PERFORMANCE, ACTIVISM AND PUBLIC SPHERE: ARCHIVE, REPERTOIRE AND REPÉRFORMANCE IN THE NEW NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS
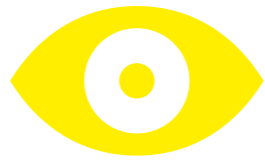
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SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND MEDIA IN A TIME OF UNCERTAINTY AND INDETERMINACY

In 2001, *Time Magazine* chose the figure of the Protester for person of the year, which was the cover story and the usual global media circulation.[1] Ted Soqui's photograph, creatively recreated by renowned street artist Shapard Fairey (the same author of Barack Obama's slogan-cartoon "Hope"), was of a woman, Sarah Mason, 25, who belonged to the Occupy LA, but some details were reworked and the anonymously presented face aimed at attaining a collective dimension. In fact, Sarah was wearing a scarf around her face printed with the number "99%", a symbol that emerged during the Occupy movement in the US. The photograph was taken on the same day Sarah was detained while participating in a human cordon opposite Bank of America, Los Angeles, in protest against the financial

[1] Cf. *Time Magazine*, "2011 Person of the Year: The Protester", content.time.com/time/person-of-the-year/2011/

system. Just minutes before, she soaked her scarf in vinegar to avoid the effects of tear gas fired by the police. These facts were avoided in Kurt Andersen's article that accompanied the photograph. Nevertheless, in that same issue *Time* published several photographs (by photo-reporter Peter Hapak) of different activists from across the world. Even despite the aesthetical stylizing of the protest/protester it is possible to find particular elements: a strong presence of women and blacks, which, although intergenerational, included mostly young people, artists, the presence of digital technologies alongside loudspeakers, beaten up bodies and the remains of bullets/tear gas canisters and faces covered in improvised masks.

The media protagonism of the protester, even if sanitized or stylized and absorbed by mainstream media logics in their search for anonymous protagonists or romantic heroes, does not hinder the dynamics of multiplication of "new spaces" of democratization and indignation that spread across the globe from 2009 onwards. This accompanied the cycle of global capitalism's financial earthquakes and accentuated the so-called crisis of democracy or, to be more precise, of democratic representation.

To take the street became a performative movement with a new intensity, on a plane that was refined and intersected, and mediated at the global, national and local scales. Which is to say, *to take the street* became a performative movement because, to a large extent, political forms of protest and resistance grew from performative gestures and actions that took on a very clear performatic tendency, i.e., occupation of public space or buildings, camps, creation of autonomous zones, using the bodies

as protagonists both of violence and peaceful resistance, or for the presentation of political subjects, etc. On the other hand, *to take the street* consolidated as an intensely mediated movement, resorting to the agitprop media and technologies of communication in the digital era. John Downing (2001) had already explained the characteristics of radical media in processes of social transformation and change that expanded the potential for social movements to share and exchange information beyond the space allotted to them in conventional media:

> (...) there are also radical formats that are not technologically driven and expensive, such as graffiti, buttons, t-shirts, song, street theater, performance art (...).
>
> (Downing 2001, 51)

Clearly, Downing referred to a whole set of tactics and strategies that emerged in late twentieth century political protest, especially driven by the so-called anti- or alt- globalization movements. In that sense, the Seattle (1990) and Genoa (2002) protests were the apex of that process of combination of "analogic" forms (described above by Downing), so to speak, with digital modalities (creation of independent platforms such as Indymedia, diffusion via fax, telephone, etc.). Julia Ruiz Di Giovanni (2015) underlines this trend of continuity outlined above:

> In the years of transition from the twentieth to the twenty-first century, in the context of the wave of demonstrations of the so-called anti-globalization movement – which were always surrounded by a debate on their efficiency and legitimacy – a new vitality in street protests emerged as an

unquestionable element of the current social and political experience (2015, 14).

For Innerarity (2010), uncertainty is an indicator of the quality of democratic spaces, which curiously has been emptied out of political debate dynamics, confined to parliaments, "closed rooms" or media debates (always peopled with specialists and commentators). And, thus, the new social movements sought, among other dynamics of mobilization, horizontal public meetings that become political performances in themselves and where the distinct narratives under discussion become themselves actions, instead of mere speeches, and are subject to unpredictability and improvisation. The street has, therefore, acquired new meanings, and its landscape and its territory take on another significance. It is now inhabited by those who, apparently, wish to become emancipated spectators – to use Jacques Ranciére's metaphor (2010) – of the political theatre. This performative declaration, under the guise of an assembly or even an encampment, claims the right to re-inhabit public space as space for the construction of the public sphere and of the political debate, as well as the production of democracy. And it is more than a symbolic act – it aims at producing reality! Like John Austin's or John Searle's performative utterances and speech acts, which are more than enunciations and actually *are* and *do* something, this new landscape of the square also *is* and *does* something.

Citizenship protests, which are considered inorganic, are also clearly marked by indeterminacy, exploring a performative dimension that allows us to speak of a sort of performance activ-

ism, as Richard Schechner[2] recently suggested, classifying it as a new third world of people that relate at a fundamentally performative, rather than ideological, level. Which is to say, while nineteenth and twentieth century activisms had a fundamentally ideological basis, focusing mostly on political rights and economic inequalities, contemporary activism seems to add this radically relational dimension – i.e., a collaborative social process of discovery and creation of new ideas, new roles, new relationships and new activities. A field, therefore, for the emerging of a *milieu de mémoire* (Pierre Nora) or a *repertoire* of incorporated performative practices, as proposed by Diana Taylor (2003), and built by the *indeterminacy* of a performative *here and now*, as outlined by Performance Studies theoreticians.

But precisely for Schechner, this performance activism would be guided by some principles, those, in fact, which are at the basis of his definition of performance. In a 1995 text, outlining the performative dimension of street protests, Schechner considered that "(…) to allow people to assemble in the streets is always to flirt with the possibility of improvisation – that the unexpected might happen" (1995, 47).

Moreover, in the era of digital capitalism we witness the emergence of a digital activism (cf. Joyce 2010) marking the correspondence between the notion of *uncertainty* (generated around the economic crisis narrative) and the notion of (technological) *indeterminacy* in the protests of the new new social move-

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[2] Proposed at a seminar during the *2012 Performing the World Conference* (cf. performingtheworld.org/past-conferences/(2012-2).

ments. If we choose visual images and representations of that correspondence mediated by digital technologies, it is likely that we may also need to redefine the agency of that digital activism, in the sense of including a new framework in which causality and indeterminacy, intention and event are not the two sides of the same coin, but rather an in-between interface (cf. Abreu 2013). One of the relevant dimensions was its constitution through Internet resources and applications, namely the use of digital agitprop through postings and images spread through social networks, live streaming of assemblies, meetings, occupations or other forms of protest. Precarious and blurred archives of images were produced very rapidly and for consumption at the global scale. Image-making processes with alternative media were constantly uploaded onto commercial platforms and social networks, but also onto independent platforms. This enabled the assemblies in the squares of Madrid, Lisbon or Athens (Syntagma) to be seen, in real time or not, in São Paulo and Wall Street, and for them to become the rhizomes of global protest. However, we should not reduce this process to a struggle for meaning and sense, but should also try to perceive that new temporality – made of uncertainty and indeterminacy – in terms of technological and media appropriations. To my mind, that new temporality unfolded with the "September 11" effect, when the narratives of threat and terror justified the plate armouring of the future in terms of people's mobility and citizenship rights (along with the austerity measures to overcome the "crisis"). In fact, based on a projection of a threatening future marked by terror, the uncertainty and indeterminacy of protests in squares, which were repeatedly described as having been created in social networks, also

seemed to materialize a performatic matrix of the revolution; a matrix of the *here and now* that does not shed any light on the roads that led to those squares. Therefore, indeterminacy and uncertainty seem to have contributed to the much-vaunted end of History.[3]

DIGITAL ACTIVISM:
THE *HERE AND NOW* OF A NEW TEMPORALITY

One of the most recurring ideas in media studies of social movements is linked to a boom in the use of information and communication technologies, which supposedly modified the dialogue and relationships between people on a global scale.[4] In fact, there has been a revolution in media formats and the technologies that lead them, and that has changed our lives. In recent years, global movements have produced new public spheres in which the distinction between "real" and "virtual" seem to vanish. And this is a common utterance to define the relationship between media and social movements in contemporaneity. But in fact, this truism on media revolutions is somehow exhausted because we could go back at least forty years to recognize this trend and reflect (in a critical or optimistic way)

on the democratization of technological usage. Communication processes in social movements obviously articulate with a technological framework. Since the early 1980s, thanks to the telefax, the global explosion of electronic mail and the internautic forums of the 1990s, the blogosphere and the creation of Indymedia in the late 1990s, the advent of Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005) and Twitter (2006), all these technical upgrades, together with the expansion of the DIY spirit, had a fundamental impact on our way of relating and communicating contemporaneously and, therefore, on the way in which social movements communicate with, mobilize and nurture political resistance communities.

Dan Schiller (2005) states that the Internet, and the large telecommunications systems on which it is based, is a consequence of an increasing transnational change in economic activity. Capitalism has always been an international system, but, since its globalization in the 1990s, its trends have created a new model for economic and financial flows. Cyberspace has unmistakably been included in those flows, in that new supranational market, which in fact has been colonized by digital capitalism. Also for that reason, I am quite sceptical as to the cybernetic potential of the Internet as an open and democratic hi-tech paradise for the sharing of information.[5]

Although there has been a growing debate on web activism (or even on hacktivism), as well as on the efficiency of new me-

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[3] A concept developed by American philosopher and economist Francis Fukuyama. It first appeared in a 1989 article that was followed by a 1992 book titled *The End of History and the Last Man*. Looking into mostly Hegelian readings of history, Fukuyama claimed that capitalism and representative democracy were the crowning of humankind's history in the face of crumbling fascisms and socialisms.

[4] Together with John Dawsey, I have organized a dossier on digital activism (cf. Raposo and Dawsey, 2015).

[5] On this and other matters, cf. the critical review of the arguments under discussion in McChesney (2013).

PAULO RAPOSO

LINES OF TENSION

426

PAULO RAPOSO

LINES OF TENSION

427

dia usage by contemporary social movements, a core idea remains: radical media (Downing 2001), such as Indymedia and other activist hubs seem to play an important role in the emergence of a certain type of counterculture. However, another question prevails: will so-called social networks provide spaces for critical perspectives and for radical or countercultural narratives? What is the role of mainstream media in social movements and how fluid is the interrelation between alternative and mainstream media? (cf. Askanius and Gustafsson 2010).

One of the most famous examples used in this debate is the original adoption of the Internet in the 1990s by indigenous Zapatista movement EZLN in Chiapas, which Castells (1999) or Cleaver (1995; 1999) saw as a "prototype" for other movements. However, although the Internet allowed the new social movements to appropriate the means to produce new expressions of protest, they also remained faithful to traditional tactics that had proved efficient in the past and could be adapted to this new virtual environment (Meikle 2002). Strikes, demonstrations, occupation of the public space or of institutions, mob-protest, pamphlets, posters, radical radio and TV channels, assemblies or rallies are tactical means that prove vital in the political performances of contemporary insurgency. This is true of the recent Brazilian case, with school occupations by high-school students, or the occupation of Ministry of Culture delegations by artists and arts and culture collectives. These bring together mechanisms that were once described as highly dangerous (nineteenth century proletarian and anarchist occupation of factories) and the digital tactics that spread the news of these occupations in real time preventing, hindering or delaying the violent suppression of protests.

Another vector of analysis concerns the computational basis nature of communication between these new social movements. The messages and images of so-called cyberprotest are hyperdynamic, appearing and disappearing without warning, distributed across multiple related or unrelated sites, social network groups, virtual forums or communities. The way that contemporary activism resorts to digital technologies, practices hacktivism, creates networks or physically manifests emerging political ideas could be considered a *blurred genre*, to use the term in the sense of anthropologist Clifford Geertz.[6]

Moreover, contemporary social movements, coexisting in this temporality of uncertainty and indeterminacy, can change shape, name, strategy or appearance, or even vanish without trace. Therefore, cyberprotest is a fuzzy category, a phenomenon that is fluid to the observer and often without clear boundaries (cf. Van De Donk et al. 2004). Juris (2005) examines how these activists use a range of communication resources (email lists, webpages, open editing software) to organize and coordinate actions and share information, reflecting a general growth of a paradigm or model for digital collaboration and sharing:

> Indymedia has provided an online forum for posting audio, video, and text files, while activists have also created temporary media hubs to generate alternative information, experiment with new technologies, and exchange ideas and resources. Influenced by anarchism and peer-to-peer net-

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[6] Geertz proposed an anthropology in which the divide between the literary and non-literary, fictional and realist, artistic and scientific genres would increasingly blur.

working logics, anti–corporate globalization activists have not only incorporated digital technologies as concrete tools, they have also used them to express alternative political imaginaries based on an emerging network ideal.

(Juris 2005, 189)

Thus, open publishing, free software sharing and live streaming have become three relevant dimensions of media performance in contemporary social movements. This means that the possibility for shared writing and collaborative commentary on activist digital platforms, the development of software outside the large corporations or the sharing and uploading of information without a password or login are now strong trumps for so-called independent movements. And, last but not least, the spamming of live streaming-produced images in independent or mainstream platforms has become a crucial arena in the struggle for information and "truth", a true political hashtag or a detonator for constant political reenactments, as we shall see below.

POLITICAL HASHTAG AND REPERFORMANCE IN CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL PROTEST

Edgar Morin (1999) would say that if the twentieth century ended with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the twenty-first century had started in Seattle. Seattle 1999, along with the Prague protests in 2000 and Genoa in 2001, could somehow be seen as the stages and primordial scenes of alternative glo-

balization and of a new worldwide political-economic scenario, or rather, of a collective awakening to its socially fracturing, fragmenting and disrupting effects.

Somehow, the recent revolts across the world, linked to the effects of the financial crisis, particularly after 2009, could be seen as replica of those primordial, turn of the millennium scenes, countering the reading that mainstream media tried to impart of a spontaneous gathering of protesting crowds. This time, however, the technological elements in a digital world have repositioned this reading. Curiously, these revolts have not only been televised in alternative channels and in mainstream channels, but they were also published across the Internet, especially on Facebook and Twitter. The question that seems to take hold of our minds is ironic and paradoxical, and it appeared on one of the posters of Wall Street protesters during the occupation of Zuccotti Square: "The revolution will not be televised, but will it be downloaded?"

As I have mentioned previously, the new new social movements stand out for their recurring use of digital information and communication technologies. The Indymedia digital platform emerged with the 1999 Seattle protests; but the use of Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, not to mention live stream broadcasting and free communication platforms, turned the protests and messages of contemporary activism into a combination of street protests, civil disobedience actions and intense digital activism. Thus, documentation and archive are not separate levels of the performative repertoires of contemporary activism, to borrow Taylor's (2003) concepts; in fact,

they never were, but now they are and with an unprecedented scale and intensity. For Joyce (2010) the power of the digital code manifests when someone posts a piece of content and uploads it, and a copy (with variations) becomes immediately available and transmissible to the world. Live streaming is one of the branches of this empowerment of the digital code.

And this directs us towards the final question: are we talking about live performance or its mediatization? Or both? What temporality opens up in this digital *here and now*?

At the turn of the millennium, a concept/practice has emerged in the field of performance art: the notion of reperformance or reenactment. Reperformance is the reenactment of a performance that nevertheless requires new enactment conditions (audience, context) for the reinvention of the "original performance". Reperformance finds itself contaminated by an interpretative or re-interpretative intention. Many performers now resort to it as a significant part of their creative processes. For years, Alan Kaprow, the creator of late 1950s happenings, thought that to re-enact his seminal performances would definitely contaminate their indeterminacy. However, weeks before his death, he authorized Munich's Haus der Kunst to remake his happenings, namely, *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* (1959), directed by André Lepecki.

Marina Abramović, Yoko Ono and other artists who emerged already in the 1970s have invested in reperformance as a way of leaving a trace of performance events for a wider audience. Abramović claims she is not satisfied with traditional documentation methods (film or photography), which, according to her, can never recreate what it is to watch/participate in a performance and, therefore, prefers the experiential dimension, the *liveness* (on which Phelan vehemently insisted). But to reperform is not to repeat, reproduce or simulate; reenactment is an invitation to transformation through memory and history, and it generates unique results and resonances. For instance, Yoko Ono's performance *Cut Piece* was reperformed by the artist countless times, each time taking on new meanings and resonances for the artist and its participants. In *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005), Abramović sought to reperform five key artist pieces that she had never watched but which had influenced her own work. She recreated one of her performances and introduced an original performance, claiming that in doing so she was opening possibilities for reinterpretation in the present.

Auslander (2006) clarifies that performative documenting, especially in the field of performance art, has always existed. He suggested two models: documental and theatrical. In the former, performers use means of recording that basically archive the event; in the latter, the recording itself becomes performance. Auslander resorts to two examples, Chris Burden's performance *Shoot* (1971), for which he invited a friend to shoot him in a Californian art gallery before a small audience, filming and recording the moment (the documentation being all that was left of the performance); and Yves Klein's *Leap into the Void* (1960), in which the artist leapt from a roof over a Parisian street and was photographed; the photograph itself (although it was a photomontage) becoming the performative object.

PAULO RAPOSO

432

LINES OF TENSION

PAULO RAPOSO

433

LINES OF TENSION

It is also in this sense that the notions of documentation (or archive) and performance enactment (or repertoire) of contemporary political protests interlink. They are categorized according to a conceptualization developed by Diana Taylor (2003). She considers the archive as the collection of material traces of objectified culture, such as texts and monuments, while repertoire consists of the performative enactments of embodied memories.

The concept of live streaming is based on the generic real-time broadcasting of any event, but its consumption and viewing may or may not be simultaneous with their enactment. However, the most interesting aspect is that, broadly speaking, with the massive live streaming circulation of pieces or images of political actions, these become viral and replicate in different contexts. They are reinterpreted and, in that sense, reperformed. *Live streamer* has become a profession within the activist community, in the same way that as alternative platforms, peer-to-peer digital environments or fee-software multiply and are shared; laptops and mobile phones are a constant visual presence in protests. This urges us to think of cyberactivism and hacktivism as a crucial dimension of contemporary political struggle.

For these new new social movements, digital revolution is about global sharing and calls for reenactment as a key concept of a new form of agitprop. Like the occupation or taking over of streets and squares, the hacktivist notion of open access is not so much of the order of "re-conquest" – a term used by re-Guattari –, but is instead irreducibly linked to notions of re-

appropriation and caring, re-learning and resisting, which all fall under the expression "to reclaim". Not to say it is "ours", not to think of ourselves as victims of lost conquests or of a Machiavellian system, but to enable us to once again inhabit the wastelands of human experience generated by contemporary capitalism. This is what intellectuals such as Slavoj Žižek, Antonio Negri, Zygmunt Bauman, Manuel Castells, Eduardo Galiano, Saskia Sassen and Boaventura de Sousa Santos have in mind when describing the Arab Spring, the *Indignados* Movements of citizens in the Iberian Peninsula or the outbreak of the so-called Occupy movement, as places for experimentation and emancipation.

To end this text, I would like to mention just a few examples of the reperformativity effect manifest in the contemporary dynamics of protest, which results in a redefinition of the performative *here and now*. In Portugal, the "Grandoladas" (an allusion to the song associated with the 1974 Carnation Revolution) chanted across the country in protest against members of the government or controversial figures, in the period of severest government imposed austerity (2011-2014), exemplify this phenomenon; generated after the protest in the galleries of the Parliament by members of the collective *Que se lixe a Troika* [Fuck the Troika] during a speech by the then Prime-minister Pedro Passos Coelho, it was replicated in several events across the country whenever members of the government or other controversial public figures spoke or officiated in ribbon-cutting ceremonies. This model is a derivation of the Argentinian *escrache* during the military regime, or of the more recent actions by the activists of 15M in Spain. The encampments of

PAULO RAPOSO

LINES OF TENSION

434

435

PAULO RAPOSO

LINES OF TENSION

Indignados in Madrid and Barcelona were replicated in other Spanish cities and inspired events in other cities across Europe and the Americas, while Occupy Wall Street generated a wave in hundreds of US cities. Another example is the solidary protests against police violence and repression that echo in other cities and countries. The arrest of the Russian activists of punk band Pussy Riot caused a multiplication of actions around the world whose key element was their coloured balaclava.

Somehow, this effect is similar to an earthquake, except that the aftershock may in some cases be stronger than the initial tremor. It is an effect that touches on the strategies and tactics of contemporary activism, especially in the case of these new new social movements, and which I have been defining as the hashtag effect.

Hashtag is the mathematical symbol (cardinal) used in Twitter in combination with a key word to designate a given subject and the postings that refer to it. The same hashtag connects several authors and allows for the reading, anywhere in the world, of the list of postings linked to it. For instance: #OWS or #queselixeatroika, #15M or #yosoy132 are facilitators of communication. Political digital activism has increased the use of narrative performative strategies to facilitate conversation in what could be deemed a political hashtag operating according to the logics of reperformance/reenactment. But to reperform is not to repeat, reproduce or simulate; reperformance is an invitation to transformation through memory and history, and it generates unique results and resonances. Therefore, if we are dealing, as Schechner claimed, with a performance activ-

ism whose main dimension is relational, we should also include in that process the dimension that represents the digital flow. And, within this flow, performative imponderability and its reperformative fluctuation are made of contaminations and reinterpretations. For contemporary activism, archive, repertoire, performance and reperformance are key words to understand it, as much as indeterminacy and uncertainty seem to be the outlines of its temporality.

Somehow, those key words clarify what Martin (2015) refers to as the possibility of existence of a contemporary political theatre qua public sphere of social experiments, despite the fact that this author is particularly concerned with documental theatre and verbatim.

This was the itinerary of compromise between art and politics that we have laid out here, somehow seeking not to compromise art, or politics, and acknowledging what both can generate in common and what are the flows of concatenation that constitute them.

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