The Green Scarf for Abortion Rights: Affective Contagion and Artistic Reinventions of Movement Symbols

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A scarf is an article of women’s clothing often worn ornamentally, to liven up an outfit. It can also be worn in a utilitarian way to protect against the wind or sun. Scarves have a long cultural history that links affects with gender in the West, and particularly in Latin America. They are associated with female beauty, grace, and modesty. How can an object so strongly associated with cultural conventions of femininity become a symbol of the fight for reproductive freedom and justice? The case of the triangular green pañuelo [scarf]\(^1\) of the \textit{Campana Nacional por el Derecho al Aborto Legal, Seguro y Gratuito} [National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion]\(^2\) in Argentina merits discussion. The case goes beyond the ability of this object-symbol to disrupt a repertoire of conventional affects and meanings. This disruption, in the context of Argentine political culture, was achieved by the emblematic white scarves of the \textit{Madres de Plaza de Mayo} [Mothers of Plaza de Mayo] who stood...
against the last military dictatorship (1976–1983) to denounce the forced disappearance of their children. The triangular green scarf carries on that legacy of tenacity and courage in the fight for human rights, but it also mobilizes new affective repertoires that were catalyzed throughout the extraordinary series of protests that occurred during the first parliamentary debate on the legalization of abortion in Argentina in 2018. Those events broadened the political and affective strength of the scarf, making it a transnational symbol of the fight for abortion rights in Latin America.

In this chapter, I analyze the trajectory of this symbol in Argentina and Chile until early 2020. Both countries had, until very recently, highly restrictive legislation. In Argentina, abortion was criminalized by the Penal Code since 1921, but exceptions were established for cases of rape or risk to the woman’s health or life (although, in practice, access is very limited). In December 2020 abortion until the 14th week of pregnancy was legalized. In Chile, a reform approved in 2017 ended penalization in all cases and allowed abortion for three reasons: when the woman’s life is at risk, when there are fetal abnormalities incompatible with life, and in cases of rape. Both countries also have active movements for abortion rights that have developed various and innovative strategies and arguments. This historical political effort achieved astonishing momentum during the first Argentine parliamentary debate. The green scarf played a central role, and Chile was the first country that took this symbol created in Argentina as its own. Feminist collectives engaged in artistic activism in both countries used the symbol to create new forms of protest. What is the role of affects in these processes of political and symbolic “contagion?” What contribution has artistic activism made to the creation of new repertoires of protest in which the body and affects play a key role?

The classic literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries on social protest and group psychology held that phenomena related to collective action were determined by passions. It was assumed that protests, uprisings, and rebellions arose from irrational impulses that caused the individual and their intellectual functions to become lost in the rise of “the masses.” From this point of view, “contagion” was a central concept for explaining how protests cycles grew and were coordinated. In fact, the very use of the term “contagion” shows how these phenomena were considered to be pathological and irrational (Snow 2013). In response to this biased and disparaging discourse, studies of social movements in the 1970s began to use conceptual models that instead postulated the rationality of political actors, of their modes of organization, and of collective action strategies. Therefore, in more recent
literature, the idea of “contagion” has been replaced by the concept of “diffusion” to describe how “movement actors are highly attuned to the actions of other actors, borrowing or imitating tactics, frames, slogans, and so forth when deemed advantageous” (Soule 2004: 295).

This chapter follows a different conceptual thread to analyze the role of emotions and affects in the expansion of the symbol of the green scarf in Chile and Argentina. First, I use elements of sociological perspectives that, since the 1990s, have held that emotions are not merely irrational impulses but rather central elements to understanding social movements and protests (Goodwin et al. 2000, 2001; Jasper 2011). These perspectives can be helpful in analyzing both the emotional repertoires mobilized by the green scarf and its historical weight. As I mentioned above, this symbol draws on the powerful political and emotional repertoire associated with the white scarf of the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. The white scarf mobilizes emotions such as female courage, determination, and hope. The green scarf rekindles that emotional repertoire and renews it with emotions like rebellion and joy.

Also relevant to this work are studies on affects, which, within the humanities, have reexamined the classical conceptual vocabulary of “contagion” from a critical perspective. This is the case of Teresa Brennan (2004) and her analysis of the “transmission of affect.” Rather than discarding the idea of “contagion,” Brennan proposes an examination of affect as a material and energetic phenomenon that questions the very idea of the individual, which arises from the interaction with others and with the environment. In this sense, the concept of “atmosphere” is also relevant: “Atmospheres are thus modes in which the world shows up or coalesces into an indivisible and intensive situation or in which a group of bodies comes to exist as a felt collective” (Riedel 2019: 85). Specifically, recent studies have shown that sustaining contemporary spaces of protest is strongly associated with the creation of intense affective atmospheres that involve the body (Runkel 2018). These conceptual perspectives can be useful to understand the ways in which the green scarf has managed to catalyze powerful affective energies and create renewed atmospheres of protest.

Although the aesthetic and the visual are central elements in collective political action, emphasis has generally been placed on its more “rational” aspects. Both academic studies and social movements themselves are part of a logocentric culture in which the visual tends to be considered a mere illustration of ideas (Doerr and Teune 2012). “In this
view symbols are superficial crowd pleasers (…) and might be regarded as somehow irrational, appealing to primeval emotions and gross populism” (Mac Ginty 2003: 235). However, other perspectives have pointed out the importance of symbols and images as resources for protest, argumentation frameworks, and the development of collective identities and emotions (Doerr et al. 2013). The symbols used by social movements can be interpreted as “visual tropes” that identify different activist causes and organizations, transmit complex political messages, raise awareness, and certify actions taken by a movement (Goodnow 2006). Specifically, the symbolic function of color is important to the history of feminisms, in which the use of ribbons and articles of clothing of certain colors date back to the suffrage movement (Sawer 2007). Recent studies on protests in South Korea have also highlighted the role of colors and symbols for their ability to transmit interpretations and express complex affective repertoires (Kim 2018). In this context, “the protest’s affective aestheticism” has been a useful concept to understand “the significance and agency of the visual conventions that were created during the protests” (Sarfati and Chung 2018: 568).

Studies on the visual productions associated with abortion rights struggles in Argentina and Chile have paid particular attention to the strategies employed by the countermovement, including the insistent use of images of fetuses to produce moral panic and terror (Olea 2001; Felitti 2011; Laudano 2012; Vacarezza 2012; Gudiño Bessone 2014). Other studies have analyzed the creative strategies of art and activism that challenge dominant representations of abortion (Gutiérrez 2011; Rosa 2012; Antivilo Peña 2015; Vivaldi and Stutzin 2017; Vacarezza 2017, 2018; Belleggia Clementis 2018).

It is noteworthy that symbols produced by organizations in favor of legalization have received less attention, despite the fact that these symbols are central to the social movement for “their capacity to stick, to evoke affects, associate meanings, and gain adherents through repetitive use and propagation” (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020: 738). This situation changed with the first parliamentary debate on abortion decriminalization and legalization in Argentina. The political developments surrounding this debate in 2018 led to new studies that highlighted the symbolic connection between the abortion rights green scarf and the white one used by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, as well as the relevance of that intergenerational political transmission. The scarf is interpreted as a “political artifact” that gains authority and acquires new meaning in
political dispute (Barros and Quintana 2020). In the context of feminist movements, the scarf is analyzed both as a “traveling symbol” and a “cognitive bridge” of transnational scope (Felitti and Ramírez Morales 2020). Other studies have explored the link between affect, politics, and bodily gestures in the use of green scarves (Haber 2018). Particularly relevant to this chapter are analyses that focus on the affective dimension of these movements, in which evocative connections with their past have galvanized political action in the present (Macón 2019).

The green scarf was vital to the creation and transmission of the affective and political power of the rising abortion rights movement in Argentina and Chile during 2018 and 2019. I have tried not to limit my analysis of the symbol to the visual dimension. The scarf is certainly a visual symbol, but it is also a material emblem linked to bodies, generating powerful affective atmospheres and new repertoires of protest. And in both countries, feminist artist collectives have reinvented the symbol in artistic interventions that contribute to the creation of intense spaces of protest. In particular, I analyze the aesthetic interventions of two feminist artist organizations that have used the symbol of the scarf and the color green. Both Nosotras Proponemos. Asamblea Permanente de Trabajadoras del Arte [We Propose: Permanent Assembly of Women Art Workers] in Argentina and Trabajadoras del Arte y la Cultura de Chile [Women Artists and Cultural Workers of Chile] have created powerful synergies between artistic imagination and strategies for political demonstrations in support of the right to abortion.

The results presented here are part of a broader study on the role of affects in the aesthetic and visual creations emerging from the struggles for abortion rights in the Southern Cone of Latin America. The methodology used in this study is certainly heterodox. My participation in feminist and abortion rights movements in Argentina for more than a decade has allowed me to very closely follow the processes I study. For the past three years, my research has also focused on the movement in Chile. During this time, I have been able to document protests, archive various types of movement materials, and have valuable conversations with activists and artists. I have used techniques of ethnographic research such as participant observation and conversations with key informants. I have also gathered and analyzed images of the use of the green scarf and its aesthetic reinventions using my own collection of images, those of other activists, and images from social media and the web.
The Triangular Green Scarf in Argentina

The triangular green scarf of the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion already had a significant history when it began to receive broad public attention during 2018. This symbol was first used during the XVIII Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres [National Women’s Meeting] that took place in the city of Rosario in 2003 (Ciriza 2013). Since 1986, these Encuentros have been a crucial space for the women’s and feminist movement, with the development of multiple argumentative frames regarding the right to abortion (Sutton and Borland 2013). Widespread use of the scarf during the demonstration at the close of the 2003 Encuentro has been characterized as a “turning point” for the movement’s visibility (Bellucci 2014: 339). The scarf has clearly been a key element for building public visibility, but it has also been vital to the creation of political attunement and collective identity. The first green scarves were distributed by the organization Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir [Catholic Women for the Right to Choose], and they bore various slogans in favor of the cause. In 2005, after formation of the Campaign, the current slogan for the scarf was established: “Educación sexual para decidir, anticonceptivos para no abortar, aborto legal para no morir” [Sex education for choice, contraceptives to prevent abortions, legal abortion to prevent deaths].

The selection of green as a movement symbol was not aimed at evoking a preexisting cultural association with the color, such as nature, ecology, or hope. On the contrary, activists wanted a color that was not already identified in Argentine political culture, and therefore, “As the Campaign grew, it carved out a new activist color niche: green as the color of abortion rights” (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020: 741). The movement quickly realized the power of color to build a collective political identity and also to create a common affective atmosphere in which abortion stopped being an embarrassing secret to instead become a public demand. From the beginning, the Campaign “dyed green” its public events and protests as a strategy that was simultaneously political, aesthetic, and affective. The 2018 demonstrations took this affective politics of color to a new level. The bodies, clothing, hair, and faces of the demonstrators, especially the youngest among them, were colored green to express a corporeal and festive commitment to the cause.

It is clear that social movements create meanings and promote certain affective repertoires through their aesthetic choices. The use of the color
green by the abortion rights movement is an example of this. At the same time, movements do not create their symbols in a vacuum but rather habitually “tap into the shared visual knowledge of the society they are rooted in. They use and reinterpret a preexisting imaginary to voice critique and to form a collective actor” (Doerr et al. 2013: xiii). Indeed, as I have already mentioned, the green scarf picks up on the deep political and affective value of the white scarf worn by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo. In the late 1970s, the Mothers covered their heads with cloth diapers, resignifying and politicizing the intimate connection with their children, who had been kidnapped by the military dictatorship (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020). The mothers thereby subverted the cultural history of the scarf/kerchief associated either with female beauty or tears, grief, and weakness. The scarf became a symbol of strength and tenacity in the fight for justice. The Campaign used this affective and political disruption and, through their choice of symbol, became part of a recognized tradition of women in the fight for democracy and human rights. “In fact, the human rights frame has become one of the ‘pillars’ of the abortion legalization project and actions by the Campaign” (Sutton and Borland 2019: 33).

One significant characteristic of the scarf is its materiality. The scarf has certainly multiplied as an image both online and offline. It appears in photos, publications of all kinds, posters, graphics, illustrations, videos, and flyers. But the symbol did not arise as an image or as a graphic design to be used on different media. The scarf is primarily an object worn on the body, especially at political events, in the protest sphere, and, increasingly, in everyday life.

The performative repertoire of uses associated with the scarf is politically relevant. The Mothers have traditionally worn the white scarf covering their heads. To demonstrate respect, Campaign activists did not wear their scarves in this way but rather tied around their necks. A growing repertoire of modes of wearing the scarf was established over the years, with incredible expansion during the 2018 demonstrations. The scarf is worn around the neck, around the wrist, or on the upper arm. But demonstrators also began to wear it in novel ways: covering their naked chests, around their waists, or tying back their hair. Both within spaces of protest and outside them, the scarf began to be used to identify oneself with the cause and publicly show support of the legalization of abortion, tied to purses, backpacks, and bags.
The scarf thereby became the visible indicator of a process of political and affective contagion that colored bodies and spaces. The widespread, daily, and continued use of the scarf created a “horizontal type of communication” (Sutton and Vacarezza 2020: 742) among supporters and broadened the space of protest such that it became indistinguishable from that of social life. “Its widespread use in national, corporeal, and political territories, as well as those of gender, class, and age, materialized a feminist solidarity that reached unimagined levels” (Felitti and Ramírez Morales 2020: 136). During the 2018 protests, the scarf began to mobilize new affective repertoires linked to feminist solidarity, but also contention and perseverance when it is worn in irreverent ways or in contexts that may be hostile to the demand being made (e.g., in religious high schools).

New ways of using or wearing the scarf also broadened the movement’s repertoires of protest and were decisive in the exponential growth of demonstrations. Specifically, on February 18th, 2018, the Campaign called for an action borrowed from a form of protest created by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo the previous year. In May 2017, in the context of an enormous demonstration against the sentence reduction of a man imprisoned for crimes against humanity, the Mothers invited protesters to wear the white scarf for the first time. Protesters were invited to wear it around their necks and wave it in the air as a gesture of protest at the end of the march. This coordinated action gave rise to a new form of protest in Argentine political culture: the pañuelazo, derived from the Spanish word for scarf/kerchief (pañuelo).3

The simplicity and affective intensity of this collective action made the Campaign decide to incorporate it into their own repertoire of protest. Since February 2018, green pañuelazos have increased exponentially through the growing protest cycle. A large number of pañuelazos were also organized outside the country in solidarity. This protest action created a huge visual impact and also proved effective to animate and strengthen the occupation of public spaces. The coordinated act was repeated until it became a ritual to create powerful forms of affective and political synchronicity. The scarf, then, has become a key material for exerting pressure, occupying public spaces, and staging demonstrations of collective power. In these protests, the symbol continues to carry affects linked with urgency and a challenge to institutional powers. These protests also activate forms of joy and pleasure connected with participation, collective encounters, and the occupation of public spaces. Its
sustained use in demonstrations, *pañuelazos*, and also outside the protest sphere have made the scarf a hopeful symbol. The triangular green scarf points to a collectively shared horizon and promises that social change is possible (Fig. 4.1).

Although the abortion legalization and decriminalization bill was not approved, the widespread and daily use of the green scarf became the visible indicator of a victory: the “social decriminalization of abortion” (Gutiérrez 2019: 35). Votes in both legislative houses have also been accompanied by mass demonstrations of over a million protesters each time. A series of metaphors connected with tides, fire, and earthquakes are

![Pañuelazo](image)

*Fig. 4.1 Pañuelazo [Protest action using green scarves]. XXXIII Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres [National Women’s Meeting], Trelew, 2019 (Photograph: Nayla Luz Vacarezza)*
now used to refer to these protests as a new poetics of mass mobilization arises from this process. The metaphor of a “green tide” was popularized during this series of protests and refers specifically to the spread of a contagious force that is much greater than the sum of its individual participants. It is the product of participation which, in turn, transforms those who participate. The scarf and the color green are fundamental symbolic agents for the creation of a magnetic and immersive atmosphere that activists refer to as the green tide.

**WE PROPOSE. GREEN SCARVES AND BRAIDS**

During the 2018 demonstrations in Argentina, a large number of artistic actions contributed to strengthening the protests through the use of the scarf and the color green. This is the case with We Propose: Permanent Assembly of Women Art Workers. This organization was formed in late 2017 in the context of a strong reactivation of feminist movements at the local and transnational levels. Its main goal is to collectively discuss, denounce, and propose alternatives to patriarchal and sexist behaviors in the art world.

Beginning with its first actions, We Propose publicly expressed its support of the legalization of abortion. In the International Women’s Day march in 2018, when growing demonstrations were beginning to gain traction, they appeared with a green banner that read “I Choose” along with the group’s name, “We Propose.” Their performances in support of this cause continued throughout May. A large group of artists, curators, researchers, teachers, students, gallerists, and other art workers signed an open letter to legislators demanding the legalization of abortion. In addition to signing, participants were invited to paint triangular green scarves on blank sheets of paper that turned the symbol into an array of pictorial images with different textures, shapes, and tones of green. All of the participants wore the scarf and performed a *pañuelazo* at the end of their intervention. Along with the cloth scarves, the participants held up the paintings they had created during the intervention.

They later created two series of posters in support of legal abortion that were put up in public spaces where protests took place. The first series was made up of two posters in which the green scarf was a central element, but only one of these was eventually put up in the streets. In this poster, the main figure is a non-geometric green scarf standing on a white background. Rather than being a static design, the symbol has
movement. The scarf appears animated by an invisible force that lifts it up.

This poster appeared in public spaces during the massive protest on June 13th, 2018, when at least a million people came together to demand a yes vote in the Argentine House of Representatives. The activists hung the posters on walls, creating compositions that covered broad surfaces. The result was a series of huge two-dimensional “pañuelazos” that quickly became a participative platform. The green section of the poster made up by the scarf was used as a “blackboard” by protesters, who wrote their own slogans in support of legalization. The second series was made up of three posters and was ready just before the vote in the Senate. The scarf itself was not used in this series, but the color green was pivotal. The images designed for this series were all green—a wave, a flame, and a female face with emphasis placed on the lips and wavy hair.

Both series of posters brought to visual language an activist poetics that was being created in mass demonstrations for the legalization of abortion. The waving scarf, the tide, the flame, or the erotic vibration of lips and hair are different ways to depict the powerful and magnetic experience of demonstrations. The posters were, therefore, an artistic action inspired by the protests that were taking place and that also returned to them, contributing to the creation of an intense and participatory atmosphere.

The Argentine Congress’s rejection of the abortion legalization bill did not end the protests or the actions of We Propose about the issue. On International Women’s Day in 2019, activists first performed Braiding Action [Acción Trenzar]. They brought an enormous green cloth braid 20 meters long and approximately 30 kilograms in weight. According to the activists, the braid was a “soft sculptural object” and was also a “performance object” because it came to life and acquired meaning through participatory action.

The braid is a single object, but it is made up of three strands. The performance action began when the activists unrolled the strands in a public space and laboriously braided them together. This bodily action of collectively braiding made publicly visible the work that sustains and builds the movement. The action of braiding metaphorically brought together different political perspectives, historical experiences, and affects. The result was one braid with three heads that, like a fantastic creature, climbed up public buildings and moved to the beat of feminist demonstrations. In fact, during this protest, the braid was hung by activists on the fence of the National Congress building, creating powerful images.
Later, during a demonstration toward the emblematic Plaza de Mayo, the braid was laid out waving atop the multitude that made up the feminist green tide, held up by demonstrators who sang and danced to the beat of protest songs.9 (Fig. 4.2)

Once again, We Propose contributed to the creation of an affectively intense atmosphere permeated by the color green. The braid brought demonstrators together into a common movement that produced and reinforced a shared future horizon. Braiding Action created forms of hope and joy that arise from coordinated action. The demonstrators wanted to hold the braid up, take pictures with it, or organize new movements, dances, or group actions. But holding up the braid also implied physical effort that tired out the body. The demonstrators’ energies were put to the test by Braiding Action. In order to coordinate the joint effort and achieve the common goal of moving from one place to another, demonstrators also had to be alert, make handoffs to each other, and allow time

Fig. 4.2 Nosotras Proponemos. Asamblea Permanente de Trabajadoras del Arte [We Propose. Permanent Assembly of Women Art Workers]. Acción Trenzar [Braiding Action], Buenos Aires, 2019 (Photograph: Nosotras Proponemos Archive)
for rest. In this action, those who participate corporeally experience the sensations of pleasure and hope that are created by activism, and they are also exposed to weariness and fatigue.

Braiding Action shows that in order to build a movement, it is necessary to bring together and harmonize differences. But the verb “to braid” in Spanish, trenzar, is also used to allude to a fight or disagreement. This action therefore brings into the public space an affective poetics in which differences do not always come together harmoniously. On the contrary, conflict, friction, and hostility might all be present. Braiding Action is a playful component that activates forms of joy and encourages coordinated participation. But it also makes participants experience types of fatigue and conflict that are part and parcel of political struggles. Far from romanticizing collective action, Braiding Action proposes an affective poetics of protest that is complex and even contradictory.

The Triangular Green Scarf in Chile

The green scarf was adopted in Chile as a symbol of the struggle for abortion rights in 2018. In June of that year, the Coordinadora Feministas en Lucha [Coordinating Organization of Feminists in Struggle] made an open call to design a logo for the green scarf that could express the specificities of the Chilean movement. The goal was to use the emblem during the Marcha por el Aborto Libre [March for Unrestricted Abortion] that has brought together those fighting for the right to choose every July 25th since 2013 (Hiner and Vivaldi 2019).

This symbolic contagion occurred at a moment of great revitalization of feminist and abortion rights struggles in the region. In Chile in particular, the months prior had been marked by a powerful series of feminist protests and takeovers of universities to protest sexist violence and sexism in education (Zerán 2018). At the same time, mass demonstrations in Argentina were accompanied by multiple actions that used the scarf and the color green as emblems in Latin America and around the world.

Indeed, the scope of the fight in Argentina inspired Chilean activists to claim for themselves a symbol that had proven to be highly effective for social mobilization. However, a thoughtful consideration of this process will find that the symbol does not cause demonstrations on its own but rather manages to strengthen and reactivate processes that were already underway. And in this case, the contagion could not be thoroughly understood without considering the history of political interactions among
Latin American feminisms that, in international Encuentros and Conferences, forged strong bonds and shared agendas (Alvarez 2000; Alvarez et al. 2002). In fact, the Campaña 28 de Septiembre por la Despenalización y Legalización del Aborto en América Latina y el Caribe [September 28 Campaign for Abortion Decriminalization and Legalization in Latin America and the Caribbean] drove region-wide use of green scarves with different designs that acknowledged the specificities of each country (Gutiérrez 2019).

The symbol of the triangular green scarf was replicated in Chile, and at the same time it acquired a characteristic mark that connected it to the local history of the feminist movement. The new logo, designed by Carolina Lería, recreated and also reformulated the visual culture of Chilean feminisms by incorporating elements from a 1937 poster announcing the first congress of the Movimiento Pro-Emancipación de las Mujeres de Chile [Pro-Emancipation of the Women of Chile Movement].10 In the historical illustration, a woman with strong arms and long hair holds up a flag. The new logo for the scarf brings into the present this image from another time, invoking the historical struggles for women’s suffrage, “family planning,” and “voluntary maternity” in Chile.

The flag’s original slogan is replaced by a peremptory demand in the present: “Abortion now!” Also, in the current logo, the woman no longer holds a baby in her left arm. Instead, there is a new character that is bare-breasted and holds up her left fist, with a triangular scarf tied around her neck. This new character represents the generation of feminists leading the protests during 2018. The slogans on the scarf also take on the legal restrictions on abortion in Chile and map out a collectively desired future: “Aborto libre, seguro y gratuito” [Unrestricted, safe, and free abortion]; “No bastan tres causales” [Three reasons aren’t enough].

As in Argentina, the scarf rapidly began to be worn in diverse ways, both in spaces of protest and in daily life. Pañuelazos were also organized, some of them in solidarity with the political process in Argentina. And as part of the preparations for that year’s March for Unrestricted Abortion, the Coordinadora Feminista 8 M [8 M Feminist Coordinating Organization] added an original element to the protest. In a collective work session, they created a giant green scarf, approximately three meters tall and six meters wide.11 (Fig. 4.3).

This new element, which was held up as a banner on five poles, has some similarities to the banners used by political parties and social organizations during demonstrations. However, its triangular shape and large
size make it novel. This gigantic scarf became a key element in various protest actions. It caught the eye, occupied public spaces, and allowed for easy identification of the demand being made. It was a point of reference amid demonstrations and also the backdrop for political discourses and interactions with the press. The giant scarf expressed both the importance and the urgency of the demand, as well as the force and determination of the movement. Whether enormous or of conventional size, held up as a standard or worn on the body, the Chilean green scarf shows how the affective and political forces that breathe life into a movement are transmitted and transformed through symbols.
Women Artist and Culture Workers of Chile. The Participatory Scarf

The organization Women Artists and Cultural Workers of Chile, or TRACC for its initials in Spanish, made its first public appearance in the 2018 International Women’s Day marches. Boosted by the growing processes of feminist mobilization in Chile and across the region, a group of contemporary artists, cultural managers, and other women workers in the artistic field decided to organize to build joint strategies for interventions. In addition to actively participating in feminist demonstrations, TRACC took on the commitment of creating support networks, denouncing sexist practices in the art world, and shining a light on the work of women artists. As an organization, TRACC’s goals did not include the fight for abortion rights. However, many of its activists became more and more involved with this cause, and the organization decided to perform collective action related to this issue.

At the 2019 International Women’s Day march, TRACC proposed a new artistic use of the green scarf for street protests. The activists made four large triangles of green cloth with holes through which participants could put their heads. The activists took a cue from Latin American artistic vanguards to renew and strengthen the protest. The performance action drew on the iconic performance *O Divisor* [Divider], by Brazilian artist Lygia Pape. *O Divisor* was first presented in the Rio de Janeiro Modern Art Museum in 1968 and had numerous reactivations. In the performance action created by Lygia Pape, an enormous white cloth with holes in it was unfurled in public space. The public participated by putting their heads through a hole, wrapping their bodies in the cloth, and connecting with other participants in a collective movement. Lygia Pape’s work broke with the dichotomy between the observer and the art object by making the public participate. *O Divisor* also proposed playful forms of collective experience that disrupted the habitual scenery and flows of the city.

In its action, TRACC decided to make the green scarf the protagonist and greatly increase its conventional size. The aesthetic gesture is similar to that performed by the 8 M Feminist Coordinating Organization with its giant scarf. In this case, the TRACC activists wanted to distance themselves from any reference to the traditional banners used by political parties, leftist organizations, and radical movements in Latin America. Banners are generally placed in a central position at the front
of the march and are carried by the strongest people in the movement, or those with the most authority. Far from repeating this habitual structure of protest, TRACC created a different aesthetic. They proposed a coming together in a common fight, a coordination of movement, and a surrender to a collective experience with a strong playful component. The participants were wrapped up and connected by the cloth triangles, creating a collective body that improvised new ways of acting together (Fig. 4.4).

In this action, the visual and discursive aspects of the symbol, namely, its logo and slogans, lost their central role. Taking the spotlight instead were the material dimensions of the symbol and its transformation into a soft object. TRACC created a poetics of participation that is exceedingly haptic because it involves the body in movement and touch. The scarf was immersive; it contained and united the participants, but it also limited

![Image](image.jpg)

**Fig. 4.4** Trabajadoras del Arte y la Cultura de Chile [Women Artists and Cultural Workers of Chile]. Acción del pañuelo [Scarf Action], Santiago de Chile, 2019 (Photograph: Trabajadoras del Arte y la Cultura de Chile Archive)
their movement. Those who participated in the performance had to adjust the dynamics of their own bodies to the dynamics that arose from the collective. The action provoked forms of joy that come from coordinated movement and playful interaction. The participants were literally connected by a commonly desired future, and that activated forms of hope.

**Conclusion**

The triangular green scarf has managed to capture the radical imagination of women’s, feminist, and reproductive justice movements. It played a key role in making the struggle for abortion rights visible in Argentina, Latin America, and around the world. Long before it acquired that visibility, the green scarf was already established as a powerful tool for the construction of a collective identity, for strengthening a sense of belonging to the movement, and for creating political attunement with regards to a common goal.

Throughout its history, this symbol has taken on meanings and affects that are deeply political. The green scarf draws on the legacy of the white scarf worn by the Mothers of Plaza de Mayo, associated with the search for justice for the crimes against humanity committed by the dictatorship, and for human rights. The white scarf also brings together affects associated with courage, tenacity, strength, and hope. That political and affective repertoire was renewed when the symbol became green and was adopted by the National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion. Through the scarf, the fight for the right to abortion was strengthened as a cause connected to human rights and social justice, but also with sexual and bodily freedom. The affective repertoire associated with the green scarf broadened over the years and exploded during the 2018 demonstrations. There, an emotional spectrum as complex as it was powerful was deployed, combining strength, contention, courage, tenacity, solidarity, hope, and joy.

The scarf quickly became an agent for transmitting those political and affective forces beyond national borders. A thorough review of this process of symbolic contagion shows that it is not wholly spontaneous and also not merely mimetic. Certain local conditions are necessary for a symbol to gain traction and inspire support outside of its place of origin. These forms of transnational contagion also do not appear in a vacuum but rather reinforce preexisting articulations that are strengthened as a
result. Finally, the process of contagion leads to transformation of the symbols, their uses in protests, and their affective repertoires.

While the symbol of the green scarf has a visual dimension, its materiality is key. Activists have innovated innumerable ways of wearing the scarf and identifying their body with the cause by wearing the color green both within spaces of protest and outside them. New forms of protest have also arisen, such as the *pañuelazo*, in which political attunement is expressed through a coordinated bodily action. The scarf and the color green allow for the exertion of pressure, the occupation of public spaces, and the demonstration of collective power. Scarves are also fundamental agents for the creation of immersive and affectively intense atmospheres of protest. The “green tide” is precisely the result of the mass use of these symbols that transform the spaces and individuals who participate. In the green space of the protest, abortion is no longer a shameful secret but rather becomes a collective, tenacious, and hopeful political demand.

Artistic activism collectives have also contributed to the creation of immersive protest spaces through the use of these symbols. Both *We Propose* in Argentina and TRACC in Chile have used strategies from the art world to renew the feminist protest for legalized abortion. Although these collectives are not organically connected, they have surprising parallels in their actions. Both groups have used the symbol of the scarf and the color green to create soft textile objects that come to life with the participation of demonstrators. In these artistic interventions, we can see how the visual and discursive facets of the symbols lose their central role. Instead, the object’s materiality becomes more important, along with the coordinated movement of bodies with a common goal and the affects provoked by participation in an immersive space of protest. The interventions made by these groups strengthen an affective poetics of feminist protest for abortion rights. The actions demand coordinated movements that can be tiring but also give rise to joy and hope that come from collective action and playful interaction.

The central role of the green scarf in protests for legal abortion shows the importance of symbols for social movements. These symbols certainly transmit political meaning and synthesize ideas. But they also accumulate and mobilize alluring affective repertoires that energize political action, even in unexpected situations. The COVID-19 pandemic spreading around the world in 2020 drove attention to other—and quite hazardous—types of contagion. However, in Argentina and Chile, the green scarf has not faded away but has again become visible in street
protests. Against all odds, the abortion rights movement managed to open up possibilities for social change in the midst of the pandemic. Abortion was legalized in Argentina in December 2020 and parliamentary debate was reactivated in Chile right afterwards. In a time of extreme uncertainty, the green scarves continues to point out the way to a future horizon we can cling to.

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Notes

1. The word pañuelo, in Spanish, can be translated to English both as scarf of kerchief. Emerging academic literature in English about this symbol uses either of these words.
2. “Gratuito” is translated as “free” in the sense of not requiring payment (Sutton and Borland 2013).
3. Photographic coverage of this event can be seen at: https://www.losandes.com.ar/-mar-de-panuelos-la-impactante-foto-de-la-marcha-contra-el-2x1-que-emociono-a-todos/.
4. See: http://nosotrasproponemos.org/.
5. See: http://www.lavaca.org/notas/pintando-la-epoca-artistas-visuales-por-abortolegal/
6. Photographic records of this action can be found on the Nosotras Proponemos Facebook page. See: https://www.facebook.com/NOSOTRASPROPONEMOS/posts/383229358863441.
7. Photographic records of this action can be found on the Nosotras Proponemos Facebook page. See: https://www.facebook.com/NOSOTRASPROPONEMOS/posts/383246572195053.
8. Photographic records of this action can be found on the Nosotras Proponemos Facebook page. See: https://www.facebook.com/NOSOTRASPROPONEMOS/posts/437056750147368.
9. Photographic records of this action can be found on the Nosotras Proponemos Facebook page. See: https://www.facebook.com/NOSOTRASPROPONEMOS/posts/559148491271526.
10. An image of the poster can be seen at: http://www.memoriachilena.gob.cl/602/w3-article-75848.html.
11. An audiovisual record of the creation of the scarf can be found at: https://youtu.be/O4dxVfgdW-k.
12. TRACC maintains an Instagram profile with images of its actions (https://www.instagram.com/tr.a.c.c/) and a web platform with job opportunities (https://tracctrabajos.wixsite.com/tracctrabajos).
13. A series of photographs of the reactivation performed in 1990 at the Rio de Janeiro Modern Art Museum can be seen at: https://lygiapape.com/obras/decada-60/.

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