

Anti-war Actionism in the Urbanized Space: A Postmodern Approach to Asserting the Value of Peace

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Abstract

This study aims to clarify the role of actionism as a peacebuilding tool, identify the advantages and disadvantages of its various techniques (performance, happening, art installation, flash mob, etc.), and evaluate their effectiveness in the urbanized space. The research methodology is based on postmodernism and its comprehension of activism, public action and protest. Anti-war actionism is considered an element of the system of socio-political actionism. It is characterized as a set of spectacular forms of non-violent public protest against armed aggression and its consequences. The expansion of today's anti-war actionism beyond the narrow artistic environment and its entrance into the broad social dimension is demonstrated. The empirical basis for the conceptualization of anti-war actionism includes two groups of actions: (1) anti-war actions carried out since the 1960s in the United States and Western Europe; (2) anti-war actions carried out in various countries in response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The regional features of anti-war actionism under the conditions of armed conflicts and wars are determined, and the advantages and disadvantages of anti-war actionism as a peacebuilding technology are identified within the space of modern cities.

Keywords

socio-political activism, actionism, anti-war actionism, military aggression, peacebuilding, Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, urban space

1. Introduction

Since the beginning of Russia's open aggression against Ukraine in 2022, the issue of war and peace has become especially relevant in public discourse. The questions that lie on the plane of "war–peace" have become global. The consequences of armed aggression, the vulnerability of sovereignty and disregard for human rights and democratic values have demonstrated that these problems concern not only institutions of power and supranational organizations. The general public has become an active participant in the debate on the cost of war, its real and potential threats and effects, and so on. An active community in various parts of the world, primarily in large cities, is participating in the process of peacebuilding, countering neo-totalitarian aggression and fighting for democratic values and human rights.

The public's activity concerning the war in Ukraine takes various forms in different countries. The public's actions differ in scale, power of influence, the volume of human and material resources, and implementation technologies, among other factors. Individuals have engaged in classic actions of solidarity with the people of Ukraine (such as rallies, demonstrations and pickets), the collection and distribution of humanitarian aid, signing e-petitions and supporting those in need of temporary protection. Generally, the latest system of socio-political activism in democratic states is characterized by a wide range of ways for the public to voice their positions, demands and initiatives.

In the system of socio-political activism, several types of activism emphasize the visual component of public action. They are characterized by theatricality, visual appeal and brightness, as well as the ability to surprise, shock and provoke. Such socio-political actions borrow the techniques

of actionism, such as avant-garde art. Thus, a particular public action can be likened to a performance, arousing interest first in form and only subsequently in content. The average citizen's initial interest in any socio-political action may be caused by the vivid form of the action. This increases the likelihood of citizens' interest in the content of the event. Protest by nature, actionism has brought its rebellious, outrageous features into socio-political life and supplemented the spectrum of classical protests with new forms, which can be noticed across cities oversaturated with events. Hence, it is important to note that the analysis in this study does not concern anti-war socio-political activism as a whole but rather actionism as the latest system of spectacular forms of political protest, discussion and debate. Consequently, the analysis covers creative forms of protest that take place in the urbanized space in response to acute social problems, including war and the struggle for peace.

The role of actionism appears to be special in the decisive moments of the history of modern states. Armed aggression, genocide and violence against civilians are such emotionally strong events that they incite the public to action, particularly giving a powerful impetus to anti-war actionism. Therefore, the study of the opportunities, limits of influence and tools of actionism in socio-political life is now of interest to the social sciences. The aim of this study is to identify the role of actionism as a peacebuilding tool, the advantages and disadvantages of its individual techniques (performance, happening, art installation, flash mob, etc.) and their effectiveness in the urbanized space. To achieve this goal, two groups of cases are investigated: (1) anti-war actions that were carried out in different countries since the 1960s; (2) actions carried out in the first months after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

2. Methodology

Postmodernism contributed to the emergence of socio-political actionism, which was formed at the intersection of activism and actionism as a form of modern art. Under the influence of postmodernism, a synthesis of protest and creative principles in arranging and holding public actions occurred. Consequently, for more than half a century, the configuration of socio-political activism has been changing due to the introduction of postmodern notions of protest and mechanisms of public action. The notions of play and interactivity, a tendency to use open space, horizontal networks of participants and the application of theatrical techniques are at the heart of such ideas. There is an ever-growing spectacularization of political activism. Due to such processes, collective action repertoires have significantly expanded (Tilly, 1984, 2006), and new individual action repertoires have been formed.

Under the conditions of postmodern reality, socio-political activism requires a non-classical form. Indeed, such a form is inherent in actionism as an art of action. The techniques of performance, happening, spatial art installation, flash mob, and street art all possess brightness of form (Lodder, 2010; Waldner and Dobratz, 2013; Khoma, 2015a, 2015b; Serafini, 2018; Trujillo-Pagan, 2019). Regardless of the relevant issues and the specific form of actionism, actionism is always spectacular and usually provocative. Public actions that are carried out using the techniques of actionism have the potential to challenge society, state institutions and even the world order. Actionism is not only outrageous and provocative but is also aimed at drawing attention, creating an information pretext and attracting publicity. Experiments with the body, space and the natural landscape can cause a strong emotional social reaction, shape the public mood and encourage a certain action or inaction. Actionism is itself the result of social reflection and, at the same time, is able to spark further processes of reflection by those who witness or partake in a particular socio-political action.

Socio-political actionism differs from actionism in its classical (artistic) sense. The distinction lies in the fact that the organizers and performers of socio-political actions may not only be socially active representatives of avant-garde art; increasingly, they are public activists who want to convey their message clearly, and thus produce an idea and implement it in a non-classical (theatrical, outrageous, provocative) form.

If socio-political actionism is typified by the spheres of life, anti-war actionism can be distinguished in this system. It combines various spectacular forms of non-violent public protest, which

in one way or another capture the attitude towards armed aggression and a wide range of issues related to war (e.g. violence against civilians, protection of refugees, use of prohibited weapons).

The analysis of anti-war actionism is based on changes in the nature of socio-political action. Postmodernism has contributed to a new understanding of the ways in which the actors of socio-political life articulate their positions. The novelty is manifested primarily in the emergence of an artistic, creative component in the format of socio-political actions. That is, the nature of protest has changed (e.g. Lamond and Spracklen, 2014; Boone et al., 2017; Gubernat and Rammelt, 2017). Imagery and emotional saturation are increasingly introduced into the action (Khoma and Kozma, 2022, p. 4). This is a response to changes in society. The "society of the spectacle" (Debord, 2002) requires a more spectacular and theatrical policy, and various dramatic pages of history must (despite the tragedy) be discussed vividly, precisely to attract the attention of as many people as possible. This is especially important when an action is held in countries that are not directly affected by the particular historical event to which it is responding.

As a result of the broad social changes of recent decades, public activists are increasingly turning to symbolic, emotionally vivid tools while planning actions. That is, they implement the tools of actionism, though often in simplified and rather primitive forms. This is what distinguishes socio-political actionism from other conventional and unconventional forms of activism. Due to the unusual format of socio-political action in the era of information noise and overload, a certain socio-political problem and the public's position in relation to it have the prospect of being noticed and included in the news media. Media (both traditional and new) are more likely to report an event or action if it is accompanied by a striking "picture". The tools of actionism provide the best possible methods for achieving this remarkability.

Anti-war actionism has been insufficiently studied by the social sciences. This is due to the recent lack of empirical material demonstrating the application of creative techniques to conduct anti-war actions. Anti-war actionism accelerated after World War II, especially during the Vietnam War. The popularity of anti-war activism during the Vietnam War is not accidental, as the establishment of postmodernism and active US military action in Vietnam coincided at that time.

Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a powerful impetus for discussing the topic of war and peace, particularly with the help of postmodern protest tools. This gave rise to considerable empirical material for the study of anti-war actionism. Performances, art installations, happenings, flash mobs and other actions that took place in the first months of Russia's military aggression against Ukraine are the empirical basis of this study. Two groups of anti-war actions are investigated: (1) actions that were held since the 1960s in the United States and other Western countries; (2) actions carried out in the first months after Russia's military invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In addition, the case of Russian actionism is singled out to demonstrate how it combines democratic anti-war actionism and anti-democratic pseudo-actionism within the framework of state propaganda to support aggression and incite hatred.

3. Anti-war actionism as an element in the system of socio-political activism

Although socio-political actionism is almost a common characteristic of postmodern reality, especially within the urban space, there are undulating shifts in its representation based on its national context. Such actions are most often provoked by historical events with a strong resonance in a particular community or at a global level. War, large-scale violations of human rights and genocide are examples of such events. As a creative process, actionism requires a burst of emotion (such as anger, anxiety or contempt), and tragic events often form the emotional basis for creative protest. Thus, the regional features of actionism are determined by the range of problems that give rise to public protest activity.

Anti-war actionism combines a number of nonviolent protest technologies at the intersection of political activism and artistry. These technologies (performances, flash mobs, etc.) are aimed not so much at reaching a mass audience, but at attracting the attention of the media, provoking a public response, and thus influencing public opinion regarding the problems of war and peace. Anti-war actionism can be understood as a system of spectacular and theatrical forms of protest conveying pacifist ideas. It is important to draw a clear distinction between anti-war activism and anti-war

actionism. They have much in common, as both are voluntary actions, directed against war and based on the energy of free-spirited people. However, anti-war activism covers many initiatives, including volunteering, financial donations, public patrols and signing online petitions. Anti-war actionism, on the other hand, involves holding sensational thematic actions to attract attention and create public resonance. Most of the actions are unique, although some of them can be repeated.

Actionism is a radical art of action, an atypical spatial manifesto. Radicalism typically generates interest in actionism, but it can also repel it. In the first case (interest), the vivid form of the action can arouse interest in its content, the social sense, which is creatively interpreted. However, not everyone who observes a particular socio-political action is prepared to perceive it and understand its intention and hidden meanings, which can lead to the second case (repulsion). Organizers must take such ambivalence in the perception of actions into account. After all, it is important that a socially significant idea, after its creative interpretation, receives a further social reaction.

The question arises: who is the creator of anti-war and other socio-political actions today? Can such actions, which by tacit agreement are artistic actions, be conceived and performed by activists who do not belong to the community of avant-garde art? If the action was conducted by citizens who do not belong professionally to the field of art, how should their actions be characterized: as socio-political actionism or as a creative approach to activism? The answer to these questions can be found in the slogan of one of the leaders of the post-World War II avant-garde art period, Joseph Beuys: "Everybody is an artist" (Tisdall, 1979, p. 7).

To understand the nature of anti-war actionism and its possibilities, it is necessary to consider how the general public perceives information and what they concentrate on in the news. Unusual approaches to visualizing a problem are often the best way to promote information about it. The more remarkable an anti-war action is (due to theatricality, desire to shock, provoke, etc.), the more people will pay attention to it and perhaps become interested in its content. If the action does not attract attention with its form, especially in a big city oversaturated with events, it will have insufficient resonance, and, therefore, will not achieve the desired social effect. The dynamics of large cities, where various types of actions are most often held, require similar dynamics from the form of the action.

Consequently, art forms are now present not only in the artistic environment but also in the open space of streets, and they have become an integral part of socio-political actionism. A comprehensive range of avant-garde art forms is in the arsenal of anti-war actionism. Postmodern features of socio-political life, including the growing roles of the individual and the public in politics, have caused the expansion of those who use the creative techniques of actionism to carry out actions. Anti-war and other socio-political actions are therefore conducted not only by representatives of avant-garde art but also by a large cohort of public activists who have the potential to creatively express their positions. In the socio-political dimension, it is not the professional (artistic) component that is becoming increasingly important but the creative energy, ideas and social courage of public activists who initiate and conduct the actions. Socio-political actions (anti-war and others) require open space and the energy of streets and are less dependent on the closed space of galleries.

From the aesthetic point of view, non-professional actions display an amateur approach, but this is compensated by other characteristics of anti-war actionism. Publicity and the dissemination of the "picture" in various ways (for example, reactions on social media networks) are important for anti-war actions. Furthermore, to attract the attention of the public and authorities, brightness and originality are essential. Thus, the structure of anti-war actionism includes: (1) the professional actions of representatives of the artistic environment, which are thought out in terms of artistic characteristics; (2) actions of public activists who use avant-garde artistic tools at the amateur level to organize and hold actions.

The question of anti-war actionism's potential in the struggle for peace and resistance to aggression remains open. Can actionism be constructive in resolving conflicts where even diplomacy faces great difficulties? Is the language of creative protest capable of hindering the destructive energy of the aggressor? Anti-war activism cannot end conflict or change the positions of the negotiating parties. However, it performs important functions, in particular: (1) information and communication, the conveyance of a certain political idea and generation of new political senses; (2) political socialization – under the influence of various actions, the political worldview of citizens and

their attitudes towards the problems of war are formed; (3) political mobilization, the consolidation of people for the country's defence, humanitarian tasks, struggle on the information front and so on.

Anti-war actionism has technological advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages are the conciseness of form, performance nature for expressing political meaning, focus on the visual effect and a bright "picture". Among the shortcomings are the symbolism and sometimes implicit (hidden) meanings that require a prepared audience. Furthermore, the actions are often outrageous and provocative and go beyond generally accepted ethical norms; therefore, not every viewer is ready to perceive and interpret them. Many actions contain elements of paradox and absurdity. Hence, the readiness of the public to perceive the action and comprehend its idea is important. An unprepared audience may evaluate the actions of the participants as illogical and absurd, although the initiators filled the action with deep sense and symbolism.

4. The evolution of anti-war actionism

The basics of actionism can be traced back to the search for answers to the problem of the First World War by the representatives of the avant-garde artistic trend of Dadaism. Since 1916, artists such as H. Arp, M. Duchamp, M. Ernst, O. Freundlich and others have emphasized the renunciation of any violence. They felt part of the terrible process of the war and hence conveyed their experiences.

In the 1960s, memories of World War II had a strong psychological impact on the representatives of the radical art movement of Viennese Actionism (G. Brus, O. Muehl, H. Nitsch and R. Schwarzkogler). Viennese Actionists witnessed the devastation of World War II and its aftermath, and each of them had trauma associated with the war: the death of loved ones (H. Nitsch, O. Muehl, R. Schwarzkogler), the rupture of relations with family members due to ideological differences (G. Brus), personal memories of the front (O. Muehl) and fear experienced during the bombings (H. Nitsch). The human body was used by the Viennese Actionists as an instrument for articulating the psychological conflicts and traumas hidden in the body. Viennese Actionism crossed traditional boundaries, creating aesthetic extremes and contradictory performances. The content of the actions carried out by the representatives of Vienna Actionism gives an idea of what the generation of young people had to endure during the years of the Second World War. Presumably, their performances were intended to exorcise their own traumatic experiences of World War II.

With the outbreak of the Vietnam War in 1964, the Viennese Actionists became increasingly involved in political life (Badura-Triska et al., 2012). At that time, anti-war protests grew in many countries, and the actions of the Actionists reflected these public attitudes. The Viennese Actionists joined the wide-ranging discussion of the nature of violence during the war (Hinderliter, 2014, p. 78).



Figure 1. Kim Jones, Wilshire Boulevard Walk (January 1976). Photo: www.gangofcarp.com

The Vietnam War intensified the role of artists and art in the transmission of socio-political ideas and attitudes. The course and consequences of that war demonstrated that traditional art forms did not meet the needs of the time. Consequently, all kinds of avant-garde art forms became

widespread, including public performances, land art and art installations. The United States of America became a platform for actionists in their attempts to convey an anti-war sentiment to the authorities. For example, the San Francisco Mime Troupe had a reputation for staunchly opposing the war in the 1970s (Mason, 2005), criticizing the war through political satire and outrageous actions. Furthermore, the anti-war march to the Pentagon in 1967 contained elements of theatricality and scandalous behaviour. The anti-war actions of the Yippies movement, founded in 1968, were similarly aimed at ending the Vietnam War; their protests were markedly theatrical and sarcastic.

Performer Kim Jones, who participated in the war in Vietnam (1967–1968), conducted anti-war performances in the image of a human tumbleweed, an itinerant figure of Mudman. Tree branches, bamboo, foam rubber, nylon, ropes and electric tape caked in dried mud and organic substances were used to build the image. Jones wore military boots and covered his face with nylon stockings. His body was dirty, hinting at long wanderings through swamps and thickets. This image was meant to evoke an association with the impenetrable tropical jungles of Vietnam. For the first time in such an image, Jones appeared on Wilshire Boulevard, one of the main streets of Los Angeles, which is known for its length (25.48 km). He moved from the centre of Los Angeles to the Pacific Ocean, in the direction of Vietnam. The action was called the “Wilshire Boulevard Walk” (28 January 1976) (Firmin and Joyce, 2007). Later, Jones repeatedly appeared as Mudman in crowded parts of Southern California. It was a formidable and disgusting image that was intended to establish parallels with the American soldiers during their stay in Vietnam. The image of the wanderer was generated by that war. In his other performances, Jones constructed various situations and images to draw Americans’ attention to the realities of the Vietnam War.



Figure 2. Joseph Beuys, *I Like America and America Likes Me* (May 1974). Photo: www.wikiart.org

One of the leaders of the European artistic avant-garde, J. Beuys, also launched a series of performances and installations protesting the war. He was a representative of the post-war generation in Germany, which healed the wounds of World War II (O’Leary, 1996) and reacted sharply to subsequent wars, including the Vietnam War. Beuys refused to see art and politics as separate spheres; after all, he was personally acquainted with the realities of World War II. Some of Beuys’ anti-war actions were in response to the Vietnam War, in particular, “How to Explain Pictures to a Dead Hare” (1965), “Dead Mouse Action / The Detached Part” (1970) and others (Stachelhaus, 1991; Thompson, 2005). During the Vietnam War, Beuys refused to come to the United States to participate in art projects. When he visited New York in 1974, he performed “I Like America and America Likes Me” at René Block Gallery. During that three-day action, Beuys was locked up with a wild coyote. As D. Levi Strauss (1988) noted, Beuys chose this animal in order to compare the resilience of coyotes to the resistance of the Vietnamese soldier. One of the most notable anti-war actionists of today is Marina Abramović (Weidemann et al., 2008). Abramović, a native of Serbia, demonstrated the devastating effects of wars and ethnic cleansing through her performances. She is well aware of such tragedies, as they took place in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. “Cleaning the Mirror #1” (1995) and “Balkan Baroque” (1997) were her main actions on the theme of war at the time. In the days of Russian aggression against Ukraine, Abramović recreated one of her most famous performances, “The Artist is Present,” at Sean Kelly Gallery. The first event was held in

2010, and the performance was carried out for almost three months. For the performance in 2022, the opportunity to meet Abramović was sold at an auction, and funds from the performance are intended to support the victims of Russia's war against Ukraine.



Figure 3. P. Cummins and T. Piper, Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red (July–November 2014). Photo: The Independent (www.independent.co.uk/)

Large-scale art installations are often organized around anti-war themes, usually dedicated to the anniversaries of tragedies. One of the largest installations was “Blood Swept Lands and Seas of Red”. It was located near the Tower of London in July–November 2014, commemorating the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War. The installation comprised 888,246 ceramic red poppies. This number corresponded to the number of British soldiers and officers, as well as people from dominions and colonies, who died in the war. According to the authors P. Cummins and T. Piper, one flower equalled one death. Red poppies seemed to flow out of the window of the Tower and fill the moat surrounding it, creating a picture of a giant bloodbath. The installation emphasizes the cost of war. The vivid form, through which the theme of war was presented, contributed to the wide publicity the installation received and sparked discussions about the possibilities of art objects to influence the preservation of the collective memory of war (Kidd and Sayner, 2018).



Figure 4. N. Azevedo, Minimum Monument (August 2014). Photo: S. Eggleton (<https://www.neleazevedo.com.br/>)

Brazilian artist N. Azevedo's installation “Minimum Monument” was also dedicated to the memory of the victims of the First World War. The installation, created from 5,000 ice figurines, was presented on 2 August 2014 on the steps of Chamberlain Square in Birmingham, U.K. (O’Gorman, 2018). The symbolism of ice as the material of the installation is associated with its short life and the transition from one state to another. This installation is special in its dynamics because the ice figures in the summer sun quickly melted, deformed, fell, and, turning into water, completely disappeared. The visual image conveys the loss and fragility of human life and the physical

disappearance of a huge number of people who fell victim to the First World War. The installation appealed to the memory of the victims of the First World War.

Only a few anti-war actions related to the military conflicts of the 20th century. It was these large-scale events that provoked the greatest response from artists and the public. At the same time, many other regional and local conflicts and wars, as well as their consequences (civilian deaths, waves of refugees, etc.) received a reaction from artists and the active public. For example, the well-known art activist Ai Weiwei erected installations on the buildings of large cities in 2016–2017 (e.g. Berlin, Copenhagen, Florence, Vienna) to draw attention to the problems of refugees (Peterson, 2019, pp. 193-194). Life jackets and inflatable boats, which had been used by illegal migrants from the Middle East and North Africa, were chosen as the main symbolic materials for the installations. The issue of war is by no means secondary in this example, as armed conflicts were the cause of large-scale illegal migration to the EU.

5. Anti-war actionism in Ukraine in the days of Russian aggression in 2022

Turning to the analysis of anti-war actionism in Ukraine or in support of Ukraine outside its borders, it should first be noted that it is mostly a different type of actionism than the one which existed in the 1960s and subsequent years. Rapid democratization, the strengthening of the national subjects of civil society, the information and communication revolution, the development of the network society and many other factors influenced the fact that actionism is represented not only to a greater extent, but its creators are now not only artists. Activists who want to capture the attention of the largest possible audience under the dynamics of social life, especially in large cities, turn to actionism. Performances, happenings and other forms of actionism are useful tools for these activists due to the sensational nature of their form.

Ukrainian activists, especially art activists, are very sensitive to the escalation of foreign policy tensions. The activist Aljoscha (O. Potupin) held an anti-war “artistic intervention” in Kyiv the day before the Russian invasion in 2022. The chosen place of the action was symbolic – next to the Motherland Monument. The central figure of the installation was the naked body of the artist, who stood without any protection from a possible armed attack. From the standpoint of pacifism, the artist argued that there are no justified conflicts; all of them are criminal, causing violence and pain to all kinds of biological beings (Sethi, 2022). In general, Aljoscha bases his conceptual installations on the ideas of bioizm and biofuturism, which condemn any violence against humans, animals or plants.



Figure 5. Installation “Price of War” (Lviv, 19 March 2022). Photo: hromadske (<https://hromadske.ua/>)

During the days of Russian aggression, the French street artist JR held an action to create a cover for the thematic issue of *Time* magazine. A 45-meter canvas was covered with a photo of a five-year-old Ukrainian girl who was forced to leave her home with her family due to Russian aggression. About 100 people held up the photo of the child. With his creative plan, JR drew attention to the problems of internally displaced Ukrainians who left their homes due to the war and need support. Emphasis is also placed on the fact that children are in the zone of armed conflict and

become its victims. Generally, JR's work is of interest due to the notion of the street as the largest gallery in the world (Ferdman, 2012; Peterson, 2019). Most of JR's works have a socio-political orientation. The theme of Ukraine was not the first among his anti-war performances.

The issue of children as victims of war consistently provokes a considerable public outcry, so it often becomes central in actions of various kinds. For example, the installation of 109 baby carriages in Lviv symbolized the number of children killed by the Russian army at that time (Lviv, 19 March 2022). Unfortunately, the number of dead children grew every day. If this installation were dynamic and long-lasting, it would have to be given an ever-larger form. Numerous further actions aimed at drawing attention to the deaths of children during the war demonstrated the steady increase in the number of war victims among Ukrainian children. In each action, children's items were used, such as books, toys, school bags and children's clothes.



Figure 6. Installation-protest against the looting of the Russian military in Ukraine (Lviv, 8 April 2022). Photo: <https://corp.suspilne.media/>

The Russian military's looting caused a series of actions aimed at public condemnation and publicizing their crimes. For instance, near the buildings of embassies and consulates of the Russian Federation in Ukraine and in other countries, there were installations of objects most often stolen by the Russian military from the premises of Ukrainians: household appliances, office equipment, clothing and more. Activists poured red paint over these items (imitation of blood) and added anti-war inscriptions. There is no highly artistic form in such installations, but their role in drawing attention to the problem is enormous.

6. Pro-Ukrainian anti-war actionism outside Ukraine

After the military invasion of Ukraine, numerous anti-war actions were held in democratic states in support of Ukraine. The creators of some were artists, but most of the actions in support of Ukraine were initiated by public activists from non-artistic backgrounds. The active public integrated anti-war actions into other events, such as sports competitions, festivals and concerts. Some examples of these actions are presented below.

Communities of musicians often resort to organizing actions in the form of flash mobs. One of the largest actions in terms of organization was the musical flash mob "Music for Peace", held in London with the participation of 200 classical musicians (Trafalgar Square, 6 March 2022) (Selby, 2022). The musicians performed compositions in protest against Russia's aggression. The performance was joined by musicians from different countries who never had joint rehearsals.

In Riga's Alma Gallery, the duo of Latvian artists, MAREUNROL'S, created an art installation dedicated to the people of Ukraine and their opposition to Russian aggression (Posviashchenye ukrayntsam ot MAREUNROL'S 2022). Black insulating tape was used as the main material for the installation. According to the author's intention, this tape wraps Ukraine, as if isolating it from other countries that enjoy peace and security.

Another performance in support of ending the war in Ukraine (Per l'Ucraina per l'Europa 2022) was held at the Franco Parenti Theater in Milan. This was the start of a series of performances by Italian artists in defence of peace in Ukraine. Explaining the purpose of the performance, the creative team pointed to the internal need of the theatre to speak openly from the stage at various turning points in history. That is, the theatre positions itself as an active subject of society. This is just one of many examples of the ways theatrical groups have used vivid artistic instruments to voice their civic position during the days of Russian aggression against Ukraine.

Russian aggression provoked a series of happenings, the central figures of which were top officials in Russia. For example, there is a centuries-old tradition in Poland of celebrating the astronomical spring by burning and drowning the dummy of winter, Marzanna, an ancient Slavic goddess that symbolizes winter and death. In Kielce in 2022, Marzanna acquired an unusual form – “Putinna”, a straw dummy depicting the leader of the Russian state (Sztandera, 2022). This happening took place a few days before Russia’s military invasion, when the escalation of tension in Russian–Ukrainian relations was already strong.

Some anti-war actions are carried out individually, which does not necessarily reduce the social effect. For example, Ukrainian musician B. Konakov conducted a performance called “Wake Up!” at one of London’s railway stations. The artist imitated a murdered Ukrainian civilian to draw attention to Russia’s military crimes in the war against Ukraine. The wake-up call was addressed to the British authorities to increase assistance to Ukraine in resisting Russia. Although the British police stopped V. Konakov’s action to maintain law and order, it became part of the news of the day, and thus achieved a certain social result.

In Brussels, more than 1,000 people took part in the “Stop promising, start acting!” performance. They lay on the ground to draw attention to the number of deceased civilians in Mariupol. This and many other pro-Ukrainian actions were held during the Extraordinary NATO Summit (25 March 2022). The great media interest in this summit made it possible for the related actions in Brussels to gain international attention. Furthermore, the performance “Stop promising, start acting!” was arranged not only in Brussels but in numerous cities in Europe and North America. For example, the action also took place in Warsaw on the day of US President Joe Biden’s visit to Poland. Moreover, the number of participants grew every time, symbolically demonstrating the increase in the number of victims of Russian aggression. A large number of people lying on the ground at the same time creates a tragic and very eloquent image.



Figure 7. Installation of shoes in memory of those killed in the Drama Theater in Mariupol (Budapest, 27 March 2022). Photo: www.ukrgate.com

At the initiative of the Hungarian public, an art installation in support of Ukraine was organized on the banks of the Danube in Budapest. Three hundred pairs of shoes were placed by the river, symbolizing the approximate number of civilians who were sheltering in a theatre in Mariupol when it was bombed by Russian aircraft. The chosen venue for the action was not accidental; there is a memorial called “Shoes on the Danube Bank” nearby, comprising cast-iron models of shoes on the Danube embankment in memory of Holocaust victims. During World War II, Nazis lined up 50–60 barefoot Jews on the riverbank, chained them together, and shot at the first, whose body pulled the rest of the people into the water. Before the execution, people were ordered to take off their shoes for later resale. Thus, the 2022 installation concerning the atrocities of the Russian army in Mariupol shows that the Russian actions are no different from those committed by the Nazis in 1944–1945 in Budapest. The political morality of the “shoe installations” is as follows: every year on 8 May, the leaders of democratic states repeat the message “Never again”, but history repeats itself nonetheless. Therefore, to live up to the slogan “Never again”, collective efforts must prevent new wars. It is noteworthy that the topic of the blockade of Mariupol and the rescue of the population of this city was often the idea of actions arranged in different parts of the world.

Amateur socio-political events are now often part of sports competitions. Tribunes and stadiums become locations for short but meaningful events. For example, before a match between

the English Premier League clubs Brentford and Burnley (13 March 2022), a flash mob in support of Ukraine took place at the stadium, in which fans formed the Ukrainian flag in the stands. Furthermore, during the Bundesliga match between Borussia Dortmund and Mainz (16 March 2022), the slogan of the action, "You will never walk alone", was applied to the background of the colours of the Ukrainian flag. Finally, 176 children's toys were laid out on seats in a special section of the Georgios Karaiskakis Stadium stands in the Greek city of Piraeus during a charity football match between the Ukrainian club Shakhtar and the Greek club Olympiacos. The toys symbolized the number of children who had died as a result of Russian aggression in Ukraine at that time (9 April 2022).

In general, during sports competitions that fell on the days of Russia's armed aggression against Ukraine, a variety of performances, flash mobs and other actions were arranged, which were short in duration but impactful in form and content. Sports fans, especially football fans, have long been recognized for their willingness to participate in social activism and they, in particular, engage in those vivid forms of protest that stem from actionism (Numerato, 2019; Hodges, 2019). Since the language of sports is global and has no boundaries, even actions lasting a few seconds can affect public opinion. The impact of anti-war actions in these contexts is also due to the television broadcasts of sports competitions, as their matches are seen by many people from different countries.

7. The ambivalence of Russian actionism against the background of a "special military operation"

Russian activists were among the first to protest Russia's aggression on Ukraine. Protest movements in Russia are aggressively pursued by the government, so actionism is one of the few ways to respond quickly to a situation. However, organizers of this type of actions are persecuted by the state. This corresponds to the nature of neo-totalitarianism, where pacifist actions can be considered a "betrayal" of the state's interest.

Under the threat of sanctions¹, Russian dissidents are increasingly forced to resort to symbolic language and more veiled forms of dissent. For example, on International Women's Day, the Feminist Anti-War Resistance group organized a symbolic flower-laying event at Soviet war memorials. Activists across Russia left flowers tied with blue and yellow ribbons near Soviet war memorials. This action was intended to honour the memory of the dead civilians of Ukraine. No less symbolism is embedded in the actions of the anonymous art group "Nevoyna" (Not the War) from Samara: on the snow-covered banks of the Volga River, the participants of the anti-war action packed themselves in big black bags that symbolized death and the many victims of war (Let the Dead Speak, 2022).

Russian authorities have opened criminal cases against art activists, including those who use anti-war or pro-Ukrainian graffiti. As soon as the images appear, they are promptly covered with paint by the municipal services, so there is not enough time for the art to produce the desired social effect. If the identity of the graffiti artist is established, a criminal case is initiated under the article on vandalism committed for ideological or political reasons. The sanction provides for punishment in the form of restriction or imprisonment for up to three years or forced labour for the same period.

Nonetheless, the actions of the Russian art group "Party of the Dead" have a protest orientation (Evstropov, 2020). On the eve of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the "Party of the Dead" activists held an anti-war performance at Piskarevskoye Memorial Cemetery in St. Petersburg. The action was a response to the Russian authorities' recognition of the legal personality of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics on 21 February 2022. The action had a clear anti-war orientation and was carried out in the style of necrorealism, which is characteristic of these activists. Covering their faces with masks depicting skulls, activists protested the probable (at the time) war, transitioning from necrorealism to the experimental political art of necroactivism. The key messages of the performance were "Corpses are not enough for them", "Russian power will

¹ On 4 March 2022, the State Duma of the Russian Federation approved a law on liability for knowingly spreading false information about the actions of Russian troops, that is, information which differs from the official information provided by the authorities. Sanctions include fines of up to 1.5 million rubles and imprisonment or labour camp terms of up to 15 years.

grow with graves” and others. During the war, the “Party of the Dead” held an action called “z200”: activists in masks of the dead came to the cemetery with posters “Russians do not bury Russians”, “We do not abandon our people (only their corpses)” and “Mothers! Your children are fake” (Eto beZumye!, 2022). Such messages clearly emphasize the socio-political problems of Russia’s war against Ukraine. Many anti-war actions of this type were held, resulting in the persecution of activists by the Russian authorities and the initiation of criminal cases.

At the same time, in the context of neo-totalitarian Russia, creative approaches to organizing political actions are also used to propagate war and violence. For example, after Russia invaded Ukraine, various Russian social groups held “patriotic flash mobs” in support of the “special military operation”. The “Z” symbol was the basis for the plot of actions (Browning, 2022); “Za mir” (For peace), “Za pravdu” (For truth) and the like were the slogans. The nature of such actions and the motivation of Russians joining them have not been sufficiently studied, particularly the question of whether these are conscious and voluntary actions or whether the participants acted under some coercion or encouragement. However, it is presently known that the Russian central government instructed regional authorities to organize all sorts of public actions in support of the Russian army and the “special military operation”.

It is noteworthy that such pro-government flash mobs, performances and so on were widely covered by the Russian media to create the impression of mass support from the population. Factory workers, teachers, students, athletes and others simultaneously “wished” to become participants in various actions in order to confirm support for the actions of the head of the Russian state. This contradicts the nature of actionism, which is the constructive energy of free-spirited people. By its nature, actionism is focused on freedom, not coercion, and on free creativity, not imposed scenarios. Of course, actionism remains in Russia as a true phenomenon of counterculture and a form of political protest, but its possibilities are constantly narrowing, especially when it comes to topics regarding Ukraine.

Thus, the technologies and tools of actionism can be applied both for pacifist purposes and for veiled propaganda promoting war and violence. Actionism now serves the purposes of democracy and peace, and, conversely, as the Russian case shows, is capable in its distorted form of becoming a tool for war propaganda and incitement to hatred. Actionism, which by its nature is a free protest of free individuals, is turned into a staged performance by the Russian authorities. This has nothing to do with the real “art of action”, although such actions display certain characteristics of actionism (theatricality, play component, spectacle, dynamics, etc.). The actionism staged by the Russian authorities cannot be considered actionism because it has lost its humanistic, democratic nature.

Only those actions that are generated by free energy and the uncontrolled emotions of people can be positioned as anti-war actionism. When the same actions are directed by authorities and organized under some kind of coercion, they violate the actionist principle of voluntariness. At the heart of actionism is the principle of play, which must necessarily be voluntary, not compulsory.

The peculiarities of Russian political culture (lack of traditional democratic participation) and the repressive policy of the authorities do not contribute to the Russian public’s ability to understand the actions of art activists. In a neo-totalitarian society, actionists are predominantly treated not only as oppositionists but also as people with mental disorders who must be isolated and treated. Some actions are qualified as hooliganism or even extremist actions. However, perhaps most striking is the indifference with which Russians pass by art activists who are holding an action. Unusual formats of behaviour (such as hands tied behind the back, a bag on the head, imitation of blood on clothing, etc.) often do not evoke the associations that the performer of the action expects. Instead, their actions are perceived as the consequence of mental disorders or intoxication.

Consequently, it is important to distinguish from anti-war actionism those public events that do not have an anti-government sentiment but only resemble actionism in form. Anti-war actionism relies on the democratic worldview of those who implement creative formats to convey a particular idea. Citizens’ need to articulate their positions and demands appears only if participant types of political culture are formed (Almond and Verba, 1963). In communities where this type of culture dominates, civic activism in all its forms is an integral part of public life. If the public is the bearer of other types of political culture (parochial, subject types), then the form of public actions can be

borrowed from actionism; however, in essence, it will be pseudo-actionism. Socio-political actionism cannot be carried out on the instruction of authorities, according to a recommended scenario, or under compulsion. Actionism must be the release of energy by free people who feel the power of their voices.

Thus, anti-war actionism is indeed present in Russia (despite repression), but many events only borrow the external forms of actionism while remaining pro-government activism that serves as state propaganda. Under the increased pressure on democracy, there is very little free-spirited actionism that is capable of opposing the government.

8. Conclusions

Public activism in all its forms (from traditional to postmodern, virtualized, etc.) is conditioned by a democratic society's need to respond to events, processes that violate established standards and values and other similar situations. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 demonstrated that war is one of the strongest motivations for social activism, including the use of creative forms and the tools of actionism.

The organizers and performers of anti-war actions are both representatives of avant-garde art and active citizens who do not belong professionally to the field of art but, given the creative nature of each person, use a variety of avant-garde techniques. Postmodernism contributed to the expansion of those who use the creative techniques of actionism to conduct actions at the amateur level. Thus, the structure of anti-war actionism includes: (1) professional actions of representatives of the artistic environment, which are designed in terms of artistic characteristics; (2) actions of public activists who use avant-garde artistic tools at the amateur level for organizing and conducting actions.

The technological advantage of anti-war actionism is the laconism of the form of public events, their theatrical nature and the focus on visualization. At the same time, there are technological features that can reduce the effect of anti-war actions, namely the symbolism inherent in most actions, hidden meanings, outrage, provocation and elements of absurdity. All of these features require a prepared audience to effectively disseminate a message, at least in terms of a democratic worldview.

By its nature, actionism is peaceful protest. This peaceful foundation is crucial to the fulfilment of the pacifist function. Despite the questionable ability of anti-war actionism to mitigate or resolve armed conflicts, it clearly performs a number of functions, such as communicating certain positions, generating new political meanings, influencing the attitude of citizens to armed methods of conflict resolution, and uniting people to counter the aggressor and carry out humanitarian tasks. These are the manifestations of anti-war actionism's great social mission.

It is worth noting that some actions relate to past historical tragedies, while others are a reaction to current armed conflicts. Therefore, the functions of such actions are different. Actions dedicated to the events of the past are aimed primarily at the formation and preservation of collective memory, the "treatment" of historical traumas and the maintenance of group identity. Actions regarding current events have a different mission: to form public opinion, encourage action and draw attention to the current issue.

In the case of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, when there is a clash of neo-totalitarian and democratic worlds, the language of actionism may, at first glance, seem completely ineffective. Indeed, anti-war art installations are not able to withstand the missile system, and anti-war happenings are not able to avert the consequences of the use of chemical or biological weapons. Furthermore, an anti-war performance can by no means reduce the risk of a missile strike, and an anti-war flash mob cannot prevent the abduction of government officials, journalists, priests and others.

In fact, for the Russian aggressor with anti-humanist, neo-totalitarian values, all kinds of creative techniques are completely alien; they are not perceived due to the existing type of culture and value system. However, in the democratic world, the actionism of artists and the public sends very informative signals. The symbolic language of anti-war actions becomes part of public diplomacy, and the symbolism of the action can create a resonance in communities. Truly democratic authorities cannot ignore the demands that come from grassroots voices.

It is no coincidence that those who use the language of actionism in public life fill the action with objects that evoke specific associations. In the case of anti-war actions carried out during the days of Russia's open armed aggression on the territory of Ukraine, the objects used included children's items (baby carriages, toys, books and clothes), clothing covered with imitation blood, a rope, a black bag, elements of state symbols, national symbols and more. Beyond the objects used during the action, the bodily postures (lying, kneeling, etc.), the place of the action and the colours used are all symbolic as well. The symbolic language of anti-war actions is, in fact, the most powerful tool for influencing an accidental viewer. Thus, it is of utmost importance that these symbolic messages are understood by those who witness a particular anti-war action. The public's ability to understand certain anti-war actions is crucial for their socio-political effect.

The effectiveness of anti-war actionism depends on the place and time of the action. The most resonant actions are performances, happenings and other events synchronized with the time and location of other important official political events, such as visits by heads of state and summits. Such successful examples are the action-performance in support of Ukraine during the Extraordinary NATO Summit (24 March 2022, Brussels) and the action "Stop promising, start acting!" held on the day of President Joe Biden's visit to Poland (26 March 2022, Warsaw). The presence of the leaders of other states and international organizations in a particular city is always accompanied by increased media attention. Therefore, the probability that protest actions and their content will receive wide coverage increases, especially if they draw attention to the problem in a bright or outrageous, provocative form.

The regional features of modern anti-war actionism are clear. These peculiarities are primarily determined by the political regime in a particular state. Democracy presupposes freedom of self-expression, and thus anti-war performances, installations and other actions are seen as important elements of the contemporary repertoire of collective and individual actions. Neo-authoritarianism and neo-totalitarianism reject an alternative to the state opinion, and the government will only tolerate spectacular forms of political activism if they are part of state propaganda. It is obvious that holding a performance in Sweden or in Russia, for example, requires a different level of courage from the organizers, a different level of publicity for the action and has radically different consequences for those who convey anti-war messages through the creative language of the actions.

Thus, in recent decades, actionism has left the artistic environment and entered the broad social dimension, especially in large cities. Despite the unprofessional nature of numerous anti-war actions carried out by activists, they attract attention and create publicity, which complements other forms of struggle against the aggressor during the war. Actionism has significant potential to turn the global public's attention to complex issues of war and peace. However, the place and time of the action, active information support, and filling the action with elements of shock, provocativeness and unexpectedness are critical for its success.

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