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Videographic Dissection: Anatomy of a Peace in Two Acts

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In 2016, Colombia lived through an extraordinary political twist: the government and the world's oldest active guerrilla group, the FARC-EP, signed a peace agreement twice, within just two months. The first signing, on September 26, was followed by an unexpected turn when a national plebiscite rejected the accord. Forced back to the negotiating table, both sides reworked the deal and signed a new version on November 26. This video dissects the televised broadcasts of both ceremonies, placing them in dialogue to explore what emerges when key moments are isolated and examined along a timeline. It invites the viewer to see not only the analytical potential of this method, but also how audiovisual communication plays a central role in shaping political reality.

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Research Statement

In 2016, Colombia experienced an extraordinary political turning point. Within just two months, the government and the world's oldest active guerrilla group, the FARC, signed a peace agreement twice. The first ceremony, on September 26, was marked by an atmosphere of triumph and hope, broadcast live to millions of Colombians and to the international community. Yet, only days later, a national plebiscite held to ratify the accord unexpectedly rejected it. The peace agreement, already celebrated as historic, was suddenly suspended in uncertainty. After intense negotiations, both sides signed a revised version on November 26. The second ceremony was a much more restrained event, held in an enclosed theatre, attended by far fewer guests, shorter and more precise, yet still carrying great symbolic weight.

This video essay places both televised ceremonies in dialogue. By dissecting and reassembling fragments of the broadcasts, it explores what emerges when we slow down, isolate, and juxtapose moments that, in real time, were meant to be experienced as spectacle. In this sense, television, by its very nature, reshapes political discourse according to the logic of entertainment, what Neil Postman (2005) diagnosed as the medium's tendency to transform public communication into show business. The staging, the camera angles, the choreography of bodies and symbols: these are not neutral transmissions, but mediated constructions designed for visual consumption. As Walter Benjamin (2008) theorised, technological reproducibility transforms collective perception and reconfigures political experience through the logic of the image. The

work examines how this audiovisual mediation shapes not only political meaning but also the emotional and sensory experience of history (Landsberg, 2004).

Approaching this video exercise, as someone who is not a scholar of film or visual studies, required me to learn a new language of observation and analysis. It changed how I relate to moving images and how I understand their role in shaping collective memory. At first, I struggled to know exactly what to look for, so I began by paying attention to what felt most obvious and accessible: who appeared on screen and who did not. This seemingly simple premise: presence and absence opened an unexpected analytical path. The broadcast production decisions regarding framing, sequencing, and visibility revealed much about the shifting political climate between the two signings. The first event presented a sense of closure and national unity; the second, a sense of exhaustion and cautious hope. The differences in who occupied the frame: government officials, FARC leaders, victims, international guests, and citizens, reflected subtle but powerful changes in the narrative of legitimacy and inclusion.

As I advanced, the dissection method became clearer. I divided the two broadcasts by who appeared on-screen and arranged them on separate video tracks in the timeline. This allowed me to compare, moment by moment, which political actors were visible in each ceremony and when they appeared. The process of aligning these sequences revealed patterns and absences that were not evident when watching the broadcasts separately. Rather than following a predetermined hypothesis, the insights emerged through the process itself. It was through manipulating the timeline, pausing, looping, and juxtaposing that new meanings surfaced. In this sense, the idea of the video essay did not precede the editing process; it grew organically out of the act of watching, isolating, and re-watching.

The video essay invites viewers to reflect on the analytical process itself and on method as a visible practice. The central figure is therefore not the original footage but the timeline: cut, colour-coded, and annotated as what it is, a working surface. Access to the original material is deliberately mediated through its analytical function. In this sense, the work resists the fetishisation of the original image, inviting viewers instead to attend to the patterns that emerge when images are displaced from their intended flow.

One pattern became particularly striking; while the first ceremony repeatedly foregrounded citizens as witnesses to peace, their presence nearly vanished in the second signing, where the frame tightened around institutional actors. This visual displacement suggests that after the plebiscite's rejection, the peace process was reframed as a matter for political elites alone, as if citizenship had forfeited its right to witness. Beyond who appeared, the broadcasts themselves communicated differently:

the second ceremony was rushed, almost reluctant, with muted colours and shorter airtime.

The urgency of the period between the two agreements is enacted in the video essay's own rhythm. The editing and musical choices seek to transmit the visceral experience of a process unfolding under pressure, at a moment when much was politically at stake. Political agitation is thus translated into visible and audible tension, allowing the viewer to experience something of the unsettled pace through which the agreement re-emerged.

This analysis revealed how the audiovisual texture of these broadcasts, sound, gesture, silence and applause, conveys emotions and tensions that were largely invisible in written or spoken accounts. These sensory traces evoke a collective affect that cannot be easily captured by text. They remind us that political events are not only discursive but also visceral: they are felt, heard, and embodied.

Engaging with these materials through video editing provided me with a new methodological tool for my work in the social sciences and the study of war and conflict. In my research, I collaborate with former FARC combatants who are now involved in community peace projects. Many of them produce their own audiovisual content: documentaries, short clips, songs, and social media videos, to narrate their experiences and aspirations. I can now envision using this analytical approach collaboratively as a way of re-examining their own materials. By dissecting and reconstructing videos together, we might explore how the visual and aural dimensions of their narratives shape the collective imagination of peace and belonging. In this sense, the method holds potential beyond academic analysis; it can become a participatory practice of reflection and re-signification.

This project also raised important questions about authorship and interpretation. As I manipulated the footage, I became acutely aware of the ethical and political stakes of editing. Each cut or juxtaposition reinterprets the past and reorients the viewer's attention. The process reminded me that images are never neutral: they are technologies of visibility that can reinforce or disrupt dominant narratives. This awareness of my own position as editor was at times unsettling but ultimately productive. It made visible the politics inherent in any act of representation (Hall, 1997).

This method could be fruitfully applied to other media objects, especially in contexts where political processes are intensely mediated by visual culture. In Colombia and across Latin America, television and digital media play central roles in how societies imagine conflict and reconciliation (Fernández & Miralles, 2021). Bringing such

materials into the classroom or into collaborative workshops could open up spaces for critical and sensory engagement with history.

Ultimately, this project is both an analytical exercise and a personal exploration. It bridges my interest in lived experience with an experimental approach to media analysis. By dissecting the visual and aural layers of these ceremonies, I found a way to think with and through images, to let them reveal what is often unspeakable in the language of politics.

AI Declaration

The authors have no known or substantial use of generative AI to declare.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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