

The Professional Protester: Emergence of a New News Media Protest Coverage Paradigm in *Time* Magazine's 2011 Person of the Year Issue

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Abstract

Time's 2011 Person of the Year issue honoring the achievements of "The Protester" is a primer for successful activism in the digital age, one that should be followed if protesters wish to stay relevant, continue their work, and ensure that they can gain access to *Time*'s journalists and photographers. An ideological analysis of the magazine's 2011 Person of the Year issue demonstrates that just as the issue celebrates the renewed impact of organized protest and the heroic actions of the protester, it also foreshadows a change in our collective memory of protest and dissent, and does so by continuing, through development of new themes, the marginalization of activism. "The Protester" is proposed by *Time* as an "exemplary model" of activism (Lule, 2001, p. 15), one that will now compete for the public's attention. This commemorative representation introduces readers to a professional paradigm of protest.

Keywords: newsmagazines, protest, activism, ideological analysis

Introduction

On December 14, 2011, *Time* magazine Managing Editor Richard Stengel announced on NBC's Today Show that "The Protester" had been selected as the publication's "Person of the Year" for 2011. Among the well-known figures beaten out for the honor were Admiral William McRaven, who led the Seal Team Six raid that resulted in the death of Al Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden; Wisconsin Republican Congressman Paul Ryan, known primarily at the time for his controversial national budget plan; and Kate Middleton, who became Catherine, Duchess of Cambridge, upon her celebrated marriage in April 2011 to Prince William, heir to the British throne. "There was a lot of consensus among our people," Stengel said. "It felt right" ("*Time* Magazine Reveals," 2011).

The year saw numerous activism-fueled triumphs for democracy, including the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement, whose grassroots activism, begun in the spring of 2011, captured the nation's attention and soon forced income inequality and corporate greed onto the public agenda; the "Arab Spring," the emergence of a civilian government in Myanmar following the 2010 release of pro-democracy activist Aung San Suu Kyi after 15 years of house arrest (Beaumont, 2011); and the decision to award the Nobel Peace Prize to

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Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, social worker and peace activist Leymah Gbowee, also of Liberia, and Yemeni journalist Tawakkol Karman for “their nonviolent struggle for the safety of women and women’s rights” (Sayare, 2011, para. 1). These developments and others compelled *Time* to celebrate the significance of what one of the author’s students proudly called the “universal protester” (Qureshi, 2011).

But an alternative reading of the *Time* Person of the Year (POY) issue is possible. The issue signals the emergence of a professional paradigm in the treatment of protest by journalists, where focus in news media coverage is on how protest happens as much as on the issues that motivate protesters or on the impact of activism. While this finding must be confirmed by additional research on a larger swath of news media coverage, this essay describes a significant shift in how activism and dissent is covered by the news media.

Literature Review

In his landmark book *The Whole World is Watching*, Todd Gitlin (1980) argued that journalists at mainstream news organizations such as *Time* tend to “process” activism. Reporters carefully control the protester’s image; they “absorb what can be absorbed into the dominant structure of definitions and push the rest to the margins of social life” (p. 5). In covering Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in the 1960s, journalists from CBS News and *The New York Times* directed most of their attention to “single grievances” offered by SDS members that could be addressed by those in power without “altering fundamental social relations” (p. 122). Reporters tended to cover “the event, not the condition; the conflict, not the consensus; the fact that ‘advances the story,’ not the one that explains it,” Gitlin asserted (p. 122). For SDS, this meant that reporters undercounted its membership, relied on government officials for information and perspective, suggested that the group was unable to disseminate its message, and intimated that Communists could be counted among its members (Gitlin, 1980, p. 122). And when interacting with protesters, reporters targeted those who “closely matched prefabricated images of what an oppositional leader should look and sound like: theatrical, bombastic, and knowing and inventive in the ways of packaging messages” to attract a great deal of media attention (p. 154).

Evidence from news media coverage of activism supporting the “protest paradigm” exemplified in Gitlin’s work continues to accumulate. Journalists marginalize groups that pursue unpopular causes or that challenge hallowed ideas and institutions. Groups lacking money and other resources receive less coverage than well-heeled groups. Activists are portrayed as deviant and erratic and as seeking out violent confrontation with law enforcement (Bishop, 2003; Gitlin, 1980; Hertog & McLeod, 1995; Small, 1994). Journalists tend to interview only the spokespeople for activist groups (Goldenberg, 1975). Gans (1979) contended that broadcast journalists typically interview the most eccentric protesters. Reporters pay limited attention to the ideas and ideals that compel protesters to action (Hertog & McLeod, 1995), preventing full discussion of issues raised today through increasingly media-savvy, technology-driven activism. Their reliance on official sources and

deployment of public opinion to distance activists from the mainstream offers dominant institutions even more ideological cover, as do the lengths to which journalists go to include the views of counter-demonstrators and representatives of dominant institutions in their coverage of activism (Small, 1994).

Characterizations of protesters by the news media still often position them in what Hallin (1986) calls the “sphere of deviance”— a rhetorically defined place where journalists and public officials position individuals who challenge public consensus on an issue. Reporters build and fortify rhetorical boundaries between these individuals and the public by condemning and excluding them. Movement of an individual or issue into Hallin’s “sphere of legitimate controversy” is possible, but only if the dominant actors define the terms of debate. Journalists working within this sphere pay particular attention to objectivity, even if it means gutting the views of outliers. Those with divergent views can only wish for entry into Hallin’s “sphere of consensus,” where the institutions, ideas, and views we hold dear are kept and rhetorically protected. Journalists do not afford dissenters the chance to weigh in on an issue or to provoke dialogue (pp. 116-117).

Reporters refined and expanded on the frames identified by Gitlin in their coverage of the Iraq War (Bishop, 2003). The diversity of the antiwar movement was cast as a weakness. It lacked focus and struggled to define itself. Faceless, nameless protesters ran through the streets committing acts of destruction. Technology-savvy young people and aging Vietnam War protesters propelled the activism, but the latter group was dismissed as irrelevant. Some undertook protest, reporters suggested, because it was fashionable. Journalists corrected the tendency to undercount protesters, but subsequent coverage revealed a near-obsession with counting the number of protesters at each event. Arguments were reduced to descriptions of signs and chants. Reporters also asserted that the antiwar movement came out of nowhere and lacked continuity with earlier activism. Yet they also claimed that older and eccentric individuals, motivated by memories of the 1960s, were key practitioners of this new kind of activism (Bishop, 2003).

These additional frames exemplified the shift in news coverage of protest to what DiCicco (2010) has called the “public nuisance” paradigm. Here, protest is portrayed by the news media as annoying, ineffective, and unpatriotic. DiCicco contends the emergence of the public nuisance paradigm coincides with the nation’s movement to the conservative side of the ideological spectrum since the September 11 terrorist attacks and a resultant tendency of journalists, scared of being labeled “liberal,” to offer more time and space for conservatives to comment on events of the day. The growing popularity of Fox News, with both the public and envious competitors who ended up copying their approach to journalism also has fueled the paradigm’s rise, DiCicco contends.

The assertion by DeLuca and Peeples (2002) that the “public sphere” proposed by Jurgen Habermas (1989) has been eclipsed by what they describe as the “public screen” (p. 127) propels the paradigm shift posited in this essay. Activists have recognized that to get

their messages across, they must create and stage television-friendly events. Their actions must offer to journalists “novelty, polemic, confrontation, and controversy,” as Jha (2008) notes. To capture and hold a slot on the world’s agenda, activists must recast their messages so they highlight “images over words, emotions over rationality, speed over reflection, distraction over deliberation, slogans over arguments, the glance over the gaze, appearance over truth, the present over the past” (Postman, 1985, p. 133). Protesters must become fully vested participants in a media culture “in which images, sounds, and spectacles help produce the fabric of everyday life,” as Kellner (1995) contends, if they expect to influence people (p. 1). Rather than bemoan, as others have (e.g., Postman, 1985), the coarsening of debate and the supposed resultant decline in citizen empowerment, DeLuca and Peebles (2002) embrace what they see as a compelling, image-centric means of participating in a democracy (p. 127). DeLuca (1999) believes progressive activists in particular have had to craft message strategies with this in mind, given their ongoing marginalization by an increasingly distracted mainstream news media.

Thus, protest must be made to entertain. Only a spectacle— an “image event,” to use DeLuca’s (1999) term—will hold the public’s attention. Activists must now spend their time engaged in what DeLuca and Peebles (2002) call “imagefare” (p. 139), an approach that calls on activists to reject disruptive confrontation and focus their energies on staging dramatic events that will draw the attention of a public dealing with a constant barrage of media messages. Ideas critical of established power must be altered so that they entertain as well as inform; activists must embrace the idea of “critique through spectacle, not critique versus spectacle” (p. 134). While opportunities to enter the public discourse had been unavailable to activists, or were frustrated by narrow readings by journalists of their actions, a spot on what DeLuca and Peebles call the “public screen” is now relatively easy for the media-savvy activist to obtain, they argue. Still, activists must struggle to reach an overwhelmed audience whose “focused gaze has been replaced by the distracted look of the optical unconscious” (p. 135). It is thus even more important that information and argument give way to drama and manufactured controversy. The audience expects such stagecraft, the authors contend, even if it might impede genuine change or results in news coverage of activism that lacks depth. As Habermas cautioned, “the world fashioned by the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only” (1989, p. 171).

With the foregoing in mind, this essay is the author’s attempt to answer several questions:

- What does the *Time* Person of the Year issue suggest to readers about the effectiveness of recent protests?
- What is the preferred reading (Hall, 2000) of recent protests, suggested by the *Time* content?
- What is *Time* asking its readers to think about the typical protester?

- And perhaps most important, does commemoration of “The Protester” by *Time* signal the emergence of a new paradigm for news media coverage of protest?

Method

In May 2012, the author conducted an ideological analysis of content created by *Time*'s editors, writers, and photographers for its 2011 Person of the Year (December 26, 2011/January 2, 2012) issue. Despite a downturn in U.S. magazine readership, *Time* continues to reach more than three million people per week with its print edition. In 2012, *Time* was named Magazine of the Year by the American Society of Magazine Editors. The typical *Time* reader is nearly 50 years old, has attended or graduated from college, and earns nearly \$75,000 a year (www.timeplanner.com, 2012).

Analyzed were the cover image of “The Protester,” a one-page introductory piece by *Time* managing editor Richard Stengel about the factors that fueled the magazine's POY decision, noted writer Kurt Andersen's lengthy story about “The Protester,” a two-page spread of 40 protester photos preceding Andersen's piece, all accompanying photos and two sidebars, and a two-page map under the headline “The Protest Network” that highlighted the progress and struggles of protesters around the world. The analysis began with “a long preliminary soak” (Hall, 1975, p. 15) of the content followed by several additional close readings. Images and text were repeatedly and methodically studied. The author took extensive notes as the analysis progressed. Repeated readings allowed for the refinement of primary themes. Because the ideology of protest contained in the POY issue was of primary concern, news media coverage of *Time*'s announcement of its POY decision was excluded from analysis.

Following guidelines for ideological analysis suggested by Sonja Foss (2004), the author identified the “presented” and “suggested” elements in the *Time* content, identified and refined the main themes that emerged from the interplay of the terms, evidence, images, and arguments found in the content, and used those themes to suggest the ideology produced by the deployment by *Time* journalists of these elements, and project how *Time*'s preferred reading may function for *Time*'s audience (p. 214). Following Mitchell's (1995) suggestion, analysis of the images included in *Time*'s Person of the Year content was informed not by the question, “what do pictures mean?” but rather, “what do pictures *want*?” (original author's italics; p. 544). Stated a bit differently, what did the *Time* images and texts ask of its readers? Of additional relevance was Dana Cloud's (2004) extension of Michael Calvin McGee's (1980) seminal work on ideographs. McGee argued that ideographs are “historically and culturally grounded commonplace rhetorical terms that sum up and invoke identification with key social commitments.” They serve as the “vehicles through which ideologies or unconsciously shared idea systems that organize consent to a particular social system become rhetorically effective” (quoted in Cloud, p. 288). An ideograph has four primary characteristics: it must be “an ordinary language term found in political discourse” (McGee, p. 15); it must be a “high-order abstraction representing collective

commitment to a particular but equivocal and ill-defined normative goal; it “warrants the use of power, excuses behavior and belief which might otherwise be perceived as eccentric or antisocial, and guides behavior and belief into channels” accepted by society; and it is “culture bound,” by which McGee meant its evolution is determined by how it is appropriated and invoked. The meaning of an ideograph is thus contested over time, as history unfolds and groups vie for power.

Where McGee contends that only “actual words or terms” (p. 8) could constitute an ideograph, Cloud and other scholars (e.g. Winkler & Edwards, 1997) argue that images are similarly “central to the constitution of meanings” (Cloud, p. 288) and should be included in McGee’s definition. Images, writes Cloud, “can enact ideographs visually and index, or point to, the verbal slogans capturing society’s guiding abstractions” (p. 288). I contend that *Time*’s Person of the Year issue furnishes a set of ideographs that the reader and journalists who subsequently cover activism might use to organize and characterize their subsequent experience of protest. But as Hariman and Lucaites (2003) caution, for these ideographs to resonate, we—the public—must see ourselves in these representations found in these texts (p. 36).

Stuart Hall (1975) defined “ideology” as “the mental frameworks—the languages, concepts, categories, imagery of thought, and systems of representation—that different classes and social groups deploy in order to make sense of, define, figure out, and render intelligible the way society works” (p. 15). Ideology works, argues Grossberg (1991), “not merely by producing a system of meanings which purport to represent the world but rather, by producing its own system of meanings as the real, natural (i.e. experienced) one” (p. 145). One perspective on the world, on an issue, dominates, pushing alternative perspectives to the cultural margins. Opposing views are permitted to exist, but adherents to the dominant ideology “define[...] the limits within which” they are expressed, Cloud asserts (1994, p. 304). They are made to seem abnormal.

But as Terry Eagleton (1991) cautions, ideology is more than “meaning in the service of power” (Thompson, 1990, p. 7). Dominance by one system of meanings in the cultural narrative on a subject does not automatically unify an audience, he suggests. An ideology propagated by dominant social groups does not always bring about cohesion. Dominated groups have “their own rich, resistant cultures” and do not give them up without a struggle (p. 36). In addition, these groups make use of the same rhetorical devices to sustain their ideology as more powerful groups do. What we come to believe is a mix of the values affirmed by dominant groups and “notions which spring more directly” from our own experience (p. 36). “If there is nothing beyond power,” Eagleton writes, “then there is nothing that is being blocked, categorized and regimented”—and dominant social groups would not concern themselves with challenges to their authority. Those with power see their ideology in a state of constant negotiation with those held by less powerful groups; this is a key source of their authority, Eagleton explains.

It is more illuminating, Eagleton argues, to approach ideology as “an organizing social force which actively constitutes human subjects at the roots of their lived experience” (p. 222). In ideology we find “forms of value and belief relevant” to our “specific social tasks and to the general reproduction of the social order” (p. 222). While Eagleton recognized that “the diffusion of dominant values and beliefs” by powerful groups “has some part to play” (1976, p. 36) in that reproduction, he asserts that ideology nevertheless “contributes to the constitution of social interests, rather than passively reflecting pre-given positions” (1991, p. 222). Ideology reveals how likely it is a claim or assertion will emerge and influence people against the backdrop of “certain power struggles central to the reproduction...of a whole form of social life” (p. 222). Application of Eagleton’s ideas enabled the author to explore the historical conditions that informed the *Time* content as well as to explain the “absences,” “silences” (p. 89), “ruptures” and “disorders” (p. 91) in the ideology of dissent that emerged from that content.

Carolyn Kitch’s (1999) assertion that journalists consider themselves “the public historians of American culture” (p. 121) also informs the analysis. A “blend of authority and interpretation” enables news magazines such as *Time* to “explain what American life ‘means’ at any given moment and over time” (Kitch, 2003, p. 188). To make these explanations clear, journalists turn to story forms familiar to their readers. “They tell the same stories they have told before and will tell again,” Kitch (2002) writes. Past, present and future events are combined into “a single, ongoing tale” (1999, p. 122) that sustains the journalist’s authority as keeper of public memory, a role built on the audience’s confidence in the journalist’s “access to the truth” (Bird & Dardenne, 1997, p. 345) as well as on the audience’s fluency in and comfort with certain narratives. Retelling of these narratives provides “a confirming, reinforcing version” of our values and of ourselves, as Fiske and Hartley (1978) argue (pp. 85-86). Here, we are brought together to receive *Time*’s take on what the act of protest means and how it can be most effectively conducted at this important point in time (Kitch, 2003, p. 188). As Eagleton instructs, my investigation of the *Time* POY content attempted to show “who is saying what to whom for what purposes” (p. 9). I contend that while *Time*’s chief purpose was to celebrate the success of recent protests in an attempt to satisfy its readers, it ended up also providing a how-to guide for socially acceptable protest. Achieving cultural relevance now requires that protestors, in short, join the professional ranks. They can do so, *Time*’s POY issue suggests, by following these instructions derived from the ideology suggested in its content:

Embrace Celebrity Treatment by Journalists

The *Time* POY issue content suggests that both the Arab Spring and Occupy protesters have already become quite skilled at some of the aspects of “imagefare” described by DeLuca & Peeples (2002, p. 139). They are quite adept at attracting media and public attention, ensuring that journalists like those who work for *Time* will continue to receive a steady diet of compelling images suggestive of celebrity about their activities. Journalists will also likely continue to emphasize the use by protesters of social media. Moreover, activists

have effected significant change with their aggressive push toward “do-it-yourself” democracy (Andersen, 2011, p. 78). But *Time*’s editors, reporters, and photographers suggest that to achieve even more, protesters must continue what *Time* characterizes as an evolution of the activist from nuisance to professional. Their efforts must be more polished. They must channel their passion into working within the system. Activists have successfully pushed their causes into Hallin’s (1986) “sphere of legitimate controversy,” but any hope of entry into the “sphere of consensus” (pp. 116-117) hinges on ridding their efforts of the last vestiges of marginalized 1960s-style protest and continuing to highlight those aspects of their activities that encourage celebrity treatment by journalists.

Activists can move toward achieving greater relevance by embracing celebrity treatment by journalists. This tendency is articulated on pages 54 and 55 of the Person of the Year issue. *Time*’s editors ran 40 photos of protesters from around the world in four rows sandwiching a large, white-type-on-black background all-caps headline: “THE PROTESTER.” All but one of the photos represent an individual. Several of the photos—for example, one of Philadelphia police captain Ray Lewis, arrested for his support of Occupy Philadelphia protesters—appeared adjacent to Andersen’s cover story, enlarged, cropped, or blown up, as was the case with the Lewis photo. Lewis appeared from the waist up in the photo assemblage; the photo adjacent to the Andersen story was tightly cropped around his face. Pullout quotes appeared in or opposite the photos. Text of the quotes appeared in black type, their attributions in gray type; both texts and attributions were capitalized. Several new photos, including one of a hand holding a spent tear gas canister launched at protesters in Egypt and a smaller photo of a broken iPhone owned by a Syrian anti-government protester, also appeared with Andersen’s story.

The photos, particularly the close-ups, at first resemble mug shots, suggesting that despite success in moving their causes on to the public’s agenda, protesters are still thought of as rabble-rousers. But this photographic technique is also popular with journalists who cover celebrities, as in *Newsweek*’s annual “Oscar Roundtable” issue. Tight close-ups of Oscar contenders appeared both in the print issue and in the magazine’s online Oscar coverage. The *Time* POY photos also recall recent well-known Benetton advertising campaigns. For some time, the company has engaged in what Tinic (1997) calls “controversy advertising,” in which an issue is raised, but neither solutions nor information for readers wishing to volunteer or offer support is offered. The company expressed the belief that politically charged images promote their clothing more effectively than the clothing itself; the images enable Benetton to market “beyond the sale” (Falk, 1997, p. 66).

But by subjecting protesters to celebrity treatment, *Time* decontextualizes the protesters and their impact. The protesters have been pulled from the front lines, or are reconstituting their experiences there, to have these photos taken. The photo spread highlights their deftness with technology and their ability to attract media attention and suggests a belief by *Time*’s editors that readers would be more comfortable engaging with these activists if they were packaged like celebrities. Symbolism and theater are the most

significant aspects of current activism (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002). Moreover, packaging protesters in this fashion may dilute their ability to recruit additional protesters. These images do not urge readers to grab a protest sign and “radically change the world we live in” (Williamson, 1978, p. 14).

Learn to Effectively Conduct “Imagefare”

Time’s POY issue supplied detailed instructions for protesters who might be wondering how to effectively take part in “imagefare.” Mastery of the instructions will expedite the activist’s evolution from amateur nuisance to polished professional. Included were three sidebars and a world map depicting “The Protest Network.” Photos of protesters and protest artifacts, some repeated from the two-page introductory spread, punctuated the story copy. In the first sidebar, readers learned “How To Occupy A Square,” drawing on the experience of the Arab Spring protesters (p. 61). In the introduction, Andersen noted that the year’s protests “were often long-term affairs” (p. 61). Future protesters were instructed to set up checkpoints to exclude officials bent on ending protests, build a stage from which to “broadcast chants, speeches, and concerts to the crowd,” and make sure there was enough electricity to run their devices (p. 61). A proper protest library should be set up, featuring “reading material” from authors such as Howard Zinn (p. 74). Andersen called Zinn’s book *A People’s History of the United States* “a seminal leftist revision of American history” (p. 74). Protesters also found much inspiration from Antonio Gramsci’s *Prison Notebooks*. Finally, “celebrity Slovenian philosopher” Slavoj Zizek, the author of *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, who addressed OWS protesters, continued to be a “cheerleader from afar” (p. 74).

The “new generation” of protesters, as *Time* managing editor Richard Stengel called them, can avail itself effectively of new gadgets and social media. They are skillful and media savvy. The public no longer has to be concerned with the erratic and drug-addled behavior of participants in the 1960s counterculture. Stengel contended social social media and new devices “did not cause these movements”—a nuance missed by many of his colleagues—“but they kept them alive and connected.” Facebook and Twitter “allowed us to watch,” comfortable on the sidelines—also our vantage point for recent wars, thanks to sporadic news coverage attenuated further by embedding of reporters—“and it spread the virus of protest.” Stengel’s use of the word “virus” is his only pejorative reference to the protesters. So long as they minimize the political content in their tweets, as Kurt Andersen instructed in his story, they will succeed. These tools “helped enable and turbocharge” physical protest, “allowing protesters to mobilize more nimbly and communicate with one another and wider world more effectively” (p. 82). As if lecturing a university class, Andersen reminded readers “new media and blogger are now quasi synonyms for protest and protester” [original author’s italics].

The theme of technology continues in the map of protest, beginning with the two-page spread’s headline: “The Protest Network.” The copy notes that protest, once it started in Algeria, quickly went “viral.” This references illness as well as technology. “Their demands

were very different, but they found inspiration in one another,” reads the copy under the headline (p. 76). This sentiment is echoed in additional copy that stretches across the bottom of both pages that describes how protesters in one country have been inspired by the earlier efforts of protesters in other countries. *Time’s* editors reinforce the progression with arrows between each description. To organize for readers the spread of protest, the arrows are numbered, beginning with demonstrations in Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, and concluding with protests in Burma and Russia. Circular photos of varying sizes accompany short descriptions of what protesters have thus far achieved and the setbacks they have experienced. Protesters are shown shouting, enduring tear gas, holding signs, marching, and throwing rocks.

Yet absent on the *Time* cover is any suggestion of the role of social media in galvanizing recent activism. The protester is not tweeting, shooting a video for YouTube, or using Facebook to update others on her progress, nor are there discernible references to social media in the background images. *Time’s* editors likely omitted social media as a nod to their older readers. And since the cover image positions the reader in a face-to-face confrontation with the protester, social media might not be necessary, unless she would go on to post about the events while remaining anonymous here. Referencing social media also would have confirmed the full impact of recent protest—perhaps too full for some readers who might consider it too intrusive or destructive, for those for whom life still may unfold on the public sphere rather than on the “public screen,” as DeLuca and Peebles (2002) assert. The protesters in the background are doing the legwork, while the *Time* protester acts as their more press-friendly public face. *Time’s* foregrounding of the protester asserts that her tactics are about as far as protesters can go if the dominant institutions—even in their newly democratic form across the Middle East—are to be preserved. New governments and old institutions remain “too big to fail.”

Stengel’s introduction is laid out in the shape of a closed and raised fist. The copy is white; the background is black, suggesting the “Black Power” salute given at the 1968 Summer Olympics by John Carlos and Tommie Smith. Stengel’s use of past tense consigns recent activism to history. Recent protest “was understood [original author’s italics] differently in different places.” This “was not a technological revolution,” he wrote. Protesters “kept” in touch with another with the latest technological devices. The revolution “was [author’s italics] a human one, of hearts and minds.” Such phrasing suggests that protesters have completed their task and that they should be prepared to move on. Despite their success, Stengel wrote extensively of ideals, giving recent activism a preliminary feel. “The meaning of democracy is that the people rule,” Stengel explained. “And they did, if not at the ballot box”—where systemic change in a democracy is achieved—“then in the streets.” Invoking the language of technology, he said protest “is in some ways the source code for democracy—and evidence of the lack of it” (p. 53). Stengel applauded the grass-roots origin of the movement’s leaders, but the timidity in his rhetoric conveys a sense that their influence is limited to the movement alone.

Learn from the Successes and Failures of Other Activist Groups

The *Time* POY issue's cover image primarily references the Arab Spring. Readers see an enhanced rendering of a young woman wearing a wool hat and scarf; only her penetrating eyes are visible. Over her shoulders in the background are shadow-like images of Occupy Wall Street protesters. Over her face are the capitalized words "THE PROTESTER." This label positions *Time*'s activist as anonymous. She has had her say and, thanks to *Time*'s editors, has been contained—willingly, it seems—in what amounts to a rhetorical protest zone. The cover image suggests that today's protestors have accepted this tactic, almost as a trade-off for the increased visibility that their mastery of "imagefare" will bring them. A professional protester endures, rather than complains, about such treatment. And rather than name one of the activists to represent the resurgent significance of activism, *Time* subsumed strands of activism in a single image. The Occupy movement is relegated to the image's background, to monochromatic hints of its members' presence in the scarf covering the protester's mouth and nose. On their signs are only vague references to their desire to find "good jobs" and a call for younger protesters to capture power and distance themselves from the "ivory tower." These images reference claims by journalists that the Occupy movement lacked a clear message and might have been trying to accomplish too much. Missing from the image is any suggestion of whom the protesters were fighting; we do not see banks, corporations, or representations of Wall Street, nor do we see the oppressive Arab leaders who cracked down on the protesters. Thus, while both groups have stimulated dialogue and effected some change, the cover image suggests they remain outside the halls of power.

The choice by *Time* to represent other protesters in shadow—they appear etched on the main image, suggesting fragile glass—conveys an impression of obsolescence. A faint image of a protester with arms outstretched near the main protester's right cheek and jaw seems to reference the young woman wailing near a Kent State student killed by National Guard troops in 1970. To her lower left are the images three anguished shouting protesters that could just as easily have appeared in a horror film dream sequence. Most of the images in and near her face and scarf are indistinguishable, but *Time*'s intent in including them is clear: to suggest that violent, less professional protest, no matter how zealously undertaken or temporarily successful—is a dangerous, destructive activity.

Occupy protesters have further to go if they are to have sustained impact. They need to become braver and better organized. They must no longer simply present for comment their most eccentric members to the news media. Failure to adapt will cause them to remain, in Gitlin's (1980) words, at the "margins of social life" (p. 5). Occupy protesters are mired in a perpetual state of becoming. Imagery of past protests is invoked to remind readers—and warn would-be activists—that a return to those tactics will move Occupy off the public's agenda. Such are the pitfalls of activism undertaken on the "public screen" (DeLuca & Peeples, 2002, p. 127), where journalists laud protesters as much for their ability to skillfully convey images using the latest in technology as for bravery in the face of a brutal regime or moving their nations toward democracy. Lauding activists for their success comes at the

expense of discussing their causes in greater detail. Thus, the admiration emanating from the *Time* content continues the marginalization of activism detailed by Gitlin and others.

Content from the *Time* issue suggests that Arab Spring protesters—with their Occupy counterparts lagging behind—are passing Cindy Sheehan and other Iraq War protesters on their way into the public eye from Hallin’s “sphere of deviance” (1986, pp. 116-117). Their success in mobilizing large numbers of people and effecting significant change, and the concurrent increase in news media coverage, has moved their causes, at least for now, into Hallin’s “sphere of legitimate controversy” (p. 116). Thanks to the work of journalists, more discussion about the protests represented in the *Time* image has occurred. Still, the protester’s presence on the cover of a magazine published by a multibillion dollar media conglomerate indicates that a particular way of shaping the debate has been achieved—the tennis match style of reporting that so infuriates critics of the U.S. media system but which ensures that “objectivity” is sustained (Schudson, 1978, 2003). As Hallin notes, debate is allowed to happen while parties occupy the sphere of legitimate controversy, but only according to the terms set by the more powerful participants so that the environment in which advertisers hawk their wares is not spoiled (Andersen, 1995).

But even the braver and more organized Arab Spring protesters—practitioners of “do-it-yourself democratic politics”—soon found that “democracy is difficult and sometimes a little scary” (p. 78). Having ended several oppressive regimes, they learned that “aftermaths are never as splendid as uprisings,” Andersen wrote (p. 78). To be sure, they should not adopt a truly egalitarian approach—the OWS model. “Once everybody has a say, everybody has a say [author’s italics],” Andersen stressed (p. 78). Instead, they must focus on overcoming the “hubris of youth”—and turn the next phases of change over to “better disciplined political organizations” (p. 78). Nascent democracies will thrive if they recognize their own “naïveté about the realities of democratic policies (p. 78).” Once again, members of the Occupy movement must do more. Just holding on to the “moral high ground” will no longer be enough (p. 82). “The youth and the other liberals don’t yet have the stomach for democratic hardball,” Andersen explained (p. 82). They are hampered by their “need for absolute consensus” on issues, which Andersen suggested may “devolve into a feckless Bartlebyism—passive resistance, preferring not to” (p. 82). Occupy protesters were even unable to understand the role of social media in expediting activism. “Calling the Arab uprisings Facebook and YouTube and Twitter revolutions is not, it turns out, just glib, wishful American overstatement,” Andersen noted (p. 82).

Andersen drew several additional distinctions between the Occupy and Arab Spring protesters. Arab Spring protesters are brave; they risk their lives for their causes. They were attacked, beaten, harassed, shot, injured, and killed. Occupy protesters are positioned as hopeful but disorganized, at times clumsy—and envious of their counterparts’ bravery. “I think other parts of the world have more balls than we do,” said one Occupy Oakland protester (p. 61). While Arab Spring protesters jumped intrepidly into the fray, the Occupy movement needed a jolt of coalescing inspiration from its founders, AdBuster editors Kalle

Lasn and Micah White. The Occupy movement is positioned as evolving, under construction, while Arab Spring protesters are, in Andersen's words, "ready to rumble in Egypt and Tunisia" (p. 89) if the fragile democracies they helped to launch threaten to unravel. The Arab Spring protesters have set an example; they are vital, on the move, making progress; members of the Occupy movement were still struggling to figure out "what 'Occupy Wall Street' might mean" (p. 73). Throughout the piece, Andersen suggests the Occupy movement's beginnings were modest. Lasn and White had to cajole their "smallish cadre of Twitter followers" with the "dream of insurrection of corporate rule" (p. 73). So while Arab Spring protesters had quickly mobilized, the Occupy movement had to be "nudged" to accept the idea of a public encampment. And they did not rush to the encampments; they "showed up," Andersen noted, as if to suggest it was a struggle (p. 73). The day OWS took up residence in Manhattan's Zuccotti Park, it was "sunny, mid-60s, perfect," he wrote (p. 73). So while protesters in Tunisia and Egypt were dodging bullets and fending off overzealous police and the military, the conditions had to be perfect for Occupy activists to take part, Andersen suggested.

Reject Outmoded Models of Protest

Time puts the finishing touches on the professional paradigm by repeatedly discrediting older models of activism in the POY issue's pages. The images and text suggest we also put aside previous conceptions of protest by oversimplifying and overstating how and why protest occurred in the past (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003). When activists "took to the streets" during the 1960s, 70s, and 80s "to declare themselves opposed [author's italics]," Andersen explained, "it was the very definition of news." Activists "were prime makers of history" (p. 56). He described protest as "the natural continuation of politics by other means," as if earlier activism occurred without opposition. And then, suddenly, protest disappeared from the cultural scene, Andersen suggests, pushed aside by two decades of greatly improved living standards. Our affluence-fueled indifference, Andersen noted, caused us to view protests as "obsolete, quaint, the equivalent of cavalry to mid-20th-Century war." Even large-scale protests like the "Battle of Seattle" in 1999 were "ineffectual" and "irrelevant" (p. 58) and only served to leave us "freshly shocked and bedoozled" (p. 89). Historical forces that caused activism to disappear rendered protest irrelevant, even obsolete. "Street protests looked like pointless emotional sideshows," Andersen explained (p. 58). We experienced dissent only in "pop-culture fantasy," in popular music and the Matrix film series.

Then, out of nowhere, thanks to the Occupy movement and the Arab Spring, protest "became the defining trope of our time," Andersen claimed. The protester celebrated by *Time* "once again became a maker of history" (p. 58). Andersen contrasted the sudden success of the Arab Spring with the raucous behavior of protesters who in the 1960s took the nation on a turbulent ride. Today's protesters are to be admired for "bringing down regimes and immediately changing the course of history," Andersen asserted (p. 66). They had "more

skin in the game” than the antiwar protesters who self-indulgently put on “a countercultural pageant” that divided the country (p. 66).

But by establishing the disconnect with 1960s protest and by arguing that today’s activism so quickly crystallized and affected billions of people, the *Time* content actually downplayed its success. For example, Stengel celebrated the bravery of protesters; they did not relent, even when met with “a cloud of tear gas or a hail of bullets.” But he then conveyed the sense that despite their bravery, so much remains to be done. He referred twice to the “idea of democracy,” as if activists are still trying to figure out what it means and how to achieve it. It is a concept in a perennial state of testing. Stengel argued that protesters “literally embodied the idea that individual actions can bring collective, colossal change.” Like discussing the “idea” of democracy, using the word “can” could lead a reader to conclude that these activists must still capitalize on their potential, and that all activists struggle about significant change. Stengel highlighted the preliminary nature of recent activism by acknowledging that protesters had tapped into “a global sense of restless promise” and had successfully “shined a light on human dignity.” Stengel juxtaposed his assessment of the work left to be done with premature congratulations, crediting protesters with “upending governments and the conventional wisdom.” Such language is typical of journalistic commemoration (Kitch, 1999, 2002, 2003). But it leaves readers with an incomplete sense of the protesters’ investment in their cause and of the intractability of the oppression they fight. It also conveys the impression that each new group of activists starts from scratch.

But stripped of its hippie pomp, this is the kind of activism, one built on mastery of “imagefare,” that the nation can rally behind. It can come together quickly, with “breathtaking momentum,” as Andersen asserted (p. 72), but it must be done professionally. Impact is almost an afterthought. These activists may only temporarily fill slots on the public’s agenda; even the well-covered Tea Party has “outlasted its expected shelf life,” Andersen suggested (p. 61). Yet the content makes clear that unmooring current protest from its turbulent past makes it more palatable for *Time*’s readers, and more significantly clears the way for other journalists and the public to build on the rhetorical foundation laid by *Time*’s editors for this new paradigm of protest. This is the story that *Time* is suggesting that we internalize and retell, a story about a slicker, more acceptable, process-driven, almost “as needed” approach to dissent.

Conclusion

Time’s 2011 Person of the Year issue introduces us to a professional paradigm of news media protest coverage to replace the nuisance paradigm posited by DiCicco (2010). The *Time* POY content achieves this change by providing a set of ideographs that journalists and the public can use to organize and characterize their experience of activism. To be sure, this analysis takes place before we fully know whether the ideographs proposed by *Time* will or have become “rhetorically effective,” to use Cloud’s words (p. 288) in gaining traction

amid competing ideologies of protest provided by the activists themselves, by law enforcement and the government, and by other newsgathering organizations, as Eagleton might suggest. While public sentiment in the U.S. has been supportive of the Arab Spring protestors and the aims, at least, of their Occupy counterparts, a “logic of public moral response” based on these and other texts surrounding recent dissent, has yet to fully form (Hariman & Lucaites, 2003, p. 40). It is beyond the scope of this paper to identify the impressions of dissent activated by this content. Nevertheless, *Time* has, in the role of public historian, purposefully inserted the reader into a constructed version of protest, one which foregrounds style and process over substance; it remains to be seen how it will be adapted as the public makes sense of what recent protests have accomplished and contemplates the future of activism. It is at this writing unclear if the *Time* content will be included among the “resources for public argument” (Hariman & Lucaites, p. 49). While emergence of the professional paradigm is a significant shift in news media coverage of protest, its existence as a site of ideological struggle must be confirmed in future research that analyzes a wider range of media content.

Nevertheless, *Time*'s editors clearly encourage a reading of the POY issue as a primer on activism in the digital age that must be followed if protesters wish to continue their work, stay relevant, and ensure they can continue to attract the attention of journalists and the public. *Time*'s protester must be an enthusiastic practitioner of “imagefare,” a nod to the assertion that our collective memory is now fueled largely by image-centered coverage of events. The news media should no longer look for scruffy, eccentric, or confrontational protesters when covering future activism, *Time*'s editors warn. Instead, the *Time* content urges them to seek out only those activists who have recognized that images “are the place where collective social action, individual identity and the symbolic imagination meet—the nexus between culture and politics” (Hartley, 1992, p. 3). “The Protester” on the *Time* cover is made for the media: interchangeable, not terribly controversial, and anonymous—yet also effective, if temporarily, perhaps due to her public relations acumen and skill with social media. She is a protester perfect for an age characterized by love of prefabricated celebrities. Yet at the same time, the configuration of elements in the *Time* cover image suggest that she is a follower, not a charismatic leader who could rally her fellow activists. She is nameless, just one of thousands of brave individuals who have pushed for democratic governments abroad and sought to empower the “99 percent” through the Occupy movement. This is a warning, born of *Time*'s still significant place in the media universe, to activists not to revert to the marginalized models of protest.

Through the use of metonymy, *Time*'s photographers affirm that protesters must craft their messages so they favor “images over words, emotions over rationality, speed over reflection, distraction over deliberation, slogans over arguments, the glance over the gaze, appearance over truth, the present over the past,” as DeLuca and Peebles contend (p. 133). In one of the photos accompanying Andersen's cover story, a Wisconsin woman holds a sign that reads “resist, recall, replace, rejoice,” and claims she will run for office (p. 66). Such an approach improves a protester's chances of gaining attention by making the protester safe for

the public to consume. Photos appearing adjacent to Andersen's cover story continue the Benetton theme suggested in the introductory photo spread. We see Mannoubia Bouazizi, mother of the produce vendor whose decision to set himself on fire was the catalyst for revolution in Tunisia. Some of the photos, like the one of Bouazizi, are accompanied by short recollections or reflections about the protests and their impact. "The people want the fall of the field marshal," read a sign held by an Egyptian protester (p. 64). "When God wants to bring in change, he needs a vehicle of change, and I became that vehicle," said a protester from India (p. 66).

While "The Protester" is for *Time* an "exemplary model" of activism (Lule, 2001, p. 15), Arab Spring protesters are closer to embodying the model than those in the Occupy movement. Protesters in Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia captured the world's attention and earned its admiration for defeating oppressive regimes; Occupy protesters moved some of their many causes on to the national agenda. But while their Arab Spring counterparts are busy promoting democracy, Occupy protesters, *Time's* editors assert, must continue to build their organization, refocus their efforts, and enlist new members. Most important, they must continue to hone their "imagefare" skills. They cannot be satisfied with increased public awareness and reliance by journalists who cover them on eccentric spokespeople. But rather than trying to inject a strand of discourse that contemplates truly alternative approaches to activism, both groups—and all activist groups that come after them—should follow the instructions laid out by *Time*. Because a professional approach to protest is advanced by *Time* as the "defining political mode" (Andersen, p. 89), Occupy protesters must move away from older, invalidated models of protest and follow the example of what *Time's* journalists have positioned as their braver, less self-involved counterparts on the other side of the world.

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