

Julia Molinari

Academic activism and how it gets written

This contribution is rooted in studies on academic writing, education, sociologies of knowledge, and philosophy. It is a fledgling reflection that assumes there is a need for 'academic activism'. I tentatively align this activism to 'activist scholarship' and concurrently call for a re-imagining of academic writing so that it can enable activism. This re-imagining might include the re-purposing of existing forms (e.g. the PhD); the creation of new forms (Comics or Blogs); or the reviving of old ones (the Manifesto, the Dialogue or the Chronicle). At the core of this call is the understanding that writing is powerful in its ontological, epistemological and ideological reach because it is how academics create and disseminate knowledge. Because of academics' reliance on it, writing becomes influential in enabling or inhibiting epistemic and social justice (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015; Fricker, 2007; Peters, 2009; Sperlinger, McLellan, & Pettigrew, 2018)

'Academic activism' underscores much recent scholarship on the values and futures of the university. However, to the best of my knowledge, this scholarship doesn't overtly use the phrase 'academic activism' (cf inter alia, Barnett, 2012; Bengtson & Barnett, 2018; Besley & Peters, 2013; Connell, 2019; de Sousa Santos, 2017). The phrase 'activist scholarship', on the other hand, features explicitly in the fields of sociology of knowledge and human rights (Choudry, 2020; Collyer, Connell, Maia, & Morrell, 2019; Maddison & Scalmer, 2006).

'Activist scholarship' can be understood as a form of *radical politics of action* that leads to social change which can involve (personal) risk. This form of scholarship flips the traditional view that it is academics who are best-placed to interpret and theorise about social justice. Rather, activist scholarship recognises that it is the grassroots social activists and organisers doing public protest who can educate academics in matters of social change and justice.

Is this what we mean by 'academic activism', namely a 'radical politics of action'? And could academic writing(s) become catalysts that lever change and enable scholarship to be 'activist'?

Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski (2018, p. 32) suggest as much in their *Manifesto for a Post-Critical Pedagogy*. They place writing at the heart of educational concerns, but they also worry that:

if authors invent an entirely new form of writing, then they will fail to care for and love the present

Despite the 'dangers' of new writing forms (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 18), they chose a manifesto rather than the established journal article. What motivated their choice?

One answer is that because ideas emerge from form *and* content (Lewis, 2018), choices about form and content matter to knowledge creation. A related answer is that since writing is at the heart of the politics of representations and meaning (Ververi, 2018), how we write politics matters. When Hodgson, Vlieghe, and Zamojski talk of 'care and love for the present' (Lewis, 2018, p. 30), they are referring to a form of education that cares about 'citizenship, social justice, sustainability' (Hodgson et al., 2018, p. 18) – these are political concerns that matter and that trigger 'activism'. All this further connects writing with 'activism', the manifesto being the 'genre of choice' for the communication of political ideas (cf Communist and Fascist Manifestos; feminist manifestos ; post-colonial manifestos (Peters, 2017). What other genres might afford academic activism?

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