

The Activist Media Researcher?

Susana Tosca & Sara Mosberg Iversen (SDU)

In the humanities we have a proud tradition of resisting any kind of instrumental thinking as an unavoidable reproducer of inequality and power structures. Despite, or perhaps because of, the ideological rigidity of recent historical periods, prominent humanists have worked hard at dissecting the many forms that injustice can take in our current society, at nuancing and complicating simplistic explanations. And yet, some of us shrink from the idea of attempting to intervene to create social change.

There might be an antiseptic precaution at work here. The old arguments of the humanising quality of the non-utilitarian, the aesthetic, the reflective, have lost their shine in a time where our teaching is weighed in terms of the direct employability of our graduates and our research into quantifiable impact. Moreover, neutrality seems necessary to provide the legitimation that other scientific areas automatically enjoy due to the urgent nature of their central problems. We are not curing cancer, or building better windmills for clean energy, so we must at least make sure that we are objective if we are to be allowed to use taxpayers' money in thinking about texts, audiencing or media platforms.

Maybe that is why it is easier for journalists to amplify the uninformed opinions of others (politicians, medical doctors, self-proclaimed experts) instead of turning to us when discussing media issues in the public sphere. If we always answer, "it's complicated", when they call, we are not going to make it to the evening news. This is of course a provocation, for not everyone is afraid of getting their feet wet or their social media filled with angry messages. Many colleagues in this field make a huge effort to align their serious research to the need to respond to societal issues.

There is also a growing surge of voices that urge the humanities to take responsibility, to get more involved in a world that is increasingly fragmented and in pain. The title of this text is inspired by one of them Caroline Levines recent book *The Activist Humanist*. But there are many, like Joanna Zylinkas *Minimal Ethics for the Anthropocene*, Jeanette Pols *Reinventing the Good Life*, to just limit myself to two examples from my reading table.

With inspiration from these texts and others, this workshop invites participants to together think about what it means to our position as researchers to actively try to contribute towards a better society, as the call for papers for this seminar invites us to. How can this be done? What are the challenges? What do ideal outcomes look like? At what cost? Isn't it just an old discussion or does it deserve to be renewed? The session will be dialogically facilitated by the presenters through the use of textual and visual prompts and common design work towards formulating a working manifesto for the activist media researcher.