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Art and citizenship: Practices and discourses of young artivists in Portugal

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ABSTRACT

The literature on youth and political participation has been increasingly paying attention to more alternative and non-institutional forms of engagement by that cohort. The growing detachment from the sphere of institutional participation is the other face of these trends which have been intensifying and are behind some authors' descriptions of young people as apathic and apolitical. In reality, young people think and act politically in fields where the private and public spheres mix, and which involve entertainment, leisure, and sociability. Outside the normative political sphere, based on an adult-centric world vision, young people construct new forms of intervention that spring from questioning the world, the exercise of power, and different forms of inequality. The artistic and creative practices have functioned as crucial devices for young people to secure a space in the public sphere. In this article we employ the term artivism to reflect on how they articulate this combination of art and civic intervention. It is based on a project developed in Portugal involving in-depth interviews with young people between 14 and 35 years who are involved in multiple causes. The analysis of their discourses allowed us to develop a typology of functions that are attributed to artivism.

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1. Introduction

Everyday discourse depicts young people as a collective marked by an increasingly remote relationship with political institutions. Such situation is often described and understood as reflecting apathy and disinterest, giving rise to a somewhat defective citizenship. Following the same rationale, it is often asserted that this leads to a weakening of the political system since this situation threatens the good functioning of democracy. In other words, this approach somewhat places on young people the onus of a democratic system that is seen as progressively frail. However, against what we might classify as a pessimist perspective, a growing

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number of voices have highlighted exactly the opposite. Many have argued that the very critical and distant posture assumed towards traditional political actors and their institutions are in fact contributing towards the revitalisation of the system (Chou et al., 2017; Pickard, 2019; Pickard & Bessant, 2018). A healthy democracy depends on pluralism and admits a range of distinct ways of exercising citizenship and political rights which are not exhausted in the electoral and political party route.

The idea that the political participation of young people often takes place at the margins of institutional politics is not exactly new. Several social, cultural, and political movements of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries were strongly influenced and even led by this cohort. We might recall as paradigmatic examples of this trend the events of May 68 or the hippie and countercultural movements of the 60s and 70s. Such examples can equally be used to illustrate something which has also been emphasised by several researchers: that the fields of creativity, art, and culture are particularly fertile soil for the civic and political expression of young people. Certain youth cultures and subcultures have been documented as playing an important role in the way they articulate aesthetic creation with political action. Punk, rap, or street art come to mind as particular forms of expression where such combination is manifested (Campos et al., 2021; Campos & Simões, 2014; Guerra, 2018). These are often the exclusive territories of young people and, as such, impenetrable to the adult gaze. They are arenas which are easily navigated by them, who hold the rains on certain capitals (symbolic, bodily, technical, etc.). Music, the use of the body, visuals, or digital media serve as tools employed in the construction of political subjects.

Some authors approach the cross between artistic participation and activism by using the neologism 'artivism' (Mekdjian, 2018; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008; Zebracki, 2020). In this article we make a generic use of the term, encompassing a range of aesthetic and creative practices with a clear political component linked to specific social causes. Our research is based on a project recently developed in Portugal where interviews were conducted with young people involved in a diverse range of social causes.[1] The central goal of this research was to analyse the political agency of young people taking place in non-institutional, subaltern, or ignored fields of participation in the public sphere. Most of them fall in the artivist category as here defined. The aim of this article is to

examine their discourses on the potential of art and creativity in terms of civic intervention and social change.

We see this article as a contribution towards the literature on contemporary youth artivism, where we present empirical data linked to a novel and largely unexplored context. As such, it builds on a line of research centred on non-conventional forms of political participation, namely those involving creative and artistic forms of engagement (Pickard, 2019; Pitti, 2018; Rhoades, 2012; Sarrouy et al., 2022; St John, 2008). The most original aspect of this article lies in its approach, where the functions of artivism as practiced and understood by young people are analysed. To do this, we developed a functional taxonomy based on the discourses of those we interviewed. From the way they described the aims of their artivist practices, both for themselves and for the communities they represent, we identified 5 main purposes: (a) art as strategy for communication and information; (b) art as self-expression; (c) art as catharsis and cure; (d) art as expression of (invisible) communities; (e) art as party.

The article is organised in four sections. The first one describes the methodological and analytical approach of the project. The second section is dedicated to the literature review and discussion, around the central topics of research – youth, citizenship, and political participation. In the following section, we discuss the concept of artivism and the way we approach it. Finally, the fourth section is dedicated to the discussion of the interviews. In this final section, we present the functions of an engaged art, which emerge from the words of our interviewees.

2. Methodology

The main purpose of the Artcizenship project was to examine how young people employ certain resources and creative grammars as ways of expression and civic participation. For this, we defined an analytical framework involving two axes. Axis 1, is named 'resources and grammars'.

It is our view, in this regard, that young people employ a variety of day-to-day resources – such as their bodies and garments, technology (digital and beyond), and expressive tools (musical instruments, paint, paper, etc.) – in a creative fashion, in the process of building their identities (individual, social, political). These resources can be applied in the domain of political expression to achieve visibility in the public sphere

developing in the process different symbolic languages and grammars of action.

Four types of resources have been considered: the body, the image, the sound, and technology.

In other words, the domain of the body encompassing, for example, performance or drama; the domain of the image involving illustration, painting, video, street art, etc.; the domain of the sound mostly consisting of music; and technology entailing the range of available formats in which digital devices can be used.

This axis allowed us to outline domains of action which helped us structure our sample, thus facilitating an even distribution of the interviewees across these distinct fields. To a great extent, this axis helped us to structure our fieldwork.

Axis 2 corresponds to 'territories and stages'. This axis draws us to spaces (territories) where political engagement occurs and citizenship is exercised, conceiving them as performative fields (stages). In the context of our research, this second axis is composed essentially of two types of territory: the urban space (the streets) and the virtual space (the internet). These are generally the territories where non-conventional political engagement achieves greater expression.

This axis forced us to see the analytical field as being composed of these two dimensions in permanent interaction. It goes without saying that we have considered this distinction from a purely analytical perspective, knowing full well how they overlap and get mixed up in hybrid practices.

In this sense, these axes allowed us to approach the analytical field in a diverse and eclectic manner, always alert to the different domains which are generated from specific resources and grammars functioning in distinct, intersecting, fields. The axes mentioned above were not only crucial in helping us define our sample but also for the development of an observation model reflected in the interview script we employed.

In terms of methodology, this project involved qualitative methods, adopting a triangulation strategy of sources and data-gathering techniques. In addition to an ethnographic approach, which was revised and adapted in the context of the pandemic we endured,[2] we conducted a series of in-depth interviews but also use of visual methodologies[3] and collaborative research practices.[4] The interviews, involving single individuals and sometimes groups, were conducted face-to-face, with some exceptions involving online interviews during the lockdown period.

They were based on a broad script covering biographical issues while also focussing on practices (involving resources, grammars, and territories) and representations around creativity and activism. The sample was collected via snowball sampling and included young people between 14 and 35 years, aiming at a degree of profile diversity. We have selected young people involved, individually or collectively, in a variety of social causes (anti-racist, feminist, ecological and environmental, LGBTQI+, etc.). A total of 69 interviews were conducted, including some exploratory ones and with other significant participants (not necessarily young). Approximately 50 interviews were selected from this sample for codification and analysis using MAXQDA software.[5] This article is based exclusively on interviews conducted with young people who either see themselves as artivists or, without identifying with the term, nevertheless develop artistic-cultural practices with a political bent.

3. Literature review – youth, citizenship, and political participation

3.1. Ambivalent takes on young people's participation

As already mentioned, young people are generally portrayed, both in public and institutional discourses as a politically weak cohort. The flaws which are attributed to them spring from a variety of assumptions. Firstly, young people are seen as citizens undergoing a process of development, as an incomplete political subject. Politics is conceived as an adult-centric universe. Political institutions are preserved, reproduced, and defined according to the interests and world visions of adults. Secondly, a narrative has been emerging which is underpinned by concerns regarding the future of democracy. Several studies suggest that young people are growing steadily less active in terms of institutional politics (Costa et al., 2022; Sloam, 2016). They are increasingly disconnected from political parties and sceptical regarding the competence of traditional actors.

Opposed to such a disenchanted and, often, moralistic vision, several authors insist that young people are in fact politically active and committed (Chou et al., 2017; Kennelly, 2011; Pickard, 2019; Pickard & Bessant, 2018; Pitti, 2018). Without denying the evidence that shows an estrangement from institutional politics, several of them argue instead that the political universe is significantly wider and more diffuse, involving multiple practices. Some go as far as to insist that

negating and/or moving away from institutional politics might, despite the apparent paradox, be seen as a political act (Farthing, 2010) in the sense that it reveals an awareness about the system and its malfunction that could act as an engine of change. We thus encounter a research trend that shares a more optimistic understanding of young people's political engagement, finding evidence that shows them not to be apathetic but rather interested in a range of political, social, and cultural subjects and able to mobilise around specific campaigns.

The problem appears to be a growing mismatch between institutional politics and younger generations. This disparity is reflected in the practices and rituals of political engagement, as well as in the concerns, causes, and priorities that define political programmes. Regarding the first point, we observe that young people prefer more horizontal and individualised forms of participation, more elastic and transitory, that are the direct opposite of how political parties operate. We thus see that young people are at the forefront of innovative ways of doing politics, of a hybrid nature, highly dependent on digital technology (Kahne et al., 2015; Loader et al., 2014; Soep, 2014). Regarding the second point, young people appear to lean more into a cause-based type of politics instead of one based on generic ideological programmes typical of party politics (Farthing, 2010). In this respect, they are once again at the vanguard as a group that mobilises around campaigns that governments do not see as priority. The most paradigmatic example might be climate issues that clearly show the cleavage between young people and institutions of political power.

Unlike politics which, as we have seen, is considered a weak point in young people, the world of leisure, entertainment, and culture is a field where they are seen as highly dynamic, engaged, and competent. This is for this reason an overrepresented dimension in youth studies, a crucial social marker typical in this age group (Bennett, 2015). Young people are classified according to the symbolic, ludic, and gregarious universes they engage with. The music they hear, the visual styles they adopt, the technologies they use, serve to demarcate them from adults, bound to a classification based on job roles. The reality is that the world of entertainment and sociabilities is crucial to the construction of the personal and social identities of young people. However, this universe is not entirely apolitical, contrary to what often reverberates in certain moralising and paternalistic discourses. On the contrary, there are hints that the political socialisation of many young people occurs among peers within certain ludic, musical, and stylistic environments (Gordon & Taft,

2011; Pfaff, 2009; Pickard, 2017). It is unnecessary to insist on the political aspect of certain youth or DIY (sub)cultures such as punk or hip-hop, extensively studied by several researchers (Guerra, 2018; Martins & Canevacci, 2018; Simões & Campos, 2017). The same is true regarding the digital world which has been shown to be an important territory for the exercise of citizenship and for a range of different types of political practices, in particular activist ones.

Several authors have drawn our attention precisely to the different grammars of action among young people, namely those belonging to minority or marginalised groups (Lewicki & O'Toole, 2017; O'Toole & Gale, 2010). Young people, women, migrants, ethnic minorities, LGBTQI+ people, for example, as traditionally subaltern category groups, tend to opt for strategies of action that escape the pressure and the obstacles imposed by authority and hegemonic normativity. The symbolic grammars inscribed in the domains of art and culture are, for this reason, frequently employed since they have proven to be expressive and creative domains highly effective in terms of the dissemination, communication, and strengthening of collective identities. It should also be stressed that these forms of action are inscribed in the fabric of everyday life corresponding to what has been defined as a micro-political (Skelton, 2010) or liminal (Pitti et al., 2023) domain of action.

3.2. Art as a form of civic intervention and social transformation

We employ the concept of artivism to reflect on these connections. The term artivism is a neologism that, according to Sandoval and Latorre (2008, p. 82) implies 'work created by individuals who see an organic relationship between art and activism'. The concept of artivism is reasonably recent and has been used with increasing frequency in recent years. Generally, artivism is understood in the context of local and micro-political individual initiatives, an activity affecting emancipatory, counter-hegemonic, and progressive processes. Despite frequently being inscribed in established social and activist movements, it often expresses a more spontaneous, horizontal, and fluid character. In some instances, it is driven by artistic vocations and a concern with aesthetic creativity, in others, artivists are motivated by specific programmes and a sense of ideological mission, by causes and social campaigns.

The literature on this subject highlights a series of attributes of these artistic manifestations (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008; Mateos & Sedeño, 2018; Mekdjian, 2018; Zebracki, 2020). Above anything else, their aim

is social change. Thus, we frequently come across critiques of the establishment and the status quo, investing several of the artivist expressions with a manifestly subversive character. Secondly, in general their goal is empowering and giving visibility to stigmatised and subaltern individuals and communities. Often this is linked to the development of communal and democratic projects seeking to involve people and provide them with tools for artistic and political expression. Finally, these initiatives often take place outside the objectives, mechanisms, and structures of the art market and its institutions. Thus, not only are economic concerns disregarded, but the very notion of a conventional artistic career, based on the structures of the art market and its institutions loses weight. The underground and DIY logic achieve a special relevance in this context. These forms of intervention are based on an anti-capitalist ethos and are relatively independent from funding, pressures, and institutional endorsements.

This last point is particularly relevant in a digital era that ignited the multiplication of tools and spaces of cultural and artistic production. The democratisation of internet access gave a significant boost and incentive to DIY and non-professional practices through the extension of hardware and software devices that enable a broad range of creative uses. Several authors have pointed out this issue, highlighting the rise of the 'serious amateur' (Buckingham, 2017) dissolving the borders between amateurs and professionals, between consumers and producers (Prior, 2010; van Dijk, 2014).

For this reason, it is important to note that digital artivism is currently seen as an extraordinarily relevant domain, as pointed out by several authors, especially concerning the use of digital tools (Rhoades, 2012; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008) and the power of social networks (Campos & Silva, 2023; Rodal et al., 2019). Consequently, as suggested by Zebracki and Luger (2019), the domain of the internet is converted into a public space, forcing us to rethink the concept of public art. Thus, the virtual world can be conceived as a new public sphere (Papacharissi, 2008; Schäfer 2015) where debate, input, and engaged artistic expression are able to proliferate. Digital artivism appears to be particularly relevant when it comes to young people and minority groups, by allowing them to avoid adult-centric and hegemonic contexts and discourses (Rhoades, 2012; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008). However, as some research shows, the adoption of these tools by activists isn't done a uncritically, since many point to contradictions and problems intrinsic to its use (Campos et al., 2016; Malafaia & Meriluoto, 2022)

Presently, any citizen is able to explore their creative side, having at their disposal a range of tools which are accessible and easy to use, as well as a worldwide network for the dissemination of their content. Consequently, digital devices have reorganised the sphere of cultural and artistic production, thus threatening the monopoly of the cultural industries or the power and expertise of certain art agents. This issue has also had an impact in terms of artivism, as our project demonstrates.

4. The power of art: Artivist discourses

Our reflection is not centred on artistic practices, but rather on discourses produced around the relation between art and politics. 'Political' is a floating concept reflecting distinctive dimensions in the function of the actors' discourses. The interviewees generally address their political intervention as a territory where civic awareness, social change, and progress, rupture with the status quo and the hegemonic normativities are inscribed. In other words, we are generically speaking of a counter-establishment politics, built on a critical vision, that is motivating the activism of these young people. The arts and creativity cross over with politics on different levels. That is to a large extent determined by the circumstances and profiles of our interviewees. Some are artists or cultural professionals who are involved daily in these activities. Others are closer to the 'serious amateur' (Buckingham, 2017), the curious or dilettante who employs certain creative tools for a specific purpose. Profiles are also clearly linked to the ages and professional journeys of these young people.

It should be noted that, although in this article we used the concept or artivism, not all those whom we interviewed recognise themselves in this term. In some cases, this is due to not being familiar with the concept, others because they consider that their work does not fit exactly in this category. We have adopted this classification to identify forms of cultural and artistic intervention that are recognised by their authors as containing an activist and civic content and/or goals.

As our interviewees see it, art in the service of politics implies a number of generic ideas about the role of art in boosting an active and informed citizenship. The underlying principle underpinning these artivists' work is the belief that creativity and art are powerful tools. Their power is revealed in terms of their impact on the individual and the collective, in their capacity to raise social awareness and inspire change. This is a crucial issue since it reveals art as a device operating at two different levels: the individual and the collective. It is, therefore, a fundamental tool

to bridge the gap between these two spheres, dissolving the boundaries between the public and the private. So, one of the reasons why art is so important is due to the personal and/or collective empowerment that its production, use, and sharing bring. In other words, our interviewees are convinced that art has a profound impact which is unmatched by other types of expression. Such conclusions are in line with what is reported in other studies which highlight how effective art and artistic practices can be in promoting social change, particularly in the context of people and groups belonging to structurally marginalised or peripheral positions (Mateos Sedeño, 2018; Mekdjian, 2018; Sandoval & Latorre, 2008; Zebracki, 2020). However, we sought to explore the differences in understanding around the role that artivism has played in the personal experience of our interviewees. We found distinct visions on how art and creativity might contribute to social change. Hence, after analysing the interviews, we propose an approach to this issue which takes into consideration a functional typology encompassing different narratives which are not mutually exclusive. The typology we propose considers five different functions that, in some cases, are very similar in their expression.

Before describing these typologies, we need to highlight two issues. Firstly, it is important to understand that the functions attributed to artivism are dependent, before anything else, on the type of expression being considered. In other words, not all artistic manifestations play a similar role nor do they have the same impact. This is partly due to the variety of positions the actors occupy in the artistic and activist fields, but also to the causes they get involved in or the type of aesthetic expression they develop. In this context, we come across a wide variety of profiles. While some develop artistic expressions linked to protest and civil disobedience, in the street, others produce theatre plays or performances for more conventional spaces, still others produce illustrations which they share on Instagram or create rap songs they disseminate on social networks. In addition, we have the multiplicity of causes (LGBTQI+, anti-racist, feminist, climate, intersectional, etc.) and artistic fields (music, painting/illustration, performance, etc.). To all this, we must also consider the type of stages where the art is manifested and communicated.

Secondly, it is important to remember the question of identity and professionalisation, which are also linked to the personal trajectory and the age of the interviewees. Those who self-describe as artists or who develop some sort of creative and artistic work cut across different age

groups. However, age has a relevant impact in terms of (artistic) professionalisation and the development of a sense of self. For this reason, it is often the case that those who are closer to, or older than 30 years of age, display a more consistent trajectory. On the other hand, age is linked to life experience and with a higher degree of reflexivity about individual trajectories. So, generally, we see in the interviews the older developing a more solid, sustained, and coherent discourse around the power of art and activism, whether that be in personal terms or at the level of their more general implications. The following stories and excerpts we present demonstrate this situation.

5. Artivism: Functions of an engaged art

5.1. Art as strategy for communication and information

There is a consensus among those interviewed that sees artistic expression as a powerful vehicle for communication. Several artivists see art as an effective way to bring together and mobilise people, drawing attention to whatever cause is being advocated. Thus, it can be a useful tool to convey information in a way that involves the public. This narrative prioritises the message. Several artivists touched on this issue, highlighting how privileged they feel to be able to create content with a message that reaches a specific public and has an impact. In this sense, some argue that artists hold a particular responsibility, since they are often public figures or are uniquely placed in terms of their capacity to intervene in the public sphere. This issue is discussed in the following two citations, the first by two musicians from a band that places strong emphasis on gender and LGBTI issues, and the second by a female immigrant rapper:[6]

> […] at the end of the day, we are also in a place of privilege. From the moment we climb on to the stage with fifty people before us, listening to our music, to our songs […] And we have a strong sense of responsibility that comes with this privilege and which we would never deny, since it's part of how we see ourselves as citizens and artists. In other words, if we wish to convey certain values, ideals, ideas, and those things we believe in, which affect ourselves and several other people in society, we must do it without ambiguity and always trying to be precise about what exactly is the message we wish to convey […]. (Luis and José, Musicians, 34 and 30 years old, 2019)

> But I think there is something, a voice telling me that things will change. Because when you change someone's life, a child or an elderly person, you

> have made a difference. My ambition is not to reach out to everyone, but rather to have a sense of that change. […] you can't underestimate the power of your art to suddenly have an effect on someone. They go their own way, you aren't part of it and will never truly know what they did or didn't achieve. But if you don't get it out there, you will stop this idea and remove any chance that it might do its thing and affect someone positively. It's almost like a responsibility, like an obligation. (Sara, rapper and graffiti writer, 33 years old 2020)

As a vehicle for communication, art often implies two dimensions, a more rational one (conveying information to the public) and a more emotional one (to rouse the senses and emotions of the public). It is a vehicle for information which is considered powerful in the sense that it uses aesthetics to engage people's emotions and is, for that reason, complimentary to other forms of dissemination of information which are used in activism. The following remarks come from two young people involved in the climate and anti-racist movements where they broach this issue:

> So, from the moment you are involved in a public, cultural and political performance, you engage people on two levels: the Art and the causes. And this [aspect] is missing if the point is to make it truly global. To try and make such connection between information and action. I think Culture has a crucial role here. In fact, how many times have you heard people say that some films have changed their lives? (Joaquim, 21 years old, 2019)

> I believe that sometimes art can work that way, it can convey something without being so analytical. I think that artivism has a crucial role from this perspective, it can convey information to someone in an emotional way. In other words, the point is to inform people, but they aren't moved by the details, but rather by the emotion. So, you need to inform in an emotional way. And, sometimes, a good way of doing it is through art. You can convey the message you wanted, and at the same time you also inspire emotion on people. (Maria, performer, 34 years old, 2020)

5.2. Art as self-expression (and the self is regarded as political)

Art is often seen as the product of individual political exercise. Several authors have noted a growing fragmentation and individualisation of the public sphere; something that is related to a range of causes linked to identity issues but also to emerging civic stages, namely the internet (Bennett & Segerberg, 2011; Papacharissi, 2008; Schäfer, 2015). In the current context we see an atomised model, from which the individual acts while using private media accounts. As Papacharissi (2008) sees it, in a highly mediatised and individualised world, the private sphere is

empowering, liquid, and reflexive triggering a kind of 'civic narcissism'. This is reflected in several of our participant's answers who use the internet as a vehicle for the creation and distribution of their work, reflecting something we previously mentioned and which is emphasised by several authors as increasingly central in contemporary digital artivism (Sandoval & Latorre, 2008; Rhoades, 2012).

The self thus becomes an object of political commentary. The self is frequently seen as the product of structural actions that mould the individual according to hegemonic normative forces. Thus, emancipation, resistance, and struggle also involve the self through its transformation. This becomes particularly salient among certain groups, whose struggle is linked to identity causes deeply rooted in the self. In these instances, artivism gets embroiled with projects involving the body and identity (Martins & Campos, 2023) which, despite being individual, acquire collective force by inscribing themselves in wider movements.

This type of approach is also in line with the specific imaginary of the artist. The discourses around art traditionally invoke the idea of the individuality and singularity of the artist (Inglis, 2005). Hence, artistic expression is recurrently seen as a singularity of the subject, a manifestation of their most profound self. This issue is frequently invoked by several of our interviewees. The artivist dimension emerges from a representation of the self as an immanent political being. In other words, the condition of oppression, of becoming the target of injustices and normative prejudices, converts every type of expression in the public sphere into a profoundly political act. From this perspective, art can act as a device for reflection about the self and the world. Quite frequently the (stigmatised) body is converted into the subject of the artistic production, in the sense that it is the target of the oppressive normative forces.

The following citations depict this function of artivism. The first comes from a transgender young person for whom illustrations have been the means to narrate his experience, which is shared on Instagram, while the others come from two black women.

> The art environment came almost as a need of expressing me to myself and to share things that I liked. […] I think that my art has sometimes an activist angle, when I speak specifically about my challenges as trans, when I speak about my struggle to get help or the way I am perceived by the world […] (Paulo, illustrator/visual artist, 25 years old, 2020)

> I think that my black activism also emerged because of my hair activism, of the natural hair movement. I stopped straightening my hair 7 years ago and

> started thinking about what it meant. […] And that triggered the conversations that gave rise to a risograph zine about my personal experience with my hair, literally since I was born until the moment it was written. […] It's me speaking about my experience with hair, but It's a very specific hair. And that made me very happy, that fact that it appeared as it did. […] (Ana, illustrator and art curator, 34 years old, 2020)

> The arts helped quite a lot […] I invited the women from the C P[7] to share a final act with me. […] As so we did a performance that involved, whilst doing our hair, talking about our lives and experiences and about the black movement. And they all belonged to the Brazilian black movement. And we talked about how the way we relate with our hair transform us and about the moment in our lives when we became conscious of ourselves as black women. Because we all have an awareness or ourselves as women, but as black women it happened in different moments of our lives. That was very beautiful and powerful, because we are different women, but our stories bear strong similarities, regarding our mothers, our hair. (Maria, performer, 34 years old, 2019)

5.3. Art as catharsis and cure

To a large extent and linked to the previous point, we also encounter a description of art as a form of liberation and catharsis, frequently linked to trauma. The activist nature of this art arises from the exposure of the individual to different forms of oppression and violence. This means structural oppressions linked to a specific personal and/or social condition. People living in poverty, who are racialised, LGBTQI+, women or immigrants are among those who more frequently report this type of situation. They consider that the traumatic events they experienced result from situations of structural injustice and prejudice which make them define these processes as eminently political. In this context, several describe their involvement in art as a contribution to a process of healing, of the pacification of the self. Art is conceived as a tool for the release of emotions, but also for self-reflection. Underlying this, there is the idea that individual change, the improvement of personal and subjective circumstances can occur through art, its production and sharing. But this does not consist of a merely narcistic or individualised act. These artivists understand that from the moment they make a presence in the public sphere they are contributing to the therapeutic and reflexive processes of others who find themselves in a similar situation.

In the first citation, a black lesbian young woman addresses precisely this quest and self-reflexivity which is linked to the artistic practice, which helps her dealing with personal pain and anguish. In the second example

we have a young woman who started her artivist journey from the moment she created and disseminated on Instagram an instance of harassment she was subjected to. Finally, a young black woman speaks to us about her music as an expression of fear and anger, a way to heal certain traumas.

> everything that I make in my artivism I get from personal experiences […] I need to sit down and process and imagine and connect with myself to be able to put down something on paper […] You know, it's personal stuff that I'm putting out […] I was searching … I needed to get everything out of the system […] it was a way of escaping […] I was always trying to find a way to express myself and … get it all out, for the world to see what it like to be a black lesbian woman in a postcolonial country […] (Carolina, illustrator/visual artist, 27 years old, 2020)

> […] once I was on the bus on the way to Lisbon and this man came the entire trip touching my leg, which bothered and even embarrassed me. I couldn't do anything about it. So I decided to illustrate this theme of harassment. At the time, I didn't share this image with anyone, but a friend told me that I should do it so that others could identify and to expose the situation. (…) The emotions that brought me here, and that I am now able to identity, are guilt and anger. Especially because, when I arrived for work I spoke about this incident and was accused of not having done anything. So this was a kind of outpouring, a vomit. In a certain way, I can even say that my illustrations were several vomits to exteriorise what was going inside. Then it flipped over, because it went from being something very personal to a question which affects all women and, now, everyone. (Cátia, illustrator/visual artist, 31 years old, 2020)

> Sometimes, despite people not even realising, I even feel bad for always speaking about the same thing, but I speak a lot about that in my music. About the fact that I feel estranged from the world, that I feel torn between two worlds, in terms of race and gender … But something I haven't mentioned, is that in my music I speak a lot about experiences of sexual abuse, that I also try to address that. […] I went through that as a child and I also speak a lot about it. Myself and my music, it's a deeply introspective process to heal trauma from when I was a child and how I feel in the world. (Nadia, Musician, 25 years old, 2020)

5.4. Art as expression of (invisible) communities

Some artivists emphasise a more collective and communitarian concept of art. In this particular case, there is the recognition that art can function to give visibility to certain minority issues and to specific groups that have been historically stigmatised and disregarded. In this context, art assumes an aggregating function, serving to build or strengthen a certain sense of

community. Collective identities can be bolstered through the creation and sharing of powerful symbols and signifiers. The idea of empowering these groups is associated to these practices. In the following citations, two black, lesbian artists stress exactly questions of representation and art as a way to give visibility to groups to which they belong.

> I refuse to draw white people […] It's not a prejudice, but rather a vow of fidelity, and that's that. […] Because this is what I wish to portray, I wish to portray the voice of the black woman. I want to depict the voice of the black man. I wish to depict the voice of the black trans woman. I want to portray blackness. The black LGBT. I wish … That's what I want to portray. It's this that I wish to shout out. It's, then, a vow of … trust that I have made to myself and my art, with my struggle. (Carolina, illustrator/visual artist, 27 years old, 2020)

> And I believe that art has this power, just like music does, illustrations, or a book. All of that can open up our minds to new worlds and new possibilities. The issue of representation as well, seeing ourselves represented is super important, especially when we are people with marginal identities, or non-white, or people with functional diversity. All these are issues that need to be discussed, but not weighed. They should not be seen as specifics. We often say universal and specific, but for these people the specific is universal. Thus, I believe it is important to have the notion that activism is whatever we wish it to be and not just joining demonstrations or go to the streets shouting. It's also making art and exist and re-exist. Especially when we are people who, for years, have been shoved aside by the patriarchy. The mere fact of people expressing themselves and making art is a force. (Rita, 32 years old – 2020)

Very present in the discourses of the interviewees is the notion that art promotes feedback, circularity, and dialogue. To build an audience is to build a community. This is especially obvious in physical contexts of community sharing (music shows, performances) but also through the use of digital platforms. As we mentioned, these have a very important role which is stressed by practically all our interviewees. To put out an illustration on Instagram, make a song or a performance available on YouTube or Instagram, allows reaching a large number of individuals, strengthening existing networks or recruiting new people for collective campaigns. These media offer, beyond that, the advantage of facilitating interaction, since several artists receive comments and feedback from their audience. This feedback is important for artists to develop a sense of how their work is received, but it also serves to give more solidity to the problems debated and the common struggles. Several of the interviewees mention the recognition that they receive from the public who

identify with the problems and experiences that are portrayed. The next two citations address specifically this experience. The first is from the musicians mentioned above, the second from a lesbian movie director who came out via an art video.

> From early on, every time we sing this song – and this was a surprise to me – the people feel it very intensely. The people who go to our gigs should already be open to it and feel very excited about what happens on stage, how we express ourselves, how I speak and dress … And then, at the same time, they reach the content more easily […] We played many gigs at The L. B. Hotel where we had an artist residency for year and a half, and after the show they would come and chat to us, many foreigners, and cry, tell stories … I think that people feel that they have shared a secret, something almost timeless, that they were at that place that during that time they discovered something unrepeatable. (Luis and José, Musicians, 34 and 30 years old, 2019)

> After releasing my video I received a lot of positive feedback and something happened that I wasn't expecting, which was many people getting in touch because they felt encouraged. People here felt encouraged by the video and were saying that they were afraid to come out, but at least they knew they were not the only ones in that situation. I ended up establishing a dialogue with many people over this issue, trying to make them stronger. So I always receive feedback about my work. (Luisa, video-maker/film director, 28 years old, 2020)

5.5. Art as party (or the carnivalisation of politics)

Another dimension which is recurrently linked to artivism involves its close links with other formats of activist activity. In such cases, artivism is seen more as product of collective undertaking, integrated into broader operations of mobilisation, recruitment, or protest. Within this framework, art is a component in a larger mechanism, it is seen as a tool to facilitate or trigger other actions. There is a more utilitarian understanding of artivism which follows objectives going beyond individual drive or need, being more in tune with the collective spirit. In these instances, we frequently encounter practices involving performance, such as guerrilla theatre, cultural jamming, or flash mobs involving a range of people and complex operations. In any case, a party atmosphere, celebratory and ritualistic, is very present. These initiatives work like high-intensity aggregatory moments which are close to the collective effervescence we see in contexts of 'carnivalisation of politics', as mentioned by St John (2008). One young man linked to climate groups speak precisely about these initiatives and the role that they play.

> Yes, the Clown Army as well. It's the same people who create these things. In the early millennium. It's really the same people. Here in Lisbon, in 2012 or 2013 if I'm not mistaken, we had a Sambacção that organised a Clown Army. You need a bit of clowning about to take action […] but this subversive universe is a creative activism, fun, not too serious and solemn. We can join protests whilst enjoying life. […] we must think in terms of image. When we take action, we also think in terms of choreography. It's always down as "Choreography;" who's in, how, when it happens … even in demonstrations. "We got in, we went that way … " And then there's a line-up, who's speaking, the language we use is quite connected with shows and we speak about choreographies because, mostly, you need to know who does what, simultaneously with whatever is going on. And, obviously, you must have several options. And some of our actions directly include performative aspects. (Sérgio, 34 years old, 2019)

6. Conclusion

In this article, we sought to reflect on contemporaneous artivism as a process through which several young people get involved in specific causes and social campaigns. The literature indicates that young people develop new grammars and formats for civic intervention by employing a variety of different devices, namely those that are more familiar to them such as digital gadgets. The ludic and symbolic universes, based on distinctive lifestyles and cultural practices, reveal themselves as a fecund field for the emergence of new formats of civic intervention. Music, the body, or images are employed daily to construct narratives about the self, community, and society. To take part and reflect on certain problems and social causes occurs, often, in these youth settings which are frequently catalogued as sterile or apolitical. However, through a range of new languages and aesthetic creations, young people effectively participate and carve out their space in the public sphere.

We used the term artivism translating a junction between the artistic creation and civic intervention. As we see it, both the type of artivism that is developed and the way in which it is conceived, is dependent on two factors. Firstly, being a fringe phenomenon, it can involve two kinds of individual insertions which determine a range of social roles. On the one hand, we have those individuals who essentially identify as artists (professional or amateur) and that see things essentially from this perspective. In these instances, we are dealing with artists with a strong civic and political intervention but inserted in a cultural and artistic field with a specific habitus. On the other hand, we have those who see themselves as activists and militants of certain causes and who employ art

and creativity in a more utilitarian fashion, on the service of their campaigns. Artivism is built from a diversity of positions located between these two poles. Secondly, the type of causes that mobilises these young people also seems to be a contributing factor. Some defend identity causes, linked to their personal circumstances and conditions, bearing the weight of the political subject. Others get involved in more transversal causes, such as the climate, human rights, or social inequality. This insertion is not a small thing, as it determines the contours of campaigns as well as the uses of art.

We conclude that, in every case, art plays a crucial role and is a very powerful instrument of personal and collective transformation. The paths toward change are diverse. In our study we have identified essentially five types of discourses around an engaged art: (a) art as strategy of communication and information, (b) art as expression of communities, (c) art as an expression of the self, (d) art as a form of catharsis and healing, (e) art as party.

Notes

1. Artcitizenship – Young people and the arts of citizenship: activism, participatory culture and creative practices.
2. The project anticipated an ethnographic approach involving field research and participant observation. The difficulties associated with the lockdown and the unpredictability of the situation, forced us to revise our methodological strategy. As a result, we decided interviews should become the focus of our project, even though we did not completely dispense with the ethnographic approach which was developed, essentially, in the early and final months of the project.
3. The use of visual methodologies, video in particular, led to the making of a web documentary with 27 episodes of approximately 3–5 min.
4. The project was meant to include workshops and artist residencies with young people. Given the difficulties involved in the period of the COVID pandemic, we had to limit this methodological approach to two workshops only.
5. Most of the ethnographic work and interviews was done by Alix Sarrouy. MAXQDA codification and analysis was done by Gabriela Leal, Alix Sarrouy, João Martins and myself, all members of the Artcitizenship project. The collective work carried out and the discussions with these colleagues were fundamental for the reflections put forth in this article.
6. All the names used in the article are pseudonyms.
7. Anonymised. It refers to an informal group of black women.

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