes

?With examples that begin to appear from 1945 forward (and we could easily look at previous centuries) the public sphere is not only one specific social space as in Habermas' study but rather a variety of social spaces according to Nancy Fraser's important critique of Habermas. Accordingly, there are a multiplicity of discursive zones from which ideas become transformed in to political acts and social movements.

The connections between the so-called 'political center' and the 'political organization of postwar democracies' brings us into the present neoliberal miasma within which the dimensions of the public sphere range from the Occupy, MeToo, and BLM movements to Facebook and TikTok. Simply put, the public sphere is not static or necessarily one dimensional and is capable of enabling a broad range of political and economic programs within which 'art' can appear as an essential and integral element.

Louis' questions, "For whom? To whom?" can be approached first by looking at From Whom? Meaning, from which positions and/or places, does ?art, theory and activism?? originate? What do our local individual ?units/collectives?? look like and what are their connections (if any) to some variation of a "public sphere"? Meaning, am I part of some discursive zone? And, BTW, does Nettime count as a public sphere? Does Stella's definition of a local unit include virtual communities like Nettime? And, how do forms of 'resistance' that ferment within virtual communities translate into activism?? This becomes a critical question if we are not to be swallowed within the Neoliberal Miasma or fenced within Trumpist ghettos.

Best

Allan