Edited by Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits

The Visual Memory of Protest

The Visual Memory of Protest

Protest and Social Movements

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest movements around the world, and academic theories are racing to catch up with them. This series aims to further our understanding of the origins, dealings, decisions, and outcomes of social movements by fostering dialogue among many traditions of thought, across European nations and across continents. All theoretical perspectives are welcome. Books in the series typically combine theory with empirical research, dealing with various types of mobilisation, from neighborhood groups to revolutions. We especially welcome work that synthesizes or compares different approaches to social movements, such as cultural and structural traditions, micro- and macro-social, economic and ideal, or qualitative and quantitative.

Series Editors

Jan Willem Duyvendak, University of Amsterdam.
James M. Jasper, Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

The Visual Memory of Protest

Edited by
Ann Rigney and Thomas Smits

Amsterdam University Press

Cover illustration: A man throwing an object at the riot police during the Amsterdam coronation riots. Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 30 April 1980. Photo: Hans van Dijk for Anefo.

Cover design: Coördesign, Leiden
Typesetting: Crius Group, Hulshout

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements

The Visual Memory of Protest: Introduction

Ann Rigney & Thomas Smits

Visuality and Visibility

During the 12th G20 summit held on 7 and 8 July 2017 in Hamburg, large numbers of protesters came into action. As they sought to draw attention to a variety of causes, from political apathy to environmentalism, there were multiple clashes and standoffs with the police. On 7 July, various news outlets reporting on this unrest illustrated it with variations on the image below:

Figure 0.1: A woman raises her hands in front of the police during demonstrations against the G20 summit. Hamburg, Germany, 7 July 2017. Photo: Antonio Masiello/Getty Images.

The viewer sees in the background a line of riot police, dressed in uniform black, wearing helmets, in some cases carrying shields. Not all police have

adopted the same pose; nor are they standing at equidistance (the line-up is a bit untidy). But the overall effect is that of a phalanx. In the foreground, at a distance of around 20 metres from the police, a single woman wearing a headscarf and carrying a shoulder bag, sits on the ground with her back to the camera. Her hands are raised in a gesture that seems to be more of defiance than of surrender. To the left, in the middle of the picture, a photographer is crouching in front of the phalanx of police, apparently pointing a camera at the woman.

"Protesters are a common sight at G20 summits" read the caption to the version of this image used in the BBC report on events in Hamburg.[1] The composition of the image as well as the idea of a "common sight" serves as a reminder that protests, as recent work in social movement studies has shown, are profoundly visual in character (Doerr et al., 2013; Mattoni & Teune, 2014). To begin with, demonstrators make use of a variety of visual tools, including "visual symbols of injustice" (Olesen, 2015), to mobilize among themselves and to communicate their causes to the public at large. As has been noted with reference to the Civil Rights Movement, displaying images is a protest tactic in itself, "as effective as bus boycotts and as righteous as nonviolence" (Raiford, 2011). Visuals also play a key role in creating a sense of common purpose, in the form of leaflets or posters, and, in the digital age, of viral memes. In the aftermath of protest events, visual markers in the form of signage, colour, clothing, and accessories (for example the yellow umbrellas carried in the Hong Kong protests in 2014 and 2019–2020) subsequently help to create a shared identity and memory among those who have taken to the streets. Finally, as we will see over and again in this collection, images, specifically photographs, are a key element in the battle over the "visual representational control" (Memou, 2015) of protest and in the definition of its success or failure. Who gets to shape the public perception and long-term memory of a protest event by producing its defining image? This collection claims that struggles over the visual definition of events and for control of the public narrative—in the short term, in the form of news, and in the long term, in the form of cultural memory—is part of contention itself and not merely a by-product.

Visuality is all the more important because social movements essentially revolve around the power to be seen. Successful claim-making is linked to an effective "management of visibility" (Cammaerts et al., 2013, p. 4). Since attention is a limited resource, "being seen" and making oneself visible is a crucial part of claim-making in a highly mediatized world. Media uptake is crucial to the impact of demonstrations. If protesters remain invisible their

1   https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-40534768.

demands and, indeed, their very existence as political, claim-making subjects are compromised (McGarry et al., 2020). A detailed study of the Hamburg summit (Teune, 2013) has shown how demonstrators had to fight an uphill battle against the gravitation of the media towards formal photographs of government leaders and against police mandates that kept them away from the location of the summit.

However, visibility is not merely a matter of appearing at the right place at the right time. It is also linked to one's ability to "be seen." Sometimes people are simply overlooked and their presence fails to be registered. The "space of appearance" (Arendt, 1958) is not a level playing field, but is instead governed by "norms of recognition that are themselves hierarchical and exclusionary" (Mirzoeff, 2017). This means that some actors and their causes are systemically ignored or misconstrued. Racism, sexism, classism, ageism, and other exclusionary mechanisms, effectively render both invisible and inaudible certain actors and their political programme. The initially dismissive attitude of the mainstream media towards Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg and the massive school strike movement she inspired is a good example of this process. Protest, especially when it takes a spectacular or unexpected form, is one way of breaking through the habitual hierarchies to produce a "counter-visuality" (Mirzoeff, 2011) through displays of sheer numbers or through the deployment of eye-catching forms of "visual activism" (Bryan-Wilson et al., 2016). Recourse to violence has been construed too as "a crying out for visibility" (Cammaerts, 2012, p. 123). But, as this collection will show, this "coming into appearance" (Mirzoeff, 2017) of protesters is ultimately dependent on the production of a visual record, be this on the part of activists or of journalists. The visual record allows the protest to be witnessed later by those who were not there, sometimes at the cost of becoming "packaged" in a recognizable way.

The history of modern protest, and its underlying struggle for visibility, is thus closely aligned with that of media technologies. Although academic discussions of visuality in protest have gravitated towards "new media" (Gitelman, 2014) in the sense of digital media, the politics of visibility have been played out historically across different media regimes, from the age of print and photography to that of television and video and, only most recently, that of computer-mediated communication (Mattoni & Teune, 2014). In particular, the history of contentious politics (Tilly & Tarrow, 2015) has developed in tandem with the emergence of new technologies for the production and reproduction of images. The role of photography in the legacy of the Paris Commune offers an early illustration of the politics of visibility: the images produced by the pro-Communard Bruno Braquehais

have had to compete in the public arena since the defeat of the insurrection with the (often manipulated) images made by the anti-Communard Ernest Eugène Appert (Condon, 2020).

Given the importance of photography in ensuring representational control, it is not surprising that protests are sometimes performed from the outset "for the camera"—be that one held by professional news photographers, citizen-journalists, protesters or, as increasingly occurs, the police. Since at least the 1960s, when student protesters had to negotiate a modus vivendi with the demands of television, protest has been played out to an important extent while "the whole world is watching" (Gitlin 1980). Capturing protest in an image or video ensures that it will be seen at other locations as part of the news and at later times as part of cultural memory. Visual media thus amplify the claims to visibility made by the protesters by carrying visual information from the streets to a wider audience. This power to reach a wider audience, however, also comes with the risk of an event being filtered through the aesthetic and political priorities of the photographer and the press, rendering it susceptible to sanitization (Hristova, 2014) or spectacularization (Debord, 1970). Hence the kickback in the form of self-mediations (Cammaerts, 2012) on the part of protesters with access to their own digital platforms. One way or another, the visual mediation of protest is already embedded in the performance of protest itself including struggles over its future legacy.

It is impossible at this stage to determine if the protester in Hamburg who figured in the BBC report had sat on the ground with her hands raised because she thought that, in doing so, she could catch the eye of the camera. Equally, it is impossible to determine with certainty why the photojournalist (who presumably took many photographs that day), the AFP and then the BBC editors, chose this image to define what was happening around the G20 summit. But there are grounds for arguing that both the protester's pose and the photographer's framing of the event were shaped, not just by the contingencies of that moment, but by the fact that its visible logic was already familiar. It was literally déjà vu. Certainly, the BBC reporting on this event tended towards slotting the protests into a familiar template as evidenced by the caption "Protesters are a common sight at G20 summits." Instead of presenting it as a possible turning point or as the coming into visibility of a new set of claims or claimants, the reporting reduced the protest to the generic status of a "common sight." That the commonness of this sight should have been illustrated by a face-off between an individual protester and a phalanx of police had everything to do with the fact that such a composition had indeed become common currency, as Marco Solaroli

also shows in his chapter here, thanks to many earlier images of standoffs between protesters and police. These included most famously *Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge* (Jonathan Bachman, 2016) where Black Lives Matter (BLM) activist Ieshia Evans faced riot police, *The Tank Man* (Jeff Widener, 1989), depicting a lone protestor facing an array of tanks in Tiananmen Square, and *The Ultimate Confrontation: The Flower and the Bayonet* (Marc Riboud, 1967) where Jan Rose Kasmir famously held out a flower to a phalanx of national guards during an anti-Vietnam war protest in 1967. The Hamburg photograph was "premediated" (Erll 2009, p. 211) by these earlier images in the sense that they provided both the protester and the photographer with a model for bringing that particular moment into visibility. The mediated memory of earlier standoffs between police and protesters could be said to have shaped (premediated) the behaviour of the woman who, in facing the police in this dramatic way, placed herself in danger while also inscribing herself into an inspirational tradition of defiance. However, the repetition of the traditional model also came at the cost of reducing the new event in Hamburg to a "typical" G20 protest that, as such, was scarcely newsworthy.

Between Déjà Vu and the Strikingly New

Aesthetic theory can help explain this crux, whereby *aesthetics* is understood in its original meaning as "relating to perception" rather than in its everyday meaning of "pleasing" or "beautiful." In order for something to be perceived as deserving of attention, the argument goes, it must also appear in its *singularity* (Attridge, 2007). Singularity is the capacity to be striking: to be really seen and registered in memory, not just noted in passing. This capacity is always relational, however, since it entails making a difference with respect to a tradition. Following this logic, the "coming into appearance" of a particular protest as a singular event entails both the activation of visual memory and a deviation from it. Images of earlier protests create the horizon of expectations for later ones and offer a benchmark for noting new departures. For this reason, some protests may appear merely as a repetition of "the same old story" while others present as a unique moment of possibility; as a potentially transformative "event" with a before and an after (Wagner-Pacifici, 2017). Images can play a major role in inflecting protests in one direction rather than another.

   The Hamburg example has served to bring to the fore the central theme of this collection: the role of visual memory in protest. Where earlier studies have focused on visual communication strategies and

how these might help bring hitherto marginalized groups and causes "into appearance" (Mirzoeff, 2017) this collection explores the interplay between visibility and visual memory. On the one hand, it explores how image-making actively contributes to making protests memorable; on the other hand, it explores how the visual memory of earlier protests informs the politics of visibility surrounding new ones. In this collection, experts in visual culture, cultural memory, social movements, and digital humanities explore the contested space of appearance between the déjà vu and the strikingly new.

The Memory–Activism Nexus

Underpinning this project is the contention that memory and activism work in tandem. At first sight this might seem counter intuitive since social movements are oriented towards the present and future. But as emerging debates at the intersection of cultural memory studies and social movement studies have shown (summarized in Daphi & Zamponi, 2019; Merrill et al., 2020) movements are also deeply entangled with the memory of past activism. Social movement scholars have by and large approached this entanglement by focussing on the way movements are remembered by actors and how this memory implicitly and explicitly informs later action (Zamponi, 2013; Zamponi & Fernández González, 2017). Cultural memory scholars have been more concerned with how semiotic carriers (texts, images, music, and so on) shape the memory of earlier protest and create common points of reference for both later activists and the public at large (Hajek et al., 2015; Reading & Katriel, 2015; Rigney, 2020).

Underlying these differences in approach and framing is nevertheless a common concern with what Rigney (2018) has called the *memory–activism nexus* (Daphi and Zamponi (2019) refers in comparable terms to the *movement–memory nexus*). This nexus represents the point of intersection between three lines of inquiry and provides a heuristic model for examining the entanglements between memory and activism. The first line leads into the *memory of activism* and the question of how protest events are collectively remembered, be this as "communicative memory" (J. Assmann, 1995) on the part of those who witnessed them or as "cultural memory" in the form of narratives and images carried by media (J. Assmann, 1995; Erll et al., 2008). The second line of inquiry leads into *memory in activism*, that is, the ways in which shared memory, the shared recollection of earlier

events, including protest, informs later protest cycles. Finally, the third line of inquiry leads into *memory activism*, cases where activism is itself directed towards changing collective memory and the priorities in public commemoration. The current campaigns to have colonial era statues removed from public spaces exemplifies the latter, at the same time as it shows how memory activism is regularly tied to political demands for the future (racial justice, in this case). As the term "nexus" suggests, these different forms of memory work feed into each other.

Mediation is a key element in the memory–activism nexus. As a growing body of literature in the field of cultural memory studies has shown, personal experiences crystallize gradually into publicly shared narratives thanks to complex processes of mediation and remediation (Erll & Rigney, 2009). *Mediation* entails using semiotic carriers to structure information in a meaningful and affect-producing way while also making it available in material forms with which people can individually and collectively engage. *Remediation* entails the iteration and adaptation of content across "plurimedial networks" (Erll, 2014) whereby memory becomes shared at different sites of knowledge production. This broad understanding of mediation includes journalism, focussed on the "news" and the emerging present, but also extends to cultural production more broadly and to retrospective representations in the form of memoirs, biographies, documentaries, movies, and exhibitions, and so on, which are produced by a variety of actors in the aftermath of events, together constituting the cultural memory of those events.

While acknowledging that cultural memory is produced through the interplay between different media and cultural forms, our collection nevertheless zooms in on image-making, specifically photography, and uses this as our lens on the broader dynamic. Although we do not go as far as to claim with Shevchenko (2014) that photography is "fundamentally constitutive of remembering in the modern age," (p. 6) there is no doubt that its current ubiquity, facilitated by the ease with which individuals make and share digital images, calls for extensive critical attention. Moreover, as was suggested earlier, there has long been close collusion between photography and contentious politics. Different mnemonic actors compete, even as events are unfolding, for control over the visual narrative and hence for control of the future memory of movements: What is to be recalled of the events unfolding, what images will define it, and who gets to steer this process? Insight into these dynamics can tell us more about the long-term impact of movements and about the memory work that occurs in the intervals between protest cycles.

Photography as a Medium of Memory

Theories of photography as a medium have been linked from the outset to what is perceived as its natural affinity with mnemonic processes of recording and documenting. Roland Barthes (1980) thus linked photography to the "having been there" (the *ça-a-été*) of things, with the image being an indexical trace of a state in the world at a particular moment in time. As material objects, photographs are powerful "vehicles of memory" (Zelizer, 2004), comparable to other sites or *lieux* where "memory crystallizes and secretes itself" (Nora, 1997, p. 7). A photograph's capacity to freeze moments in time gives it a distinctive power as well as limitations not shared by texts whose meaning unfolds across time. A photograph's survival as material trace makes it subsequently possible for earlier moments to be made virtually present at later ones. For this reason, photography has been recognized by memory studies scholars as "mnemonic at [its] core" (Olick, 2014). Although digitization has made it easier than ever to manipulate images and change them post-facto, photography has so far maintained its privileged role as a recorder of, and witness to, events.

Zelizer (2010) has argued influentially that photography's unique ability to freeze time makes it a powerful medium for capturing "unsettled moments" (in her analysis, when people are about to die). Photographs of violent and often traumatic events, such as the violent repression of protest or the death of protesters (Olesen, 2013; Rigney, 2020), play an important role in the memory–activism nexus by providing concrete evidence of injustice. Photography's ability to freeze time, however, also helps to capture hopeful moments—acts of defiance, unity, solidarity and victory—and offer them as objects of recollection independent of the ultimate outcome of the actions depicted; Zelizer (2010) has written in this regard of images having a subjunctive "voice." As Smits (2021) notes, following its ability to capture contingent moments, where the future of a social movements seems bright and its demands within reach, photography plays a vital role in the "cultural transmission" of hope alongside defeat (Rigney, 2018). This was borne out in the exhibition *Soulèvements/Uprisings* (2017) curated by Georges Didi-Huberman, which showed through an accumulation of examples how image-makers have sought to capture moments of hope during popular uprisings (the moment when a stone is about to be thrown and has not yet landed, for example, or when a group launches itself towards an obstacle), arguing that these images help transmit the mobilizing energy of people in motion to later viewers.

Didi-Huberman's exhibition was inspired by the work of Aby Warburg (1924–1929), who explained the appeal of well-known photographs by their

recycling of certain never-changing visual tropes or *Pathosformeln*. Other researchers, like Zarzycka and Kleppe (2013), have similarly attributed the power of certain images to their mobilization of particular combinations of form and content that resonate over the ages (a *pietà* for example). Nevertheless, as indicated earlier, contemporary aesthetic theory links the appeal of cultural artefacts to their singularity, that is, to the fact that they both resonate with tradition and offer something unexpected, a unique identifier that means that they can never be reduced to a pregiven schema. Accordingly, we argue here that photographs, while having a documentary function, are also potentially aesthetic artefacts that use framing, focus, composition, lighting, and texture to make the world visible in distinctive ways and to hold the viewers' attention. Artistry, typical of professional photojournalism but potentially also present in the work of amateurs, can thus be a key factor in the making of impactful images. As several of our contributors will show, most notably Erika Zerwes and Marco Solaroli, well-made photographs help in *making* events *memorable*.

Reproduction and Remediation

Recent theories of collective memory have established that repetition is at the core of remembering. Aleida Assmann (2008) has distinguished usefully between "archival memory" and "working memory," the former associated with storage, the latter associated with the reproduction and renewed engagement with an image or narrative from the past. If an image or other record is left to gather dust in an archive, it remains inert. Only if it is reproduced—be this in the original or in some modified form—does it become a constitutive part of cultural memory. Iteration can thus be taken as an observable measure of memorability. Images remain in circulation as part of "working memory" by appealing to viewers who are moved to preserve, reproduce, and share them—an activity which of course has become all the easier in the digital age.

   If we are to grasp the role of images in cultural memory, then, studying the ways in which images are reproduced is as important as knowing how they are made. This move from production to reproduction is in line with recent theories of photography that have emphasized viewers' active responses as a key element of photography as a cultural phenomenon. The title of W. J. T. Mitchell's *What Do Pictures Want?* (1994) encapsulates the idea that pictures interpellate people; that the meaning of a photograph, like that of other cultural carriers, is never fixed once and for all but is the ever-renewed

outcome of a transaction between image and public. Although images indeed freeze moments in time and refer to a specific historical moment, their meaning changes in the eyes of their present-day viewers. Azoulay (2015) refers in this regard to the two "events" of photography. The first event occurs when a photographer and the camera capture a particular moment in a particular way. The second event occurs when the meaning of what is captured is shaped and reshaped by the actors who reproduce the image, the context in which this circulation takes place, and the different audiences that interact with them. Azoulay (2015) shows that these two events of photography are fundamentally connected, like the "two constituents of a mathematical equation" (p. 66). What is *captured* by a picture changes as a result of its *reception* by different audiences in diverse contexts. In considering photography as a medium of memory, then, it is important to see images in relation to both the original event in which they were produced and in relation to the renewed investment in those images on the part of those who become attached to them. As images reproduce across time in changing contexts, they carry the memory of the "second event" of photography as well as of their original referent. Displays of the image of Che Guevara, for example, now recall both the Argentinian revolutionary and the tradition of displaying his image both in left-wing networks and consumer culture (Casey, 2012).

Our collection is distinguished from earlier approaches to the visualization of protest by its double concern: with the production of images as well as with their reproduction over time. What makes some images "stick" longer in cultural memory than others? Is this a function of the properties of the image itself or of contextual factors? Tracking the afterlives of images (Azoulay's "second event") is accordingly a recurring theme in the essays that follow. As the chapters by Merrill and Smits and Ros exemplify, the ease with which images can be digitally reproduced makes it even more urgent to develop digital methodologies for studying modes of reproduction, proliferation, and canonization.

In line with insights from cultural memory studies, the notion of reproduction is extended here to include remediations (transfers to another medium) and reworkings (adaptations of the image to new contexts and material forms). Images that originated as photographs may later procreate in a remediated form as an internet meme, drawing, stencil, or mural. The transformation of George Floyd's photograph into a painted icon, which proliferated across the US and Europe in the summer of 2020, offers a good illustration of this process. As do the remediations of the photo-portrait of Turkish revolutionary Deniz Gezmiş in the form of a silhouette, discussed

below by Duygu Erbil, and the remediation of portraits of radical suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst in the form of a mural, discussed below by Clara Vlessing.

Legacy images can also be reproduced in a derived form in the making of new ones. The reworking of "standoff" photographs, such as that of the Tank Man in the G20 photograph, offers a case in point. So, too, do the multiple reworkings of Eugène Delacroix's famous painting *La Liberté guidant le peuple* (1830) in, for example, Jean-Pierre Rey's image of *La Marianne de '68* (Leblanc, 2015; and discussed further below by Antigoni Memou) and several images that circulated online during the Hong Kong protests of 2019–2020 (Smits, 2020). These reworkings are testimony to the memorability of the original painting as well as to the extent of its reproductions since 1830, which had made it familiar to the public at large. The formal and affective echoes between new images and historical ones serve to link one protest cycle to another through a specifically visual form of resonance (Armstrong & Crage, 2006).

Iconicity

How does the idea of the iconic photo fit into these dynamics? Since iconicity has been a central topic in discussions of public photography and public memory, and constitutes a particular form of reproduction, it deserves extra attention here. In the first instance, iconicity can be understood in terms of the relationship between an image and the event or persons it depicts. It pertains to photographs that have become "the defining, enduring image of an event" (Dahmen et al., 2018) and that are perceived as having captured the singularity of a particular moment or, as Sophie Dufays' discussion below of ID-photos shows, the essence of a particular life. For this reason, they can later come to typify or "sum up" events and the broader histori-cal processes of which they are a part. As time passes, an iconic image in this sense becomes a "metonym that stands in for larger, more complex phenomena" (Dahmen et al., 2018, p. 271). This is what happened with the Tank Man: as the censuring of this image on the Chinese internet indicates, this photograph has come to serve as a visual stand-in for the Tiananmen massacre of 1989 as well as for contemporary resistance to the illiberal Chinese state (Hillenbrand, 2020).

As this case also shows, the aesthetic power of an image is a necessary but never sufficient condition for iconicity. An image's reputation, seen here as the outcome of repeated reproduction, also needs to be considered. Images only become iconic by being reproduced and remediated countless

times and, linked to this, by being frequently labelled "iconic." In common parlance, indeed, "iconic" is often used as synonymous with "very well-known." According to Hariman and Lucaites (2007), iconic images are "widely recognised and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics" (p. 27). As Boudana et al. (2017) have noted, however, the cost of iconic-ity—and of the instant recognizability that this entails—may be a loss of meaning: "The more an iconic photo is circulated, the more it is recognized as iconic, yet the more it may become devoid of the significance that made it iconic in the first place" (p. 1227). Another downside is that the attention given to a limited number of extremely well-known iconic images comes at the cost of ignoring others. This is par for the course in cultural memory since, as Rigney (2005) has argued, the production of shared memory is governed by the principle of scarcity. It tends to concentrate in a limited number of canonical sites, which, by virtue of being limited in number and over-exposed, can become collective points of reference. As Memou shows here, the photographic legacy of 1968 has been largely reduced to a highly selective set of images that, in over-emphasizing the role of particular individuals, occludes the participation of women and the broader alliances behind the uprising.

There is also an upside to this concentration of cultural memory on a select number of images. Precisely because they are so well known, iconic images become easily available for adaptation and appropriation by others in their own claim-making. Duygu Erbil shows this below in her analysis of how an iconic photograph of student leader Deniz Gezmiş could be re-used by different parties: since it is so well-known it belongs to everyone and no-one. This public availability means that being associated with an iconic photograph is a mixed blessing for activists trying to control the legacy of their movement. An iconic photograph may preserve the memory of the movement but sometimes at the cost of dissociating it from its po-litical demands or of limiting its value to the aesthetic realm of galleries and museums. Raiford (2011, p. 16) has similarly signalled "cooptation, de-politicization and commodification" in the case of iconic images of the civil rights and black power movements of the 1960s, which began to appear four decades later in advertising campaigns. However, as Cambre (2012) has argued with reference to what is probably the most commodified revolutionary photograph of all time, Alberto Korda's portrait of Che Guevara *Guerrillero Heroico* (1960), commodification does not necessarily mark the death knell for an image's radical force. This is also borne out in the present

collection in the essay by Thomas Smits and Ruben Ros, which shows how the hyper-canonical Tank Man could continue to be mobilized as a tool of contention in the context of recent protests in Hong Kong.

The literature on iconicity has largely coalesced around a small number of "super icons" (Perlmutter, 1998) for which "no caption [is] needed" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007), such as the Tank Man or John Paul Filo's *Kent State Shootings* (1970), which are then discussed *as* icons rather than in relation to what they are icons *of*. Our volume embeds the issue of iconicity into a broader consideration of reproduction and, crucially, also considers images that are popular but not necessarily iconic in the usual sense; although they function as metonyms of particular events that are only reproduced over shorter periods of time or with a more limited circulation. In taking such images into account alongside hyper-canonical ones, we aim to open up new perspectives on the mechanisms whereby images gain and lose salience in cultural memory. This is important not only for deepening our understanding of how (iconic) images are reproduced and reworked, but also for exploring the cultural longevity of images, or lack thereof, in the digital age (Smits & Ros, 2021). Theories of iconic imagery were first developed around 2000 (Brink, 2000; Hariman & Lucaites, 2001; Perlmutter, 1998) and were modelled on the media landscape dominated by top-down mass media, such as the newspaper, the illustrated magazine, and television, which had blossomed in the decades following the Second World War. Since then, however, the digital media have transformed, not only the ways in which images are created, but also how they are selected, distributed, and reproduced (Dahmen et al., 2018).

As Edrington and Gallagher (2019) argue, the advent of digital media and mobile technology has "democratized" the battle over visual representational control by allowing activists to disseminate and reproduce visual messages without having to rely on traditional gatekeepers. But the very ease with which digital images can now be reproduced is also changing the very conditions in which visual memory operates. As mentioned above, iconicity implies scarcity. In the condition of "post-scarcity" (Hoskins, 2017) characteristic of digital media, however, where images seem to be in unlimited supply, memory is less likely to coalesce for a longer period around a single image. There is a widely shared concern that the digital circulation of digitized and born-digital iconic pictures leads to the "trivializing" (Boudana et al., 2017) or "collapsing" (Merrill, 2020) of the original meaning of "the iconic" as the memorable encapsulation of a particular event. Memeification of photographic icons has been described as the most extreme manifestation of this process (Boudana et al., 2017). The very pace at which "iconization"

occurs in digital environments—where images are labelled "iconic" almost as soon as they appear and are then rapidly reproduced across different platforms—seems to diminish the capacity of images to stay iconic in the longer term. While the affordances of digital media cause images to spread quickly and with ease, these "instant news icons" (Mortensen, 2016) or "speeded-up icons" (Dahmen et al., 2018) are believed to quickly rise to prominence, but also to be quickly forgotten. While digital media offer activists unrivalled opportunities for producing, selecting, and reproducing their own visual record, they may also be diminishing their capacity to transmit memory to the next generation of activists.

The visual memory of protest, linking generations and protest cycles, is dependent on images being continuously reproduced. At first sight, the ephemerality of "instant news icons" poses a serious threat to the very possibility of a shared memory being sustained over a longer period. Is the investment in a limited number of highly memorable images being replaced by other forms of visual memory, for example, by fluid "networks of photographs" (Smits, 2021), or visual "memory assemblages" (Chidgey, 2018; Merrill, 2020) that provide for continuity across time while changing and adapting to new circumstances? Clara Vlessing's study of the online reproduction of images of Sylvia Pankhurst has led her to conclude that image reproduction is still governed by the principle of scarcity, not least because of constraints placed by copyright and paywalls. Sam Merrill, in contrast, argues that the internet is also generating new forms of meaning-making in the form of image constellations thrown up by search engines, suggesting that visual memory-making is now happening in part through the combinatory potential of algorithms. So while our collection does not offer a definitive conclusion about the future of iconic images of protest in the digital age, it does identify some key issues for future exploration. In the meantime, we have subsumed the issue of iconicity as such into broader concerns about the reproduction, remediation, and reworking of images across time.

Visual Memory in Mobilization

A final set of issues addressed by this collection pertains to the way images—often well-known iconic images—are mobilized in the conduct of protest. What role does visual memory, specifically the visual memory of earlier protest events, play in activism itself? Zamponi (2018), as mentioned earlier in our introduction to the memory–activism nexus, distinguishes between the implicit and explicit memory of movements. Implicit memory

relates to the protest habitus of actors, and the inherited assumptions and repertoires that inform action. From the perspective of our collection, this habitus includes the visual memory of earlier protests as this has been mediated and transmitted through images. Thus, the G20 photograph from Hamburg indicated that the visual memory of earlier protest cycles implicitly shapes the performance of protest as activists (un)consciously recreate or restage earlier images, be it those that are well-known to the public at large or those that have a particular meaning within a movement (Raiford, 2011).

As the term suggests, "explicit memory" entails overt references to earlier protest cycles as a protest tactic, as a form of visual activism. Visual invocations of memory can take the form of historic names, slogans, and symbols being displayed on posters and T-shirts and stencilled on walls. More importantly from the perspective of our collection, explicit visual memory work involves reproducing and recycling historical images so as to build a visual–material bridge between "then" and "now." Displaying key events in the movement's history serves as a reminder of unfinished business or, indeed, of broken promises. Displaying the portraits of demonstrators killed by police or other victims of police violence is a common strategy in demands for those responsible to be held to account (Assmann & Assmann, 2010; Rigney, 2020) and is often linked to larger campaigns for civil rights and social justice. This is brought out by Sophie Dufays in her analysis of the mobilization of the photos of the disappeared in Mexico. The display of historical images in new contexts can also be a way to flag inspirational models and acquire extra symbolic power by grafting the new movement onto the old one and inscribing it into a longer tradition. This is shown here in Alice Mattoni and Anwesha Chakraborty's account of the mobilization by recent activists in India of the iconic image of Gandhi as a way of piggybacking on his symbolic capital. In such cases, the display of images gives historical depth to a new movement and, in doing so, adds to its weight, unity, and worthiness, key elements of what Charles Tilly would have called its "WUNC" (Tilly & Wood, 2016).

Overview

Bringing the different facets of the memory–activism nexus together, this collection explores the interplay between the visualization of protest, the memory work that is done in the intervals between protest cycles, and the visual memory work that takes place during protests. Written by an interdisciplinary team, the nine chapters are clustered into three sections each with its own focus.

Producing Memorable Images focuses on how images of earlier protest events are composed, exploring the correlation between the aesthetics of the images and their capacity to be "memorable"; that is, to stick in culture rather than disappear with yesterday's news. In the opening essay, *Marco Solaroli* investigates the institutional work of the World Press Photo awards in shaping the visual memory of activism, asking how protest imagery is produced, articulated, and valorized through the World Press Photo awards and, more generally, in the field of photojournalism. He argues that the awards simultaneously shape professional standards and aesthetic–stylistic trends, to the extent that the iconic power of prize-winning photographs risks tipping protest over into "mere" aesthetics.

In the chapter that follows, *Erika Zerwes* examines the work of Brazilian photojournalist Nair Benedicto. She shows how Benedicto used her photographic skills in the service of visual activism, acting as a witness to the several massive strikes in São Paulo between 1979–1981 and hence ensuring the visibility of these protests against the dictatorial regime. She shows, moreover, how Benedicto carefully composed her images in such a way as to resonate with the memory of earlier protest images, most notably those of the 1968 protests in Europe. Although it has not been widely reproduced, she concludes that Benedicto's work provides a visual archive of protest that could yet serve as a resource for a counter-memory of modern Brazil.

Finally, *Duygu Erbil* analyses the iconic portrait of the Turkish student leader and revolutionary Deniz Gezmiş taken at the moment of his arrest in 1971. She notes how this image has been reproduced and appropriated by a wide range of political groups, including during the 2013 Gezi Park occupation, and asks why this particular image has proven such a fruitful resource for later protesters. Why did this specific photograph become so attractive for reproduction by amateurs as distinct from the photojournalists that are the subject of the previous chapters? Erbil argues that the image became memorable not merely thanks to its subject matter, but above all thanks to its material qualities: its direct and simple composition, with the figure of Deniz Gezmiş front-lit and foregrounded, made the image available for amateur reproduction and remediation, whether as graffiti, posters, or fanart. Its memorability, in other words, lies in those features that meant that it could be easily reproduced in the DIY settings typical of protest.

Reproduction and Remediation focuses on the way images circulate, in their original or in an adapted form, in the intervals between protest cycles. Which images are recycled, which ones gain an iconic status, and how are they reworked in different media? In the opening essay, *Antigoni Memou* critically examines the visual legacy of May '68 in France, noting that the iconization

of a limited number of images has fed into a very narrow interpretation of the uprising as being a student affair, led especially by male students. She then zooms in on one of the most iconic photographs of May '68 in France—often referred to as *La Marianne de '68*. While noting that its memorability is linked to its resonance with Delacroix's famous painting *Liberty Leading the People*, Memou argues that the power of this visual memory ends up producing a very male-gendered view of the movement, one that effectively reduces women to symbols. Memou takes this photograph as a starting point from which to consider more generally the complex processes both of remembering and of forgetting behind the reproduction of photographs of May '68. She shows how the selectivity of cultural memory has colluded in rendering invisible not only women, but also striking workers. Like Zerwes, Memou ends by pointing to the possibility of historians and activists going back to the archives in order to actively promote an alternative visual memory of '68 by bringing other photographs into circulation again.

Clara Vlessing examines a mural of Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960) painted on the wall of a pub in East London. The mural presents a collage of remediated photographs of Pankhurst that were sourced from the internet. Vlessing uses these images to examine the long and often complicated pathways images take before they become carriers of cultural memory. While the internet supposedly ushered in a culture of "post-scarcity" and imagistic abundance, institutional, financial, and technological constraints continue to shape Pankhurst's image. Showing how memory in material and digital environments intersect, the chapter argues that the visual memory of activism continues to be governed by scarcity.

Finally, *Samuel Merrill* discusses the online circulation of *The Woman with the Handbag*—a photo from 1985 that shows a woman striking a neo-Nazi with her handbag during a rally in Växjo, Sweden. Exploring the conceptual edges between iconic and viral images, he studies the visual assemblages that have formed around this picture in the digital realm. The chapter notes how the algorithms behind search engines such as Google place images of protest into visual constellations that cross-over between different mnemonic contexts. Because these constellations frequently gravitate towards emphasizing the vulnerability and violence of *The Woman with the Handbag*, Merrill argues that algorithms have an agential role in promoting a specific type of action in collective memory.

Mobilizing Visual Memory focuses on the way visual memory is activated by protesters in an overt manner through the display of historical images. As the three essays show in different ways, displaying historical images not only helps directly in articulating claims, but, above all, in inscribing new protests

in a longer tradition. *Alice Mattoni* and *Anwesha Chakraborty* examine how visual memory operated in the India Against Corruption Movement (2011–2012). They show how activists combined the use of legacy photographs with other visual markers to inscribe their campaign within the Gandhian tradition. The leader of the protest wore a white cap, reminiscent of Gandhi, while a photograph of Gandhi was literally used to frame the platform from which campaigners spoke. They argue that the overt invocations of Gandhian memory not only helped to align the anti-corruption movement symbolically with a nationally recognized tradition of resistance to power, but also collapsed the distinction between past and present, making it seem as if the latest movement was also a continuation of the older one.

Sophie Dufays explores the display of photo-portraits of 43 "disappeared" students in Mexico in justice campaigns. The ID-photographs of the students, remediated on murals as well as reproduced in the form of silhouettes, have been a key feature of protests against their disappearance. Dufays explains the mobilizing power of these images by their resonance with national and international traditions of protest, as well as their resonance with religious iconography. They speak to a very broad constituency because they are carriers of the intimate attachments and religious beliefs of the local community, while also recalling other Mexican and Latin American campaigns against human rights violations.

Finally, *Thomas Smits* and *Ruben Ros* chart the online circulation of the iconic Tank Man photograph. Using the Google Cloud Vision API, to retrieve 50,735 online circulations of this image between 2013 and mid-2020, they use computational methods to study the relationship between its meaning and the (online) places where it is used to remember the Tiananmen protests. The chapter then zooms in on the connection between the online circulation of the Tank Man and the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests of 2014 and 2019–2020. They show how Hong Kong has provided an online space where differences between Western and Chinese interpretations of the image become apparent and where it has been a constant part of new waves of mobilization.

Across the different chapters, one conclusion stands out: that demonstrations do not finish when people leave the streets. Social movements leave visual traces. While some images end up in the archive, others are reproduced, remediated, and reworked to form a collection of images—a cultural memory—that can be mobilized in later protests. In the light of our findings, visual memory is certainly one of the most important conduits of the memory of activism and the most important resource for memory in activism. Hopefully, this collection will stimulate further work in this direction.

Bibliography

Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. Chicago University Press.

Armstrong, E. A., & Crage, S. M. (2006). Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth. *American Sociological Review, 71*, 724–751.

Assmann, A. (2008). Canon and Archive. In A. Erll, & A. Nünning (Eds.), *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook* (pp. 97–107). De Gruyter.

Assmann, A., & Assmann, C. (2010). Neda: The Career of a Global Icon. In A. Assmann, & Conrad, S. (Eds.). *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (pp. 225–242). Palgrave Macmillan.

Assmann, J. (1995). Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. *New German Critique, 65*, 125–133. https://doi.org/10.2307/488538

Attridge, D. (2007). *The Singularity of Literature*. Taylor & Francis.

Azoulay, A. (2015). *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (L. Bethlehem, Trans.). Verso.

Barthes, R. (1980). *La chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*. Gallimard.

Boudana, S., Frosh, P., & Cohen, A. A. (2017). Reviving Icons to Death: When Historic Photographs become Digital Memes. *Media, Culture & Society, 39*(8), 1210–1230. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717690818

Brink, C. (2000). Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps. *History and Memory, 12*(1), 135–150. https://doi.org/10.2979/his.2000.12.1.135

Bryan-Wilson, J., González, J., & Willsdon, D. (2016). Editors' Introduction: Themed Issue on Visual Activism. *Journal of Visual Culture, 15*(1), 5–23. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412915619384

Cammaerts, B. (2012). Protest Logics and Mediation Opportunity Structure. *European Journal of Communication, 27*(2), 117–134.

Cammaerts, B., Mattoni, A., & McCurdy, P. (Eds.) (2013). *Mediation and Protest Movements*. Intellect Books.

Cambre, M.-C. (2012). Stealing or Steeling the Image? The Failed Branding of the Guerrillero Heroico Image of Che Guevara. *Imaginations: Journal of Cross-Cultural Image Studies, 3*(1), 64–87.

Casey, M. J. (2012). *Che's Afterlife: The Legacy of an Image*. Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

Chidgey, R. (2018). *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Condon, C. (2020). *1871, La Commune–Portraits d'une révolution* [documentary].

Dahmen, N. S., Mielczarek, N., & Perlmutter, D. D. (2018). The Influence–Network Model of the Photojournalistic Icon. *Journalism & Communication Monographs, 20*(4), 264–313. https://doi.org/10.1177/1522637918803351

Daphi, P., & Zamponi, L. (2019). Exploring the Movement–Memory Nexus: Insights and Ways Forwards. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *24*(4), 399–417.

Debord, G. (1970). *Society of the Spectacle*. Bread and Circuses Publishing.

Doerr, N., Mattoni, A., & Teune, S. (2013). Towards a Visual Analysis of Social Movements, Conflict, and Political Mobilization. In N. Doerr, A. Mattoni, & S. Teune (Eds.), *Advances in the Visual Analysis of Social Movements* (Vol. 35) (pp. xi–xxvi). Emerald.

Edrington, C. L., & Gallagher, V. J. (2019). Race and Visibility: How and Why Visual Images of Black Lives Matter. *Visual Communication Quarterly*, *26*(4), 195–207. https://doi.org/10.1080/15551393.2019.1679635

Erll, A. (2009). Remembering Across Time, Space, and Cultures: Premediation, Remediaton and the "Indian Mutiny." In A. Erll & A. Rigney (Eds.), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (pp. 109–138). De Gruyter.

Erll, A. (2014). From 'District Six' to District 9 and Back: The Plurimedial Production of Travelling Schemata. In C. De Cesari, & A. Rigney (Eds.), *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales* (pp. 29–50). De Gruyter.

Erll, A., Nünning, A., & Young, S. B. (Eds.) (2008). *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*. De Gruyter.

Erll, A., & Rigney, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. De Gruyter.

Gitelman, L. (2014). *Always Already New: Media, History, and the Data of Culture*. MIT Press.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left*. University of California Press.

Hajek, A., Lohmeier, C., & Pentzold, C. (Eds.) (2015). *Memory in a Mediated World: Remembrance and Reconstruction*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2001). Dissent and Emotional Management in a Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph. *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *31*(3), 5–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/02773940109391204

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

Hillenbrand, M. (2020). *Negative Exposures: Knowing What Not to Know in Contemporary China*. Duke University Press.

Hoskins, A. (2017). *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*. Routledge.

Hristova, S. (2014). Visual Memes as Neutralizers of Political Dissent. *TripleC: Communication, Capitalism & Critique. Open Access Journal for a Global Sustainable Information Society*, *12*(1), 265–276. https://doi.org/10.31269/triplec.v12i1.507

Leblanc, A. (2015). *L'image de Mai 68. Du journalisme à l'histoire* [Thèses, EHESS – Paris]. https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/tel-01851102

Mattoni, A., & Teune, S. (2014). Visions of Protest: A Media-Historic Perspective on Images in Social Movements. *Sociology Compass*, *8*(6), 876–887. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12173

McGarry, A., Erhart, I., Eslen-Ziya, H., Jenzen, O., & Korkut, U. (2020). Introduction: The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication. In A. McGarry, I. Erhart, H. Eslen-Ziya, O. Jenzen, & U. Korkut (Eds.), *The Aesthetics of Global Protest* (pp. 15–36). Amsterdam University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvswx8bm.6

Memou, A. (2015). *Photography and Social Movements: From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement against Globalisation (2001)*. Manchester University Press.

Merrill, S. (2020). Following the Woman with the Handbag: Mnemonic Context Collapse and the Anti-Fascist Activist Appropriation of an Iconic Historical Photograph. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media* (pp. 111–139). Palgrave Macmillan.

Merrill, S., Keightley, E., & Daphi, P. (2020). Introduction: The Digital Memory Work Practices of Social Movements. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 1–32). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mirzoeff, N. (2017). *The Appearance of Black Lives Matter*. [NAME]. https://name-publications.org/item/2017/the-appearance-of-black-lives-matter

Mitchell, W. J. T. (1994). *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation*. Chicago University Press.

Mortensen, M. (2016). "The Image Speaks for Itself"—Or Does It? Instant News Icons, Impromptu Publics, and the 2015 European "Refugee Crisis." *Communication and the Public*, *1*(4), 409–422. https://doi.org/10.1177/2057047316679667

Nora, P. (Ed.) (1997 [1984–92]). *Les Lieux de mémoire, I, II et III*. Paris: Gallimard.

Olesen, T. (2013). Visual Injustice Symbols in the Egyptian Revolution, 2010–2011. In N. Doerr, A. Mattoni, & S. Teune (Eds.), *Advances in the Visual Analysis of Social Movements* (pp. 3–27). Emerald.

Olesen, T. (2015). *Global Injustice Symbols and Social Movements*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Olick, J. (2014). Willy Brandt in Warsaw: Event or Image? History or Memory? In O. Shevchenko (Ed.), *Double Exposure: Memory and Photography* (pp. 21–41). Transaction Publishers.

Perlmutter, D. D. (1998). *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises*. Praeger.

Raiford, L. (2011). *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle*. University of North Carolina Press.

Reading, A., & Katriel, T. (Eds.). (2015). *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles: Powerful Times*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Rigney, A. (2005). Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory. *Journal of European Studies*, *35*(1), 011–028. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244105051158

Rigney, A. (2018). Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic. *Memory Studies*, *11*(3), 368–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771869

Rigney, A. (2020). Mediations of Outrage: How Violence against Protestors is Remembered. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, *87*(3), 707–733.

Shevchenko, O. (2014). Memory and Photography: An Introduction. In O. Shevchenko (Ed.), *Double Exposure: Memory and Photography* (pp. 1–21). Transaction Publishers.

Smits, T. (2020, April 17). *Delacroix in Hong Kong: Activism, Memory and Visual Representation.* Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe. https://rememberingactivism.eu/2020/04/17/delacroix-in-hong-kong-activism-memory-and-visual-representation/

Smits, T. (2021). A Network of Photographs: The Visual Public Memory of the Dutch Provo Movement, 1967–2016. *Memory Studies*, *15*(1), 184–203. https://doi.org/10.1177/17506980211037282

Smits, T., & Ros, R. (2021). Distant Reading 940,000 Online Circulations of 26 Iconic Photographs. *New Media & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211049459

Teune, S. (2013). Imagining Heiligendamm: Visual Struggles and the G8 Summit 2007. In B. Cammaerts, A. Mattoni, & P. McCurdy (Eds.), *Mediation and Protest Movements* (pp. 205–228). Intellect Books.

Tilly, C., & Tarrow, S. (2015). *Contentious Politics* (2nd ed.). Oxford University Press.

Tilly, C., & Wood, L. J. (2016). *Social Movements, 1768–2012* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

Wagner-Pacifici, R. (2017). *What is an Event?* University of Chicago Press.

Zamponi, L. (2013). Collective Memory and Social Movements. In D. A. Snow, D. Della Porta, B. Klandermans, & D. McAdam (Eds.), *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements* (pp. 1–4). Wiley Blackwell.

Zamponi, L. (2018). *Social Movements, Memory and Media: Narrative in Action in the Italian and Spanish Student Movements.* Palgrave Macmillan.

Zamponi, L., & Fernández González, J. (2017). Dissenting Youth: How Student and Youth Struggles Helped Shape Anti-Austerity Mobilisations in Southern Europe. *Social Movement Studies*, *16*, 64–81.

Zarzycka, M., & Kleppe, M. (2013). Awards, Archives, and Affects: Tropes in the World Press Photo Contest 2009–2011. *Media, Culture & Society*, *35*(8), 977–995.

Zelizer, B. (2004). The Voice of the Visual in Memory. In K. Phillips (Ed.), *Framing Public Memory* (pp. 156–187). University of Alabama Press.

Zelizer, B. (2010). *About to Die: How News Images Move the Public*. Oxford University Press.

About the Authors

Ann Rigney is professor of Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. She has published widely on theories of cultural memory and on memory cultures in Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries. Her books include *The Afterlives of Walter Scott* (OUP, 2012) and *Transnational Memory* (co-edited with C. De Cesari, De Gruyter, 2014). She is principal investigator on the ERC-funded project *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* (ReAct) (2019–2024). (a.rigney@uu.nl)

Thomas Smits is a post-doc researcher at the University of Antwerp. A historian with an interest in visual culture and computer-assisted methodologies, he is author of the prize-winning *The European Illustrated Press and the Emergence of a Transnational Visual Culture of the News, 1842–1870* (Routledge, 2020). Between 2019–2021, he worked as a post-doc researcher for the *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* (ReAct) project. Recent work has been published in *New Media and Society, Memory Studies, Visual Communication* and *Social Movement Studies.* (thomas. smits@uantwerpen.be)

Producing Memorable Images

1 Photojournalism, the World Press Photo Awards, and the Visual Memory of Protest

Marco Solaroli

Abstract

This chapter investigates the relationship between photojournalistic prizes, protest movements, and visual memory, focusing on the institutional work of the World Press Photo (WPP) awards in shaping the visual memory of protest over the last two decades. It offers an analysis of the WPP archive, complemented by interviews with photographers and jurors. Through exemplary cases, it highlights (dis)continuities in the content and style of protest imagery. It focuses on persistent visual motifs (e.g. shield-bearing riot police vs. protesters) and innovative authorial practices developed by award-winning photojournalists. The chapter concludes that the tensions between reiteration and innovation in the WPP's performance of value and its institutionalization of memory have repercussions for the shaping of protest imagery and its public visual memory.

Keywords: awards, memory, photography, protest, World Press Photo

Introduction

The World Press Photo (WPP) is an independent, non-profit foundation based in Amsterdam, which has organized one of the largest press photo competitions in the world since 1955. Out of tens of thousands of photos submitted annually, the WPP awards around 50 prizes (first, second, and third prize in various thematic categories, both for single photographs and visual stories)—plus the World Press Photo of the Year, arguably the most relevant prize, given to a single image that is supposed to represent the best

photojournalistic product of the previous year. All winning photographs are included in a yearbook published in different languages and in a worldwide travelling exhibition, which is said to be seen—often within photo festivals—by over three million people in some 45 countries.[1]

The mission of the competition has been meaningfully reframed over the last decades. For many years, the purpose was synthesized in the slogan "to develop and promote quality visual journalism," while more recently the organization presents itself online as a global platform that aims at "connecting the world to the stories that matter," being founded on the officially stated core values of "accuracy, diversity, and transparency."[2] Beyond the competition, it develops master classes for emerging photojournalists, publishes an online magazine and various research reports, and organizes special thematic exhibitions.

During the autumn of 2020, the World Press Photo Foundation in collaboration with UNESCO and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands organized the photo exhibition entitled *People, Power: Documenting Protest Since 1957*. Displayed between September and December in public spaces across Rotterdam, Amsterdam, The Hague, and Tunis, as part of the World Press Freedom Conference 2020—then travelling in the following months to Paris, Valletta, and other cities—the exhibition "presents images that have become global symbols of people power and celebrates the work of professional photographers who are showing us the stories that matter."[3] Showcasing protest images that have won prizes at the prestigious WPP contests over the last decades, the exhibition can be interpreted both as a strategic public valorization of the WPP's vast archive and the outcome of a process of institutional self-reflexivity on an issue that has recently acquired increased relevance and attention within the professional news media field (as well as in scholarly research): the visual representation and memory of protests. The exhibition thus offered the opportunity to deepen the process of constructing the professional and public visual memory of protest events, by shedding light on the ways in which the work of "professional photographers who are showing us the stories that matter" comes to be carried out in practice, then prized, valued, celebrated and reproduced over a longer period of time, and, in parallel, on the ways in which certain photographs of protest become "global symbols of people power."

1   https://www.worldpressphoto.org (all the links in these chapter footnotes were accessed on 1 July 2021).

2   https://www.worldpressphoto.org

3   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/exhibitions/highlights/2020/people-power

This chapter investigates the institutional work of the WPP awards in shaping the visual memory of protest. In the first section, it outlines a conceptual framework with which to analyse the WPP organization and its evaluation process. Competitions and awards can provide an occasion to all parties (juries, participants, observers) for a fundamental reflection on value and judgements. While such competitions do not usually reflect the wide diversity existing within the profession, they nevertheless shed light on shifts in taste and priorities, and in the models of excellence that contribute to defining what counts as quality news photography and thus orient professional practice. In particular, this first section outlines the institutional role of the WPP in establishing visual trends and standards that aim to strike a balance between the appreciation of realism and the appreciation of expressiveness—both values traditionally associated with photography—and in contributing to the social construction and discursive justification of the iconic status of specific photographs.

In the second section, the chapter explores the multiple ways in which protest imagery is produced, articulated, valorized, and remembered through the WPP awards. Focusing on a number of exemplary photographs, it highlights several discernible trends and (dis)continuities in the professional practices of photojournalism and in the aesthetic composition of protest imagery. In addition, it reconstructs some effects of the awards in terms of professional standards and styles, focusing on the potential iconic power of award-winning photographs and their role in the tension between reiteration and innovation in the visual representation of protest within the photojournalistic field. As Rigney and Smits write in the introduction to this volume, "in the contested space of appearance between the déjà vu and the strikingly new" (above; p. 14), visibility is shaped, inspired, but perhaps also constrained by the memory of earlier events as transmitted through images. On this basis, by focusing on the World Press Photo's performance of value and its institutionalization of memory, the chapter aims to shed light on the visual production and afterlives of protests by analysing the cultural legitimacy and role of press photo awards in shaping protest imagery and its public memory.

Methodologically, the paper draws on a wider research project based on an archival analysis of the last 20 years (2001–2020) of the World Press Photo awards; 30 in-depth interviews with WPP jurors and winning photojournalists, combined with discourse analysis of juries' official statements; and ethnographic sessions during award ceremonies and discussion panels at major photo festivals and World Press Photo exhibitions in the United States, France, and Italy.

Performance of Value and Institutionalization of Memory at Press Photo Awards

Through international awards, such as the World Press Photo, photographs can become *valuable* as well as *memorable*, within both the professional photojournalistic field and the wider public visual culture. However, the performance of value and the institutionalization of memory carried out in the awarding process—and the consequent exhibitions and editorial projects—can take a variety of meaningful and impactful forms. This variety reflects the multiplicity of values constitutive of photography as a medium as well as the dynamic relations between photography, journalism, and memory.

Since its inception, photography has generated debates about whether it most represents a mechanized and objective form of reproduction or, alternatively, a subjective, aesthetic interpretation of social and material life. The perceived "double nature" of photography has also shaped discussions within the professional field of photojournalism. As is well known, "objective" reporting became a foundational "professional ideal" and a "strategic ritual" in the genesis and development of professional journalism (Tuchman, 1972). Between the 1930s and 1940s, reporters "reacted" to the burgeoning presence of photographers by eschewing "the photograph's interpretative function" and defining

> the photographer's mission in hard news as a primarily denotative one … By upholding one function of photography—denotation—over another—connotation—reporters persuaded photographers to adopt one of the professional goals by which the journalistic community had long defined its own boundaries of practice. (Zelizer, 1995, p. 137)

However, in the following decades, photojournalists increasingly struggled to strike a balance between strategic respect for the ideal of objectivity and the drive to refine their visual aesthetics; they had to "insist on the objectivity of their pictures at the same time that they attempt[ed] to demonstrate their mastery of the craft" (Schwartz, 1992, p. 96). Photojournalists increasingly realized how "photography as a medium is characterized by two powerful and potentially contradictory qualities: its apparent ability to capture a particular moment and its tendency to transcend the moment" (Griffin, 1999, p. 139). This realization was also related to the increasingly perceived public "power" of photography, particularly the social and political impact of certain shots that could stir debates, condense complex events, and last long in public memory as iconic photographs.

In the course of the last decades, digitalization and the loss of salaried jobs with newspapers has dealt a severe blow to traditional photojournalism. In parallel, however, the work of news and documentary photographers has gradually entered art galleries and museums, with top-tier photojournalists increasingly laying claim to being recognized as authors and even as artists (Solaroli, 2016). In this context, a significant role is played by press photo competitions and awards, which work as institutional devices of professional consecration, circulating cultural value and shaping visual memory. Their relevance is evident and debated within the relatively institutionalized professional field of photojournalism, where they can raise fundamental questions of value definition for juries, participants, and other observers. According to a key figure in the global photojournalistic field, who was also Secretary of the World Press Photo contest multiple times:

> The World Press Photo doesn't have to *set* the standards, it has to *reflect* the standards ... as a reflection of the media industry, more than a driver ... Nowadays the competition is reflecting a very confused set of standards, because the world of photojournalism is going through a very confused but challenging moment ... It's also amazing how resistant the competition is to force change: there is *a consistency of styles over the years* [emphasis added].[4]

Lacking formally established criteria of evaluation, what appears as a "consistency of styles over the years" in the WPP competition can be traced back to the influence of the history of the competition itself (in terms of previously winning ideas, themes, and styles) in combination with deeply rooted visual-cultural repertoires of iconographic representations. This is consistent with what Bourdieu (1996) claimed about competitions that tend to attract professionals "who bow to the canons of a tested aesthetic ('prize-winning' ... successful ... etc.)" and thus, thematically and stylistically, tend to circularly re-produce prize-winning photographs (p. 144). In other words, emerging photojournalists sometimes act more or less consciously as followers rather than as path-breaking innovators. In the tension between imitation and innovation, prizes like the WPP produce winners "by establishing the rules and conditions that define the *type* of winner" (Street, 2005, p. 833). In the process, they also fulfil an agenda-setting function, by drawing public attention to specific topics.

Moreover, as consecrating agencies, awards can highlight specific photographs as being particularly outstanding cultural products, constituting

4   Interview with the author, New York, January 2014.

a crucial vehicle for the performative attribution of an iconic status to specific images. In other words, awards can spark the wider circulation and visibility of the winning images, making them the focus of critical discussion and helping them to stand out in public memory. In this way, icons come to work as "symbolic condensations" that root social meanings in specific material forms (Alexander, Bartmanski, & Giesen, 2012), and their ability to reinforce or disrupt dominant national-political narratives is enhanced (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Solaroli, 2015).

On this basis, the next section presents the results of research into the visual trends in protest photographs that were awarded prizes at the WPP in the first two decades of the 21st century. In particular, it focuses on the ambivalent role of the dominant motifs of winning photographs and on their "potential for institutionalization" (Armstrong & Crage, 2006), a major condition facilitating the commemoration of social movements and contributing to a protest's commemorative success.

The Visual Memory of Protest at the World Press Photo Awards, 2001–2020

The first clear result of the archival analysis of the WPP awards relates to the fluctuating weight of protest as a central theme in the overall number of award-winning photographs over the years. In the two decades under analysis, two major protest phases can be identified, while in other years there were markedly fewer recurrences of the theme. The first phase occurred between 2007 and 2012, with a significant role played by the Arab Spring; the second one covers the period 2018 to 2020 with a highpoint in 2020 when the two most important awards—the WPP Photo of the Year and the WPP Story of the Year—were given to photographs of protests, from Sudan and Algeria, respectively. Moreover, four out of six prizes in the General News category were awarded to protest photographs shot in Sudan, Iraq, Chile, and Hong Kong. In 2020, protest clearly represented the most salient theme in the award-winning photojournalism at the WPP.

In order to understand the role of the award-winning protest photographs in shaping the visual memory of protest movements, a distinction needs to be made for the purpose of analysis between their symbolic content and their expressive style. In what follows, some selected cases from the archive will be analysed in order to explain the forms and effects of the visual trends and the journalistic standards they exemplify. Particular attention will be paid to the photos that were awarded the top prize—the

World Press Photo of the Year—and their potential role as icons in shaping and institutionalizing the visual memory of protest.

Symbolic Content

Archival research has shown that the symbolic content of the award-winning protest imagery was articulated through a number of recurrent visual motifs and themes. This finding is consistent with the few existing scholarly works that have investigated the photojournalistic representations of protests with reference to the period 2007–2011, during the first phase of appreciation for protest photography at the WPP awards in the 21st century (e.g. Becker, 2019; Veneti, 2017; Zarzycka & Kleppe, 2013).

Focusing on protests in Greece, Iran, and Egypt between 2008 and 2011, Becker (2019) compared how they had been represented on a select number of global television channels with how they had been covered in international award-winning press photographs, arguing that "WPP photographs contrast sharply with the TV coverage of the tumultuous protests in the streets and … portray different protesters from those seen on television news" (p. 132). Moreover, Becker (2019) showed that although

> no "icons" in the conventional sense of the term were found, several motifs and themes are identified that cut across this coverage in different ways … none of the journalistic images … are repeated across newscasts, channels or media platforms in ways that suggest that they can stand for these specific protests … [but] when we look beyond the specific image and its iconic potential, several visual themes emerge from this coverage that can stand for contemporary protest. (p. 135)

According to this perspective, such recurrent visual motifs and themes can be conceived as potential or actual icons, moving from picture to picture, and functioning "as visual materials, references, and exemplars for the actions that people engage in during demonstrations" (Faulkner, 2013, pp. 1–2) as well as for photojournalists and media producers.

Deepening the professional specificities of the photojournalistic practices relating to protests in Greece, Veneti (2017) resolved the tension between journalistic objectivity and artistic interpretation by analyzing practices and photographs that in different timeframes focused on the causes, symbols, and vibe or mood (the "general feeling") of the protest. The photojournalists interviewed for that research confirmed the existence of two temporally consecutive working phases, the first one more descriptive and stylistically

oriented toward the principle of realism, the second one more symbolic. In the second phase, photojournalists

> are seeking to take captivating photos moving beyond the use of standard photojournalistic techniques that serve to embody the narrative story of the protest. It is during this phase that most photographers tend to employ hybridized strategies ... as it is basically art photography that allows them to achieve more nuanced and multilevel depictions of the protests. It is the affective qualities that such images possess ... that provide their importance, in the context of protest and demonstrations. (Veneti, 2017, pp. 288–289)

Photojournalists can be interested in producing (also) such symbolic photographs, too, offering an aesthetic and cognitive interpretation of the event, in the expectation that their value can be recognized by professional peers, including the juries of awards. A case in point is the photograph by Yannis Kolesidis (Reuters), which was awarded the second prize in the People in the News (Singles) category in 2009, arguably thanks to the difficulty involved in its making and the richness of its symbolism (Veneti, 2017). The photo shows a man's hand dripping with blood as he stands in front of shield-bearing riot police at a demonstration outside the Greek parliament, which had been triggered when a boy was killed by a police bullet in the city a few days earlier and had then widened to include broader expressions of political grievances in what became Greece's worst rioting in decades.[5] As Becker (2019) noted: "Through its juxtaposition of an injured civilian, presumably a protester, and the police insignias, the photograph becomes a symbol of political violence" (p. 130).

In line with studies by Becker (2019) and Veneti (2017), my analysis of the protest imagery in the WPP archive revealed the persistence of a major visual motif: the opposition between police and protesters, which, with the help of symbolic elements such as riot shields, morally structures the visual dichotomy between opposing factions. Among recent examples, the first prize for single photographs in the Spot News category was given in 2020 to a photograph taken by Farouk Batiche (Deutsche Presse-Agentur) showing students scuffling with shielded riot police during an anti-government demonstration in Algiers.[6] In 2021, the second prize for the stories in the Spot News category was given to a set of photographs entitled *Presidential Vacancy*, taken by Ernesto Benavides

---

5   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2009/30520/1/2009-Yannis-Kolesidis-PN2
6   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2020/39660/1/Farouk-Batiche

(AFP) in November 2020, showing demonstrators in Lima confronting riot police who had formed a blockade with shields to prevent them from reaching the Peruvian Congress building during a period of great political instability when three presidents came to power over the course of little more than a week and massive protests took place throughout the country.[7] In 2012, the third prize for the stories in the Spot News category was given to a set of photographs entitled *Dawn of a Revolution*, taken by Eduardo Castaldo in Cairo in the first two months of 2011, also showing demonstrators facing shield-bearing riot police at the entrance of Tahir Square.[8] As Hariman and Lucaites (2016) noted:

> Riot police in particular are often clothed in body armor and full-collared, visored helmets, carrying shields and macelike clubs, advancing en masse or on horseback to battle with ragged civilians. These images capture a dark tendency that is spreading across the globe: what might be called a new feudalism. (p. 194)

It is worth highlighting that, in the protest photographs prized at the WPP, such a visually dichotomous motif often comes to be structured in gender terms, where the collective anonymous body of armed, shielded, dark-uniformed, and helmeted male policemen (often with visors and anti-tear gas masks) is placed in a visually highlighted unequal power opposition to the single body and face of one protesting woman. In recent years, such a motif has emerged often in public visual culture, for example within the Black Lives Matter protest movement: a notable example is the photograph of a lone woman in a flowing dress protesting the shooting dead of Alton Sterling and facing police in Baton Rouge in July 2016—a shot that has since gone viral.[9] Against this background, the analysis of the WPP offers insights into the possible genesis and trajectories of such a motif. The many examples to emerge from the archive include the photograph by Oded Balilty (AP) that was awarded the first prize for single photographs in the People in the News category in 2007: it shows a female Jewish settler resisting Israeli shielded riot police enforcing a Supreme Court order to demolish homes in an outpost of the Amona settlement in the central West Bank.[10]

---

7   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2021/41393/1/Ernesto-Benavides
8   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/2012/eduardo-castaldo/2
9   https://time.com/4400563/baton-rouge-protests-alton-sterling-woman-arrest-photo-iconic-reuters-jonathan-bachman; see also the introduction to this volume for further examples.
10   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2007/30894/1/2007-Oded-Balilty-PN1; in an empirical analysis of iconic news photographs and collective memory in Israel, Cohen, Boudana, and Frosh (2018) underlined the apparent contrast between the professional

In 2009, the first prize for single photographs in the General News category was awarded to a photo by Luiz Vasconcelos, showing a woman carrying a child in her arms while resisting police eviction of squatters on private land, protesting against the lack of housing in Manaus, Brazil. In 2019, the third prize for stories in the Long-Term Project category was awarded to a set of 29 photographs entitled *State of Decay*, taken by Alejandro Cegarra in Venezuela between 2013 and 2018, from Chavez's through Maduro's presidency: the story included a photograph taken in 2017 and showing a woman trying to halt National Guard anti-riot officers during protests against the Venezuelan government in Caracas.[11]

Going back in time, it is relevant to recall that, in 1988, the WPP of the Year was awarded to a photograph taken in South Korea by Anthony Suau, showing a mother clinging to a policeman's shield at a polling station after her son had been arrested with thousands of demonstrators trying to prove that the presidential election had been rigged. Thanks to the visibility acquired through the most important and most influential prize of the competition, this photograph arguably become a professional model for the following cases.[12]

What conclusion can be drawn from the persistence of this visual motif? The consecrating process of the WPP awards increases the symbolic capital and professional prestige of the award-winning photographers in the professional field along with the public visibility and potential iconic power of their photographs. But in so doing, it also tends to institutionally produce visual models and canons to be followed and reproduced by professionals in later years. At the same time, the persistence of the above-described motif can help in shaping and visually dramatizing "a moral configuration where innocence is pitted against culpability, right against might, citizenry against the state, hope against its destruction" (Rigney, 2016, p. 90), a form of visual memory that tends to detach specific protests from their immediate political context and to frame them as generic visual tropes within wider moral codes.

In a similar vein, in a content analysis of the award-winning photographs at the WPP in 2009–2011, Zarzycka and Kleppe (2013) argued that WPP can influence the generic understanding of conflicts, disasters, and protests,

consecration and media visibility of this news photo—which won both a World Press Photo award and a Pulitzer—and the fact that it was among the least recognized by their research respondents.

11   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2019/37697/11/Alejandro-Cegarra-LTP-AAC-(10)

12   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1988/34086/1/1988-Anthony-Suau-WY

Figure 1.1: Fatima al-Qaws cradles her son Zayed (18), who is suffering from the effects of tear gas after participating in a street demonstration. Sanaa, Yemen, 15 October 2011. Photo: Samuel Aranda for *The New York Times*/Panos Pictures.

based on a restricted number of persistent visual tropes or morally and gender-coded thematic conventions, which gain professional and public recognition through the winning photographs. In particular, they highlighted how in recent years these tropes were present on some occasions in almost 50% of the cases. Among the most widely present visual tropes, the "mourning woman," the "helpless child," and the protesting "civilian facing soldiers" stand out—thanks to the cultural status of women and children as "ideal victims" for the representation of global crises and protests (Hoijer, 2004), but also to their associability to culturally hegemonic iconographic repertoires of artistic and religious conventions (Solaroli, 2015).

Some of the WPP award-winning photographs very evidently resonate with such a logic. For example, in 1998, the World Press Photo of the Year was awarded to a photograph that was taken in Algeria and soon renamed "Madonna of Bentalha," showing a woman crying for the loss of family members after the massacre of villagers by armed guerrillas—and described as reminiscent of the *Laocoon* sculpture (Zarzycka, 2013).[13] Similarly, in 2012, the WPP of the Year was awarded to a photograph taken in Yemen and showing a veiled woman holding her son suffering from the effects of tear gas after a street protest (Figure 1.1).

13   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/1998/32504/1/1998-Hocine-WY

Among the first official comments, a juror declared that the photo spoke for the entire region, standing for all that happened in the Arab Spring. The vice president of Getty Images and president of the jury of the WPP contest at that time, Aidan Sullivan, stated that the photo evoked compassion and poignancy, showing the consequence of an enormous event, and representing the timeless image of maternal love—with its implicit likeness to Christian images of Mary cradling a dead Jesus. Similarly, among the first press reactions, the photo was described by *The New York Times* as a "painterly World Press Photo winner," that "has the mood of a Renaissance painting"—insofar as it echoed artistic masterpieces such as Michelangelo's *Pietà* (MacDonald & Furst, 2012).

In a seminal empirical investigation of the photographic field, Bourdieu (1990) already noted that, in part due to the middle-brow artistic status of photography vis-à-vis sculpture and painting, photographers often acted according to a visual logic based on artistic categories and canons from earlier times. Reflecting the central place occupied by the intersecting fields of religion and fine arts in the dominant visual cultural traditions, well-known photographs sometimes draw their power from their references to religious icons—as also shown by the impact of the Abu Ghraib scandal images, particularly the one evoking the figure of the (hooded) Christ (Mitchell, 2011).

The role of tradition casts new light on the praise heaped in 2012 on the winner of the WPP of the Year for being a "timeless" image. While the winning photo was offered as a news document capturing the social and emotional effects of a specific protest event, critical reflection points also to its generic status clearly resonant with Western artistic and religious imagery. Press photo awards have sometimes been criticized for institutionalizing generic symbolic tropes and reinforcing Western dominant iconographic traditions. For example, an historical analysis of the Picture of the Year prizes awarded in the mid-20th century showed how they were oriented towards "the romantic artistic ideals of modernism, emphasizing emotion, symbolic power and eternal values"; in the views of both jurors and photographers, the ideal prized press photo "may require (historical) topicality, but it is also supposed to be above history, society, and even language. It is supposed to speak for itself … to represent something greater … to be at once typical of the times and timeless, concrete and abstract, documentary and symbolic," translating "political and social devils into emotional mood poetry" (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2000, pp. 199–204). In the case of the WPP, critics have complained that the selection mechanisms and exhibitions are designed to "put selected photographs in a specific context for perception and evaluation, foregrounding iconographic conventions

rather than journalistic criteria of impact or accuracy" (Zarzycka & Kleppe, 2013, p. 991). Similarly, according to Saussier (2001), the activities of the WPP can contribute to the diffusion of "international norms of industrial photo-reportage" (p. 329), which, in turn, can reiterate the standardized production of news photographs that, "like Chinese boxes, claim to be a condensation of an event, while they are condensations of … the iconographic tradition of Western mass media and its planetary hegemony" (p. 309).

Expressive style

In contrast to the persistence of visual motifs and tropes, it is relevant to note that, over the last two decades, a relatively restricted number of increasingly influential international photojournalists have won World Press Photo awards on multiple occasions with photographs that often do not fall within the dominant thematic and stylistic trends. In a productive tension between reiteration and innovation, these WPP winners have adapted to a rapidly shifting scenario by renewing traditional practices of production and representational forms in order to highlight their distinctive professional and authorial status by developing new subjectively articulated aesthetic styles as a strategy of field position-taking (Solaroli, 2016).

The archival analysis of the WPP awards has revealed relevant examples of photojournalists who questioned accepted conventions of practice and technique—such as the frontal and detailed shoot—in favour of a relatively unusual set of styles that comes to define a "dark fuzzy" aesthetics, full of darkness and opaqueness, and characterized also by the choice of tilting the camera, the use of portable flash, and the adoption of a decentred composition, even slightly out of focus. It could be claimed that, rather than exclusively providing the observer with visual news, their photojournalistic styles (e.g. the enigmatic presence of shadows, or the blurred texture of the photographs) aim at generating an emotional space for imaginative speculation.

Such an interpretation emerges also from a number of interviews with WPP jurors. For example, according to a member of the 2004 jury, one of these photojournalists, Paolo Pellegrin, member of the prestigious Magnum Photos agency and, with more than 10 WPP awards to his name, one of the most celebrated, can be defined as "a very *poetic photojournalist* [emphasis added]" that is,

> a great reporter, producing meaningful information … as well as his way
> of looking at something and interpreting it, adding to what our readers
> might already know about the story … This kind of rich chiaroscuro,
> this kind of very artful … soulful, a more existential quality … I like that

kind of risk taking, the picture is black ... so out of focus, so mysterious, it gives the anxiety.[14]

According to a member of the 2012 WPP jury, "the ability to render *more abstractedly* places and feelings in Paolo [Pellegrin]'s hands can be very, very effective ... if you talk about a world in turmoil, where he is able to convey an emotion, a feeling ... a sense of anxiety."[15]

In the 2005 WPP contest, Pellegrin won the second prize in the General News category for a story on thousands of Palestinians converging in November 2004 on a compound in Ramallah for the burial of Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat. The photographs show mourners climbing on high structures in the compound to get a first glimpse of the helicopter that arrived bearing Arafat's body, crowds swarming on the landing pad, then chanting and firing guns in the air in tribute after the burial. Interesting to note from a compositional and aesthetic viewpoint, the tilted, decentred, dark and fuzzy images showed silhouetted characters rather than specific individual mourners, thus speaking of the general affective mood of the event as much as of the authorial style of the author[16]—who has often declared himself to be more interested in "open" photographs that are able to combine hic-et-nunc coverage with a more universal and metaphoric echo of the existential condition of the photographed subjects—e.g. migrants, war victims, or protesters (Solaroli, 2016; 2020).

The significance of this kind of innovation was particularly evident at the turn of the first decade of the 2000s. In 2010, the generic tropes widely present in the previous years of the WPP awards were recognizable in only 5.5% of the photographs (Zarzycka & Kleppe, 2013); at the same time, as the archival analysis showed, at least 10 prizes (almost one fifth of the total, including the prestigious WPP of the Year) were won by photographs that did not call on established conventions or familiar tropes. In particular, the 2010 WPP of the Year was awarded to a photograph taken by Pietro Masturzo in Iran in June 2009 (Figure 1.2). That month, when President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad defeated opposition candidate Mir-Hossein Mousavi during disputed presidential elections, allegations of vote-rigging were immediately raised, and violent demonstrations took place throughout the capital. The photograph shows a few women shouting their dissent from a Tehran rooftop at night. At night, supporters of Mousavi climbed onto their rooftops, shouting expressions

14   Interview with the author, New York, January 2014.
15   Interview with the author, New York, January 2014.
16   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2005/31267/11/2005-Paolo-Pellegrin-GNS2-KL

Figure 1.2: People shouting protests against the Iranian regime from a rooftop, after the disputed presidential elections. Tehran, Iran, 24 June 2009. Photo: Pietro Masturzo.

of their discontent. As the streets emptied and went quiet after daytime demonstrations, cries of "Allahu akbar!" and "Death to the dictator!" filled the night air. These protests were an echo of the ones that took place during the 1979 Islamic Revolution. For expressive and technical reasons, which also allowed the faces of the photographed protestors to remain unidentifiable, the photographer chose to adopt a long exposure, which aesthetically resulted in a very blurred image that lacks an immediate reference. Such a photograph quite manifestly breaks with the historically established informal repertoire of photo-journalistic conventions, such as the close-ups and frontal shoots of recognizable physical actions, expressive faces, and detailed contexts. In contrast, the 2010 WPP of the Year—dark and slightly out of focus, with a softly meditative tone and evocatively lyrical character—does not indeed appear easily recognizable and explicitly informational, at first sight.

In the official words of the jury, Masturzo's photo of the year invites the viewer to discover an important news story in a different way, with a powerful sense of atmosphere, with tension and fear, but also quietness; moreover, the photo's beauty gives it added value, touching the viewer both visually and emotionally while also offering access to the news story. As one jury member put it: "A lot of the images of the WPP do look the same and it begins to look like a system. We thought that we would open up doors: for me it's a picture that is … not frontal, frontal as in a picture of a demonstration" (cited in Zarzycka & Kleppe, 2013, p. 988).

Figure 1.3: Protesters in Tahrir Square, crying, chanting, and screaming after listening to the speech in which President Hosni Mubarak said he would not give up power. Cairo, Egypt, 10 February 2011. Photo: Alex Majoli for *Newsweek*/Magnum Photos.

Within a gradual shift from traditional to more emotional and conceptual photojournalism, and through a strategy of field position-taking and of constructing an authorial status, some of the winning photojournalists over the last two decades have rejected the historical orthodoxy of the field in order to articulate a recognizably distinctive and emotionally orientated poetics with subjective implication, making their work more symbolically and aesthetically powerful (and thus also more likely to win competitions) (Solaroli, 2016).

A major yet very different example of this process can be found in the 2012 edition of the WPP. The first prize in the General News (Singles) category was awarded to a photograph taken during a square protest in Cairo in February 2011 by Alex Majoli (Figure 1.3).

A few expert jurors interviewed for this research described this particular photograph as a paradigmatic example of what a valuable authorial news photograph of protest ideally could be. According to a juror involved in the WPP prizing process in 2012:

This photo by Alex Majoli is extremely theatrical and "constructed." But what does "constructed" mean? This photographer has chosen an extremely strong point of view, very close, he has illuminated the scene

in front of his eyes, and he has offered a particularly dramatic fragment of the protest, of the Arab revolt. It has been defined as a theatrical photograph. It has been particularly discussed, it has been discussed a lot, a lot, within the World Press Photo, it has been deeply debated. In this debate, I'd like to say that this photograph touches, opens up a scenario, raises questions, obliges you to look. It stands out from the mass of photos produced during the Arab Spring. This photograph raises questions and, at the same time, it touches you affectively, that does not mean that it shocks you, it means that you stop and look … it is powerful and innovative. It mixes up different languages, such as staged portrait photography and spot news photography. Here the darkness is the result of a choice, a very explicit choice, and not necessarily the result of manipulation. It is the choice of illuminating, somehow dramatizing. Here is a very true, sincere, declaration. He took a position, "I bring some lights with me, and I enter the protest." I was really impressed by the photographer's position, his physical closeness to the protesters, to the anger, he was almost physically touching them. There is both the proximity and the choice of how to tell the story. He is not merely covering, he is covering in the way in which he decided to cover. He chose a viewpoint, he brought the lights, and he constructed the image. Formally, this photograph is very geometric, rigorous … Physical proximity and authorial choice: that is, giving a fragment of reality, as an eyewitness, and, strongly, as an interpreter.[17]

This extract from an interview with a jury member makes clear that the value judgement passed on this award-winning protest photograph conceives it as an innovative response to the underlying tension between realism and expressiveness in photojournalism (in the expert's words: "giving a fragment of reality, as an eyewitness, and, strongly, as an interpreter")—eventually enhancing the photographer's distinctive authorial status. In this case, the photojournalistic practice generates a very dark and indefinite visual background where the emerging, aesthetically dramatized, almost plastic faces of the protesters move beyond their specific identities and individual features to work more as typified characters, thus helping to evoke the general emotional mood of the event.

As the archival analysis reveals, Majoli's photographic work during the Arab Spring arguably inspired other photographers. Its WPP award contributed to consolidating a visual path that has been continued—in a variety of aesthetic styles—by a number of photojournalists covering global crises and protests. Among recent cases, the WPP of the Year was awarded in 2020 to a photograph

17   Interview with the author, Milan, June 2013.

entitled *Straight Voice* and taken in June 2019 by Yasuyoshi Chiba (AFP) in the context of protests in Khartoum, Sudan. Enriched by brief videos made available by the photojournalist, the winning photo shows a young man, emerging from a black background, illuminated by mobile phones, reciting protest poetry while demonstrators chant slogans calling for civilian rule, during a blackout imposed by the authorities searching to defuse the protests.[18]

Conclusions

By reconstructing major visual motifs and constitutive tensions between reiteration and innovation in the World Press Photo's performance of value and institutionalization of protest memory, this chapter aimed at raising critical reflections on the relationship between photojournalistic prizes, protest movements, and visual memory. Three main observations—on the *aesthetic forms*, *visual voice*, and *public mnemonic role* of award-winning protest photography—can be offered in the end as particularly relevant and in need of further research.

Firstly, as the examples analysed in this chapter suggest, the search for aesthetic innovation, authorial distinction, and iconic power can, paradoxically, turn out to detract from the urgency of the causes depicted. In other words, the valuable creative practices developed to visually render specific protest events more abstractedly and conceptually—and thus more generic and potentially universal—can run the risk of dismissing the actual and situated dimensions of the personal and the political. In newer forms, this is partly consistent with existing literature on photographic icons and photo awards, showing that

> certain types of photograph, especially those that emphasize dramatic aesthetic form but lack specific historical detail, most readily lend themselves to this abstraction process. Such metaphoric pictures are precisely the images that become most widely celebrated and are most likely to receive Pulitzer Prizes or World Press Photo awards and become the models that elite photojournalists strive to emulate (Griffin, 1999, pp. 139–140);

and that the ideal winning photo "may be supposed to reflect the times—but in a timeless way, via eternal emotions and symbols … the winning pictures tend to sentimentalise and mythologise, to exhibit powerful emotions as such without reference to the identities of those pictured" (Anden-Papadopoulos, 2000, pp. 209–210).

---

18   https://www.worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo/2020/39852/1/Yasuyoshi-Chiba-POY

Secondly, the cases analysed reveal the relevance of both the voice of photography and the photography of voice in protest memory. Zelizer (2004) defined the "voice of the visual" in memory as a heuristic tool to refer to the relationship between the spectator and the image, "to situate visual memory on the boundaries of the familiar, ensuring not only that new images build on a visual tradition in both form and content but on a series of related expectations for how we are willing to connect with the past and where our resistance for doing so can be found … voice helps introduce the more amorphous aspects of visual depiction that are associated with what might be loosely called an image's mood, tense, and aspect" (p. 162). On partly similar lines, Mitchell (2002) claimed that "visual culture encourages reflection on … the ratios between different sensory and semiotic modes … the tactile, the auditory, the haptic, and the phenomenon of synesthesia" (p. 170). On this basis, it is worth noting that most photographs analysed in this chapter—from Masturzo's *Teheran Echoes* (2009) to Chiba's *Straight Voice* (2019), as well as many other photographs of protests that won awards at the WPP over the years[19]—actually embed a potential audio sensibility. In other words, they address—or at least raise questions on the implications of—the role of chanting, singing, shouting, and praying during protests. Such implications relate to the emotional dimensions of social movements and protests (e.g. Jasper, 2011), and thus to the performatively affective enactment of collective effervescence and ritualized entrainment during protests, but also, more widely and symbolically, to the political "voice" (Couldry, 2010) of the protesters. At the same time, they suggest meaningful relations between the (lack of) sound and the contingent engagement with—and thus power of—protest photographs. Such a potentially fertile analytical dimension has received only scarce attention (e.g. Zarzycka, 2013). Further research paths might therefore focus on the multiple relationships between different needs, forms, and memories of voice, and on the role of photography in what could be called the process of "visually voicing" protest memory—and, eventually, in the cultural transmission of hope (Rigney, 2018).

Finally, the research on the WPP presented in this chapter showed that the awards play a role in shaping the memory of protest by institutionalizing the professional memory of the winning—symbolically powerful and visually recognizable—photojournalistic models and motifs of the protests. These visual models and motifs can, in turn, influence future practices in

19   Including, among the most recent examples, the photo story entitled "Chile: The Rebellion Against Neoliberalism", by Italian photojournalist Fabio Bucciarelli, which was awarded the second prize in the General News (Stories) category in the 2020 WPP contest: https://www. worldpressphoto.org/collection/photo-contest/2020/fabio-bucciarelli/1

the production and evaluation of news photographs, but also the visual (social) media practices of protesters themselves, and of other mnemonic actors involved in capturing and transmitting the memory of the events.

On this basis, the official re-branding of the mission of the World Press Photo organization quoted at the beginning of this chapter—from "developing and promoting quality visual journalism" to "connecting the world to the stories that matter"—seems to be conceivable as a variable balance of focus on internal professional dynamics and external public issues, most recently confirmed by the case of the photo exhibition *People, Power: Documenting Protest Since 1957*. In other words, the principles of scarcity and selectivity in visual memory require constant institutional self-reflexivity on the part of the WPP regarding its public role and cultural strategy as a global organization. The award-winning protest photographs analysed in this chapter reveal a process of consecration converging towards an authorial poetics of "expressive realism," through which more easily intelligible journalistic images can co-exist with more abstract, evocative, and conceptual photographs—building, as a whole, a more heterogeneous and diversified repertoire for visual memory. In this trajectory, the social authority of the professional field of news and documentary photography (and its contract of trust with the spectators) turns out to be grounded in the double role of witnessing and interpreting. If award-winning photojournalism can be conceived as "public art" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2016) potentially enabling forms of civic spectatorship and visual citizenship, then the crux of the relationship between photojournalistic prizes, protest movements, and visual memory should be looked for in the creative developments within the photographic field aimed at striking a balance between, on the one hand, the search for aesthetic innovation, authorial distinction and symbolic recognition and, on the other hand, the foundational professional goal of voice-giving and memory-building in relation to the ongoing protests and global crises that have been defining the first two decades of the 21st century.

Bibliography

Alexander, J. C., Bartmanski, D., & Giesen, B. (Eds.) (2012). *Iconic Power: Materiality and Meaning in Social Life*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Anden-Papadopoulos, K. (2000). The Picture of the Year and Its View of the World. In K. Becker, J. Ekecrantz, & T. Olsson (Eds.), *Picturing Politics* (pp. 196–218). Stockholm University.

Armstrong, E. A., & Crage, S. M. (2006). Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth. *American Sociological Review, 71*, 724–751. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100502

Becker, K. (2019). Icons of Protest in the Visual Culture of News. In A. Robertson (Ed.), *Screening Protest: Visual Narratives of Dissent Across Time, Space and Genre* (pp. 120–147). Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (Ed.) (1990). *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art.* Polity.

Bourdieu, P. (1996). *The Rules of Art.* Stanford University Press.

Cohen, A., Boudana, S., & Frosh, P. (2018). Iconic News Photographs and Collective Memory. *Journal of Communication, 68*(3), 453–479. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy017

Couldry, N. (2010). *Why Voice Matters: Culture and Politics after Neoliberalism.* Sage.

Faulkner, S. (2013). Images and Demonstrations in the Occupied West Bank. *JOMEC Journal, 4*, 1–19. http://doi.org/10.18573/j.2013.10254

Griffin, M. (1999). The Great War Photographs: Constructing Myths of History and Photojournalism. In B. Brennen, & H. Hardt (Eds.), *Picturing the Past: Media, History and Photography* (pp. 122–157). University of Illinois Press.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy.* University of Chicago Press.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2016). *The Public Image: Photography and Civic Spectatorship.* University of Chicago Press.

Höijer, B. (2004). The Discourse of Global Compassion: The Audience and Media Reporting of Human Suffering. *Media, Culture & Society, 26*(4), 513–531. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443704044215

Jasper, J. M. (2011). Emotions and Social Movements: Twenty Years of Theory and Research. *Annual Review of Sociology, 37*(1), 285–303. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-081309-150015

MacDonald, K., & Furst, D. (2012, February 10). *A Painterly World Press Photo Winner. The New York Times.* https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/a-painterly-world-press-photo-winner/

Mitchell, W. J. T. (2002). Showing Seen: A Critique of Visual Culture. *Journal of Visual Culture 1*(2), 165–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/147041290200100202

Mitchell, W. J. T. (2011). *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present.* University of Chicago Press.

Rigney, A. (2016). Differential Memorability and Transnational Activism: Bloody Sunday, 1887–2016. *Australian Humanities Review, 59*, 77–95.

Rigney, A. (2018). Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic. *Memory Studies 11*(3), 368–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771869

Saussier, G. (2001). Situations du reportage, actualité d'une alternative documentaire. *Communications, 71*, 307–331. https://doi.org/10.3406/comm.2001.2090

Schwartz, D. (1992). To Tell the Truth: Codes of Objectivity in Photojournalism. *Communication, 13*(2), 95–109.

Solaroli, M. (2015). Iconicity: A Category for Social and Cultural Theory. *Sociologica, 9*(1), 1–51. https://doi.org/10.2383/80391

Solaroli, M. (2016). The Rules of a Middle-Brow Art: Digital Production and Cultural Consecration in the Global Field of Professional Photojournalism. *Poetics, 59*, 50–66. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2016.09.001

Solaroli, M. (2020). Competition and Consecration in the World Press Photo Awards. In D. Stark (Ed.), *The Performance Complex: Competition and Competitions in Social Life* (pp. 55–77). Oxford University Press.

Street, J. (2005). 'Showbusiness of a Serious Kind': A Cultural Politics of the Arts Prize. *Media, Culture & Society, 27*(6), 819–840. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443705057672

Tuchman, G. (1972). Objectivity as Strategic Ritual: An Examination of Newsmen's Notions of Objectivity. *American Journal of Sociology, 79*(1), 110–131.

Veneti, A. (2017). Aesthetics of Protest: An Examination of the Photojournalistic Approach to Protest Imagery. *Visual Communication, 16*(3), 279–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357217701591

Zarzycka, M. (2013). Showing Sounds: Listening to War Photography. In B. Papenburg, & M. Zarzycka (Eds.), *Carnal Aesthetics* (pp. 42–53). I.B. Tauris.

Zarzycka, M., & Kleppe, M. (2013). Awards, Archives, and Affects: Tropes in the World Press Photo Contest 2009–11. *Media, Culture & Society, 35*(8), 977–995. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443713501933

Zelizer, B. (1995). Words against Images: Positioning Newswork in the Age of Photography. In H. Hardt, & B. Brennen (Eds.), *News Workers: Toward a History of the Rank and File* (pp. 135–159). University of Minnesota Press.

Zelizer, B. (2004). The Voice of the Visual in Memory. In K. R. Phillips (Ed.), *Framing Public Memory* (pp. 157–186). University of Alabama Press.

About the Author

Marco Solaroli is associate professor of Sociology of Culture and Communication in the Department of the Arts at the University of Bologna. His research interests are located at the intersection of cultural sociology, visual culture, and journalism studies, focusing on visual journalism, digital photography, and popular culture. (marco.solaroli@unibo.it)

2 The Photographs of Nair Benedicto and the Memory of Protest in Brazil

Erika Zerwes

Abstract

This chapter focuses on the work of photojournalist Nair Benedicto during the final years of the military dictatorship in Brazil. It examines her work in relation to other known photographs from the period in order to show some of the ways in which photography, activism, and collective memory can be articulated in visual culture. As photographer and activist, Benedicto played an important role in connecting different social movements both through her photographic practice and through her professional and political engagements. In doing so, she helped to shape the visuality associated with political and social protests in contemporary Brazilian history.

Keywords: Nair Benedicto, photojournalism, photography and gender, Brazilian military dictatorship

It does not matter if I am photographing an indigenous person, a worker, or a whore. What matters are my opinions, how I express myself as a woman. There are people who accuse me of being too politicized. They say that I politicize everything. But I am not the one who politicizes, it's life that is politicized.[1]

—Nair Benedicto

The Photograph

Brazilian photographer Nair Benedicto (1940) built her career as a photojournalist during the civil–military dictatorship that came to power after

---

1   Interview with the author, 2018. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are by the author.

Figure 2.1: Frontline of the rally that followed Santo Dias da Silva's funeral procession. São Paulo, Brazil, 31 October 1979. Photo: Nair Benedicto/NImagens.

a coup in 1964 and governed the country until 1985. On 31 October 1979, Benedicto photographed the frontline of the funeral procession of Santo Dias, a union leader who had been killed in clashes with the police during a labour strike. Headed by Santo Dias's family and friends, other union leaders, intellectuals, and members of the Catholic Church, the funeral procession rapidly transformed into an important political demonstration against the dictatorship.

Benedicto's photograph of the funeral is probably one of its best-known visual representations. Over time, it became a symbol of the entire dictatorship period. One of the main reasons for this is that Benedicto's photographic act—including her formal and technical choices—has created a very narrative image. Even those who are not aware of the context in which it was taken, or the identity of the photographer, can get a sense of its overall meaning. Even if we do not know the identity of the people marching, the way that the line they form was photographed conveys a sense of unity and motion. Unity, because they are arm in arm in a solid and compact block. Motion, because many of them are caught with a foot in the air, in the act of walking; but also because they are photographed from a frontal point of view, in close proximity, occupying the entire frame that bleeds on both sides. These formal aspects invite the viewer to infer that the people carrying the banner are leading a much larger crowd that is closely following them. The tall buildings tell the viewer that they are marching down a

street in a big city. That is also meaningful, as we see in their body posture how re-taking the streets and re-occupying the public space by marching is, at that moment, an act of defiance. This is confirmed by the sign with the political slogan "down with the dictatorship," which cuts the image in half. Partly obscured by the line of people, the image blends the letters of the sign with the demonstrators: the people with their message. Among those portrayed, we see a priest, a child, and three women. There are more men than women on the line, but the women take central stage. The line of people makes an inverted "v" shape, lower on the edges of the frame, while the lines created by the windows and verandas of the tall buildings form a "v" shape on the upper third of the photograph. In the centre of the frame, where both concave and convex shapes meet, we see a woman arm in arm with an adolescent child. Her dress pattern continues the perspective created by the tall buildings. Our eyes are immediately drawn to her and she becomes one of the protagonists of this image.

Stepping outside the image, further information about the specific circumstances in which the photograph was taken reveals that the people on the front line are in fact the family and friends of Santo Dias, a union leader; that he was assassinated by the military police during a strike; that he was part of the *Pastoral Operária*, a left-wing branch of the Catholic Church that promoted the workers' evangelization; and that they were marching during his funeral procession. Further information about the photographer indicates that Nair Benedicto is a politically engaged photojournalist; that she used her camera as an instrument of resistance during the Brazilian dictatorship; and that, for over four decades, she has been documenting social issues and public protests, especially those led by women.

Nair Benedicto's career cannot be disentangled from her politics. From the start, it was shaped by them. Benedicto recalls that, originally, she had wanted to work with audiovisual media, but her plans were interrupted in 1969 when she was arrested by the military regime due to her participation in a leftist organization. When she was released after nine months of imprisonment and torture, a criminal record meant she was banned from working in television, a medium considered to be of strategic importance by the military regime. Only after her arrest did she embrace photography as her main medium of expression. In her own words, reproduced in the quote above, she used photojournalism as a way to express herself, building a career marked by the defence of professional freedom both in form and content—or, as she states, the freedom to shape her photographic work in line with her own ideals and her personal political views.

At the start of her career, in parallel with the country's tumultuous political situation, Brazilian photography was going through significant changes, mostly related to the institutionalization of artistic and documentary photography and the professionalization of photojournalism. During the second half of the 1970s, photography started to be exhibited and incorporated into public and private institutions and collections.[2] Since the creation of the National Foundation of the Arts (FUNARTE) in 1975 and, more specifically, the founding of the FUNARTE's Photography Centre in 1979, it also started to be promoted by governmental institutions.[3] At the same time, after a group of independent photographers fought for a unified sale price, copyright on images, and the freedom to pursue their own news stories, photojournalism finally became a recognized profession in Brazil. Showing the entanglement of her politics and photographic practice, Benedicto had an important role in this effort.

In this period, most of Benedicto's photographic production focused on recording the struggles and occasional protest actions of social minorities in Brazil. In the early 1980s, she documented the many popular manifestations and workers' strikes in São Paulo that would mark the end of the military dictatorship. She also used her camera to photograph protests against increases in the cost of living, in favour of women's rights, and big marches like the yearly International Women's Day march and the Pride Parade.

Connecting Benedicto's photograph of Santo Dias' funeral procession to her other work on public demonstrations and strikes in São Paulo in the early 1980s, this chapter highlights the entanglement of politics and aesthetics in Benedicto's photographic practice and argues that her photographs work as a visual memory of the period, impacting Brazilian contemporary visual culture. It starts by discussing how her political commitments shaped different aspects of her photographic practice: from her technical and aesthetic choices to her professional ones, opting to work as a freelancer and

2   On the process of legitimizing photography by the art system in Brazil during the 1970s, see Costa (2018, pp. 131–173).

3   As Costa and Zerwes (2015) write: "One of the first actions of this Núcleo was to create a gallery, which was named Galeria de Fotografia. Created in the same pattern as 'The Photographers' Gallery,' founded in London in 1971, this Galeria had an important role not only as a place to exhibit photographs, but also as a meeting place for photographers. Similarly, the association of these institutions with exhibition spaces can be noticed, for example, through the Fototeca de Cuba, which, since its creation, keeps exhibition spaces dedicated to photography. It is perceptible, therefore, that the creation of these Latin American institutions had an important role not only through the policies they instituted, but, specially, as places where photographers, critics and historians could exchange experiences and have dialogs, constituting a field dedicated to photography" (p. 3).

forming a cooperative photographic agency. It examines how some of her photographs were able to articulate and render visible the various resistance movements of this period. The second part of the chapter, based on W. J. T. Mitchell's (2002) dialectical understanding of visual culture, shows how a specific visual culture, to which Benedicto was a key contributor, developed to represent a specific historical moment. In turn, this new visual culture also gave shape to the political processes that would lead to the end of the dictatorship and the re-democratization.[4]

The Political Context

In April 1964, a military junta seized power from the democratically elected government of Brazil. After years of what first promised to be a short and precise intervention to prevent a fictional communist threat, civil society started to rise against censorship and the regime's brutal oppression of the opposition. In 1968, demonstrations took place on the streets of all major Brazilian cities. In March of that year, after the military police of Rio de Janeiro killed a student, both his funeral and the traditional seventh-day mass mobilized thousands of people in the city centre. During the following months, students continued to demonstrate, motivated by the French and international protests that had erupted in May 1968. In June, General Costa e Silva, who held the presidency, announced that as long as he was in power he would not "allow Rio de Janeiro to become a new Paris" (quoted in Ventura, 1988, p.75).[5] The next week, the city saw some of the biggest student demonstrations in its history, with students winning the support of the population against the police. A few days later, on 26 June, Rio de Janeiro would provide the stage for the *Passeata dos Cem Mil*, one of the most famous marches in Brazilian history. Intellectuals, artists, religious people, and diverse sectors of society joined students in their protest against the dictatorship's violence, censorship, and repression. However, the repression and police brutality only increased. The final backlash came on 13 December, when the authoritarian government passed the Institutional Act number 5, or

---

4   The famous quote by W. J. T. Mitchell (2002) affirms: "In short, a dialectical concept of visual culture cannot rest content with a definition of its object as the social construction of the visual field, but must insist on exploring the chiastic reversal of this proposition, the visual construction of the social field. It is not just that we see the way we do because we are social animals, but also that our social arrangements take the forms they do because we are seeing animals" (p. 171).

5   For a comprehensive account of the Brazilian 1968, see Ventura (1988).

AI-5, removing a large part of civil rights and forcing most social movements
to go underground. Inaugurating the most repressive phase of the dictatorial
regime, the passing of AI-5 halted popular demonstrations, especially by
students and unions.

The situation persisted until 1974, when several internal and external factors
led the country into economic and political crisis, causing the government
to lose some of its original support from the middle classes. General Ernesto
Geisel, who was president at this time, came up with the idea of a slow political
opening, which would keep the re-democratization of the country under the
control of the military. According to Kucinsky (1981) it was "[a] gradual and
controlled way out of the authoritarian regime" that would, in the medium
term, result in the end of most forms of censorship, the decriminalization
of left-leaning opposition, the loosening of the state's control over political
activities, and the end of the prohibition of opposition parties.[6] In the long
term, Kucinksy continues, this gradual and controlled opening would demand
the "substitution of physical coercion, efficient only when combating small
groups, by ideological domination, necessary when controlling mass opposi-
tion" (p. 57). Although the government continued its repression of political
opponents, the reforms did allow certain political demands to emerge as
organized popular movements. Between 1978 and 1981, one of these move-
ments took the shape of a series of strikes in industrial districts close to São
Paulo. These districts, the peripheral cities of Santo André, São Bernardo do
Campo, and São Caetano would give the ABC strikes their name.

Starting in the Saab Scania factory on 12 May 1978, the strike wave in São
Paulo's ABC districts quickly spread to over 90 factories. In the following year,
new strikes, which mobilized more than one hundred thousand workers,
showed that its leaders were becoming better organized. The strikes would
continue to challenge the government and major employers until 1981,
having a fundamental political significance, as they removed total control
of the political reform process, which had recently been set in motion, from
the hands of the authoritarian regime. Aware of its political significance,
Benedicto started to document different aspects of the organization of labour
in the ABC districts. Besides the assemblies and the pickets outside the
factories, she also photographed the workers' everyday life, the participation
of women in the struggle, and other events linked to the strikes, such as the
assassination of labour union leader Santo Dias da Silva in 1979.

6   The Brazilian Democratic Movement, or MDB, was the only opposition party allowed by
the military regime. After the end of the dictatorship, it was pulverized into many different
left-wing parties.

Nair Benedicto's Photographic Practice

Most of Benedicto's images of the ABC strikes display a common production method and a common narrative. We see images of crowds of working-class people mobilized around common issues. These crowds are captured in close up, mostly from a frontal eye level perspective, revealing the photographer's presence amongst the workers, in the centre of the action. This perspective shows that the photographer's political position was no secret. She is not an observer but a part of the mobilized mass. Ruiz (2016) notes that the political views of many photographers who covered the 1978–1981 ABC strikes meant that they could easily move around "the factory environment, in the strike pickets, and even boldly position themselves among the military police at the moments of repression against the workers. Being favourable to the mobilisations, they could also better position themselves in the union environment, assemblies and strategic meetings" (p. 9).

Embedding herself in the daily reality of the workers, Benedicto did more than simply document their struggle. Part of a group of journalists and volunteers, she set up a small newspaper and adult education courses in strategically selected working class neighbourhoods on the border between São Paulo and São Bernardo do Campo. Laís Tapajós and Silvia Campolim (cited in Kucinsky, 1981), two journalists who edited the *Jornal da Vila* newspaper, noted that its aim was "to try to make a popular newspaper that was close to social movements, reflect on their experiences and contribute to their development" (pp. 99–100). The *Jornal da Vila* circulated in the same period and in the same location as the ABC strikes. It focused on the living conditions and specific problems of the neighbourhood's 150,000 inhabitants. Its articles discussed popular movements and political issues, as well as the more prosaic issues of daily life, which its founders saw as a way to interest the local population and gather more readers. After producing 26 issues, the *Journal da Vila* ceased publication in June 1980.

Like Benedicto herself, the volunteers who worked for the newspaper and adult courses were mostly journalists and intellectuals persecuted by the dictatorship. They had often just been released from the regime's political prisons. According to Benedicto,

> When I got out of prison, for example, I started to teach in the poor outskirts of São Paulo. We made a newspaper, which was called *Jornal da Vila*. We did a study to know where it would have the most impact. At that time, everyone was coming out of jail. I think this is just incredible. I was extensively tortured. I got a kidney problem, which I still have today.

But after you were released you would say, "What are we going to do now?"
and certainly not "Now I'm going home, to retire." No, we firmly believed
that something had to be done … We did a study and found the perfect
district. It had nothing and was on the border of São Bernardo and São
Paulo. There were poor areas called *Vilas*—Vila Moraes, etc.—and the
people there had nothing, so we went to talk to the people of the Church
to go there and do something. (Benedicto, interview given to Zerwes &
Costa, 2016)

The partnership with the Catholic Church was also a decisive factor. Its
involvement in the resistance movement against the dictatorship is visible
in many of Benedicto's photographs. In the years that followed the military
coup, the early 1970s, progressive branches of the church, such as the follow-
ers of Liberation Theology, reached many people by forming *Comunidades
Eclesiais de Base* (CEBs). Established after the Second Vatican Council, these
small groups were meant to discuss religious doctrine but often ended up
discussing social and political issues. Thanks to their significant numbers
and their capillarity, especially in industrial areas, these CEBS were able
to carry out fundamental work at local level and offer popular leadership.[7]

The CEBs were instrumental for the ABC strikes because these networks
were used to support the organization of the workers. Catholic churches also
provided a place of shelter and refuge for strikers and other opponents of the
regime. When the Ministry of Labour ordered an intervention in the ABC
labour unions, the Catholic Church allowed the remaining union members
and supporters to gather in permanent assembly at the Main Church of
São Bernardo do Campo. Benedicto's photograph displays the cooperation
between the workers and the Catholic Church (Figure 2.2). Taken from an
upward angle, it shows a background composed of a high-ceilinged wall
adorned by stained glass and decorations representing saints and religious
symbols; this forms a contrast to the foreground of mobilized workers
holding a Brazilian flag and a sign demanding the release of their arrested
fellows. Above all the others, on the right side of the image, a worker holds
the Brazilian flag. He stands next to a partially visible statue of Jesus Christ
on the church's altar.

Another essential part of Benedicto's photographic practice was the
decision to work as a freelancer. In the midst of the strikes, in 1979, Benedicto
co-founded the F4 Agency, a cooperative photo agency inspired by the famous

7   In 1970, there were over 80,000 CEBs throughout the country, half of them in urban zones.
On that, see Kucinsky (1981, pp. 95–96); Aguiar (1988).

Figure 2.2: Workers on strike gathered in permanent assembly in the Main Church. São Bernardo do Campo, Brazil, 26 April 1980. Photo: Nair Benedicto/F4 Agency.

international agencies Magnum and Gama, and she remained associated with it until its end in 1991. One of the F4's main demands was that its photographers would no longer follow the orders of the newsroom, but would set their own agendas. Benedicto had always sought the freedom to produce images that were not subordinate to the interests of the daily newspapers, but would have a more long lasting effect, a "historical importance" (Benedicto, in interview with the author, 2018). Working for the agency she could escape the editorial guidelines of the mainstream press, which could not diverge from the official state narrative, and decide what and how to photograph. Her critical point of view, both in her politics and photographic practice, resulted in her work being mainly published in alternative newspapers and magazines critical of the regime.

After General Geisel announced the gradual opening up of Brazilian society in 1975, a substantial number of new magazines and newspapers appeared. While some titles were distributed on the national level, most of them were regional in scope. They all opposed the regime either politically, by giving a voice to left movements, or socially, by challenging the morals of the middle class. This alternative press employed experienced professionals who had been victims of political purges and repression and could not find a job in the mainstream media, as well as young journalists, recently graduated, who often belonged to militant left-wing groups. According to Kucinsky (1981), "the alternative press emerged from the articulation of

two equally compulsive forces: the left-wing desire to be the avant-garde of the institutional transformations they proposed; and the journalists' and intellectuals' search for alternatives to the mainstream press and to the university" (p. XVI). As he argues further, it is in this double opposition to the regime and in "the limitations to intellectual-journalistic production under authoritarianism, that we find the points of articulation between journalists, intellectuals and political activists" (p.xvi). To those we would also add the photographers. The alternative press became a new and alternative public space, where the ABC workers strike movement was extensively documented, and Benedicto's photographs circulated.

Circling back to the image at the start of this chapter, Benedicto's photograph of Santo Dias' funeral procession that had turned into a political demonstration is one of her most relevant works from this period. On 30 October 1979, a military police officer had shot the labour leader during a picket outside the gate of the Sylvania factory in São Paulo. The killing changed the course of the strike almost immediately: workers who had been hesitant to join the movement now joined the strike. After a wake in the Consolação Church, the coffin was taken to Sé Cathedral the next morning, where a mass was held in Santo Dias' memory. After the mass, a funeral procession went across the city towards a cemetery in the south of São Paulo. All these processions, from church to church and church to cemetery, attracted thousands of participants, spontaneously turning his funeral into a public and political event. The alternative press extensively reported on it, and the photographic coverage of the funeral transformed Santo Dias both into a martyr for the workers' cause and an important part of the collective memory associated with the ABC strikes.

Reiterated forms

Benedicto's photograph of 31 October 1979 deviates from the ways in which funerals had been traditionally represented, but the frontal view of a line of people marching holding hands and carrying signs, as well as other characteristics discussed in the beginning of this chapter, are in line with established topoi in the visualization of mass demonstrations. In general, its formal structure and technical choices dialogue with famous 20th-century photographs of protest. It shares a few common features with photographs taken in 1968, and specially during the *Passeata dos Cem Mil*. This was the last time, before the military regime passed the AI-5 laws, that a major popular

protest had taken place in Brazil. Until the rise of workers during the ABC strikes, Brazilian streets had not seen a major protest for over a decade.

One of the most disseminated images of the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* shows the frontline of a march, led by a group of women holding hands. Above them and in the background there are banners denouncing the censorship of culture and the press. The women are theatre actresses who would later become some of the most important in the country's history. Similar photographs circulated in the mainstream press and are still frequently reprinted in connection to these events.

In 2015, Argentinian artist Marcelo Brodsky chose one of the photographs of the actresses holding hands during the *Passeata dos Cem Mil*, almost identical to the one below, which had originally been published in the *Folha de São Paulo*, to be part of his *1968: The Fire of Ideas* series.[8] In this series, Brodsky uses mainly press photographs showing protests around the world. The similarities between themes and aesthetic choices convey a sense of shared ideals and goals, suggesting that these different events, set in different locations around the globe, were somehow linked. The similarities between the selected photographs relate not only to their aesthetic composition (for example, the frontal, eye-level view of the frontline of a protest), but also to the additions Brodsky has made to them by writing over the black-and-white images in colour. In the Brazilian picture, he coloured the signs and the women's dresses, and drew circles around the protesters holdings hands. These interventions were arguably Brodsky's way of drawing attention to the most important features of the photographs; namely, the fact that they shared demands (as the banners showed) and gestures (holding hands, open mouths). These are the visual aspects that convey the pathos of the scene portrayed, and are comparable to the Warburgian notion of *Pathosformeln*, or "those gestures that are intensified in representation through the artists's recourse to the visual formulas of classical Antiquity" (Didi-Huberman, 2017, p. 25). By highlighting the iteration of certain gestures, Brodsky too imbues them with a broader meaning as exemplifications of particular events and emotions.

We have seen the same visual aspects in Benedicto's 1979 photograph of the Santo Dias' funeral procession (Figure 2.1). Her picture also shows the frontline of a demonstration with people marching joining arms, some with open mouths, probably shouting their demands, and a very visible protest sign with a written message that summarizes the demands of the protest.

---

8   This image is credited to Folhapress and can be accessed through the link https://marcelobrodsky.com/1968-the-fire-of-the-ideas/?lang=en

Figure 2.3: Tônia Carreiro, Eva Wilma, Odete Lara, Norma Bengell, and Cacilda Becker on the frontline of the Passeata dos Cem Mil march against the Military Dictatorship. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 26 June 1968. Photo: Unknown photographer/Arquivo Nacional.

In this way, Benedicto's photograph draws on the same *pathos* as those from 1968 showing the international rising up against authoritarianism. Moreover, it is also directly related to the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* frontline photographs. In both pictures, women are the central protagonists, although in the latter they are famous public figures instead of an anonymous working class family. The central figure of Benedicto's photograph even wears a similar kind of dress, albeit with the triangles inverted, as one of the actresses on the photograph from 1968. By invoking the visual topoi of 1968, Benedicto's photograph creates a connection that transcends time and bridges the two historical events. The aesthetic similarities evoke discursive similarities, forming links between the new mobilization of workers and the last time the country saw a massive demonstration of resistance to the dictatorship, as well as with the international uprisings against general forms of State oppression in 1968.

Brodsky's goal with the *1968: The Fire of Ideas* is clear. His interventions in the photographs work together to change their individual meanings and to represent his interpretation of 1968 as a global event. The images reinterpret history, giving it a "visual anchor" (Brodsky, 2018). A similar case can be made about the Brazilian photographs of protest, including

Benedicto's, mentioned above. Over time, they have become visual anchors in the Brazilian collective memory of the entire period of the military dictatorship. One example of the permanence of this images in collective memory is the use of the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* photograph (Figure 2.3) in almost every history book as an illustration to the chapter on the dictatorship. One can conclude from this that the Passeata photograph has come to stand for the global struggles of 1968, just as Benedicto's photograph of the Dias funeral would later come to represent popular resistance to authoritarianism in Brazil.

The reiterated presence of formal and technical features in photographs of protests, such as the ones highlighted in Brodsky's project and in Benedicto's photographs of the late 1970s and early 1980s, helped the images to transcend their specific moments of creation and incorporate new and broader meanings. At the same time, Brodsky's appropriation of the *Passeata dos Cem Mil* changed its original space of circulation, promoting its passage from newspaper pages to galleries and museum walls. These are characteristics that in the literature are traditionally associated with the "iconic" in photography.[9]

After 1979, Benedicto frequently referenced in her own work the visual aspects that had turned her 1979 photograph into an iconic image of protest. Being close to the streets and working-class struggles, she was present during the most important protests and manifestations of the next decades. In her archive held at NImagens, we can see a large number of photographs showing women leading protests, forming a frontline, holding hands, marching in front of written signs. From the wives of the ABC workers supporting the 1979 strikes to the 2014 Brazilian presidential election, and most of

9   Borrowing from an analysis close to semiology, Philippe Dubois applied the notion of index and icon to photography in the early 1980s. Whilst the indexical aspect would link photography by a physical connection to something that at some point and somewhere needed to exist, its iconic aspect would allow the image to overcome the physical relationship with its object. This iconic character, according to Dubois (1983), would emerge precisely when the photographic image ceases to refer directly to its specific object, and starts to represent something more comprehensive, settling in memory and thus losing its temporal connection. A couple of decades after Dubois, Hariman and Lucaites (2007) would refer to similar characteristics of images considered icons of photographic reporting. In the book *No Caption Needed* documentary "iconic" photographs are defined as "widely recognised and remembered images" and "understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics" (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 27). The expansion of the meaning of the iconic sign is identified in this definition. The photographic icon transcends not only the original conditions of its making, but also those of its circulation, because in addition to being associated with the representation of an entire event, and not just its particular object, it also travels in different media, and therefore with different objectives.

Figure 2.4: Public manifestation at Praça da Sé during International Women's Day. São Paulo, Brazil, 8 March 1981. Photo: Nair Benedicto/NImagens.

the annual Women's Day Marches in between, with many photographs portraying indigenous and black movements, Benedicto photographed women occupying public spaces and protesting.[10]

One example is a photograph from the 1981 International Women's Day protest. Women here are also joining arms and holding hands, forming a frontline, and signs with written political slogans are held just above their heads. This time they are not marching, but standing on the front steps of Sé Cathedral. However, the defiance of the act that comes with the occupation of this public space is clearly present. This time Benedicto did not photograph them from a frontal point of view, but from below and from right to left. This dislocation of the viewpoint also allowed her to include in the frame more of the words on the sign and the image of the crucified Jesus above the Cathedral's main door. The religious figure hovers above the women, as if he is giving them his blessing. The point of view and the inclusion of religious symbolism recalls the photograph Benedicto took one year earlier (Figure 2.2) of the striking workers gathered in the main church of São Bernardo during the ABC strikes. In both cases, the association of the Catholic Church with the social and political struggles of the dictatorship period is clear.

10   Nair Benedicto's photographs can be accessed through the NImagens website: http://www.n-imagens.com.br/banco.php?b=1

Although the aesthetic language of the photographs discussed above was closely associated with the representation of resistance movements during the dictatorship, it continued to be used in the representation of the urban working classes and their struggles in the decades that followed. The engaged photojournalism that covered the ABC helped to establish a specific visuality associated with urban workers. Brazil's late industrialization meant that only in the 1970s was there extensive urbanization, with internal migration forming the poor outskirts of São Paulo and providing the worker force to its industries. The ABC strikes put the factory worker in evidence for the first time. Until then, they had not been represented in Brazilian photography and in the hegemonic media, nor in the discourse of the traditional left in Brazil. Photojournalists like Benedicto were helping to establish this visual representation, associated with the demands and struggles of social minorities, including women. At the same time, the alternative press enabled the dissemination and establishment of the new visuality created through photography.

By Way of Conclusion: The Afterlives of Benedicto's Photographs

Benedicto's photographs of the ABC strikes circulated mainly in the alternative press. However, after the major 1980 strike, understanding the historical importance of the event, she and other photojournalists published a small paperback book. *Documento: A Greve do ABC* (Kotscho et al., 1980) contains photographs by 18 different photojournalists who answered an open call for contributions. On its cover, we find Benedicto's photograph of a workers' assembly inside the church. Funded by an international NGO, the book appeared at the end of 1980. It was printed in a small format and on cheap paper, which shows that its main goal was to help the images circulate as fast and as widely as possible. It is questionable whether the book ultimately achieved this goal, but it certainly made the memory of the events more perennial.

Even though some of her images had a limited circulation, Benedicto's photographs of the ABC strikes shaped the visual culture of the final years of the Brazilian dictatorship. Her own political commitment and proximity to the working class allowed her to embed in her photographic practice many of the pressing social issues of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Taking into consideration that the social construction of the visual field cannot be separated from the visual construction of social conditions (Mitchell, 2002, p. 171), we can conclude that Benedicto's work has shaped Brazilian

culture in two ways. Firstly, it articulates activism and visuality through a professional practice that is politically engaged and aims to have an active social role instead of only reporting stories. Benedicto's political militancy cannot be separated from her formal and thematic choices. These were intertwined with her political views, and the photographic style that results from this intersection plays an important part in connecting up different social movements (such as those fighting for the rights of women, workers, and ethnic minorities) to each other and to the Catholic church and its symbolism, and in publicizing their demands and fostering their agendas.

Secondly, her work is not only specific but also repeats, and therefore consolidates, a visual tradition in the representation of protest in Brazil. Associating itself with specific visual topoi or reiterated forms, her work builds a link to other visual representations of social movements which enhances the photograph's narrative potentiality. Like all iconic images, photographs such as the Santo Dias's funeral procession are able to free themselves from the time and place of origin in such a way that their meaning is amplified and representative of general resistance to authoritarianism. This combination of militant photographic practice and iconic imagery establishes the connection between different movements and, as a result, shapes the visualization of protest in contemporary Brazil.

Although the photographs of the ABC strikes were effective in shaping a visuality associated with political resistance, becoming icons of Brazilian photojournalism, the events they portrayed did not remain in the collective memory of Brazilian society. Both the role of the strikes in resisting and helping to overthrow the dictatorship and the creation of Brazil's largest labour party, the PT, were lost over the years. Thus, it was timely that, on the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the strikes, the images were published in a new book celebrating the photojournalists who recorded them (Ruiz, 2016). In 2018, Brazil was going through an important moment, having to negotiate many levels of erasure and re-writing in relation to its recent political history. After another legitimate government was unjustly ousted, it was also on the verge of electing a president who denies the crimes of the dictatorship, openly defends its perpetrators, and emulates the military regime's ethos. In light of these events, Benedicto's archive gains a new relevance, her photographs taking on the role of witness as well as promoter of social and political changes, in the hope that history will not repeat itself.

Bibliography

Aguiar, C. (1988). CEBs: Comunic(ação) e identidade social. In P. Gomes, & M. Piva (Eds.), *Políticas de comunicação, participação popular* (pp. 118–127). Paulinas.

Brodsky, M. (2018). *1968: The Fire of Ideas*. RM/La Marca Editora/Estudio Madalena/ Kaunas Photo Gallery/Ffotogallery.

Costa, E., & Zerwes, E. (2015). The Dialogical Construction of a Historical and Photographic Narrative in Brazil and Latin America between the 1970s and 1980s. *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies, 1*(3), 1–6.

Costa, H. (2008). Da fotografia como arte à arte como fotografia. A experiência do Museu de Arte Contemporânea da USP na década de 1970. *Anais Do Museu Paulista História e Cultura Material*, *16*(2), 131–172. https://doi.org/10.1590/ S0101-47142008000200005

Didi-Huberman, G. (2017). *The Surviving Image: Phantoms of Time and Time of Phantoms: Aby Warburg's History of Art*. Pennsylvania State University Press.

Dubois, P. (1983). *L'act photographique et outres essais*. Nathan/Labor.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

Kotscho, R., et al. (1980). *Documento. A greve do ABC: A greve vista por vários fotojornalistas*. Caraguatá.

Kucinsky, B. (1981). *Jornalistas e Revolucionários. Nos tempos da imprensa alternativa*. Página Aberta.

Mitchell, W. J. T. (2002). Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture. *Journal of Visual Culture*, *1*(2), 165–181.

Ruiz, A. (2016). Fotógrafos em ação. In A. Ruiz, & E. Brauns (Eds.), *Máquinas paradas, fotógrafos em ação* (pp. 55–58). Fundação Perseu Abramo.

Ventura, Z. (1988). *1968, O ano que não terminou*. Nova Fronteira.

About the Author

Erika Zerwes has a PhD in History, with a séjour doctoral at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, and a postdoc at the Museum of Contemporary Art of University of São Paulo. She is the author of the books *Tempo de Guerra: Cultura visual e cultura política nas fotografias dos fundadores da agência Magnum* (2018), *Cultura Visual, imagens na modernidade* (2019), which was a Jabuti Prize finalist, and *Mulheres Fotógrafas, Mulheres Fotografadas. Fotografia e gênero na América Latina* (2020). She is currently a fellow at the conjoint fellowship DfK – Paris and Casa de Velazquez / MIAS – Madrid. (erikazerwes@gmail.com)

3   Deniz Gezmiş Takes to the Streets: From Photograph to Silhouette

Duygu Erbil

Abstract

This chapter analyses the role of media materialities and the means of cultural production in the circulation of the visual representations of Deniz Gezmiş. In analysing the afterlife of the most iconic photograph of Gezmiş, it pays specific attention to alternative media and activist cultures of production that are circumscribed by limited material resources and technical skills. It seeks to understand why the composition was so attractive to activists and the methods by which amateurs remediate and reproduce protest ephemera. It argues that the memorability of Deniz Gezmiş' iconic portrait is facilitated by its availability for legible and recognizable low fidelity reproduction.

Keywords: Deniz Gezmiş, memorability, materialism, culture of production, alternative media, protest ephemera

A young man gazes directly at the camera. He inches towards the right of frame, but that does not affect his centrality, it is clearly a portrait. Behind his left shoulder, an older man stands in profile, but we cannot see his face, nor the person he appears to be talking to, who is evidently not essential for the photographer. The subject of the portrait is wearing a parka, and this is a curious element given the photograph is taken indoors. It is a half-length portrait, from head to waist, so the parka occupies almost half of the frame. Our eyes are drawn to the young man's face, but it is not clear whether he wears a blank expression or is slightly sad, and one may see a hint of a smile if that is what you are looking for. Although its expression is elusive, the face itself is very recognizable for a Turkish audience, and so is the photograph. Known as "the Turkish Che Guevara," Marxist-Leninist "martyr"

Deniz Gezmiş' arrest photograph, taken by journalist Ergin Konuksever, is considered one of the most iconic photographs of the 1968–1971 protest cycle in Turkey thanks to its prolific afterlife of reproduction and remediation. Giving a face not only to the so-called 1968 movement in Turkey, but also to subsequent Marxist and youth movements and, indeed to a general political culture of contention, it allows us to consider the role of visual representation in the *memory–activism nexus* (Rigney, 2018).

Deniz Gezmiş has become a symbol of contentious politics in Turkey and this frontal portrait is considered the most iconic representation. When it is carried on banners in commemorative marches every 6 May, the anniversary of his execution by hanging, it functions in *memory activism*. When it is printed on the covers of books or next to newspaper articles about Deniz Gezmiş, it becomes visual evidence for the existence of the life it documents, and hence aids the *memory of activism*. Moreover, when it is taken into the street, remediated as graffiti or as a stencil on protest props representing political groups that draw on Gezmiş' memory as a cultural resource to legitimize their own collective, it serves the use of memory *in* activism. This paper aims to untangle the latter by analysing the aesthetic and material affordances of this photograph that are activated in different mobilizations. What makes this photograph apparently so attractive to activists for remediation and reproduction? My intention here is to show that the visual representation of the past for the purposes of demonstration gains meaning not only through the past it represents but also through its production process, which includes techniques of mediation.

I look at visual memory through the lens of cultural memory studies, which defines memory as always, inherently mediated (Erll, 2011), and thus consider *mediation* integral to meaning-making about the past and its documentations. Crucially, I understand mediation as referring to the production of media in general, including non-professional, do-it-yourself, and protest-specific means of cultural production. I thus focus on the means of cultural production accessible to demonstrators, when they choose to mobilize visual representations of the past. A materialist look at visual memory *in* activism denaturalizes our assumption that images and photographs are disembodied "visions" that can circulate anywhere; an assumption naturalized by the copy-paste practices of our digital era. Photographs and videos of protest signs that are dragged on the street or sprayed with water cannons confront us with the materiality of the mediation practices employed by protestors with limited access to technology and/or limited technical skills. This brings us to the question of the agent in cultural remembrance practices: who mediates the memory to be used

in activism? The demonstrator is not only the carrier of protest signs, but is also an active producer in the memory–activism nexus. The main question for this essay then is why demonstrators—as amateur agents of cultural production—choose this specific photograph of Deniz Gezmiş to reproduce in ephemeral forms? How, in the context of contentious politics, is the afterlife of a photograph produced long after its photographer ceases to be the primary actor in mediation? While acknowledging that there is more to cultural memory formation than material conditions and resources, this chapter focuses primarily on the materiality of cultural production to analyse its specific role in cultural memory, within an activist "culture of production" (Du Gay, 1997, p. 4).

The Story of the Photograph

"I took this photograph of Deniz at the gate of Ankara Ministry of the Internal Affairs. That day Deniz spit on the face of the Minister," recalls Ergin Konuksever (cited in Acar, 2012), in an interview about his own life, which he spent as a war photographer and documenting the Turkish student movement. He is describing the day after Gezmiş' arrest, along with his comrade Yusuf Aslan, on 16 March 1971, after an armed conflict. There were other friends in the same area, all of whom were killed by the gendarmerie. Gezmiş, Aslan, and others, generally known as "Deniz Gezmiş and his friends," constituted a Marxist–Leninist armed guerrilla organization called THKO, the People's Liberation Army of Turkey [Türkiye Halk Kurtuluş Ordusu]. The group was one of several enactments of the "guerrilla model" in the Turkish student movement during the 1968–1971 protest cycle, which became popular among students in 1969 due to the influential translation and publication of books by Che Guevara, Carlos Marighella and Regis Debray (Alper, 2009, p. 433). Before embracing guerrilla warfare, the members of the group, like most of the militant revolutionaries of this era, were student activists and leaders. Gezmiş was a well-known student leader from the Istanbul University Department of Law, where he instigated protests against American imperialism, most famously against the United States Sixth Fleet visiting Turkish ports, which has itself become a historical symbol for the so-called '68 movement in Turkey, along with its most mediatic leader. Gezmiş also led university occupations for education reforms, and protests against farmers' exploitation. But in 1969, when student protests were increasingly the targets of violence on the part of the police and right-wing militants, he received guerilla training upon invitation by

Figure 3.1: Republican People's Party Youth members at the commemoration of the 36th anniversary of the execution of Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan. Istanbul, Turkey, 4 May 2008. Photo: Ünsal Karabulut/Anadolu Images.

the Palestine Liberation Organization and took up arms (Uslu, 2015, p. 524). Upon his return to Turkey, he co-founded the THKO, but never escalated armed resistance to the level of political murders.

Members of THKO topped Turkey's "most wanted" list in 1971 due to a bank robbery and the kidnapping of US servicemen, and other guerrilla activities. Then came the 1971 Turkish military memorandum of 12 March, Turkey's second military intervention following the 1960 coup d'état, to end the political chaos and "carry out reforms 'in a Kemalist spirit'" (Zürcher, 1993, p. 258). It was in the context of this "coup by memorandum" that Deniz Gezmiş and his comrades were arrested or killed. The military trial of Gezmiş and his friends would begin on 16 July 1971, to be concluded with the death sentence handed to 18 young revolutionaries for trying to "overthrow the constitutional order" (Çelenk, 1974). Only three of the sentences ended up being carried out after a judicial deadlock: Deniz Gezmiş, Yusuf Aslan, and Hüseyin İnan were executed on 6 May 1972, in an unlawful manner according to legal experts (see Çelenk, 1974; Behram, 2006). The portrait of Gezmiş in his parka at the gate of Ankara Ministry of the Internal Affairs came to represent the historic moment of the 1971 coup: Turkey's traumatized democracy, law's crisis of legitimacy under military rule, the murder of three young men, and the defeated revolutionary movement.

The Afterlife of the Photograph

As the visual representation of Gezmiş' life, the portrait has given face to everything Gezmiş himself symbolized; never a single meaning, such as being a Marxist–Leninist revolutionary or a victim of state violence. Like the meaning of the life it represents, the meaning of this portrait of Gezmiş has always been dependent on the context in which it has been reproduced. When circulated in protests, it represented defiance and its long history.

This was not the first arrest photograph of Gezmiş, since he was in and out of prison between 1968 and 1970 as a student leader and spent 32 months of his six years of active political life between 1967 and 6 May 1972 in prison (Uslu, 2015). He became notorious because of search warrants and news of his arrest but it was the arrest photograph taken for the *Günaydın* newspaper that became the iconic face of contentious politics in Turkey. There are tens of different photographs of Gezmiş, including different angles of his arrest, which could be circulated widely thanks to the legal archive of evidential photographs that was compiled for and taken at the THKO trial. Furthermore, his family photographs have been widely circulated due to extensive biographical research taken up by different cultural actors, and journalists still dig up new photographs or recirculate forgotten ones to report on the "unknown" or the "unpublished" photographs of Gezmiş.[1] Journalist Can Dündar's popular 2014 book *My Brother Deniz: Memoirs of Hamdi Gezmiş with Unpublished Letters and Photographs*, for example, exhibits this discourse and practice in its subtitle. The very discourse of "unknown" photographs points at the fact that there are well-known photographs, such as the frontal portrait by Konuksever. Among these "known" and "unknown" photographs, there are rhetorically powerful photographs of Gezmiş pointing his finger at the military prosecutor or the judge; clearly defiant photographs of Gezmiş protesting with his fist in the air. Considering the abundance of such photographs with a clear visual rhetoric of protest, why is the most iconic Deniz Gezmiş photograph this specific portrait taken upon his last arrest?

The photograph was first disseminated as journalistic evidence of the defeat of the radical Marxist–Leninist guerrilla group THKO, as it documented the capture of their mediatic leader in *Günaydın* newspaper. However, the image has become a touchstone for subsequent leftist movements in Turkey

---

1   Newspapers and media outlets that report on Gezmiş' unpublished photographs include *OdaTV*, *Evrensel*, and *Hurriyet* in 2011, *Sabah* in 2014, *Hurriyet* again in 2016, *Sondakika* in 2017, *Cumhuriyet* in 2018, and *Sozcu* in 2019.

as it was reproduced time and again as the representation of the iconic "martyr" of the revolutionary movement, as well as the so-called 1968 in more liberal framings. The photograph has become familiar to many from a remarkable number of book covers that commemorated his life: Erdal Öz's prison memoir, based on his interview with Gezmiş, *Deniz Gezmiş Anlatıyor* (1976) was originally published with this photograph on its cover, before it was later extended and published as *Gülünün Solduğu Akşam* in 1986, which has been reprinted 65 times by 2021. Since then, whether in works memorializing Deniz Gezmiş, like *Bitmeyen Deniz* (2019), or in works on the student movements and the Left in general, like *Türkiye Solundan Portreler* (2015), the photograph has become the defining photographic image of his afterlife and the 1968 generation in Turkey. Due to the symbolic power it accrued via this reproduction, it has also become a marketable object of commemoration. It has been widely reproduced on market goods from handwoven wall tapestry to manufactured panels available from e-commerce retailers, as iconicity and commercialization went hand in hand. Some of these photographic reproductions and remediations used Konuksever's iconic photograph, others used another full-length portrait by an unknown photographer, with the same front angle (though with a slightly more defiant look on Gezmiş' face) while still referring to it as his "iconic photograph," as it has usually been cropped to mimic Konuksever's head-and-shoulders composition.

This second photograph, after being cropped to re-enact Konuksever's photograph and remediated as a silhouette, adorned the façade of the Atatürk Cultural Centre during the Gezi Park protests in 2013. As a mnemonic anchor, the use of Gezmiş' photograph was imbued with the political symbolism of Marxism in Turkey. It figured alongside several other symbolically charged portraits, like that of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Marx, Engels, and Lenin, on curiously smaller banners. Gezmiş' remediated portrait on one of the largest banners framed the Gezi Park Protests with a revolutionary tone, even though the protests were marked by ideological heterogeneity. The banner, made by Mücadele Birliği [Struggle Alliance], declared: "Bütün İktidar Emeğin Olacak" [all power to labour]. Although it represented a Marxist organization, a year after the Gezi Park protests, journalist Can Dündar (2014) referred to this banner on the back cover of his book *My Brother Deniz: Memoirs of Hamdi Gezmiş with Unpublished Letters and Photographs* and suggested that the book would help understand why Gezmiş' image adorned the "most visible" part of the Atatürk Cultural Centre during Gezi. The intriguing aspect of this reference is that the book is a collaborative life narrative of Gezmiş that emerges from Dündar's interviews with Gezmiş'

brother Hamdi and the family archive, and insistently frames Gezmiş as a Kemalist youth rather than a socialist (Uslu, 2015). This is a testament to how the photograph is layered with different forms of political symbolism, as Dündar could reframe the Mücadele Birliği banner as the monumentalization of a Kemalist youth, thereby obscuring the politics and symbolism of this Marxist organization. It does not matter if Mücadele Birliği's avatar on social media is the same stencil printed on their Gezi Park banner (although it is printed on red this time), and it makes no difference that this specific image is the logo of a specific political group. In its indexicality, the stencil is recognizable as Deniz Gezmiş in his iconic pose, whose life is rendered meaningful in other people's narrativizations.

The same stencilled avatar, black on red, is also used by a Mücadele Birliği related youth organization, Devrimci Öğrenci Birliği (DÖB) [Alliance of Revolutionary Students] who use the remediation as their representative avatar everywhere from social media to street demonstrations. In their October 2021 zine, *Sabırsızlık Zamanı* [Time of Impatience], we observe, on a textual level, how they relate to and use the memory of Gezmiş to legitimize their own contentious politics and identity by using his name as a mnemonic anchor: he is defined as the leader of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist youth with roots in the global 1968 movement (p. 28), as someone who fought for the emancipation of the working class (p. 34), as the co-founder of DÖB (p. 34), and also as the founding figure who insisted that the struggle must be in unity with Kurds and against chauvinism (p. 35). One can add that the zine also circulates an old CCCP poster, and while its front cover has the photograph of the façade of the Atatürk Cultural Centre, its back cover circulates the stencil of Che Guevara's iconic photograph with the beret superimposed on the Cuban national flag. As these visual and verbal signifiers are articulated into a political identity for this revolutionary youth in 2021, Gezmiş' stencilled portrait comes to represent a revolutionary youth organization in solidarity with minorities, workers, women, and LGBT+ communities (p. 4).

The same stencilled silhouette, however, is also used by other political actors, among which we can paradoxically find the ultranationalist organization Türkiye Liseliler Birliği (TLB) [High-schoolers Union of Turkey]. An interesting use of the stencilled portrait by TLB occurred in May 2014, one year after the Gezi Park protests. Some Istanbul residents received letters, stamped with the same silhouette used on the Gezi banner on the left top corner of the envelope. The bottom right was stamped with a reworked portrait of Atatürk, which also serves as TLB's avatar. A red stamp on the envelope announced: "Deniz Gezmiş'ten mektup var" [You've got mail from Deniz Gezmiş] and the letter invited the people of Istanbul to the

commemorative march for the 42nd anniversary of the execution of Deniz Gezmiş, Hüseyin İnan and Yusuf Aslan on 6 May. The commemoration march was organized in collaboration with *68'liler Birliği Vakfı* [Foundation of the Union of the '68ers], a key player in the proliferation of the afterlife of Deniz Gezmiş. TLB too chose to use Gezmiş as a mnemonic anchor for their youth organization and his stencilled portrait as an icon, but reproduced the image in the context of ultranationalism and Kemalism. Curiously, TLB identifies with Gezmiş, using the same visual representation as DÖB, while occupying the opposite end of the Turkish political spectrum. TLB's 2021 campaign for shutting down the Peoples' Democratic Party (HDP) for its "schismatic" (read pro-minority) politics, for instance, makes us look back to their 2014 use of Gezmiş' portrait with confusion. Why did they use that particular portrait and its specific stencil on the envelope despite the fact it represented antagonistic politics?

Indeed, representations of the past are indexical, and Gezmiş' life gains new meanings according to the context in which it is remembered. Thus, TLB's use of the same stencilled silhouette as DÖB does not concern them. It looks exactly like Gezmiş' "iconic photograph" by Konuksever, only in silhouette form. However, the stamp on the envelope is not a simple case of reappropriation of leftist iconography by a conservative group. It also raises a question regarding the material means of cultural production. TLB refers to Gezmiş as a mnemonic anchor, and uses the memory of Deniz Gezmiş in their ultranationalist politics, especially in their commemoration marches of 6 May. Nevertheless, the more common high-quality visual representation they use online is the famous portrait by Konuksever, photoshopped to look like an illustrated cartoon, accompanied by remediated side portraits of Yusuf Aslan and Hüseyin İnan next to Gezmiş, layered on a blue sky. Why then did they choose the more "radical" silhouette for their envelope in 2014? On a discursive level, TLB's appropriation of the memory of Gezmiş can be explained by its *resonance* with a nationalistic formulation of youth as a political category, as I discuss elsewhere (see Erbil, 2022). In terms of the material use of a specific stencilled silhouette on a specific medium, however, I argue that the answer is to be found, at least in part, by their do-it-yourself production process, their reproduction technique. The technical ease of reproducing this stencil as a stamp on an envelope makes it materially more accessible, to an extent that the demonstrators can take the risk of being misrecognized as the opposite party. The stencil is an available and recognizable way of representing Deniz Gezmiş. In the end, it is the silhouette of *their* Kemalist, nationalist Gezmiş, even though the stencil happens to be the logo of DÖB.

Figure 3.2: A woman holds a framed print of the photograph of Deniz Gezmiş. Izmir, Turkey, 6 May 2004. Photo: Mehmet Özdoğru/Anadolu Images.

The Silhouette of Deniz Gezmiş

Whether it takes the form of digitally mimicking the stencilled look as an homage to old techniques of commemorating "martyrs," or an actual DIY stencil used on placards or walls as graffiti, using the silhouette of a person is one of the most accessible means of visual cultural production. It is a single-coloured pattern on another colour, and even when digitally printed, a single colour print on the colour of your choice is less expensive than a colour print. This accessibility in the *production of culture* is constitutive of demonstrators' *culture of production*, that is, "the ways in which practices of production are inscribed with particular cultural meanings" (Du Gay, 1997, p. 4). The stencilled look communicates dissent, because stencilling is an accessible and democratic form of cultural production available to and used by demonstrators, and thus inscribed with contentious cultural meanings. It communicates protest because it is historically used in protest media produced by amateurs.

Protest media are produced either by ordinary people without sufficient means of cultural production, or by professionals with tight budgets, and by virtue of taking to the streets, they are marked by ephemerality. Protest ephemera can be dragged on the street and confiscated by the police; graffiti can be painted over, and posters can be ripped from the wall. Even if one has drawing skills, simply spraying paint through a stencil on a wall is quicker, and thus safer, than drawing an image. Consequently, a portrait photograph can be remediated as stencil to circulate more widely on the streets, to be used as memory *in* activism. In other words, remediation of the photograph as a silhouette has the *affordances* of circulating more widely due to quicker, cheaper, safer, more accessible reproduction and dissemination options. This access to wider circulation, in turn, shapes cultural memorability in activism, supplementing the lack of material durability: the ephemera that disappear on the streets might not seem as memorable as a statue, but if the same stencil takes to the street every year on different surfaces, it can constitute visual memory with a different type of durability.

Different mediation practices produce memory differently and this is evidenced especially in discussions of *alternative media.* Alternative media scholars have long been interested in the relationship between mediation and activism, or protest media. Whether they call it alternative, radical, or social movement media, these media are defined in opposition to mainstream media, although there are also some critics of this binary. Chris Atton (2010) argues that alternative media are defined by low levels of economic and cultural capital, supplemented by high interest in symbolic value which "challenges the mainstream media monopoly on producing

symbolic forms" (pp. 17–18). They are counter-hegemonic, participatory, democratic, accessible, and amateur, and form alternative or counter-publics (Mowbray, 2015; Drüeke & Zobl, 2018). Among different theorists of social movement media, J. D. Downing (2000) has a special interest in the role of "radical media" in the formation of cultural memory as he calls for the recognition "of how they may light a mnemonic flame that sometimes burns over decades and generations" (p. 34). He goes as far as claiming that "ephemeral media address social memory differently" (p. 102), but this focus on "social memory" comes short of recognizing that memory is always mediated. In other words, radical mediation as a cultural remembrance practice in social movements has not yet received the attention it deserves, leaving cultural memory scholars an exciting disciplinary lacuna to further explore. Let us ask then: How do counter-hegemonic, participatory, democratic, accessible, and amateur practices mediate cultural memory?

What makes a portrait remediable to the extent that it can be reproduced as a blot but is still recognizable? Is there a palpable reason why Gezmiş' iconic portrait has become iconic? First, we cannot ignore the fact that Gezmiş' photograph itself has become recognizable thanks to the book covers it was printed on. For a photograph to be printed on book covers, one needs permission from the photographer. Konuksever, a self-declared sympathizer with the '68 movement and militant students, might have made it easier to circumvent copyright issues for publishers who chose to publish commemorative life narratives of his young friend Deniz Gezmiş. This social aspect of the reproducibility of the iconic photograph, certainly facilitated its subsequent popularity though this was not the only photograph of Gezmiş taken by Konuksever. However, this portrait of Gezmiş, which arguably has a more youthful look than the others, shows how the symbolism in the afterlife of Gezmiş draws on the "Turkish youth myth" and formulates Gezmiş as the representative of "youth" as a contentious political category (Erbil, 2022). His wearing a parka might also have added to its memorability because parkas have become markers for the revolutionaries of the period. However, it is not clear whether the parka (now known as the Deniz Gezmiş Parka) rendered the photograph iconic or the photograph the parka. For these observations to be more than speculation, more testimonial and textual evidence would be needed regarding the visual register of youthfulness in Turkey, or for the parka's place in the symbolic universe of this movement. One thing is clearly and materially observable in Konuksever's photograph, and is shared by the second, anonymous photograph that is usually cropped to re-enact Konuksever's composition: the parka's hood is lined with fur, which creates a contrasting frame for the body. This helps make Gezmiş'

figure recognizable when the portrait is remediated as a stencil. What otherwise would be the silhouette of a face, which might look like any random youth, becomes the silhouette of this this specific man. The parka's fur lining creates a referential link to the original photograph even when reduced to rough outlines, just like Che Guevara's iconic beret.

The symbolism of the parka surely communicates an ethos of militancy and political self-sacrifice, like Guevara's beret, and thus renders the photograph a recognizable symbol of militant resistance. But again, there are other photographs of Gezmiş with his parka. What renders Konuksever's photograph—and the anonymous one when it is cropped—available for a more legible and recognizable remediation as a silhouette is the symmetrical frontal shot: Gezmiş' direct gaze that fixes the viewer's attention is perfectly in line with the parka, creating a semicircle. This creates a halo, and thus aligns with the aesthetics of martyrdom, which also contributes to the legibility of amateur remediation.[2] Because circular compositions lead the viewer to complete the implied shape by filling in the missing parts (Sale & Betti, 2008), they are not only aesthetically pleasing but also available for low fidelity remediation thanks to the closure law of *Gestalt principles*[3]: even if you are running out of paint and thus the stencil does not come out perfect, the viewer will complete "the circle in spite of the abrupt ending to the flow of the shape" (p. 71). Thanks to strong shadows and the intrinsic high contrast of the portrait, it is easily remediated into a silhouette where stains form a recognizable image via the applied closure principle, and even if the low fidelity amateur reproduction is not perfect—e.g. in graffiti that were quickly sprayed—the eye can easily complete the reproduction due to the composition of the portrait. This legibility despite imperfection in reproduction, facilitates this photograph's wide use in protest media, rendering it memorable in activism, that is, easily reproducible within the culture of production that activists operate in.

In addition to the ease with which the photograph is remediated in a legible low fidelity form, we can also observe that its composition effectively

---

2   Although halos are more familiar from Christian art, they have a long history and can be found elsewhere, from Buddhist to Islamic art.

3   Meaning "unified whole" in German, *Gestalt* gave its name to a school of applied psychology in Germany, which theorized visual perception on the basis of the understanding that "the mind 'informs' what the eye sees by perceiving a series of individual elements as a whole" ("What are Gestalt Principles?", n.d.). Gestalt principles (proximity, similarity, figure-ground, continuity, closure, and connection) have become an essential part of visual design and especially the closure principle of completing shapes informed iconic logos such the World Wildlife Fund's panda ("What are Gestalt Principles?", n.d.).

Figure 3.3: Demonstrators gather around a banner by Mücadele Birliği [Struggle Alliance] during the 39th anniversary of the execution of Deniz Gezmiş. Istanbul, Turkey, 6 May 2011. Photo: Metin Tokgöz/Anadolu Images.

accommodates written text. The eye is not only looking at a semicircle, but also a triangle that the semicircle is inscribed in. This composition, in addition to the closure principle of the eye completing the pattern, is ideal for poster design—or book covers—if one wants to incorporate written text such as slogans or commemorative poetry. When positioned at the bottom of a poster, which is usually a rectangle, the triangle leads the eye to the top by virtue of pointing upwards and thus draws attention to the possible writing space that completes the rectangle. When the silhouette is positioned on top, this composition allows the written word to be framed by the implied circle that the parka outlines, leading the eye to the centre, to the written word. Given that protest ephemera are likely to incorporate slogans, this availability for multimodal composition makes the portrait and its silhouette a convenient choice for demonstrations that incorporate principles of practicality and accessibility. In this sense, its material, aesthetic composition facilitates the cultural memorability of this photograph.

A photograph can indeed be technically reproduced infinitely if one has access to technologies of photographic reproduction. If not, there are low fidelity, "democratic forms of media"—such as stencils—that do not necessarily comply with the visual conventions of hegemonic cultural practices, but promote self-determination, participation, and accessibility (see Spencer, 2008). In other words, the means of cultural production in activism, which constitutes the communicative repertoire of contention, structures the mnemonic capacity (Armstrong & Crage, 2006) of demonstrators.

The Culture of Production in Dissenting Turkey and its Aesthetic Legacies

In their discussion of the conditions that facilitate the commemorability of social movements, Armstrong and Crage (2006) point to an important material condition for commemoration that they call *mnemonic capacity*. This concept refers to "the skills and resources needed to create commemorative vehicles," which may vary according to differential access to "technologies of memory" (p.726), like printing and building memorials, which are all susceptible to restrictions by law, material resources, and crises of public legitimacy. Mnemonic capacity is an instructive term for thinking about the material conditions of memorability given that it acknowledges access to medial production as a facilitative condition. However, it is limiting to think only within the binary of "access" and "restriction," since restriction can direct activists to democratic forms of memorialization and commemoration, in accordance with the "DIY ethos" that privileges participation in cultural production and reproduction (Spencer, 2008). This means that an understanding of mediation beyond institutionalized and professional forms, which is to say *mediation by amateurs*, can enhance our understanding of visual protest aesthetics, as well as of visual memory in/of activism.

Amateurs and activists employ different cultural production and reproduction techniques with media materialities that are specific to their repertoires of contention. For instance, when streets are historically designated as the site of contention the visual culture of contention evolves according to the material conditions of the streets and the mnemonic capacity of the demonstrators to produce ephemera. The recent digitization of activism should not make us forget the site-specific materialities of protest media. The process of mediation begins far earlier than the spectacle of the crowd. Protest signs must be constructed before they can be carried. Anyone who has made a protest sign, read guides for the mediation of protest available on mainstream Internet (such as the "How to Make Protest Signs" co-authored by wikiHow Staff (2022), or "How to Make a Protest Sign That Isn't Garbage" by Justin Caffier (2017) on *Vice*) or attended a banner and slogan workshop by an activist organization, knows the distinct materialities and textualities required for self-determining the aesthetics of protest. Although some banners and signs are mass-produced by activist organizations who have budget for access to production technologies, it is a fact that both budget and access are limited for non-institutionalized groups.

Perhaps the clearest way to understand how visual cultures of activism are shaped and self-determined within these constraints is by paying attention to

the way activists themselves remember the production process. Documenting and memorializing the visual culture of the Left between 1963–1980, Yılmaz Aysan's *Afişe Çıkmak* (2013), for instance, offers us a selection of interviews with five activists who were involved in Devrimci Afiş Atölyesi [Revolutionary Poster Atelier] at Middle East Technical University that was active from 1968 to 1971. Interestingly, these interviews do not recall symbolic tactics in their poster production as much as the technical tactics. For example, in the interview with Hasan Barutçu, Barutçu does not mention anything about colour symbolism at the Atelier. Instead of recalling why certain colours were used in a poster, he describes how the students used five colours in one specific poster produced through serigraphy, not separately but printed on top of each other to achieve accent colours, like in the trichotomy method: "We printed trichotomy through serigraphy, can you believe it!" (cited in Aysan, 2013, p. 105). Of course, this enthusiastic take on craftmanship may be a result of the interviewer Aysan being a graphic designer himself, but the description of the techniques and the material processes of production throughout the interviews is very relevant for analysing the cultural memory of images.

While the question of why a certain colour is used for its symbolic power can be central to the study of the representative aspects of an image, the role of production technique is equally definitive in the formation of visual cultures and memory. For example, to Yılmaz Aysan's question of whether the Turkish posters are different from other posters around the world, Ali Artun gives a technical answer, explaining that the distinguishing feature of Turkish posters is that they are not produced by "fine arts students like in France":

> For example, the "silhouette" technique. It was something imposed by the screen-printing technique. I mean you have to fill in the screen with ink blots. For example, if it concerns a murdered revolutionary, these blots [sic] are subtracted from his photograph. It is contrasted and worked directly on the screen by hand. We see that technique has a very important effect on the formation of images. For example, if a painter had dealt with this job, he could have sat down and tried to paint the man, whereas we wouldn't have been able to do this anyway. (cited in Aysan, 2013, p. 127)

Lacking the drawing skills of the fine art students who produced posters during the French '68, these students at the Revolutionary Poster Atelier may thus seem to lack the mnemonic capacity that the French art students could create. However, by adapting to the more accessible form of the silhouette, they started a visual tradition of martyr commemoration via a stencilled aesthetic. Even today, not only the "martyrs" of that era like Deniz Gezmiş, but

also the Gezi "martyrs," are depicted via the stencil's aesthetics of protest, on posters and banners, as well as the Internet where an actual photograph could as easily be disseminated. This is because the "silhouette" has become *the legible aesthetics of commemoration* in the Turkish protest culture of martyrdom marked by amateur visual production. This is an exemplary case for how a medium of production can become a mnemonic resource. Capturing the aesthetic differences that emerge from professional and amateur production and how the production techniques and conditions shape visual cultures, Artun's explanation also shows us how the much-overlooked question of mediation technique shapes the conditions of cultural memorability.

Conclusion

Most of the time, we assume an iconic photograph is reproduced and remediated because it is iconic. This circularity, however, obscures reproduction and remediation processes that are closely attached to the context in which they are occurring. Memory cultures of activism cannot be isolated from the cultures of production and circulation that generate and accommodate cultural remembrance practices that are specific to activists. In this chapter, I argued that media materialities and the means of cultural production are interrelated and relevant categories of analysis in the study of the memory-activism nexus. With the assumption that cultural production in activism employs amateur techniques and is structured by different material conditions than the conventional field of cultural production, I asked: What makes this "iconic" photograph of Gezmiş so attractive for reproduction and remediation on the part of amateurs who primarily act in the political rather than the cultural field? To answer this question, I first explained the historical context of the original photograph by Konuksever, which is considered "iconic" in Turkish public discourse. Then, I sketched the circulation extent of the original photograph and another anonymous version with the same composition to draw attention to the sometimes contradictory contexts it appeared in. This brief look at the afterlife of the photograph aimed to show that the discursive aspects of visual memory are context specific, and the use of the same visual representation by antagonistic groups might have material reasons. Based on the observation of different remediations of Gezmiş' photograph, I then focused specifically on its remediation as a silhouette for stencilling and contextualized this technique within the amateur and activist culture of production. We saw that independent from their political beliefs, all activists with limited access to material resources and technical

skills operate in the same culture of amateur cultural production, which circumscribes their capacity for visual reproduction.

The chapter argued that the memorability of Deniz Gezmiş' iconic portrait is *facilitated* by its availability for legible and recognizable low fidelity reproduction. It is an effective mnemonic object to use in activism because the composition makes a good silhouette, which complies with the culture of production in Turkish activism. The last section hence drew on the culture of production in Turkish contentious politics, as reflected in the older generation's memories of producing visual representations for claim-making and protest commemoration. I have thus shown that the memorability of the portrait is facilitated by its compatibility with the culture of production, which is structured by the low mnemonic capacity of the older generation of Turkish activists. There is a feedback loop here: The stencil of Deniz Gezmiş communicates dissent partly because it is a stencil, a mediation of a dissenting type; it evokes graffiti, pamphlets, posters, banners, the streets, and, most importantly, the older medial practices which turned into an aesthetic tradition. I have argued that the visual rhetoric of dissent cannot be isolated from the culture of production it is embedded in.

Due to the institutional regulations of cultural production, protest repertoires of mediation primarily incorporate do-it-yourself methods and low fidelity aesthetics. What is intriguing is that this aesthetic of accessibility, in turn, becomes a visual tradition, as seen in the stencilled Gezi "martyrs": the very materiality of commemorative silhouettes imbues the new re-enactments with the symbolism of political martyrdom. The DIY stencil style itself constitutes the aesthetics of activist memory, for commemorating activists required this aesthetics of accessibility before widespread online commemorations. This DIY nature of the cultures of production in activism, however, is largely ignored in the study of the visual aesthetics of protest; many simply lose sight of the materialities that condition the much-celebrated dynamics of visuality and visibility in contentious politics.

Of course, it is not only the principles of organization in composition that makes the arrest photograph of Deniz Gezmiş memorable. The profound cultural afterlife of Gezmiş turned him into a revolutionary icon and the photograph, being an important document of his arrest, belongs to the vast media constellation that shapes the memory of Gezmiş as well as Turkey's contentious past. Capturing a symbolic moment in Turkish history and incorporating the symbolism of the parka facilitate the portrait's memorability on a discursive plane. One could also ask if the frontal framing and the halo provided by the parka aligns the portrait in the visual culture of martyrdom, which might be informed by Islamic, especially

Alevi art. There are many other questions to ask about the cultural value and meaning of this photograph. As Stuart Hall (1997) showed, "the question of meaning arises in relation to all the different moments or practices in our 'cultural circuit'—in the construction of identity and the marking of difference, in production and consumption, as well as in the regulation of social conduct" (p. 4). Visual memory is bound to the entire "circuit of culture," the circuit of representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation (Hall, 1997; Du Gay, 1997). Within the scope of this essay, I have paid exclusive attention to production, not to prioritize and isolate it, but as a reminder of its function in the "circuit of culture." This essay hence aimed at demonstrating the ways in which the memory-activism nexus can benefit from considering questions beyond representation and identity in the process whereby meaning is made of the past.

Bibliography

Acar, S. (2012, November 25). *"Yerde yatan Mahir'i mavi kazağından tanıdım."* Milliyet. https://www.milliyet.com.tr/pazar/yerde-yatan-mahir-i-mavi-kazagindan-tanidim-1632355

Alper, E. (2009). *Student Movement in Turkey from a Global Perspective, 1960–1971.* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Atatürk Institute for Modern Turkish History at Boğaziçi University.

Armstrong, E. A., & Crage, S. M. (2006). Movements and Memory: The Making of the Stonewall Myth. *American Sociological Review*, *71*(5), 724–751. https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240607100502

Atton, C. (2010). Alternative Media. In J. D. Downing (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Social Movement Media* (pp. 15–19). Sage Publications.

Aysan, Y. (2013). *Afişe çıkmak. 1963–1980: Solun görsel serüveni*. İletişim.

Balbay, M. (2019). *Bitmeyen Deniz*. Halk Kitabevi.

Behram, N. (2006). *Darağacında Üç Fidan*, 34th ed. Everest Yayınları.

Caffier, J. (2017, February 22). *How to Make a Protest Sign that Isn't Garbage.* Vice. https://www.vice.com/en/article/ypxmwk/how-to-make-a-protest-sign-that-isnt-garbage

Çelenk, H. (1974). *1. THKO Davası* (*Mahkeme Dosyası*). Yöntem Yayınları.

Devrimci Öğrenci Birliği (DÖB). (2021, October). *Sabırsızlık Zamanı* [*Time of Impatience*]. https://mucadelebirligi.com/pdf/SabirsizlikZamani/SabirsizlikZamani_Ekim2021.pdf

Downing, J. D. (2000). *Radical Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements*. Sage Publishing.

Drüeke, R., & Zobl, E. (2018). Forming Media: Alternative Media and Activist Cultural Practices. In G. Meikle (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Media and Activism* (pp. 134–141). Routledge.

Du Gay, P. (1997). Introduction. In Du Gay et al. (Eds.), *Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman* (pp. 1–5). Sage Publishing.

Dündar, C. (2014). *Abim Deniz. Hiç yayınlanmamış mektup ve fotoğraflarla Hamdi Gezmiş'in anıları*. Can Yayınları.

Erbil, D. (2022). The Making of a Young Martyr: Discursive Legacies of the Turkish "Youth Myth" in the Afterlife of Deniz Gezmiş. In F. Krawatzek, & N. Friess (Eds.), *Youth and Memory in Europe: Defining the Past, Shaping the Future* (pp. 113–126). De Gruyter.

Erll, A. (2011). *Memory in Culture*. Springer.

Hall, S. (1997). Introduction. In S. Hall, J. Evans, & S. Nixon (Eds.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, 2nd ed. (pp. 1–11). Sage Publishing.

How to Make Protest Signs. (2022, January 3). wikiHow. https://www.wikihow.com/Make-Protest-Signs

Mowbray, M. (2015). Alternative Logics? Parsing the Literature on Alternative Media. In C. Atton (Ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Alternative and Community Media* (pp. 21–31). Routledge.

Öz, E. (1976). *Deniz Gezmiş Anlatıyor.* Cem Yayınevi.

Rigney, A. (2018). Remembering Hope: Transnational Activism beyond the Traumatic. *Memory Studies*, *11*(3), 368–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771869

Sale, T., & Betti, C. (2008). *Drawing: A Contemporary Approach*. Thomson Wadsworth.

Spencer, A. (2008). *DIY: The Rise of Lo-Fi Culture*. Marion Boyars Publishers.

Türkmen, E. A., & Özger, Ü. (Eds.). (2015). *Türkiye Solundan Portreler.* Dipnot Yayınları.

Uslu, A. (2015). Deniz Gezmiş. Öğrenci Hareketlerinden ‹Halk Savaşı›na Giden Yolda Bir Devrimcinin Portresi. In E. A. Türkmen, & Ü. Özger (Eds.), *Türkiye Solundan Portreler* (pp. 503–536). Dipnot Yayinlari.

What are Gestalt Principles? (n.d.). The Interaction Design Foundation. https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/gestalt-principles

Zürcher, E. J. (1993). *Turkey: A Modern History*. IB Tauris.

About the Author

Duygu Erbil is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. Her research analyses the cultural afterlife of Deniz Gezmiş through a cultural materialist approach and is part of the *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* (*ReAct*) project. (d.erbil@uu.nl)

Reproduction and Remediation

4 Photography, Memory, and Women in May '68

Antigoni Memou

Abstract

The dominant narrative configurations of May '68 in France have rendered the figure of the "radical protesting student"—typically male—as the primary actor in the events, while women's role has largely been erased from the "official" collective memory. The most frequently exhibited and published visual documents of the era dovetail neatly with these narratives, representing female participants either as problematic emblems or as passive, inactive, and bereft of political agency. This chapter focuses on photographs of female participants in the events that can be considered "canonical," and asks how women have been portrayed in the visual narratives that dominated the post-1968 public discourse and whether alternative representations of them were, and maybe still are, excluded from this canon.

Keywords: women, protest movements, photography, May '68, memory

The students' and workers' uprising in France during the months of May and June 1968, also known as "the events of May 68" or just "May '68," have generated an enduring visual legacy of photographs, documentary footage, graffiti, political cartoons, and posters that were produced collectively in the occupied École des Beaux Arts, the so-called Atelier Populaire. Most of these artefacts were kept in sparse and incomplete archives, both state and personal ones, while a smaller number were reproduced in publications, media, and commemorative exhibitions in the decades that followed the events. The process of compiling a best-of list of photographs and posters was accelerated around anniversaries, when historians, commentators, protagonists, editors, and curators used May '68 artefacts to illustrate their accounts of the events or to organize commemorative exhibitions and

magazine issues. As a result, particular photographs have been rendered "canonical" and, as such, they have contributed to the construction and reinforcement of the dominant narratives that have grown up around May '68.

Over the last 50 years, there have been intense debates about the nature and specific aspects of May '68, as well as its historical and political significance, which have given rise to "a certain, restricted perception" of the events and a "contested history" (Reynolds, 2007, p. 2). The interpretations of May 1968 that dominated French public discourse in the following decades attempted to manage the memory of May '68, often by a systematic elimination of its political radicalism and its societal effects. Often reduced to a "harmless" youth revolt that heralded the triumph of individualism and the emergence of neoliberalism, May '68 has been interpreted as an "ephemeral incident" with only a short-term impact (Rancière, 2019, p. 30). In his re-examination of May '68, Rancière (2019) argues that specific attention should be paid to the ways in which the events are narrated as well as to the interrelationship "between narration, time and politics" (p. 30).

Photography has played a crucial role in the ways in which the events of May '68 have been narrated, remembered, and commemorated. As "sites of memory," dominant photographic documents have often provided the basis on which historical interpretations of the events have been constructed. Memory, in this case, equates to *cultural memory*, that is "shared memories of the past" as products of "mediation, textualization and acts of communication" (Rigney, 2005, p. 14). These mediated representations of the past are the subject of selection, revision, and repression. In the case of May '68, a "battle of memories" has taken place, not as "an exchange of arguments, a discussion whose stake would be to tease out reflection on the part of the public; it is rather one voice drowning out others" (Ross, 2002, p. 154). Ross (2002) has effectively shown that the narrative strategies and spokesmen that dominated the public discourse since the 1970s and became ubiquitous in media and state commemorations promoted a revisionist rendering of the events. It is not accidental that Ross refers to spokesmen, as male participants' memoirs offered key narratives in the years that followed.

This emphasis on spokesmen opens up questions about the "absence of gender as a category of analysis in the vast majority of secondary as well as primary analyses of these events" (Evans, 2009, p. 333). As Evans (2009) reminds us,

> most national historiographies of 1968 … have pursued women's history in isolation, thereby leaving the transformative implications of gender

analysis outside the mainstream narratives. Closer investigation reveals the power of a gendered paradigm embedded in the ethos of the movements themselves that framed the ways they told their own stories, the ways the popular media perceived them, and most subsequent historical accounts as well. (p. 333)

Equally, questions about the ways in which women, alongside other figures such as the workers, migrants, farmers, and the unemployed, have been pushed out of the representational frame have been overlooked. There are at least two reasons for this that are inherent to the medium of photography. The first concerns the photographer's own prejudices and their awareness of the political possibilities of the medium. The second relates to the ways in which such photographs have been used by subsequent institutional framings.

This chapter focuses on photographs of female participants in the events that can be considered "canonical," and asks how the role of women has been portrayed in the visual narratives that dominated the post-1968 public discourse. In order to do so, it first returns to the conditions under which the photojournalistic images of the May events were produced and then traces how specific canonical photographs of individuals prevailed in commemorative events in the decades that followed. It also asks whether alternative representations of women were, and maybe still are, excluded from this canon.

May '68 through the Lens of Photojournalists

Throughout the months of May and June 1968, the protests on the streets of Paris, the barricades, the clashes between the protesters and the police, and the occupied factories and buildings were photographed by professional photojournalists who took to the streets of Paris. The great majority of them belonged to the post-war generation of photojournalists whose photo-reporting was facilitated by the availability of portable cameras and the high demand for their images in the mainstream press and the popular illustrated magazines of the time. In a famous motto, Robert Capa, one of the founders of the influential Magnum photo agency, celebrated quick reflexes, physical strength, and proximity to the action: "if your pictures are not good enough, you are not close enough" (Hacking 2012, p. 191). The proliferation of photojournalistic agencies in the post-war era, such as Magnum and Gamma, gave affiliated photographers the freedom to cover

stories from different angles and resulted in newspapers and magazines ending up with a great number of pictures, only a fraction of which could be published (Bair, 2015, p. 231). The photographs taken on the streets of Paris, accordingly, were intended for publication in the mainstream printed media, accompanying news stories and often dramatic headlines about the protests. Most of the photojournalists who covered the events in Paris were men, with the exception of Martine Franck and Janine Niépce.[1]

While there may be some slight differences in the style of the photojournalists who documented the events, the themes that they photographed were similar: they covered the barricades in the Latin Quarter, the general assemblies at the occupied Sorbonne University, and the clashes between students and police on the Parisian streets. Zooming out in order to portray the magnitude of the protesting body was one of the common working methodologies deployed by many photojournalists documenting protest movements. The photographic recording of crowds reduced the diversity of the movement to a homogenous mass (Memou, 2013). Nevertheless, taking a closer look at the oceanic photographs of crowds, we see that women have a distinct presence, testifying to the importance of their participation in the demonstrations, occupations, and assemblies. The photographic documents also act as evidence for the unprecedented intermingling of different social classes, genders, and age groups that was a distinctive characteristic of participation in the events.

Nonetheless, in the decades that followed, the photographs of crowds did not become "canonical" photojournalistic documents of May '68. Next to overview shots of crowds, photojournalists had also zoomed in, focusing on the individual, the single participant. As Hariman and Lucaites (2007) put it, "photojournalism produces many, many images of representative individuals, and description of an individual's experience is the standard lead-in for any feature news story" (p. 90). This is a common photojournalistic practice, according to which representative individuals are chosen to stand for the collective (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). In the case of May '68, I argue that photojournalists tended to focus on the young male protestor of student appearance, portrayed either as a leader or as a violent subject. At the same time, they represented proportionately fewer women and when

---

1   A partial list of photographers includes Gilles Caron, Claude Dityvon, Ellie Kagan, Guy Le Querrec, Serge Hambourg, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Philippe Vermès, Jo Schnapp, Martine Franck, Jean-Pierre Rey, André Sas, Georges Melet, Jean-Claude Gautrand, Alain Dagbert, Hervé Gloaguen, Janine Niépce, Gökşin Sipahioğlu, François Hers, Michel Piquemal, Patrice Habans, Henri Bureau, and Marc Riboud, amongst others.

they represented them, they focused on them as the leading figures carrying a flag at the head of the demonstration.

In terms of leadership, the bourgeois media tried to find an easily recognizable figure that could be presented as the student leader. As Gitlin (2003) shows, this also occurred in the representation of other movements in the 1960s where one individual was certified by the media as newsworthy and used as a stand-in for a diverse group. Gitlin rightly points out that such leaders were never entirely invented by the media: they were often already distinguished figures within the movement who were granted a celebrity status by the media. Writing about the American 1960s, Gitlin argues that "the movement elevated many leaders; the media selected for celebrity those among them who most closely matched prefabricated images of what an opposition leader should look and sound like: articulate, theatrical, bombastic, and knowing and inventive in the ways of packaging messages for their mediability" (p. 154).

Many of these characteristics can be said to be applicable to Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the "spokesperson" chosen by the media in May '68. Cohn-Bendit was a sociology student at the University of Paris' campus in Nanterre who had become known in university Marxist–anarchist political circles. His ironic attitude and spontaneity had drawn the attention of the media as early as 8 January 1968 in an incident with the minister of youth and sports, François Missoffe, during his visit to the campus of Nanterre to inspect a new swimming pool. Cohn-Bendit accused him of not having included the sexual problems of young people in his recent book on French youth. When the minister's reply implied that Cohn-Bendit take a dip in the swimming pool, the latter responded: "That's the kind of answer you would get under a fascist regime" (Reader, 1993, p. 7). The importance of the incident resides, to a large extent, in the style of confrontation, which "inaugurated Cohn-Bendit's celebrity as a verbal provocateur" (Seidman, 2004, p. 61). Photographed marching in the first row of demonstrations along with Jacques Sauvageot (vice president of UNEF) and Alain Geismar (general secretary of SNEsup) or speaking in assemblies alongside Jean-Paul Sartre, Daniel Cohn-Bendit became a favourite subject for many photojournalists.[2] Gilles Caron's photograph of Cohn-Bendit in which he, with a lively and mocking expression on his face, confronts a policeman has been widely disseminated.[3] His sarcasm,

2   UNEF was the Union Nationale des Étudiants de France [National Union of French Students], and SNEsup the Syndicat National de l' Enseignement Supérieur [National Union of Higher Education].

3   See image here: https://www.polkamagazine.com/radio-mai-68-iconique-mai-68-historique/

as captured by Caron, was seen as reflecting the movement as a whole, which became known for its rigorous critique of De Gaulle's repressive government and the values of conventional and conformist "bourgeois" society.

Cohn-Bendit's popularity within the movement reached a high point towards the end of May, when he was refused re-entry to France and solidarity demonstrations were organized on the streets of Paris (Feenberg & Freedman, 2001). Nonetheless, his celebrity status was undoubtedly at variance with the perception that students, and even workers, may have had of the movement, as an anti-hierarchical grassroots movement. The movement tended to resist strict hierarchy, official leadership, and centralized structures. It was developed and organized collectively by a variety of political groups and *comités d'action* [action committees]. The emphatically collective nature of the events was manifested in the many innovative forms of direct action mounted by its activists including sit-ins, teach-ins, consciousness-raising groups, marches on factories, and the occupation of public and private spaces, challenging "the 'normal' distribution of words and actions, spaces and times"(Rancière, 2019, p. 39).

The second dominant figure in the photojournalistic coverage of May '68 was not a named celebrity, but an anonymous student throwing stones. There are several variations of this visual theme including Gilles Caron's photograph of a demonstrator throwing a stone across an empty street while the policemen are invisible.[4] Bruno Barbey (1998) and Claude Dityvon (1988) made similar photographs, in which protestors are depicted in aggressive poses, gesturing violently, while the police are not included in the frame or appear to be inactive. It is not accidental that these photographs were picked up for reproduction in the mainstream coverage of the events, given that both left- and right-wing mainstream French press condemned the protesters' insulting language and violence. What was often left out of the television and radio coverage was the police brutality, which became the main topic of criticism in student tracts and publications (Memou, 2013). One of the most significant of the protest newspapers, *Action*, published photographs of policemen brutally beating protesters with their batons and cartoons depicting the police as violent and repressive personifications of an authoritarian state (Memou, 2013).

Alongside the depictions of leaders and of violent individuals, photojournalists also zoomed in on female individuals. While female figures were not as often represented as their male counterparts, they

---

4   The photograph is reproduced on the cover of one of Caron's photobooks, *Sous les pavés la plage* (1993).

were customarily represented carrying a flag or clenching their fists at the head of demonstrations. The most renowned example is Jean-Pierre Rey's photograph of the model Caroline de Bendern on the shoulders of her artist friend Jean Jacques Lebel, carrying his Vietcong flag. Taken at Place Edmond-Rostand near the Luxembourg Gardens on 13 May, Rey photographed De Bendern when she climbed on the shoulders of her friend because her feet were sore. "La jeune fille au drapeau" [the young girl with the flag] or "La Marianne de Mai 68" [Marianne of 68] as the photograph became known was published in the American *Life* Magazine on 24 May and in *Paris Match* of 15–22 June 1968. The first publication of the photograph in the two-spread dedicated to the French events in *Life* magazine is of particular interest as it presents what was happening in Paris as a youth revolt that was part of an international struggle against the old structures alongside the American anti-Vietnam movement and the Prague Spring (Anon quoted in Gunthert, 2018).

Bruno Barbey took two similar photographs, whose composition shares striking visual similarities to "La Marianne de Mai 68." Taken only three days before Rey's image, the first photograph is a close-up image of an anti-Gaullist demonstration. In the first row, as the caption reminds us, we see Jacques Sauvageot, vice president of UNEF and Alain Geismar, general secretary of SNEup, who had emerged as the most well-known leaders of the movement by 7 May. In the middle of the composition, we see a woman sitting on the shoulders of a male protester holding a monochromatic flag, presumably red. An array of similar flags occupy the upper space of the photograph, which captures what is seemingly a rather male-dominated protest. Barbey's second photograph is a close up of a demonstration in support of General de Gaulle on the 30 May 1968. It depicts two women sitting on the shoulders of the men in the demonstration's front row holding the latest issue of the newspaper *France-Soir* with the headlines: "I stay," "I keep Pompidou." It was taken on 30 May, when one million people marched in support of General de Gaulle.

"La Marianne de Mai 68," and, to a certain extent, the women in Barbey's photographs, are portrayed in the familiar and stylized mode of French 19th-century Romantic painter Eugène Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People* (Gunthert, 2018). Frequently noticed by journalists, this visual similarity cannot be accidental. As Hariman and Lucaites (2007) assert, iconic photojournalistic images often share visual aspects with celebrated middlebrow paintings and draw upon artistic conventions recognized by a wider public, regardless of the audience's (non-)familiarity with the visual arts. Painted to commemorate the July Revolution of 1830, Delacroix's

allegory of *Liberty* is personified as a young, rebellious woman who recalls the Revolution of 1789 and the idea of popular sovereignty. Delacroix's painting has been recognized beyond French society as a universal image of revolt for freedom. Caroline's posture, gesture, and performance for the camera (which was a result of her awareness of being photographed), as well as Rey's composition and framing of her improvisational performance, recreates Delacroix's familiar visual patterns. According to Leblanc (2009), the version of Rey's photograph that has been most widely circulated was a version of his initial print that was cropped in order to achieve the pictorial reference to the well-known painting.[5] In addition, Leblanc and Versavel (2018) argue that the cultural significance of the photograph grew in the decades that followed, and that it was especially prominent in commemorations on the 20th anniversary.

Photographs of Women and Their Afterlives

The public commemorative reconstructions of May '68 have re-used the photographs of recognizable individuals, including the photographs of women leading the protests. Kristin Ross (2002), giving particular attention to commemorative television programmes, documentary footage, and magazines, has demonstrated the ways in which the subsequent representations or "afterlives" of the events have shaped and reshaped our understanding of them. The role that photography plays in the construction of these subsequent interpretations has been only partially examined, and the visual representation of gender in particular has remained largely unaddressed (Leblanc & Versavel, 2018). This may reflect the fact that photography has traditionally been bound together with history in an epistemological hierarchy whereby photography is reduced to the mere illustration of historical texts. In this hierarchy, the narrative potential of photography is overlooked. In addition, the interest in gender and memory in the historiography of 1968 is a relatively recent phenomenon, which has not yet included questions of visual representation (Colvin & Karcher, 2020; Evans, 2009).

In the decades that followed 1968, women's memories of their involvement in the events were not foregrounded. While women participated in large numbers, a gendered-hierarchical discursive norm persisted within the

5   The digitized version of Rey's reportage as part of the 2008 initiative of CODHOS (Collectif des centres de documentation en histoire ouvrière et sociale) includes wide shots that depict many more participants.

cultural memory of the movements (Colvin & Karcher, 2020). As Evans (2009) observes:

> closer investigation reveals the power of a gendered paradigm embedded in the ethos of the movements themselves that framed the ways they told their own stories, the ways the popular media perceived them, and most subsequent historical accounts as well. The drama of fathers and sons, filled with military metaphor and sometimes-violent conflict, "made sense" to participants and observers alike. (p. 333)

In France, the same male voices were allowed to interpret the events and the trajectories of the lives of these men were "projected retrospectively back onto May, where the seeds, at least, for their current transformation can, amazingly, now be found" (Ross, 2002, p. 157). By the time of the 20th anniversary, the same few, by now famous, individuals (among whom Cohn-Bendit) became "the official memory functionaries and custodians" of '68 history on television (Ross, 2002, pp. 154–155). On the basis of their activism, they were granted the authority to "represent," "interpret," "deny," and "repudiate" the events (Ross, 2002, pp. 154–155). Their point of view and interests coincided "with the interests and opinions of the government elites and corporations that own the media" (pp. 154–155).

Such individual narratives were consistent with dominant, political narratives since the 1970s, which have denounced the emancipatory potential and revolutionary aspirations of the 1968 movement, often reducing it to a "harmless" youth revolt that heralded the triumph of individualism and the emergence of neoliberalism. Emerging in the mid-1970s, the ideas of the so-called "nouveaux philosophes" were central to this debate. Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut (1985) claimed that the events of '68 pre-empted the rise of contemporary individualism, and Gilles Lipovetsky (1983) claimed that "the '68 spirit" contributed decisively to precipitating narcissistic individualism's actualization as the dominant form of contemporary subjectivity. Ross (2002) argues that by the second anniversary, "the absence of analysis of '68 culture, language, or history" was complete and the movement and its collective forms had been diluted within the individual stories of particular individuals (p. 191).

Visual documents foregrounding the role of individuals were carefully chosen from the large visual legacy to enhance such interpretations. "La Marianne de Mai 68" is an exemplary case. The photograph resurfaced on the 10th anniversary, in various iterations, including Poivre d'Avror's *Mai 68–Mai 78* book cover and the covers of *Nouvel Observateur* and *Paris*

Figure 4.1: Paris Match n°1511 du 12 mai 1978. British Library Item: LOU.F234E. Photo: Antigoni Memou.

Match (published 29 April 1978 and 12 May 1978, respectively). Interestingly, in *Paris Match*, "La Marianne de Mai 68" was published next to Barbey's photograph of the pro-Gaullist demonstration (Figure 4.1). Particular emphasis should be given to the fact that, alongside "La Marianne," *Paris Match* reproduced the photograph of the pro-Gaullist demonstration and not the student anti-Gaullist one. The undifferentiated close-up photographs of the collective body in a pro- and anti-Gaullist protest—in Rey's and Barbey's photographs respectively—project a generalized image of May '68 as a youth uprising, eliminating the ideological differences at play. As a result, in the subsequent decades, the image of the pro-Gaullist demonstration was used widely and came to stand for an event—the students' and workers' uprising—that it does not actually represent. For example, on the 40th anniversary of 1968, the photograph was used in a leaflet advertising a series of commemorative events on May 1968 in London (Hayward Gallery, 2008). On the 50th anniversary, it was featured on the Facebook page that advertised a roundtable discussion about the legacy of May 1968 at the Beaubourg museum in Paris. The fact that a photograph of a pro-Gaullist protest has been used during these commemorations to stand for the students' and workers' uprising indicates that these public acts of *remembering* the events in fact entail the danger of *forgetting* central parts of them.

On the 20th anniversary, some biographical details of Caroline de Bendern, the woman on Jean-Pierre Rey's photograph, were "revealed" in *L' Express*. "Marianne" was a model of English aristocratic descent. Due to her involvement in 1968, her rich grandfather had disinherited her.[6] This information was used to frame the image in a new way: the revolt of 1968 could be attributed to the ephemeral and spontaneous qualities of youth, who later in life regretted (or even quite literally paid for) their involvement with the movement. In 1988, Rey's "La Marianne" appeared again on the cover of *Paris Match* alongside the headline: "We were 20 years old, the stars of today will remember."[7] The past tense on the cover echoes Daniel Cohn-Bendit's book title: *Nous l' avons tant aimée, la révolution* [the revolution, we loved it so much] published in 1986. They both referred to the 20-year-olds of the past and to the events of May as a symptom of their youth, which has now been done with and abandoned.

By the 20th anniversary, photographs such as "La Marianne" had become part of a larger constellation of images and discursive formations which foregrounded the perception of the events as a youth revolt. Some sociological accounts had reached the same conclusions. Sociologist Alain Touraine's writings interpreted the events as a "youth revolt" and as a "pure expression of socio-hormonal frustration, a biological convulsion" (1971, pp. 27–28). He argued that '68 marked a new type of conflict, "a new social movement," which emerged from the values and forms of action created by "postindustrial" society. According to Touraine (1971), the new societal groups participating in this conflict (i.e. students) revealed the diminishing role of the working class as the central actor in what had become a struggle against technocracy and not against capitalism (pp. 27–28).

Shaped by the anniversary commemorations of the events, the public memory of May '68 celebrated the role of "renowned protagonists" often visually represented in monumental and epic forms. "La Marianne" is such a monumental form. Being yet another representative of this generation, whose involvement with the movement has been regretted, repudiated, or just left behind. The cultural memory of '68 is formulated through the repetition of the same stories, the same narratives and ultimately, the same photographs of women circulated in a wide range of different media and formats, from TV commemorations to printed images in magazines. It is through this "repetition in different media" rather than "isolated acts of

---

6   For more on the framing of 'La Marianne de Mai 68' in *Paris Match* and *L' Express* on the 20th anniversary, see Leblanc (2009).

7   See the 1988 issue on http://imagesociale.fr/6887

remembrance" that the cultural memory of May '68 has been constructed (Rigney, 2005, p. 35).

Within this repetitive cycle, specific historic information was lost, and photographs were often used as mere illustrations. In its multiple reproductions, "La Marianne" has lost its historical anchorage. The day it was taken, 13 May, was one of the most important moments for the movement, when students and workers demonstrated together in Paris, in a march led by both student leaders and trade unions. The general strike triggered 450 demonstrations in various French cities and towns, especially those with large working-class populations (Vigna, 2011). Following this successful event, workers called for the continuation of the strike, initially at the Sud-Aviation factory at Bouguenais on the outskirts of Nantes, followed by the Renault factories and the Lockheed plant in Beauvais (Vigna, 2011). This wave of strikes spread to factories throughout the country and culminated in a general strike involving workers in public transport, petrol stations, farmers, artists, doctors, and mass media workers, affecting both the private and the public sectors (Artières & Zancarini-Fournel, 2018). The duration of the strike and its geographical diffusion (across the country), as well as the wide range of direct actions taken by the strikers were unprecedented (Vigna, 2011, pp. 48–50). The crisis swiftly developed into a broad-based and widespread political action, centred on a critique of authoritarian and hierarchical societal structures and engaging diverse social groups that included students, unskilled and semi-skilled workers, the professional classes, and the unemployed. Appearing on *Paris Match*'s cover (and several other publications) without this historical context, the photograph's meaning is greatly and effectively reduced. This narrative boils the May events down to a youth revolt, a celebration of the individual, and reduces the involvement of women in the events to emblematic figures.

The dominant narrative of May 1968 obscures the extent of a movement that combined various societal groups, including women, whose role in the events was more important than has hitherto been recognized (Evans, 2009). On the one hand, the absence of gender as a distinct category in 1968 is partly responsible for that. As Ross (2002) argues,

> women activists in the Comités d' Action, in the streets, or in the factories tended to self-identify as any number of things, as workers, as members of different groupuscules or political tendencies, as German Jews, as the 'pègre,' as activists or citizens—rather than as women per se. (p. 155)

While gender difference seems to not have been consciously experienced during the events, the events shaped the emergent feminist movement in

France and influenced their action repertoire, including "provocative forms, spontaneous gatherings, and scepticism of traditional forms of organisation and institutionalisation" (Greenwald, 2018, p. 108). On the other hand, various other collective bodies, such as workers (French and foreigners) and their unions, professionals, farmers, anti-colonialist militants, and the unemployed (both male and female) have been excluded from these dominant accounts and analyses, which placed particular emphasis on the individual figure.

The exceptional alliance of these groups throughout May and June produced a moment of political solidarity with no equivalent in any other European country. The large, open, anti-hierarchical assemblies at the occupied university, in which everyone had the opportunity to talk, soon attracted workers and farmers. This led to a displacement, according to which the various societal groups (of students, workers, and farmers) broke away from the locations assigned to them by the state and the police. Workers joined meetings at the Sorbonne; students walked to factories to talk to workers; farmers, workers, and students met in local action committees and neighbourhood assemblies. These were "political experiments in *de*classification, in disrupting the national 'givenness' of places" (Ross, 2002, p. 25). In this way, the different social groups were not focused solely on the interests of their own group; they opened themselves up to the interests, demands and struggles of each other. The government attempted to break up these groups in order to deal with each one individually, and more effectively—and it partially succeeded. The government's strategy was helped by the trade unions' resolution to prevent dialogue between workers and students and to control the general strike, which was manifested in attempts to keep workers away from the street protests, and within the confines of the occupied factories.

This unprecedented alliance that "the major unions had considered practically impossible" and that "the Communist Party had declared theoretically absurd" and that "the government had never imagined" (Feenberg & Freedman, 2001, p. 25) was not celebrated equally in the subsequent narrative configurations of the events of May '68, which often failed to capture the multiplicity of the actors involved, and reduced the events both geographically (to Paris) and temporally (to the month of May).[8] The figure of the—typically male—"radical protesting student" and the emblematic representations of female participants tend to dominate, pushing other main actors in the events and collective bodies out of the representational frame.

---

8   For the temporal and geographical reductions of May, see: Ross 2002, pp. 8–10; Reynolds, 2007, p. 4–6; Jackson, 2011, pp. 3–9; Reader, 1993, pp. 249–252.

Returning to Barbey's and Rey's canonical images allows us not only to unravel the multiple uses of these images across media and the processes of their canonization, but also to take a fresh look at the parts of the visual legacy of May '68 that have been actively suppressed or simply forgotten. Photographs of women marching along their male counterparts and participating in the anti-hierarchical assemblies were part of many photo reportages of the time, but they are not the ones that enjoyed a prominent afterlife. There are exceptions such as Janine Niépce's photograph of women occupying the Galeries Lafayette.[9] There was also Gökşin Sipahioğlu's reportage showing a woman in a miniskirt looking sarcastically at the policemen surrounding her in the middle of the barricades.[10] Finally, one can look to the anonymous woman in the documentary film *La Reprise du travail aux usines Wonder*, who appears to be vehemently rejecting the Grenelle Accords, as did many of her male co-workers (Abidor, 2018).

Rethinking the relationship between gender, the memory of '68, and visual representation also requires us to speak about the "untaken" photographs of May '68 (Azoulay, 2019, pp. 370–371). For example, we simply have no visual documents of the women who played a leading role in the neighbourhoods' comités d'action. These comités d'action, which pre-dated 1968, grew rapidly in number in 1968 and operated in a highly localized way, covering specific neighbourhoods, schools, universities, and factories. Women in the neighbourhood, sometimes with no prior experience in political organization, created these autonomous spaces, which practiced solidarity with the students and striking workers. This democratic self-organization can be seen as one of the most important political innovations of May 1968, standing in sharp contrast to the standard top-down organizational methods of political parties and trade unions. According to Azoulay (2019), the untaken photograph "can take many forms: a verbal description, a testimony, a drawing or a photograph of a re-enactment of the unphotographed event, based on its description by one of the participants in the event" (p. 317). In the case of May '68, women's testimonies would be necessary to re-enact the unphotographed comités d'action and all other women driven contributions to the action repertoire.

Remembering these vital aspects of the movement would lead to a rewriting of May '68 history from the perspective of women. Walter Benjamin (1999), in his famous theses "On the Concept of History," has written about

---

9   Janine Niépce, Événements de mai-juin 68. Grève, occupation des Galeries Lafayette, / Événements de mai-juin 68. Grève, occupation des Galeries Lafayette – Janine Niépce.
10   For the picture, see: https://fotojournalismus.tumblr.com/post/119607964588/ paris-may-1968-photos-by-g%C3%B6k%C5%9Fin-sipahio%C4%9Flu

the danger of the image of the past becoming a tool of the ruling classes. History is a form of official memory, according to Benjamin, and as such is infected by forgetting because of its emphasis on the deeds of great men, which are often represented in epic form and leave anonymous people out of history. The visual legacy of May '68 has been endangered in such a way, often reduced to the revolt of the young, male protester of student appearance or to the emblematic image of the female figure, leaving other societal groups and collective bodies out of the photographic frame. Restoring these collective bodies into the historical and visual record of '68 would mean refusing to "give up on its potential" (Walker, 2020, p. 6) as a source of inspiration for contemporary left politics and as a possibility for new, collective, radical bodies of opposition to the contemporary, multi-faceted global crisis, including the ongoing ecological crisis and resurgent nationalist-populist and far-right political parties.

Bibliography

Abidor, M. (2018). *May Made Me: An Oral History of the 1968 Uprising in Frame.* Pluto Press.

Artières, P., & Zancarini-Fournel, M. (Eds.) (2008). *68, une histoire collective (1962–1981).* La Découverte.

Azoulay, A. (2019). *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism.* Verso.

Barbey, B. (1998). *Mai 68, ou, L'imagination au pouvoir.* Galerie Beaubourg, Éditions de la Différence.

Bair, N. (2015). Never Alone: Photo Editing and Collaboration. In J. Hill & V. Schwartz (Eds.), *Getting the Picture: The Visual Culture of the News* (pp. 228–235). Bloomsbury Publishing.

Benjamin, W. (1999). Theses on the Philosophy of History. In H. Arendt (Ed.), *Illuminations* (pp. 245–255). Random House.

Caron, G. (1993). *Sous les pavés la plage. Mai 68 vu par Gilles Caron.* Sirene.

Cohn-Bendit, D. (1988). *Nous l' avons tant aimée, la révolution.* Seuil.

Colvin, S., & Karcher, K. (2019). *Women, Global Protest Movements, and Political Agency: Rethinking the Legacy of 1968.* Routledge.

Dityvon, C. (1988). *Mai 68.* Camera Obscura.

Evans, S. M. (2009). Sons, Daughters, and Patriarchy: Gender and the 1968 Generation. *American Historical Review,* 114 (2), 331–347.

Feenberg, A., & Freedman, J. (2001). *When Poetry Ruled the Streets: The French May Events of 1968.* State University of New York Press.

Ferry, L., & Renaut, A. (1985). *La Pensée '68.* Gallimard.

Gitlin, T. (2003). *The Whole World is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left.* University of California Press.

Greenwald, L. (2018). *Daughters of 1968: Redefining French Feminism and the Women's Liberation Movement.* University of Nebraska Press.

Gunthert, A. (2018, December 19). *La "Marianne" de Mai 68, ou l'effet Disneyland.* L' Image Sociale. http://imagesociale.fr/6887

Hacking, J. (Ed.) (2012). *Photography: The Whole Story.* Thames and Hudson.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture and Liberal Democracy.* The University of Chicago Press.

Hayward Gallery. (2008). *May '68: Street Posters from the Paris Rebellion* [advertising leaflet].

Jackson, J. (2011). Rethinking May 68. In J. Jackson, A.-L. Milne, & J. S. Williams (Eds.), *May '68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution* (pp. 3–16). Palgrave Macmillan.

Leblanc, A. (2009). *L' iconographique de Mai 68. Un usage intentionnel du photoreportage en noir et blanc ou couleur.* Sens Public. http://sens-public.org/

Leblanc, A., & Versavel, D. (2018). *Icônes de Mai 68. Les images ont une histoire.* Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Lipovetsky, G. (1983). *L'Ère du vide. Essai sur l'individualisme contemporain.* Gallimard.

Memou, A. (2013). *Photography and Social Movements: From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement against Globalisation (2001).* Manchester University Press.

Poivre D'Arvor, P. (1978). *Mai 68, Mai 78.* Seghers.

Rancière, J. (2019). Re-Politicising '68. In V. Cherepanyn, V. Havránek, & T. Stejskalová (Eds.), *'68NOW* (pp. 29–52). Archive Books.

Reader, K. A. (1993). *The May 1968 Events in France: Reproductions and Interpretations.* St. Martin's Press.

Reynolds, C. (2007). *May '68: A Contested History.* Sens-Public. https://www.sens-public.org/IMG/pdf/SensPublic_CReynolds_AContestedHistory.pdf

Rigney, A. (2005). Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory. *Journal of European Studies 35*(1),11–28.

Ross, K. (2002). *May '68 and its Afterlives.* University of Chicago Press.

Seidman, M. (2004). *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968.* Berghahn Books.

Touraine, A. (1971). *The May Movement: Revolt and Reform.* Random House.

Vigna, X. (2011). Beyond Tradition: The Strikes of May–June 1968. In J. Jackson, A.-L. Milne, & J. S. Williams (Eds.), *May 68: Rethinking France's Last Revolution* (pp. 47–57). Palgrave Macmillan.

Walker, G. (Ed.) (2020). *The Red Years: Theory, Politics and Aesthetics in the Japanese '68.* Verso.

About the Author

Antigoni Memou is senior lecturer in Visual Theories at the School of Arts and Digital Industries at the University of East London, UK. She is the author of *Photography and Social Movements: From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement Against Globalisation (2001)* (Manchester University Press, 2013) and co-author of *Resist! The 1960s Protests, Photography and Visual Legacy* (Lannoo, 2018). (a.memou@uel.ac.uk)

5 Scarcity in Visual Memory: Creating a Mural of Sylvia Pankhurst

Clara Vlessing

Abstract

This chapter looks at the "premediation" (Erll & Rigney, 2009) of a mural of the early 20th-century activist Sylvia Pankhurst and considers a number of photographs that it remediates, asking the question: How did these images end up here? The chapter follows the images in relation to broader characteristics of Pankhurst's remembrance, exploring the long and often complicated pathways they take to become carriers of cultural memory. This exploration reveals the many different forms of political or aesthetic attachment behind the mural, which themselves are shaped by institutional, financial, or technological constraints and possibilities, and demonstrates that even in a culture of "post-scarcity" (Hoskins, 2018) and supposed imagistic abundance the visual memory of activism is still governed by scarcity.

Keywords: visual memory, activism, Sylvia Pankhurst, mural, scarcity principle, premediation

On the brick wall of the Lord Morpeth pub in Bow, East London, facing an empty grassy square and visible from a distance, is a large black-and-white mural with a woman's face at the centre. Her hand rests elegantly beneath her chin as she looks out across the green with a wistful, slightly crooked gaze and a faint smile. Her face is bordered by smaller images of figures in long dresses and big hats set against a background of grey clouds and ink spills; in one, a pair carry a banner that reads "Votes for Women"; in another, a woman leans over a balcony as if to address a crowd below. Underneath the placard, which displays the name of the Lord Morpeth pub, is the word "Sylvia" written in a cursive font. This mural remembers the lifelong activist

and campaigner Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960), who lived in Bow for 10 years from 1914 to 1924.

Testimony to this period, the mural (Figure 5.1) reproduces several photographs of Pankhurst in the form of a painted collage. These photographs ground Pankhurst's memory in a particular time and place: the East End of London in the early 20th century. And the mural contributes a sense of history specific to the local area which, for the most part, is quiet, residential, far from the crowds and tourists of the city centre. However, the photographs that make up the mural also circulate prolifically on the internet, where the specificities of their historic or geographic roots are not easily traceable. In light of recent debates that consider interactions between digital and the non-digital media in the cultural memory of activism (Daphi & Zamponi, 2019; Merrill et al., 2020), this chapter asks the question: How did these images end up in the mural? Through what mechanisms, contingencies, and opportunities does this visual memory work operate? The Sylvia Pankhurst mural in Bow demonstrates the long and often complicated pathways that photographs take to become carriers of cultural memory as they are repeated and remediated in ways which resonate with different narratives.

Following a delineation of key concepts, this chapter considers the mural from three angles. First, I examine the images that make it up: their material composition, their circulation, and their availability. I go on to situate the mural's premediation more widely in relation to Pankhurst's life and the cultural memory of her time in the East End. The last part of this chapter studies later mediations of the mural to explore how its digital and non-digital premediation has conditioned its place in Pankhurst's remembrance. Teasing out the different factors that co-create this site of remembrance, from institutional limitations to aesthetic attachments, demonstrates the centrally constitutive role of scarcity in visual memory work and, running counter to claims of visual abundance in the digital age, establishes that scarcity operates across both non-digital and digital media.

Scarcity in the Premediation of Visual Memory

Attending to the mural's *premediation* entails a study of "the ancestors to a particular act of mediation," the "cognitive schemata and patterns of representation that are available in a given media culture …, and which already preform the events that we later remember through mediation" (Erll & Rigney, 2009, p. 8). Such premediation may be conscious and

Figure 5.1: Sylvia Pankhurst Mural. London, United Kingdom, December 2021. Photo: Clara Vlessing.

unconscious, intended and unintended: as Ariella Azoulay (2015) writes, "[t]he imagination is always shot through with splinters of images that have their source in the outside world and in other people" (p. 17). The obscurity of these pathways in the finished product—which does not include citations, references, or natural directions to turn to for further information—seems particular to *visual* memory work, where the immediacy of visual representation often occludes the premediatory processes that make it up.

Understanding the premediation of this likeness reveals the distributed agency that prevents any straightforward correlation between creative intent and its eventual realization. It uncovers many different forms of political or aesthetic attachment, which themselves are shaped by institutional, financial, or technological constraints and possibilities and availabilities. So, while they are various and numerous, the pathways through which this site of memory is constructed are not infinite. Instead, the mural's premediation is determined by, in Michel Foucault's terms, the principle of "scarcity" [*rareté*] (1969). Responding to a tendency to see memory as once fully formed and in danger of being lost—which she terms the "'original plenitude and subsequent loss' model" (2005, p. 12)—Ann Rigney has shown how the principle of scarcity affects the workings of cultural memory, determining the process of remembrance and the transfer of memories, and providing limitations in terms of "the selectivity of recall, the convergence of memories, the recursivity in remembrance, the recycling of models of remembrance and memory transfers" (p. 16). Running counter to any idea of memory as inexhaustible or ever-increasing, Rigney demonstrates that

memory circulates through the mediation of common frameworks, familiar models and recurring patterns.

Further developing the role of scarcity in the formation of memory, Andrew Hoskins has coined the description of the digital age as "post-scarcity" (2011a; 2011b; 2018), characterized by the agitation between, on the one hand, the huge scale of accessible digital material and, on the other, the impossibility of consuming it. The "mass availability" of digital media, he argues, has further contributed to an idea of memory wherein it can be captured, contained, and evoked (Hoskins, 2018, p. 271). Post-scarcity culture offers new modes of engagement with media which give rise to "digitally fostered values" (Hoskins, 2018, p. 13) such as open access and instant search results. The vast availability of digital media has ushered in a new imaginary which "amazes in the very recognition of the scale of this post-scarcity culture" (Hoskins, 2018, p. 15). The past—liberated from its spatial archives—appears as a vast load or responsibility with little internal logic or coherence. In considering Pankhurst's mural, as shaped both by tangible carriers of memory that have preceded it and the affordances of specific parts of the internet, this chapter shows that the digital and non-digital cannot be neatly separated. It demonstrates that the scarcity principle remains a determining factor in shaping remembrance in the digital age, functioning across both digital and non-digital media.

The Photographs: Materiality and Availability

Painted in 2018, the mural is an example of a reappraisal of Pankhurst's memory that is linked to the widespread celebrations of the centenary of the 1918 Representation of the People Act, which gave some women the right to vote. It is the work of aerosol artist Jerome Davenport, also known as Ketones6000. In a semi-structured interview that I undertook as part of a broader enquiry into Sylvia Pankhurst's afterlives, Davenport explained that the photographs incorporated into the mural were chosen mainly by searching the internet.[1] Indeed, the images remain relatively easy to locate online: an incognito Google Image search of "Sylvia Pankhurst" (January 2021) returned three out of four among the first 30 images that came up.

The mural reproduces four photographs, three of Pankhurst and one without her, all of which appear to be from roughly the period of her life she

---

1   Discussed in interview 22 September 2020. Unless otherwise stated, information about the mural's origins draws from this same conversation.

spent in Bow: a full-frontal portrait in the centre of the mural; Pankhurst speaking on a balcony, with placards behind her, on the viewer's top right (Figure 5.2); Pankhurst, again talking to an audience, wearing a hat and in front of a lamppost, bottom left (Figure 5.3); and Christabel Pankhurst with fellow suffragette Annie Kenney holding a sign in the top left corner. The first of these photographs adheres to the recognisable visual logic of portraiture: the head and shoulders of a single sitter who faces the camera head on, aware of its presence, with their features and body arranged into a self-conscious pose against a nondescript background. Pankhurst's elbow is propped on a table, she wears a dark jacket with glinting buttons and a white shirt. Both familiar in its setup and unfamiliar in the open vulnerability with which Pankhurst faces the camera, the slight masculinity of her outfit, her faintly open-mouthed half smile, the photograph exemplifies the theory of "singularity," as expressed in the introduction to this volume. Remediated in the mural, the bottom half and background of the photograph do not appear, so that Pankhurst becomes a floating head propped on a hand. With a glimpse of colour in what is otherwise a black and white image, the portrait dominates Davenport's mural. In this central position it signals the painting's relation to a particular subject; its composition and detail show that it is not simply an anonymous face but a definite historical referent. The figures that surround it, based on the other three photographs, are more abstracted, less personal. Although they remediate existing photographs of Pankhurst and her sister, they stand, in this version, as vague gestures to Edwardian social movement culture.

Institutional as well as aesthetic factors have shaped the circulation of this photographic portrait. A reverse Google Image search showed that it is consistently used to accompany recent news articles relating to Sylvia Pankhurst. It also adorns the front cover of the most recent biography on her, Rachel Holmes's *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel* (2020). However, the portrait does not appear anywhere in previous biographies of Pankhurst, suggesting its limited circulation pre-internet.[2] In its online appearances, there is no information about where, when, and by whom the photograph was taken. Holmes's biography credits Getty Images, where the image can be purchased for between £150 and £375. Getty Images' website signals its origins in the Hulton Archive of photojournalism, which comprises some 15 million images from the major British newspaper and press archives of

2   The photograph of Pankhurst on the balcony appears in *Sylvia Pankhurst: Artist and Crusader* (Pankhurst, 1979, p. 161) labelled with the year 1912, in *Sylvia Pankhurst: A Crusading Life* (Harrison, 2003, p. 184) and on the cover of Winslow's book.

Figure 5.2: Sylvia Pankhurst speaking from balcony, the Sylvia Pankhurst mural. London, United Kingdom, December 2021. Photo: Clara Vlessing.

Figure 5.3: Sylvia Pankhurst demonstrating, the Sylvia Pankhurst mural. London, United Kingdom, December 2021. Photo: Clara Vlessing.

the 19th and 20th century and was bought by Getty in 1996. The Hulton Archive was digitized in the early 2000s "to serve traditional editorial sectors, nostalgic marketing and advertising campaigns, and online art consumers" (Frosh, 2003, p. 200). Pankhurst's portrait has therefore become incorporated into the global trade of photographic images used in news and advertising. And, as Frosh (2003) points out, the transnational conglomerates—such as Getty Images—which dominate the stock photography industry benefit from the "structural and ideological advantage" (p. 183) of their invisibility in the circulation of images for profit.

With its enormous and far-reaching collection, Getty Images collapses the boundaries and distinctions between different photographic genres, so that photojournalism and marketing images are repackaged under the unifying signifier "content" (Frosh, 2003, p. 207). The extent to which markers of production are indeterminate, or are combined into indicators of circulation and consumption, obscures the contexts in which the images are produced. Thus, although Getty Images dates the portrait to 1918 (a year that Pankhurst did indeed spend predominantly in Bow), the agents and mechanisms behind its

creation are not apparent, and information about how it reached the internet is lacking.[3] The same can be said of the other Pankhurst portraits remediated in the mural: Pankhurst on the balcony is also from the Hulton collection, while the provenance of the image of her in a hat is unclear. The routes that these images have taken from Pankhurst's life to her cultural memory are far from transparent; instead they appear unanchored and commercialized. In their digital form, these images can be linked to Pankhurst's name and used to anchor her remembrance, as on the cover of Holmes's biography, but they are also transitory, moving between contexts with ease and rapidity. They stand as potential sites of "context collapse" (Davis & Jurgenson, 2014; Marwick & boyd, 2011; Merrill, 2020), whereby the digitization of images has anaesthetized their historical specificity.

The photographs that make up the mural are unusual in their lack of connection to their origins. Most photographs of Pankhurst sit in the International Institute for Social History (IISG) in Amsterdam, which holds her sizeable personal collection, all of which are catalogued alongside information about the year in which, and sometimes place where, they were taken. The bulk of these images are part of the Sylvia Pankhurst Papers which were given to the IISG by her son Richard Pankhurst in 1961. These include photographs that appear to be from the same events as those used in the mural, including portraits that seem to be from the same sitting. However, the photographs in the IISG can only be reproduced with the institution's consent and so are not easily circulated online. In comparison to the abundant but potentially inaccessible material available in the IISG archive, Getty offers both a curated selection of high-quality digital images and a relatively straightforward way of clearing any copyright concerns.

As a result, a relatively scarce number of images become widely circulated to a broad audience. The varieties of Pankhurst's representation become increasingly limited as the same images are selected for their familiarity, so that the prevalence of, for instance, the central portrait fixes Pankhurst's remembrance on a version of her in which she is composed, young and solitary. In this way, the stock image economy could be seen to advance the consolidation of Pankhurst's afterlives, in this case anchoring her cultural memory to the Bow years.

---

3   A scan of the back of the original image revealed that the portrait was taken by Elliott and Fry, a London photography studio founded in 1863. The studio's premises was bombed during the Second World War but many of their negatives are held by the National Portrait Gallery. Many thanks to Melanie Llewellyn, who works as a curator at Getty Images, for her help in obtaining this information.

Pankhurst's Life and Remembrance in the East End

To understand the ways in which the mural offers a remembrance of Pankhurst, and the role of scarcity in affecting its resonance, the account that follows attempts to provide a sense of moments in Pankhurst's life that are pertinent to the makeup of her cultural "afterlives" (Rigney, 2012). Any such account is bound to emphasize particular moments or themes to the exclusion of others, mediating Pankhurst's experiences into a neat sequence that is incapable of fully capturing the complexities and nuances of a human life. This version draws from Pankhurst's own writings, the IISG archive, and biographies by Davis (1999), Harrison (2003), Connelly (2013), and Holmes (2020).

Pankhurst was born on 5 May 1882 in Old Trafford, Manchester, to Dr Richard Marsden Pankhurst (1834–1898) and Emmeline Pankhurst (née Goulden) (1858–1928). In 1903 Emmeline Pankhurst set up the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), later known as the "suffragettes." Sylvia Pankhurst was a key part of this movement from the outset. She was the WSPU's first honorary secretary, designed its logo, and, in 1911, wrote *The Suffragette*, the earliest history of the movement. However, in the years leading up to the First World War, she was increasingly at odds with her mother and her sister Christabel (1880–1958), so much so that they dismissed her from the WSPU in 1914, at which point she moved to Bow. Accounts of Pankhurst's life provide different motivations and timelines for her split from the WSPU. These range from the more personal, such as jealousy at Christabel's success or an inherent dislike of authority, to the politico-ideological. Sylvia opposed the movement's use of violence, the organization's authoritarian structure, and its gradual movement to the political right, particularly in its attitude towards class: she was a determined socialist and fought against Christabel and Emmeline's notions that all women's interests were best represented by bourgeois women.

In Bow, after some contestation with the WSPU about whether she could use the word "suffragette," Pankhurst set up the East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS). During the years of the First World War (which, in contrast to the WSPU official line, she did not support), she was a consistent campaigner for women's and workers' rights. As well as agitating for an end to the war, the ELFS campaigned for the welfare of working mothers and their children. Much of this campaigning was effected through Pankhurst's newspaper, first named the *Woman's Dreadnought* and later the *Workers' Dreadnought*. The ELFS was widely active in the local area, organizing a People's Army and setting up a toy factory in an effort to provide well-paid

work for local women. Other projects included a crèche (called "The Mother's Arms") and a cost price restaurant, which aimed to provide cheap and nutritious food to all.

Still living in Bow, Pankhurst became a great supporter of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and later travelled around Continental Europe meeting left-wing leaders, including a visit to Moscow in 1920—at some personal risk—to meet with Lenin. Although she was a founding member of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) she was expelled from it soon after for her refusal to tow the party line in her paper. In 1924, she left the East End and moved to Woodford Green in Essex with her partner Silvio Corio, an Italian anarchist. Here she continued writing on a range of campaigns, including in opposition to Mussolini and fascism in Italy. In later life, Pankhurst's involvement in anti-fascism and anti-imperialism led her to become involved in campaigns for Ethiopian independence, first from Italian forces and later from British intervention. She spent the last years of her life in Addis Ababa. On her death, she was given a state funeral and pronounced and "honorary Ethiopian" by Emperor Haile Selassie.

Despite her long and remarkable life, Pankhurst's afterlives have mostly convened around her split from the WSPU and her time in the East End. For many who have subsequently taken an interest in her life, Sylvia Pankhurst's schism with her mother and sister heralds her independence as an activist and establishes her credentials as a socialist. Her distinctiveness from Emmeline and Christabel has subsequently become a fundamental element of her remembrance. Cultural representations of this period of Pankhurst's life range from early academic accounts to more recent popular explorations. By way of example, Barbara Winslow's *Sylvia Pankhurst: Sexual Politics and Political Activism* (1996) argues that, in diverging from the "narrower view of feminism" (Winslow, 1996, p. x) set out by her mother, sister, and the WSPU, Pankhurst's activism reveals wider questions about the articulation of gender and class in social movements. Winslow contends that accounts of Pankhurst's years in Bow reveal her remarkable ability to operate on widely different scales, from the local and community-based, to high-level issues of foreign policy. In *SYLVIA*, a 2018 hip-hop musical based on Pankhurst's life, the focus is on her split with the WSPU as proof of Pankhurst's struggle for a wider social cause than that pursued by most in her immediate circle. Those involved in the production were keen to assert these differences between Sylvia and the other Pankhursts as proof that their protagonist was "outside" or even "ahead of" her time (Crockett, 2018).

As these examples suggest, central tenets of the cultural memory of the period when Pankhurst lived in the East End have become a) her

independence from her mother and sister, b) the grassroots or practical nature of her activism, and c) her awareness of the combined oppressions of class and gender. Based on these elements, Sylvia Pankhurst's memory has become embedded in the trajectory of the left-wing of the women's movement in the United Kingdom as, for instance, Marxist feminist historians in the late 20th century sought out historical precedents for their ideas. In particular, her memory has formed part of a reparative feminist desire to counter patriarchal accounts of history by inserting exemplary socialist women into the record.

The Mural: Contingent Agencies

Remediating the photographs in the form of the mural consolidates their link to Pankhurst's remembrance. As a form of visual expression, the mural is not institutionally backed but is instead created bottom-up, reliant on relatively simple materials and has a long history as a form of socialist art.[4] "[A mural is] a reaction against the commodification of art by its markets and institutions," writes Malcolm Miles, "… and reflects a critical realism derived from Marxism, feminism and ecology which implies that artists act for and with others in reclaiming responsibility for their futures" (1997, p. 4). Rendered by hand, in paint, on a brick wall, the photographs are repositioned outside of the commercialized structures of stock image exchange. This act appears to circumvent questions of ownership and copyright. Once the photographs are remediated in the form of the mural they are no longer easily replicated; moving from a position of banality to one of singularity. The photographs therefore appear to be attached to a radical tradition in which social movement actors are remembered by contemporary figures fighting for the same causes.

However, like the photographs, the mural acquires new and different meanings depending on its relationships and surroundings. Its premediation demonstrates the contingent agencies through which visual sites of memory come to be. For instance, those involved in preserving Pankhurst's memory have been consistently motivated and mobilized by political concerns, with their attachments to Pankhurst as a historical character formed on a basis of

---

4   Although large painted murals do have a long-standing place in socialist commemoration around the world—see, for instance, the work of Diego Riviera—it is worth noting that compositionally Pankhurst's mural is not from the same tradition. Rather than, for instance, depicting nameless crowds or masses it focuses entirely on the commemoration of an individual.

ideological allegiance. By contrast, Davenport's attachments can be better described as aesthetic. He is an unexpected addition to the many actors who have been involved in preserving Pankhurst's memory. Originally from Western Australia, Davenport noted that he first heard about Sylvia Pankhurst when living in London and that he was not "particularly politically minded" but had become interested in her because she "helped a lot of people and the way in which she gave back so much." He had at this stage already painted several large murals in the area (including, for instance, one of the naturalist broadcaster David Attenborough) none of which had any thematic link to Pankhurst and her activism. Indeed, Davenport's original motivation was based on the appeal of the material rather than anything ideological: he approached the Lord Morpeth's pub owner because it was "such an amazing wall." Pankhurst, as a subject to fill this wall, was far from his thoughts.

The decision to choose Pankhurst as the mural's focus therefore did not come from its artist but from the pub's owner who, to quote Davenport, "wanted someone who was an icon." The paths by which the design of the mural reached its eventual form follow a compromised, far from straightforward, link between Pankhurst's activism in the East End and its remembrance in the form of the mural. Following our interview, Davenport sent me two of the mock-ups that he had considered to form the basis of the mural. In these, much of the composition and texture of the eventual mural are already there but the choice of photographs which constitute the collage is different. These versions include representations and juxtapositions that have an odd or uncomfortable relationship with the events of Pankhurst's life and, perhaps more pertinently, those that dominate her remembrance. One places her portrait—a later one than appears on the finished product—alongside George Lansbury, a politician and social reformer who went on to lead the Labour Party, despite the fact that by 1914 Pankhurst's politics were anti-parliamentary and she was vocal critic of that party. In the other mock-up, the central image of Sylvia Pankhurst is placed alongside an equally sized portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst. While Sylvia stares off into the distance pensively, Emmeline faces forwards more challengingly, an eyebrow raised. Placing Sylvia alongside Emmeline in this way runs altogether counter to the events surrounding her rejection of and dismissal from the WSPU, which are a key touchstone in her remembrance. The un-realized mural shifts Pankhurst's memory away from known and familiar resonances and towards an unstable and compromised representation.

To understand the extent to which this representation would have been compromised, we need to recognize that, from January 1914 onwards, Sylvia's

break with the WSPU and with her family was complete. With the exception of some vaguely reconciliatory letters exchanged with Christabel in later life, she had little more to do with them. When Sylvia gave birth to her son Richard in 1927, Emmeline refused to see her or the baby, on the grounds that he had been born "out of wedlock." When Emmeline died two years later, Sylvia was excluded from commemorations of her life. A mural in which images of Sylvia and Emmeline fade into one another is altogether at odds with the events of her life and with the particular strands of left-wing and anti-establishment feminism—quite distinct from her mother's more conservative feminism—for which Sylvia is remembered. This divergence and disassociation from the prevailing narrative of Pankhurst's remembrance has its roots in the circulation of Pankhurst's images online. As Davenport explained, the early process for constructing the mural relied on a Google search to provide relevant photographs. As a search for Sylvia Pankhurst inevitably also produces images of Emmeline Pankhurst (who, for the most part, is a more well-known figure, particularly in the United Kingdom), it seems highly likely that the mock-up in which they are both featured so inappropriately is based on such a process.

The Mural: Mnemonic Meaning

However, ultimately Davenport's mural succeeds in connecting photographs obtained on the internet to other, more familiar, mediations of Pankhurst's cultural memory in a way that develops that memory and may go on to inspire future activism. Further exploration reveals that the development of the mural, as well as its instigation, grew out of a collaborative exchange of information that took place in person rather than online. Davenport suggested that the pub's owner and many others in and around Bow felt a connection to Pankhurst's activism: "[E]veryone in that area has something to say about it, all the families that were directly involved, so much pride in that kind of cockney East London heritage." Davenport's link between Pankhurst and "cockney heritage" might, from up close, appear as a creative reimagining of the activist's identity, but the comment serves to demonstrate his burgeoning sense of the connection between Pankhurst's remembrance and a distinct locale. Davenport also described how the inside walls of the Lord Morpeth were decorated with photographs of suffragettes. These included one of the ELFS lined up outside the pub, which they used as a meeting space for many years. The role of these photographs in affirming Pankhurst and the ELFS's embodied connection to the Lord Morpeth, shows

how memory forms "pluri-media networks" (Erll, 2011, p. 138). Pankhurst's remembrance is distributed across photographic evidence, local attachments and many other means or connections, which themselves are circulated verbally and in various mediated forms.

In creating the mural, Davenport was further aided by a local historian, who took him on a tour of sites connected with Sylvia Pankhurst's history. It was this historian who warned him against putting Sylvia Pankhurst and Emmeline Pankhurst on the same mural: showing how, in this case, the remediation of digital images was limited by contextual historical and political factors. The limited availability of narratives that might give the mural meaning is a function of the recycling and convergence inherent to Rigney's (2005) explanation of the scarcity principle in mnemonic terms. Davenport emerged with a sense of Pankhurst's memory in the local area, observing that she was not remembered for her Communism but for her work on "women's rights" and the grassroots nature of her activism: "giving back" and "standing up against authority." Davenport's sense of Pankhurst's symbolic significance in the East End had an impact on his choice of photographs for the mural: "I would go through the images and think: What is striking? What is powerful? … In some she looks too soft, you want to get across the power that she had in those speeches and her ferocity." The material and affective affordances of historic photographs explicitly fed into its eventual shape and form.

When it was unveiled, the mural was described by the pub's manager as a "labour of love" ("Sylvia Pankhurst Mural Commemoration on Lord Morpeth," 2018). In its final public form, it remembers a version of Pankhurst's activism that is deeply rooted in its specific geographic location and community. Adding to the pluri-medial network that forms Pankhurst's cultural memory, the mural has since contributed to the creation of further carriers of memory which take embodied, as well as visual and textual, forms. Following the mural's completion, the street art blog inspiringcity.com, which had previously had a post on Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Suffragettes ("Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Suffragettes," 2015), produced a Sylvia Pankhurst walking tour of the East End ("Sylvia Pankhurst Suffragette Walking Tour in East London," 2019). This tour, which is freely available online, moves from the Bow Police Station, past the buildings where the *Dreadnought* was published and sold, takes in houses in which Pankhurst recovered from hunger strike, and recognizes the site of the Mother's Arms and the toy factory. It also provides a wider genealogy for Pankhurst's activism, including the sites of social movement events such as the Bryant and May matchstick factory where the 1888 Match Woman Strike,

Figure 5.4: Overview of the Sylvia Pankhurst mural. London, United Kingdom, December 2021.
Photo: Clara Vlessing.

described in the tour as "one of the forerunners of the modern trade union movement," took place. Pankhurst's activism is therefore placed within a distinctly local memoryscape. The mural both represents and becomes part of a network of information about the historical importance of a particular geographic location, with a wider allegiance to working-class movements, and an individual's memory within it.

The mural has also taken a place within the wider network that makes up Pankhurst's cultural memory, beyond her time in the East End. In this vein, an image of the mural is replicated within Holmes's biography, which makes a strong case for Pankhurst's importance as an ancestor of contemporary activists, comparing her, for example, to Greta Thunberg and Malala Yousafzai. On Holmes's cover, the very portrait that forms the central image in Davenport's mural is once again remediated. It has moved through archives from analogue photograph to digitized photograph, to painted mural and now to (digital) photograph of mural within material book, gaining new associations and circulating Pankhurst's memory to new audiences with each new iteration. In another example of its place within wider networks, the mural has been visited by members of the Sylvia Pankhurst Memorial Committee, who are engaged in a long campaign for the erection of a statue of Pankhurst in central London, suggesting a role for it in generating support for new sites to Pankhurst's memory. Finally, canvassing during the 2019 General Election, a local Twitter user came across Pankhurst's mural and noted how it had "in a moment of political personal crisis … inspired me to continue door-knocking" (James, 2020). This Tweet

suggests Pankhurst's mural can inspire political activity that goes beyond the injunction to consider activist pasts and carry out reparative memory work. It suggests that the mural's presence, serving as a visual reminder of the reach and legacy of Pankhurst's politics, can prompt corresponding movements in the moment. As such, the mural feeds into an ideological continuum from Pankhurst's activism, through her remembrance and into the present day.

Conclusion

The mural's premediation demonstrates the impossibility of overlooking digital processes in visual memory work or of separating them from non-digital mediation. Its location in London's East End links photographs of Pankhurst directly with events in her life and contributes to the development of a strand of her cultural memory. This chapter has considered the wide-ranging factors that make up an instance of visual memory work. It has emphasized the scattered agencies that have gone into determining the mural. Identifying and following these pathways demonstrates that, even in a culture of post-scarcity and supposed imagistic abundance, the visual memory of activism is still governed by scarcity. The mural's final state is shaped by the selectivity, convergence, recursivity, recycling, and the transfers that Rigney (2005) sees as aspects of mnemonic scarcity, working across the digital and non-digital and ranging from the limited availability of reproducible images online to political concerns, conditioned by previous remembrances, which prevented it from taking certain forms.

Pankhurst's activism in the East End was innovative, collaborative, and came out of an understanding of the needs of the community. Like that activism, the mural came about through a collaborative and locally based initiative. In this respect, it may be seen as a "counter-monument" (Young, 1992) to Pankhurst's memory: neither state-sponsored nor based on the workings of the heritage industry but collaboratively imagined. And, refuting the "self-defeating premise of the traditional monument" (Young, 1992, p. 295), any hopes of longevity may be curtailed by the London weather, the potential of the Lord Morpeth's closure, or the possibility that it is graffitied out of recognition. While it is still there, however, the mural's presence ensures a memory of Pankhurst's practical activism in Bow and offers inspiration for acts of practical activism in the present and the future.

Bibliography

Azoulay, A. (2015). *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. Verso.

Connelly, K. (2013). *Sylvia Pankhurst: Suffragette, Socialist and Scourge of Empire*. Pluto Press.

Crockett, M. (2018, September 3). *Meet the Woman behind This Autumn's Biggest Feminist Musical*. Stylist. https://www.stylist.co.uk/visible-women/kate-prince-sylvia-old-vic-zoonation-interview-pankhurst-suffragettes-theatre/225172

Daphi, P., & Zamponi, L. (2019). Exploring the Movement–Memory Nexus: Insights and Ways Forward. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *24*(4), 399–417. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-24-4-399

Davis, M. (1999). *Sylvia Pankhurst: A Life in Radical Politics*. Pluto Press.

Davis, J. L., & Jurgenson, N. (2014). Context Collapse: Theorizing Context Collusions and Collisions. *Information, Communication & Society*, *17*(4), 476–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.888458

Erll, A. (2011). *Memory in Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Erll, A., & Rigney, A. (Eds.) (2009). *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. De Gruyter.

Foucault, M. (1969) *L'Archéologie du savoir*. Gallimard.

Frosh, P. (2003). Digital Technology and Stock Photography: And God Created Photoshop. In L. Gross (Ed.), *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (pp. 183–216). University of Minnesota Press.

Harrison, S. (2003). *Sylvia Pankhurst: A Crusading Life, 1882–1960*. Aurum Press.

Holmes, R. (2020). *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel*. Bloomsbury.

Hoskins, A. (2011a). 7/7 and Connective Memory: Interactional Trajectories of Remembering in Post-Scarcity Culture. *Memory Studies*, *4*(3), 269–280. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698011402570

Hoskins, A. (2011b). Media, Memory, Metaphor: Remembering and the Connective Turn. *Parallax*, *17*(4), 19–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2011.605573

Hoskins, A. (Ed.) (2018). *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*. Taylor & Francis.

James, E. [@emmavjames]. (2020, March 3). *Felt like one of the luckiest people in the world today meeting @HelenPankhurst. I shared how, in a moment of....* Twitter. https://twitter.com/emmavjames/status/1234940656189132801

Marwick, A. E., & boyd, danah. (2011). I Tweet Honestly, I Tweet Passionately: Twitter Users, Context Collapse, and the Imagined Audience. *New Media & Society*, *13*(1), 114–133. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810365313

Merrill, S., Keightley, E., & Daphi, P. (Eds.) (2020). *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Merrill, S. (2020). Following the Woman with the Handbag: Mnemonic Context Collapse and the Anti-Fascist Activist Appropriation of an Iconic Historical Photograph. In S. Merrill et al. (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 111–139). Palgrave Macmillan.

Miles, M. (1997). *Art, Space and the City*. Taylor & Francis.

Pankhurst, R. (1979). *Sylvia Pankhurst: Artist and Crusader: An Intimate Portrait*. Paddington Press.

Rigney, A. (2005). Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory. *Journal of European Studies*, *35*(1), 011–028. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244105051158

Rigney, A. (2012). *The Afterlives of Walter Scott: Memory on the Move*. Oxford University Press.

Sylvia Pankhurst and the East London Suffragettes. (2015, November 25). Inspiring City. https://inspiringcity.com/2015/11/25/sylvia-pankhurst-and-the-east-end-suffragettes-historic-locations-and-where-to-find-them/

Sylvia Pankhurst Mural Commemoration on Lord Morpeth. (2018, March 13). Roman Road LDN. https://romanroadlondon.com/sylvia-pankhurst-lord-morpeth-mural/

Sylvia Pankhurst Suffragette Walking Tour in East London. (2019, June 30). Inspiring City. https://inspiringcity.com/2019/06/30/sylvia-pankhurst-suffragette-walking-tour-in-east-london/

Winslow, B. (1996). *Sylvia Pankhurst: Sexual Politics and Political Activism*. University College London Press.

Young, J. E. (1992). The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today. *Critical Inquiry*, *18*(2), 267–296.

About the Author

Clara Vlessing is a PhD candidate in Comparative Literature at Utrecht University. Her PhD project examines the cultural afterlives of women activists involved in social movements in the period 1871 to 1945. Focussing on Louise Michel (1830–1905), Emma Goldman (1869–1940), and Sylvia Pankhurst (1882–1960), it serves as a case study within the *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* (ReAct) project. (c.l.vlessing@uu.nl)

6 Memory, Iconicity, and Virality in Action: Exploring Protest Photos Online

Samuel Merrill

Abstract

Using a photo from 1985 of a woman swinging her handbag at a neo-Nazi in Sweden as an entry point, this chapter explores the formation of collective memory through iconicity and virality with respect to digital protest imagery. It studies the visual assemblages and constellations that have formed online around this photo and then reflects on their mnemonic and activist impact. It shows how the algorithms behind search engines like Google Images place the photo in visual assemblages characterized by colliding and colluding mnemonic contexts. It also reveals how the vulnerability and violence inferred by the photo are variously emphasized in the visual constellations of different protest-related image-compilation webpages, influencing the sorts of collective action the image promotes.

Keywords: viral photos, iconic photos, collective memory, assemblages, constellations, Google

Introduction

On an overcast April day in 1985 photojournalist Hans Runesson took a photo that had a lasting impact on the visual representation and collective memory of protest in Sweden and, in relation to anti-fascist and feminist activism, arguably across the world. The photo, taken in the Swedish town of Växjo, shows a woman swinging her handbag towards the head of a neo-Nazi demonstrator. Known as *The Woman with the Handbag*, it initially spread internationally via the printed press and was soon considered iconic in Sweden. Then, around 30 years later, with the emergence of a proposal to install a statue inspired by it in the town's main square and after the identity

of the woman had been publicly revealed as Danuta Danielsson, the photo started to appear more widely online. Its increased digital spread became most evident in 2016 when it twice 'went viral.' The first time involved its comparison with a new Swedish protest photo taken by David Lagerlöf of Tess Asplund in May 2016 as she peacefully defied a rally of around 300 neo-Nazi activists. The second involved its memeification in the USA after Donald Trump's presidential election in November 2016.[1]

Inspired by these events, this chapter uses the photo to explore the formation of collective memory through iconicity and virality within the context of digital protest imagery. Empirically, it considers how some of the online visual assemblages and constellations surrounding *The Woman with the Handbag* have been formed through the combined forces of human and non-human actors, and, in turn, their mnemonic and activist impact. Such an analysis of the visual company that the photo keeps—including other older photos lauded as iconic and more recent protest photos known for their virality—acknowledges that images are rarely viewed online in isolation and is operationalized here through the examination of different sets of images algorithmically returned by specific search engine queries as well as those from user-curated image-compilation webpages.

The chapter first distinguishes between iconic and viral photos and their role in collective memory formation by emphasizing their differing temporalities of public exposure and attention. The methods and material that underpin the chapter are then discussed. Thereafter, the chapter's analysis shows how search engines like Google Images place the photo in visual assemblages characterized by the collision and collusion of different mnemonic contexts. It also reveals how the vulnerability and violence inferred by *The Woman with the Handbag* are variously emphasized in the visual constellations of different protest-related image-compilation webpages, influencing the sorts of collective action it promotes. The chapter concludes by discussing the implications of its analysis for the continued study of memories of protest in digital settings.

Iconic and Viral Photos: Mnemonic Temporalities, Assemblages, and Constellations

Most definitions of *iconic photos* stress their capacity to: summarize historical events; invite widespread reproduction; generate emotional responses;

---

1   For a detailed account of the photo's history and these events, see Merrill (2020).

shape collective memory; and support political action (see Boudana et al., 2017; Dahmen et al., 2018; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007), with the latter conferring their activist potential (see Merrill, 2020). These capacities are suggested also by Cohen, Boudana, and Frosh's (2018) definition:

> (a) as a symbolically dense image that is widely replicated and circulated, attracts public attention, gives rise to public discussion and helps shape the collective mood at the time that it is first circulated, (b) as a widely recognized collective mnemonic device, representing an event, an era or an historical theme for subsequent generations, and (c) as a formal blueprint for other images made in later periods which echo or deliberately imitate it. (pp. 454–455)

While such definitions are commonly applied regardless of whether a photo was taken before or after the so-called 'digital revolution', it is widely acknowledged that the rise of digital media and technology has heavily influenced the formation of iconic photos and also led to them being integrated within the "digital memory work practices" of social movements and activists (Merrill et al., 2020). This is exemplified by the digital sharing practices that can lead to the viral spread of protest photos. Nahon and Hemsley (2013) define *virality* as:

> a social information flow process where many people simultaneously forward a specific information item, over a short period of time, within their social networks, and where the message spreads beyond their own [social] networks to different, often distant networks, resulting in a sharp acceleration in the number of people who are exposed to the message. (p. 16)

Viral photos share many of the characteristics of iconic photos, and indeed have been made sense of as *hypericons*—those photos that are "rapidly consumed online by a networked global audience" (Dahmen et al., 2018, p. 279). Unlike their predecessors, however, hypericons are usually regarded as transient rather than enduring like iconic images (Dahmen et al., 2018; Mortensen, 2017). Iconic and viral photos can thus be distinguished from one another with respect to their differing temporalities of public attention and exposure. Definitions of iconic photos suggest their longevity, but only a few emphasize that iconicity is a capacity that is reaffirmed over longer temporal durations and among various audiences that span broad chronologies and diverse geographies. In this chapter, iconic photos are explicitly conceived

as having commanded recurring public recognition over the longer term, while viral photos are conceived, at least for the time being, as only having been subjected to specific, shorter-term periods of rapid repetition. To emphasize these temporal distinctions does not mean to deny that viral protest photos can achieve iconic status or disregard scenarios where older iconic protest photos can later achieve virality. Older iconic protest photos like *The Woman with the Handbag* can 'go viral' when being (re)discovered by new audiences in light of later, resonant cycles of contention (Merrill, 2020; Smits & Ros, 2020). Instead, distinguishing between iconic and viral photos in this way means to better highlight how iconicity and virality interrelate and the consequences of their interrelation for the formation of collective memories including those related to protest.

The relationship between iconic photos and *collective memory* has come to be regarded as conventionalized (see Hariman & Lucaites, 2003). Cohen et al. (2018) for example, suggest that iconic photos are ostensibly part of *cultural memory* even if they can also contribute to *communicative memory* when circulated digitally. The corresponding relationship between viral photos and collective memory has received less scrutiny even though virality now plays a significant role in memory's new digital ecologies (see Hoskins, 2018). Ibrahim (2018) has, however, highlighted how the "pledging of memory through the viral is … about its reframing through the popular and the ephemeral where new content and exchanges are constantly vying for our attention" (p. 458). In other words, virality binds collective memory to the extenuated economies of attention created by digital media including, most exaggeratedly, those on which corporate social media platforms rely. Through virality, collective memory thus becomes influenced by a rapid turnover of content (including photos) that temporarily reaches the forefront of public attention. While few viral photos will gain the mnemonic longevity customarily attributed to earlier iconic photos the formation of new iconic photos with similar degrees of longevity to their predecessors is not precluded altogether. However, the attention economies of digital media and specifically social media platforms, which activists and social movements amongst other actors often seek to harness, displace the power to determine iconicity and collective memory that previously was mostly vested in the broadcast and printed press. These formerly controlled the public exposure of photos through editorial selection processes and their top-down, few-to-many modes of communication, but have now been supplemented, if not superseded, by the horizontal, many-to-many communication practices of digital media users (Mortensen et al., 2017). While the formation of iconic photos has always been determined by the circulatory speed and reach

enabled by the media ecologies of their time, the rapid pace of sharing made possible by digital and social media is generally considered to have led to new degrees and rates of content, and thus mnemonic substitutability.

If iconic photos can be closely identified with more deeply rooted cultural memory then viral photos might be best associated with the shorter time-frames of communicative memory. Yet, distinguishing between iconic and viral photos based on the time frames that were originally used to separate cultural and communicative memory seems inappropriate given that these sought to account for meta-historical processes (see Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995). While few today would uncritically apply these time frames to contemporary processes of collective memory formation, if the assertion that communicative memory fades after 80–100 years unless it becomes cultural memory were accepted, then many more decades would need to pass before it could be claimed that *The Woman with the Handbag* had definitively entered into cultural memory. While the mnemonic status of this photo already exceeds communicative memory and the transition to cultural memory can occur before the vanishing point of communica-tive memory, it is important to also remain aware of cultural memory's presentism and therefore acknowledge that iconicity too can be bestowed and 're-invested,' but also withdrawn, at any point in time (see Erll & Rigney, 2009). Judgements regarding how and when viral protest photos (that might initially be conceived as contributing primarily to communicative memory) crystallize as iconic protest photos (and come to contribute to a cultural memory of protest) should thus proceed on a case-by-case basis and rely on more indeterminate temporal arbitrations. Temporally specifying when accepted iconic protest photos later gain digital virality is arguably more straightforward—as their rapid and wide digital spread speaks for itself (see Merrill, 2020).

With both these transitions in mind, it is persuasive to think of virality as serving as a route to, or reconfirmation of, iconicity, with repetition leading to or reflecting recognition. This relational approach resonates with calls to study iconic photos more as a genre (Hariman & Lucaites, 2018). In turn, deprioritizing individual iconic photos in light of the current digital "age of image abundance" resonates with the recent reconceptualization of both collective memory and action in a more connective and multitudinous manner (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Mortensen et al., 2017, p. 74; Hoskins, 2018). In the spirit of exploring more multitudinal and connective forms of protest memory, iconic and viral photos are approached in this chapter as contributing to complex mnemonic *assemblages* and *constellations* as they are shared online and appropriated and reproduced in new digital

and digitized contexts. Assemblages are dynamic entities that "keep very heterogeneous elements together" via discursive, material, embodied and affective trajectories (Deleuze, 2007, p. 177; Chidgey, 2018). Conceptually, they are also commonly understood to emphasize the more-than-human composition of our socio-material world in ways that resonate with emerging efforts to understand the mnemonic agency of the algorithms that underpin digital platforms (Müller & Schurr, 2016; Smit, 2020). Constellations are also arrangements of heterogenous elements, but conceptually they reserve mnemonic agency only for human actors by referring to an instable interpretative procedure (Krauß, 2011). Considered both as arrangements and those arrangements made sense of by the human mind, constellations are contingent and each is just "one permutation among an infinite number of possible configurations, conjunctions and correspondences" (Gilloch, 2002, p. 25). Overall, thinking in assemblages and constellations helps highlight how photos come to be variously arranged and interpreted in different interconnecting digital groupings that involve the "collapsing" or merging of mnemonic, historical, and biographical contexts (besides others) via unintentional collisions and intentional collusions (Merrill, 2020; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). Their distinction in terms of the degrees of non-human agency that they acknowledge is also important. Mnemonic assemblages and constellations often link digital and non-digital elements (see Merrill, 2020) but, for pragmatic reasons, this chapter's use of these concepts is limited to the analysis of different sets of images collected from digital settings via the methods detailed below.

Method: Googling "Danuta Danielsson"

The Google Images search engine was used from a computer in Sweden to generate a set of images connected to *The Woman with the Handbag* suitable for further analysis. Results returned by search engines are influenced by national censorship laws and personalization algorithms. While the impact of the latter was reduced by the use of a new internet protocol (IP) address, overall, the aspiration to explore how Google Images shapes everyday users' encounters with visual content meant that no attempt was made to evade the search engine's personalization of results for Swedish IPs or Sweden's relatively modest internet censorship laws (see Trevisan, 2014). Google Images retrieves images from webpages featuring a search query or by analysing an uploaded image and conducting a reverse image search. Here, "Danuta Danielsson"—the name of the woman in the photo—was used

as a search query. This also influenced the returned results because, as mentioned, Danielsson's name only became more widely known from 2015 onwards, meaning that earlier digital reproductions of the photo were missed. However, earlier studies of the photo using Google's reverse image search showed that the increase in its digital appearance was contemporaneous with widening knowledge of Danielsson and that while it may have previously been more associated with its creator's name, Hans Runesson, since 2015 it has been increasingly associated with its main protagonist (see Merrill, 2020). These factors legitimized the search query used in this study, while an interest in the other sorts of images associated with the photo precluded the use of a reverse image search because, although this would reveal where the photo appeared online, it would then require excessive effort to survey or collect the images that it appeared alongside.

Carried out on 17 November 2020, the search returned 377 images from 187 unique web addresses. The algorithm behind Google Images ranked and selected these results according to criteria including the quality of the image, the placement of the image on the website, and the authority of the website that featured the image. The Google Images algorithm also prioritizes more recent digital content, and while it picks up particularly impactful social media content, it is generally inefficient at returning results from social media platforms (Åkerlund, 2020). Overall, these images formed a digital visual assemblage surrounding *The Woman with the Handbag* that was specific to the user's (in this case the author's) history of digital activity at the moment the search was carried out and the location from where it was requested. In this sense, the returned images are only indicative rather than comprehensively representative of the broader digital mnemonic assemblages to which the photo contributes. While the creation of this assemblage of images was highly influenced by the Google Images' algorithm, overall it is more appropriately approached as the output of a hybrid process involving combinations of human, user and non-human, computational agency (see Merrill, forthcoming). The algorithm was after all designed by humans, trained on human digital activity and applied to content created by humans (see Gillespie, 2014).

Each of the returned 377 images was downloaded, had its web address recorded and was given a unique identifier corresponding to its Google rank. A total of 41 images turned out to be collages, adding 51 images to the sample, meaning that 428 images were analysed in total. All were categorized with respect to their primary content and how they connected to *The Woman with the Handbag*. As a human interpretative process in itself, this procedure identified constellations within the assemblage of images returned by Google Images. Four categories emerged inductively after multiple viewings of

the images. These were: the photo and its derivatives; other protest images (excluding the photo); statue images (excluding those based on the photo); other historical photographs (excluding the photo and other protest images); and other images.[2] A second analytical step involved the closer reading of 13 image-compilation webpages that contributed images to the Google Images results. These webpages accounted for 57 of the original 377 search results (circa 15%). Combined, these actively curated webpages included 233 images and were also treated as mnemonic constellations.

Since this volume is published in Amsterdam, the images that are reproduced in collages as part of this chapter's analysis are done so according to the Dutch Copyright Law's 'citation right,' which is similar, yet more restrictive, to the 'fair use' provision common in anglophone legal contexts. While acknowledging that copyright law itself influences processes of iconization and, following the digitalization of society, has increasingly shaped collective memory processes (see Merrill, 2013), in practical terms this means all images have been reproduced in monochrome and different dimensions to their originals in collages that are directly discussed in the text. What were originally colour images are indicated in these collages by black borders.

Predicted by the chapter's empirical starting point—*The Woman with the Handbag*—and in light of this volume's specific focus, the analysis of these different assemblages and constellations leans towards issues and examples that connect most directly to the interfaces between collective memory and social movements, activism, and protest. While the analysis of the Google Images assemblage speaks most directly to questions and issues regarding how protest is publicly remembered that of the image-compilation webpages touches also on the mobilizing capacity of visual memories of protest.

The Algorithmic Assemblage: Google Images' Colliding and Colluding Memories

The visual results returned by Google Images created a mnemonic assemblage characterized by a multitude of meanings and associations and an array of contextual collisions and collusions. Still, 134 of the 428 images did relate directly to *The Woman with the Handbag*, reflecting and reconfirming its iconic status. These included: the photo itself (50); the statue based on the photo designed by Susanna Arwin around its 30th anniversary (50);

---

2   Seven images were categorized as both protest and statue images.

other representations of Danielsson based on the photo including graphics and gestures (33); and a still of Danielsson from a Swedish television film crew's footage of the exact moment the photo was taken from a different angle (1). These images were generally the highest ranked results (including 18 of the top 20 results) indicating the effectiveness of the Google Images search algorithm.

But the algorithm did not always return the sorts of results that users might expect. A total of 143 images did not convey any clear visual relation to *The Woman with the Handbag* or the search query. These 'other' images were returned because they appeared online in the vicinity of the search query and additional image- and text-based markers associated with it. Many Google Images users might consider these to be irrelevant results, but they also illustrate the algorithmic agency of search engines and their ability to influence the visual assemblages that users encounter in unexpected ways. Although somewhat arbitrary, these results have the potential to trigger more random or creative interpretive associations with *The Woman with the Handbag*. The images, few if any of which could be classified as iconic or viral, in other words, exemplified the sorts of non-intentional contextual collisions that can occur within algorithmically generated assemblages of images: *The Woman with the Handbag* next to a photo of doctors in personal protective equipment; an electoral map of the USA; a tattoo of a tree on a woman's back; a logo declaring "save our steel."

The remaining 148 images reflected clearer associations with the search query via three different lines of connection: historical photos (35), statuary (62), and protest (61). These photos indicate how the Google Images algorithm creates assemblages of results that at least partially reflect the deliberate interpretative and curatorial efforts of human internet users. This is borne out by the 13 image-compilation webpages from which some of the search results originated. Four of these webpages positioned the photo within groups of other historical photos; four positioned the photo and the statue it inspired within collections of other statues; and five featured the photo within arrangements of protest images. These three constellations, discernable within the larger assemblage, are each discussed below before the protest image-compilation webpages are analysed in more detail in the next section.

Historical Photos

Most of the images categorized as historical photos (Figure 6.1) were connected through aesthetic similarity rather than common content. All but two

rely on the monochrome aesthetic that is widely perceived to authentically convey "a basic quality of pastness" (Grainge, 1999, p. 385). Their constellation contains iconic photos including a colourized version of Juan Guzmán's 1936 Spanish Civil War photo of Marina Ginestà that has gained mnemonic significance within contemporary anti-fascist and feminist activist circles. It also contains Charles C. Ebbets' 1932 *Lunch atop a Skyscraper* and Richard Drew's *The Falling Man*. Via the Google Images algorithm, these photos, as with those that originate from image-compilation webpages with titles like *25 Interesting Historical Photos*, create striking contextual collisions and a multitude of mnemonic associations. In this case, an image of a group of construction workers enjoying a break during the building of the Rockefeller Centre in 1932 is refracted by that of a lone trader falling to their death shortly before the collapse of the World Trade Centre on 9/11.[3]

Threads of more self-evident mnemonic continuity can also be found in the constellation, with many of the photos relating to Germany's Nazi past. Specifically, multidirectional memories of the Holocaust (see Rothberg, 2006) are discernible that foreground elements of Polish-born Danuta Danielsson's biography, given that it is widely accepted that her mother spent time in a Nazi concentration camp. A number of these photos originate from the so-called 'Solahütte album' that shows SS personnel from Auschwitz enjoying themselves at a holiday resort. The Solahütte photos first gained public attention and exposure when they were donated to the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in 2007, highlighting the temporal complexities inherent within photography's relationship with collective memory. They exemplify how a new genre of 'forgotten' or 'rare historical' photos is gaining prominence online alongside those of iconic and viral photos. *The Woman with the Handbag* is also occasionally framed in this way—that it can be considered iconic by some and forgotten by others highlights again the impact of different audiences on the mnemonic significance of photos more generally.

Statuary

The statuary constellation (Figure 6.2) first and foremost indexes the activist response to the Växjo municipal government's 2015 decision not to install a statue based on *The Woman with the Handbag* for fear that it might promote violence. Across Sweden, people placed handbags on military statues and shared photos of them on social media in order to reveal the hypocrisy

---

3   This juxtaposition may gain greater impact for those who know that Danielsson took her own life in 1988 by jumping from Vaxjo's water tower.

of this decision. Such photos appear regularly in the constellation, often alongside those of the proposed statue itself and other statues by the same artist. Relatedly, one of the statuary image-compilation webpages listed nine Swedish statues that its creator considered more problematic than the one proposed. These photos foreground how Google Images not only algorithmically triggers memory of the original event captured in *The Woman with the Handbag*, but also of secondary events related to the renewed public attention that the photo gained around its 30th anniversary.

As already mentioned, the Google Images algorithm prioritizes more recent content leading to chronologically specific visual assemblages. Reflecting this, the statuary constellation also foregrounds the protests of summer 2020 that led to the toppling of statues like that of Edward Colston in Bristol, UK (which features in two photos) within a broader cycle of decolonization and Black Lives Matter activism. Against the public debate about how to best memorialize contentious pasts that these protests triggered, *The Woman with the Handbag* and its statue (eventually installed elsewhere in Sweden), started to become visually connected to images of toppling statues including that of Saddam Hussein in Baghdad (removed in 2003) and Christopher Columbus in Chicago (removed in 2020). Within this new "collusionary" collapsed interpretative context (see Davis & Jurgenson, 2014) the photo went viral for a third time when the founder of a UK-based anti-racism group tweeted an image of it alongside its statue.[4] Remediating social media content from this period and including this tweet, three statuary-related image-compilation webpages displayed photos of statues "better than the ones being toppled," "that will restore your faith in humanity," and "that might leave you completely indifferent until we reveal their stories."[5] While some of the photos on these webpages reflected some degree of activist sentiment, they also accounted for many of the more eclectic images in the constellation.

Protest

The protest constellation (Figure 6.3) includes other photos of the protest during which *The Woman with the Handbag* was taken, but also those that

4   https://twitter.com/jdpoc/status/1270391835047976961
5   https://frontpagelive.com/2020/06/20/statues-better-than-ones-being-brought-down/; https://www.popsugar.co.uk/news/positive-historical-statues-around-the-world-47548267; https://brightside.me/creativity-art/10-sculptures-that-might-leave-you-completely-indifferent-until-we-reveal-their-stories-759110/

visually connect the photo to an array of historical and more recent protests from across the world. Some of these show recent protests involving the toppling and defacing of statuary linking to the statuary constellation. Others feature recent far-right protests and anti-fascist counter-protests illustrating again the significance of *The Woman with the Handbag* within the cultural identities and memories of contemporary anti-fascist groups (Merrill, 2020). This significance is supported by mnemonic visual reference points in the form of historical photos of protest and defiance towards Nazi Germany including of a prisoner of war confronting Heinrich Himmler and another of a man refusing to give the Nazi salute during the public launch of a ship in Hamburg in 1936. Beyond this, women protestors feature prominently in the constellation, indexing the photo's growing influence within the broader feminist movement. While many of the photos of women protestors are more recent and arguably known for their shorter-term virality rather than longer-term iconicity, a number of deeper visual historical references to women protestors are also present. These include photos of the death of suffragette Emily Wilding Davison at the Epsom Derby in 1913, American female civil rights activists Gloria Richardson and Elizabeth Eckford from the 1950s and 1960s, and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp in the 1980s.

The feminist and anti-fascist mnemonic constellations that *The Woman with the Handbag* contributes to and connects are further indicated by at least four of the five protest image-compilation webpages.[6] These four webpages contributed 13 photos to the Google Images results but contained 110 images in total. Three of them, collectively containing 103 photos, specifically feature women protestors under the feminist action frames conveyed by their titles: *53 of the Most Powerful Images of Women Protesters of All Time; A Woman's Place is in the Revolution: These Powerful Images from around the World & throughout History Prove It; International Women's Day: Iconic Images of Women Protesters.*[7] The fourth, which is entitled *There's a Tumblr Full of Nazis Getting Punched Because that Will Always be Awesome* foregrounds the photo's anti-fascist significance.[8] All are discussed more in the next section.

---

6   The fifth protest image-compilation webpage, entitled *10 Incredible Photos of Defiance from History*, is more eclectic with only some references to feminist and anti-fascist activism. https://www.indy100.com/viral/ten-incredible-photos-defiance-history-past-present-edl-7392886
7   https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20180308-international-womens-day-iconic-images-of-women-protesters; https://www.boredpanda.com/powerful-women-protesters/; https://www.girltalkhq.com/womans-place-revolution-powerful-images-around-world-throughout-history-prove/
8   https://dangerousminds.net/comments/theres_a_tumblr_full_of_nazis_getting_punched

Figure 6.1: Constellation of historical photos. Collage based on a Google Image search (September 2021). Produced by Samuel Merrill.

Figure 6.2: Constellation of statuary photos. Collage based on a Google Image search (September 2021). Produced by Samuel Merrill.

Figure 6.3: Constellation of protest photos. Collage based on a Google Image search (September 2021). Produced by Samuel Merrill.

The Curated Protest Constellations: Image-Compilation Webpages, Visual Templates, and the Mobilization of Vulnerable and Violent Activism

The three image-compilation webpages dedicated specifically to women protestors create mnemonic constellations that through visual aggregation amplify each individual photo's mobilizing potential. Across them, one particular visual template dominates. This template involves close-up profile shots of women protestors facing-up to and standing-off against male adversaries usually in the form of military and police personnel (clad in body armour and wielding weapons) or far-right activists (Figure 6.4). One example is Lagerlöf's May 2016 photo of Asplund, which appears in three of the five image-compilation constellations. Appearing equally often is a photo of an unknown woman protestor staring at a riot policeman in Santiago, Chile, from September 2016 and that of Saffiyah Khan smiling down a far-right English Defence League protestor in Birmingham, UK, from April 2017. These photos are only out-represented across the protest image-compilation webpages by *The Woman with the Handbag*, which, for sampling reasons, obviously appears in all, and by Jonathan Bachman's photo of Ieshia Evans at a Baton Rouge Black Lives Matter protest from July 2016, which appears in four of the five constellations.

These four particular *standoff* photos are known for their virality and at least Bachman's photo has been academically scrutinized as an iconic photo (see Dahmen et al., 2018) but none has yet displayed the sorts of longevity that have traditionally characterized iconic photos. Furthermore, these and many other similar examples do not so much establish a 'blueprint' for future imitations—to recall Cohen, Boudana, and Frosh's definition of iconic photos (2018)—as follow one. The blueprint that they follow is at least as old as Marc Riboud's 1967 iconic protest photo entitled *The Ultimate Confrontation: The Flower and the Bayonet*, which captured pacifist Jane Rose Kasmir placing a flower in the bayonet of a Pentagon guard during an anti-Vietnam War protest.[9] Viral protest photos like Lagerlöf's and Bachman's in essence capture reenactments of Kasmir whether or not their subjects (in this case Asplund and Evans) are aware of their gestural remembrances. In other words, they indicate the existence of compositional, chorographical, and performative repertoires through which past protests come to shape those in the present even as the origins of these repertoires become obscured.

---

9   A similar iconic photo known as *Flower Power* and showing a male protestor called George Harris was taken at the same event by Bernie Boston.

Figure 6.4: The Standoff Template. Collage based on the five protest image-compilation webpages (September 2021). Produced by Samuel Merrill.

Different iterations of Riboud's photo, for example, only feature in two of the five protest image compilations suggesting that this icon is becoming mnemonically overshadowed by its later viral visual echoes.

Visual echoes of Lagerlöf's photo can additionally be traced in Bachman's, adding resonance to Asplund's words when she was interviewed about the photo: "I hope something positive will come out of the picture. Maybe what I did can be a symbol that we can do something—if one person can do it, anyone can" (cited in Crouch, 2016). In this sense, standoff protest photos are collectively powerful in suggesting that anyone can resist threats to the ideas and causes that they believe in, but their increasing prevalence can also flatten and equate the individual specificity of these same ideas and causes. Their near routine recreation and, in turn, saturation suggests that photojournalists and civilian journalists mimic the content and conditions of those photos that have previously 'gone viral' or have been deemed iconic in order to maximize their circulation. In short, they know what sort of photographic compositions or in Cartier-Bresson's word's "decisive moments" (1952) they are looking for based on previous precedents of iconicity and virality. These moments are arguably easier to 'hunt' with digital cameras given that these provide greater opportunities to capture a large batch of fleeting scenes without wasting film, which can then be scoured for qualifying photos later (Suler, 2012). Likewise, in an era when protests are increasingly choreographed and success is as dependent on documenting activism in order to gain visibility for activist causes as on the activism itself, protestors

are themselves aware of what types of photos will gain the greatest public exposure and publicity for their cause. They are thus prone to reenacting certain symbolic physical gestures and stances knowingly or otherwise.

In the longer term, the risk is that the predictability of standoff protest photos may actually render them banal, undermining their mobilizing power and activist potential. In their choreographed, repetitive, and interchangeable composition, these standoff photos already appear as qualitatively different from those individually exceptional protest photos like *The Woman with the Handbag*. The exceptionality of this photo lies in the violence of its "decisive moment." Few images in the Google assemblage match its inferred violence, potentially because of Swedish and EU internet censorship laws against violent content. Likewise, only one photo in the three image-compilations of women protestors suggests similar degrees of physical violence. It shows an unidentified woman swinging a metal bar at a riot police officer during the 1990 London Poll Tax protests. These constellations thus reinforce the idea that women protestors are, if not exclusively then at least typically, non-violent. Furthermore, they reiterate the idea that women protestors can gain greatest visibility for their causes by deliberately exposing themselves to power. Indeed, standoff protest photos illustrate what Butler (2016) discusses as embodied acts of vulnerability and their capacity to be "an incipient and enduring moment of resistance" (p. 25). Some of the featured protestors like Asplund identify as pacifists but Evans has rejected this label and claimed that Bachman's photo misrepresents her stance on violent political action: "I'm not against protesting peacefully, and I'm not pro-violence, but I'm definitely in favor of defending yourself" (cited in Jones, 2018). With violent political action rarely advocated within feminist movements, the violence displayed in these photos of women protestors is usually directed *towards* them rather than *enacted by* them. In this way, women protestors are generally mnemonically mobilized to place themselves in harm's way rather than do harm themselves.

Thus, within these constellations the violence suggested by *The Woman with the Handbag* is tempered and the photo is recontextualized, to some degree at least, as non-violent. Its rereading in this way is borne out by some of the arguments mobilized after the statue based on the photo was rejected by Växjö's council because of its perceived promotion of violence. For example, Arwin, the statue's designer, was quoted as saying that the photo "is more like a symbol of anti-violence and a feeling of 'enough is enough'" (cited in "Swedes Rally in Bizarre Handbag Protest," 2015). These comments, like those of Evans, actually resonate more with militant anti-fascist understandings of the place of violence within activism, namely as a legitimate form of self-defence that can prevent the exceptional violence of fascism and thus

reduce overall harm (see Copsey & Merrill, 2020). Overall, then, *The Woman with the Handbag* arguably sits more comfortably with visual expressions of anti-fascist violence than feminist vulnerability. This is illustrated by its appearance on an image-compilation webpage, which borrows images from a Tumblr called *Nazis Getting Punched* that was created after a video showing neo-Nazi Richard Spencer getting punched by a militant anti-fascist during the inauguration of Donald Trump went viral in January 2017.[10] Similar to other widely used contemporary visual signifiers of anti-fascist violence like the so-called anti-fascist kick (see Lundberg, 2020), the earliest images of 'Nazi punches' were graphic renderings dating to the 1930s and 1940s including the one on the cover of the 1941 debut issue of the Captain America comic, which showed the superhero knocking out Adolf Hitler. This cover is one of the seven images featured in the Nazi punching image-compilation webpage.[11] With the exception of *The Woman with the Handbag*, all of these images show male characters throwing punches. Like the "anti-fascist kick," the "Nazi punch" thus also indicates militant anti-fascist activism's common reliance on a predominantly "masculine capacity to use violence if necessary" (Lundberg, 2020, p. 285). All the images besides *The Woman with the Handbag* on this webpage are also fictional and, besides a film still showing Indiana Jones punching a Nazi (see Merrill, 2017), they are all comic book renderings. This suggests the rarity of Nazi punch photos but also perhaps the legal, ethical, and moral judgements made when considering whether to remediate photos of explicit violence. It is harder to closely recreate or photographically capture rapid, and often spontaneous, violent actions like punches and kicks as compared to those more slowly unfolding and, in many instances, premeditated actions captured in standoff protest photos. This may limit the extent to which violent iconic images can become blueprints that are later imitated in protest settings, at least in the case of photographic imitations. Still, the Tumblr on which this particular image-compilation webpage was based contains a number of photos, videos, and video stills from recent anti-fascist protests that, in showing actual Nazi punches, exceed the inferred violence of *The Woman with the Handbag.* These suggest that the increasingly common rallying cry to "punch a Nazi" is being accompanied by the emergence of corresponding visual templates. Regardless of whether *The Woman with the Handbag* serves as a blueprint for these photos or indeed comes to serve as one for even more accurate future reenactments, these developments foreground the role of violence in determining iconicity.

10   https://punchingnazis.tumblr.com/
11   This website's activist framing justified its consideration as a "protest image-compilation."

Conclusions

This chapter has demonstrated how, in different digital settings, older, iconic protest photos and younger, viral protest photos come into contact with each other within mnemonic assemblages and constellations that influence not only the formation of collective memory, but also ideas about collective action. In the case of *The Woman with the Handbag*, its appearance in assemblages of images that have been algorithmically generated by search engines like Google Images brings it into dialogue with a multitude of mnemonic visual reference points that shape its public remembrance and ability to mobilize activism. Some of these visual reference points are relatively banal and arbitrary, creating contextual collisions that foreground the search engine's algorithmic agency. While these can encourage the search engine's users to explore and fashion more speculative mnemonic connections they could also potentially erode the photo's activist impact. Others reveal more substantive mnemonic collusions whether in terms of the photo's contribution to a general canon of historical photos, its enrollment in debates regarding public statuary, or its status within the visual repertoires of activists. In the latter instance, *The Woman with the Handbag* and the collective memory it conveys have been drawn into visual exchange with a host of other protest events and memories in ways that mutually enhance its and the other protest photos' mobilizing power via processes of visual accumulation. At the same time, this accumulation risks undermining the historical and political specificity of the activist causes and efforts enshrined in each photo.

While it might be tempting to suggest that the algorithm behind Google Images is primarily responsible for this, any complete rethink of mnemonic agency along these lines needs to be tempered by the acknowledgement that many of the results algorithmically returned by the search engine still reflected human interpretative procedures including those behind the visual constellations of protest evident on the different image-compilation webpages. In other words, the outputs of search engines are agentically hybrid (see Merrill, forthcoming) insofar as although they may have been algorithmically determined their inputs are still largely curated by humans. This is made clear by the protest photo image-compilation webpages discussed in this chapter. Created by various internet users, they illustrate how *The Woman with the Handbag* has been refracted via its inclusion in different mnemonic constellations to promote both non-violent feminist activism that relies on visibility garnered through vulnerability and militant anti-fascist activism that, to a greater extent, consents to the use of symbolic and

physical violence. Within these constellations, older iconic protest photos like *The Woman with the Handbag* are accompanied and outnumbered by newer viral protest photos, many of which rely on the standoff template. The abundance of this type of protest photo actually shows signs of mnemonically obscuring their predecessors (as the underrepresentation of Riboud's photos of Kasmir across the studied image-compilation webpages suggests) even as they serve as records of their reenactment.

Highly sought by activists, virality remains difficult to predict and perhaps even harder to intentionally bring about (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). Earlier iconic and viral protest photos can contain the choreographical and gestural clues and cues that might enable activists to gain widespread visibility for their causes via their digital memory work practices (see Merrill et al., 2020). In this sense, it might be productive to begin thinking about how iconicity and visual memories of protest spread by association. Has *The Woman with the Handbag* somehow lent iconicity and with it visibility to Lagerlöf's photo of Asplund? Has that photo, in turn, done something similar for Bachman's photo of Evans? Might the plethora of compositionally similar viral standoff protest photos be collectively approached as iconic insofar as they summarize and visually remember an extended period of heightened global protest roughly spanning the years between 2015 and 2020? Besides exploring such questions there is need for more research into how digital visual assemblages and constellations of protest are consumed by internet users. For instance, how do they and the memories they foreground more directly influence the collective action repertoires and remembrances practices of activists and social movements? It is hoped that, however modestly, this chapter will support such efforts by stressing how the visual company that a protest photo comes to keep online, due to a hybrid of human and non-human agencies, can influence how it is remembered and, in turn, the sorts of activism it might mobilize.

Bibliography

Assmann, J., & Czaplicka, J. (1995). Collective Memory and Cultural Identity. *New German Critique, 65*, 125–133. https://doi.org/10.2307/488538

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The Logic of Connective Action. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*(5), 739–768. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.670661

Boudana, S., Frosh, P., & Cohen, A. A. (2017). Reviving Icons to Death: When Historic Photographs become Digital Memes. *Media, Culture & Society, 39*(8), 1210–1230. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717690818

Butler, J. (2016). Rethinking Vulnerability and Resistance. In J. Butler, Z. Gambetti, & L. Sabsay (Eds.). *Vulnerability in Resistance* (pp. 12–27). Duke University Press.

Cartier-Bresson, H. (1952). *The Decisive Moment*. Simon and Schuster.

Chidgey, R. (2018). *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Cohen, A. A., Boudana, S., & Frosh, P. (2018). You Must Remember This: Iconic News Photographs and Collective Memory. *Journal of Communication, 68*(3), 453–479. https://doi.org/10.1093/joc/jqy017

Copsey, N., & Merrill, S. (2020). Violence and Restraint within Anti-Fa: A View from the United States. *Perspectives on Terrorism*, *14*(6), 122–138.

Crouch, D. (2016, May 4). Woman Who Defied 300 neo-Nazis at Swedish Rally Speaks of Anger. *The Guardian.* https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/04/woman-defied-neo-nazis-sweden-tess-asplund-viral-photograph

Dahmen, N. S., Mielczarek, N., & Perlmutter, D. D. (2018). The Influence-Network Model of the Photojournalistic Icon. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, *20*(4), 264–313. https://doi.org/10.1177/1522637918803351

Davis, J. L., & Jurgenson, N. (2014). Context Collapse: Theorizing Context Collusions and Collisions. *Information, Communication and Society*, *17*(4), 476–485. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2014.888458

Deleuze, G. (2007). *Two Regimes of Madness* (Revised Edition). MIT Press.

Erll, A., & Rigney, A. (2009). Cultural Memory and Its Dynamics. In A. Erll & A. Rigney (Eds.), *Mediation, Remediation and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (pp. 1–14). De Gruyter.

Gillespie, T. (2014). The Relevance of Algorithms. In T. Gillespie, P. J. Boczkowski, & K. A. Foot (Eds.) *Media Technologies: Essays on Communication, Materiality and Society* (pp. 167–194). MIT Press.

Gilloch, G. (2002). *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations*. Polity.

Grainge, P. (1999). TIME's Past in the Present: Nostalgia and the Black and White Image. *Journal of American Studies*, *33*(3), 383–392. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021875899006155

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2003). Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of "Accidental Napalm." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, *20*, 35–66. https://doi.org/10.1080/0739318032000067074

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2018). Predicting the Present: Iconic Photographs and Public Culture in the Digital Media Environment. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, *20*(4), 318–324. https://doi.org/10.1177/1522637918803354

Hoskins, A. (2018). Memory of the Multitude: The End of Collective Memory? In A. Hoskins (Ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (pp. 85–109). Routledge.

Ibrahim, Y. (2018). Transacting Memory in the Digital Age: Modernity, Fluidity and Immateriality. *Fudan J. Hum. Soc. Sci., 11*, 453–464. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-018-0222-2

Jones, J. (2018, May 7). *2 Years after Going Viral, Ieshia Evans Reflects on Her Iconic Protest Photo.* Huffpost. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/two-years-after-going-viral-ieshia-evans-reflects-on-her-iconic-protest-photo_n_5b3bbefde4b09e4a8b28129f

Krauß, A. (2011). Constellations: A Brief Introduction. *MLN, 126*(3), 439–445. https://doi.org/10.1353/mln.2011.0038

Lundberg, V. (2020). 'The Antifascist Kick': A Signifying Cultural Practice in the History of Transnational Antifascism? *Fascism, 9*(1–2), 272–287. https://doi.org/10.1163/22116257-09010007

Merrill, S. (2013). The London Underground Diagram: Between Palimpsest and Canon. *The London Journal*, *38*(3), 245–264. https://doi.org/10.1179/0305803413Z.00000000033

Merrill, S. (2017, January 24). Punching Nazis: What Would Indiana Jones Do? *The Conversation.* https://theconversation.com/punching-nazis-what-would-indiana-jones-do-71756

Merrill, S. (2020). Following the Woman with the Handbag: The Activist Appropriation of an Iconic Historical Photograph. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, and P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 111–139). Palgrave Macmillan.

Merrill, S. (forthcoming). Hybrid Methodologies for Studying Social and Cultural Memory in the Post-Digital Age. In A. Hoskins, & Q. Wang (Eds.), *The Remaking of Memory in the Internet Age.* Oxford University Press.

Merrill, S., Keightley, E., & Daphi, P. (2020). The Digital Memory Practices of Social Movements: Claiming, Circulating and Curating. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp.1–30). Palgrave Macmillan.

Mortensen, M. (2017). Constructing, Confirming, and Contesting Icons: The Alan Kurdi Imagery Appropriated by #humanitywashedashore, Ai Weiwei, and Charlie Hebdo. *Media, Culture & Society, 39*(8), 1142–1161. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717725572

Mortensen, M., Allan, S., & Peters, C. (2017). The Iconic Image in a Digital Age: Editorial Mediations over the Alan Kurdi Photographs. *Nordicom Review, 38* (Special Issue 2), 71–86. https://doi.org/10.1515/nor-2017-0415

Müller, M., & Schurr, C. (2016). Assemblage Thinking and Actor-Network Theory: Conjunctions, Disjunctions, Cross-Fertilisations. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *41*(3), 217–229. https://doi.org/10.1111/tran.12117

Nahon, K., & Hemsley, J. (2013). *Going Viral*. Polity.

Rothberg, M. (2006). Between Auschwitz and Algeria: Multidirectional Memory and the Counterpublic Witness, *Critical Inquiry*, *33*(1), 158–184. https://doi.org/10.1086/509750

Smit, R. (2020). Connective Memory Work on Justice for Mike Brown. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 85–108). Palgrave Macmillan.

Smits, T., & Ros, R. (2020, November 18–20). *Quantifying Iconicity in 940K Online Circulations of 26 Iconic Photographs* [Paper presentation]. CHR 2020: Workshop on Computational Humanities Research, Amsterdam, The Netherlands. http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-2723/short34.pdf

Suler, J. (2012). The Decisive Moment. *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*, *9*(4), 372–375. https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.1334

Swedes Rally in Bizarre Handbag Protest. (2015, February 19). The Local. https://www.thelocal.se/20150219/swedes-rally-in-bizarre-handbag-protest

Trevisan, F. (2014). Search Engines: From Social Science Objects to Academic Inquiry Tools. *First Monday*, *19*(11). https://doi.org/10.5210/fm.v19i11.5237

Åkerlund, M. (2021). Dog Whistling Far-Right Code Words: The Case of 'Culture Enricher' on the Swedish Web. *Information, Communication & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2021.1889639

About the Author

Samuel Merrill is associate professor of Sociology at Umeå University's Department of Sociology and Centre for Digital Social Research (DIGSUM). He specializes in digital and cultural sociology and his research concerns the intersections between collective memory, digital media, social movements, and cultural heritage. (samuel.merrill@umu.se)

Mobilizing Visual Memory

7   Visual Memory in Grassroots Mobilizations: The Case of the Anti-Corruption Movement of 2011 in India[1]

Alice Mattoni & Anwesha Chakraborty

Abstract

This chapter investigates the role of images in social movements in activating and nourishing collective memory as a process that has an instant recall value of the past in the present. Using the example of the India Against Corruption movement of 2011–2012, we unpack the role played by visuals as mnemonic devices to trigger and sustain protests and mass mobilizations. Our primary data shows how activists deployed images of Gandhi as well as Gandhi-related visuals to position their campaign within the long tradition of anti-colonial struggles in the country. The chapter contends that images can act as bridges between the present and the past and that they can also contribute to merging different protest waves, hence blurring the lines between past and present.

Keywords: visual memory, protest cycles, grassroots movements, anti-corruption mobilizations, India

Introduction

On a spring evening in March 2021, we sat conversing with some activists who had worked tirelessly behind the scenes about a decade earlier, in 2011, to organize and mobilize people in the framework of an upcoming hunger strike

carried out by Anna Hazare, a then relatively unknown anti-corruption activist on the national stage. The venue was Jantar Mantar, an important site for resistance at the heart of the Indian capital of New Delhi. Our respondents explained that they had done their best to spread the word across the city through digital and non-digital means, but they were not prepared for the hundreds and thousands of people who would eventually turn up at the protest site. As one of the activists recollected: "People had started to come up with slogans of their own. There was a slogan: 'Anna nahi aandhi hai, desh ka dusra Gandhi hai'" (translated from Hindi to "He's not Anna, he's a storm; a second Gandhi of this country"). The India Against Corruption movement, as it was called initially, had captured the national imagination between April 2011 and April 2012 (Chowdhury, 2019). While many important members of Indian civil society, including lawyers, activists, and spiritual leaders, occupied the podium in the rallies, Hazare was the most prominent face of the movement. Indeed, his name would become synonymous with the movement itself. He was considered both by his supporters and journalists to be "a leader of Gandhian proportions" (Sengupta, 2014, p. 407). Photos and videos of Anna, a "self-identified Gandhian" (Sharma, 2014, p. 366), flashed across national and international media, portraying a man clad in white wearing the so-called Gandhi cap, with the image of Gandhi often hanging behind him on stages where he carried out his fasts. The use of images of Gandhi and the deployment of Gandhi-related visuals, often related to his memory, will be the focus of our analysis here.

As literature on social movements argues, images and other types of visual tools are highly relevant for activists in different moments of their contentious collective actions (Doerr et al., 2015), including: activists' self-representation during protests (Rovisco 2017; Tilly, 2008; see also Eyerman, 2006), the development of collective identities (Morrison & Isaac, 2011; Ramsey, 2000; Hardt & Ohrn, 1981) and other actors' representation of social movements through images circulated in various types of media, including the mainstream press (Corrigall-Brown & Wilkes, 2012; Perlmutter & Wagner, 2004; Rohlinger & Klein, 2012). Furthermore, the cultural resonance of activists' injustice frames can be boosted using the right image (Ryan, 1991) and photographs of injustice are sometimes able to trigger mobilizations at the national and transnational level (Olesen, 2018). Images of injustice published in newspapers also have a significant role in the unfolding of frame meanings (Parry, 2011; Gamson & Meyer, 1996; Gamson & Stuart, 1992), visual landscapes (Rohlinger & Klein, 2012), and transnational mediascapes (Appadurai, 1996) on controversial issues that also involve the active attempts of activists to reframe the public debate.

However, activists also use images and other visual tools as mnemonic objects during street protests in order to evoke symbolic connections with battles of the past. The relationship between social movements and collective memory has been at the centre of a rich debate in social movement studies, memory studies, and cognate disciplines. In memory studies, Ann Rigney (2018a) discusses the intertwining of memory and activism as a complex process "of recycling, recollection and political action that can be summed up as 'civic memory'" (p. 372) and introduces the analytical category of *memory–activism nexus*. More recently, social movement scholars Daphi and Zamponi (2019) have systematized the literature on social movements and collective memory by evoking the three levels that feature in the memory–activism nexus originally proposed by Rigney. First, *memory of activism* refers to the way collective memory related to distinct social movements develops and changes over time, offering different types of representation of what a specific social movement has been in the past and formulating public understandings of its significance, heritage, and influences for the social movement of the present. Second, *memory activism* relates to the way collective memory becomes an object of contention for specific social movements that question dominant narratives and memories related to past historical periods or important events. Third, *memory in activism* casts light on how collective memory work within social movements affects activists' activities and, more generally, focuses on the ability of collective memory to act as a facilitating factor for the emergence of protest in societies.

In this regard, collective memory about past social movements and their protests develops thanks to the accounts of those who participated in them. However, over time, as work in the field of cultural memory studies has shown, other actors also participate in collective memory processes of mediation whereby the past is represented from changing perspectives in the present with the help of cultural artefacts in a variety of media. Visuality plays an important role in the mediation of memory (see the introduction to this volume). Accordingly, visuals—in the form of flyers, banners, posters, photographs, and other media types, either alone or together with text—provide activists with an important resource for bringing the past into the present. Indeed, once a street protest, specific events within it, and other forms of dissent, have been represented through visuals, they have the potential to remain in the public space for a long time (Merrill, 2020). Activists, accordingly, employ images strategically to link their current protest to past mobilizations so as to increase the resonance of their claims. For instance, the 15M massive mobilization in Madrid produced the iconic images of squares massively occupied by protestors. These images were able

to transcend Spain's national boundaries, circulating worldwide through social media and representing a specific vision of participatory democracy that revolved around a consensual decision-making process (Rovisco, 2017). The images resonated with/echoed other images related to previous protests that included the peaceful occupation of public spaces. They connected the present moments of the 15M with activists' memory of past protests: it is precisely the link between the lived experiences of activists in 2011 occupying the squares of Madrid and Barcelona, among others, and what activists remembered about past occupations of public spaces worldwide that gave these images their worldwide resonance (Rovisco, 2017).

In this chapter, we make a contribution to this line of research by investigating the role of images and other visual tools in social movements in activating and nourishing collective memory as a process that puts the past in the present (Terdiman, 1993). As our opening vignette indicated, we will do so with specific reference to the India against Corruption movement in 2011 and, to a lesser extent, the farmers' mobilizations that happened in the same country in 2020. In the case of the former, we show how activists deployed images of Gandhi as well as Gandhi-related visuals to position their campaign within the long tradition of anti-colonial struggles in the country. In the case of the latter, we illustrate how news media appropriated the images of the India against Corruption movement in 2011 to speak about the farmers' mobilizations that erupted in 2020. In what follows, we cast light on how collective memory developed, dynamically, through two mechanisms, each acquiring a more prominent role in one of the two waves of mobilizations in India: first, the bridging of past and present struggles in the country during the India against Corruption movement in 2011; second, the merging of different times of protest in a subsequent round of farmers' mobilization that happened in India in 2020. Through bridging, visuals create a connection between the present and the past, allowing activists to look at their current mobilizations through the lens of previous protest waves. In this case, the past and the present remain two separate moments that are, however, linked through the use of images. Through collapsing, instead, visuals contribute to the blurring of borders between past and present, hence developing a narrative in which different times of protest live seamlessly side by side. To enrich the discussion of the two mechanisms, we also spend a few words on the agency behind the creation and use of visuals in the framework of the two mobilizations under discussion. Indeed, visuals do not come into existence by themselves: activists and other actors create them, sometimes with clear intentions, at other times without thinking strategically. While this is not the main question of the present chapter,

discussing agency with regard to the role of visuals in collective memory adds a further layer of interpretation to, and yet also problematizes, the role that images and other visual artefacts have in the production of collective memory related to protests.

The paper develops as follows. In the next section, we first explain the choice of case study, the massive street protests and hunger strikes associated with the social movement India Against Corruption that garnered global attention (Lal, 2017). We end this section with a quick discussion of the data gathering methods. The chapter then moves to address its central questions in the three sections that follow. First, we analyse the visual aspects of the protest, reflecting on the bridging mechanism to discuss how the present struggle is linked through visuals to past mobilizations and how this linking impacts the understanding of the present and of the past. We then look at the collapsing mechanism to explain how visuals contribute to the ongoing construction of collective memories once newer mobilizations unfold. Finally, we consider why movement organizers decided to employ visuals as tools of collective memory to reinforce the link between the current protests and those that preceded them. Conclusions summarize the main findings and discuss them further.

Case Study and Methods

The chapter rests on data gathered in the framework of a cross-country comparative research project on how anti-corruption activists employ digital media to fight corruption from the grassroots and outside political institutions. As a case study, it takes one emblematic collective action against corruption that developed in India: the massive anti-corruption movement, popularly known as the India Against Corruption movement (hereafter IAC), the Jan Lokpal movement or the Anna movement, which started in 2010 and reached its peak in the street protests of 2011. The backdrop to the movement was the large-scale political corruption by the then ruling Congress party, which manifested itself in the form of a plethora of scams, most notably the Commonwealth Games of 2010 in New Delhi, which directly implicated the then Chief Minister of Delhi, Sheila Dixit, from the ruling party. Arvind Kejriwal, an ex-officer of the Income Tax Department of the Government of India and noted Right to Information (RTI) activist, who had given up his lucrative position to fight systemic corruption, was a central figure of the movement (Chowdhury, 2019; Sharma, 2014). In November 2010, Kejriwal officially announced the launch of the movement and demanded

the passage of the Lokpal Bill in the Indian parliament, which would create an independent anti-corruption ombudsperson and bring all perpetrators of corruption, including those holding ministerial positions, to book.

While it began in 2010, the movement truly gained momentum in April 2011, when Anna Hazare, a septuagenarian social activist from the state of Maharashtra, carried out the first of several hunger strikes at Jantar Mantar, an important protest site at the heart of the capital, New Delhi. His fast-unto-death received enthusiastic support from major civil society actors and activists and was a publicly performed act attended by thousands of ordinary citizens ("Anna Hazare on Indefinite Fast over Stronger Lokpal Bill," 2011). Over the following months, there would be multiple such events at the capital, with Hazare and key IAC members taking the lead in negotiating with the Union government to pass the Jan Lokpal Bill and failing every time. By August 2012, Hazare and his team of activists ended yet another hunger strike that began towards the end of July that year, announcing the formation of a new political party, which would become Aam Aadmi Party (Common People's Party) ("Team Anna Ends Fast at Jantar Mantar," 2012). In just over a year, in December 2013, the party would win the Delhi elections, with Arvind Kejriwal becoming the Chief Minister of Delhi for the first time.

This chapter aims to unpack the iconography associated with the movement and its connection with collective memory, especially concerning the constant parallels drawn between Hazare and India's best-known figure of non-violent struggle, Mahatma Gandhi.[2] We look at images as cultural objects with a mnemonic potential to understand how the memory of past mobilizations informs/impacts contemporary activism. More specifically, we consider anti-corruption activists' deployment of images of Gandhi and

2   In recent years, the narrative about Gandhi as the "Mahatma" (or "the great soul") has become a topic of contention, especially in the context of race and caste relations (see, for example, Omvedt, 2006 and Vahed, 2017) where he is seen as a figure who staunchly supported the status quo and did not seek emancipation outside the religious fold of Hinduism. These attributes make him, in the discursive constructions of present anti-caste activists, an unlikely candidate to be considered as a radical social reformer. However, in the specific discursive context in which the anti-corruption movement is located, the use of the Gandhi portrait was strategic, as he is the reference point in Indian history and cultural memory for non-violent struggles and for being the tallest figure of the Indian freedom struggle. His notion of non-violence is also inextricably linked with ideas about and the pursuit of truth (Pradhan, 2006). We would also like to note here that his portrait, seen in the IAC movement's posters, has an instant recall value for Indian citizens because of its ubiquity in Indian social life, most notably, in its presence on Indian banknotes (of all denominations). It would thus not be far-fetched to argue that Gandhi is not just an icon of civil disobedience but also of transparency, even if this line of enquiry has not been explored yet in academic writings.

other related visual tools: most prominently, the Gandhi cap. To this end, we analysed three photos of the movement received from the activists, first considering their denotative level and then taking into account the relationship the images established with the broader context in which they were created. In these photos, we see a clear framing of Hazare as the new Gandhi, something that was deemed contentious, as we will discuss later, by India's progressive circles (Sengupta, 2012). Additionally, we also interviewed four protest organizers with in-depth knowledge of the mobilization in order to enhance our understanding of the agency behind the visuals. They were ambivalent about their role in creating and propagating the Gandhi–Hazare parallels. The activists were contacted through networks established as part of a larger research project on anti-corruption and digital media. We obtained their consent to record their recollections of the movement and anonymized their responses. Their testimonies serve as the crucial missing link between the images and the stories behind them since these were not always recorded by the national and international media, which otherwise did a thorough job in documenting the protests. In their act of reminiscing, the activists provided valuable stories about how the movement organizers employed various audio, visual, and performative media—banners, flyers, posters, street plays, missed calls,[3] and SMS campaigns—to encourage and persuade people to partake in the protests. As mentioned previously, one of the heavily used images was that of Gandhi, to whom the star campaigner of the movement, Hazare, was constantly compared. Our chapter documents this specific aspect of the movement.

The Image of Gandhi and the Bridging of Different Times

Memories of past mobilizations can be a source of inspiration for movement organizers, who look to past struggles to develop a broader, consistent narrative about who they are in the present. In this way, activists legitimize themselves in the eyes of the participants in the protests they organize, but also in the eyes of their allies and even their opponents. Building a tangible link to the past by keeping alive the memory related to mobilizations that occurred

---

3   A missed call is a call terminated by the caller before the receiver can answer it, without any credit reduction. Back in 2011, when mobile phones were not as diffused in India as they are today and instant messaging apps and free calling facilities were not available, missed calls were a cost-effective way for individuals to show interest in a campaign without incurring costs. At the same time, the number of the interested callers would be registered in the campaign organizers' database.

years, sometimes even decades earlier is one way in which activists construct unitary, coherent, and ongoing narratives related to the social movements in which they participate (for a review cfr. Daphi and Zamponi, 2019). Such a process is in line with the social movements' need to become visible in the public space as relevant political phenomena whose legitimacy cannot be easily contested. Through the activists' production of images depicting protesting crowds, through banners and slogans, and bringing together different political/interest groups, movement organizations display the high numbers of protesters, their commitment to mobilizations, and the morally justified cause that unites different movement organizations and protesters in the same social movement (Tilly, 2004). However, such images also have a mnemonic potential because, in some cases, they can also bear witness to present struggles and develop a symbolic connection with the past. In other words, as already pointed out in the introduction, images become relevant in connecting present-day protests to previous struggles at home and abroad.

Visuals' capacity to link up protests that happened in different times is not that different from some of the framing activities that movement organizations and activists perform when they mobilize. More specifically, Snow et al. (1986) speak about the activity of frame bridging, thanks to which activists construct a connection, or better a bridge, between two otherwise disconnected frames. When frame bridging occurs at the level of movement organizations, the bridged collective action frames remain separate and easily distinguishable one from the other. Similarly, visuals work as mnemonic devices that can connect two or more otherwise disconnected protest events that occurred at different times although for different purposes. Accordingly, the metaphor of time bridging seems appropriate to describe a mechanism whereby visuals can connect two protest events, or social movements, that share neither the same temporality nor, as often happens, the same collective action frame. While each of the two protest events or social movements remains distinct, the connection between the two is performative in that it gives a specific meaning to events in the present where the time bridging mechanism operates.

The case study presented in this chapter offers a striking example of these processes: the massive mobilization against corruption in India between 2010 and 2012 with the Gandhian figure Hazare at the helm drawing large crowds to fasting and protest sites in the Indian capital of Delhi. At these rallies, the striking visual element characteristic of the movement was the use of the image of Gandhi on posters and placards linking the present struggle of Anna Hazare with the past struggles for India's independence from British rule. As we see in the following images, both from 2012, Anna Hazare and the other prominent civil society activists who were heading the movement are

Figure 7.1: Hunger strike of Anna Hazare and prominent IAC activists. A portrait of Gandhi is visible on the banner in the background. New Delhi, India, July 2012. Photo: Sanjay Raghav.

Figure 7.2: Hazare and Gandhi on banner. New Delhi, India, 27 December 2011. Photo: Sanjay Raghav.

seated in front of large banners where Gandhi's face features prominently. The metaphor of war is used liberally in the text of the banners, but the war is expected to be fought according to Gandhian principles, that is, through civil disobedience and hunger strikes, even if those in power use coercive tactics to tackle or silence activists. As Chowdhury (2019) noted while writing about the movement, the IAC activists were weaving a conscious narrative by juxtaposing the present struggle against the government with the past struggle against colonial rule. Protestors at these sites often raised the slogan "Inquilab Zindabad" ("Long Live Revolution" in Urdu), which is historically rooted in the pre-independence struggle for freedom (Jeelani, 2011).

Through these pictures, we can see content remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) at work according to which activists insert one medium, the picture of Gandhi, into a different, more recent context from which another picture is produced. The resulting image becomes a trigger in connecting two struggles that, despite their many differences, are now linked through the juxtaposition of two charismatic figures. This case exemplifies the general model of remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), in the sense that one medium, the photograph of the present mobilization, absorbs another, older medium, the icon of the past mobilization, combining them so that the differences between the two struggles cannot be immediately seen. While they remain distinct, activists connect them to cast light on the continuity between them, to root the present struggle in a longer tradition of people's movements against the corrupt and powerful and to give a visual reference to contemporary anti-corruption struggles that they would otherwise lack.

Activists used the image of Gandhi as a powerful signifier to frame the anti-corruption protest as part of a broader discourse of empowerment, liberation, and the Indian people's self-determination. This, of course, gave the struggle an immediate resonance not only in India but more broadly worldwide. While Hazare was not very well known outside India when he began the hunger strike, Gandhi was already a significant iconic image of non-violent protests in many countries across the world, including in the West (Scalmer, 2011). The connection between the present and the past through the juxtaposition of the images of these two protest leaders, then produced a strong continuity between the two movements, making them part of the same narrative: the visual memory that activists mobilized through the iconic image of Gandhi was instrumental for the construction of a shared history of non-violent fights against the powerful. The selection of the hunger strike as the main form of protest against corruption worked together with the image of Gandhi to allow the emergence of a specific anti-corruption

frame which contrasts the social justice activists to the systemic injustice they were fighting and to the main target of the mobilization.

As Tilly (2002) also noted, the repertoire of contention has a robust communicative dimension, in that the selection of one form of protest rather than another allows activists to speak to their opponents according to a particular shared understanding of who the protestors are and which values support their demands. Nevertheless, it is also relevant to note that the use of a commonly shared repertoire of images, if the meaning of those images is contested, can also produce cleavages among the potential protest supporters. In her analysis of Hazare and the anti-corruption movement that emerged in 2011, Mitu Sengupta (2012) shows that their use of the Gandhi image was considered in progressive activists' circles to be exaggerated if not openly misleading. Sengupta was referring to Hazare's own apparent authoritarian tendencies, such as calling for the death penalty for the corrupt or his praise for the then Gujarat Chief Minister (now Prime Minister) Narendra Modi, who was and continues to be a polarizing figure in Indian politics. These attributes, as Sengupta argued, made Hazare a far less nuanced figure than the Mahatma. While much derided in progressive circles, support for Hazare on the ground swelled and the activists capitalized on this Hazare–Gandhi juxtaposition. Indeed, the visual memory of past struggles arrives in the present with specific meanings attached to it, and, for this reason, bringing past mobilizations into present struggles can renew controversies around collective memory within the social movements.

The anti-corruption protest did not stop with Hazare's multiple hunger strikes: it grew into a massive mobilization bringing hundreds of thousands of people to the streets all over India and in cities around the world with a sizeable Indian population. The small white cap that Hazare wore during these rallies became yet another visual reference to the IAC protests: printed with the name of Hazare, his supporters used it to signal their belonging to the IAC movement. Pictures of Hazare, wearing the little white cap with the image of Gandhi behind him, quickly became, in itself, an evocative icon of the anti-corruption movement and its most crucial front man. These pictures were circulated and remediated by print and TV media extensively when referring to the IAC protests.

The Image of Gandhi and the Merging of Different Time Periods

So far, we have talked about the hunger strikes and rallies in 2011–2012 and the iconic image of Mahatma Gandhi that worked as a powerful

mnemonic tool in the hands of activists. We have also discussed how activists and protestors strategically engaged in mnemonic work to connect anti-corruption movements to past independence struggles in the country. However, collective memory about past events is not static. Rather, and especially in the case of fast-evolving street mobilizations, we are dealing with a dynamic process in which the reading of what happened in the past changes in light of events happening in the present. In other words, it seems that mnemonic projects about the struggles that occurred in the past decades always remain unfinished. From this perspectives, collective memory is an ongoing interaction with the past, one that is able to continuously generate different understandings of what happened before and how this can be embedded in the present through remembrance. That is to say, it is a practice of meaning-making about the past in the present (Rigney, 2018b; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Irwin-Zarecka, 1994). The emergence of new political actors, configurations of political power, and political events together lead contemporary activists to engage in a work of resignification so that the past acquires specific functions in the present (Schwartz et al., 1986) where visuals are once again crucial to the narratives of emergent mobilizations. However, non-movement actors, such as media organizations and journalists, can also engage in meaning-making by bringing the past into the present so as to construct other narratives about emerging mobilizations.

This dynamic recycling of images also happened with the IAC movement. Nine years after that wave of mobilizations, the images of Hazare produced during those protests circulated again in the news during the large-scale farmers' protests that began in the last trimester of 2020 and were supported by several key figures of the IAC movement (while other key figures refrained from showing support).[4] Hazare, then 83 years old, was in the news between December 2020 and January 2021, as he planned to undertake what he called his "last protest" in support of the farmers and their demands ("Anna Hazare Threatens to Launch His 'Last Protest' for Farmers," 2020). The images of Hazare in these reports were mostly file photos of him clad in his Gandhi cap and white outfit, sometimes with the national flag in the background ("Farm

---

4   Here it is also important to note that both IAC and the ongoing farmers' protests are movements against the government of the day. However, while IAC brought together people from various sides of the political spectrum, the farmers' movement has primarily garnered support from the socialists and communists. Hazare, who supported the farmers and their demands, withdrew his indefinite hunger strike later on in January 2021 as he claimed that he had faith that the Union government would ensure fair prices for crops to the farmers (see also "Anna Hazare on Indefinite Fast over Stronger Lokpal Bill," 2011).

Law Stir," 2021). The act of placing these images alongside news articles and reports instantly rekindled memories of the IAC. One video report produced by the right-wing Republic TV, which discussed Anna Hazare's participation in the farmers' movement, showed him garlanding a bust of Gandhi while wearing the trademark Gandhi cap (the video had no time stamp thereby making it difficult to ascertain when it was filmed) ("Anna Hazare Sits on Hunger Strike to Support Farmers", 2020). Be that as it may, these images and videos constructed a connection between the past and the present, positioning the current agricultural workers' protests as part of the long heritage of people's struggles against the ruling government. The use of such images to speak about more recent protests around farmers' rights in India signals the fact that the image of the social activist, all dressed in white and with his tiny white cap, became yet another relevant image in itself, able to evoke a more recent past of anti-corruption struggles, and of large scale grassroots mobilizations.

Furthermore, in this new wave of mobilization, collective memory is related, simultaneously, to two periods in the past: the distant liberation struggle that occurred in India in the early decades of the 20th century, with Gandhi's mass campaigns of civil disobedience, and the much more recent anti-corruption struggles of Hazare that are the subject of this chapter. Both of these are collapsed into one image in newspaper reports on the current protests in support of the Indian farmers. The image of Gandhi embedded in the image of the anti-corruption protests connects these two past times and merges the collective memories of two different periods of mobilization. Unlike what happens with the time bridging mechanism, in this case the collective memory related to the three different waves of contention—in the distant, in the much nearer past, and in the present—do not remain distinct and distinguishable. In other words, they are not simply bridged one with the other: the condensation of different images through the mediation of news organizations blurs the boundaries between ongoing events and the two earlier periods. The liberation struggle, the anti-corruption mobilizations and the farmers protests come together around the image of Gandhi, the differences between them suspended in favour of a shared narrative of resistance against the power holders that, paradoxically, seems to be timeless.

In this way, one specific visual can merge and condense different contexts belonging to the distant past, the most recent past, and the present (Merrill, 2020). Similar to what happens with time collapse in social media (Brandtzaeg & Lüders, 2018), various temporal layers can be connected even within the same image, thus giving rise to a configuration of meaning that casts light on present protest through the lens of past ones. This type of

Figure 7.3: Hazare in the foreground with Gandhi at his shoulder. New Delhi, India, 25 March 2012. Photo: Sanjay Raghav.

convergence is also recognized as a key feature of memory sites as defined by Nora (1997) and others (e.g. Rigney, 2005). In the case of mainstream media, the process of time collapse happens due to a double remediation of contents: first, activists remediated the image of Gandhi, bringing it to the physical stage of the anti-corruption protests of 2011–2012 in the form of a giant banner, and taking pictures of Hazare with the image of Gandhi in the background (and, as we will see in the next section, even placing photos of Hazare and Gandhi side by side); subsequently, mainstream media remediated those pictures and visuals of Hazare from the anti-corruption protests to speak about ongoing (2020) farmer protests. By being displayed in new contexts and circulated in news media, the cultural life of the Hazare visuals was extended. In this sense, they can be compared to private digital photographs that have a second life on the internet, allowing them to be included in other, sometimes unexpected, contexts (Van Dijck, 2008). While the three waves of protests did not share the same contentious issues and did not mobilize the same constituencies, the time collapse produced by visuals contributes to developing a common thread between them emphasizing non-violent civil disobedience to achieve a political aim. In the case of the independence movement, this was freedom from colonial rule; in 2011, it was the passing of the Jan Lokpal Bill to fight political corruption; in the farmers' protests of 2020–2021, it was the repealing of certain laws that farmers perceived as detrimental to their interests.

Distributed Agency in Memory Work

So, how did the idea of equating Hazare with Gandhi come about? Did the activists actively engage in drawing such a parallel and communicating it to the public or was it the media, or even the protestors, who made the connection first? The few scholarly articles available on the movement agree that the activists who managed the protests had intentionally woven such a narrative to create an immediate connection with their intended audience (Chowdhury, 2019; Sharma, 2014). In a recollection published by one of the movement organizers, Lal (2017) writes that, in one of the earlier protests in 2011, at the Ramlila Maidan, the image of Bharat Mata ("Mother India" in Hindi; an iconic image of a saffron-clad woman on the backdrop of the geographical contours of India, often carrying the national flag and sometimes accompanied by a lion) was used as the stage backdrop. This caused consternation as the image has long been associated with right-wing Hindu nationalism. There was, however, no specific mention of the use of the image of Gandhi in this context.

Our respondents, who were insiders themselves, interestingly, had divergent viewpoints regarding how the activists used Gandhi as a mnemonic device for the movement. One of them, who joined the movement as a protestor before becoming an active member of the IAC team, explained that the comparison between Hazare and Gandhi was not planned by the activists but came from outside:

> It wasn't an idea initiated by us. It was an idea adopted by us. One has to anticipate how people perceive things. Especially when you are at the helm of a movement like this. You have to be receptive to what others are feeling and gauge what is working and what is not. So, for the longest time we used to refer to the Lokpal Bill as Jan Lokpal. People used to refer to it as Anna ka Lokpal. Media used to refer to it as "Anna ka Lokpal." Eventually we had to start referring to it as Anna ka Lokpal. Because that is what actually the people resonated with.

According to this respondent, Anna had become such a popular figure during this period that his name became synonymous with the movement itself, not unlike the Mahatma, who was the symbol of the independence movement. The purpose of the protests, as discussed earlier, was to create pressure on the Union government to pass the Jan Lokpal Bill (the people's ombudsman bill). However, over time, the bill came to be known as Anna ka Lokpal (Anna's Lokpal bill). Much like the ubiquity of Gandhi in any

discussion on India's struggle for independence against the British, Hazare had become a ubiquitous figure: the one-stop reference point for the movement. According to our respondent, it was not the case that the organizers had set out to forge the connection between Anna and Gandhi, but that they had to pay heed to the emotional connect that Hazare had made with the people, thanks to strong parallels between his life and that of Gandhi.

Gandhi's image had acquired mobilizing potential through its iterated use across history. As was clear both from the images of the anti-corruption mobilizations and the interviews we had with activists, Gandhi's image was the most salient reference point in activists' cultural repertoire: for activists, it was a natural choice to use such an image and somehow obvious to the point that they do not recall any strategic choice made in this regard. Two other respondents suggested that the comparison between Gandhi and Hazare happened organically, without divulging further details as to whether the activists themselves were instrumental in disseminating those images. According to one participant, it was Anna's piety and his simple lifestyle that created a strong connection with Gandhi:

> [T]he media was highlighting what was visible to them ... that look there is a man sitting here who is like Gandhi. He is 73 years old. He has nothing of his own. He is sacrificing everything. He has adopted villages, he is now staying at a temple ... And with Anna obviously the movement became much more pious. Because people felt that, yes, this man at the age of 73 is willing to risk his life in order to help ... When you see a 73-year-old man can give up his life for the country. Where are you? What are you doing?

In this context, it is worthwhile recalling that Mohandas Gandhi is remembered the world over as the "Mahatma," which is an honorific title signifying "the great soul." From the testimonies of our respondents, it was clear that they saw Anna in the same light, as a larger-than-life figure and as a beacon of hope. However, drawing conclusions about who was responsible for the Anna–Gandhi juxtaposition—the media, the protest organizers, or the protestors themselves—is tricky, even though it is evident that the activists managing the movement mobilized the collective memory inspired by Hazare's life story and utilized his Gandhian appeal to spread the protests far and wide. In other words, with the passing of time Gandhi's image became a cultural artefact with a mobilizing power in itself.

This remains true also in the case of the farmers' mobilizations that occurred in 2020. As we have argued above, the remediation of images of Hazare's donning the small white cap and clad in white clothes rekindled

memories of one powerful event and cast its long shadow on the present one. In this case, it is worthwhile speculating whether any of the initial protest organizers were responsible for disseminating the decade-old images of Hazare. Reading some of the newspaper articles that carried the news of Hazare's most recent fast in favour of the 2020 protests, several visuals used in them were old file/archival photos of the movement. This shows that it is indeed difficult to identify a single actor with control over the dispersion of the visuals and agency over the narrative that projected Hazare as the second Gandhi. At least in the case of the IAC movement, we experience what can be termed as distributed agency, where it is close to impossible to say who decided to release certain visuals and what they should signify. As far as the Hazare–Gandhi parallel is concerned, it would be futile to trace a single source or originator of this idea as it diffused widely immediately after the movement broke out and occupied a firm place in the collective memories of protest organizers and participants. Even more importantly, such distributed agency also rests on the performative potential of cultural artefacts, like Gandhi's images, which themselves accumulated a mobilizing potential over the course of the years. In another decade, some of these images would re-appear in an instance of what we have called time collapse, where the visuals are able to condense contexts at a temporal distance.

Conclusions

In this chapter, using the India Against Corruption movement of 2011–2012 as our case study, we have attempted to unpack the role played by visuals as mnemonic devices to trigger and sustain protests and mass mobilizations. We have contended that images can act as bridges between the present and the past and they can also contribute to the merging of different protest waves, hence blurring the lines between past and present. Through the processes of bridging and merging, visuals bring forth the recall value of iconography from past movements, which, in turn, allows activists to strengthen their narrative in the present. As was the case with our example, the image of the movement's primary face, Anna Hazare, was placed in conjunction with that of Mahatma Gandhi. Hazare also appeared in almost every single image accessed so far (both from media and personal sources) in white clothes and the iconic white Gandhi cap, to create an instant and unmistakable connection with the most prominent leader of the Indian independence struggle. Many protestors who arrived at the street rallies and the hunger strikes to support the movement, wore replica Gandhi caps

with the words "Main Anna Hoon" [I am Anna], thereby showing a strong identification with and admiration for the movement's leading face.

The colour white, symbolizing purity and piety, the two qualities that are antagonistic to corruption, was constantly associated with Hazare, by the activists who coordinated the movement as well as his followers, who diligently turned up at the marches or were glued to the television sets where Hazare was covered at almost feverish pitch. Our final contention is that these visuals, which activists select and employ to trigger collective memory, have a dynamic life span of their own and can appear from time to time, thereby bridging and collapsing the past, present, and future with an instant recall value that immediately transports the onlooker to past protests. We saw Anna's images resurface after almost a decade in a different context for the farmers' protests, which had completely separate political goals. In this case, the use of the images from the previous protest was exogenous to the original movement. Yet, it managed to create an instant recollection of the iconic scenes from 2011 when common people came out in large numbers to oppose the government of the time, much like the ongoing farmers' protests. In so doing, we also show that the mnemonic capacity of visuals in social movements that engage with massive street protests vary according to the stage in which the mobilization finds itself: visuals are hence dynamic tools in the construction, transformation, and spread of collective memories associated with social movements, with other actors than activists interacting with visuals in different ways across time. We also cast light on the various actors that contribute to the creation and diffusion of visuals related to protest: instead of singling out a specific social actor who is responsible for the visual strategies in mobilization, we showed that the agency is spread across different actors, including protest organizers, protest participants, interested bystanders, and, of course, mainstream media. The choice of the Gandhi portrait was strategic in order to harness its mobilizing power, which was rooted in cultural memory and the accumulated history of all its reproductions. All these social actors produce, circulate, and look at visuals from different perspectives. However, interestingly, in our discussion we illustrated how, independently from the social actor at stake, the mnemonic potential of visuals is not only always present, but also explicitly or implicitly employed to either bridge or merge past struggles with present mobilizations.

This chapter is intended to be the starting point of a larger conversation in which we aim to build on visuals and their role in both activating and nourishing collective memory in collective action against corruption. From the example of India, the analysis can be expanded to other countries to

develop a more fine-grained understanding of how collective memory, as a dynamic process, changes retrospectively in the light of how activists use key images in collective actions against corruption in later movements.

Bibliography

Anna Hazare on Indefinite Fast over Stronger Lokpal Bill. (2011, April 5). Hindustan Times. https://web.archive.org/web/20111116172557/http://www.hindustantimes.com/India-news/NewDelhi/Anna-Hazare-to-start-fast-unto-death-for-strong-Lokpal-Bill/Article1-681415.aspx

Anna Hazare Sits on Hunger Strike to Support Farmers; Says 'Create Pressure Not Violence'. (2020, December 8). Republic TV. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8jFtzucBFE

Anna Hazare Threatens to Launch His "Last Protest" for Farmers. (2020, December 28). The Economic Times. https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/anna-hazare-threatens-to-launch-his-last-protest-for-farmers/articleshow/79987131.cms?from=mdr

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. University of Minnesota Press.

Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. A. (1999). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press.

Brandtzaeg, P. B., & Lüders, M. (2018). Time Collapse in Social Media: Extending the Context Collapse. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118763349

Chowdhury, A. (2019). Anti-Corruption Movement: A Story of the Making of the Aam Aadmi Party and the Interplay of Political Representation in India. *Politics and Governance 7*(3), 189–198. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.v7i3.2155

Corrigall-Brown, C., & Wilkes, R. (2012). Picturing Protest: The Visual Framing of Collective Action by First Nations in Canada. *American Behavioral Scientist, 56*(2), 223–243. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211419357

Daphi, P., & Zamponi, L. (2019). Exploring the Movement–Memory nexus: Insights and Ways Forward. *Mobilization*, *24*(4), 399–417. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-24-4-399

Doerr, N., Mattoni, A., & Teune, S. (2015). Visuals in Social Movements. In D. della Porta & M. Diani (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Social Movements* (pp. 557–566). Oxford University Press.

Eyerman, R. (2006). Performing Opposition or, How Social Movements Move. In J. C. Alexander, B. Giesens, & J. L. Mast (Eds.), *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatics, and Ritual* (pp. 193–217). Cambridge University Press.

Farm Law Stir: Anna Hazare Calls Off His Indefinite Hunger Strike after Centre's Assurance. (2021, January 29). Scroll. https://scroll.in/latest/985426/farm-law-stir-anna-hazare-to-begin-hunger-strike-from-january-30-calls-government-insensitive

Gamson, W. A., & Meyer, D. S. (1996). Framing Political Opportunity. In D. McAdam, J. D. McCarthy, & M. N. Zald (Eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (pp. 275–290). Cambridge University Press.

Gamson, W. A., & Stuart, D. (1992). Media Discourse as a Symbolic Contest: The Bomb in Political Cartoons. *Sociological Forum, 7*(1), 55–86.

Hardt, H. & Ohrn, K. B. (1981). The Eyes of the Proletariat: The Worker Photography Movement in Weimar Germany. *Studies in Visual Communication 7*(3), 46–57.

Irwin-Zarecka, I. (1994) *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory.* Transaction Publishers.

Jeelani, M. (2011, September 1). *The Insurgent.* The Caravan Magazine. https://caravanmagazine.in/reportage/insurgent?fbclid=IwAR3jen4scAtq_mw5pbx-wbEQdV27J_wZCP-4VKcF_bEqRQw1ChiF82F1jGCg

Lal, A. (2017). *India Social: How Social Media is Leading the Charge and Changing the Country.* Hachette India.

Merrill, S. (2020). Following the Woman with the Handbag: Mnemonic Context Collapse and the Anti-Fascist Activist Appropriation of an Iconic Historical Photograph. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 111–139). Palgrave Macmillan.

Morrison, D. R., & Isaac, L. W. (2011). Insurgent Images: Genre Selection and Visual Frame Amplification in IWW Cartoon Art. *Social Movement Studies, 11*(1), 61–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2012.640530

Nora, P. (Ed.) (1997). *Les Lieux de mémoire, I, II et III.* Gallimard.

Olesen, T. (2018). Memetic Protest and the Dramatic Diffusion of Alan Kurdi. *Media, Culture & Society, 40*(5), 656–672.

Olick, J. K., & Robbins, J. (1998). Social Memory Studies: From "Collective Memory" to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices. *Annual Review of Sociology, 24*, 105–140.

Omvedt, G. (2006). *Dalit Visions: The Anti-Caste Movement and the Construction of an Indian Identity.* Orient Longman.

Parry, K. (2011). Images of Liberation? Visual Framing, Humanitarianism and British Press Photography during the 2003 Iraq Invasion. *Media, Culture & Society, 33*(8), 1185–1201.

Pradhan, R. C. (2006). Making Sense of Gandhi's Idea of Truth. *Social Scientist, 34*(5/6), 36–49.

Perlmutter, D. D., & Wagner, G. L. (2004). The Anatomy of a Photojournalistic Icon: Marginalization of Dissent in the Selection and Framing of "a Death in Genoa." *Visual Communication, 3*(1), 91–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357204039600

Ramsey, E. M. (2000). Inventing Citizens during World War I: Suffrage Cartoons in the Woman Citizen. *Western Journal of Communication, 64*(2), 113–47. https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310009374668

Rigney, A. (2005). Plenitude, Scarcity and the Circulation of Cultural Memory. *Journal of European Studies, 35*(1), 011–028. https://doi.org/10.1177/0047244105051158

Rigney, A. (2018a). Remembering Hope: Transnational Memory beyond the Traumatic. *Memory Studies, 11*(3), 368–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698018771869

Rigney, A. (2018b). Remembrance as Remaking: Memories of the Nation Revisited. *Nations and Nationalism, 24*(2), 240–57. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12388

Rohlinger, D. A., & Klein, J. (2012). Visual Landscapes and the Abortion Issue. *American Behavioral Scientist, 56*(2), 172–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764211419487

Rovisco, M. (2017). The Indignados Social Movement and the Image of the Occupied Square: The Making of a Global Icon. *Visual Communication, 16*(3), 337–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470357217702088

Ryan, C. (1991). *Prime Time Activism: Media Strategies for Grassroots Organizing*. South End Press.

Scalmer, S. (2011) *Gandhi in the West: The Mahatma and the Rise of Radical Protest*. Cambridge University Press.

Schwartz, B., Zerubavel, Y., & Barnett, B. M. (1986). The Recovery of Masada: A Study in Collective Memory. *Sociological Quarterly, 27*(2), 147–164. https://doi-org.ezproxy.unibo.it/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1986.tb00254.x

Sharma, A. (2014). Epic Fasts and Shallow Spectacles: The 'India Against Corruption' Movement, Its Critics, and the Re-Making of 'Gandhi.' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies, 37*(3), 365–380. https://doi.org/10.1080/00856401.2014.933759

Sengupta, M. (2012). Anna Hazare and the Idea of Gandhi. *The Journal of Asian Studies, 71*(3), 593–601. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911812000617

Sengupta, M. (2014). Anna Hazare's Anti-Corruption Movement and the Limits of Mass Mobilization in India. *Social Movement Studies, 13*(3), 406–413. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2013.860025

Snow, D. A., Rochford, E. B., Worden, S. K., & Benford, R. D. (1986). Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation. *American Sociological Review, 51*(4), 464–481. https://doi.org/10.2307/2095581

Team Anna Ends Fast at Jantar Mantar. (2012, August 3). NDTV. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/team-anna-ends-fast-at-jantar-mantar-732139

Terdiman, R. (1993). Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis. In *Present Past*. Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501717604

Tilly, C. (2002). *Stories, Identities and Political Change*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Tilly, C. (2004). *Social Movements, 1768–2004*. Routledge.

Tilly, C. (2008). *Contentious Performances*. Cambridge University Press.

Vahed, G. (2017). The Past in the Present: Writing the South African Gandhi. *Journal of Labor and Society, 20*(1), 107–127. https://doi.org/10.1163/24714607-02001008

Van Dijck, J. (2008). Digital Photography: Communication, Identity, Memory. *Visual Communication 7*(1), 57–76. https://doi.org/10.1177/147035720708486

About the Authors

Alice Mattoni is associate professor at the Department of Political and Social Science of the University of Bologna. She is the principal investigator of the ERC funded project BIT–ACT, which investigates how activists employ digital media to counter corruption from the grassroots. She has published extensively on social movements and their relationship with various types of media. Her work has appeared in: *Communication Theory*, *European Journal of Communication*, *Information, Communication and Society*, and *Social Movement Studies.* (alice.mattoni@unibo.it)

Anwesha Chakraborty is a postdoctoral fellow at the Department of Political and Social Sciences, University of Bologna, where she is part of the ERC-funded project BIT–ACT. She is currently working on digital media and collective action against corruption. She is interested in exploring various aspects of digital society, including digital policies, digital divide, and ICTs for development. Her work has appeared in Italian and international journals, including *Journal of Science Communication*, *Telecommunication Policy*, and *Sociologia del Lavoro.* (anwesha.chakraborty3@unibo.it)

8 Visual Activism in Protests against Disappearances: The Photo-Portraits of the 43 Ayotzinapa Students[1]

Sophie Dufays

Abstract

This chapter focuses on how activists have used and remediated photo-portraits of the 43 students who "disappeared" from the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Guerrero Mexico in 2014. It explores the different visual memories that have shaped the role of these portraits in new protests. It argues that the mobilizing power of these images is rooted in three traditions of visual memory: a religious tradition in which the photos are appropriated as icons; a tradition of creating murals, which can be connected to the visual memory of revolution in Mexico; and, finally, the national and transnational memory of the "disappeared" in Latin America

Keywords: Mexico, Ayotzinapa case, photo-portrait, enforced disappearance, remediation, icon.

In the night of 26 to 27 September 2014, students from the Raul Isidro Burgos Rural Teachers' College in Ayotzinapa, one of the poorest regions in the Mexican state of Guerrero, were attacked as they drove through the town of Iguala. At least six of them were killed, 40 were wounded, and 43 others were "disappeared" by local police forces, in collusion with members of

---

the state and federal security forces.[2] While we do not know what exactly happened to the disappeared students, the Mexican Government claims that local police handed them over to members of the "Guerreros Unidos," a criminal syndicate, who presumably murdered them.

The mass disappearance resulted in one of the biggest political crises in Mexico of the last decade. For months, thousands of Mexican citizens took to the streets to demand the reappearance of the students. The protests took place in public, on the streets of Guerrero and in many other Mexican cities, but also in the virtual public space of the internet. Through digital media, the disappearance of the students of Ayotzinapa became a global event. All over the world, grassroots activists shared photos, videos, and texts on social media in solidarity with the disappeared students and their families.

In the "visual activism" (Bryan-Wilson, González, & Willsdon, 2016) that followed the disappearance, the ID photos of the 43 students—first used by the government of Guerrero on the search poster that was published three days after the event and subsequently reappropriated by the protest-ers—became a crucial device.[3] Even today, the photo-portraits of the 43 students are omnipresent in all sorts of protests around the case, including artistic or *artivist* ones, from street performances to exhibitions in museums. In addition, they have also been massively distributed and remediated through the internet. The use of the portraits varies from one activist group to another. De Vecchi Gerli (2018) identifies four groups: "the relatives of the disappeared, the two main human rights organisations working with the relatives of the disappeared (Tlachinollan and Centro Pro), the students of the Ayotzinapa school, and the broader public in solidarity with the movement" (pp. 212–213). The first three groups are Mexican, while the last group is transnational.

---

2   In addition to the 43 disappearances, the attacks left six people dead, 40 injured, 110 direct victims, and more than 700 indirect victims (GIEI, 2015, pp. 311–313). On the relationship between the Ayotzinapa case and the broader context of disappearances in contemporary Mexico, see Mandolessi (2022).

3   The appropriation of these official identity documents by the relatives of the disap-peared and by the whole civil society, as testimonial evidence of their existence, "inverted the sense of the government quest and, in turn, addressed the state for its responsibility for their disappearance" (González-Flores, 2018, p. 488). It also reversed the implicit criminalization associated with the use of such photos, similar to the mugshots of criminals published on wanted posters. About the ID photographs as an instrument of control and surveillance of identities (of disappeared people), and their contradictory effects of individualization and desubjectivization, beyond the Mexican context, see Richard (2000), Longoni (2010), or Blejmar, Fortuny and García (2013).

The use of photographs of the disappeared as part of the protest repertoire is usually traced back to the Argentine dictatorship (1976–1983), but in fact it had also been common in Mexico starting with the counterinsurgency period of the 1970s. Simultaneously, in the State of Guerrero and in the Ayotzinapa school, the faces of the disappeared students are recurrently associated with a series of "icons of Revolution" (Noble, 2010), while the students' families and rural communities, as well as transnational activists, have appropriated their images as religious icons.

This chapter examines how the use of the photo-portraits by activists can be linked to interconnected visual memories *of* and *in* protests. It shows that the portraits mobilize visual memory both explicitly, through clear references to earlier protest cycles, and implicitly, through the remediation of similar images (Bolter & Grusin, 2000; Erll & Rigney, 2009). Applying the general definition of media offered by Bolter and Grusin (2000), we can argue that photography "appropriate[es] techniques, forms, and social significance of other media" (p. 98). In this case, the photo-portraits of the 43 students have been appropriated and remediated through national visual traditions (such as the importance of religious icons and revolutionary murals in Mexico), transnational practices (such as the use of the silhouette in visual activism surrounding disappearances in Argentina), and global ones (the remediation of the portraits in the digital realm). To borrow from Bryan-Wilson et al. (2016), "[h]ow does the past become a form of visual activism in the present? To what degree do forms of visual activism travel, and in what ways are they necessarily grounded in locally specific knowledge and geographically specific spaces?" (pp. 9–10).

This interest in the forms and strategies of visual activism underlies this chapter's study of the mobilizing power of the photo-portraits of the disappeared students. It argues that they derive their power from their resonance with three traditions of visual memory. First, the religious tradition, where the faces of the dead acquire an auratic presence. Second, the visual memory of revolution in Mexico, to which the muralist tradition can be related. Third, the transnational visual memory of the disappeared in Latin America, which has its roots in 1970s Argentina and Mexico. The resonance of the ID photos with these various mnemonic frames, corresponding to connected but distinguishable strands of protests, gives them power in the private (family), local, national, and transnational spheres.

Adopting a *media–ecological perspective* (Treré, 2019), able to account for the "hybrid character of today's memory ecologies and mnemonic assemblages" (Merrill, 2020, p. 115), this chapter considers the multidirectional circulation of the photo-portraits both in the physical and the digital media spaces. Looking

at these "more or less digital" circulations (Merrill et al., 2020) through what Fuentes (2019) has called "performance constellations," a theoretical lens focused on "the entanglement between street protests and digital networking as cocreators of insurgent collective action" (p. 2), the chapter examines traditional graphic or artistic practices (graffiti, stencils, paintings, drawings, engravings, and so on) involving material media (posters, billboards, flyers, clothes, murals, among others) as well as the digital circulation and remediation of the portraits through social media like Twitter, Tumblr, or YouTube. The images of live protests, which are also used to study the circulation of the 43 portraits, mostly derive from documentaries, audio-visual reports, activist videos, and amateur images posted on YouTube.

Assmann and Assmann (2010) state that, in its career "from image to icon," a photograph is "disconnected from its local and historical context and transferred into the global arena"; it "is bleached of its referential specificity, allowing for an immense widening of its meaning. What had started as an *image of* ends up as an *image for*" (p. 235). Examining the photo-portraits of the 43 disappeared students, this chapter proposes an alternative to this definition. Instead of separating the *index* and *icon* and the *local* and *global*, the portraits of the disappeared become icons as the result of their joint local and global circulation and remediation. In this process, however, they keep their referential force as historical documents. This shows that, at least in this case, the "widening of meaning" of some images is not a one way and irreversible process. As we will see, a single portrait may refer to an individual student, to the set of the 43 students as a specific group (representing the singularity of the case), to the other victims of disappearances in Mexico (the contemporary ones, and/or past ones), to the transnational "ideal type" of the disappeared as it has been defined by the Argentine model, or even to all these levels at the same time.

The Visual Memory of Religious Traditions

The mnemonic and mobilizing power of the portraits can be explained in the first instance as the outcome of the ritual practices that have imbued the portraits with religious connotations. The relatives and communities of the students, who are by and large rural and Catholic, place their portraits on domestic altars where they are frequently juxtaposed with Christian icons such as the Virgin of Guadalupe. However, far from being a local particularity, such a religious iconization is seen in many on- and offline remediations of the portraits, such as those of the project
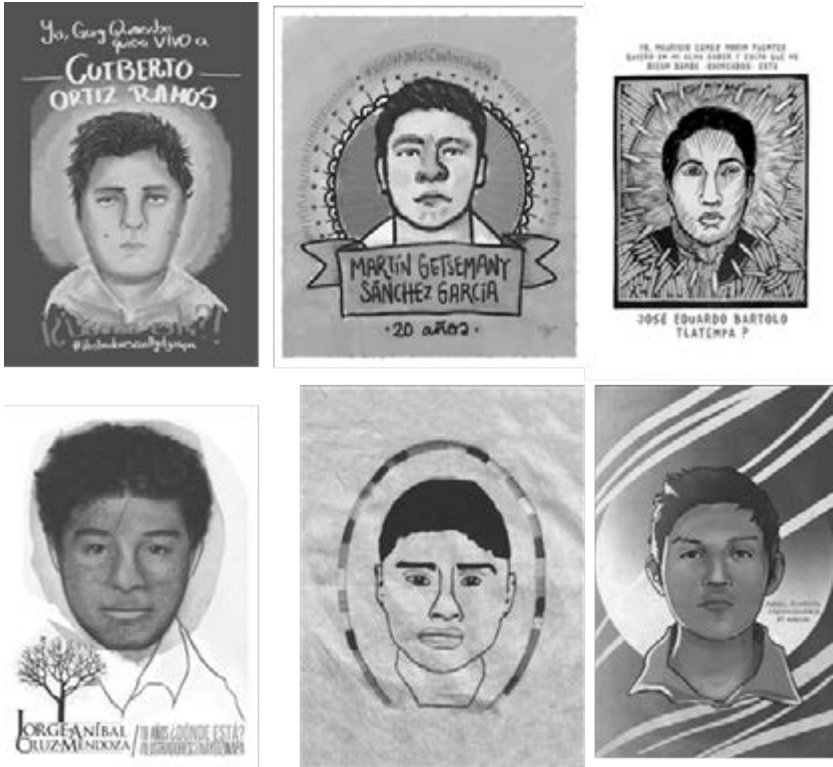
Figure 8.1: Images from *Te buscaré hasta encontrarte. Ilustradores con Ayotzinapa*, 2021. Texts from Elena Poniatowska, Témoris Grecko, Paris Martínez, and David Huerta. Various illustrators. Project by Valeria Gallo, Mauricio Gómez Morin, and Andrea Fuertes. Section Editorial Production, Coordinación de Extensión Universitaria, UAM Xochimilco, Ciudad de México (courtesy of the editors).

#IlustradoresConAyotzinapa,[4] where the aureole, a traditional attribute of Christ and the saints, is omnipresent.[5]

Additionally, the practice of carrying the portraits of the 43 students in marches and smaller scale street protests—a practice also present in some YouTube activist videos combining multiple selfie-videos sent by

4   This project has been launched by Mexican visual artist Valeria Gallo: she invited any interested illustrator to realize a creative portrait of one student based on his ID photo and including the student's name in the work. The initiative led to a "bank of portraits" composed of drawings that remediate the original photos. As noted by Mandolessi (2019), "these drawings have become viral and have been incessantly reproduced in commemorative events, websites, demonstrations; we can see them taking the place of the traditional black and white photos" (n.p.).

5   See: https://ilustradoresconayotzinapa.tumblr.com

transnational protesters[6]—recalls the Argentine and Mexican mothers carrying the photos of their missing children. At the same time, this practice itself evokes the iconographic trope of the *pietà*, which depicts the Virgin Mary cradling the dead body of Jesus. In the marches and the video activism against the disappearance of the 43, this practice not only "expresses an embodied commitment to remembering," as Rigney (2020, p. 721) writes about the portraits of dead protesters in general, but it also manifests contradictory desires for incarnation and resurrection, notions rooted in Christianity.

Next to the domestic and local rituals, the carrying of the 43 portraits in marches lends them a religious meaning related to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of the sacred icon. Indeed, if we accept the *pietà* as an underlying visual trope, the portraits of the 43 share visual elements with the Orthodox depiction of Christ: faces of young men, who are looking directly at the spectator and do not express any recognizable emotion (Kemp, 2011).[7] In the Orthodox tradition, icons were not regarded as mere visual representations but as authentic copies of the "original images" of Christ or the saints (cf. Mondzain, 1996 or Belting, 1996). In essence, the icon is an image of the image; the image of Christ is the archetype of the Image as the incarnation of God. This origin adds a spiritual meaning to the ghostly understanding of photography[8] that has been recurrently applied to the special case of the photos of disappeared people (García, 2013).[9]

Alongside the iconographic memory of the *pietà* and the Orthodox icons implied in the ritual uses of the portraits, another meaningful visual reference contributes to their religious dimension and auratization. As summarized by Longoni (2010), the 1983 *Siluetazo* (in Plaza de Mayo), an action that may be described as a "public workshop during which the artists and the general public painted human-sized silhouettes on cardboard

6   See for example the video "Somos Ayotzinapa," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1adZVQPwIlI (13 October 2014; 181 627 views).

7   For Kemp (2011), "the full-frontal view of a forward-looking face often exhibits a certain emotional starkness" (p. 14), a potency that is "perfectly adapted to giving visual form to the concept of the all-seeing God" (p. 15). This religious and cultural model provides the 43 disappeared students with the quasi-divine authority of a stark judging gaze. Expressing initially "the gaze of the State at the human face" (Figueroa, 2016, p. 209), the portraits as icons conversely come to express the Christic, god-like gaze at the dehumanizing Mexican State.

8   Cf. the Barthesian notion that "photography has something to do with resurrection" (1980, p. 129). Brink (2000) elaborates on the magical qualities ascribed to photography (pp. 139–140) in her article on photographs from Nazi concentration camps.

9   García (2013) argues that the photo-portraits of the disappeared, even more than "representing" them, embody their spectral condition, their ghostly materiality.

and then placed the silhouettes on walls, monuments and trees" (Zícari, 2018), has been read by some authors in terms of a "radical liquidation of the category of modern art as an object-of-pure-contemplation," as well as "the recuperation of a magical-religious dimension of art that modernity had taken away" (Buntinx, 2008, p. 278, quoted in Longoni 2010, p. 56). To a certain extent, these ideas may be applied to some of the activist uses of the remediated photo-portraits of the 43. For Buntinx (2008), the collective action based on the silhouettes, in its attempt to "reclaim the loved ones trapped in the phantasmagorical borders of death for a new life," becomes "a messianic and political experience where resurrection and insurrection merge" (p. 260). In the protests around the Ayotzinapa case, the photos of the 43 have similarly activated a ritual dimension by referencing the Christian notion of resurrection. The ritual use of the portraits makes manifest an apparent discordance between the desire to believe in the "return-with-life" of the disappeared, that is, in their miraculous resurrection, and the desire to reincarnate them, as Christ incarnates God: as messengers ready to sacrifice their life. In a sense, that is what many relatives of the 43 are doing, quitting their jobs to devote all their energy to demanding justice for the disappeared.

The Visual Memory of Revolution and Guerrilla in Mexico

A second important visual tradition linking memory and protest in this case is the (post)revolutionary Mexican muralist tradition as appropriated by the students of the Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College (cf. Torres Arroyo, 2019). The walls of the College are covered with paintings representing a Mexican history filled with violent struggles, revolutions and counter-revolutionary action, reflecting the long-standing opposition between the Mexican State and the Rural Teachers' Colleges (cf. Castellanos, 2013; Coll Lebedeff, 2015). Among the multiple portraits of communist thinkers and leaders (including Marx, Engels, Lenin, Zapata, Mao), three persons are accorded special admiration and even devotion. Next to the Cuban revolutionary leader Che Guevara, we find two local *guerrilleros*: Lucio Cabañas Barrientos and Genaro Vázquez Rojas. Former students of the Ayotzinapa College, Vázquez and Cabañas led armed movements in the 1960s. Vázquez founded the Asociación Cívica Nacional Revolucionaria [Guerrero Civic Association] and Cabañas the Partido de los Pobres [Party of the Poor]. They embody the struggles for land, agrarian reform, and education, issues that were already central demands in the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920) and which

Figure 8.2: Mural of Lucio Cabañas with the faces of the 43 students who disappeared in Iguala in 2014; Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College, Guerrero, Mexico, 13 March 2016. Photo: Jessica Torres Barrera.

Figure 8.3: Mural in the "Camp Santo" Neighbourhood. Tixtla, Guerrero, Mexico, 2 November 2014. Photo: Germán Canseco.

resulted in the creation of the *Escuelas Normales Rurales*. Like Guevara, Vázquez and Cabañas were killed in the 1970s. Prestholdt (2019) notes that "when iconic figures die young they preserve the dream of what they could have been. They become totems for potential unfulfilled" (p. 15). Through a visual juxtaposition with the 43 photo-portraits, this aspect of Guevera, Vázquez, and Cabañas is transferred to the disappeared students.

These three icons of dissent (Prestholdt, 2019), especially the image of Cabañas, have been prominently displayed in protests surrounding the disappearance of the 43 students. We see them on the walls of the Ayotzinapa College but also in other material remediations.[10] Most strikingly, some murals in the Ayotzinapa College and in other places in Guerrero display the portraits of the 43 literally surrounding one of the three icons.[11]

In the first (mosaic) mural, titled *Somos un ejército de soñadores* [we are an army of dreamers], Cabañas' *sombrero* appears as a saint's aureole,[12] and the photos of the 43 students surround his head as if they were angels in a religious painting. The second mural (in the village of Tixtla) represents the 43 portraits in a photographic tape that resembles a timeline connecting the students with other famous revolutionary icons (Cabañas, Che, Subcomandante Marcos).

The remediation of the 43 photo-portraits on murals is a clear strategy of visual activism, which transforms them into visual "icons of dissent" and of revolution. While the murals associate the portraits of the 43 students with former revolutionary figures, the medium of reproduction itself is also significant, insofar as it takes over the established tradition of Mexican muralism as a (post)revolutionary art. From the visual connection with Che, Cabañas and Vázquez in the protests emanating from the Ayotzinapa community of students, the missing 43 are remembered in the guise of social strugglers integrated within a revolutionary process that is far from completed; their visualized memory calls for continuous political and armed actions from a communist perspective.

10   Cf. the images presented in the Facebook pages devoted to the memory of these leaders, https://www.facebook.com/genarovrojas/ and https://www.facebook.com/Lucio-Caba%C3%B1as-Barrientos-37828478674/photos
11   See also the mural painted in the lobby of the city hall of Acapulco (Guerrero, 2014), visible in: https://www.lajornadaguerrero.com.mx/index.php/sociedadyjusticia/item/4689-pide-activista-le-permitan-terminar-el-mural-del-ayuntamiento-de-acapulco
12   Noteworthily, this portrait of Cabañas wearing a sombrero and carrying a rifle responds itself to the archetype of the revolutionary, arguably created by a photograph of Emiliano Zapata (the 1913 full-body portrait taken by the Hugo Brehme), which is also remediated on the walls of the College. About this "icon of Revolution" and its use by the Zapatistas, see Noble (2010, pp. 145–148) and Memou (2013).

The National and Transnational Memory of the Disappeared in Latin America

Thirdly, and most notably for the transnational community of activists and observers, the portraits of the 43 activate a "transnational memory of disappearance particular to Latin America," a memory that finds its roots in the Argentina of the 1970s (Mandolessi, 2018, p. 25). The use of the ID photos as a means to demand justice, truth, and continued remembrance can be linked to the protests of the Mothers and Grandmothers of the Plaza de Mayo who, from 1978 onwards, used (portrait) photographs to demand the *reaparición con vida* [reappearance with life] of their sons and daughters, who had been disappeared during the 1976–1983 military dictatorship. As Mandolessi (2019) observes, such a reference reduplicates the referential function of the photos of the 43 students, which can be seen as "'quotes' of a previously established representation: we recognize in them the figure of the disappeared and the claims, the struggles, and the history of activism which is called upon to make sense of the disappearance in the present" (n.p.). Along with the silhouettes used as a strategy of visual activism from the first *Siluetazo* in 1983, the ID photos of people who were disappeared during the Argentine dictatorship have been commonly used to remember, represent and *vivify* the disappeared (*vivificarlos*). They display a semiotic tension between the individual they represent and their function as an "unequivocal collective sign" of all the disappeared (Longoni, 2010, p. 45).

For Gabriel Gatti (2017), the image of relatives holding and showing black-and-white photographs of their disappeared loved ones, often in combination with specific slogans ("¿Dónde están?" [where are they], "Vivos se los llevaron, vivos los queremos" [they were taken alive, we want them back alive]), has become the "universal image" of the disappeared. This visual "ideal type" has been constructed as a legal-criminal category over time[13] and has psycho-clinical features (with the fundamental topic of impossible mourning) as well as socio-political dimensions (including the family frame of the protest and the claim for memory). All these characteristics converge in the expressive meaning of the ID-photos: they manifest and symbolize the ghostly reappearance of the disappeared, linked to their unstable legal status and ontological condition between life and death.[14]

---

13   Gatti (2017) quotes the legal definition proposed by the International Convention for the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance, a text that was ratified in February 2007. See https://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CED/Pages/ConventionCED.aspx

14   About this aspect, see also Richard (2000) and García (2013).

If we look at the faces of the 43 students of Ayotzinapa as a set, we may identify a relatively homogenous group with similar visual features: "a group of young men that have scarcely passed their teenage years, and who belong to a poor, indigenous or mestizo (mixed-race), brown-skinned class" (González-Flores, 2018, pp. 495–496). As a group, they significantly differ from the majority of the victims of the Argentine dictatorship (white-skinned working-class people). However, the recognizable format of the photos and the way they are carried and used in marches and protests clearly connects them to the transnational mnemonic category of the disappeared.

Zícari (2018; 2021) and Mandolessi (2018) have highlighted the role of Latin American cultural repertoires in the global reception of the Ayotzinapa case. They argue that previous forced disappearances have provided the case of the 43 students "with a clear frame, in which the role of the drug gangs as perpetrators has been set aside and the State has been pointed at as the main responsible" (Mandolessi, 2018, p. 24). The dissemination of the photos, with their cultural, socio-political, and legal associations, have contributed to extending the indictment of the government of President Enrique Peña to the collective complicity of the Mexican State in the Ayotzinapa disappearances and the many other cases of disappearance in the country.[15]

If the figure of the disappeared is strongly associated with the dictatorships of the Southern Cone, it has, from the late 1960s onwards, also been present in Mexico. During the so-called Dirty War or counterinsurgency war, which lasted from the Tlatelolco Massacre (1968) up to the 1980s, successive Mexican governments used forced disappearances to repress political opponents.[16] In this period, between 275 and 1300 people were disappeared, the majority in the State of Guerrero where the Ayotzinapa College is located. Similar to Argentina, albeit in a less visible way, the relatives of these disappeared have protested and created human rights organizations. For example, Rosario Ibarra de la Piedra, whose son Jesús Piedra Ibarra disappeared in 1975, founded the Comité ¡Eureka! in 1977. Inspired by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo,[17] protest posters of the organization included photo-portraits of the disappeared (López Ovalle, 2013, p. 67).

---

15   The accusation against the State has crystallized in the famous slogan and hashtag "Fue el Estado" [it was the State], frequently associated with the students' photos. For an analysis of the constellations or choreographies of protest actions linked to this slogan, see Fuentes (2019) and Zícari (2021).

16   For recent historical studies about this period, see Calderón and Cedillo (2012), Castellanos (2013) or Ovalle (2019), among others. For a perspective centred on cultural memory, see Szurmuk and Castro Ricalde (2015).

17   Cf. Ibarra's declarations in the 2013 documentary *Rosario* (Erenberg et al., 2013).

Until at least the 2000s, the history of disappearances in Mexico was left largely unacknowledged in the country's collective memory.[18] Protests against this type of violence in Mexico prior to the Ayotzinapa case were less reliant on a visual than on a textual repertoire and on handcrafts (Olalde, 2016). Although photo-portraits of the thousands of "new" disappeared in the drug war that began in 2006–2007[19] only started to appear extensively in 2014, portraits of the "old" disappeared, cases stemming from the 1970s, were still being circulated by activists although without reaching wide social visibility. For example, from its foundation in 2000, the organization H.I.J.O.S. México[20]—the Mexican section of a transnational organization born in Argentina in 1995—used photo-portraits, along with other strategies of visual activism, in their protests (cf. López Ovalle, 2013).

Considered against this historical background, the frequent use of the photo-portraits of the 43 Ayotzinapa students in 2014 contributed to the unearthing of a marginalized memory of earlier protests against disappearances. De Vecchi Gerli (2018) notes that:

> *Although not always knowingly* [emphasis added], the new generations and new groups of relatives of the disappeared use the discourses that Eureka and other organisations made public in past decades. The memories of the disappeared, which have not had a prominence in the public space, have nonetheless travelled in time and impacted the new generations. (p. 159)

While De Vecchi Gerli mostly studied discursive practices, her point can be expanded to the display of photo-portraits. The Ayotzinapa case sheds new light on the need to examine a clear tradition of State terrorism (Gómez Unamuno, 2020) and the circulation of the portraits of the 43 students played a crucial role in this renewed visibility.

In their visual activism, both the Comité ¡Eureka! and the H.I.J.O.S. have anonymized the ID photos, using silhouettes of the portraits with words or

---

18   About the few academic and artistic efforts to promote memory work against a "public politics of forgetting," see Seydel (2014) and Gómez Unamuno (2020).

19   In 2020, the government has revised the number of people disappeared between 2006 and 2019, estimating it to be around 60,000, a number that has been revised upwards to 100,000 in 2021 (by the National Commission for the Search for Disappeared Persons, Comisión Nacional de Búsqueda). About the "unstable spectrum of appeared and disappeared people in Mexico" and its spectral dimension, see Barriendos (2019, p. 10).

20   "Hijos por la Identidad y la Justicia contra el Olvido y el Silencio" [Sons and Daughters for Identity and Justice against Oblivion and Silence].

other graphic signs on posters.[21] Here, we might infer the influence of the silhouette as a visual trope of protest against enforced disappearances. In the Argentine context, the photos and the silhouettes have been studied as opposed visual strategies, which stress individualization and quantification respectively (Longoni, 2010, p. 60). In Mexico, from the 1970s onwards, these two strategies were often combined.

Following this form of visual activism, some remediations of the portraits of the 43 Ayotzinapa students represent their faces in stylized and/or abstract ways. This practice seems to underline the tension between individuality and anonymity, between referentiality and symbolization. Strikingly, some of the remediations recreate the pixel effect particular to the digital image but use material building blocks, such as the Lego blocks used by Ai Weiwei for some of his portraits, or a mechanical machine, such as the typewriter in Del Olmo's installation.[22] They are examples of a "commemorative materialisation of new digital logics" that, alongside the "digital mediatisation of previously non-digital commemorative activities" or devices, constitute a transnational "atmosphere" defined by "feelings of togetherness" (Merrill et al. 2020, p. 562) in this case against the global crime of disappearance. Again, the interplay between material elements and digital imagery underlines the tension between individuality and anonymity that is characteristic of the ID photos of the disappeared.

We find the same visual tensions as an aesthetic trend in one of the most famous remediations of the ID photos: the creative portraits realized for the aforementioned project #IlustradoresConAyotzinapa. A number of these illustrations use the mnemonic device of the silhouette and combine it with different signs and symbols linked to the case and/or to Mexican culture.[23] The logo of the project itself merges the silhouette of the portrait with a slogan epitomizing the personal commitment of activists to make the disappeared "reappear": "Te buscaré hasta encontrarte" [I will look for

21   Among the images produced by the Comité ¡Eureka!, see the poster "Uno es igual a todos," by Andrés Ramírez Cuevas (visible in: https://cmch.colmex.mx/images/boletines/boletin-432.pdf). Some images, stickers, and posters produced by H.I.J.O.S. Mexico are freely available on their website: http://hijosmexico.org/index-stickers#12 (see also López Ovalle, 2013).

22   I am referring to the Lego portraits realized by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei (2018) in the Museo Universitario Arte Contemporáneo, and to the installation by Argentine artist Javier del Olmo, entitled *43 Students from Ayotzinapa* (2014). Both works are reproduced and briefly analysed in Barriendos (2019).

23   See: https://ilustradoresconayotzinapa.tumblr.com If we can recognize the influence of the silhouette in the students' portraits, conversely in the "siluetazo por Ayotzinapa" organized at the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art in 2014, "each silhouette [was] identified with a picture of the face and the name of a disappeared student" (Zícari, 2018, p. 5).

you until I find you].[24] The drawings and logo strive to iconize the portraits of the students, transforming their faces into a universal symbol.

This widening of the meaning of the 43 portraits is not without its tensions. As Trinh T. Minh-Ha argues, "invisibility is built into each instance of visibility" and each is the "condition for the advent of the other" (cited in Bryan-Wilson, González, & Willsdon, 2016, p. 17). In the iconization process, the portraits of the 43 students are linked to other victims of forced disappearance in Mexico. They become symbols of the broader phenomenon of disappearances, which means that they become less specific and, one could argue, unfocused. Therefore, it is important to note that only a couple of the remediations make an explicit connection between the Ayotzinapa case and the broader human rights crisis in Mexico.[25] While the Iguala crime has certainly made the phenomenon of disappearances in contemporary Mexico more visible, it also, following De Vecchi Gerli (2018), "had an effect of making other cases less prominent" (p. 6). In the process of synecdochization, these faces at once stand for all the others and, at least to a certain extent, conceal or mask them. The mnemonic resonance of the visual pattern at a transnational level and the weight of Guerrero's regional history of disappearances impact on the synecdochic ability of the photos of the 43, causing them to elicit more connections with the political disappeared from the 1970s than to the—much more numerous—contemporary victims of disappearance from the war on drugs.[26]

Conclusions

This chapter examined how the widespread use and remediation of photo-portraits of the 43 disappeared students from the Ayotzinapa Teachers' College contributed to rooting the mobilizations around the Ayotzinapa case in three interconnected historical lines of protest, involving different mnemonic frames.

At a global level, the 43 photo-portraits activate a transnational memory of enforced disappearance. They are connected to strategies of visual activism,

---

24   See: http://www.ilustradoresconayotzinapa.org

25   Cf. the poster with the slogan "En mi casa sí tenemos memoria, nos faltan 43 y miles más" [we do have memory in my home. We are missing 43 and thousands more], created by a cultural centre in Mexico City, and the poster "No solo es Ayotzinapa… es todo México" [It is not only Ayotzinapa… it is all of Mexico], created by José Miguel Chávez Gutiérrez. Both of them are reproduced in De Vecchi Gerli (2018, p. 214).

26   About the genealogy of state repression that the activism around the Ayotzinapa case has put forward, see Zícari (2021).

which started in Argentina in the 1970s. This reference has been instrumental in drawing global attention to the human rights crisis in Mexico and severely damaged its diplomatic image. At the same time, the Latin American model also played a decisive role on the national level. By using the portraits of the 43 students to protest against the corrupt government of Peña Nieto and the Mexican State as a false democratic structure, activists have unearthed repressed or marginalized memories of the political disappeared from the Mexican "dirty war," with whom they have become more closely associated than with the people who disappeared during the drug war. The goal of accusing the state—whose responsibility is clearer to establish in the counterinsurgency period than in a context dominated by drug-related criminality—is one factor explaining this mnemonic bias.

At the regional level of the State of Guerrero and the local level of the Ayotzinapa College itself, the 43 faces have been painted on walls and transformed into revolutionary icons in line with global and regional guerrilla leaders, such as Che Guevara, Cabañas and Vázquez Rojas. Here, their faces recall the unfulfilled promises of the Mexican Revolution and highlight racial and territorial issues.

At the private, domestic level of the student's families, but also in the public space, the ritual practices around the photos, the ways they are carried at protests, and several graphic elements in their on- and offline remediation, such as the aureoles, connect them to an iconographic religious tradition. The use of the photos as religious icons entails a merging of the Christian notion of resurrection with the political experience of the insurrection.

These memory frames are entangled and combined in variable mnemonic assemblages across different groups of protesters, but in asymmetrical ways. If the transnational and national memories of the disappeared are identifiable in the local appropriations of the 43 portraits, the reverse is less true: the photos used and remediated in global protests are not necessarily connected to the revolutionary version of the 43 students, which can be related to the local specificities of the case and to the history of the Ayotzinapa school. However, the stylization of the photo-portraits through multiple remediations and their auratization through ritualized practices operate "at multiple, interlocking scales and involv[e] conduits, intersections, circuits, and articulations" (De Cesari & Rigney, 2014, p. 6); in other words, the different frames under consideration are dynamic layers of a memory field that is intrinsically transnational and "globital" (Reading, 2011). More precisely, the mobilizing force of the photos of the disappeared lies in their intrinsic mediatic hybridity and in the ritual uses that give them a cult value, two aspects that are grounded in their spectral

but inalienable referentiality, and are indissociable from the mnemonic frameworks they activate.

This final statement is based on two ideas that have underlain the analysis. The first one is that the photo-portraits remediate the social significance, cultural meaning, and protest value of other media together with their technical or formal aspects (the forms of visual activism): the revolutionary appeal of murals, the haunting ubiquity of digital images, the religious idea of resurrection associated with traditional icons, the performative aura of silhouettes, among others, converge in these ID-photos. Second, the hybridity and combination of more or less digital techniques of recreation and modes of circulation is a defining characteristic of the photos' mnemonic and activist ambi- and multivalence. To sum up, the multiplicity of visual forms, media, and practices that converge in the activist uses of the students' ID photos at once roots these uses in different historical and geographical lines of protests, and allows them to move and mobilize a domestic, local, national, and transnational public.

Bibliography

Assmann, A., & Assmann, C. (2010). Neda: The Career of a Global Icon. In A. Assmann & S. Conrad (Eds.), *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (pp. 225–242). Palgrave Macmillan.

Barriendos, J. (2019). Spectral Violence: Art and Disappearance in Post-Ayotzinapa Mexico. *Porto arte: Revista de artes visuais*, *24*(42), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.22456/2179-8001.104676

Barthes, R. (1980). *La Chambre claire. Note sur la photographie*. Gallimard/Seuil.

Belting, H. (1996). *Likeness and Presence: A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (E. Jephcott, trans.). University of Chicago Press. (Original work published in 1990).

Blejmar, J., Fortuny, N., & García, L. I. (2013). Introducción. In *Instantáneas de la memoria. Fotografía y dictadura en Argentina y América Latina* (pp. 8–21). Libraria.

Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. MIT Press.

Brink, C. (2000). Secular Icons: Looking at Photographs from Nazi Concentration Camps. *History and Memory*, *12*(1), 135–150.

Bryan-Wilson, J., González, J., & Willsdon, D (2016). Editors' Introduction: Themed Issue on Visual Activism. *Journal of Visual Culture*, *15*(1), 5–23.

Buntinx, G. (2008). Desapariciones forzadas / Resurrecciones míticas (fragmentos). In A. Longoni & G. A. Bruzzone (Eds.), *El siluetazo* (pp. 253–284). Adriana Hidalgo. (Original work published in 1993).

Calderón, F. H., & Cedillo, A. (2012). *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964–1982*. Routledge.

Castellanos, L. (2013). *México armado*. Ediciones Era.

Coll Lebedeff, T. (2015). Las Normales rurales. 90 años de lucha y resistencia. *El cotidiano*, *89*, 83–94.

De Cesari, C., & Rigney, A. (Eds.). (2014). *Transnational Memory: Circulation, Articulation, Scales*. De Gruyter.

Del Olmo, J. (2014). "43 Students from Ayotzinapa. Detail," work presented in the exhibition "Ecos Mecânicos—a máquina de escrever e processos artísticos." Museu de Arte Contemporanea, USP, São Paulo.

De Vecchi Gerli, M. (2018). *¡Vivxs lxs Queremos! The Battles for Memory around the Disappeared in Mexico*. Doctoral Dissertation. University College London. https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10064633/

Erenberg, S. (director, writer), Bruchstein, N. (writer), & Barberis, N. (2013). *Rosario* [documentary]. Bias Producción | Fondo para la Producción Cinematográfica de Calidad (Foprocine).

Erll, A., & Rigney, A. (Eds.). (2009). *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory*. De Gruyter.

Figueroa, M. (2016). Gazing at the Face of Absence: Signification and Resignification of Family Photographs of Disappeared University Students in Peru. In G. Cánepa Koch, & I. Kummels (Eds.), *Photography in Latin America: Images and Identities across Time and Space* (pp. 196–217). Transcript-Verlag.

Fuentes, M. A. (2019). *Performance Constellations: Networks of Protest and Activism in Latin America.* University of Michigan Press.

García, L. I. (2013). Espectros. Fotografía y derechos humanos en la Argentina. *Papel Máquina. Revista de cultura*, *8*, 131–147.

Gatti, G. (2017). Prolegómeno. Para un concepto científico de desaparición. In G. Gatti (Ed.), *Desapariciones. Usos locales, circulaciones globales* (pp. 13–32). Siglo del Hombre Editores.

Gómez Unamuno, A. (2020). *Entre fuegos, memoria y violencia de Estado. Los textos literarios y testimoniales del movimiento armado en México*. University of North Carolina Press.

González-Flores, L. (2018). What is Present, What is Visible: The Photo-Portraits of the 43 'Disappeared' Students of Ayotzinapa as Positive Social Agency. *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *27*(4), 487–506. https://doi.org/10.1080/1356 9325.2018.1485557

Grupo Interdisciplinario De Expertos Independientes (GIEI). (2016). *Informe Ayotzinapa II. Avances y nuevas conclusiones sobre la investigación, búsqueda y atención a las víctimas.* https://prensagieiayotzi.wixsite.com/giei-ayotzinapa/ informe-

Kemp, M. (2011). *Christ to Coke: How Image Becomes Icon*. Oxford University Press.

Longoni, A. (2010). Fotos y siluetas. Dos estrategias en la representación de los desaparecidos. In E. Crenzel (Ed.), *Los desaparecidos en la Argentina. Memorias, representaciones e ideas (1983–2008)* (pp. 43–63). Biblos.

López Ovalle, E. (2013). *Identidad, memoria y justiciar. La imagen de los desaparecidos políticos en México dentro de la lucha de los familiares por su presentación (1977–2009)*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. http://132.248.9.41:8880/jspui/handle/DGB_UNAM/TES01000688409

Mandolessi, S. (2018). Anacronismos históricos, potenciales políticos. La memoria transnacional de la desaparición en Latinoamérica. *Memoria y Narración*, *1*, 14–30.

Mandolessi, S. (2019). Memorias digitales y desaparición. El caso Ayotzinapa. *Revista Transas. Letras y Artes de América Latina*, 1–16. http://www.revistatransas.com/2019/09/26/memorias-digitales-y-desaparicion-ayotzinapa/

Mandolessi, S. (2022). Introduction: From the 'Dirty War' to the 'War on Drugs.' In S. Mandolessi and K. Olalde (Eds.), *Disappearances in Mexico: From the 'Dirty War' to the 'War on Drugs'* (pp. 1–27). Routledge.

Memou, A. (2013). *Photography and Social Movements: From the Globalisation of the Movement (1968) to the Movement against Globalisation (2001)*. Manchester University Press.

Merrill, S. (2020). Following the Woman with the Handbag: Mnemonic Context Collapse and the Anti-Fascist Activist Appropriation of an Iconic Historical Photograph. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 111–139). Palgrave Macmillan.

Merrill, S., et al. (2020). Togetherness after Terror: The More or Less Digital Commemorative Public Atmospheres of the Manchester Arena Bombing's First Anniversary. *Society and Space*, *38*(3), 546–566. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263775819901146

Mondzain, M.-J. (1996). *Image, icône, économie. Les sources byzantines de l'imaginaire contemporain*. Seuil.

Noble, A. (2010). *Photography and Memory in Mexico: Icons of Revolution*. Manchester University Press.

Olalde, K. (2016). *Bordando por la paz y la memoria en México*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Universidad Autónoma de México.

Ovalle, C. V. (2019). *Tiempo suspendido. Una historia de la desaparición forzada en México, 1940–1980*. Bonilla Artigas Editores.

Prestholdt, J. (2019). *Icons of Dissent: The Global Resonance of Che, Marley, Tupac, and Bin Laden*. Oxford University Press.

Reading, A. (2011). Memory and Digital Media: Six Dynamics of the Globital Memory Field. In M. Neiger, O. Meyers, & E. Zandberg (Eds.), *On Media Memory: Collective Memory in a New Media Age* (pp. 241–252). Palgrave Macmillan.

Richard, N. (2000). Imagen-recuerdo y borraduras. In N. Richard (Ed.), *Políticas y estéticas de la memoria* (pp. 165–172). Cuarto Propio.

Rigney, A. (2020). Mediations of Outrage: How Violence against Protestors is Remembered. *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, *87*(3), 707–733.

Seydel, U. (2014). Políticas públicas del olvido y el derecho del recuerdo. Lucio Cabañas y Aleida Gallangos. In M. Szúrmuk & M. Castro Ricalde (Eds.), *Sitios de la memoria en México post 68* (pp. 163–208). Cuarto Propio.

Szurmuk, M., & Castro Ricalde, M. (Eds.). (2015). *Sitios de la memoria. México Post 68.* Cuarto Propio.

Torres Arroyo, A. (2019). *Imágenes colectivas y espacios públicos agonistas.* Red de estudios visuales latinoamericanos. Retrieved 16 December 2020, from https://www.revlat.com/single-post/2019/03/28/IMÁGENES-COLECTIVAS-Y-ESPACIOS-PÚBLICOS-AGONISTAS

Treré, E. (2019). *Hybrid Media Activism: Ecologies, Imaginaries, Algorithm.* Routledge.

Weiwei, A. (2019). *Restablecer memorias / Resetting Memories* [Exhibition catalog]. MUAC.

Zícari, M. (2018). Silhouettes: Choreographies of Remembrance against Enforced Disappearance. *Alter/nativas: Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies*, *9*. https://alternativas.osu.edu/en/issues/autumnspring-9-2018-19/essays6/zicari.html

Zícari, M. (2021). *Choreographing Remembrance: Digital Contention and Street Action against Human Rights Abuses in Mexico (1968–2014).* Doctoral Dissertation. KULeuven

About the Author

Sophie Dufays is a postdoctoral researcher, specializing in Latin American cinema and (popular) culture. She has written two books on the figure of the child in Argentine cinema (Tamesis, 2014, and Biblos, 2016) and coedited two books on the use of popular songs in Latin American and European films (Libraria, 2018, and Peter Lang, 2019). (sophie.dufays@kuleuven.be)

9   Space and Place in Online Visual Memory: The Tank Man in Hong Kong, 2013–2020

Thomas Smits & Ruben Ros

Abstract

This chapter charts the online circulation of the iconic Tank Man photograph. After retrieving 50735 online circulations (URLs) of this image between 2013 and mid-2020, it applies computational methods to examine the relationship between its meaning and the (online) places where it is used to remember the Tiananmen protests. The chapter zooms in on the relationship between the digital circulation of the Tank Man, the memory of the Tiananmen protests, and the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests of 2014 and 2019–2020. We show how Hong Kong has provided a (online) space where Western and Chinese interpretations of the image clash and mutually sustain each other.

Keywords: iconic photographs, memory of activism, cultural memory, digital humanities, distant reading

On 15 April 1989, following rapid economic decline, the reformist politics of Mikhail Gorbachev in the USSR, and, more directly, the death of the pro-reform former Communist general secretary Hu Yaobang, a massive, student-led protest movement erupted in the People's Republic of China (PRC). For the entire month of May, thousands of protesters occupied Beijing's central Tiananmen Square, demanding political and social reforms. After some initial *rapprochement* with the demonstrators, the standing committee of the Politburo declared martial law and ordered the military to squash the protests. On 3 and 4 June, troops violently advanced on Beijing and cleared the occupied square. While there is little footage of the military action on 4 June, the suppression of the protest was symbolically captured the next

day. From the balcony of a hotel, a slender young man was photographed holding up two plastic shopping bags and standing defiantly in front of a column of tanks that was leaving the square. Known as the "Tank Man," the "Unknown Protester," or "Unknown Rebel," the picture is widely seen as one of the most iconic 20th-century images of protest (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, p. 231).[1] Although different photographs were taken of the same event, Associated Press' Jeff Widener's picture (Figure 9.1) became the prime contender to be its iconic representation (Van der Hoeven, 2019, p. 67). In the years after 1989, it quickly became the "supericon of Tiananmen" and dominated visual histories of the event (Perlmutter, 1998, p. 61).

The Tank Man is not only one of the most widely known, but also one of the most widely studied iconic photographs. Most of this research has focused on the question where the picture means what to whom. Although it depicts a Chinese event, many researchers have questioned if the picture is widely recognized in the PRC, where the memory of Tiananmen is heavily suppressed through on- and offline censorship (Lim, 2014). Following this observation, others have examined if new forms of digital remediation, such as memes, are able to effectively circumnavigate the Chinese censor and keep the memory of Tiananmen alive (Hillenbrand, 2017, 2020; Ibrahim, 2016). Looking at another aspect of this process, some scholars have studied the meaning of the Tank Man in Western countries (Hubbert, 2014; Perlmutter, 1998; Žižek, 2002). Finally, in light of the recent Chinese crackdown on democracy in Hong Kong, researchers have become interested in the meaning of the Tank Man to the inhabitants of this city (Chan, 2020).

Previous work on the Tank Man has been based on a (close) reading or analysis of the iconic picture itself or a limited sample—in number, period, and geographic distribution—of circulations. Introducing a "distant reading" (Moretti, 2000) method, this chapter retrieves 50735 online circulations of the Tank Man between 2013 and mid-2020 and applies several computational methods to examine the relationship between its meaning and the (online) places where it is used to remember the 1989 Tiananmen protests. After a discussion of previous work and sections on data and methodology, it specifically studies the relationship between the digital circulation of the iconic picture, the commemoration of the Tiananmen massacre, and the Hong Kong pro-democracy protests of 2014 and 2019–2020. Pointing to the importance of the Tiananmen commemoration in Hong Kong for the online circulation of Tank Man, we argue that it should be seen neither as a Western

---

1   Over the years, several stories about the identity of the Tank Man have sprung up. None of them have been proven.

Figure 9.1: Pro-democracy activists display the famous 'Tank Man' photograph during a march that preceded the annual 4 June Victoria Park vigil to commemorate the 1989 Beijing Tiananmen Square student massacre, Hong Kong, HKSAR, 28 May 2017. Photo: Jerome Favre/ANP.

nor as a Chinese icon. Rather, we show how Hong Kong has provided a space where these two narratives have clashed and mutually sustained each other.

Based on an analysis of the online circulation of the Tank Man between 2013 and mid-2020, this chapter makes a broader point about the continued importance of space in online memory. Some memory studies scholars have argued that the advent of digital media dissolved, or at least substantially blurred, the borders in space, time, domain, and power that demarcated the production of cultural memory in the 19th and 20th century (Chidgey, 2018; Hoskins, 2017). First, the chapter demonstrates that computational methods can be fruitfully used to map the space(s) where cultural memory lives online. In other words, they provide us with the opportunity to map the borders that demarcate different online mnemonic cultures. Second, our distant reading of the online circulation of the Tank Man shows that space, or rather the political power that produces on- and offline space, continues to give shape to memory in the digital age.

Close Reading the Tank Man

Discussing the afterlife of the Tank Man, researchers have argued that its iconic status was not evenly shared over the world. Ten years after the 1989

protests, Perlmutter (1998) noted that the narrative that made the picture iconic—lone protester stands up to the violence of an illiberal state—was produced by a Western media elite for Western audiences. Žižek (2002) similarly argued that the image allowed a Western audience to establish itself in opposition to the lack of freedom and suppression of liberty in the PRC (pp. 45–46). In 2014, Hubbert noted that the image functioned as a "cipher for human rights … that configures Western-style democracy as the antithesis of communist oppression" (p. 117): a sort of visual mirror that could be used to draw attention to illiberal tendencies in the west. Hillenbrand (2017) stated that the photograph became an embodiment of the Chinese nation from the perspective of the Western World. In a later publication, she remarked that the Tank Man had "effectively [been] airlifted abroad and then often, though not exclusively, pressed into the service of U.S.-led democratic liberalism" (2020, p. 172). In short, these scholars argued that the Tank Man depicted a Chinese event but mainly functioned as an iconic picture in Western politics.

The strong association between the Tank Man and Western media, audiences, and values, and, vice versa, the perceived lack of influence of the picture in the PRC, is frequently explained by the repression of the memory of the Tiananmen protests in this country. Some researchers question if it is known in the PRC at all (Brady, 2009). Lim (2014) indeed found that only 15% of Chinese university students recognized the Tank Man. Based on a more robust online survey, Van der Hoeven (2019) showed that 17.5% of Chinese respondents could correctly identify it, compared to 48.6% of all respondents (a controlled group of 3000 people around the world). Following the effective censoring of the photograph, mostly by requiring search engines to block pages that reference the Tiananmen protests, some researchers have argued that memes, remixes, and remediations of the Tank Man, which for some time were less likely to be picked up by automatic censors, allowed Chinese audiences to engage with the memory of Tiananmen (Hillenbrand, 2017; Ibrahim, 2016). According to Hillenbrand (2020), the wide array of memes and other remediations of the Tank Man in online "Chinese spaces … unquestionably challenge the notion that … the image is 'unknown' and robbed of all significance" in the PRC (p. 174). Ibrahim (2016) agrees that these remediations provide a "playful counter to the vigilance of censorship in China" but she also notes that these memes run the risk of separating the photograph from the political significance of the original event (p. 11). In other words, the Tank Man might become a symbol for the censoring rather than the repression of the Tiananmen protests.

The emphasis on remediation and memes in academic work on the Tank Man follows a more general trend in research on the online lives of iconic photographs (Smits & Ros, 2021). Iconization has traditionally been presented as a progressive sequence from a short-lived, specific, and contextual meaning in the realm of news to a general, symbolic, or even universal meaning in the realm of iconic pictures (Assmann & Assmann, 2010; Sturken, 2018). Boudana et al. (2017) describe this process as a paradox: "The more an iconic photo is circulated, the more it is recognized as iconic, yet the more it may become devoid of the significance that made it iconic in the first place" (p. 1227). Digital circulation, especially in the form of appropriations, remixes, or memes, might "revive an icon to death," which means that audiences are no longer aware of the original event or context that caused an photograph to achieve an iconic status (Boudana et al., 2017).

The Tank Man in Hong Kong

Research on the continued influence and significance of the Tank Man has been dominated by the question if it is a Chinese or a Western icon. Connected to this, following the censoring of the picture on the Chinese internet, scholars emphasized its non-contextual digital circulation: the online life of the Tank Man as a meme. Defying this dichotomy between the West and China, researchers have recently pointed to a space in between these two contexts where the Tank Man figures prominently in the memory of Tiananmen and a contemporary political struggle for democratic rights: the Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong (HKSAR).

Even before the violent crackdown on the Tiananmen protests of 4 June 1989, a march on 21 May 1989 in Hong Kong in support of the protests already drew around 1.5 million sympathizers. Ever since, commemorations of the Tiananmen interacted with Hong Kong society in complex ways (Florence & Pernin, 2019). As a result, some scholars have argued that the city became "the major site" for the preservation of its memory (Lee et al., 2019, p. 5). Cheng and Yuen (2019) and Tai (2019) noted that the Tiananmen massacre had become an unavoidable point of reference for politicians and social movements in Hong Kong. Especially since the handover of the city from the United Kingdom, its former colonizer, to the PRC in 1997, commemorations of 4 June 1989 have been linked to fears and anxiety about the uncertain future of political freedom in the city (Cheng, 2009). Between 1999 and 2020, the Hong Kong Alliance, an umbrella organization of civil society groups, organized an annual candlelight vigil in Victoria

Park to commemorate the victims of the 1989 protests (Lee & Chan, 2013). From the 20th anniversary of the event in 2009, the vigil started to attract yearly crowds of over 100,000 demonstrators (Cheng & Ma, 2019; Chu, 2021). During the protests of 2019, an estimated 200,000 persons attended the vigil, many fearing that it would be the last as the PRC started to crack down on the political freedom and protest in Hong Kong.

Next to the annual vigil, a June 4th museum was opened in April 2014 and several other annual pro-democracy marches, such as the New Year March and the 1 July March, first organized in 2003 on Establishment Day, the day Hong Kong was handed over to the PRC, invoke the memory of Tiananmen to draw attention to the curtailing of democratic rights. The last two major waves of pro-democratic contention in Hong Kong, the Umbrella Movement of 2014 and the 2019–2020 protests, were closely connected to these mnemonic practices. Studying the Umbrella Movement, Cheng and Ma (2019) noted how "thoughts and memories of the 1989 Tiananmen protest were invoked" to mobilize demonstrators (p. 13). Lee et al. (2019) similarly argued that the movement used analogies to 1989 to anticipate, and devise possible responses to, state violence.

Being *the* iconic visual representation of the repression of the Tiananmen protest, what role has the Tank Man played in these mnemonic practices? Chan (2020) described how, until very recently at least, the picture was "familiar imagery" in Hong Kong. Describing the visual culture of the Umbrella Movement, Garrett (2015) noted that the Tank Man was a "prominent … symbol of visual resistance on many posters; it graces numerous flyers, many t-shirts, and protest props" (p. 257). Next to its use by activists, media outlets in Hong Kong and Western countries used the Tank Man to link the 2014 and 2019–2020 Hong Kong pro-democracy movement to the Tiananmen protest of 1989 (Chu, 2021; Song & Lee, 2019). In 2014, the *Umbrella Man*, an image of a protester holding up an umbrella in the middle of a cloud of teargas smoke, was immediately compared to the Tank Man ("Is Hong Kong's Umbrella Man the New Tank Man?," 2014). In 2019, a photograph of an unarmed protester "peacefully confronting a Hong Kong police officer" bought back "memories of 1989" for many (Nagourney, 2019).

In 2019, Tai noted that while "the souls of Tiananmen Square might not be remembered by many in mainland China" they never "left Hong Kong" (p. 69). As part of a broader crackdown on democratic rights in the city by the PRC, the commemorations of the 1989 protest came under heavy pressure. Commentators observed that the so-called national security law, which came into effect in the summer of 2020, de facto criminalized a wide range of political dissent, including the annual vigils and marches. In 2020

and 2021, citing concerns over the spread of COVID-19, the vigil was banned by the government ("Hong Kong Tiananmen Square Commemorations," 2021; Hui, 2020). After several of its leaders were arrested, the Hong Kong Alliance, which organized the annual vigil, disbanded in September 2021 ("Hong Kong Tiananmen Vigil Group Disbands Amid Crackdown on Dissent," 2021). In the same month, the June 4th museum, also run by the Hong Kong alliance, was raided by the police (Davidson, 2021). Instead of a major site for the memory of the Tiananmen 1989, many fear that Hong Kong now faces its own "Tiananmen 2.0" (Hui, 2020).

Data

In the last three decades, Hong Kong has been an important space for the offline circulation of the Tank Man and, as a result, its iconic status. Using computational methods, this chapter examines if the city and its social movements are similarly important for the online circulation of the photograph. It is based on an analysis of 50735 online circulations—websites (URLs) containing the photograph—of the Tank Man between 2013 and July 2020 (Smits & Ros, 2020). We retrieved these online circulations in two steps. First, we uploaded a high-quality version of Jeff Widener's picture to the Google Cloud Vision Application Programming Interface (GCV API), which makes computer vision available in the cloud. Computer vision techniques, such as object detection and facial recognition, use deep learning algorithms to identify patterns, such as human faces, in a large collection of digital images. We relied on a basic computer vision functionality of the GCV API to identify full and partial circulations of the Tank Man on the internet. This results in a list of web addresses (URLs) that contain the iconic photograph. The version of the Tank Man on these URLs is often slightly different from the first image we uploaded. We used these other versions to find more and less recent online circulations of the Tank Man. In the second step, we applied several computational methods to collect (meta)data from the URLs, such as the language of the webpage and the text surrounding the photograph.

The data aggregation and curation of our method is limited by several factors. First, Google does not collect information on the entire internet. As the proprietary indexing algorithms of the company seek to optimize user experience, our method will surely extract a significant number of relevant circulations of the Tank Man. However, specific parts of the internet, such as websites hosted in the PRC and Hong Kong or certain social media platforms, might be under- or overrepresented. Second, the proprietary computer vision

techniques of the GCV API might be unable to identify certain (kinds of) circulations of the Tank Man. Looking through the 50735 circulations, we found many remediations of the Tank Man, such as a well-known meme where the tanks are replaced by rubber ducks. As a result of the proprietary status of its algorithms, it remains unclear what kind of remediations the GCV API is able to find. Third, our method might be biased towards recent URLs. Websites constantly disappear from the internet, for example if they are taken offline by users or providers, and Google's algorithms, hoping to provide users with high-quality search results, prioritize recent websites. As a result, our dataset becomes less complete the further back in time we go. Following from this, we hypothesize that URLs in our dataset from 2013 or 2014 that were still online in 2020 (when this chapter was being prepared), will frequently be maintained by relatively "stable" parties, such as news organizations or social media platforms.

Our method retrieves online circulations of the Tank Man (an image) but most of the data we analyse in this chapter is textual. Although several algorithms exist that can parse, or collect, relevant textual information from websites, the URLs in our set were too heterogeneous in form to apply them. Instead, we had to rely on a method that extracts text from HTML-elements that commonly contain text, such as <p>, which denotes a paragraph, or <h1>, which is used for titles or headers. While this method catches all relevant textual data, it also introduces textual "noise" in our dataset. For example, it might collect texts from website menus, advertisements, and other website elements. Having considered all of these (possible) limitations of our data, we hope to enable sound (historical) comparative research in the future by releasing our dataset and the methods used to acquire it (Smits & Ros, 2020).

Methodology

Following a more general trend in research on the digital life of iconic pictures, studies of the Tank Man are mostly based on a close reading of a select number of circulations, remediations, or memes (Smits & Ros, 2021). Hubbert (2014) discussed four American remediations of the picture, Ibrahim (2016) based her research on an unspecified but small number of versions on Sina Weibo (a Chinese social media platform), and Hillenbrand (2017) studied remediations by "an augmented reality artistic collective, a video installation artist, several internet cartoonists, photo-artists, and others" (p. 131). Instead of generalizing from a small number of examples,

this chapter uses a distant reading approach to identify larger patterns in the 50735 online circulations of the Tank Man between 2013 and mid-2020.

First coined by Moretti (2000) for literary history, *distant reading* refers to the use of computational methods in the humanities to analyse a large collection of digital texts (Underwood, 2017). We previously argued that distant reading techniques can also be used to study the interaction between iconic photographs and text at scale (Smits & Ros, 2021). In this chapter, we apply several distant reading methods to identify patterns in the texts surrounding 50735 online circulations of the Tank Man between 2013 and 2020. First, we use *htmldate*, a code package that can identify the publication date of an URL, to chart patterns of commemoration (Barbaresi, 2020). In other words, when do people circulate the Tank Man on the internet? Second, we use domain extensions (.com), top-level domains (twitter.com), and *langid*, a language recognition code package, to analyse where on the internet—social media, message boards, news sites, etc.—we can find the *Tank Man* and by which languages it is surrounded (Lui & Baldwin, 2012).

Because Hong Kong combined the languages (English and Chinese), cultures and (online) customs of China and its former colonizer for many decades, it is relatively hard to locate the city online. Therefore, we applied Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), the most commonly applied form of a method known as *topic modelling*, to study large-scale patterns in text surrounding the online circulations of the Tank Man (Blei et al., 2003). Topic modelling is based on the intuition that a text only describes a small number of topics and that the distribution of specific words can be used as a measure of these topics (Jelodar et al., 2019). For example, "bone" will appear more frequently in texts about dogs, "meow" more in texts about cats, and "pet" approximately equally in both. We use LDA to extract topics, represented as a list of prominent words, from the text we collected from the URLs in our dataset to examine in what contexts the Tank Man is circulated.

Using LDA requires taking note of several pitfalls and flagging some limitations. Most importantly, we only used topic modelling to study the 22118 English-language webpages (43%) in our dataset. As Hong Kong is a bilingual Chinese–English city, this limits our analysis. However, in addition to the fact that we do not speak Chinese, multilingual topic modelling is still a difficult process (Vulić et al., 2015). Second, LDA is limited because the method does not provide a way to determine the optimal number of topics. Researchers have to pick the number of topics and this precise number is then identified in the texts. In general, the higher the number of topics, the more fine-grained they become. At the same time, as texts often discuss

only a small number of topics, training a model with a high number of topics can result in uninterpretable or nonsensical results.

We trained models for six to 30 topics on the text extracted from the 22118 English URLs in our corpus. We decided to mainly use and interpret the results of the 20-topics model. We justify the high number of topics by the heterogenous nature of our dataset, the relatively low number of non-semantic, or uninterpretable, topics, and the fact that we could clearly observe topics becoming more fine-grained. For example, our 10-topics model contained a single topic on the Tank Man, while our 20-topics model contains three topics on the commemorations of Tiananmen, one of which specifically connects them to Hong Kong. We also combined the publication date of the URLs in our dataset with our 20-topics model. This results in Figure 9.6, which shows the normalized diachronic distribution of the 20-topics per month between 2013 and July 2020.

Distant Reading the Tank Man in Hong Kong

The memory of Tiananmen and the Tank Man as its most well-known visual representation continue to play an important role in Hong Kong society and politics. Distant reading 50735 online circulations of the iconic picture, this section connects the mnemonic culture of Hong Kong to the online circulation of the Tank Man. Moving past the dichotomy between Chinese amnesia and Western over-emphasis, it demonstrates that, over the last six years, the city has been an important site for the continued online circulation and resulting significance of the iconic photograph.

Following earlier work that charts online patterns of commemoration (Merrill & Lindgren, 2020; Zamponi, 2020) and work on repetitive patterns of 'anniversary journalism' of the Tiananmen protests (Chu, 2021; Song & Lee, 2019), we started by looking at the publication date of the URLs in our dataset. Figure 9.2 shows the absolute frequency of Tank Man URLs per month between January 2013 and July 2020. A repetitive increase of URLs in the month of June reveals a clear commemorative pattern: every year people upload the Tank Man to remember the repression of the Tiananmen protest. Looking through the URLs of June 2013, an unexpected peak, we came across stories in Western media about the online censorship of the Tiananmen commemorations on the Chinese internet. Ibrahim (2016) notes how, in 2013, users of the Chinese microblogging website Sina Weibo successfully circumvented Chinese censorship by photoshopping the Tank Man. One of the most widely shared and talked-about memes replaced the
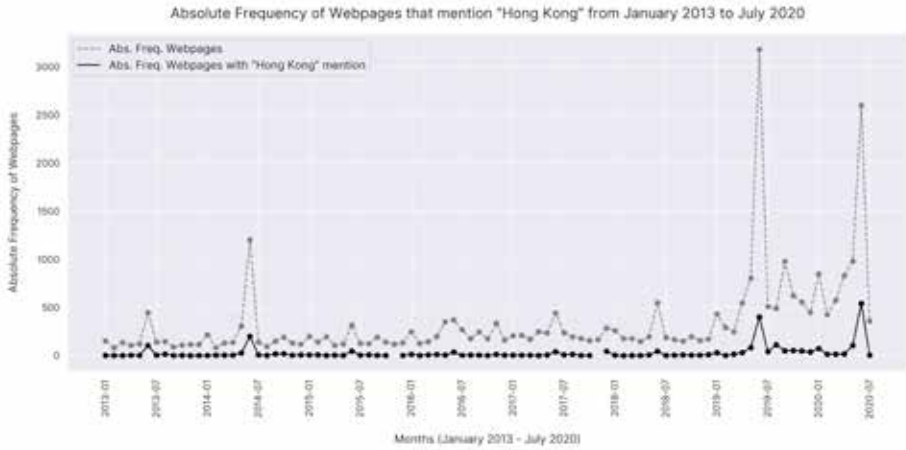
Figure 9.2: Absolute Frequency of URLS (that Mention Hong Kong) in our dataset between 2013 and July 2020. Produced by Ruben Ros.

tanks with four rubber ducks. The ducks referred to a giant floating balloon sculpture of a yellow duck, which floated in Hong Kong's Victoria Harbour at that time. *The Yellow Duck Patrol*, as the image came to be known, and the words "Big Yellow Duck" were quickly blocked by the Chinese censors. Left unmentioned in most Western accounts, the connection between *Yellow Duck Patrol* and the rapidly growing annual commemorations of Tiananmen in Hong Kong was, of course, not a coincidence.

The high number of circulations in June 2014 and June 2019 can be partly explained by the 25th and 30th anniversaries of the event. At the same time, the years 2014 and 2019 also saw massive waves of pro-democratic contention in Hong Kong. While the commemoration of Tiananmen in 2014 preceded the Umbrella Movement, which mostly took place in September of that year, the 30th anniversary in 2019 roughly coincided with massive pro-democratic marches on 9 June, 16 June, and 1 July in Hong Kong. However, demonstrating the connection between the pro-democracy protests and the online circulation of the Tank Man is made difficult by the entanglement of the Hong Kong protests with the commemoration of Tiananmen in the city. A clearer picture emerges after we include URLs that contain the words "Hong Kong" in Figure 9.2. In normal months (all months except June) the URLs almost never refer to Hong Kong. However, in June 2013, 2014, 2019, and 2020 the online circulation of the iconic picture is significantly boosted by URLs that mention the city.

We can use several other computational methods to connect the online circulation of the Tank Man to mnemonic practices in Hong Kong. First,
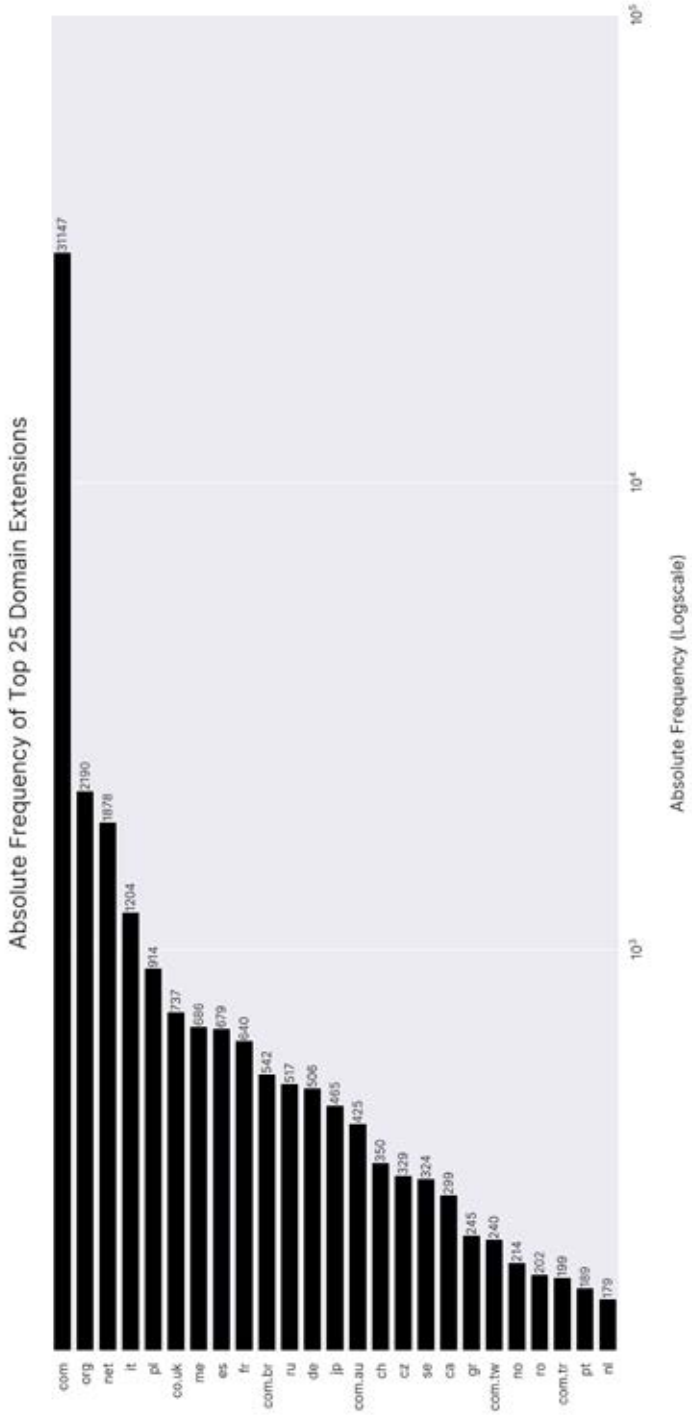
Figure 9.3: Absolute Frequency of Top-25 Domain Extensions. Produced by Ruben Ros.
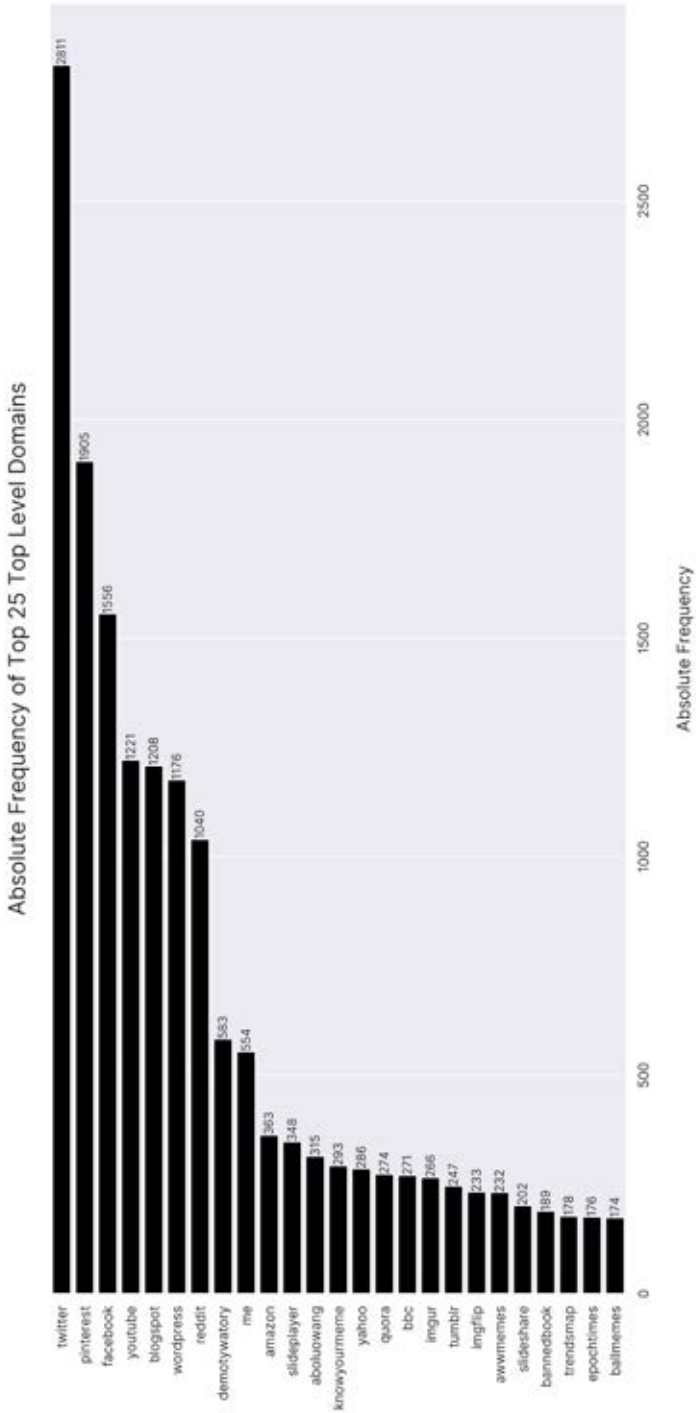
Figure 9.4: Absolute Frequency of Top-25 Top Level Domains. Produced by Ruben Ros.

we look at the domain extensions of the URLs. Figure 9.3 shows that the .com, .org and .net extensions, which are widely used all over the world, are dominant. The Hong Kong domain extension (.hk) is absent from the list and was apparently not widely used to circulate the Tank Man online. The relative importance of other domain extensions such as .it (Italy), .pl (Poland) and co.uk (UK), suggests that these countries might have specific commemorative cultures regarding Tiananmen. As our topic models (see below) are based on the English-language URLs, these possibly specific Italian, Polish, or French patterns of commemoration are not considered.

Figure 9.4 displays the absolute frequency of the 25 most common top-level domains. Social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, message boards like Reddit, photo and video sharing and storing platforms such as YouTube, Pinterest and the discontinued Me.com (now iCloud), and blog platforms such as Wordpress and Blogspot, all provide a digital space for circulations of the Tank Man. Corresponding with Perlmutter's (2003) observation that the iconization process is decentralized on the internet, we find that previously powerful cultural gatekeepers, such as media corporations, are only responsible for a small fraction of all the circulations of the picture. With 290 circulations, BBC.com is the only Western news outlet that appears in Figure 9.4. With 393 circulations, Abuluowang.com, a site that makes news available to Chinese-speaking audiences that is blocked by the censors of the PRC, is the most prominent news medium of Figure 9.4.

Finally, we use LDA (topic modelling) to chart the textual contexts in which the Tank Man circulates online. For comparison, we start with Figure 9.5, which shows the normalized diachronic distribution of 10 topics between 2014 and July 2020. Following common practice, we collapsed the seven non-semantic (uninterpretable) topics and listed the 15 most prominent words of the eight remaining topics in the legend. Firstly, all our models, from six to 20 topics, contain a topic that roughly consists of the same words and connects the Tiananmen protest to Hong Kong (Table 9.1). In Figure 9.5, the topic that starts with china, chinese fulfils this function. Furthermore, the diachronic distribution of this topic follows the commemorative pattern we observed in the absolute frequency of the URLs: every June the topic that links Tiananmen to Hong Kong quickly becomes more prominent. In Figure 9.5, we see that this is especially the case in June 2014, just before the Umbrella Movement started its protests.

Some might argue that the topics of Figure 9.5 do not clearly separate the more general commemoration of Tiananmen from the specific mnemonic practices of Hong Kong. Figure 9.5, which displays the normalized distribution of 20 topics per month between 2013 and July 2020, is harder to interpret but

Table 9.1: *Topics that connect the Tiananmen Protest to Hong Kong in six to 20-topics models.*

Model	Topic	Words
6	2	china chinese tiananmen square beijing people government june hong kong said protests students man democracy party communist tank one tanks
7	4	china chinese tiananmen square beijing people june government hong kong said protests students democracy man party communist tank one protesters
8	7	china chinese tiananmen square beijing june people hong government kong protests students man said democracy tank tanks party one protesters
9	3	china tiananmen square chinese beijing june hong people kong government protests students said man democracy tank tanks protesters student party
10	2	china chinese tiananmen square beijing june people hong government kong protests said students man democracy tank party tanks student protesters
11	10	china chinese tiananmen square beijing june people hong government kong students protests said democracy party protesters student massacre years one
12	3	china chinese tiananmen square beijing people june hong government kong students said protests democracy party communist student protesters massacre years
13	7	china chinese hong kong said tiananmen beijing people government rights party democracy year square years human crackdown communist june one
14	7	china chinese hong kong said beijing tiananmen people government rights year party human democracy years security crackdown square police law
15	0	tiananmen china square chinese beijing june hong kong people government students protests said democracy protesters student massacre crackdown party years
16	8	tiananmen china square chinese beijing june hong kong people government students protests said democracy protesters student massacre crackdown party years
17	14	china tiananmen chinese square beijing june hong kong people government students protests democracy said protesters student massacre party years crackdown
18	11	china chinese tiananmen square beijing hong kong june government people democracy protests said students party massacre student years communist protesters
19	3	china chinese hong kong said tiananmen beijing people government rights square year years democracy crackdown june human police party anniversary
20	12	square tiananmen beijing hong kong june students china chinese people protests government democracy protesters student said pro police may massacre

Normalized Diachronic Topic Distribution with 10 Topics
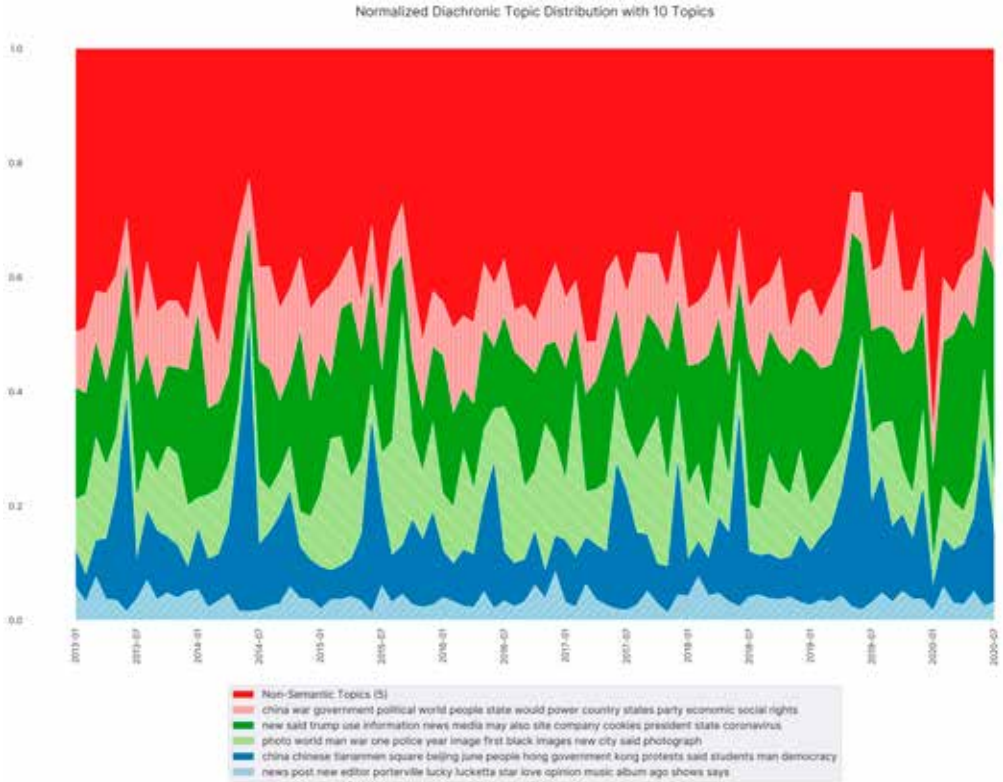
Figure 9.5: Normalized Diachronic Topic Distribution with 10 Topics between 2013 and July 2020. Produced by Ruben Ros.

also provides a clearer picture. First, we examine the non-semantic topics, which mostly contain clustered noise (Table 9.2). For example, topics 1, 2, and 16 contain words in other languages (Italian, Spanish, and Indonesian/Malay respectively). This is probably the result of the fact that some of the English-language URLs in our dataset contain (snippets of) text in these languages. The non-semantic topics also contain words that refer to cooky settings (7), internet browser settings (10), and image file formats, such as jpg, png, and jpeg (19). We included topic 13, which starts with the words meme, game, memes, in the list of non-semantic topics. However, this topic might also be interpreted as referring to the memeification of the Tank Man. Next to the non-semantic topics, some of the other topics, such as the one that starts with Trump, said, president, the the one that starts with show, star, new, and the one that starts with art, book, film are hard to connect to online circulation of the Tank Man. The prominence of the Trump/Corona topic probably points to the omnipresence of this combination of words on the web, including URLs that

Table 9.2: *Non-Semantic topics of the 20-topics model.*

Model	Topic	Words
20	1	che per del non della una con nel come sono dei dell alla gli delle anche dal questo anni cui
20	3	que los por del para las una con como van een het est ser sus com pero este uma die
20	7	cookies och use som att den site det die agree der und services website med policy privacy using account jag
20	9	use com content page please information news google new company facebook www site les email free data online may website
20	10	like let something javascript browser give would yes disabled went twitter another wrong shot legacy proceed detected fret get know
20	13	meme game memes ago com new share music reddit album https one like card song beatles man funny band post
20	16	yang dan orang ini mereka dengan nce mler tidak untuk dalam itu pada dari cina adalah mahasiswa ada melayu tersebut
20	19	jpg png feb aug jpeg com sep clipart https jun background gif transparent img apr tank image mar may nov

contain the Tank Man, in the period we collected our dataset (early 2020). Many websites include so-called dynamic content: non-static elements that change based on the person (or computer algorithm) visiting the website. In the early 2020s, dynamic content elements on Tank Man URLs were likely to refer to Trump and the Coronavirus: the all-overshadowing news stories of that period.

We should not dismiss topics as non-relevant or the result of noise too quickly. At first glance, the topic that starts with athletes, olympic, smith might make little sense. However, after Googling these words in combination with "Tank Man," it becomes clear that it describes the iconic picture of the black athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raising their fists at the 1968 Olympic games. Although less clear, using the same strategy for the topic that starts with police, city, year points in the direction of *Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge*: a photograph by Jonathan Bachman for Reuters of a woman being arrested by police officers in full riot gear during a Black Lives Matter protest. In 2016, the photograph quickly went viral and was widely compared to the Tank Man. In previous work, we demonstrated how two or more iconic pictures are frequently circulated together if they display a common theme. As a result, a new iconic photograph displaying the same theme can boost the circulation of an older one (Smits & Ros, 2021). The connection between the Tank Man, the image of Smith and Carlos, and Taking a Stand in Baton Rouge can be explained by the fact that they are all iconic visual representations of defiance and protest. In addition, the
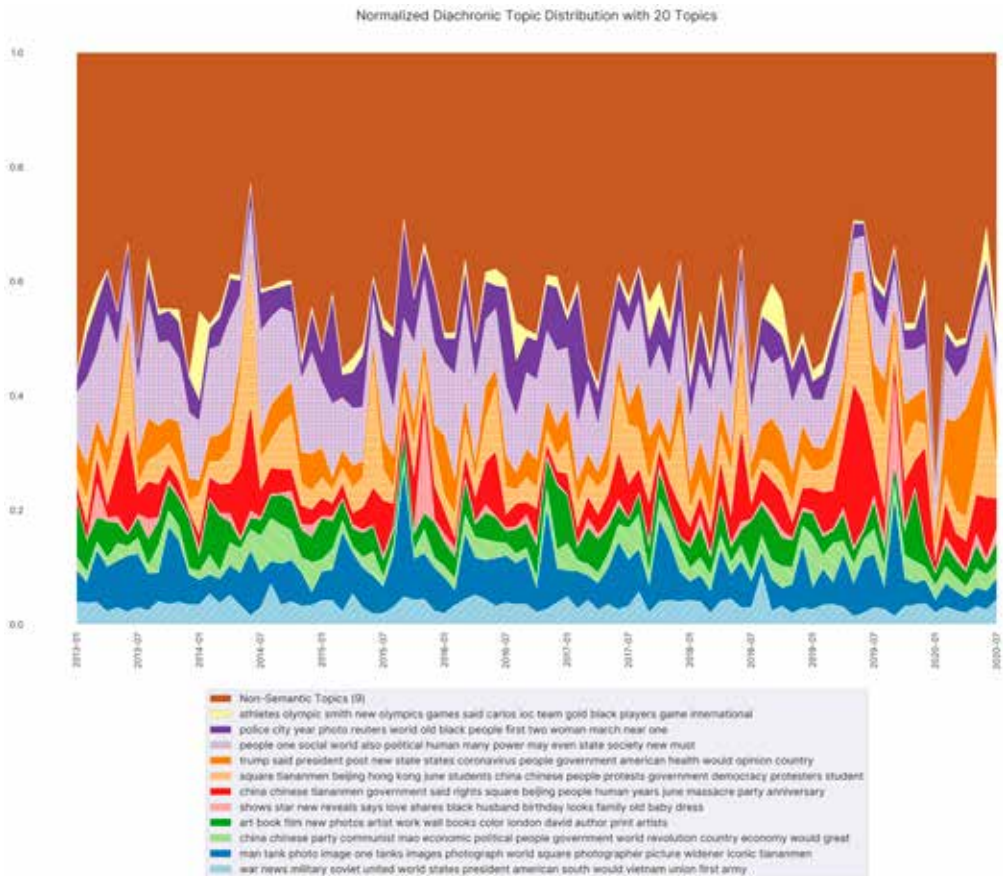
Figure 9.6: Normalized Diachronic Topic Distribution with 20 Topics between 2013 and July 2020.
Produced by Ruben Ros.

connection substantiates Hubbert's (2014) notion that some circulations of
the Tank Man, or, rather, circulating it together with another picture, "speak
less about the absence of political liberalism and democracy in China …
and more about their absence in the contemporary United States" (p. 114).

Figure 9.6 also displays topics that can be more directly connected to
different aspects of the Tank Man. Firstly, the relatively stable importance
of the topic that starts with man, tank, photo stands out. This self-referential
topic describes the *Tank Man* as an iconic picture. Next to the word "iconic," it
also includes the words "tank" and "man" and the name of the photographer:
"[W]idener." As texts, or URLs in our case, often contain more than one
topic, we expected to find a relatively stable topic on the iconicity of the
Tank Man. After all, the majority of URLs will mention the Tank Man's

iconic status as this is the starting point for circulating the image. Other topics might be seen as adding different sorts of background information.

After discussing the majority of topics, we can now return to connecting the online circulation of the Tank Man to the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong. Comparing Figures 9.5 and 9.6, it is evident that they display the same commemorative pattern: every year in June several topics become more prominent. Figure 9.5 only displays this pattern for china, chinese topic, which, as we noted, includes references to Hong Kong and protest but also to a more general, and possibly Western, pattern of commemoration. However, Figure 9.6 shows that the 20-topics model has separated these two aspects into two different topics. The topic that starts with china, chinese, tiananmen includes references to the Tiananmen "square" / "massacre" and to the "anniversary" of this event. In addition, the inclusion of "years" in the topic suggests that URLs where this topic is prominent discuss the Tiananmen protest as happening *n* years ago. The topic that starts with square, tiananmen, beijing also includes references to the Tiananmen square, but these are followed by references to Hong Kong, "protest" and "protesters," "student" and "students," and "democracy." The topic connects the student-led Tiananmen square protest of 1989 in China to the commemorative culture of this event in Hong Kong, where remembering Tiananmen has always been directly tied to the struggle for democratic rights. In addition, the normalized diachronic distribution of this topic shows that it became more prominent every June, but especially in June 2014 (and the rest of that year) and June 2019, during pro-democratic protests in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

The iconic status of the Tank Man has often been explained by its reference to Western democratic values and its resonance with Western audiences. Co-dependently, as a result of successful censoring and state-induced amnesia, it is presented as being virtually unknown in the PRC. Connected to this, several researchers have argued that the iconic photograph runs the risk of being separated from its original historical and political context: the violent repression of the last massive pro-democratic social movement in China. Taking the vibrant and diverse commemorations of Tiananmen 1989 in Hong Kong at its starting point, this chapter examined the space between these two extremes. Applying distant reading techniques, it studied to what extent the online circulation of the Tank Man can be connected to two waves of pro-democratic contention in Hong Kong in 2014 and 2019–2020.

The online circulation of the Tank Man follows a distinct commemorative pattern. Every year in the month of June, the picture is used to remember the crackdown of the Tiananmen protest on 4 June 1989. Analysis of the absolute frequency of URLs in our corpus showed that the 25th and 30th anniversary of the event in June 2014 and 2019 display significantly more circulations of the iconic photograph than other years. Using topic modelling to distant read the English-language URLs in our datasets, we demonstrated that this increase in circulation of the Tank Man can be linked to the commemorative use of the picture by social movements in Hong Kong. In June 2014, the Umbrella Movement, and June 2020, the latest wave of pro-democratic contention in the city, this pattern is especially noticeable. In these periods, more Tank Man URLs contain the words "Hong Kong" and the topic that connects the 1989 protests directly to the fight for democracy in Hong Kong quickly becomes more prominent.

Although English is an official language of Hong Kong, some might suggest that our focus on English-language URLs limits our research to Western use of the Tank Man. Even if we can connect the circulation of the Tank Man to protests in Hong Kong are we not simply finding Western circulations that use the iconic picture as a template for grassroots protest against the illiberal politics of the PRC? While an examination of the Chinese URLs in our dataset would enhance our understanding, our research shows that viewing the Tank Man as either a Chinese or a Western icon makes little sense. Rather, these contexts are mutually dependent on each other. In Western countries, the Tank Man partly retains its iconic status because of its repression in China, while its subversive nature in the PRC partly depends on its iconic status in the West. Hong Kong, where the image was, until recently, not censored, never forgotten, and not separated from its original political context, should be seen as the hinge point between these contexts or, more poignantly, the space where they clash.

Attempting to digitally disentangle Western commemorative circulations of the Tank Man from those that are related to Hong Kong politics, we learn something about the processes that give shape to online memory. Some scholars have argued that the production of memory in the digital age is fluid and frictionless: that borders that were important in pre-digital times (time, space, domain, power) are so permeable as to be irrelevant. This chapter shows that memory did not become borderless on the internet but that we need computational techniques and distant reading methods to fruitfully study the new ways in which it is limited or confined. This is not only a result of the scale of the internet—the fact that a researcher simply cannot close read thousands of URLs—but also of the fact that the digital production of

memory is decentralized. While the internet might feel fluid and frictionless, online mnemonic actors—the people writing and tweeting about the Tank Man—still have to take boundaries into account. The online circulation of the Tank Man should not be seen as a single borderless monolith. Rather its continued online circulation stems from the interaction between different commemorative cultures of Tiananmen in China, Hong Kong, and the West.

This chapter argued that Hong Kong is the hinge point that connects Western and Chinese commemorative cultures of Tiananmen. Until recently, the city could fulfil this function because of the democratic rights of its citizens. The so-called national security law will not only lead to direct repression of the memory of 1989 but also to more subtle forms of off- and online self-censorship. Only the future can tell what the possible removal of Hong Kong as a hinge point will mean for the status of the Tank Man as an iconic picture. Will it become a purely Western icon? Will it fade away, having lost its political meaning? Although current developments give no reason for optimism, we hope that the citizens of Hong Kong will be able to keep freely circulating the Tank Man.

Bibliography

Assmann, A., & Assmann, C. (2010). Neda—The Career of a Global Icon. In A. Assmann & S. Conrad (Eds.), *Memory in a Global Age: Discourses, Practices and Trajectories* (pp. 225–242). Palgrave Macmillan.

Barbaresi, A. (2020). Htmldate: A Python Package to Extract Publication Dates from Web Pages. *Journal of Open Source Software*, *5*(51), 2439. https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.02439

Blei, D. M., Ng, A. Y., & Jordan, M. I. (2003). Latent Dirichlet Allocation. *Journal of Machine Learning Research*, *3*(Jan), 993–1022.

Boudana, S., Frosh, P., & Cohen, A. A. (2017). Reviving Icons to Death: When Historic Photographs become Digital Memes. *Media, Culture & Society*, *39*(8), 1210–1230. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443717690818

Brady, A.-M. (2009). The Beijing Olympics as a Campaign of Mass Distraction. *China Quarterly*, *197*, 1–24.

Chan, M. M.-L. (2020). Remixing Chineseness: Censorship, Disembodiment and the Voice in Hong Kong Digital Media. *Journal of Chinese Cinemas*, *14*(1), 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/17508061.2020.1712776

Cheng, J. (2009). The Tiananmen Incident and the Pro-Democracy Movement in Hong Kong. *China Perspectives*, *2*(78), 91–100. https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.4811

Cheng, E.W. & Ma, N. (Eds.). (2019). *The Umbrella Movement: Civil Resistance and Contentious Space in Hong Kong*. Amsterdam University Press.

Cheng, E. W., & Yuen, S. (2019). Memory in Movement: Collective Identity and Memory Contestation in Hong Kong's Tiananmen Vigils. *Mobilization: An International Quarterly*, *24*(4), 419–437. https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-24-4-419

Chidgey, R. (2018). *Feminist Afterlives: Assemblage Memory in Activist Times*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Chu, D. (2021). Remembering 1989: A Case Study of Anniversary Journalism in Hong Kong. *Memory Studies*, *14*(4), 819–833. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698020988749

Davidson, H. (2021, September 9). Hong Kong Police Raid Tiananmen Massacre Museum. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/09/hong-kong-police-raid-tiananmen-massacre-museum

Florence, E., & Pernin, J. (2019). 1989–2019: Perspectives on June 4th from Hong Kong: Interviews Compiled and Edited by Éric Florence and Judith Pernin. *China Perspectives*, *2019*(2019–2), 81–86. https://doi.org/10.4000/chinaperspectives.9234

Garrett, D. P. (2015). *Counter-Hegemonic Resistance in China's Hong Kong: Visualizing Protest in the City*. Springer.

Hariman, R., & Lucaites, J. L. (2007). *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

Hillenbrand, M. (2017). Remaking Tank Man, in China. *Journal of Visual Culture*, *16*(2), 127–166. https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412917703154

Hillenbrand, M. (2020). *Negative Exposures: Knowing What Not to Know in Contemporary China*. Duke University Press.

Hong Kong Tiananmen Square Commemorations: In Pictures. (2021, June 4). BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-57356140

Hong Kong Tiananmen Vigil Group Disbands Amid Crackdown on Dissent. (2021, September 26). The Guardian. https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/26/hong-kong-tiananmen-vigil-group-disbands-amid-crackdown-on-dissent

Hoskins, A. (2017). *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition*. Routledge.

Hubbert, J. (2014). Appropriating Iconicity: Why Tank Man Still Matters. *Visual Anthropology Review*, *30*(2), 114–126. https://doi.org/10.1111/var.12042

Hui, V. T. (2020). Crackdown: Hong Kong Faces Tiananmen 2.0. *Journal of Democracy*, *31*(4), 122–137. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2020.0060

Ibrahim, Y. (2016). Tank Man, Media Memory and Yellow Duck Patrol. *Digital Journalism*, *4*(5), 582–596. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2015.1063076

Is Hong Kong's Umbrella Man the New Tank Man? (2014, September 29). *Huck Magazine*. https://www.huckmag.com/perspectives/activism-2/hong-kong-pro-democracy-protests/

Jelodar, H., Wang, Y., Yuan, C., Feng, X., Jiang, X., Li, Y., & Zhao, L. (2019). Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and Topic Modeling: Models, Applications, a Survey.

Multimedia Tools and Applications, *78*(11), 15169–15211. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11042-018-6894-4

Lee, F. L., & Chan, J. M. (2013). Generational Transmission of Collective Memory about Tiananmen in Hong Kong: How Young Rally Participants Learn About and Understand 4 June. *Journal of Contemporary China*, *22*(84), 966–983. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2013.795311

Lee, F. L., Chan, J. M., & Leung, D. K. (2019). When a Historical Analogy Fails: Current Political Events and Collective Memory Contestation in the News. *Memory Studies*, *12*(2), 130–145. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017703809

Lim, L. (2014). *The People's Republic of Amnesia: Tiananmen Revisited*. Oxford University Press.

Lui, M., & Baldwin, T. (2012). Langid. py: An Off-the-Shelf Language Identification Tool. *Proceedings of the ACL 2012 System Demonstrations*, 25–30.

Merrill, S., & Lindgren, S. (2020). The Rhythms of Social Movement Memories: The Mobilization of Silvio Meier's Activist Remembrance across Platforms. *Social Movement Studies*, *19*(5–6), 657–674. https://doi.org/10.1080/14742837.2018.1534680

Moretti, F. (2000). Conjectures on World Literature. *New Left Review*, *1*, 54–68.

Nagourney, E. (2019, August 26). In Hong Kong, Protest Photo Evokes Memories of Tiananmen Era. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/26/world/asia/viral-hong-kong-protest-photo.html

Perlmutter, D. (1998). *Photojournalism and Foreign Policy: Icons of Outrage in International Crises*. Praeger.

Perlmutter, D. (2003). The Internet: Big Pictures and Interactors. In L. P. Gross, J. S. Katz, & J. Ruby (Eds.), *Image Ethics in the Digital Age* (pp. 1–25). University of Minnesota Press.

Smits, T., & Ros, R. (2020). *Dataset and Trained Models Belonging to the Article 'Distant Reading Patterns of Iconicity in 940.000 Online Circulations of 26 Iconic Photographs'* [Data set]. Zenodo. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4244001

Smits, T., & Ros, R. (2021). Distant Reading 940,000 Online Circulations of 26 Iconic Photographs. *New Media & Society*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448211049459

Song, Y., & Lee, C.-C. (2019). 'Collective Memories' of Global Media Events: Anniversary Journalism of the Berlin Wall and Tiananmen Crackdown in the Anglo-American Elite Press, 1990–2014. *Journalism*, *20*(11), 1460–1479. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884917720304

Sturken, M. (2018). Icons and Remakes. *Journalism & Communication Monographs*, *20*(4), 314–317. https://doi.org/10.1177/1522637918803353

Tai, B. (2019). 30 Years after Tiananmen: Hong Kong Remembers. *Journal of Democracy*, *30*(2), 64–69. https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0025

Underwood, T. (2017). A Genealogy of Distant Reading. *DHQ: Digital Humanities Quarterly*, *11*(2), 1–12.

Van der Hoeven, R. (2019). *The Global Visual Memory: A Study of the Recognition and Interpretation of Iconic and Historical Photographs*. Universiteit Utrecht.

Vulić, I., De Smet, W., Tang, J., & Moens, M.-F. (2015). Probabilistic Topic Modeling in Multilingual Settings: An Overview of its Methodology and Applications. *Information Processing & Management*, *51*(1), 111–147. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2014.08.003

Zamponi, L. (2020). #ioricordo, Beyond the Genoa G8: Social Practices of Memory Work and the Digital Remembrance of Contentious Pasts in Italy. In S. Merrill, E. Keightley, & P. Daphi (Eds.), *Social Movements, Cultural Memory and Digital Media: Mobilising Mediated Remembrance* (pp. 141–171). Springer International Publishing.

Žižek, S. (2002). *Welcome to the Desert of the Real!: Five Essays on 11 September and Related Dates*. Verso.

About the Authors

Thomas Smits is a post-doc researcher at the University of Antwerp. A historian with an interest in visual culture and computer-assisted methodologies, he is author of the prize-winning *The European Illustrated Press and the Emergence of a Transnational Visual Culture of the News, 1842–1870* (Routledge, 2020). Between 2019–2021, he worked as a post-doc researcher for the *Remembering Activism: The Cultural Memory of Protest in Europe* (ReAct) project. Recent work has been published in *New Media and Society*, *Memory Studies, Visual Communication* and *Social Movement Studies.* (thomas.smits@uantwerpen.be)

Ruben Ros is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Contemporary and Digital History at the University of Luxembourg. His research focuses on the history of technocratic reasoning in 20th-century parliamentary debates and the development of computational methods for historical research. (rubensros1995@gmail.com)

List of Illustrations

Index

Page numbers in **bold** refer to photographic works by said persons, page numbers in *italic* refer to images of said persons and page numbers followed by an n refer to footnotes.