Burning images
*Performing effigies as political protest*
Göttke, F.U.

**Publication date**
2019

**Document Version**
Other version

**License**
Other

**Citation for published version (APA):**

**General rights**
It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

**Disclaimer/Complaints regulations**
If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.
It was 2001, in an issue of Dutch newspaper *de Volkskrant*, that I first saw an effigy being burned in a political protest. The photograph taken in Pakistan less than two weeks after the September 11 attacks in New York showed a throng of young men beat and burn a stuffed version of President of the United States George W. Bush. The protesters were reacting to the threat of war in neighboring Afghanistan, which would have serious repercussions for their country, following the president’s ultimatum that the Taliban government in Afghanistan extradite Osama bin Laden, who the US deemed responsible for the attacks.

While my clipping of this image has yellowed, it has not lost its appeal. One can sense the chaotic expression of communal anger, captured so well by the photographer in far-away Pakistan, its energy palpable to Western-European readers; the excitement on the young men’s faces, eager to take part in symbolic punishment and their resolve to make their anger heard; and the experience of injustice and outrage over the immediate impact of the neglectful politics of a foreign power on their country. For my project *Toppled* (2005–10), in searching for images with which to reconstruct the story of Saddam Hussein’s statues knocked down during the Iraq War, I came across many more images of Bush effigies being burned in protests against the Iraq War in Iraq as well as in protests in Pakistan, Afghanistan, India, and many Western countries. At that time, Bush appeared to be one of the most despised men on the planet.
In 2011, closely following the events of the Arab Spring, I saw effigies appear in reports from Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen. In February, activists in Tahrir Square staged mock trials of President Hosni Mubarak, his effigy standing in as the accused—six months later, the real Mubarak was wheeled into a Cairo courthouse to stand trial. That same month, protesters in the Yemeni capital Sanaa hanged effigies of President Ali Abdullah Saleh—by April he had promised to step down, and after eight months of delay tactics finally did. Also in February, protesters in Benghazi, Libya, hanged and mutilated effigies of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. In October, Gaddafi was captured and killed. Images of his corpse, exhibited for four days in a walk-in freezer in a market, circulated widely in the news.

The connection between the actual punishments of these leaders, and the staged burning of their effigies, seemed strangely prescient. I realized that the practice of hanging and burning effigies might be a fascinating and complex topic of study. I began searching for protests with effigies more systematically, and found an overwhelming number of reports and images from across the globe and extending far back in time. This form of political protest appears to have a very long and widespread history and a relation to traditional rituals. It is likewise a paradoxical practice in which protesters make an effort to create images just to destroy them during demonstrations. It is a very local, grassroots practice, which nevertheless functions perfectly within the framework of the global news media.

The research I embarked upon—and which led to this dissertation—builds on the image research that is part
Pakistan  Students in Peshawar on Thursday burned an effigy of A. Davis, the C.I.A. contractor who was freed Wednesday. Elsewhere in several civilians were reported killed by a U.S. drone attack. PAGE 8

Libya  Jadhafs, Libya’s second-largest city, protesters who seized control hanged Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi in effigy. (a)
of my practice as a visual artist working with images from the news media. I consider these images as a way of gaining knowledge of the world, as a channel of communication, that establishes a connection—albeit faint and fragile—to people distant in geography and time, who often are in situations of crisis. I work with and study these images not only as a means of communication, but also to investigate the conditions of their production and the impact they have on both ends of their appearance—the events of their production and reception.¹

My work has affinity with artists, theorists and curators like Eyal Weizman, Rabih Mroué or Ariella Azoulay, who work in between academia, art and activism and who combine modes of artistic or architectural practice with academic research. Trained as an architect, Eyal Weizman established the research agency Forensic Architecture in 2010 at Goldsmiths University of London with a team of researchers assembled from multiple disciplines. Forensic Architecture has primarily an activist agenda, and conducts research “on behalf of international prosecutors, human rights organizations and political and environmental justice groups.”² Forensic Architecture applies visual methods from architectural practice, 3D modeling and animation, to enhance and contextualize fragmented audio-visual material of critical moments in highly politicized conflicts to be used as evidence in human rights court cases. That

their visually compelling documentary presentations are also in demand in the art context and presented in exhibitions, publications, etc. is secondary. Nevertheless their prominence in the art world validates their work, enhances their public profile and credibility, and furthers their activist agenda.

The Lebanese artist, performer and theater maker Rabih Mroué mixes reality and fiction, often using documentary and archival material for his discursive works. For his 2012 video “The Pixelated Revolution,” he collected video-footage of the Syrian civil war from the internet made by activists documenting the war with mobile phone cameras. Because of their image making, these activists were targeted by the regime and in a number of cases recorded their own deaths. Mroué reflects on the moments when the viewfinder of the camera and the scope of the rifle align. For a fraction of a moment, the rifle is aimed at the viewer of the video before the video image breaks apart and the viewer is left to imagine the violence that occurred.3

Ariella Azoulay is a theorist of photography and visual culture and Professor of Comparative Literature and Modern Culture and Media. She attempts to radically rethink photography’s relation to the political and make visible photography’s grounding in colonial rule and state power.4 Azoulay is also a curator and filmmaker. She uses

archival material in videos or installations combined with discursive text to visually and argumentatively demonstrate her theoretical analysis. The installation “The Body Politic” builds on Edward Steichen’s famous photography exhibition “The Family of Man,” which Azoulay proposes as a “visual proxy of the United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.” She complements Steichen’s collection with photographs from the same period that document concrete instances where people make rights claims in strikes and presents the assemblage with a discursive text.

In this work I want to avoid making the distinction between artistic work and academic research, and rather integrate artistic modes of research into academic research and integrate academic research into the work of art. I do not want to further theorize my practice here but practice the research instead. This dissertation, then, is one form of the work, appropriate in the academic context, adhering to but also stretching the conventions that apply. The work that I might present in an art exhibition, while still combining both visual and textual elements, would take on a different form. Here the visual part—the images assemblages described later in this introduction—will be more prominent, possibly as large prints. Text certainly will be added as annotations, hand-outs, audio-tracks and/or in some other form.

Given the long history and topicality of this practice in recent geopolitics, it came as a surprise to me at the

outset of this study that it had not been taken up as a topic of academic research. The only substantial work on effigies is ethnologist and art historian Wolfgang Brückner’s *Bildnis und Brauch: Studien zur Bildfunktion der Effigies* (Portrait and Custom—Studies of the Image Function of Effigies) from 1966, in which he examines effigy punishment and the use of images in formal law in European history. While he acknowledges that formal effigy punishment developed from traditional ritual effigy practices through political use, he dismisses the study of the many modern examples in political contexts.

Effigy protests are mentioned in some studies of rituals and folklore in relation to traditional effigy practices like public shaming or Guy Fawkes Day celebrations. They appear anecdotally in books and weblogs about early US history and in studies about nineteenth-century rioting in England and the US. American anthropologist Mériam N. Belli devotes a chapter of her book *An Incurable Past: Nasser’s Egypt Then and Now* (2013) to effigy protests during the first half of the twentieth century, which over time turned into a carnivalesque festival in Port Said, Egypt.

---

Performance scholar Joseph Roach proposes “effigy” as a conceptual category that signifies the prescribed roles of social actors. But there is virtually no text that aims to understand the practice as a genre of political protest. Effigy hanging and burning seem to have remained out of sight for any academic discipline, perhaps too infrequent to be really relevant to the histories of riots and political protests, and too unspecific for anthropology. It might also be too uncommon for performance studies and possibly too violent for progressive political protest studies. More closely related to folklore than high art, this image practice remains equally invisible to the field of art history.

Effigy protests comprise an image practice central to which is the production, manipulation, and dissemination of images: the effigies as well as the photographs produced during their performance. The images are tools of a practice that communicates through mass media; they are used for impact. In the interaction, images acquire agency: they become “operative” and influence social and political relations beyond the control of human actors. Many visual culture scholars have worked more or less explicitly with the notion of “image operation.”

11 Georges Didi-Huberman wrote about a similar archaic image practice, the votive image. It has a lot of similar characteristics, formally as well as functionally. But in contrast to effigies the votive hardly plays a role in contemporary culture or politics. Georges Didi-Huberman, “Ex-Voto: Image, Organ, Time,” L’Esprit Créateur 47, no. 3 (2007): 7–16.
13 James Elkins, for instance, names W. J. T. Mitchell, Nicholas Mirzoeff,
Operations: Visual Media and Political Conflict, Jens Eder and Charlotte Klonk collect a number of different approaches to the term in order to come to a working concept, without defining it too narrowly. They consider the role of images as both tools and agents from an interdisciplinary perspective, especially in the context of political conflict. Relevant to my study is that images, as Eder and Klonk posit, can “influence the development of social discourses, the distribution of knowledge and power and the formation of social organizations.” I do not attempt to further define the concept of image operations, instead specify how it guides attention to performance, performativity, and agency of images, which I address in the study.

There are five different aspects of effigy practice that can be described as operations:

1. Effigies are images that are used as props in protest performances, as tools to demean and insult the depicted.
2. Their specific qualities, namely their grotesque aesthetics, contribute to this aforementioned operation of denigration and declassification.
3. During performances, protesters often interact with effigies as if the dolls possess a life of their own. Effigies

---


15 Eder and Klonk, “Introduction.”
seem animated in these interactions and operate with some agency.

4. Protesters stage performances with an image—the effigy—to produce news media images and thereby communicate with a wider public and influence the social and political constellations of their community. The media images are used as tools to operate in the social and political realm.

5. As it becomes detached from the specific event in the process of mediation, both actors and mediators lose control of the media image’s relevance and meaning. It can affect social and political relations beyond the intention of any actor involved in its creation. The media image becomes operational on its own.

My research is guided by the images that I have collected through extensive internet searches. I apply a close reading to the individual images and their descriptions, giving attention to the political contexts in which they operate. In a further step, I order the images and arrange them in image assemblages according to different criteria. From the connections between images and the patterns that appear in these assemblages, I identify relevant and productive lines of inquiry. Working from the images toward theory and back to images I venture into the fields of history, art history, anthropology, performance studies, photography theory, iconology, image studies, and political philosophy. The protest practice as it becomes visible in the images, poses some fundamental questions that concern these disciplines: what are the genealogies of effigy protests in these different countries? What are the mechanisms of
transfer between different places and over time? How does this trans-historical and trans-local image practice function in the contemporary global media environment? How does it operate as an image practice in so many different political constellations? What kind of politics does this protest practice promote?

Collecting Images

In the remainder of this introduction, I explain the research framework and methodology of collecting, reading, and writing with images. The study’s starting point is investigating the contemporary practice of effigy protest as it has become visible in the news media. As this information is most readily accessible online, data is collected through extensive internet searches. To consider whether the study would also have been possible using traditional archives, I analyzed a sample of online archives. In none of these did I find a substantial number of images depicting effigy protests. Even traditional archives in Western countries are still severely limited in terms of online access, often not structured in such a way that enables searches for visual elements. Furthermore, these archives focus on historical data but are limited in coverage of recent events. I would argue that the study was only possible by collecting the data on the internet. The consequences of this perspective are addressed below.

16 See appendix 5.
The data I collected comprises visual documents and written reports from political demonstrations in which effigies are used in a symbolic form of protest. Most of the images and reports were found on established news media, digital news, open-access picture agency, stock photo agency, and newspaper websites. Less used sources were government-funded institutional archives, university libraries, museum archives, personal blogs and photo-sharing sites. The resulting data is very diverse. While predominantly photographic, there are also scans of historical prints and illustrations from secondary literature. The written accounts consist largely of contemporary news reports and a smaller number of descriptions from secondary literature. I included the name of the author, photographer, source, captions, and political context of the protest whenever possible. But in many cases, the information provided on websites is fragmentary or missing entirely.

Even though I searched for images, I used language as my excavation tool, finding the images of effigy protests via the tags attached to them or keywords in associated written reports. I used various languages for the searches, but English, being the internet’s main tongue, led to most results. In addition, from the languages I used—including German, Dutch, French, Spanish, Russian, and Farsi—

17 This dissertation relies on images sourced from websites as follows: news (34 percent); picture and stock photo agencies (32 percent); institutional archives, libraries, and museums (12 percent); blogs (12 percent); other (10 percent). See appendix 1 for detailed source list.
18 I tried to use the Google function “search by image” for my query, but this lead to few relevant results. While Google uses a combination of image analysis and metadata, text searches led to more relevant results.
English, being a language with a very rich vocabulary, is the only one with a specific and widely used word for the practice (to burn/hang in effigy) and the doll (effigy) that I was searching for. German and French, for instance, use the Latin appendix “in/en effigie” for the practice, but it has not entered everyday use, and both languages lack a specific noun for the doll itself. The other languages do not have a specific word for “effigy” either, and use words that are translated as puppet, dummy, or doll.

The language and internet use certainly influenced my results, as my data originates to a large degree from Western news media sources, establishing a largely Western and Anglo-Saxon view of events that often happened in very different cultural and political contexts (58 percent of the events in the collection are from non-Western countries). Nevertheless, English provided the best access to non-Western sources as it is spoken in many non-Western countries. Websites are often translated into English to reach larger international audiences, including those referred to in my research such as Israeli right-wing news source Israel Defense, Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), and South China Morning Post as well those of activists in Bangladesh and Pakistan.

I sourced freely accessible data so that I could see the images, and then think and talk about them. I own them as memories, mental images, but not as objects. I don’t have the authority to archive them as they are not my property. I cannot exhibit them, but the copyright law allows me to cite them in my discourse. The data from these many different sources constitute a collection that is not fixed,
but in motion, changing according to the direction of the research. This collection should not be considered an authoritative archive, but a research collection determined by the conditions I describe above and shaped by the ongoing development of the research.

In total I collected data of about 3,000 political demonstrations worldwide, in which effigies were used in some form. The oldest example from Europe dates back to 1328 in Italy, and concerns the burning of an effigy of Pope John XXII by soldiers of Emperor Louis IV, who was preparing to invade Rome to unseat the pope.\[^{19}\] My earliest US example is the hanging of a tax collector at the beginning of the American Revolution in 1765 and in Asia, the parade and burning of an effigy depicting the British Home Secretary Sir John Simon in 1930 in India’s long struggle for independence. In most non-Western countries, though, my records start in the 1950s.

In the first instance, I ordered the collected images according to chronology and geographical origin. The collection is structured by nation-state grouped into continental regions (North Africa, Africa except the north, Central Asia, East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, Europe, North America, Central America and the Caribbean, South America, Australia, and New Zealand). Inside these categories, data are ordered chronologically. Overall, the distribution is uneven. In an early phase of collecting, it appeared that some countries and regions—the US, South Asia, and the Middle East—seemed more

prevalent than others, because the practice was very visible in the news media and of current political relevance. Subsequently, I concentrated my efforts on those countries and regions in order to arrive at a collection that would be substantial enough to garner conclusions about effigy practice. As a consequence, my collection is US-centric, and has a heavy focus on international conflicts in South Asia and the Middle East. For South America, Africa, and Europe, on the other hand, the collection only allows for general assessments.

My analysis of the data shows significant variations in the number of effigy protests in different countries. As indicated above, for non-English speaking countries the data reflects effigy protests of international relevance and interest to the largely Western international news media. I calculated an effigy index to compare the frequency of effigy protests in different countries between 2001 and 2018. The countries that score highest are Pakistan, Palestine, and Afghanistan, followed by Libya, the US, India, and Egypt. The reasons for this frequency differ, however: in Pakistan, India, and the US the practice is a well-established form of protest used consistently over time and in a wide variety of political conflicts; in Palestine, the practice has been used regularly since the 1970s, but almost exclusively in the context of the conflict with Israel; in Afghanistan, the first effigy protest was reported in 1999, with frequency only increasing from 2005 onwards in relation to the US occupation and incidents perceived as insults to Islam by

20 See appendix 1.
Western actors; and in Egypt and Libya, most protests have been staged in the context of a single politically tumultuous period, namely the Arab Spring in 2011 and its aftermath.

To determine if my collection is representative for the countries on which I concentrate, I cross-referenced it with more consistent archives. I conducted a quantitative analysis of the digital archive of the *New York Times*, which provides articles published in the printed version of the newspaper from 1852 to 2002.\(^{21}\) Later articles are available online. The analysis largely supports the representativeness of the research collection for the US.

I also conducted an analysis of the archive of English-language Indian newspaper *The Hindu*, which goes back to 2000.\(^{22}\) I analyzed five months of reporting in 2012 and compared it with articles from the same period in the *Times*. While *The Hindu* featured 218 articles that reported on effigy protests in India, the *Times* only reported on one effigy protests in the US. It appears that in India, the practice is incredibly widespread and used in regional, national, and international political conflicts. I suggest this stems from the opulent use of image in Hindu cultures, supported by the many Indian political effigies that appropriate formal aspects of effigies used in traditional rituals. Unfortunately, there were no databases available to cross-check the representativeness of the collection regarding other countries crucial in my research, especially those in the Middle East and South Asia.

\(^{21}\) See appendix 3.  
\(^{22}\) See appendix 4.
Although the initial source material is heterogenous, the internet homogenizes data and impoverishes images. Every image, be it a woodcut, an analog photograph from a negative, or a video still from a smartphone camera enters my collection as a digital image—disembodied, displayed on a screen at rather low resolution. Yet a photograph’s materiality, its mode of production and history of distribution, often remains traceable even in poor images.

This photograph from 1903, shows the hanging effigy of strike breaker Frank Curry in Chicago. It must have been a beautiful sunny day when this image was shot in November. Four horse-drawn carts drive through a rather empty street alongside an electrical tram, which links the photograph to a transitional moment in the ongoing industrialization of American society. Three pedestrians are visible, one man in hat and coat has stopped, turned, and looks straight into the lens of the camera, acknowledging the photographer, while the effigy hangs from the tram cables five meters above without anyone paying attention. It is a beautifully composed image: the utility pole almost violently bifurcates the image vertically, a bit left of center, while the man turned to the camera strikes a balance with the silhouette of the hanging figure in the sky—one wonders if the photographer staged the man’s position. The emptiness of the street belies the charged context of the hanging effigy, the fierce and violent labor dispute of the railway strike in that time. But nothing of the turmoil that must have riveted the city and its inhabitants at the

time is visible in this photograph. The image shows edges that identify the “original” as a 4 x 5 inch glass negative, which hints at the considerable effort involved in producing a photograph then, due to the size of the equipment and the elaborate processing. It also points to the *Chicago Daily News*’s eagerness to serve its readers with photographic images and the technological possibilities of the time to reproduce photographs in print. The watermark of Getty Images is embedded in the middle of the image and the reference number on the lower left corner, marking Getty’s collaboration with the Chicago History Museum in the digitization of the *Chicago Daily News* photo archive. If we zoom in closer, we can see that the effigy is made from workers’ pants and jacket and bears a sign that we see only from the back. A second photograph from the Chicago Daily News Collection in the Getty Images archive shows another effigy of a strike breaker hanged in a similar manner during a strike in 1904, indicating that the practice was not uncommon.

**Reading Images**

Hanging or burning effigies as political protest is a layered image practice that not only includes the production of effigies and performances staged with them, but also the mediation of the event of which my data is comprised.

---

24 I am unable to ascertain if this particular image was ever published.

25 The Chicago Daily News Collection in the Getty Images archive consists of 179 digitized images of glass negatives dating from 1900 to 1916.
The recorded events are performances of protest, *tableaux vivants*, staged to become living images visible to those present as well as those reached through photographs published in the media. There are therefore four layers to my data: media image, photographic image, performed image of communal punishment, and sculpted image or effigy.

Though each of these four layers comes with its own theoretical framework and set of questions, I consider how they relate and together communicate protester’s message to varied audiences. Even though I focus more on performances and effigies visible in the photographs, I keep in mind that these become visible to me and most spectators only as photographs or as descriptions through the media.

The first two layers—the media image and photographic image—are closely linked, since the photojournalists who record events are part of a media apparatus. Mediation entails a number of operational manipulations. Photojournalists determine the camera position and the moment at which actors, action, and surroundings turn into the pictorial elements that together represent the protest.26 Photographers frame the performance according to their aesthetics and the conventions and expectations of the news outlet. On top of that, picture editors at the news outlet add their own frame by selecting, editing, cropping, and adding captions. These

---

procedures embed the photographs within the discourse of the specific media outlet and its audience.

Nevertheless, it is impossible to reduce a photograph to only one perspective. Photographs are characterized by “fragmentation, ambiguity, dislocation and uncertainty.”

According to Ariella Azoulay, a photograph is both partial and singular, neither icon nor purely document. It exhibits a “specific pattern of excess and lack” that points to the conditions of its production and dissemination.

For Azoulay, a photograph is the “product of an event shared by several participants,” a complex cultural construct that involves multiple actors, and that unfolds as an event in a series of encounters. The first is the “encounter—even a violent one—between a photographer, a photographed subject and a camera.” The second encounter is between photograph and spectator who takes part in the production of the image’s meaning. Both encounters shape the meaning of a photograph. None of the actors are able to fully determine the meaning of the photograph and “their attempt to determine and shape what will be seen in the frame and the power relations between those participants within it leaves traces that enable one to reconstruct the complexity of the event of photography.”

By interrogating

---

the space between the photographs’ fragmentary character and their singularity, with careful consideration of their “practical, social, cultural, and medial environments,” it is possible—and necessary—to read them in ways beyond and counter to the first obvious meaning.

Emphasizing the social and political implications of news photography, Azoulay conceives photography as a civil contract, which not only establishes a reciprocal relationship between the people photographed and the viewer, but also a certain responsibility. The spectators’ responsibility is to prevent the foreclosure of the photograph’s meaning by any dominant narrative. Especially if it concerns news photographs in situations of crisis, one cannot conceive the photographer as the sole author of the image and the media outlet as the one who determines its meaning. Instead, as Azoulay points out, one has to consider the specific interests of the photographed subjects in the production and dissemination of the images and attempt to recover their suppressed side of the story. In the case of most of the photographs I investigate, protesters performing effigies actively take part in the photograph’s production. They seek out the camera and stage the scene to be photographed in order to address wider audiences. The agency of the subjects in these photographs is evident, inviting a reading into the intentions and attitudes of protesters as they try to pierce the obfuscating screen of the media while and communicate through it.

35 See chapter 3: Performing Protest.
Writing with Images

One way to work with the data is to order it rationally following geographical and chronological criteria. This order situates events in their historical geographical context and allows for inquiry with respect to genealogies, cultural specificity, and development over time. Another approach is to take the images themselves as entry points into the study of the living cultural practice whose remnants are these violent and grotesque images. In a forensic manner, I read the images closely for clues as to how to think about the practice as a whole.36 I analyze their visual content for gestures, expressions, and constellations, as well as their different layers in relation to each other.37 The images activate each other and resonate with one another; they start talking back and patterns in the different layers of the photographs and events they depict become visible.

I follow the clues hidden in single images as well as their accumulation within a large number of images, seeking resemblances, associations, and affinities. In this close reading, connections between the images across time and origin are established, revealing semantic traces and patterns that further direct my research. With the collection set in motion, new configurations appear that ask for different trans-disciplinary perspectives.

In reading the practice through images, some photographs become especially significant. These belong to a class of images that the eminent theorist of visual culture W. J. T. Mitchell describes as “meta-pictures,” which reflect “on the practices of pictorial representation.”\(^{38}\) They can embody, or rather picture, an argument, lead the investigation in a specific direction, or cause it to branch out in several directions. This image from India is an example of such a meta-picture at the intersection of several lines of thinking that I follow in my research: the relaxed attitude of the group of protesters hints at the relatively common use of effigies in political conflicts in India and calls for research into the genealogy of the practice. A sense of animation of the effigy underscores the skill of its maker as well as an uncanny interaction between it and the protesters, steering the research toward anthropology and psychology. The similar iconography of the garlanded statue in the background suggests an engagement with iconology.

Other images do not need to be closely analyzed but nevertheless provide sudden, lucid insights. Philosopher Walter Benjamin terms these images “dialectical” emerging “suddenly, in a flash” in the “now of [their] recognizability.”\(^{39}\) Following this statement he elaborates on the relationship between images and knowledge: “To thinking belongs the movement as well as the arrest of thoughts. Where thinking comes to a standstill in a constellation saturated with

---

tensions—there the dialectical image appears.” Political philosopher Susan Buck-Morss specifies that Benjamin’s “dialectics of seeing” relies “on the interpretive power of images that make conceptual points concretely, with reference to the world outside the text.” Images reside on the nexus of memory and knowledge of the world. Some images in my collection vividly emulate iconic images stored in social memory. For instance, the photograph of a hanged effigy of an African-American voter from 1939 establishes a link to violent practices of racial subjugation in the American South, so that this monstrous image, as the trace of an event in time, evokes a concrete social and political environment.

In the same sense, art historian Aby Warburg, whose work has gained attention far beyond his own field and has become an inspiration for artists in the last twenty years, considers, in philosopher Giorgio Agamben’s words, “the image as the organ of social memory.” By investigating the reappearance of image motifs over time and their migration across cultures, Warburg aimed to turn art history into the study of “historical psychology of human expression.”

Focusing on the relation between images, he pursued “an ‘iconology of the interval,’ a study of the Zwischenraum

40 Benjamin, The Arcades Project, 475.
in which the incessant symbolic work of social memory is carried out.”  
Curator and art historian Philippe-Alain Michaud defines the iconology of the interval as based on the “interrelationships between the figures in their complex, autonomous arrangement, which cannot be reduced to discourse.”

In the last years of his life, Warburg created assemblages of heterogenous images—the “maps” of his Mnemosyne Atlas—to make apparent connections between images with distant origins in time and location. On large plates covered with black canvas, Warburg pinned reproductions of artworks and cultural artefacts from antiquity to the Renaissance, as well as contemporary images found in advertisements and newspapers. Through their arrangement, Warburg traced the lineage and survival of gestures and other visual tropes, which he called Pathosformeln (pathos formulas). The assemblages were his research tools, and the atlas a laboratory in continuous motion, expanding over time, with a growing collection of images in changing constellations. It remains unfinished, and only photographs of its different stages are preserved.

Art historian Georges Didi-Huberman points out the affinities between Warburg, Benjamin, and French intellectual Georges Bataille in their attention to images: “Warburg’s practice pursues the kind of knowledge

44 Agamben, Potentialities, 100.
obtainable through montage—the nonstandard kind recommended, practiced, and theorized in the same period by Benjamin in his *Arcades* and Georges Bataille in his journal *Documents*.” Referring to literary theorist Maurice Blanchot, Didi-Huberman characterizes montage as a way of writing with images. He stresses, though, that this kind of writing does not aim to reduce the “problems of the image” to speech, but to “unfold the image as the environment of appearance and disappearance.” In “a dynamic montage of heterogeneities,” knowledge is created in the dialectical movement between the singularity of photographic images and the constellations into which they are brought. The image montage functions as a “thought-space” that enables the dialectical movement between imagination and reason.

I take Warburg’s *Mnemosyne Atlas* as the model to guide my study of burning effigies: emotionally charged images of protest. I arrange the images into spatial assemblages, some kind of maps to use as research tools, according to resemblances, patterns, and associations that create semantic connections. From this an argument forms that is not linear but spatial, uneven, fragmentary, and sometimes circular. A track courses through the maps from key images to clusters of images to others, meandering, branching out, and occasionally returning to earlier associative lines of seeing and thinking. In a dialectical

movement, the image maps inform my thinking that in turn shapes the arrangement of images. From the associative relations laid out in the maps, I identify relevant, productive lines of inquiry, relating the image practice to theory from different fields: history, art history, anthropology, performance studies, photography theory, iconology, visual studies, and political philosophy. Based on the associative arrangements of the material, the text is not strictly linear either, but moves in each chapter in different directions to intersect at certain points in the dissertation.

In an attempt to stabilize the image maps I arrange them in a semi-linear narrative that runs parallel to the text in my dissertation. The narratives of image and text meet intermittently. The text connects directly to key images in the development of this argument and engages with theoretical aspects of image practice. The images ground the argument, tying it to specific events and contexts, while keeping the text on edge. Because of their polysemic nature, they resist finite conclusions and instead open up alternative readings, complicating the argument. The reader should spend at least as much time with the images as with the text—moving from image to text and back again, as visual studies scholar James Elkins suggests in *Writing with Images*, in a slow reading of the argument in the interaction between these media.  

Chapter Outline

During the process of close reading and ordering the images, certain characteristics central to the effigy protest practice became evident. These characteristics determined the ordering of the various assemblages, or image maps, and the approaches of my research. Some assemblages follow a rational diachronic and geographical order, situating effigy practice in specific political and historical contexts. Other assemblages are ordered synchronically, guided by association, resemblance, affinities, or motifs. Chronological and spatial order presupposes causal connections and development over time. This approach reveals genealogies and ways of transfer, and can shed light on the politics of the practice in specific political constellations. Establishing connections between events in a synchronic order outlines the general characteristics of effigy protests. They contain aspects of performance, visual strategies, aesthetics, attitudes, image operations, imaginaries of the social, and relation to the political.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the basic parameters of the practice: the meaning of “effigy” in European history in the diachronic chapter 2, and the relation between the live performance and its mediation in the synchronic chapter 3. Building on this basic understanding, the diachronic chapters 4, 5, and 6, delineate the history and genealogy of effigy protests in a number of countries in the context of specific political conflicts. Departing from these specific examples, the synchronic chapters 7 and 8 investigate the most striking general properties of effigy protests—their
grotesque aesthetics, the laughter and the violence they exhibit—in relation to the political.

Chapter 2, “Double Bodies,” offers a definition of the term “effigy” through a genealogy of effigy practices. Based in ancient Roman image culture, effigies were used as substitute bodies in political rituals, formal justice, popular justice, and calendrical rituals throughout the course of European history. Effigies do not represent physical private bodies, but rather their public extensions: the social and political aspects of a person, the political office and the sovereign power invested in it.

Chapter 3, “Performing Protest,” takes insights from performance and ritual studies to understand how an effigy protest unfolds as a performance of punishment of a perpetrator by a community and to what effect. I describe the stages of the performance: the making and parading of effigies, setting, execution, and mediation of the performance. Staging and embodiment have strong effects on the memory and identity of participants and create alternative imaginaries for the political sphere, while news images and reports emerge as integral and intended parts of the live performances which extend their reach. As compressed descriptions of the conflicts, the media images are pathos formulas of protest, to use Aby Warburg’s terminology, recognizable formulaic images, which enable the communication between diverse audiences across temporal and cultural distances. Moving between embodied performance and mediated report, the practice is activated from and re-inscribed into the social memory to become part of the political protest repertoire.
I then present three diachronic chapters, focusing on countries in which effigy protests appear most prominently in recent news media. In the US, effigies have been performed very visibly during the last three presidential elections. In Middle Eastern and South Asian countries embroiled in conflicts and wars with the US and its allies, effigies have been performed in protests against Western hegemonic policies. In Arab Spring nations (Egypt, Libya, Syria, and Yemen), effigies were performed to demand change in domestic politics.

Chapter 4, “Effigy Protests in the History of the United States,” shows the development of effigy protests in one specific country over an extended period of time, from the American Revolution in 1765 until the present day. Rooted in two traditional effigy practices, effigy protest has come to address a large variety of political conflicts. It is used to positively affirm the existing order, to suppress resistance through violent threat, or to challenge that order and demand change. Some effigy protests, staged for instance in the struggle for and against civil rights in the 1950s and ’60s, pointedly articulate the conflict that lies at the heart of modern liberal democracy, between the principles of popular sovereignty and universal human rights.

Chapter 5, “Effigy Protests in Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan and Across the Middle East,” traces the genealogies of effigy protests in Egypt, Iran, and Afghanistan and the wider region, from the perspective of Western news media. Most political effigy protests in these countries were staged in protest against Western cultural, economic, and military
domination. These protests hint at the apparent lack of justice and channels for redress in international conflicts. I concentrate in this chapter on different modes of transfer: with migrating people, by appropriation, and through the news media. Lastly, I elaborate on the role and limitations of the media in cross-cultural communication contributing to emerging transnational and cross-cultural public spheres.

On the basis of the previous chapter, chapter 6, “Dialogic Communication: Effigy Protests in Iraq,” zooms in on a period in one country, Iraq, to inquire into a series of effigy protests staged against US military occupation in Baghdad between 2005 and 2009. From a Western perspective, I explore the communication between different populations through symbolic visual signs and how image practices from Islamic and Western cultural contexts interrelate. The communication via news media leads to a shared symbolic language developed dialogically across national and cultural borders, as described in chapter 5.

Chapter 7, “Resemblance and the Grotesque,” focuses on operational aspects of images and their aesthetics. I read effigy practice in relation to different notions of resemblance, in which resemblance is an operation that recognizes and at the same time constructs relationships between actors and objects. I then introduce the grotesque as an image operation equally relevant to effigy protests, but which disrupts the ordering principle of resemblance. The grotesque distorts the object and exposes it to mockery and debasement. While based on the same mechanisms as resemblance, the grotesque exerts a form of exclusionary violence that ridicules and insults the political opponent.
and aims to influence the political sphere.

Chapter 8, “Violence and Laughter,” explores violence and laughter, which paradoxically permeate the performance of protest effigies in regard to their effect on the social and political sphere. Yet neither violence nor laughter is reducible to one form, nor do they neatly align. With that in mind, I consider the relation between effigy protest, conflicting notions of justice and the law, and the configuration of the political. I investigate how laughter figures in these different constellations as either subjugating or liberating. Relating to current discourse in political philosophy, I differentiate between effigy protests that exert extreme subjugating violence, which destroys the possibilities of politics, and violence that is unavoidable as an aspect of resistance against an oppressive political status quo.

In the conclusion, I bring together the different strands developed in this study. I evaluate the findings in relation to each other, and indicate trajectories for further productive inquiry. Finally, I evaluate the role effigy practice can play in relation to the political as an indicator of injustice and violence and as a symptom of fundamental conflicts at the internal and external limits of contemporary liberal democracy.

The diversity of approaches reflected in the succession of chapters, captures the phenomenon of effigy protests as thoroughly as possible concerning the aspects that I have identified as central to the practice. This transdisciplinary approach, I argue, makes it possible for the first time in academic research to comprehensively assess the practice of hanging or burning effigies in a single study.