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The Aesthetics of Creative Activism: Introduction

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ABSTRACT

In this introduction to *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* special issue on the aesthetics of creative activism, we canvas influential scholarship of political aesthetics to sculpt a broad typology of six interconnected mechanisms by which art might intervene in the world. We label these: Documentation, Disruption, Recognition, Participation, Imagination, and Beauty. Each has a compelling tradition of theory and application, augmented, extended, and sometimes challenged by the thirteen fresh and provocative contributions in the special issue. Yet, we ask, if both politically minded artists and culturally minded activists are convinced of the power of art to provoke social change, and if we live a world that by almost all measures is now saturated with politically inclined, aesthetically informed practices, interfaces, objects, and texts, why does art not seem to be making a difference? Clearly, we need to think harder about the relationships between art and action, a task the articles assembled here call upon us to take seriously.

> [T]here is no political revolution without a revolution in sensibility.
> — María del Rosario Acosta López (2021, 143)

Changing the world is complex enough even before we bring art into the conversation. Certainly, composing music or carving sculpture can seem powerful ways to sway hearts and minds, but to put the matter perhaps too bluntly, when activism is conducted creatively there is a lot that can go awry. Criticisms can be co-opted, intentions misconstrued, and appreciation can take precedence over agitation. Such problems are comically dramatized in the appropriately named "Arts and Minds," the fifth episode of the Australian television comedy series *Utopia* (Sitch 2014). The storyline sees staff from the satirically inept fictional "Nation Building Authority" tasked with commissioning "a series of iconic roadside installations" to adorn a new (yet already obsolete) major highway.

In response to this creative prompt, the artists seek not to beautify the roadside, but to engage in what we can recognize as *creative activism*. One artist designs a "Road to Nowhere" off-ramp that sends traffic in an endless loop. Another plans a three-quarter-sized replica "fake truck stop," that diverts traffic just before the real truck stop. Another adorns the concrete crash barriers with graphic murals of road accident fatalities. A fourth erects an enormous red concrete penis by the roadside, and a fifth, tasked with making an artistic sound baffle wall, designs it to augment, rather than reduce, the noise of engines, exhausts, horns, and screeching tires. Such parodic artworks arguably fulfill precisely the promise that propels creative activism: the use of artistic works to intervene in urgent political and social conversations. One work disrupts the inevitability of "progress," while others point to the phallocentrism of capitalism or reinsert repressed knowledge into public discourse by amplifying, not obscuring, the costs of growth. Such interventions are crucial if, as Krzysztof Wodiczko argues, "The democratic process depends on the vitality of public space" (2014, 119).

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However, as is often the case with actual artistic interventions, problems for *Utopia*'s artists emerge in the gaps between concept and execution. In this special issue, such gaps are productively theorized by Christopher Earley (2023), in his piece on balancing artistic exceptionalism with audience expectations. In *Utopia*, such expectations pointedly manifest through the comic intrusion of meddling bureaucrats who demand modifications to the artworks: the paintings of dead and ruptured human bodies are replaced with (to the bureaucrats) more palatable images of non-human roadkill; the fake truck stop is moved after the real one so that progress along the highway, and opportunities for consumption, are unimpeded; a second sound wall is erected to suppress the output from the interruptive first; and the phallus is reengineered to be limp. The deflation of the artists' ambitions offers a sad indictment of art's ability to make a difference, while at the same time the television show *Utopia* itself, in pointing to these issues, might be argued to be using art to bring a debate about the role of public art to public consciousness through an act of meta-creative activism.

This special issue is concerned with providing better answers for the questions and challenges comically posed by "Arts and Minds." How might we make sense of art that explicitly and unapologetically looks beyond itself to try and act upon the world? What are the mechanisms by which art might intervene in matters of politics and ethics? And what do we need to understand if we wish to harness artistic tools to drive social change? Questions of this sort are increasingly inescapable as culturally minded activists and politically minded artists alike seek to *use* art to *do* things: political and social things in the world. However, much of the work carried out as part of creative activism places the emphasis on the latter term and draws its inspiration from theories of social movement formation, participatory action, and community organizing. Consequently, those working in the creative activism paradigm have tended to overlook how questions of art and aesthetics also bear upon these practices, and thereby have under-thought how aesthetic aspects might complicate or contribute to the political elements of activist interventions. Our purpose in this special issue is thus to re-emphasize the *creative* aspects of creative activism—especially insofar as that term leads into wider discussions of art, aesthetics, and culture—as a way to theorize and realize better ways of intervening with art.

I. WHAT ART DOES WHEN ART DOES POLITICS

Throughout the twentieth century, influential voices in philosophical aesthetics and cultural criticism dismissed questions of political activism as inappropriate or even pernicious (Beardsley 2004 [1983]; Bloom 1994; Greenburg 1957; Scarry 1999; Steiner 1995). Despite this discouragement, there exist numerous theoretical approaches that seek to account for the political potential of artistic works. Predominantly informed by postcolonial, feminist, Marxist, and other critical perspectives, these theories of political aesthetics (to prioritize one term among many) provide relevant resources for those who seek to articulate how a given artwork might engage the world in politically meaningful ways. In so doing, they map and assert mechanisms by which an artwork can reach out to stir psychological arousal within its audience, for example, or establish new social relationships and ways of living together. However, although in their specifics these models of political and activist art are characterized by nuance and internal variation, they also tend to return to a set of six mechanisms when seeking to explain how artworks can influence the world. For convenience, we have labeled these mechanisms: Documentation, Disruption, Recognition, Participation, Imagination, and Beauty.

I.A. Documentation

Documentation refers to how an artwork can make visible that which is otherwise overlooked, obscured, or difficult to perceive.[1] As we are evoking the term here, *documentation* is the mimetic impulse of art to denote aspects of the world. By means of documentation, art can contribute to public debate and political discourse (Simoniti 2021). It can bring issues and topics to public attention, expose injustice, and confront its audience with what they have not been able or have not wished to see or hear. It can, as Sondra Bacharach (2023) argues in her contribution to this special issue, "bear witness," through the (re)exhibition of both material and figurative components of historical events.

Beyond realism, artistic documentation may also surface and provide processing space for difficult topics through metaphor, allegory, and allusion. It can slow time to enable micro-scrutiny of important implications of routine practices—as encapsulated in Isaac Julien's observation that the

"violence of everyday life occurs in the way in which people may look at one another" (2001, 101). In *Utopia*, this mechanism informs the artwork which adorns the roadside with depictions of gruesome road-crash victims, forcing drivers to acknowledge the hidden brutality of the system in which they participate.

Historically, documentation manifests, on the one hand, in the social realism of artists from Käthe Kollwitz and Gustave Courbet to Diego Rivera and Ken Loach, who sought to make visible forms of human suffering or ways of life that were too often neglected in art (Clark 1973; Forrest 2013; Shapiro 1973; Worpole 1981). The opera *La Muette de Portici* by Daniel Auber is an oft-quoted example, with its folktale of a fisherman who starts a people's uprising recorded by historians as one of the sparks that lit the 1830 revolution in Brussels that ended in Belgian independence (Arblaster 1992, 49). On the other hand, a similar but distinct impulse can be seen at work in theories that explore how artistic production might create new ways of perceiving the world, such as Walter Benjamin's assertion that film's "dynamite of the split second" will enable a new penetrating perception of the natural and social worlds ([1935] 2008, 37). It is likewise this idea of documentation that sits at the heart of Lukács' ([1938] 2007) noted quarrel with Brecht and Bloch over the political potential of expressionism versus realism as alternate means to convey the reality of class struggle as the motor of history.

I.B. Disruption

Disruption is the potential of art to interrupt, upset, or disturb habits of perception and understanding. This is the shock of the avant-garde, the challenge to convention of the radically new, that is associated with wild daubs of paint and the provocation of atonal melodies (Goehr 1994; Herbert 1992). A frequent proposition in modernism, *disruption* describes the process by which artworks can incite, through the play of form and the difficulty of their indirect mode of expression, their audience to perceive the world in new and confronting ways (Bürger [1974] 1984; Erjavec 2015; Leighten 2013). One strong claim for this particular mode of aesthetic intervention has been made with reference to rock music, in which beat and noise are argued to embody a "Dionysian" sensibility that subverts and attacks social norms (Garofalo 2002; Gracyk 1996, 99–148, 99–148; Marcus 1989). A darker variation is the use of similar tactics by Vladislav Surkov—novelist, theater director, and advisor to Vladimir Putin—who has weaponized aesthetic disruption as a tool of aggressive realpolitik (Luzkow 2021; Pomerantsev 2019). Rossen Ventzislavov (2023) explores other, performative, examples of disruption in his article in this issue, using historical examples of politically charged performance art to usefully counter the lay misconception of "performative" as lacking effect.

Artistic disruption has been extensively theorized, from Viktor Shklovsky's ([1917] 1965) formalist account of *ostranenie* or "defamiliarization"—a technique by which art renders objects unfamiliar and thereby thwarts habitualization of perception—through Sigmund Freud's ([1919] 1953, 210) theory of *Unheimlich*, or the uncanny—a vague feeling that something familiar is not quite right—to Bertolt Brecht's (1964, 143) *Verfremdungseffekt* or "alienation effect" that turns "the object of which one is to be made aware... from something ordinary, familiar, immediately accessible, into something peculiar, striking and unexpected" and Heidegger's assertion that an artwork "founds" a new world that disrupts existing interpretations of the world and thereby engenders a state of existential disorientation (quoted in Vattimo 1992, 50–1). Perhaps the most influential manifestation of this mechanism in current discussions is a post-Rancièrean notion of disruption as an aesthetic means to disturb and realign the dominant "distribution of the sensible" (Chanter 2019; Rancière 2008; Shapiro 2019). In *Utopia*, we might understand this mechanism in terms of the confronting image of the giant red phallus that discombobulates its audience. Among the articles in this special issue, Adam Burgos and Sheila Lintott (2023) argue that although artistic transgression has often been claimed to disrupt only the artworld, 'aesthetic disobedience' has a much wider, generative potential that parallels civil disobedience, while Sara Rich and Sarah Bartholomew (2023) argue that the iconoclastic disruption and destruction of previous art can itself be understood as a form of creative activism. Alongside this, Marina Gržinić's (2023) call for a radical aesthetics can be read as an urgent plea for disobedient art on all sides—but also as a caution that to engage with what exists, even to oppose it, risks reinforcing it, and thus that the most disruptive aesthetic of all may be to "refuse" and "turn away."

I.C. Recognition

Recognition here refers to the ability of art to enhance empathy (Castano, Martingano, and Perconti 2020), build connections across difference (Barraza et al. 2015), and provide a means to link diverse peoples and build peace through intercultural connection and understanding. As we are articulating it here, *recognition* is often less about what is to be depicted through shapes or tones, than of who is seen to be capable and allowed to participate in the production of art regarded as a fundamentally human activity. It is more a matter of authors than texts. Through the mechanism of recognition, an artwork allows its audience to extend their understanding beyond their monadic self to experience and understand the lived experience of others. At its fullest extent, recognition can be conceived in terms of the encounter with the Other: the radical experience of alterity that informs strands of post-Lyotardian aesthetics (Carrol 1987; Fernandez 2022).

Recognition can also inform grounded and contingent accounts of artistic politics, such as theorized in Rancière's (2012) *Proletarian Nights*, where he argues that the perseverance of nineteenth century workers to create art and participate in a cultural life under exceptionally unconducive conditions was itself a deeply political act that spoke to their membership in the polity. In more contemporary conversations, recognition has tended to be articulated in terms of diversity and access, particularly as the basis for the ethical value and function of including previously excluded human and more-than-human voices in the production of art (Dixon 2009; Felski 2021; Gordon 2018; Mirzoeff 2015, 289–298; Taylor 2017; see articles by Fred Evans (2023) on hearing the cosmos and Mark Harvey (2023) on Indigenous aesthetics in this issue). Art is here envisioned as a means to embrace or amplify marginalized voices in order to facilitate extrospection and broaden representation (Weiser 2018; see Andrea Baldini (2023) in this issue on graffiti as redressing unequal access to urban spaces of communication). The best example of such practice in *Utopia* is the post-materialist baffle wall that augments the voices of more-than-human elements of the environment such that their presence cannot be ignored. It should also be noted that, in this special issue, both Helen Petrovsky (2023) and Marina Gržinić (2023) posit that recognition is not automatically progressive and sometimes creative activists must refuse its assimilatory embrace.

I.D. Participation

Participation refers to art's capacity to crystallize and construct a community, often through a set of aesthetically articulated ideas or beliefs around which a politically meaningful community can form. This is the ideological work of aesthetic forms reimagined in more positive terms: not as false consciousness, but as the proposition of a shared worldview that is necessary to enable and inform political action. Although not directly framed in such terms, this impulse informs a range of work in early cultural studies that explores how aesthetic works can act as the nuclei of new webs of connections or to which a community might return when they are seeking validation or encouragement in the face of adversity (Gilroy 1993; Hebdige 1979; Radway 1984). Giving voice to this potentiality, Thomas DeFrantz argues that:

> This could be the endgame for us all, then: to imagine creative exchange that considers our assembly, and temporary recognition across difference, as the reason to participate in art—by, about, and for an us briefly convened but sparkling in discovery rather than abject solitude or misrecognitions. Let us make space for one another, by retreating from having to know what's next or what came before and instead encouraging a long-winded encounter of an art making public with itself. (2017, 15)

We still do not fully understand how and why participatory art can form community—although Stephen Duncombe's (2023) article in this issue lays out some illuminating theories of affect and the crowd, and Cathleen Muller's (2023) piece on "cheap art" makes a compelling argument for a democratized understanding of cheap art as "art of the people and for the people"—but makers of dance and performance have long understood that audiences align in both physical and psychological ways while experiencing the artwork. Neuroscientists and behavioral psychologists have now joined those attempting to explain the *frisson* of live art, for example in research suggesting that watching live theater synchronizes audience members' heartbeats and that this lasts even during the interval (Mancing and Marston William 2022).

In its generative context, the participatory artistic mechanism has been thought through in Nicolas Bourriaud's ([1998] 2002) relational aesthetics, whereby the artwork becomes a meaningful event or experience of people together, rather than the encounter with a distinct and bounded text. In a dark way, both the fake off-ramp and truck stop from *Utopia* illustrate this mechanism: these artworks do not simply invite contemplation, they draw the audience into a deceptive and frustrating shared experience that could potentially form the seeds of a new community. However, such a negative experience would usually be understood as an exception to the general tendency of the participation mechanism in creative activism that emphasizes the power of art to provide human connection, opportunities for dialogue, a sense of solidarity, and through these and other communitarian means to help develop reflexive self-awareness (Miller 2021), heal wounded people and communities (Beausoleil 2014; Davis Johnson 2016), and inspire or facilitate the collaborative work needed to restore damaged ecosystems (Sanz and Rodriguez-Labajos 2021; Sommer and Klöckner 2021).

I.E. Imagination

Imagination considers the politics of art to emerge from its ability to give form not to what *is* but to what *could be* and thereby offer either aspirational inspiration (Muñoz 2009) or the opportunity for scenario-building and future-testing. Art can prototype both dystopian and utopian futures, taking the form of artistic experiments mapping the possible endpoints of current ideas or behaviors. Proponents of art's power argue that it may by this means that artists can "change social discourses about possible worlds we could live in" (Tilley 2022, 21). Examples include the imaginary worlds created by novelist Ursula K. Le Guin in which she tried out what a society without gender divisions might feel like (*The Left Hand of Darkness*; 1976) or how anarchy could work in practice (*The Dispossessed*; 1974). Such futurist envisioning tactics are now common in the worldbuilding of many online role-playing games in which players can experiment not only with experiencing alternate identities including more-than-human identities, but with constructing new social-ecological systems (Bousquet et al. 2002). Likewise, the burgeoning genre of ecofiction sees writers such as Octavia Butler and Leslie Marmon Silko imagining the planet's future after environmental breakdown and thereby exploring alternate-life philosophies and practices for the present (Streeby 2018).

Exercising the imagination may also, as Duncombe (2023) (by way of Marx) argues in this issue, lead to material outcomes, given physical changes must be structured and envisioned in the imagination before they can be built in reality. Meaghan Morris (2019) notes ways in which this happens in "cultural communities" that are inspired by imagined social arrangements from creative sources to adopt literal "experiments in living." Her example is steampunk, which has "flowed from literature to everyday life in which people devise present-day 'futures' using costumes, imagery and equipment," often with an "emphasis on fabrication" that "resonates with the ecologically-minded communities that form around vintage clothing, the rediscovery of sewing and crafts, 'sustainable fashion' initiatives and, on the dietary side, vegan culture" (2019). Expanding on the work of J. K. Gibson-Graham on economies as performative in nature, Morris reminds us that not only are alternative economic identities possible, but they are also already being creatively performed, even within the pervasive theater of capitalism.

The fictional artworks depicted in *Utopia* do not include an obvious example of imagined futures—say, a mural depicting a lush wetland replete with birdlife and oxygenating flora, threaded with bicycle paths or electric public transportation, seeding passing highway commuters' imaginations as to what could be possible in an alternative or future world. However, the show itself arguably provides a dystopian warning in its depiction of a democracy so broken by political pandering to public relations that a highway must be built even if it has already been proven obsolete.

I.F. Beauty

We debated whether beauty should be included here. Is it separate from documentation, recognition, and participation? Does an artistic function of, as Lyotard ([1979] 1984, 81) termed it (commenting on the Kantian sublime), "solace and pleasure" sit well with the action orientation of activism? On reflection, we consider beauty a crucial inclusion in any typology of art's political attributes. Anthropologists have posited visual and performative art's functions in preliterate society as

twofold: not only to encode into accessible memory practical information addressing the struggle for survival materially and socially by passing on lessons about how to succeed as a community, but also to buffer emotionally against subsistence stress (Minc 1986). In the context of creative activism—which is a stressful vocation characterized by burnout and compassion fatigue (Gorski and Chen 2015)—such buffering seems essential. Activists need to attend to their wellbeing, and the specific capacity of art to nourish that wellbeing should not go unacknowledged. James Thompson, commenting on the famous quip, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be in your revolution," (attributed to feminist-anarchist activist Emma Goldman[2]), states that

> art is understood to have a role in the present, as a protective force with an "in spite of" quality that enables people to tolerate suffering, not so that they become immune to it, but so that they have the energy to continue to resist. This is not dance as an opiate, but as a source of nourishment. (Thompson 2009, 2)

More than this, beauty in art, through its links to the categories above of imagination and representation, reminds us that it is not only the excluded present and hoped-for future that can be represented, but also the exquisite now: that which is worth fighting for and which can spur activists to continue the struggle. In this special issue, Matilde Carrasco-Barranco (2023) explicates this potential by analyzing the complex interrelations between beauty and anger. Of course, if art gilds what Heidegger ([1927] 1962, 102–107) termed the existentials—the social and political status quo, sealing them with a gloss of rationality and stability in the guise of beauty—it is conservative art. But, as Kathleen Higgins notes, beauty also "assures us that something real is loveable" and "provides the comforting background against which one can think the uncomfortable" (1996, 283). None of the fictional artworks in *Utopia* perform this function but, arguably, the comedic packaging of the television show itself provides both release from stress and an accessible space in which to then think through some difficult questions about art's purpose. Perhaps *Utopia* offers us the function of artistic beauty in the form of humor.

We have little doubt that incisive and legitimate objections will already be stirring in many readers' minds in response to these bald categories. Like all typologies, ours is necessarily crude, glossing significant differences within the categories and overlooking the extent to which particular theories of political aesthetics overlap. We welcome these objections as the beginning of a more structured and therefore hopefully more useful conversation about creative activism aesthetics: one where we are not always reinventing wheels and throwing babies out with bathwater. Our wager here is that what is lost in subtlety by boiling down the aesthetics of creative activism to six fields of interest is compensated for by increased clarity regarding the patterns and aspirations that have recurrently characterized previous attempts to explain how art might do politics. We hope our list provides an account of enough of what has come before to enable us to now ask, if this is what art can do, why hasn't it been doing it in consistently effective ways? If this body of knowledge constitutes a good understanding of the political work of art, then why does art so often seem detached from the business of "real" politics? And perhaps, most importantly, given that we live in a world filled with not just art but with politically inclined, aesthetically informed practices, interfaces, objects, and texts—a world that by almost all measures has more art in it than ever before—why have we not seen a concomitant change in political action and behavior? *Why has this not been working*?

II. ART HASN'T BEEN WORKING

As we write this introduction, two young Just Stop Oil activists, Phoebe Plummer and Anna Holland, have just been arrested on charges of criminal damage and aggravated trespass at London's National Gallery. They threw soup on one of Van Gogh's *Sunflower* paintings (protected by glass), stating, "What is worth more, art or life? Is it worth more than food? More than justice? Are you more concerned about the protection of a painting, or the protection of our planet and people?" (quoted in Kekatos 2022). Public opinion is divided: are they despicable, self-aggrandizing vandals who have alienated people from the Just Stop Oil cause and risked damaging a thing of beauty or are they in the

nature of the "lonely sentinels" that Petrovsky (2023), drawing on Peter Kropotkin, describes in her article in this issue? India Bourke, writing in *The New Statesman*, suggests that Van Gogh would have approved of their protest: "Van Gogh was a radical. By advancing abstraction and experimentation, his paintings asked contemporaries to look afresh at the world they lived in," particularly through his recurring depictions of poverty (Bourke 2022, para 5).

And yet, Van Gogh's hypothetical support for this anti-art action also demonstrates exactly why such action had to take place. If not the most successful and revered artist of the twentieth century, Van Gogh is certainly in contention for that title. It is an understatement to declare that his work has been feted, analyzed, reproduced, and repurposed around the world. His personal story has been dramatized on screen and page, the asylum where he was hospitalized in Saint-Rémy-de-Provence reimagined as a sunny tourist stop, and his artistic works transformed into an immersive video production that tours the world. Given its reach, its valorization, the deep ubiquity of its rough brushstrokes that could almost stand in for all fine art in the popular consciousness: if there is any art we might have expected to achieve its political ends, it is Van Gogh's. Perhaps, his work and its influence upon broader artistic and cultural traditions have contributed to a process whose ultimate and now imperceptible influence saved us from a greater nightmare of instrumentalist industrialization. Yet it is unclear whether it still possesses any power to encourage its audiences "to look afresh" at the world. When strolling the halls of the National Gallery, how many patrons are inspired to reimagine how they perceive and understand social arrangements, inequality, or poverty, or to recognize their own privilege in being in a position to spend leisure time consuming art?

The question now, in a post-Van Gogh-meets-soup world, is what art could do differently if and when it seeks to change the world. In a world that is confronted by terrible challenges from climate change to technological monopolies, terrifying pandemics to resurgent fascism, what can art do to help? And do we need to think about art and aesthetics in new ways to better confront these challenges? Asking these questions in a useful way requires that we move away from the often-unstated assumptions that framing a political intervention in creative ways will automatically make it more palatable or effective. It is not necessarily the case that art will succeed in political ends by virtue of its creative inspiration or affective intentions (Holm 2022). Indeed, creative activism can go very wrong. It can harm audiences (Carello and Butler 2014), misrepresent or appropriate causes (Zulli 2020), and cause "distraction from the needs of an actual movement" (Davis 2013, 42). Sometimes its processes can enfold the very problems—colonialism, patriarchy, ableism, racism, capitalism, or carbon footprint—it seeks to change (Barker 2012; Boler et al. 2014; Derby 2013; Gorski and Erakat 2019) or descend into "art washing" (Ruck 2020) or "poverty porn" (Quinn 2015), both of which can obscure or turn away the impulse to act. Despite the two-plus millennia of thought directed to questions of art and its social and moral impact—from Confucius to Plato to the burgeoning scholarly interest in creative activism today (e.g., Abujbara et al. 2017; Duncombe and Lambert 2021, 6)—the specifics of how "good art" can best deliver "good activism" remain unclear (Marchart 2019).

This does not mean though that we ought to (necessarily) abandon art as a means to change the world. Instead, we need to think harder about art and action. We need to interrogate how the potential and mechanisms of art's politics may have changed in the context of a changing world. Simply because Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* once (possibly) challenged institutional orthodoxy and helped imagine new ways of seeing and being, does not mean that they continue to do so in our current conjuncture. What do creative activism and the politics of aesthetics look like two decades into the twenty-first century? And how might philosophies of art and theories of art criticism help us rethink the relationships between art and the broader world? We are excited by the fresh and fundamental contributions the authors in this special issue make to answering these questions.

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END NOTES

1 The more obvious word here might be representation, but we have purposefully sought to avoid that term. This is because of the way that term can conflate what we are calling documentation and recognition (see below) by virtue of a quirk of the English language. This can be seen in Stuart Hall's highly influential account of representation, in which he defines the term as an act where one thing "stands in the place of" another ((2003 [1997], 16). This can either be in terms of (1) depiction and denotation, or (2) political or legal representation, where a person or group participates in a process by way of a proxy. Through this theoretical maneuver, Hall draws a connection between cultural acts of depiction and systems of authority and power by way of a linguistic sleight of hand. However, when accounting for the mechanisms by which art can do political work, this collapse of meaning confounds rather than clarifies two distinct processes. Thus, for our purposes we have sought to distinguish the two concepts.

2 Goldman says that this is a gloss of her point that "I did not believe that a Cause which stood for a beautiful ideal, for anarchism, for release and freedom from conventions and prejudice, should demand the denial of life and joy" (1934, 56).