

COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

VISUAL MOTIFS AND REPRESENTATIONS OF POWER IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

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This special issue of *Communication & Society* aims to create a space of dialogue and interaction between experts in cinema, visual arts and researchers of 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 time.

The images to represent 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, police, or even the social movements themselves. We hypothesize that there is an organized combination of motifs to represent usual situations in the everyday life of the public sphere, which appeal to the spectator's prior knowledge of the spectator of these staging models, thus configuring a fertile space for reflection 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 conjunctural political plot along with a historical, religious and iconographic background that conveys both the emotional content and the codes through which power is expressed, which often survive through the ages. A visual motive such as piety, for example, is not only identifiable in artistic representations such as painting and cinema, but has also been used by photojournalism to express unjust pain in warlike conflicts and humanitarian catastrophes. The visual motif of David against Goliath, meanwhile, has become recurring by showing Greta Thunberg and Donald Trump in the same photo during the UN General Assembly, an image that is also a narrative invocation of Antigone's tragic motif, evoking legitimacy and the preservation of dignity in the face of unprecedented power.

This last image has been reappropriated by social networks in the form of memes, gifs, and mashups. Together with the exercise of transmission of visual motifs, we are interested in their contemporary reinventions in the hands of the social network *prosumers*. There is a significant tradition of studies of political iconography inspired by the seminal figure of Aby Warburg, which is extended through Erwin Panofsky, Horst Bredekamp, Monica Centanni, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Patrick Boucheron, as well as the aforementioned Carlo Ginzburg. His attention to the central role of visual motifs in the construction of public space converges with the inquiries made by a large

number of theorists from other fields such as theory and art criticism (Boris Groys, Hito Steyerl, Harun Farocki); political philosophy and critical thinking (Giorgio Agamben, Byung Chul-han, Franco “Bifo” Berardi, Sara Ahmed); film studies (Nicole Brenez, Alain Bergala, Emmanuelle André); the study of political campaigns (Jordi Pericot, Arantxa Capdevila, Xavier Ruiz Collantes); photography theory (Ariella Azoulay); social semiotics (Theo van Leeuwen); xenofeminism (Helen Hester); neurology (Catherine Malabou); or cognitive iconology (Ian Verstegen).

Moreover, we must add the realm of production studies (Banks, Caldwell, Du Guy, Thompson and Burns), which grants attention to the degrees 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, all of which are essential to understand how the visual forms of the past are transmitted and survive so as to provoke emotional recognition in users. In this sense, social networks and the transmedia integration present in public, political communication, as well as the work of more traditional media, warrant a new and urgent perspective on 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 echo onto print and online press and new communication formats.

In this context, and confronted with the current awareness regarding 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 are the mechanisms for reappropriating 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.
- GIF, memes, and mashups both in political processes and in the public sphere.
- Case studies and production studies in photojournalism, television, online press 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 November 30, 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>

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