VISUAL MOTIFS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF POWER IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

This special issue of Communication & Society aims to create a space for dialogue and interaction between experts in cinema, visual arts and researchers on social and political communication, in order to establish the core principles that define the system of self-production of images of power that characterizes our times.

Images that portray the various aspects of power and the public sphere in the media are frequently articulated through visual motifs that hail from cinema, painting and other iconographic legacies. Far from separating the images from their traditional sources, the expansion of social networks has endorsed the importance of the user-viewer’s background when reading the self-representation of the various scenarios of power in the public sphere - political, economic, judicial, from the police or even the social movements themselves. We hypothesize that there is an organized combination of motifs to portray commonplace situations in the everyday life of the public sphere which appeal to the spectator’s prior knowledge of these staging models, thus configuring a fertile space for reflecting on their ambiguity and political and communicative effectiveness.
As Carlo Ginzburg has pointed out in *Fear, reverence, terror. Five essays of political iconography*, every image contains the current political storyline along with a historical, religious and iconographic background that conveys both the emotional content and the codes through which power is expressed, and which often survive through the ages. A visual motif such as the Pietà, for example, is not only identifiable in artistic representations such as painting and cinema, it has also been used in photojournalism to express unjust pain in wartime conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes. The visual motif of David against Goliath, meanwhile, has recurred when Greta Thunberg and Donald Trump were shown in the same photo at the UN General Assembly, an image that is also a narrative invocation of the tragic motif of Antigone, which evokes legitimacy and the preservation of dignity in the face of insuperable power.

The latter image has been reappropriated by social networks in the form of memes, gifs, and mashups. Together with the action of the transmission of visual motifs, we are interested in their contemporary reinventions in the hands of social network *prosumers*. There is a significant tradition of studies on political iconography inspired by the seminal figure of Aby Warburg which is continued on through Erwin Panofsky, Horst Bredekamp, Monica Centanni, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Patrick Boucheron, as well as the aforementioned Carlo Ginzburg. His emphasis on the central role played by visual motifs in the construction of public space converges with the investigations carried out by a large number of theorists from other fields, such as theory and art criticism (Boris Groys, Hito Steyerl, Harun Farocki), political philosophy (Giorgio Agamben), film studies (Nicole Brenez, Alain Bergala, Emmanuelle André), photography theory (Ariella Azoulay), social semiotics (Theo van Leeuwen), cognitive iconology (Ian Verstegen) and production studies (Banks, Caldwell, Du Guy, Thompson and Burns), all of which pay attention to the levels of awareness and control over the images produced, whether in film and photojournalism, in the praxis of TV documentaries and reports or in online productions.

In this sense, social networks and the transmedia integration that is present in public and political communication, as well as the work of more traditional
media, warrant a new, urgent consideration of how visual motifs circulate, how the production of images of power is organized, and the visual constants that link them. Through these analytical viewpoints, we aim to address a process of collective bargaining of the visual where cinema functions not as a destination but as a catalyst of visual shapes that are echoed in print and online media and new communication formats.

In this context, and given the urgency of our awareness today of the use of images in the new public sphere, this monographic issue calls for empirical research and theoretical approaches on the ways in which power and the public arena are staged, how their images are reinterpreted by citizens, and which mechanisms exist for appropriating and reinventing iconographic sources.

Among the possible topics, the following are proposed:

- Visual motifs in the representation of the different spheres of the public arena: political, economic, judicial, police, civil organizations and forms of citizen participation.

- Motifs and visual narratives of political campaigns based on the reinvention of previous iconographic sources.

- The study of the representation of power and the public sphere in cinema.

- The iconographic evocation in photojournalistic practices; the civil contract of photography.

- GIFs, memes and mashups, both in political processes and in the public sphere.

- Case studies and production studies in photojournalism, television, online media and social networks concerning images of power.
- Theoretical studies on the continuity and transformations of political iconography.

**Submission deadline for proposals:**
Original articles must be sent in before **December 15, 2020** to be submitted to the peer review process. Authors should indicate in the "author comments" section that this is an article for this special issue.

The articles submitted must comply with the journal's style guidelines: https://www.unav.edu/publicaciones/revistas/index.php/communication-and-society/about/submissions#authorGuidelines

**Publication: April 2021**