



Image/Protest

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Abstract

This editorial introduces the articles of the special issue *Image/Protest*. It explains that the articles in the issue consider the production and reproduction of images of protest, their strategic use by various actors, their representation to wider audiences through various media channels, and their implications in the public realm. These contributions offer a collection of conceptual and analytical perspectives through which to analyse images related to protest, including ethnographic observation, semiotic analysis, historical/genre analysis and content analysis. The empirical focus of this issue includes different practices of image activism or representation of protest in the media as case studies: demonstrations in the West Bank, protests against the ban of public nudity in San Francisco, protests around the Canadian tar sands, street battles in Copenhagen over the forced eviction of Iraqi asylum seekers, online video activism on *YouTube*, and the visual coverage of Syrian conflict in the mainstream media outlets. The issue offers a wide perspective on the complex media environment in which contemporary protest is made visible, as well as on the diversified media tactics of activists which combine 'new' and 'old' media.

Contributor Note

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*I wouldn't trade my camera for a
Kalashnikov.*

Syrian activist in *Gulf News*, July 15, 2012

The mission of *JOMEC Journal* is to forge new connections between scholars working in the fields of journalism studies, media studies, and cultural studies. In the editorial of the first issue, Paul Bowman envisioned that within future individual issues 'there may well be a range of different disciplinary approaches to a shared theme' (Bowman 2012). This is such an issue. *Image/Protest* brings together scholars who represent different disciplinary approaches – art history, cultural anthropology, security studies, media and communication studies – to explore the intimate, but so far scarcely investigated, connection between images and political protest (but see, for instance, the collection edited by Doerr, Mattoni and Teune 2013).

The articles in this issue consider the production and reproduction of images of protest, their strategic use by various actors, their representation to wider audiences through various media channels, and their implications in the public realm. These contributions offer a collection of conceptual and analytical perspectives through which to analyse images related to protest, including ethnographic observation, semiotic analysis, historical/genre analysis and content analysis. The empirical focus of this issue includes different practices of image activism or representation of protest in the media as case studies: demonstrations in the West Bank, protests against the ban of public nudity in San Francisco, protests around the Canadian tar sands, street battles in Copenhagen over the forced eviction of Iraqi asylum seekers, online video activism on *YouTube*, and the visual

coverage of Syrian conflict in the mainstream media outlets.

Why images? 'Images give us something that other forms of representation do not and cannot give us; otherwise, we would not need them', Frank Möller (2013) argues. In the context of protest and demonstrations, this 'something' has been seen to provide a powerful means of mobilisation for protest: the inarticulate nature of images allows for a common language, for condensing the protest message and for eliciting emotions and moral shocks (Doerr, Mattoni and Teune 2013).

Images have historically played an important role in the constitution of protest and political action: they have been produced or constructed by activists to help them gain visibility and recognition. In addition, the protest has been an appealing subject that other actors, such as journalists, have recorded in photographs, film and video, for their subsequent public display and scrutiny.

Recently, the media environment of protest and its visual production have been undergoing transformation due to a dramatic increase of visual media and new communication technologies more generally. In particular, digital cameras and mobile camera-phones have provided hitherto unforeseen opportunities for activists' self-representation, and activists' cameras are today an essential part of any demonstration or protest (Askanius and Gustafsson 2010).

Additionally, one of the changes in contemporary political activism with wide-ranging effects is the mainstreaming of the protest (Cottle 2008: 867). Protest has moved from an outlying or marginal position to a commonly

used political strategy for an expanded range of social actors. The variety of actors producing, circulating, and strategically using images in the context of protest is reflected in this issue, including Israeli and Palestinian activist photographers (Faulkner), corporate business using protest tactics to frame and counter-frame their issue (Aronczyk), nudists defending their alternative lifestyle (Lehmuskallio), video activists (Askanius), protesters and police (Andersen) and professional journalists (Pantti).

Another important change in contemporary protest, related to the increase of actors engaged in protest, is the diffusion of protest across national borders (Cottle and Lester 2011). New visual technologies support the sharing of images across space and cultures; however, at the same time, the mainstreaming of protest has increased the competition for visibility. This has led activists to be more creative in creating spectacular 'image events' (DeLuca 1999) to gain media exposure. Online sites have become key arenas and tools for the production, distribution and mobilisation of images to support activists' causes and their circulation among global publics, making visible what previously could have remained invisible.

This issue, however, is not specifically focused on the impact of new communication technologies on political activism. Rather, it offers a wide perspective on the complex media environment in which contemporary protest is made visible, as well as on the diversified media tactics of activists which combine 'new' and 'old' media (Cammaerts, Mattoni and McCurdy 2013).

There are some shared assumptions that guide this issue's focus on the role of visual images in contemporary protest. The first is that images are things that enable people to interpret and act within the world (Belting 2011; Mitchell 2005). In other words, images are not just representations of a pre-existing reality; rather, they 'do' something – they are performative, enact social reality, and participate in its transformation (Chouliaraki 2013; Möller 2013). The current volume also expands the notion of images as material documents, the role of which is to record something happening or having happened in the past. Images of protest are also displayed with and on bodies (see Lehmuskallio and Aronczyk in this issue).

In addition, Simon Faulkner, in this issue, discusses how images also precede protests and demonstrations as mental or memory images in relation to which people perform particular actions during demonstrations. For instance, the iconic picture of a Palestinian stonethrower has been internalised and the depicted act reiterated at demonstrations in the West Bank.

The second shared theme of this special issue is that images travel from one medium and context to another. In all of the current issue's articles, images make journeys in time and across space, literally, materially and metaphorically. They travel from activist cameras to the internet and mainstream media; they travel from analogue forms and genres of video activism to today's digital media; from the mental images within the body to the material images in the media; and endlessly, through protest events.

Summary of the articles

Simon Faulkner's article, 'Images and Demonstrations in the Occupied West Bank', examines how images travel to and through demonstrations across media and time. Drawing on art historian Hans Belting's (2011) idea that the image exists in the interaction between the physical (specific media) and the mental, he examines how the pre-existing mental images of a specific act of resistance carry over to bodies that perform those acts within a demonstration, acts which in turn are transformed into new versions of this image (to be viewed and internalised yet again). He examines this extended journey of the image to and through protest events in the case of two demonstrations in the Palestinian village of Bil'in.

Asko Lehmuskallio's article, 'Banning Public Nudity: Images of Bodies as Sites of Contested Moral Values', discusses the role of images in societal body politics and the limits of the controllability of images in the digital age. By drawing on Belting's (2011) distinction between 'images in corpore' and 'images in effigy' – images displayed with and on bodies and images using other supporting media than human bodies to become visible – he examines the ways authorities establish what can and what cannot be seen in an urban environment. The political campaign around San Francisco's ban on public nudity (February 2013) provides an example of the body as a site for displaying and detaining images: the nude body, as an image in corpore, is considered by the supporters of the nudity ban a threat to a set of common morals and by nudists again as an expression of desirable morals.

Melissa Aronczyk, in her article 'Market(ing) Activism: Lush Cosmetics, Ethical Oil, and the Self-Mediation of Protest', relates the concept of 'self-mediation' to the media practices and strategies of corporate actors performing social and political activism. Using the cases of the self-mediated image activism of two corporate actors – the Lush Cosmetics company and the Ethical Oil lobby group – she discusses the co-optation of the concepts of activism and protest, and the capture of the symbolic moral benefits connected to them, by commercial firms, and goes on to examine the creation and circulation of visual protest 'artefacts' in the media strategies of Lush Cosmetics and its opponents in relation to the tar sands issue. Aronczyk concludes by suggesting that the market commodification of social action by corporate actors has the potential to weaken the ability of protest and contentious politics to bring about social change.

Tina Askanius, in 'Online Video Activism and Political Mash-up Genres', highlights the need for a historically grounded conceptualisation of online video activism. She proposes a typology for understanding the varied array of protest videos available online as a hybrid and diverse range of media forms for political investigation and portrayal. Using the political mash-up video as her case study, she examines contemporary forms of video activism as a set of material remix practices, in terms of, on the one hand, a convergence between different styles, genres and modes of address, and on the other, the multiple and weakening boundaries between different political actors and motives in online video activism. She concludes that mash-up videos work to both deliver the political as a set of participatory practices directly

attacking formal institutions of power and to bring out a sense of political engagement that can materialise in numerous, often unforeseen (and sometimes even unintended) ways across the cultural terrain.

Rune Saugmann Andersen's article, 'Epistemic Authority, Lies, and Video: the Constitution of Knowledge and (in)Security in the Video/Security Nexus', discusses how video participates in constituting politically acceptable knowledge about a protest and, consequently, in producing and contesting political power. Andersen provides an in-depth semiotic analysis of two 'epistemic battles' related to protests in Copenhagen in August 2009 against the forced eviction of a group of Iraqi asylum seekers that had sought refuge in the Brorson Church. He analyses a series of videos taken by the police and protesters on the street to show how police and protesters enact strategies that condition the possibility for images to impact public debate by becoming politically relevant knowledge.

Finally, Mervi Pantti, in her article 'Seeing and not Seeing Syria: New Visibility and the Visual Framing of the Syrian Conflict in Seven Newspapers and Their Online Editions', turns our attention to the mainstream media as the extended space of protest. The mainstream media continue to be an important channel through which protest movements aim to gain visibility and support for their aims. However, rather than looking at tactics of protest movements, she links the concept of new visibility (Thompson 2005) to the ways in which newspapers and their online editions have visually constructed the Syrian conflict – how they have regulated what can and cannot be seen.

All in all, this issue hopes to present a variety of approaches to the study of the interplay between images and protest. It seeks to illustrate the variety of protest practices and contexts within which the image emerges, travels and obtains its multiple meanings in our visually-saturated public life.

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