

PROTEST AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS



Edited by Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya,  
Olu Jenzen, and Umut Korkut

# The Aesthetics of Global Protest

## Visual Culture and Communication

Amsterdam  
University  
Press

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# 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 mobilization, 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. Books in the series will be published in English. One goal is to encourage non-native speakers to introduce their work to Anglophone audiences. Another is to maximize accessibility: all books will be available in open access within a year after printed publication.

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# The Aesthetics of Global Protest

*Visual Culture and Communication*

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*Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen,  
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Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen, and Umut Korkut  
Amsterdam, May 2019

# Preface: Devisualize

*Nicholas Mirzoeff*

At the moment of neoliberalism's beginning, Stuart Hall (2017) declared: 'When a conjuncture unrolls, there is no "going back." History shifts gears. The terrain changes. You are in a new moment.' And here we are, once again in such a moment. For Hall, the method was 'Marx plus Fanon', which I will invert for this moment to read 'Fanon plus Marx.' Fanon here stands for the politics of decolonization, from the territorial acknowledgement of Indigenous claims to Palestine and South Africa's Fall-ism: all must fall. Patriarchy must fall, white supremacy must fall, all forms of hierarchical relation must fall (Bofelo 2017). Marx stands for the circulation of socially mediated capital in the era of biopolitical production, which Michael Hardt (2012) calls '[t]he production of ideas, images, languages, code, affects, and social relationship'. Unlike Hall's 'conjuncture' in which all aspects of the social were connected via the economic, the present is a moment of disjuncture in which it seems that things fall apart. The rupture with neoliberalism's 'common sense' was felt first in the megacities of the global South and their regions but can be felt everywhere now. For the real conditions of existence have changed. Since 2008, more people live in cities than in the countryside for the first time in history. Since 2011, the global majority is aged under 30. In 2014, half the world's population gained access to the Internet. And in May 2014, carbon dioxide crossed 400 part per million for the first time in millions of years. Add to this the post-2008 disaster capitalism that has foisted precarity on the 99% to make spectacular inequality structural.

There is, then, a rupture with and within the society of control. It has spread from beginnings in the global South to Europe, North America and East Asia. The rupture remains active. Rupture is a break in space and time, a break, actual or imaginary, with previous ways of being, seeing and relating change. Once in the rupture, we find, in the manner of Jacques Rancière, that 'the rupture is not defeating the enemy. It's ceasing to live in the world the enemy has built for you' (Loret 2011). Neoliberalism created a public-private urban space where only 'passive recreation' was allowed, to

quote the rubrics now applied in Zuccotti Park, New York, where Occupy Wall Street once camped. If the paradigm spaces of neoliberalism were non-places, like airports, malls and amusement parks, the space of disjuncture is the concrete park where sitting is not allowed, the side of the road where there is nowhere for people to walk, the subway station with no elevator and all those other notionally public spaces that are no one's land. Neither common or corporate, public or private, these are the zones where the non-person may die. These conditions are in flow from global South to North, just as the new authoritarianism in the global North is the reflux of neocolonial formations to their places of origin.

Rupture is a place of density and proximity, a stepping outside the boundaries proposed by the society of control. In a moment of rupture, even such non-space can take on new meanings and temporalities become uneven. People claim that space to invent the commons of the future. Neoliberalism asserted that, in the words of Margaret Thatcher, 'there is no alternative.' But now there is, whether it is the radical right and revived authoritarian nationalism or social movements like South Africa's successful student movement Fees Must Fall, which placed education as a common good above government finances. And in this rupture we are looking to see what's happening – in 2017, 1.2 trillion photographs were taken. Four hundred hours of YouTube are uploaded every minute; 3.5 billion Snaps are posted to Snapchat every day. This is not global narcissism but a symptomatic response to the experience of rupture and the crisis of the representation principle, from politics, to mental health and the possibilities of appearance. What people are trying to create are not just images but a just image of their own situation.

I want to appropriate Hannah Arendt's (1998: 199) evocative phrase 'the space of appearance' to describe both the segregated space delineated by white supremacy as 'public' and counterclaims to appearance. But I use it in a very different way. Arendt described this space as that which occurs 'wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action', in the democracy of the ancient Greek city state, or *polis*, founded (as she herself attests) on the exclusion of women, children, non-Greeks and enslaved human beings (ibid.). By the time everyone is left out, only 3% or 4% of the population were part of this so-called democracy. It was more exactly a space of representation because all those admitted represented the title of free, male citizens. Understood this way, Arendt's space of appearance was as the infrastructure of white supremacy (see Bernasconi 2000; Allen 2004; Gines 2014). There is another appearance that is not representation, either in the political or cultural sense. It is the very possibility of appearing directly. In the non-enclosed encounter, prefiguring an outside to coloniality, I see

you and you see me and the look that passes between us is not singular and cannot be owned, it is common. It is an apprehension of the claim of the other to the right to look. That look that is exchanged in friendship, solidarity and love. I do not speak in that moment; I wait, I listen, even and especially if you do not talk. We do not and cannot enter the space equally because history and ancestry cannot be abolished. To appear here is not optical. It is the combination of the embodied mediation of appearance; an awareness of time that respects the ancestors and remembers the future; an engagement with the land on which the appearance takes place; and a commitment to the reciprocity and consent of that appearance.

In this space, as Judith Butler (2015: 110) put it when speaking of ethical action, 'I am undone as a bounded being.' Just as we are in love – another space of rupture between two or more persons. The space of appearance is, then, unbounded, before and after enclosure. In its oscillation between networked digital spaces and refunctioned urban space, the space of appearance breaks the frame, exceeds and extends representation, even as it is the object of depiction. What appears is a glimpse of the society that is (potentially) to come. It is a space of and in abolition, creating the possibility of abolition democracy. And in so doing the past is also seen differently, both in the ways that it shapes and determines the present, and in pasts that have not been fully recognized or allowed to be. The space of appearance is not universal and it is not unchanging. Unlike the modern (according to Bruno Latour), however, we have often been able to appear to one another. Those in protest have nonetheless failed to make it sustainable.

Aesthetics is exactly why that hasn't happened. As Frantz Fanon (2005: 3) identified long ago, coloniality is sustained by the 'aesthetic forms of respect for the established order', from flags and parades to monuments and museums. This process was central to the formation of visibility as a colonial technology. The space of appearance today is the workshop for the production of devisibility, meaning the undoing of visibility by decolonization. Devisualizing means undoing the processes of classification, separation and aestheticization formed under settler colonialism as what I would now call the coloniality complex. It had variants from the plantation complex to that of imperialism and counterinsurgency, even as the fundamental techniques remained constant. Today, the oversight of the plantation has been intensified and technologized into the carceral state, CCTV or the missile-carrying video-enabled drone. Like the two-headed creatures of so many mythologies, devisualizing will require decolonizing past and present formations. From the past comes an understanding of 'the' state and its relation to a supposed 'state of nature' that needs to be undone. If colonial

reason proposes the Leviathan as its agent, devisualizing Leviathan means becoming ungovernable, then and now. The deep classifications of colonizer and so-called 'savage' (because let's not euphemize what coloniality does) create divides of space and time that cleave the understanding of life. To leave it here, if the history of racial capitalism has been the history of racialized exploitation, another history is (still) possible, despite everything. Or more exactly, herstory, transtory and/or ourstories. And that is the beginning.

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## About the Author

Nicholas Mirzoeff is a Professor of Media, Culture, and Communication at New York University. He is visual activist, working at the intersection of politics and global/digital visual culture. His most recent book *How to See the World* was published by Pelican in the UK (2015) and by Basic Books in the US (2016).

# Introduction: The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication

*Aidan McGarry, Itir Erhart, Hande Eslen-Ziya, Olu Jenzen, and Umut Korkut*

## Abstract

Protest movements are struggles to be seen and to be heard. In the last 60 years protest movements around the world have mobilized against injustices and inequalities to bring about substantial sociocultural, sociopolitical, and socio-economic changes. Whilst familiar repertoires of action persist, such as strikes, demonstrations, and occupations of public space, the landscape is very different from 60 years ago when the so-called 'new social movements' emerged. We need to take stock of the terrain of protest movements, including dramatic developments in digital technologies and communication, the use of visual culture by protestors, and the expression of democracy. This chapter introduces the volume and explains how aesthetics of protest are performative and communicative, constituting a movement through the performance of politics.

**Keywords:** protest, communication, aesthetics, voice, performance, visual culture

## Introduction: The Performance of Protest

Protest movements are a key function of democracy. They represent an expression of ideas and principles to challenge dominant orthodoxies and have resulted in significant changes to policies and legislation as well as to attitudinal transformations in local, national and international contexts. Protest movements show no signs of abating in the twenty-first century as

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people challenge governments, regimes, economic structures, austerity, material inequalities as well as advocate for global issues such as food, water, energy, healthcare, and climate change. And in spite of critiques of identity politics and the mainstreaming of queer theory, identity continues to anchor political struggles around the world (McGarry and Jasper 2015; McGarry 2017).

Protest is an operation of democratic power which can be performative; it is both an act and an enactment. Protest is a collective struggle which calls into question 'the inchoate and powerful dimensions of reigning notions of the political' (Butler 2015: 9). The democratic public performs its existence through resistance: it demands recognition, embodies visibility, articulates a political voice, and communicates ideas/demands. In doing so, protest constitutes 'the people', and through the aesthetics of protest, rupture conventions of doing politics. Protests emerge when people come together to react against exclusion, inequality and injustice, usually propagated by the state or government, though other actors or structures including environmental precarity or economic instability can mobilize people to act. Protest is possible because we have inalienable rights to assemble, to associate, and to speak though this does not necessarily mean that we want to be included in the dominant political order, as many protestors, from Occupy to the Arab Spring, seek to overhaul governments and economic and political regimes. Rather, the enactment of protest signifies democracy in its most essential form, one that is founded on action and enactment: 'Democracy is, properly speaking, the symbolic institution of the political in the form of the power of those who are not entitled to exercise power – a rupture in the order of legitimacy and domination. Democracy is the paradoxical power of those who do not count' (Rancière and Panagia 2000: 124).

Protest is not only concerned with seeking recognition; protest seeks to disrupt the existing political order, transcend or abandon its ideological trappings, and create new possibilities. In the Gezi Park protests in Turkey in 2013, protestors created a new collectivity, one that had not existed before. The 'Gezi spirit' was created by heterogeneous people coming together and crafting something new that fractured the existing order, narratives, and ideologies (Akçalı 2018; McGarry et al. 2019). This became a focal point, which oriented protestors in terms of their ideas, possibilities, and identities. 'Gezi spirit' denotes the enactment of solidarity rather than a collective identity so that performing solidarity is created through different voices being heard. This shows that different voices are possible. The performance of protest in Gezi Park, by women, by Alevi, by football fans, by Kurds, by Kemalists, by LGBTIQ, anti-capitalist Islamists, as well as those whose exclusion by

the government cannot be easily reduced to identity positions, is based on participation, communication, and interaction. Protest interaction occurs in a demonstration or a march, but the occupation of public space facilitates the creation of new publics and possibilities and allows for the expression of dissenting voices which challenge the political legitimacy of the state or an authority. In this respect, the occupation of a public space such as in Tahrir Square in Cairo or Gezi Park creates and amplifies a political voice, meaning that aesthetics of protest is a form of communication with the potential to inspire and mobilize people to action.

This book maintains that aesthetics are more than Kantian interpretations of what is beautiful or pleasing to the eye but comprise a range of *performances*. In this respect, we build on the recent work of cultural sociologists who seek to understand the role of aesthetics in social relations and political life, particularly 'the role that aesthetics play vis-à-vis social change' (Olcese and Savage 2015: 723). Whilst aesthetics can be understood as a quality, style, taste or value, we believe this positivist position fails to capture the complex communicative and expressive processes in protest action, and what it means for democratic processes. Research has explored aesthetic choices which protestors use when capturing and communicating ideas, which is bound up with the visual framing or staging of protests (Veneti 2017). In the past, those who capture protest images can help to communicate ideas about the protestors, to raise awareness and visibility, and certainly aesthetics can act as a resource for further mobilization (Doerr et al. 2013). We seek to shift our focus to protestors themselves and help reveal how protestors document and produce protest through aesthetics. This means that value judgements regarding 'pure aesthetics' (sidestepping the issue of whether such judgements are possible) are less interesting for us as the expression or performance of protest and what it means for communication and solidarity. This volume is partly motivated by a desire to show how aesthetics are harnessed by sociopolitical and sociocultural actors through protest and have the power to transform existing structures, ideas, and orthodoxies. Moreover, the various contributors seek to politicize aesthetics, conceiving aesthetics as a practice, a resource, a choice with instrumental and expressive components. Tulke's (2013) research on street art in Athens highlights three overlapping levels of significance: the appropriation and reinterpretation of urban space, the actual message encrypted, and the subsequent generation of alternative discursive communication channels. As we shift our focus from subjective taste and style we are able to capture the aesthetics of protest, its materiality and visual dimensions, its silence, its vocalization, and its rhythm.



Figure 0.1. Whirling Dervish with gas mask, Taksim Square, 2013. Photo by Seamus Travers.

We understand the aesthetics of protest to be the slogans, art, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, clothes, and objects that comprise a material and performative culture with a high capacity to be replicated digitally and shared across social media networks, ideological terrain, state borders, and linguistic frontiers. A key concern for this book is how the aesthetics of protest are expressed, what they communicate, and its significance for political voice. In the same vein, the dramatic proliferation of digital technologies and images of protest reveals different possibilities for articulating a political voice. Politics is not produced solely by the vocalized claims or demands of protestors but by their action, and sometimes their inaction, thus the aesthetics of protest reveals how democracy is constituted through ‘a complex interplay of performance, images, acoustics and all the various technologies engaged in those productions’ (Butler 2015: 20). Performance is a form of agency expressing a political voice. The political voice that emanates from the aesthetics of protest cannot be reduced to verbal utterances or background noise; political voice communicates resistance and solidarity. Performativity enacts the power of individuals and groups united in a common message but does not necessarily carry a specific demand as recent protest movements such as Occupy have demonstrated. Not surprisingly, the aesthetics of protest is acutely important for minority

and marginalized voices that might remain invisible or not heard, such as refugees in Calais or Lesbos, peasant farmers in South America or queer people in Russia. It is surprising how little attention has been given to the role of performance in political activism and social movements.

The solidarity expressed through performance during protests draws attention to those silenced voices laying claim to the democratic sphere, drawing attention to their collective existence, and challenging existing forms of political legitimacy (Butler 2015). As students protested in front of the central government offices in Hong Kong in 2014, police used pepper spray and tear gas to disperse the crowds. Students used the only thing they had, i.e. umbrellas, to protect themselves. Within days, hand-drawn yellow paper umbrellas appeared on the barricades surrounding the protestors and pro-democracy citizens began changing their Facebook profile photos to pictures of yellow umbrellas. Umbrellas disappeared from stores across the territory and reappeared as impromptu public art on city streets. The umbrella was a perfect symbol for the demonstration as it spoke of orderly civic life, of conscientiousness, of ordinary middle-class respectability (Matchar 2014; Ma and Cheng 2019). The innocuous yellow umbrella became a symbol for democracy; a visual and expressive medium to communicate a political voice. Aesthetics of protest carry a potential symbolic resonance bound up with identities, affect, attitudes, and new meanings and knowledge; aesthetics are thus a dynamic process which are attuned to adapt to and support rapid social change engendered by protest movements. Political voice is not concerned with merely being recognized or included in the existing political order; it seeks to rupture dominant political, cultural, and economic structures.

Performance is uniquely placed to fuel political activism as it develops new materiality, the use of bodies, and is often artistically creative, symbolic, and interactive (Serafini 2014: 323-324). *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication* highlights the role of art in politics (Reed 2005) and builds on the contribution of artists through 'creative activism' (Rubin 2018) to show how protestors across the world use aesthetics in order to communicate their ideas and ensure their voices are heard. This book looks at protest aesthetics, which we consider to be the visual and performative elements of protest, such as images, symbols, graffiti, art, as well as the choreography of protest actions in public spaces. Through the use of digital technologies and social media, protestors have been able to create an alternative space for people to engage with politics that is, in theory, more inclusive and participatory than traditional electoral politics. This volume focuses on the role of visual culture in a highly mediated

environment and draws on case studies from Europe, Thailand, South Africa, USA, Argentina, and the Middle East in order to demonstrate how protestors use aesthetics to communicate their demands and ideas. The book focuses on protests which have manifested around the globe rather than protests which span the globe as transnational protests. It examines how digital media is harnessed by protestors and argues that *all protest aesthetics are performative and communicative*.

## Visual Culture and Digital Communication

The time is right to examine how aesthetics of protest have transformed thanks to developments in visual culture and communication, both of which have been key components of protest movements over the years. Recently, waves of protests have emerged from São Paulo to Hong Kong and Seoul that are original in their cultural and artistic production and expression. They employ artistic forms that have proliferated from those on the margins of society and retain a creative and handmade quality (Caldeira 2013), frequently enlisting popular culture tropes. The appropriation of visual culture by protestors has been explored, notably the *V for Vendetta* mask of Guy Fawkes, which has become emblematic of the Occupy and Anonymous protests (Kaulingfreks and Kaulingfreks 2013), along with the image of Ché Guevara for resistance movements on the left (Memou 2013). Whilst conventional forms of democracy, such as political party membership or voting, have declined around the world, political voice is increasingly expressed and performed through a variety of text, visual, graphic, and communication forms (Loader and Mercea 2012: 5). Protest movements in the last decade were amongst the first to use global social media in combination with aesthetics of protest to try and create 'visual thinking' (Mirzoeff 2015) about representation and social change, to constitute groups and communicate key ideas and demands. What we are witnessing is an opening up of the public, facilitated by social movements, which expands the range of voices that can be heard and diverse expressions of political voice. Many of these voices are articulated visually as our volume illustrates.

This book explores the importance of social media understood not just as a tool to disseminate information (Walgrave et al. 2011), but also as a mechanism allowing people to communicate visually and engage in a non-material space, which impacts on how aesthetics represent and constitute the polity (Rancière 2006). In this respect, digital technologies expand our understanding of how and where politics is done. We understand social

media as a space that complements the physical or material manifestation of protest in parks, squares and streets. Even protest activities and movements which focus exclusively on digital spaces cannot be entirely disentangled from the material power of mass mobilization in public space. The overall aim of this book is to investigate the aesthetics of protest in protest movements in order to understand the forms of political expression and participation that are intertwined with, but not limited to, digital media. This book will lead to advances in knowledge of protest movements today by developing an understanding of protest aesthetics and their effect in creativeness, consciousness-raising, identity formation and overall in the articulation of opinions and demands.

Protest movements that straddle material and virtual spaces are on the rise across the world with people becoming increasingly able to engage with media technologies in order to be more visible and to ensure their voice is heard (Couldry 2006, 2010; Castells 2012; Barbas and Postill 2017). Research on the Arab Spring and Occupy movements reveals the importance of social media as a key tool for communication between protestors (Bennett and Segerburg 2013) and facilitating mobilization (Gerbaudo 2012), but less is known about how protestors use visual culture to communicate their ideas, identities and interests across diverse social spaces, both material and virtual. It is clear that people are able to harness different media and digital technologies to produce and disseminate ideas, which reflect their realities. Researchers do not yet comprehend the contemporary potentials of visual culture and digital media in affecting social change (Walgrave et al. 2011). That is why this book signifies an attempt to redress this shortcoming and explore how groups challenge authorities using visual culture, performance, and digital media. We explore political mobilization today and seek to understand the role of social media in communicating visual culture and deliberation processes and expression across diverse publics (Brunsting and Postmes 2002), particularly as it relates to marginalized communities and voices. Through aesthetics, protestors' ideas, preferences, and interests are represented and articulated publicly (Werbner et al. 2014). The questions guiding this book are: What are the implications for society of the evolving aesthetics of protest in an age of rapidly changing visual and technological culture? What is the significance of protest aesthetics and their potential in communicating meaning, identity negotiation and in the articulation of opinions and demands? What motivates protestors in their choices of visual communication and mediation? To what extent are aesthetics of protest communicative and performative, and what impact do aesthetics of protest have on the articulation of political voice?

Visual images help protestors to be visible and to communicate. Digital technologies and social media platforms are developed with specific purposes in mind, which facilitate activities such as our capacity to photograph and upload images onto social media platforms from our smartphones, whilst precluding others, such as our restricted ability to register an emotional response to a status update. Digital technologies retain a materiality, which inform what is possible and encourage us to engage with technology in prescriptive ways due to the design. Such teleological issues are fundamental to how and why we use social media platforms, and, of course, if we choose not to. For protestors, social media is useful to exchange ideas, share information regarding activities, and raise awareness of a protest. Research has noted how social media offers a space for the creation of counterpublics to challenge existing power holders, for new social meaning to emerge, and is based on the assumption that digital technologies such as smartphones and social media platforms afford people an opportunity to participate in politics. This is important for protest movements, which seek to challenge mainstream media, especially in those regimes and contexts which curb and monitor Internet access. Often social media complements a protest, acting as another space to facilitate participate, mobilization and build solidarity but online protest alone is not sufficient to sustain a movement.

Digital technologies themselves are not ‘inherently democratic’ (Loader and Mercea 2012: 3) as there are significant issues of access to and visibility within social media platforms. However, the possibilities for participation and communication have far reaching potential for radical transformative democracy, understood as democratic processes which are more inclusive, deliberative and participatory (Van Reybrouck 2016). There is a significant amount of hyperbole, which in the past has declared ‘Twitter revolutions’ and arguments that, amongst others, the Egyptian revolution in 2011 was thanks to social media. Such technological determinism simplifies the relationship between media communication and social movements (Morozov 2011). As a corollary, the dismissal of digital activism as ‘clicktivism’ or ‘slactivism’, due to the fostering of lightweight relationships and favouring of less commitment than the physical investment in time and risk ignores important mobilization and communication interactions that happen in digital spaces (Earl and Kimport 2011; Bennett and Segerberg 2013). Whilst the power of social media in different protest movements is open to debate, it offers the possibility to explore media ecologies, mediation and communication (Mattoni and Treré 2015). This is why the visual realm is so important. Visual activism means we can ‘use visual culture to create self-images, new ways to see and be seen, and new ways to see the world’ (Mirzoeff 2015: 297).

In order to better understand the relationship between protest action, digital technologies and communication, it is necessary to explore how meaning is constructed through the performance of protest, that is, the sociocultural framing and communication of aesthetics. Tacchi et al. (2003) argue that we should pay attention to the role of actors as well as the content of communication. Hence, we look at the role of visual culture produced and disseminated during protests. Performance becomes for us a frame to better understand and articulate our being in social, political and technological spaces and the potentialities of communication and mediation. Performativity is an empowering concept, politically and artistically, because it not only explains how norms are constituted but also shows that change and invention are always possible (Kember and Zylinska 2010: 3). Contestation is a permanent condition of politics, which allows for ruptures. Sometimes we witness the gradual shift of attitudes, ideas, practices and values, such as those engendered by second-wave feminism, the black civil rights movement and peace movements in the 1960s and 1970s, whilst other times a rupture is a dramatic fissure resulting in the transformation of economic and political structures.

Visual culture is the 'shared practices of a group, community or society through which meanings are made out of the visual, aural and textual world of representations and the way looking practices are engaged in symbolic and communicative activities' (Sturken and Cartwright 2009: 3). Gerbaudo (2014: 266) argues that social media becomes a 'source of coherence as shared symbols – an act of/a sort of centripetal focus of attention – which participants can turn to when looking for other people in the movement', thereafter orienting protests by providing a focal point. That is why political voice is a form of agency that communicates ideas of solidarity – fundamental for protest movements in order for individuals and groups to coalesce and intersect. Though not insignificant, the lines between individual and collective mobilization are increasingly blurred (Kaun et al. 2016). Digital media extends the parameters of who can participate by opening up new paths for communication and mobilization whilst creating 'more decentralized, dispersed, temporary and individualized forms of political action which then subvert the notion of the collective as singular, unified, homogeneous, coherent and mass' (Kavada 2016: 8). Kavada (2016) is critical of entrenched ways of understanding protest movements with success being measured against demands and argues that the constitution of the movement itself as a political actor can, in itself, be a political outcome. This distinction is crucial if we are to understand how protestors expand the scope of how communication is possible, which extends to the creative use



of visual culture as a way to articulate political voice and express solidarity. The aesthetics of protest is a form of communication which creates a new way to engage and participate and is potentially powerful in consciousness raising, fostering solidarity and mobilization.

Visual culture is highly visible through a series of 'compressed performances' (Pinney 2004), which is now frequently played out on social media. Rose (2014: 13) argues that visual images are 'a trace of social identities, processes, practices, experiences, institutions and relations: this is what they make visible' and it is here where the social and political world is produced and communicated. We can add an additional layer because visual culture such as photographs of protest can 'speak' about things that are not immediately visible. The visual political voice can challenge how discursive interventions are made and communicate ideas and issues, which are latent or invisible. Visual culture works to record things, to represent, to signify, to make visible, to argue, to create affect, and the form can be frivolous or meaningless: 'they are sent as messages to maintain or destroy social relationships; and they achieve this through what they show, how they are seen, and what is done with them' (Rose 2014: 20). If visual culture is rendered meaningful depending on the context of its use, then protest movements challenge where meaning is made; through communication and exchange across digital and material spaces.

## Between Digital and Material Space

Whilst there is a propensity to only consider urban spaces as those where protest is possible and where democracy happens, it is important to note how protest manifests in digital spaces through various technologies and media. Public spaces are a stage on which protestors express solidarity and challenge the legitimacy of political and economic structures, and provide conditions where citizenship can be performed (Clark et al. 2014). Protest movements such as Indignados in Spain, Maidan in Ukraine, and various Occupy mobilizations emerged to 'collect the space itself, gather the pavement, and animate and organize the architecture' (Butler 2015: 71). The appropriation of public space to express power is a long-standing strategy of the state (Taylor 1994). When people assemble in a public space they challenge the idea that the state alone has the authority to determine how it is to be used, whether for ritualistic pageantry or as an expression of state power. During the Red Shirt protests in Bangkok, blood was collected from an estimated 70,000 protestors, pooled together and then poured at

the gates of Government House as a way to draw attention to the violence and exclusion against sections of Thai society. In this respect, 'the art of urban protest thus confronts the question of who can speak beyond the conventions of the state in non-conventional ways' (Viernes 2015: 133). The political meaning and consequence of the act of contesting public space is dependent on visibility; for example, those who prayed publicly in Tahrir Square, Cairo, during the Arab Spring represent a non-violent battle for control of public space (El-Hibri 2014).

Digital spaces also challenge state power by facilitating the horizontal exchange of knowledge and ideas. Such participation and interaction across social media are not reliant on mainstream media, but actively circumvents it in order to allow different voices to be heard. As protestors document and photograph and record protest activities they communicate information and help foster a counterpublic, meaning that protest images have the potential to contribute to a vibrant public sphere (Olesen 2013). In this way, the Indignados in Spain used visual images to capture public performances which develop 'shared and translocal ways of thinking and acting in public rather than a manifestation of the multitude' (Rovisco 2017: 347), but there is also identity work at play. In this respect, the public square acts as a theatre where the individual and collective identities of protestors are performed, as it communicates ideas of democracy, including specific demands and grievances. There is a conventional understanding of social media as a new scale where democracy is enacted: protestors harness public space which social media then amplifies to diffuse protest action with the intention of reaching different publics and extending beyond state borders. For some protestors, gaining international attention is a goal whereas for others the diffusion of ideas is less important; the use of English language or symbols is important for protestors to show solidarity with one another. Notably, visual culture has the capacity to cut across linguistic frontiers even if, at times, satire and humour gets lost in (visual) translation.

This raises a question as to how the aesthetics of protest matter across different scales and whether the performance of protest can collapse more rigid distinctions between what is considered to be 'online' (material) and what is considered to be 'offline' (digital) or not. Certainly, sociocultural and sociopolitical opportunities are transformed by digital technologies with user-generated content prominent on sites such as Facebook, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter that host images, movies, videos, and live-stream. Such visibility can be double-edged with surveillance and monitoring of protestors by state authorities, as well as on social media, which can make protestors vulnerable to political adversaries and the state

(Milan 2015). During protest action, users can navigate digital technologies to dissolve geographies and ascribe meaning to activities. The interface between material and digital space is facilitated by human agency that requires attention to human practices, such as protest aesthetics, which ultimately produce meaning.

A key contribution of this volume will be to demonstrate how aesthetics of protest render distinctions between digital and material spaces negligible, and instead shift our focus to consider the interplay between material and digital spaces as a democratic space that enables political voice to be heard. Meaning becomes dispersed, diverse and driven at the interface between digital and material spaces thanks to 'human reflection, creativity and routine' (Rose 2016: 21). Thereby, the performance of protest not only questions and subverts ideas of where politics is done, but constitutes a rupture to the existing political order by its enactment. The question is not how much the material or digital space accounts for but what the interaction between online and offline spaces means for democratic expression, political voice, visibility and notions of solidarity. As an example, protestors playfully subverted the supposedly rigid distinctions between online and offline during the Indignado occupation by creating an 'analogue Twitter' at the height of the Plaça de Catalunya encampment with protestors writing 'tweets' on Post-it notes and sticking them to a pedestal in the square (Rovisco 2017). The presence of digital space offers opportunities to structure interaction across different actors (such as public, protestors, politicians, media, government) with some social media platforms being 'a mechanism to co-constitute and co-configure the digitally networked protest space' (Bennett and Segerberg 2013: 95). Digital technologies allow a flexible means for protestors to access and navigate protest space, irrespective of their geographic location, but physical presence at a protest can engender different sensory experiences such as smell of tear gas, which is not easily communicated across digital spaces. In this regard, digital technology is not an independent actor but emerges in the context of specific cultural and social settings (Kaun et al. 2016: 2). Digital technologies do not merely facilitate communication and participation but actually constitute the demos by allowing different voices to be heard and expressed in creative and often radical ways. Bennett and Segerberg (2013: 42) maintain that 'communication mechanisms establish relationships, activate attentive participants, channel resources and establish narratives and discourses' and thereby approach communication as primarily concerned with organization rather than action. This book focuses on agency and enactment rather than the organization of protest.

## Outline of the Book

Our book explores how communication and performance constitutes protest movements. This core argument runs through each chapter. One of the advantages of this approach is that it allows us to observe diverse aesthetics of protest at work within complex protest movements and carefully analyse the role of performance and communication. Whilst there are cross-cutting themes which emerge across the chapters such as performance, communication, agency, art, visual culture and digital media, each chapter helps to develop a nuanced understanding of aesthetics of protest. However, there are also contradictions and tensions which emerge across the volume, not least a clear agreement on the definition and interpretation of aesthetics of protest. Rather than find diverse conceptualizations of aesthetics of protest problematic for our central argument, we believe that they enrich our conceptual, empirical, and methodological development, and reflect the multifaceted and contested nature of aesthetics of protest. *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication* presents diverse cases from across the globe from multidisciplinary perspectives, including fine art, performance art, photography, sociology, politics, media and communication, and development studies. A common refrain across the book is a call for engagement between aesthetics and protest, using the latter as a lens to understand the former. These chapters render social and political practices a lived experience through protest which remind us that 'aesthetics alerts us to the creativity involved in routine social practices' (Olcese and Savage 2015: 724). The book develops three angles from and through which to better capture the aesthetics of protest.

First, the book argues that we should move beyond strict Kantian interpretations of aesthetics which has been a cornerstone of the arts and humanities for centuries. We do not slay this giant but modestly seek to agitate for change by showing the creative potential of agency through aesthetics of protest. For this reason, we have included two artists in the volume to understand artist practice (see Eğrikavuk; O'Hara) as well as scholars who work on artistic media and expression such as photography (see Faulkner), performance art (see Lewin), street art and graffiti (see Ryan; Tulke), and video (see Viernes). The key claim here is that art is not a value but a practice which yields insights and understandings as well as creating worldviews and meanings. Second, the book argues that visual activism is a mediated space of resistance (see Mirzoeff). The visual realm, which comprises the use of visibility and visual culture by protestors, is not just a monolithic optical entity but demands a response. The visual

realm is therefore relational in that it requires recognition or a response from others; aesthetics of protests are a form of visual mediation to engage in this dialogue (see Hayward and Komarova; Faulkner). In this respect, mediation can be enacted through embodied performances (see Vis et al.; Lewin) challenging the centrality of a materialist ontology which grounds Kantian interpretation of aesthetics. But we also see this in the deployment of visual media by protestors to contest dominant narratives and to ascribe meaning to real-world events (see Faulkner; Viernes; Özdüzen; Jenzen et al.). Thirdly, the book explores the interplay between material and digital realms for protestors, attempting to show how protest is not confined to specific sites and spaces (or scales). Aesthetics of protests allow us to capture the interplay between material and digital spaces (see Mercea and Levy; Özdüzen; Jenzen et al.; Vis et al.) which become spaces of resistance.

This volume understands the aesthetics of protest as both communicative and performative. Throughout the chapters, certain approaches like slogans, art, music, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, and objects were taken as means to understand how the aesthetics of protest are expressed, what they communicate, and their significance for political voice. The diversity of approaches used in this book reflects the richness in its methodology, its flexible, diverse nature allowing us to understand the dynamic process from different angles and reveals different possibilities for articulating aesthetics of protest. For instance, Chapter 1 explores visual activism and the way in which it complicates/broadens conventional conceptions of activism in South Africa, which operates at the complex intersections of race, class and gender. Chapter 2 is based on ethnographic fieldwork on the Protestant/Unionist Orange Order in Northern Ireland, analysing and interpreting the ongoing events as both territorial struggles and quest for visibility. In Chapter 3 Eğrikavuk looks at the work produced by artist collectives in Turkey four years after the Gezi Park protests. Chapter 4 examines the active resistance taking place in Argentina by the mothers of the 'disappeared' coinciding with another public protest where life-sized paper bodies were deployed during the protest. Chapter 5 develops a case study of spatial politics of street art within the framework of 'right to the city' activism. In an interview with Morgan O'Hara, Chapter 6 discusses her approach to the performance of protest: handwriting the US Constitution as silent collective resistance. Chapter 7 conducts a visual analysis of a small number of photographs of demonstrations selected from the online Israel/Palestine-based photographic collective while Chapter 8 uses independent Thai cinema as a regime of fictionality where the personalization of protest

returns. In Chapter 9 Özdüzen analyses censored films and popular activist videos from Turkey whilst Chapter 10 carries out qualitative thematic analysis of music videos during Gezi Park protests. Chapter 11 analyses four Occupy Gezi hashtags through in-depth interviews whilst in Chapter 12 the appropriation of the symbol of protest explores how aesthetics are mediated and performed by activists. In all these chapters both the similarity and the diversity of the methodological approaches provides the richness of this volume. Such differences in the methodology enables us to understand the dynamic process of aesthetics of protest from different angles.

The book is divided into two sections with six contributions in each section, followed by a conclusion, which examines the role of visual culture in protest. The first section focuses on 'Performance, Art, and Politics'. First, in this section, in South Africa visual activism has a different epistemological history and contemporary form thus setting the scene for subsequent chapters. Lewin's chapter uses the work of South African artists FAKA, a queer performance duo, and Robert Hamblin, a fine art photographer, to explore *visual* activism and the way in which it complicates/broadens conventional conceptions of activism. Hayward and Komarova use one of the most contentious annual protests, an Orangeman parade, in Belfast, Northern Ireland, to explore how participants are engaged in a quest for visibility and show how the ways in which this is managed and performed can be decisive. At this point we introduce an artistic perspective from Eğrikavuk, an artist who uses an exhibition that she curated in Istanbul in 2017 entitled *Maybe, We Will Benefit from Our Neighbour's Good Fortune* to examine the role of art collectives and the artwork produced as performances of protest in a post Gezi Park political context. The following two chapters address the use of street art by protestors. Ryan situates street art in Latin America, particularly in Buenos Aires, as one example of 'politics by other means', and encourages an appreciation of the 'ambiguity' of such street art, which has both an aesthetic and a political dimension and value. Tulke then asks whether graffitied slogans or large murals, creative interventions into public space have the potential to stage meaningful encounters between city dwellers and the urban landscape they inhabit, inscribing alternative histories and possibilities into the very surface of the city. This chapter stages a dialogue between Athens and Istanbul, exploring how in each case interventions into public space formed part of a larger aesthetics of protest, while also reflecting on how the material shift from physical to digital space may transform the perception and meaning of an artwork. Finally, this section concludes with an interview between New York-based artist, Morgan O'Hara and McGarry, who explore the notion of the 'introvert's

protest' and the performance of protest through the 'Handwriting the Constitution' project.

The second section is 'Visual Activism and Digital Culture'. In order to understand how photographs function in relation to protest, Faulkner looks at Activestills, an Israel/Palestine-based photography collective that was established in 2005 and currently involves Israeli, Palestinian, and international photographers, who have focused their photographic practice on the depiction of protests and political struggles, primarily in the Occupied Territories, but also within Israel. Viernes explores the cult of visibility in Bangkok protest culture and the role of drones, video and cinema, which intervene in visual protest culture. The next three chapters cover the Gezi Park protests in Turkey and start by developing Viernes's intervention on the role of video and mediation of protests. Özdüzen examines the intersection of Turkish politics and alternative visual and digital media in order to delineate the ways in which activists/artists have coped with the process of polarization in Turkish society. She pays particular attention to text and context of censored films and widely circulated activist videos in an increasingly authoritarian political context. Jenzen, Erhart, Eslen-Ziya, Güçdemir, Korkut, and McGarry explore the use of music videos produced and shared on YouTube during the Gezi Park protests and assesses music was deployed by protestors with the purpose of expressing solidarity and community. Mercea and Levy draw on research with protestors at Occupy Gezi Park, who were selected for their enduring commitment to the protest evidenced by their communication on Twitter. Tweeting enabled the representation as well as the choreography of the collective action and channelled the imagery of police repression as a non-violent counterweight substantiating the violence perpetrated against the activists. The final chapter from Vis et al. in this section looks at the Black Lives Matter (BLM) protest in the USA. It examines a photograph of the arrest of BLM activist DeRay McKesson in Baton Rouge in July 2016, which encapsulates and makes visible a number of tensions namely the profit driven interests that underpin Twitter and the technology sector resulting in a superficial notion of being 'woke', as well as a contradictory engagement with black political culture. Aulich provides a conclusion by elegantly weaving the themes of the book such as mediatization, aesthetics, and protest through significant manifestations of protest across time. He presents an argument which reminds us of the importance of historicizing social movements to better understand evolving aesthetics of protest and how these are linked with democratic expression and consolidation.

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