

THE   
PROTEST   
EXPERIENCE 

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### **Acknowledgements**

Eléonore Challine  
Alexandra Midal  
Sébastien Quéquet  
Jérémy Cerman

Javier Urbaneja  
Shemal Pandya

My family, and friends

**MA Space & Communication**  
**HEAD-Genève**  
**2020**



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# INTRODUCTION

I was deeply drawn by the structure of protests happening around the world at the time, fascinated by, and emotionally touched as well. When I presented my interest for the thesis, Eléonore listened patiently as I outlined the project with possible areas of focus. With her encouragement, I discovered fresh perspectives within my initial interest to study the design, construction and production of protests. After several weeks of immersion in my research, I stumbled upon this fascinating protest which happened in Spain 5 years ago. And this is how I started investigating my claims, my case study and the several ideas surrounding protests. The case study of the “holograms for freedom” protest is particularly interesting for two reasons - firstly as a first of its kind demonstration, and secondly never again recreated elsewhere with the same impact. Uncannily, the research commenced in the middle of the pandemic, when the majority of the governments across the globe have imposed mobility restrictions to prevent the spread of the virus. The use of multimedia communication technology is never felt more important for raising voices and making concerns and demands heard, far and wide.

“Then what does it take? What more ?”

The answer to this question may take years to emerge, but the most famous protests in history serve as a lesson in the “something more” being the long-term social capital and political empowerment built through the act of protest itself.<sup>1</sup>

**HOLOGRAMS**

FOR FREEDOM

## If there is nowhere to march, where does that leave us ?

### Spain, April 2015

In December, Spain's conservative government introduced the Citizen Security Law to curb public protests and squelch social activism. The law on public security – dubbed the “ley mordaza” or “gag law” – would define public protest by actual persons in front of Parliament and other government buildings as a “disturbance of public safety” punishable by a fine of 30,000 euros. People who join in spontaneous protests near utilities, transportation hubs, nuclear power plants or similar facilities would risk a jaw-dropping fine of €600,000. The “unauthorized use” of images of law enforcement authorities or police – presumably aimed at photojournalists or ordinary citizens with cameras taking pictures of cops or soldiers – would also draw a €30,000 fine, making it hard to document abuses.

The law was introduced in 2013 by the government of Prime Minister Mariano Rajoy, whose conservative party enjoys a majority in both houses of Parliament. The lower house approved the law in December, and, despite pleas from rights groups and the United Nations, the Senate approved it on March 26, 2015, as a direct response to increasing social mobilizations in the streets, the government approved a new

Citizen Security Law. Despite the peaceful nature of the protests, the law functions as a defense mechanism by the government in a further attempt to control public space by silencing criticism against its austerity measures.<sup>2</sup>

It is essential to understand that the political timeline of Spain, has been complicated with its share of discontented citizens since history. In recent years, after the civil war in the 1930s, the Spanish dictatorship continued to rule until 1975. The years later, governed by democracy, were entangled in economic instability and high unemployment percentages. The economic crisis of 2009 became a volatile canvas for protests and acts of violence. It can be deduced, that the decision of the government to ban public protests, did not arise out of a singular incident, rather it is a product of several decades of political turmoil. Even then, it is debatable to provide justification.

Thousands of Spaniards thronged the streets throughout the winter of 2014 to demonstrate a few final times before the law went into effect in the summer of 2015. Javier Urbaneja, a publicist for DDB Spain in Madrid, was at a meeting a few days after the law passed its first vote when a colleague, still stunned by the news, shared a dark thought. "It's like we have to turn ourselves into holograms if we ever want to protest again," he said. At first, there were forlorn nods of agreement, Urbaneja told me, but then a flicker of excitement. What if they did just that? What if they organized a protest without actually appearing in the flesh? It would be a symbolic jab at the government from within the confines of the new law—and, more impressive still, it would be the world's first political protest by hologram.<sup>3</sup>

The demonstration also included short speeches via live hologram (again, these were projections) from two of the organizers explaining the reasons for the protest. This recording was then projected onto a screen that the organizers set up in the Plaza de las Cortes, allowing the ghostly protesters to "march" in front of Congress. The

projection gave the figures a bluish white color and the translucent screen allowed spectators to see through the demonstrators to the symbolic building behind them. The hologram protest was staged as a singular political performance, and while the ten minute recording was looped twice, it was projected in a specific and controlled temporal and spatial reality.<sup>4</sup>

The hologram protest captured the attention of thousands of people around the world who became interested in the gag law itself and the political landscape in Spain. The protest made visible the increasing restrictions on freedom that the Spanish government was attempting to keep under wraps.

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Starting by sharing the commonly accepted meanings of a few basic cultural and theoretical ideologies which will help to anatomize the first ever hologram protest. The emergence or entrance of new age mediums of communications, in the world of protests has resulted in an evolution of the physicality of the spaces of protests, enabling protestors to engage in propagating their messages with never before seen outreach and scale. "Holograms for Freedom" as a case study emphasizes the claims made earlier and addresses questions about the future of protesting. The three questions important from the point of view of this thesis are elaborated below.

This thesis looks at protests as a product of communication design, and how new multi-media plays a role in shaping its characteristics. Along with that, it aims to start

a dialog about will the physical protests be replaced or diminished by the digitalization wave? Finally, the research undertaken broadly investigates the claim Modern mediums of technology have offered a renewed platform for the act of protesting, but do these new platforms justify the resources invested into them?

With the primary media in analytical question is “holograms”, this thesis also throws light on the supportive communication mediums as necessary players in the big picture. Mediums here refer to the communication technologies, immersive experience generating technologies, as well as all mediums necessary to create content for them. Traditionally, platforms for protesting would point at the built public infrastructure which offer their elasticity to accommodate expressions of dissent against the state. New platforms for protesting, expanding this very definition, takes into account the non-physicality of this infrastructure. These include not only the direct media consumption channels, but also entertainment mediums and sometimes even physical interactions which function solely with digital inputs. An example of such a physical interaction would be banking activities or online shopping.

The ideas about how the evolving world requires a fuller and deeper understanding of how modern technological tools, ideas, practices, and institutions interact, and how different societies adjust themselves to emerging realities of the digital age by Mahmood Monshipouri was a great starting point to deconstruct the case study of the hologram protest. The research documented by Jacqueline Sheen was focused on the holographic projection which collapsed both space and time through technological mediation, manifesting a scene of things, not beings. This book was extremely important in writing this thesis, and has been cited extensively. It has helped translate several thoughts, into words. Sean Johnston has written a book about the cultural history of holograms. He writes about popular interpretations of the word “hologram” evoke the traditional allure of magic and galvanize hopeful technological

dreams. His work was instrumental in connecting the dots for the intangible elements of the case study.

The first part establishes the changing dimensions of protesting in today's hyperconnected world. It explains the need to use entropy, a measure of the efficiency of a system (such as a code or a language) in transmitting information, being equal to the logarithm of the number of different messages that can be sent by selection from the same set of symbols and thus indicating the degree of initial uncertainty that can be resolved by any one message. It also highlights the need to dramatize the outcome. The second part focuses almost entirely on the design of the Holograms for Freedom, the protest from Madrid 2015. Majority of the content in this part has been transcribed from a virtual interview conducted with Javier Urbaneja, the creator of this protest campaign. The third part offers a synthesis of the writer's observations about the role of multimedia in the success of protests. It addresses the questions raised throughout.

1. MALCHIK ANTONIA, *A Walking Life : Reclaiming our health and our freedom* 2020, 57
2. LÓPEZ ALMUDENA ESCOBAR, *Invisible Participation: The Hologram Protest in Spain* (University of Rochester 2016) 1
3. BLITZER JONATHON, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/protest-by-hologram> 2015
4. SHEEAN JACQUELINE, (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

# 01 / The act of Protesting

- Changing Dimensions
- Identity & Community
- Cinematic Quality
- Visibility & Reception

# 01 / The act of Protesting

Conceptually, protests arise out of some kind of group dissatisfaction with a sovereign political authority, almost always the state or government, but sometimes even institutions or communities. Protests are an expression of dissent, or disagreement to the laws of the governments. Matt Clement explains “Throughout history, whenever the common people assembled, their motivation was often fuelled by a sense of injustice—creating a need to muster strength in numbers in order to respond to the tyranny of a ruler whose acts of violence constituted a threat to their wellbeing. It’s a social (prosocial) movement of the majority that is needed to counter the antisocial or unjust actions of the powerful few.”<sup>5</sup>

With the mention of protests, the French Revolution (1778 - 1799) is notably remembered, for its remarkably long period of protesting, violence and eventually leading towards a much needed reform at the time. Followed by the Suffragettes in Britain (1890 - 1919) and the Civil Rights Movements in USA (1954 - 1968), Indian Independence (1857 - 1947), the Arab Spring (2010 - 2014), and recently the Black Lives Matter (2020) which took the world by storm, there have been innumerable displays of courage, mobilization, controversy, violence, social and lawful reforms. This vast knowledge of protesting history has been studied, researched by many, experimented with, and have contributed measurably to human societies and political science. In this moment, it stands at the brink of unimaginable change. There are several unknowns, yet the emotions running strong.

Over time, the nature of protests has evolved, while still maintaining the same ideology. Similar to all activities of social engagement, technology and change in human interaction has shaped the nature of protests. The internet, if it is appropriate to call it any kind of space at all, is less some kind of futuristic “cyberspace” and more a discontinuous narrative space.<sup>6</sup> More than just a communication medium, the Internet fosters the spread of liberty and the exchange of ideas, both of which go hand-in-hand with democracy.<sup>7</sup>

Protest is by definition an unconventional action, which makes it more difficult to measure than institutionalized activities such as voting that are reported in government statistics. There is clearly variation in the degree to which protest disrupts and challenges cultural and political authority. We therefore conceptualize protest as a continuum of unconventional political action, which seeks to influence the course of social and political change from outside traditional institutions.<sup>8</sup> The conventional political activities such as voting, are clearly well-organized, planned in advance and follow a prepared set of rules year after year. The unconventional activity of protesting on the other hand, may sometimes be unplanned and spontaneous. Even the degree of organization can be varied depending on the political situation.

Mahmood Monshipouri is a professor specializing in human rights, international relations and Middle Eastern Studies. He received his PhD from the University of Georgia in 1987. He has written and edited several books on human rights, identity construction, and globalization. He explains “It is through protesting against state violations of human rights norms that social forces can fundamentally alter state actions. The activities of autonomous, mobilized, and digitally interconnected social actors - through individual or collective means - are likely to weaken the control of those holding institutional power. How and under what conditions such empowering tools can be successfully utilized remains open to debate. The critical matter is that

the emancipatory theory of power and social change in the digital age is bound up with internal and external systems of support and incentives.”<sup>9</sup>

5. CLEMENT MATT, *A people's history of riots, protest and the law* (University of Winchester, 2017) 26
6. JONES STEVEN G., *Virtual culture : identity & communication in cybersociety* (Sage Publications 1997) 15
7. SELNOW GARY W., "The information Age is Fostering the Spread of Freedom and Democracy" in James D. Torr, ed., *The Information Age* (Farmington Hills, MI : Green-haven Press, 2003) 31
8. DALTON RUSSELL J. & VAN SIKLE ALIX, *The resource, structural and cultural base of protest* (CSD at University of California, Irvine 2005) 2
9. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 5

## - Changing Dimensions

New media technology is either celebrated as a vehicle for social change by expanding political discourse beyond the here and now into transnational political communities as well as closing the moral distance between world citizens (Chouliaraki, 2006; Fenton, 2006; Drache 2008) - or, alternatively, such technology is condemned for undermining the authenticity of discourse and interaction by failing to fulfil the ideal of co-presence in offline political action often coupled with the viewpoint that the internet fosters an ultimately neoliberal system of commodification requiring persuasion and impression management in order to be seen and heard in the cacophonous jungle of the world wide web. (Putnam, 2000; Dahlberg, 2005, 2007). These two conflicting narratives seem to beg the question of whether technological development leads to a degradation of political participation or an enrichment of democratic development.<sup>10</sup>

By making information more accessible than ever before, digital technologies have come to shape societies and cultures in many respects. These technologies also offer tools for resistance and change that can be effectively deployed to influence existing power relations. People around the world have increasingly used digital media to present political reactions against authoritarian rule or to speak out against failed policies. A notable example is of WikiLeaks, which is an international non-profit organisation that publishes news leaks and classified media provided by anonymous sources. In contrast to all-too-familiar centralized, vertically integrated social movements, theories of new social movements (NSMs) argue for a new way of doing politics - namely, through "network politics". More importance is attached to social

movements, theories of new social movements (NSMs) argue for a new way of doing politics - namely, through "network politics". More importance is attached to social and cultural concerns in these movements, and the focus of politics shifts away from recruiting members toward establishing informal, loosely organized social networks of supporters.<sup>11</sup>

Herbert Marshall McLuhan CC, was a Canadian philosopher, whose work is among the cornerstones of the study of media theory. In his book - *The Global Village*, he writes "communication media of the future will accentuate the extensions of our nervous systems, which can be disembodied and made totally collective. New Population patterns will fuel the shift from smokestack industries to a marketing information economy. Video-related technologies are the critical instruments of such change. For example, the new telecommunication multi-carrier corporation, dedicated solely to moving all kinds of data at the speed of light, will continually generate tailor-made products and services for individual consumers who have pre-signaled their preferences through an ongoing database. Users will simultaneously become producers and consumers."<sup>12</sup>

The way protests are conceived, built, received and remembered has been changing constantly; even more rapidly since the democratization of multimedia and communication technology. The vocabulary has evolved from boycotts and sit-ins to hashtags and digital signatures. Using innovative strategies, newly available resources and freshly energized youth, protests are nothing less than a spectacle to watch, share, tweet. They make some hearts swell with pride, some to shed a tear, maybe even share a joke about it, and a topic of discussion sitting in a bar, hundreds of miles away from the place of action. This capacity to reimagine ourselves, post-capitalism, seems rooted in forms of positive spatial action that can envisage and present alternatives of everyday life. These are not necessarily the built and

architectural alternatives of twentieth-century modernism, but rather operational alternatives and systems by which we can reboot, shedding our habits and norms as a daily resistance of the status quo. Reimagining in this way is arguably a form of design in the here and now; a sort of spatial and urban project which does not require us to wait for it to be implemented, and which can operate at multiple scales, upon and within existing structures and institutions.<sup>13</sup> Visual and interactive modes of information have enabled people to challenge, deconstruct, and even upend old authorities who once controlled the flow of information, in the hope of replacing them with new ones. The convergence of “smart mob” technologies, to borrow a term from Howard Rheingold, has become inevitable.<sup>14</sup>

Today, the aim of protests has expanded to fulfil several goals, short term and long term. These very goals shape the direction a protest or a social movement may adopt. They determine the duration, aggression, public participation, location, vocabulary, actions, demands, expansion, documentation, visual choreography, financial support, police reaction and government response of a protest. Protests are primarily made up of people. As demonstrated by the Holograms for Freedom, the day has finally arrived when protests can take place without real people. But can they really ?

10. DAHLBERG L. (2005). The corporate colonization of online attention and the marginalization of critical communication? *Journal of Communication Inquiry*, 29(2), 160-180. Dahlberg, L. (2007). *Rethinking the fragmentation of the cyberpublic: From consensus to contestation*. *New Media & Society*, 9, 827.

11. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 3

12. MCLUHAN MARSHALL & POWERS BRUCE R., *The Global Village* (Oxford University press, 1992) 83

13. DODD MELANIE, *Spatial practices : modes of action and engagement with the city* (New York : Routledge, 2019) 1

14. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 267

## - Identity & Community

When the word spread about a hologram protest being organized, naturally, people were excited. They were going to not only take part in a protest from the comfort of their living rooms, but also contribute to an exciting, innovative experiment. The provision to customize individual participation was an added incentive. People could send in their photograph, message/slogan an audio recording. What better than to retain one's sense of identity and yet, participate in a collective. Word spread quickly, and soon the website had participants from remote parts of the world, nearly 17000!

Putting one's physical body in a public space as an act of petitioning one's representative government for change is dangerous, is unpopular with those who see little wrong with the status quo, and can also be a sublime, powerful act. It is in these kinds of mass acts that citizens both demand attention from a government that has refused to hear their individual voices, and begin to find their political identities.<sup>15</sup>

Charles Tilly defined identity as the experience of a social transaction (with the various obligations, expectations, ties and networks that evolve from these transactions) coupled with public representation of that experience (Tilly 2003, 49). In effect, he claims that organizers or leaders of social movements construct political identities and mobilize people with these identities to engage in collective action.<sup>16</sup>

Marshall McLuhan illustrates projected identities with a story - The real meaning of the legend of Narcissus is that he did not fall in love with an image of himself but rather the

face of a seeming stranger. Zeus made him gaze into the watery pool which gave back a reflection of someone like him but different enough to be fascinating. Not a replica but a re-presentation. This is precisely what happens when we project our bodily and psychological functions onto the world outside. We 'amputate' them because we cannot gaze too long at a balefully realistic playback of ourselves. All media are a reconstruction, a model of some biological capability speeded up beyond human ability to perform. Each medium is brought to the pinnacle of vortical strength, with the power to mesmerize us.<sup>17</sup> The real potential lies in tapping this power.

Technology secures our rights as individuals while providing the capability to circulate, via mediation, among others. We transcend self-expression by simultaneously fixing an identity and making it mobile, much as a photograph "captures" an image and makes it transportable.<sup>18</sup>

Even then, with all that technology offers us, it's still reassuring to be part of the collective. People are willing, because there is the expectation that everyone else is also willing. There is a certain kind of safety in the collective. Being a part of it cannot guarantee physical safety or political immunity, one may even be faced with aggressive police control, or confrontation with opposers. Because the experience is shared, your comfort or discomfort is shared. Any emotion in that event is shared. Irrespective of whether people assemble physically or virtually, the common feature is the feeling of community. A protest can perform, for its participants, some of the same work that everyday neighbourliness does, creating interconnectedness and civic engagement, satisfying the craving to be together. The sense of affirmation and solidarity that protests give also creates the space for individual acts of heroism from seemingly ordinary people.<sup>19</sup>

Free speech and association have their place, but assembly is something different.

Protest marches that adhere to the restrictions of permits and regulated times and places can never have the same effect as the swell of energy, and often, outrage, that brings tens of thousands of people to their feet as they march along at the pace of humanity's craving for justice, forcing governments to reckon with the people they are beholden to. The right to free speech is in the end an individual rather than a communal right - an important distinction. The right to assemble along with the right to petition is a right that requires more than one person, and it is in that collective action that people build the capacity to influence those in power. <sup>20</sup>

15. MALCHIK ANTONIA, *A Walking Life : Reclaiming our health and our freedom* 2020, 58

16. SHEEAN JACQUELINE, (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

17. MCLUHAN MARSHALL & POWERS BRUCE R., *The Global Village* (Oxford University press, 1992) 87

18. JONES STEVEN G., *Virtual culture : identity & communication in cybersociety* (Sage Publications 1997) 27

19. BUSCH AKIKO, *How to disappear : Notes on invisibility in a time of transparency* (Penguin Press, New York 2019) 128

20. MALCHIK ANTONIA, *A Walking Life : Reclaiming our health and our freedom* 2020, 50



photo submissions of participants to the website

## - Cinematic Quality

When Javier Urbaneja, reached out to Alvaro Gorospe of Garlic TV, a production company to discuss the possibility of executing the idea, it established the nature of the project. Satisfied that they could handle the technical aspects of the protest, Urbaneja and Gorospe approached a group called No Somos Delito (We Are Not Crime), which represents more than a hundred organizations, from Greenpeace to lawyers' associations, united against many of the Spanish government's recent measures.<sup>21</sup>

On April 6, filmmaker Esteban Crespo filmed fifty people—activists from No Somos Delita and other social platforms together with non activist people who volunteered for the filming—marching in the town of Paracuellos del Jarama, about eight miles from Madrid. The images of these bodies were combined with the participation of more than seventeen thousand people who sent their images, slogans, and voices through the website ([www.hologramasporlalibertad.org](http://www.hologramasporlalibertad.org)). The sound of their voices was mixed with the original sound of the filming, and their written slogans were used for the banners incorporating their participation in the final action.

Just like dramatized fictional films which are so carefully directed to evoke the right emotions in their audience, most protests and movements which have been successful, exhibit these qualities. Some of them have been intentionally strategized, while some have emerged organically from grassroots activism. It's no longer about a singular audience. Protests have to appeal to several groups, which have varied interests to the cause. It is almost imperative that the protest embraces the political

and the activist, but also the performative, the curatorial, the spatial, the architectural and the urban. Whether it has been staged or evolved, these details matter because the protests will be described, documented and analysed. They must involve actors from various backgrounds who don't always fit categories or align to professional disciplines, but who support action and engagement through various channels. When everything comes together, in a sustainable existence, every protest has the potential to create change and be immortalized.

Cinema functions through the same fundamental technology as the photograph. Through a succession of frames, the subject is captured not in a pose, but in passing. The body filmed is fixed for a future moment of reappearance, and the filmed body is already gone by the time it reappears on the film. In hauntological fashion it is at once there and not there. In this sense, the medium is more than simply a prosthesis, or even a corporeal extension of man (to use Marshall McLuhan's famous phrasing). Here, the projected hologram functions as part of a human-technological network, eliding the materiality of the body and rematerializing it in the form of light. The bodies of the protesters disappear into film, and are then projected as illuminated and technical objects.<sup>22</sup>

In an age when appearance and image are as politically relevant as action and impact, how human rights actors represent themselves visually matters tremendously. Human rights campaigns, for instance, demand more from the audience than charitable giving. Performance artist Marina Abramović said in an interview. The "public is so tired of looking at things," she added while discussing the pervasiveness of technology in our lives "they want to experience something different"<sup>23</sup> Although this statement was made in reference to performance art, it holds relatable truth for protests, which are essentially an act, involving all the elements of a performance.

The new social movements in the digital era have to rethink their political strategies and operational frameworks.

21. BLITZER JONATHON, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/protest-by-hologram> 2015

22. SHEEAN JACQUELINE (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

23. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 51



journalists documenting the protest

## - Visibility & Reception

In spite of its incorporeality and virtuality, the hologram protest had real results, including widespread international media coverage and awareness of the political situation in Spain. In contrast with the old-fashioned model of representative democracy with its sole head of state, the holograms continued the discussion started by the 15-M Movement. <sup>24</sup> Jacqueline Sheean, is a professor of spanish whose research in contemporary Spanish cultural studies focuses on the intersection of media theory and critical urban studies. In her book, she has written her observations about the hologram protests - the holographic projection collapses both space and time through technological mediation, manifesting a scene of things, not beings. The apparatus of the hologram conjures a past subjectivity preserved in light, transforming an embodied political subjectivity into a disembodied technical object. Grounding my analysis of both the performance of the protest and the medium of the hologram itself in the politically charged history of spectrality in Spain and in the context of the country's financial crisis, I argue that the protest rethinks the concepts of political space and occupation. <sup>25</sup>

Prosecuting organisers is as far-fetched an alternative. In the Spanish example, authorities could not pursue legal action as the permission that Garlic TV obtained foreclosed legal reprisal. Any charges would still have targeted obtaining a false permit rather than organising a protest – it was a sound and light show at most. Hologram protests hold the most promise in that law itself provides them immunity. Law defines an assembly as an assembly of persons, which is a legal category that a hologram

neatly side steps. <sup>26</sup>

The national press also relegated the protest to internal pages, burying it in secondary sections; El Mundo placed it in its “Innovators” subsection within its “Economy” section dedicated to digital advancements and gadgets, while El País placed it only in the local section dedicated to entertainment in Madrid and, furthermore, published only in that geographic area. The reports focused on the protest’s technical innovation and only vaguely touched on its aims, mentioning No Somos Delita in some cases. <sup>27</sup>

Visibility has become the common currency of our time, and the twin circumstances of social media and the surveillance economy have redefined the way we live. Exposure is an inevitable by-product of the connectivity so many people today find vital. Websites, digital forums, social networking sites, and message boards give us not only tremendous validation but also a bond and necessary sense of engagement with the larger world. Oblivious to geographic or political boundaries, online communities nurture loyalties and professional allegiances. These networks enable diverse populations to connect, exchanging ideas, experience and knowledge. In some cases, the very invisibility of these gatherings is exactly what assures their success. <sup>28</sup>

Public protests are [sometimes] designed to unleash a public debate, to draw the attention of the public to the grievances of the actors in question, to create controversy where there was none, and to obtain the support of the public for the actors’ concerns. <sup>29</sup> Furthermore, social movements’ campaigns are now structured around the technologies of communication. The medium can affect the message, and often shape it. For instance, a movement’s success or failure may be based on media depictions of certain aspects of a campaign, rather than being perceived on any subsequent outcome. Public attitudes are swayed by media images. <sup>30</sup>

Marked by communication autonomy, these new technologies have become effective tools of organizing and instigating uprisings, making the search or the need for a centralized leadership arguably unnecessary and making mass mobilization and protest possible.<sup>31</sup> Essentially, the strategic impact new media forms have had on protest movements has been based on a movement's ability to influence overall media agendas. The ratings potential of protest coverage is dependent on two main themes: the message of the movement, and the potential for an attention-grabbing media event emanating from that movement's activities. Therefore, the subject of movement salience becomes a critical aspect of how media attention is maintained.<sup>32</sup>

24. MALCHIK ANTONIA, *A Walking Life : Reclaiming our health and our freedom* 2020, 39

25. MINDER RAPHAEL, "Spain's News Media Are Squeezed by Government and Debt," *New York Times*, November 5, 2015, [www.nytimes.com/2015/11/06/world/europe/as-spains-media-industrychanges-rapidly-some-worry-about-objectivity.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/11/06/world/europe/as-spains-media-industrychanges-rapidly-some-worry-about-objectivity.html?_r=0)

26. VANAJ VIDYAN & SHIKHAR YADAV, *Protests in a pandemic: Holograms lead the way* (Dr. RML National Law University 2020) <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2020/06/25/protests-in-a-pandemic-holograms-lead-the-way/> 4,5

27. LÓPEZ ALMUDENA ESCOBAR, *Invisible Participation: The Hologram Protest in Spain* (University of Rochester 2016) 2

28. BUSCH AKIKO, *How to disappear : Notes on invisibility in a time of transparency* (Penguin Press, New York 2019) 11

29. KRIESI HANSPETER, *Mobilization of protest in the age of austerity in Street Politics in the Age of Austerity* (Amsterdam University 2018) 74

30. LEONARD LIAM, *Media and Protests: The Utilisation of Communication Technologies by Environmental Movements* (National University of Ireland, Galway 2007) 3

31. *ibid.*, 4

32. *ibid.*, 4



the protest in front of congress

## 02 / The Design Process

- Using Holograms
- Invisible Infrastructure
- Strategy & Secrecy
- Ghostly Perception

## 02 / The Design Process

Right from the casual discussion in the office in early January, to the date of demonstration on 10th April 2015, the entire project took almost 4 months to be executed. For a marketing campaign, this is an average timeline. For protest, this is an unusually long timeline. Even though ambiguous, the projection in the particular space of the Parliament is what makes this event a protest. In a logical debate, the event fulfils a range of criteria to be labeled as an interactive installation, a light and sound projection, a film shoot (as per the permission sought from the police), or even a social experiment. It is, for sake of argument, all of the above, as much as it is a protest.

The most interesting aspect of the Hologram Protest is that the collective individuals leading (creating) it, come from a marketing and design field of practice. They are not political activists or social reformers. The idea comes from the people who create commercial campaigns, from an advertising point of view, designed to captivate their audience. Upon deeper deconstruction, the Hologram Protest unfolds beautifully, as an impactful product which emerged from a design process followed thoughtfully.

This part of the thesis focuses entirely on the infrastructure, technical aspects and the execution of the protest. Most of the information in this part has been extracted from the interview with Javier Urbaneja conducted in August 2020 over email. Now, famously known as the "hologram man", Javier resides in Costa Rica. He regularly indulges everyone interested in this project, and passionately narrates his experience.

Project of a lifetime, so powerful, it has changed his life overnight. Along with his words, the author's observations are elaborated.

It is important to note that multiple "mediums" were involved to deliver a project of this scale. There are several studies published already that investigate the role of "internet and communication technologies" to propagate messages and mobilize crowds. The aim of this chapter is to throw light on the "content creation" which forms the biggest part of the success story.

In the same way, the hologram protest gained significance through its mediated framing and reproduction. Indeed, this protest was designed to be reproduced and shared, as evidenced by the meticulous production of the event itself and the polished videos of the protest created by the organizers. The protest was covered internationally by such news outlets as the *New York Times*, *the Guardian*, *Diario La Nación*, *CNN*, *Al Jazeera*, *Le Monde* and others, bringing public attention to the Ley Mordaza.<sup>33</sup>

For the sake of understanding the process, the players in the field can be classified into four categories - The creators/organizers, the participants/users, the target audience/institutional authorities, and the general spectators/communication channels. People who conceptualize and organize innovative forms of protest are passionate about the cause. They are responsible for the event until the day of its execution. They may or may not be thinking of making this a user-friendly experience for their participants or about how creatively this interaction is designed, or the immersive experience they offer to the fellow protestors. Yet, they deliver a life-changing experience and a life-long memory to the participants.

33. SHEEAN JACQUELINE (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

## - Using Holograms

At the first glance, the hologram protest appears in the form of bluish, ghostly people marching in front of the Congress building at night. The experience is uncanny because part of the image appears to hang in space. It is not immediately obvious what exactly is happening. It takes a minute or two to jog down the memory lane and make an association with the technology made popular with the release of Star Wars in 1977.

Holograms were conceived in postwar laboratories as a key element of sophisticated new microscopes and radar systems. For over a decade after their invention, they were seen by no more than a few dozen people, inspired even fewer. When combined with newly-invented lasers, however, holograms revealed magical qualities.<sup>34</sup> Holograms reached popular consciousness during the 1960s and, over the following decades, evolved along with culture itself. No other visual experience is quite like interacting with a hologram; no other cultural product melds the technological sublime with magic [reference to a nostalgic past] and optimism [reference to a promising future] in quite the same way.<sup>35</sup>

Instilled with imagined attributes that reflected cultural desires and expectations, holograms of the future developed a virtual life. They carried on the modernist tradition : in the worlds of fiction expressed in new media, they represented unbridled technological progress that seemed inevitable. But holograms also evoked other associations : older technologies, contemporary fashions, rumours and myth. Although genuine holograms are less commonly viewed today, their symbolic identity has been

grafted onto an expanding range of cultural products and anticipations. Tracing this cultural evolution takes us further from the scientific roots of holograms. Instead of representing an inexorable expansion of knowledge and application, holograms began to accrete competing popular meanings.<sup>36</sup>

For more optimistic audiences, science fiction could portray holograms as elements of a visually exciting technological world; cinema, television and video games could illustrate what the fiction writers had described.<sup>37</sup> Holograms satisfy the distinct appeals of hidden science, magical portrayals and conspiracy theories. A quick search on google, shows a series of imagery, with the same visual language - set in a science fictional plot, emerging out of a device, and emitting a bluish light in the air with an invisible projection plane.

The aesthetic effect of holographic space as well as its substantial existence receives its self-creating energy solely from light. The image attains its importance, as well as its aesthetic effect, only by its ability to produce illusions in the viewer who may be interpreted as having a desire for illusion. Hence the viewer does not accept the image at its face value, as "a bold abstraction of reality", but rather accepts it as a perfect analogy of reality.<sup>38</sup>

The philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1927-2007) discussed holograms as the embodiment of a simulacrum, or an inadequate representation of reality. He argued that its images are 'mercilessly detailed' yet empty - literally intangible - versions of the real thing with properties that are unlike those of a mirror or optical illusion. Instead of being a copy or double of something real, he suggested, holograms confer new Godlike powers. Baudrillard argued that holograms exemplify modernity. They satisfy the desire for the most faithful and contemporary representations of reality, on the other hand, but also invent a highly artificial reality of their own that is hyper-real. The imagery is

simultaneously mesmerizing, desirable and false, reflecting modern culture itself. <sup>39</sup>

## Why is a technology that has been known to us since the 1960s, perceived as “futuristic” even today?

From the revelation of the hologram in the 1960s, then, there has been an increasingly obvious bifurcation of technologists’ and science fiction writers’ conceptions. They extended the ontology of popular fantasies. Holograms became a staple of science fiction plots alongside robots, time travel and wormholes. (attached images) But, in the process, holograms were translated into a more compelling technology for contemporary audiences. The future would include more immersive and interactive experiences, fictional holograms would integrate computing and intelligence, and appeal to additional senses. The holograms of popular fantasy were forecasts allied with particular worldviews, like the stories in which they were embedded. The hologram might represent mythical magic, an imminent new channel for mass consumption, the decline of modernist dreams or the secretive tool of a militaristic state but, in one guise or another, it came to inhabit most of our imagined futures. <sup>40</sup>

The idea of adopting a technology used primarily for entertainment, and moulding it around a narrative for political communication, was a powerful act.



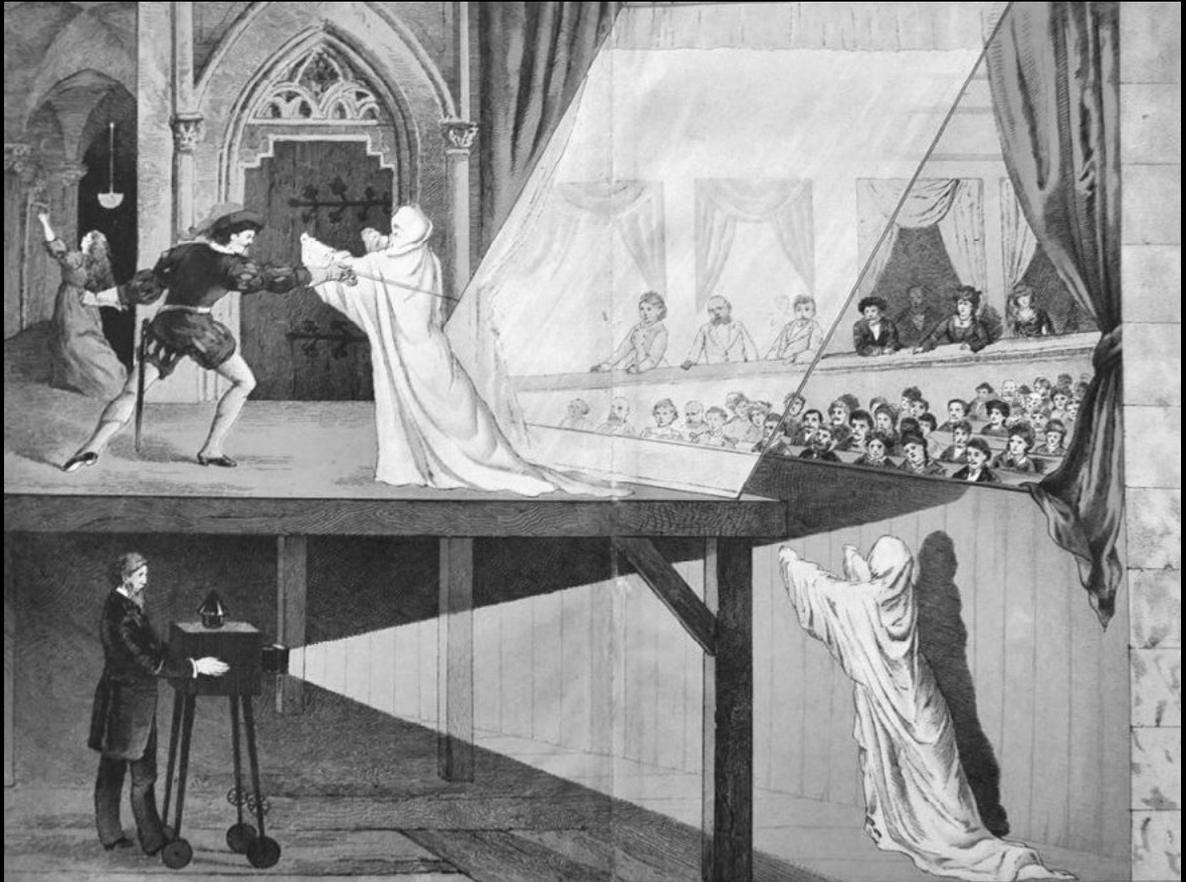
holograms used in Star Wars films

# Pepper's Ghost

The visual trick most often misidentified with holograms is Pepper's Ghost, a spectacular stage effect first seen by Victorian theatre audiences. An off-stage actor, illuminated by a bright lamp, would be visible to the audience via his reflection in an unseen plane of glass on stage. The ghost illusion had been conceived around 1858 by Henry Diricks, a retired civil engineer. His scheme was developed and first employed by analytical chemist John Pepper for stage plays. The key to the illusion is to ensure that the audience cannot detect the screen itself, which usually is accomplished by arranging a dark background and ensuring that the reflector or screen is unlit by other sources.

It is worth noting that the most implementations of Pepper's Ghost have none of the features of three dimensional imaging, they require neither binocular disparity, motion parallax, accommodation nor convergence. Observers use these visual cues merely to locate the position of the image in space as they would when viewing a cinema or television screen. Tricked into perceiving the spectre as a living person rather than a projected image, their brains 'fill in' the missing dimension of depth. <sup>41</sup>

The technique used for the demonstration in Madrid was Pepper's Ghost. So why was it marketed as a hologram? The use of the term hologram is perhaps not the result of scientific naïveté, but instead an appeal to the cultural resonances of the term itself. It holds more weight than Pepper's Ghost, which is associated with parlour tricks often used in the circus for entertainment. Hologram on the other hand, is associated



peppers ghost technique illustration

with serious scientific innovation and futuristic ideas. This vocabulary appropriation worked in favour of the organizers, without being disqualified by scrutiny.

The trick takes advantage of the fact that the screen on which the film or image is projected is both transparent and reflective, allowing the viewer to see both the projected image and whatever lies behind the screen. The nearly invisible screen makes the images appear to be floating in the air. Pepper's Ghost is in essence a performance illusion, a ghostly sleight of hand. <sup>42</sup> The hologram conjures its politically meaningful ghosts through what is fundamentally a "trick" of cinema, a projection of a video recording on a hidden screen. While Pepper's Ghost only fooled the most gullible viewers into taking the projected apparitions at face value, perhaps there is still something to be said for the technology's function as a spiritual medium. <sup>43</sup>

34. JOHNSTON SEAN F., *Holograms : A cultural history* (University of Glasgow, 2016) 195

35. *ibid.*, 195

36. *Ibid.*, 195

37. *ibid.*, 195

38. BARTHES ROLAND, *Die fotografie botschaft* (Osnabruck 1982) - as cited in PETER ZEC (media scientist, writer), translated by Jacqueline London-Kohlem, *The aesthetic message of holography* (The federal republic of Germany, 1987) 2

39. JOHNSTON SEAN F., *Holograms : A cultural history* (University of Glasgow, 2016) 201, 202

40. *ibid.*, 222, 223

41. *ibid.*, 222, 223

42. SHEEAN JACQUELINE, (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

43. *ibid.* 465-480

## - Invisible Infrastructure

When a physical protest takes place, the infrastructure fuelling the event is evident. The energy, the financial resources, geographical and weather conditions, most importantly the physicality of the “spatial platform” all come together to make it happen. Javier Urbaneja talks a little bit about the infrastructure that he and his team built, for the staging of this protest.

In Javier’s words, as transcribed

“We created the website and took it online about two weeks before the protest. Then we released some teaser videos with people from No Somos Delito (We Are Not Crime), the NGO that sponsored the protest. In the videos, one of the spokesperson explains what will happen with the passing of the gag law and then she said the only way to protest is to turn into a hologram and the image of her turns into a hologram. So the teaser and a call to action, to participate in the website. On the website, you could take a picture of yourself and make a scream or write a message. And then we collected all that but we only really used the shouts and their messages. Why? Because it’s impossible even with an astronomical budget to integrate such different images from web cams of the public, thousands of people with different lighting conditions are in front of the webcam which don’t match. They are static; we cannot recreate a protest with that. But what we did was call some of the people that uploaded their image and asked them if they wanted to come to a shooting in which we were going to make a loop of 50 people marching through the street. We did that on a set with a chroma key, so we could afterwards integrate that into the

projection. The 50 marchers represented the 17,000 participants. We needed to take into consideration the distances and the angles of the street. This street has a little slope, you know from left to right it came downwards. We have taken every aspect of this into consideration at the shooting. So that the image of the projection syncs perfectly into the street later. We edited it and transformed it (to appear as) Holograms, you know, the classic image of a hologram is this bluish transparent.. And why is that? the Holograms could be of any color. But Star Wars has made it [popular] and the people [now] think the Holograms have bluish, and have this ghostly appearance. So [we] did not go against it, it's common culture. This is what the people think so we build on that. We simply made a video of transparent people marching. The duration was 7 minutes and then it flips out with a glitch and the people are in front of us, you know that they are in front of us looking at us, not marching sideways, but in front of us looking at us. And then there's folks in the organization who tell the manifesto, a manifesto of 3 minutes which explained what we were doing.

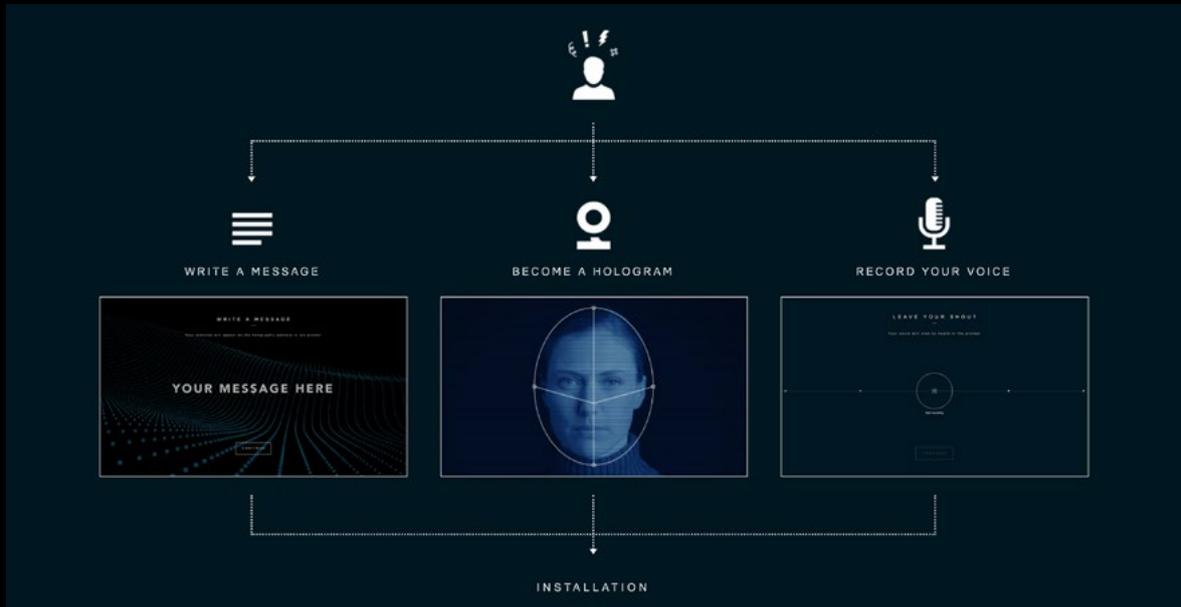
The technology involves projection over a semi transparent screen of 4 by 7 meters. It was more like a cloth, something like a pantyhose - semi-transparent. The technology in fact is very simple and makes use of the pepper ghost effect. If you project a reflection of an image over a semi transparent screen the sensation is as if the image was floating in the middle of space so that that was then. The technology and the effect that we were using this pepper, pepper ghost effect. [Installed] between two lamp lights, I recall, very simple. The projector was very powerful, it was the most expensive part of the project because it needed to be very powerful in order to be visible on the street and the technology was simple."

The description of the process, almost sounds like a film production preparation. One of the biggest assets was the in-house technological expertise required to pull this off.

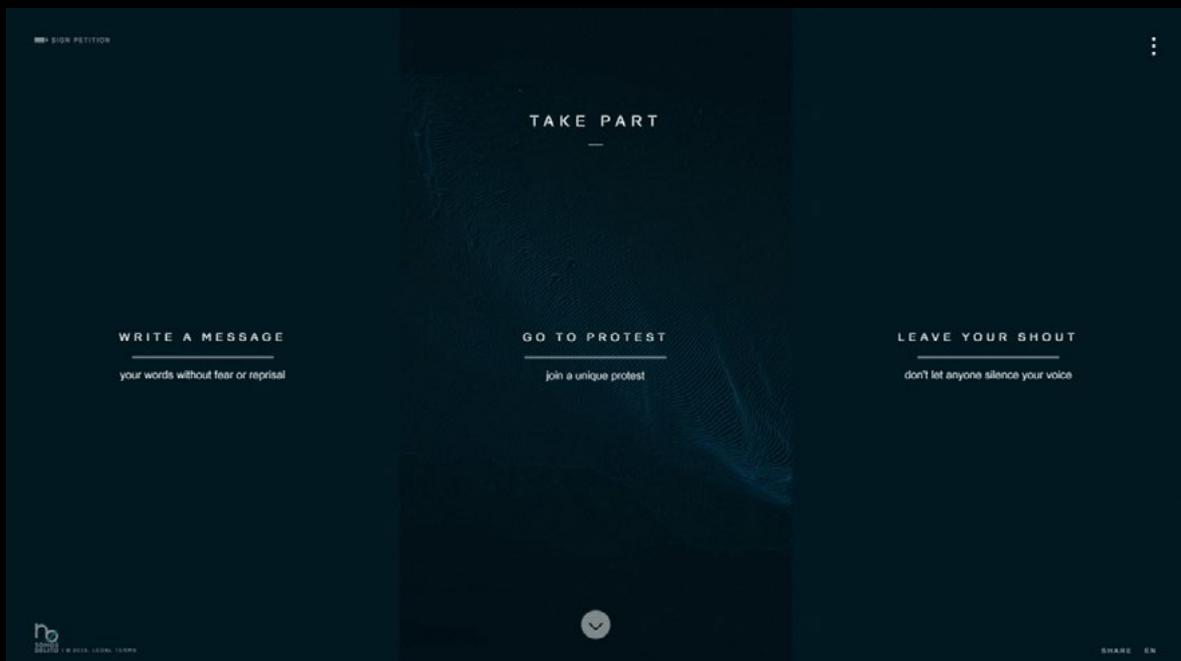
Imagine the time lost in translation of the idea to various executors and contributors. As an agency whose political reach is arguably very narrow compared to that of an activist, the success of the campaign was outstanding. Communication technologies enhance protest movements by providing leverage and influence for grassroots groups in an era characterised by knowledge flows and technocratic expertise. Internet linkages facilitate innovative approaches to political opportunity structures for movements through emergent features of cyberprotest that create a new nexus of capabilities in a globalised age. <sup>44</sup> They provide the infrastructure which is invisible in its industrial sense.

“Javier’s words have been transcribed from the audio interview conducted in August 2020 over email by the author.

44. LIAM LEONARD, *Media and Protests: The Utilisation of Communication Technologies by Environmental Movements* (National University of Ireland, Galway 2007) 2



screenshots of the website





filming with the green screen



## - Strategy & Secrecy

Javier talks about the challenges they faced to maintain utmost secrecy until the moment of execution

“Yes, we had to be very very secretive and most of all [about] the location of the protest, you know, because originally we didn’t know where we were going to hold the protest. When they [production company Garlic TV] came with their possible locations they came up with three parks around the city of Madrid in the you know Suburban areas of Madrid. At the end of the presentation they proposed to do it in front of the Congress. And we say wow, that would be really very impactful. Right? That will also be very very dangerous because there is a police presence 24/7. So the complexity of the project was a lot higher with that location as we have to risk it, you know there than the impact of doing the protest in front of Congress. [Several protests in the past have unsuccessfully attempted, in fear of police violence.] And so it was very important that the location was secretive.

We had to advertise. We had to tell not only the public but also the media that we were going to have a hologram protest in Madrid on April 10th at 9pm in the evening, but we didn’t say where. So maybe some people thought it was going to be virtual. We had to be very secretive with the media because the majority of the media in Spain are of the conservative editorial line and you know, so they supported the government in some way and they would tell the government of our intentions. So we told the media that we were going to call them one hour before the protest to tell them the exact location of the protests. Even some International media arrived

in Madrid, fascinated only with the concept of a hologram protest. Some French, German Russian media outlets sent reporters to cover it even without knowing where it was going to take place or if it was going to take place [in physical reality]. So at the last moment, we called them and we told them the location, the street in front of Congress in Madrid.

Some of the media which were not so supportive of the government started with live coverage. And from that moment on, even the authorities could not do anything to us because we were live and it would be even worse if they tried to stop the protest.”

Secrecy was not the only challenge which had to be addressed. Unforeseen last minute obstacles are anticipated, in events such as these. In the words of Javier

“Well, the execution on site was very difficult and very important too as it has a relevance with the secrecy. Because I didn’t tell you earlier about the other answer for your question about secrecy. We couldn’t just get in front of Congress and start making projections. That way the police will have surely stopped us. What we did was ask for a shooting permit for 2 days two consecutive days every day. There are a lot of shootings in Madrid, maybe commercials, documentaries, films, a lot of things. So we asked for a permit to film in front of Congress, and we reserved space [for it]. With some fences, metal fences and we were supposed to be there. We waited, we showed our papers to the police. So no problem, they did not add two and two. They [didn’t] think that maybe these people are the ones of the Hologram protest with the teaser. The Hologram protest had a lot of attraction, but not so much as with the real protest. People were not talking about it on the streets, you know, so the police did not match up when we showed up with a piece of paper, [saying]we are supposed to be here shooting. They said, okay.

So the first day we were making rehearsals without sound, testing some things

and that was a very smart [exercise] to do because projection was easy, but it was not clearly visible. Why? 2 Reasons - the projector was not powerful enough, and secondly the lights of the streets. So we waited, we needed more darkness for the projection to be completely visible. So in 24 hours, we had to get the power department to ask for permits to turn off the lights of the streets of the Congress. That involved asking a lot of favors. We didn't test the sounds because we didn't want to alert the authorities and we didn't see the protest [on the rehearsal day] So that the day we actually projected we were very nervous because we didn't know. Either way it's going to happen and finally it worked."

The Parliament building is supposed to be the core of the democratic space, where representatives make decisions for the common good of the community. But within a representative democracy such as Spain, fences and police forces enclose the Parliament. The holographic images reactivated the space, transforming it into a virtual agora where there was room for criticism and debate. For a few minutes, the voices of the people were heard within the empty space of Parliament. Their transparent images reflected on the walls of the building foregrounded the opacity and stasis of the authoritarian government. The holograms occupied the space of representation and transformed it into a participatory space, returning its openness to the people.<sup>45</sup>

The technical ability of protesters to get around state-instituted online censorship, or expertise in social media of the sort that was demonstrated in the Holograms for Freedom, are both key aspects of modern protesting.

"Javier's words have been transcribed from the audio interview conducted in August 2020 over email by the author.

45. LÓPEZ ALMUDENA ESCOBAR, *Invisible Participation: The Hologram Protest in Spain* (University of Rochester 2016) 3



setting up at the venue on day of protest

## - Ghostly Perception

The demonstration was more than just a technological gimmick; it was intended as a performance of the political consequences of the law that would soon go into effect— a projection of the near future in which civil liberties would be restricted. <sup>46</sup>

This historical future premise and the mediated nature of this performance – a projected reproduction, restaging and re-enactment of a previous act as a vision of a future to come – represent a collapse of any homogeneous temporality. But that is not to say that this holographic event is just a theoretical exercise or even simply a technological ornament to the greater political unrest of 2015. Instead, this moment composed a significant part of the action itself, garnering a great deal of international attention in regards to the Ley Mordaza while also speaking to the pervasive imbrication of globalized technological networks in twenty first-century political protest. <sup>47</sup>

The Pepper's Ghost technique has been widely employed in commercial and pop culture settings, often to bring back the dead. Thus the performance of the political can be read as a politics of both embodied presence and temporal present. Yet this political performance contains neither. What happens when those bodies are prohibited from gathering, when presence is punishable? And what demand can be read in these ghostly bodies that are not bodies at all, but emanations of light from another place and time?

Jacqueline's study affirms that to bring ghosts (and the radical loss they stand for) into the space of interpretation is thus to infuse them with political potential. Or perhaps the technological apparatus of the hologram instead serves to conjure the ghosts of the past and allow those dead generations to return. In other words, the technology forms an ambivalent relation to the past, simultaneously erasing it and recalling it. The images of the hologram are arresting in this way too. <sup>48</sup>

The protest's disembodied images enacted severe criticism of the vacuity of the democratic system in Spain and its consequent flaws. The holograms became an alternative language for protest in absence, an action without a body. They transformed the inability to protest into an ironic and absurdist protest without protesters. The holographic images were not a direct representation of reality but a visual manifestation of the injustices of Spanish representative democracy, in which the actual bodies of citizens are the least important element. The protest was a direct reference to the lack of representation within the Spanish political system in which the voice is disembodied and carried into the body of the representative—the politician. At the same time, it criticizes the lack of efficacy of the system and shows the capacity of technology to enable the organization of protests in both physical and non physical form. <sup>49</sup>

46. SHEEAN JACQUELINE (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

47. *ibid.*, 465-480

48. *ibid.*, 465-480

49. *ibid.*, 465-480



Autodesk Smoke File Edit View Clip Sequence Mark Effects Window Help

Thu 10/01 Smoke

Timeline: 00:00:25.03

Render: 00:01:00.00

Node: w1824

Property	Value	Unit
Position X	0.00	0.00°
Position Y	0.00	0.00°
Position Z	0.00	0.00°
Rotation X	100.00	0.00
Rotation Y	100.00	0.00
Rotation Z	100.00	0.00
Scale X	100.00	0.00
Scale Y	100.00	0.00
Scale Z	100.00	0.00
Shear X	0.00	0.00
Shear Y	0.00	0.00
Shear Z	0.00	0.00

Frame: 21474



Autodesk Smoke File Edit View Clip Sequence Mark Effects Window Help

The screenshot displays the Autodesk Smoke software interface. The main preview window shows a video sequence of a crowd of people, with a red bounding box highlighting a specific group. The interface includes a timeline at the bottom with a playhead at 00:00:25:03. The left sidebar shows a hierarchical tree of clips and actions. The bottom control panel features various settings for position, rotation, scale, and shear, along with buttons for 'Auto Scale', 'Free Axis', 'Parented Camera', and 'Look At'.

Timeline: 00:00:25:03

Node: action5

Property	Value
Position X	0.00
Position Y	0.00
Position Z	0.00
Rotation X	0.00°
Rotation Y	0.00°
Rotation Z	0.00°
Scale X	100.00
Scale Y	100.00
Scale Z	100.00
Shear X	0.00
Shear Y	0.00
Shear Z	0.00

Buttons: Auto Scale, Free Axis, Parented Camera, Look At



Autodesk Smoke File Edit View Clip Sequence Mark Effects Window Help

Mon 16:21 Smoke

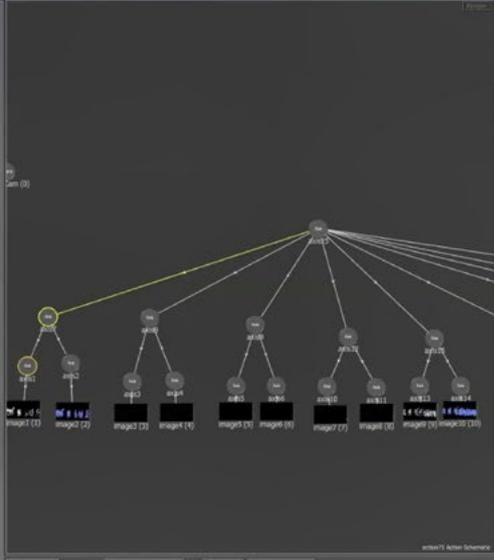
Timeline: 00:00:23:00

Node: **inst13**

Property	Value	Unit
Position X	0.00	0.00°
Position Y	0.00	0.00°
Position Z	0.00	0.00°
Rotation X	100.00	0.00°
Rotation Y	100.00	0.00°
Rotation Z	100.00	0.00°
Scale X	0.00	0.00
Scale Y	0.00	0.00
Scale Z	0.00	0.00
Shear X	0.00	0.00
Shear Y	0.00	0.00
Shear Z	0.00	0.00

Frame: 21474





Timeline and controls area of the software interface. It includes a timeline with a playhead at 00:00:25:02. Below the timeline are various control panels for different tracks and objects.

Track	Object	Position	Rotation	Scale	Shear	Centre	Stabilize	Auto Scale
DEF1	inst1	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF2	inst2	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF3	inst3	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF4	inst4	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF5	inst5	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF6	inst6	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF7	inst7	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF8	inst8	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF9	inst9	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off
DEF10	inst10	X: 0.00, Y: 0.00, Z: 0.00	0.00°	100.00	0.00	0.00	Track	Off

Additional controls include 'Parented Camera', 'Look At', 'Path', and 'Imp' buttons. The interface also shows a 'Task' list and a 'Timeline' with various playback controls.

## 03 / Analysing the Experience

- Participative Eagerness
- Paradox of Outreach
- Revisiting the questions
- Thoughts about the future

## 03 / Analysing the Experience

When asked about his personal observations of the project, Javier was straightforward with his answer “ My communication design standpoint? The project was perfect in my opinion and was the only perfect project of my career. The same way as I imagined it from the very beginning and the results are there. 800 million people saw the Hologram protests that’s one sixth of the world population. That’s a tremendous achievement”

Being seen, recognized, and acknowledged is essential to human experience.

If we are to be made to care about strangers - so much so that we will give our time, money, or political capital in their assistance - a message must be felt and believed that relies on a cosmopolitan sensibility that expands our current conception of inclusion and community.<sup>50</sup> By prompting interactivity and participation, where one becomes not only consumer but also creator of online content, and where sharing ideas and exchanging feedback becomes the norm, these new digital technologies enable youth to redefine patterns of participation, civil involvement, and self expression.<sup>51</sup>

Designer Bill Moggridger who pioneered the human-centred approach in design said “The interactive systems we design have implicit as well as explicit meanings. A design may communicate its purpose clearly, so that it’s obvious what it is and what we should do with it. But its qualities, its aesthetic qualities particularly, speak to people in a different way. Consciously or not, people read meanings into artifacts. Artists and designers are trained to use the language of implicit meanings to add a rich

communicative element over and above direct functional communication.”<sup>52</sup>

## Who do we think we are when we are online, and who do we want to be there?

We have the opportunity online not only to easily seek out communities of interest convergent with our own, but to reshape ourselves, adopt different personae for different communities and environments, and experience more such fleeting moments of convergence.<sup>53</sup>

However, one cannot presume that the modern technologies are going to be used only by those who seek to reform, or address political injustice. The autonomy of media makes it available to be explored and used by anybody who understands the potential. Once the language is familiarized with the audience, it is inevitable that everything it would see, protest included, can be turned into a commodity and used as an empty emblem of political correctness or radical chicness. The truth in Marshall McLuhan’s writings cannot be ignored. “The bad news is that all persons, whether or not they understand the processes of computerized high-speed data transmission, will lose their old private identities. What knowledge there is will be available to all.”<sup>54</sup>

Surveillance and digital documentation are the important uses of the very same technologies which are used by governments and institutions to restrict the very expression of an individual. Consequences, of being caught in the act, can get complicated. These very reasons could be the reasons for reluctance in participation,

in spite of the attractive narratives sold to the audience.

50. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016)

51. FORSYTHE DAVID P., *Human Rights in International Relations* (Cambridge, UK : Cambridge University Press 2012), 45

52. MOGGRIDGE BILL, *Designing Interactions* (MIT Press 2006)(preface)

53. JONES STEVEN G., *Virtual culture : identity & communication in cybersociety* (Sage Publications 1997) 27

54. MCLUHAN MARSHALL & POWERS BRUCE R., *The Global Village* (Oxford University press, 1992) 129

## - Participative Eagerness

There were perks to participating in the Hologram Protest. In addition to the absence of any law recognising or prohibiting holograms, they cannot endanger public safety, order or health. Where once violence from social and environmental movements, at protests or otherwise, gave authorities the excuse to respond with the strong arm of the state's military and police apparatus, such repression by the state can be avoided by technologically driven protests. This avoidance of direct confrontation between protestors and the authorities on the streets or at the site of environmental dispute allows for a broader public empathy with the protest movements aims. Furthermore, this strategy of utilising technologies and expertise gives protest movements an air of respectability, which belies their anti establishment motives, while crucially allowing for increased media access. <sup>55</sup>

Modern technologies have served as an important instrument not only in documenting human rights abuses, but also in mobilizing citizens to raise their dissenting voices. <sup>56</sup>

What is remarkable about protesting social movements in the age of CMC (computer-mediated communication) is that they frequently do not have a clearly identifiable leader or even set of leaders. CMC is not a medium that can totally replace the organization of a social movement. Physical participation is not only needed, but essential. The Internet and social media have not usurped the importance of resource mobilization in organizing a movement, but have merely altered the resources in question.

Although communication technologies have facilitated the connectivity and interactivity of individual's aspirations, the need to fundamentally alter political and economic conditions and structures can be met only by an extraordinary commitment on the part of the protestors and their willingness to take on attendant risks.<sup>57</sup> Digital participation can translate into real power, but as Mirko Tobias Schafer contends, talk of empowerment paints an abstract and fanciful picture of social progress attained through technology use often at odds with the stubbornness of practical reality.

The debate over the power of social participation in the digital world has raised a key question : Will digital media, if properly safeguarded by privacy-protecting settings, flourish into new forms of communication, protest and resistance, the spread of knowledge, and a revitalized civil society ? Once pervasive view holds that in a digitally connected infosphere, gaining participatory media skills has become crucial to facing massive problems, from global warming to water sharing conflicts, from mass collaboration to collective action, and from mediated barriers to face-to-face practices that can increase or drain social capital. These technological developments, coupled with the flourishing of new civil society organizations, have empowered the powerless and voiceless, while at the same time rendering governments grudgingly more tolerant of diverse views and competing narratives.<sup>58</sup>

Manuel Castells Oliván is a Spanish sociologist especially associated with research on information society, communication and globalization. In his words "the more interactive and self-configurable communication is, the hierarchical is the organization and the more participatory is the movement."<sup>59</sup>

The structure of the Hologram Protest shares these ideals, which helped in its eventual success & impact.

55. LEONARD LIAM, *Media and Protests: The Utilisation of Communication Technologies by Environmental Movements* (National University of Ireland, Galway 2007) 7
56. LÓPEZ ALMUDENA ESCOBAR, *Invisible Participation: The Hologram Protest in Spain* (University of Rochester 2016) 3
57. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 83
58. *ibid.*, 280
59. *ibid.*, 267, 268

## - Paradox of Outreach

Once placed in relation to the computer/transponder, the user is everywhere at once. You are everywhere and so is everybody else using the system. What is really new about the satellite is that it intensifies the process of being everywhere at once. One can appear simultaneously at every terminal access point on earth or in outer space.<sup>60</sup>

### What do we choose to leave behind as we adopt and adapt to new media technology ?

New communication technologies enable a global reach in the sense that their causes stretch beyond the locality of the events, raising issues that provoke engagement and strike chords amongst people in transnational communities. However, the crucial point to note is that the way individuals participate, cooperate, organize, and coordinate forms of contention through modern technological means is what accelerates progress towards achieving human rights.

While online organizing has been effective at connecting far-flung groups, including people who live more isolated lives in places with lower population density, there is a

certain amorphous quality to that form of human contact.<sup>61</sup> There is some truth to the statement often said “history is made on the street, not on the internet” The internet, however, is a catalyst. The internet has become a key enabler of human rights activities allowing individuals, to matter where they reside, to receive information and redirect it to others.<sup>62</sup>

The above observations trigger a new chain of thoughts. Would it advisable to organize a demonstration such as the Hologram Protest in countries where the government is unforgiving of any criticism, and is documented to respond with violence? Would it be possible to explore the technological route in countries where the audience is not culturally educated to absorb the content, or even technologically equipped to receive the communication? Would it be feasible to mobilize resources to engage in a heavily resourced performance in countries where the activists and reformers have to prioritize health and survival? Addressing these thoughts in this text would deviate this thesis away from its primary questions. However, it is a continuum of questions such as these which eventually will lead to prospective expansion of knowledge.

Presently, concluding the focused observations with the following text.

60. CASTELLS MANUEL, *Networks of Outrage and Hope : Social Movements in the Internet Age* (Cambridge, UK : Polity Press, 2012) 15

61. MCLUHAN MARSHALL & POWERS BRUCE R., *The Global Village* (Oxford University press, 1992) 118

62. MALCHIK ANTONIA, *A Walking Life : Reclaiming our health and our freedom* 2020, 54

## - Revisiting the questions

A social movement is not simply an object; it is primarily a process, and should be studied as a historical phenomenon in a span of time. In an age when political protests are becoming more and more virtualized and mediated, when public space extends from the plaza to the Web, the hologram [protest] performance engages with the already present technological tendencies in political action.<sup>63</sup> What started in Spain as a symbolic jab could be the most viable mode of protesting amidst humanitarian crises. Hologram protests will survive restrictions on an assembly of 'persons,' despite the dominating constructive presence of human figures. This leaves law enforcement agencies faced with two alternatives: either prosecute individuals who volunteered to present their images as holograms, or prosecute the organisers.<sup>64</sup>

The hologram performance then allows for a circumvention of the stipulations of the law. As Almudena Escobar López has argued, the hologram "revealed the capacity of the oppressed to rebel and jump the containment fences built by the government around public space" (2016, 10). Yet as she adds, this is "an action without a body" – a circumvention of the human body.<sup>65</sup>

For while this performance projects a totalitarian near future, the hologram conjures a past subjectivity that is preserved in light and a collapse of past, present and future through technological projection. These concepts of space, presence and embodiment, as part of a contemporary democratic rubric, are thus thrown into question, leading us to ask: Can we imagine a body politic without bodies? And, upon

what present and presence do we predicate the concept of politics? <sup>66</sup>

Protest isn't, in the end, necessarily about breaking systems and seeing immediate change enacted, enticing as the prospect is : it's about something less easily defined, speaking directly to people's yearning for political agency, especially in a system in which they feel personally powerless. <sup>67</sup> For human rights organizations to maximize their impact in a digital age, they must articulate an identity that is resonant with the audience as well as consistent with the progressive principles at the heart of human rights claims. <sup>68</sup> It is worth noting that awareness alone does not lead to social change, but opening up a political space is essential to such a transformation. The changing methods of social media and engagement provide a way to connect people with real human rights problems. Ultimately, however, social media must be linked to grassroots organizations if such methods of communication are to not only mobilize collective action in the form of civil disobedience but also serve as a tool for assessing accountability. <sup>69</sup>

63. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 6

64. SHEEAN JACQUELINE (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

65. VIDYAN VANAJ & YADAV SHIKHAR, *Protests in a pandemic: Holograms lead the way* (Dr. RML National Law University 2020) <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/socialpolicy/2020/06/25/protests-in-a-pandemic-holograms-lead-the-way/> 3

66. SHEEAN JACQUELINE (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

67. MALCHIK ANTONIA, *A Walking Life : Reclaiming our health and our freedom* 2020, 55

68. *ibid.*, 55

69. HERMAN JOHANNA, *Hashtags and Human Rights : Activism in the age of twitter*, available at [www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics\\_online/0099](http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0099), 2014

## - Thoughts about future

The 2015 protest was the first instance of a holographic political demonstration. This model has definitely inspired a few more protests around the world. The most documented example is of the Ghost Protest held in Seoul, capital of South Korea by the group Amnesty International Korea in 2016. The technical disadvantage was the poor quality of projectors used, which diminished their impact. The perceptive disadvantage was the comparison drawn to a cleaner executed event of the same kind, and one which was swiftly devoured by the communication networks of the time. This brings us to an important question of scalability. Whether this can become a regular occurrence, depends on technological and financial scalability of this model.

Digital technology has opened up unimaginable worlds of access and connectivity, but it has also brought into question its own role in undermining the foundations of governments built by people, for people. The realities of face-to-face contact and in-person mass protests, the tools of centuries of struggle for full citizenship and rights, have become even more essential to grounding us as we navigate through a new era of human's relationship with technology. Physical protest is an embodiment of the ability to hold our governments accountable beyond our letters and phone calls, even beyond our votes. The right to use our public spaces to remind those in charge of policy that the "demos" in democracy refers to us, the people. New eras of protest will have to learn how to combine the ease and speed of online connectivity with the long term face-to-face organizing that gives physical protest its strength and staying power.

It remains to be seen how media technologies will continue to transform the political landscape. For just as the hologram may gesture toward new and developing technological modes of the political, it also gestures to the ongoing encroachment of the market and corporate interests in the social and political sphere. <sup>70</sup>

Despite the limitations of information and communication technologies, such as the fact that the majority of the world population faces accessibility and participative barriers, the digital age does hold promising prospects for social change, activists and organizations as they employ the connective and immersive tools ICTs offer.

There is no point trying to avoid what is coming, because to a great extent that structure of that change is already here. A watchful eye must be kept on the landscape that is being formed with these technologies; sometimes that landscape is visible on our computer screens, and sometimes it is not. No matter where it may be visible it behooves us all to keep it in view, for it affects us all - and it promises to keep changing. <sup>71</sup>

70. SHEEAN JACQUELINE (2018) A (new) specter haunts Europe: the political legibility of Spain's hologram protests, *Journal of Spanish Cultural Studies*, 19:4, 465-480

71. JONES STEVEN G., *Virtual culture : identity & communication in cybersociety* (Sage Publications 1997) 5



the hologram protest

# CONCLUSION

I read this singular protest through the lens of contemporary media and design theory to interrogate the ways in which this particular performance, for better or for worse, reimagines twenty-first-century political action and traditional networks of political subjectivity. As a designer, I believe the future lies in immersive experiences created by an intersection of physical and virtual spaces. There is immense scope in reimagining the concept of "space" and its involvement in the world of retail, society, politics, entertainment and education. For those who would use electronic media to foster change, their potential seems great.

Action focused on design, politics and the political does not imply exclusivity - clearly there are other fields of human conduct that should be viewed as contributors to those transformations so desperately needed - but design led change is tremendously important, and will become ever more so - as a means to essential change.<sup>72</sup>

'We' are not, for instance, in control of what we have brought into being (information technology, the televisual, genetic engineering, nanotechnology, and so forth). These technologies have become independent 'tectonics'. No individual, group, corporation or nation can control them or their onward designing (of biophysical ecologies and ecologies of mind). The subjects who work in their orbit are equally, at least in the significant part, mental and genetic objects of their creation.<sup>73</sup>

Technology as such is not a remedy,  
it is a tool. <sup>74</sup>

72. FRY TONY, *Design as politics* (Berg, imprint of Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2011) 3

73. FRY TONY, *Design as politics* (Berg, imprint of Oxford International Publishers Ltd., 2011) 244

74. MONSHIPOURI MAHMOOD, *Information Politics, Protests, and Human Rights in the Digital Age* (Cambridge University Press, 2016) 12

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## PROJECT CREDITS

FESTIVALS : ADC\*E, AdWeek Project Isaac, Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, D&AD Festival, El Ojo de Iberoamérica, El Sol, Eurobest, IAB Inspirational, New York Festival, The One Show

AWARDS & NOMINATIONS : Adweek Project Isaac, Art Directors Club Europe, Bill Bernbach Awards, Cannes Lions, CDEC, Clio Awards, Club de Creativos, D&AD, El Ojo de Iberoamérica, El Sol, Epica Awards, Eurobest, IAB Inspirational Awards, Laus, London International Awards, New York Festivals, The One Show

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The emergence or entrance of new age mediums of communications, in the world of protests has resulted in an evolution of the physicality of the spaces of protests, enabling protestors to engage in propagating their messages with never before seen outreach and scale. "Holograms for Freedom" as a case study emphasizes the claims made earlier and addresses questions about the future of protesting. The three questions important from the point of view of this thesis are elaborated below.

This thesis looks at protests as a product of communication design, and how new multi-media plays a role in shaping its characteristics. Along with that, it aims to start a dialog about will the physical protests be replaced or diminished by the digitalization wave ? Finally, the research undertaken broadly investigates the claim Modern mediums of technology have offered a renewed platform for the act of protesting, but do these new platforms justify the resources invested into them?

With the primary media in analytical question is "holograms", this thesis also throws light on the supportive communication mediums as necessary players in the big picture.



L'émergence de médiums de communication new age dans le monde des protestations a amené à l'évolution de la réalité physique des espaces de manifestation, permettant aux protestataires de propager leurs messages avec une portée et une ampleur encore jamais atteinte. Cette thèse considère les manifestations comme œuvre de design et de communication, et explore les façons dont les nouveaux multimédias jouent un rôle dans l'élaboration de ses caractéristiques. Elle affirme également que les supports de communication sont des acteurs nécessaires dans cet acte collectif et parallèlement, elle vise à ouvrir un dialogue sur l'aspect physique des protestations. Seront-elles remplacées ou diminuées par la vague de la numérisation ?

Cette recherche examine la technologie des hologrammes qui a offert une nouvelle plateforme pour l'acte de protester à travers le cas d'étude « Holograms for Freedom tout en questionnant si les ressources investies sont toujours justifiées et en abordant la question du futur des protestations.

