

VISUAL ARTEFACTS IN POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS: AN ESSAY ABOUT MUTATIONS IN THE MODES OF SUBJECTIVATION AND POLITICAL ACTION BETWEEN 2013 AND 2018

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FIGURE 1
[São Paulo,
2013]. Fonte:
[Henrique Parra].

This essay explores a certain aesthetic-political configuration featuring in a photograph of a street rally on June 20, 2013, in Paulista avenue, São Paulo.

On the left-hand side of the photograph, people carry big banners and red flags (some are white and yellow). The image is divided in half by the avenue's median strip, on which a few people gather, observing the whole scene. On the right-hand side of the image there are many youngsters individually bearing placards with handwritten messages.

This image heralds a distribution of the sensible (Rancière 2005) in movement. The photograph establishes a dialogue with the transformations that took place in the years that followed 2013, triggering countless questions about a new geometry in the forms of political representation, and the changes in the modes of subjectivation, indicating disputes over the compositions and distributions instituted in the forms of contemporary political action.

Prompted by this single photograph, I started to prospect my personal photo archive for pictures of subsequent demonstrations (2013-2018), observing how image records of such events display and reverberate that constellation present at Paulista in the 2013 photograph.

On that 20th of June, many demonstrations took place in São Paulo and other Brazilian cities. This march celebrated the reversal of an increase in public transport fares. At the same time, the day's protests heralded an inflexion point in the so-called Journeys of June (*Jornadas de Junho*) of

2013, when new actors entered stage and the directions for the political energy unleashed in the streets became the subject of fresh disputes¹.

The images in this essay document a few visual expressions that will perhaps provide clues for the interpretation of the processes set in motion.

What can we say about the banners, flags, and placards? What can their appearance indicate? How do they distribute the presence of people and organizations, configuring regimes of visibility and legibility of the causes, forces, institutions, and subjectivities within the space of a demonstration?

There are banners delimiting blocks, signaling beginnings and borders. Both the marches' fronts and the groupings moving within the flux are instances of the production forms for strategic topographies on the flatness of the streets, they are ways of inscribing bodies inside the multitude in specific performances.

The poetics of the banners, flags and placards carry indices. Are they machine-painted? On plastic or on cloth? Were the texts written by hand or were they produced in a series of identical placards? Which and how many resources are needed to make a banner or a placard? How many people are needed to carry each one of such artefacts?

Each visual communication technology can indicate a sociopolitical, organizational or economic diagram that gives it existence, expressing and inspiring different modes of subjectivation and of political representation.

The presence of handmade placards or of banners provided by organizations in demonstrations is not new. But it is in the contrast between their presence and their distribution within the visual experience over time that we can notice previously imperceptible mutations.

The proliferation of discursive forms and demands about the problems experienced can be contrasted to forms that concentrate and give unity to the protest. Humor, irony, anger, and objective statements compose a diverse repertoire of expressive forms and, alternatively, manifest different conceptions about political modes of action.

Also visible is a deep mutation in the very experience of intervention in the public debate. Be it in the streets or in the digital social networks; in the last decade, we have seen transformations in the participation and engagement thresholds of political debate. What is needed, what are the necessary resources for me to express my opinion?

1. In other texts I analyze the political and social tensions of the June 2013 events (Parra, 2013; 2014).

Such transformations are related to the way life is experienced through existing social institutions. The way in which governments, political parties, social movements, associations, and collectivities are perceived as spaces of representation and of belonging have changed. Communication technologies and the means of enunciation and of intermediation are no longer the same. The ways of expressing “us” and “I” are now other.

Placards-bodies, banners-collectives, organizations-printworks-machines, singular-manuscripts, groups-standard-flags, all are instances of this image-driven proliferation that can help us to interpret and imagine the mutations in the regime of sensitivity, in the modes of subjectivation and of political action currently underway.

TRANSLATION

Gavin Adams

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ABSTRACT

This essay explores a certain aesthetic-political configuration in a photograph of a street rally on June 20, 2013, at Paulista avenue, São Paulo. This image heralds a distribution of the sensible (Rancière, 2005) in movement, that will be explored through a collection of photographs of street protests from 2013 to 2018. Those images trigger countless questions about a new geometry in the forms of political representation, and about the changes in the modes of subjectivation, indicating disputes over the compositions and distributions instituted in the forms of contemporary political action.

KEYWORDS

Photography;
subjectivation;
visual artifacts;
social movements;
activism.

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