

*The Aestheticization of Protest: from May'68 to MeToo*

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In a social media infused world, revolutionary movements in need of spreading the word, seem caught in a vicious cycle; in need of media for the creation of networks and frames that will allow them to reach wider audiences, causes such as feminism, gay rights or ecology often result in extensive marketing strategies for products that become associated with them through targeted ads. While there are positive results coming out of popular protest movements such as Me Too, there needs to be a more cautious approach to the study of this new type of activism. While on a surface level it appears like progress is being made, the current political panorama tells us otherwise: the extreme right is on the rise as are highly conservative parties, we are living in a highly polarized world. Perhaps part of the issue is our insistence to consider that change on a cultural level (TV shows, celebrities, literature, art etc.) is conducive of long-term sociopolitical change. The current trending modes of protest and activism such as hashtag (#) and celebrity activism as well as the general implication of social media in the world of protest need to be carefully considered, not only because they create an erroneous idea of positive change, but because they could be altering the notion of protest at its core. This paper will try to establish a trajectory of protest as we understand it now, starting from the iconic counterculture movements of the 1960s in the United States as well as some European countries. This approach is taken because of the hypothesis that in doing a historiography of protest we will be able to identify key moments where the concept's meaning began to be displaced out of the sphere of the political and into the sphere of the cultural - or even - the aesthetic. In order to achieve that this essay will be looking at the means through which the contrarian groups mobilized in the 1960s and analyze them for similarities and differences between current ones. This paper ultimately aims to establish a continuum of protest-aestheticization throughout the past sixty years and, perhaps, even suggest some ideas for a restoring of protest as a valid tool for sociopolitical change in a macro level.

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