Burning images
*Performing effigies as political protest*
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Performance

The theatricality of effigy practice is evident in the reports and images replete with actors and props, theatrical exaggeration and pathos. Staging a performance also implies the presence of an audience, of which both immediate spectators and news consumers are part. To understand the effects of this theatricality, I introduce the framework of performance. Following performance theorist and practitioner Diana Taylor, I use the concept “performance” as the methodological lens through which I investigate political performances constituted by effigy protests.¹ This perspective highlights effigy hangings or burnings as cultural and embodied practices that performatively co-constitute social reality.²

Performance and ritual scholars have observed that these areas are central to politics.³ Through enactment and re-enactment, performances create social reality and form social memory, they make the symbolic order of society visible and at the same time performatively construct and enforce that order.⁴ Performance and ritual, however,

4 Schechner, Performance Studies, 42–43.
also play a role in contesting existing political orders and creating alternative memories and imaginaries. The performance of protest provides the embodied presence on which, as political philosopher Judith Butler stresses, the political subject depends especially in resistance to marginalization.5

Within the framework of performance, this chapter addresses fundamental questions posed by the practice of effigy protests: how does it bring actors and audiences into being? How does it create alternative imaginaries of society and influence social relations through its symbolic staging? How does its embodiment in performance relate to the way in which it is mediated? How do these performances produce and transfer social knowledge, memory, and identity? Finally, how is the practice itself transferred between different communities over time?

The following text describes the elaborate performance of protest against British taxation in Lebanon, Connecticut in 1765. Partly adapted from the Pope Day celebrations and also traditional effigy practices related to popular justice, the performance follows the general script of public punishment, filled in with improvised details and parodic elements.

The mob at Lebanon undertook to send Ingersol to his own place. They made three effigies: one to represent Mr. Grenville [prime minister of Great Britain]; another Ingersol; and a third, the Devil. The last was dressed with a wig, hat and black coat, given by parson Solomon Williams, of Lebanon. Mr. Grenville was honoured with a hat, wig, and coat, a present from Mr. Jonathan Trumbull, who was afterwards chosen Governor. Mr. Ingersol was dressed in red, with a lawyer's wig, a wooden sword, and his hat under his left arm, by the generosity of Joseph Trumbull. Thus equipped, the effigies were put into a cart with ropes about their necks, and drawn towards the gallows. A dialogue ensued between the criminals. Some friendship seemed to subsist between Mr. Grenville and the Devil, while nothing but sueers and frowns passed from the Devil to Ingersol; and the fawning reverence of the latter gave his infernal highness such offence, that he turned up his breech and discharged

fire, brimstone, and tar, in Ingersol's face, setting
him all in a blaze; which, however, Mr. Grenville
generously extinguished with a squint. This was many
times repeated. As the procession advanced, the mob
exclaimed, “Behold the just reward of our agent, who
sold himself to Grenville, like Judas, at a price!” In
this manner the farce was continued till midnight, at
which time they arrived at the gallows; where a person
in a long shirt, in derision of the surplice of a church
clergyman, addressed the criminals with republican
atticisms, ralleries, &c. concluding thus: “May your
deads be tedious and intolerable, and may your souls
sink quick down to hell, the residence of tyrants, traitors,
and devils!” The effigies were then turned off, and
after hanging some time, were hoisted upon the top
of a huge pile of wood, and burnt, that their bodies
might share a similar fate with their souls. This pious
transaction exalted the character of Mr. Trumbull, and
facilitated his election to the office of Governor: and
what was of further advantage to him, his mob judged
that the bones of Ingersol's effigy merited Christian
burial according to the rites of the church of England,
though he had been brought up a Sober Dissenter;
and resolved, therefore, to bury his bones in Hebron.
Accordingly thither they repaired; and, having made
a coffin, dug a grave in a cross street, and made every
other preparation for the interment, they sent for the
Episcopal clergyman there to attend the funeral of the
bones of Ingersol the traitor. The clergyman told the
messengers that neither his office nor person were to
be sported with, nor was it his business to bury *Sober Dissenteri*, who abuse the church while living. The mob, enraged at this answer, ordered a party to bring the clergyman by force, or send him to hell after Ingersol. This alarmed the people of the town, who instantly loaded their muskets in defence of the clergyman. Thus checked in their mad career, the mob contented themselves with a solemn funeral procession, drums beating, and horns blowing, and buried the coffin in the cross street, one of the pantomimes bawling out, *We commit this traitor’s bones to the earth, ashes to dust and dust to ashes, in sure and certain hope* that his soul is in hell with all tories and enemies of Zion. Then, having driven a stake through the coffin, and each cast a stone upon the grave, they broke a few windows, cursed such clergymen as rode in chaises and were above the control of God’s people, and went off with a witless saying, viz. “It is better to live with the church militant than with the church triumphant.”

The protesters stage a mock execution and mock funeral of the tax collector Jared Ingersoll with much attention to detail, each of which are crucial to the protest narrative. The gentleman’s outfit and lawyer’s wig signifies the social standing of a British loyalist, the reference to Judas and the monetary reward signify treason. Before the mob performs

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7 Description of the effigy procession of stamp master Jared Ingersoll in 1765 in Lebanon, Connecticut (emphasis in original). In the text, Ingersoll’s name is spelled incorrectly with only one *l*. Anonymous, *A General History of Connecticut* (London, 1782), 343–47.
Richard Schechner proposes that there are seven functions of performance:
1. to entertain;
2. to make something that is beautiful;
3. to mark or change identity;
4. to make or foster community;
5. to heal;
6. to teach, persuade, or convince;
7. to deal with the sacred and/or the demonic.

Applying Schechner’s categories to the performances of effigies, their main functions are: 4. fostering community; 3. marking the identity of the protesting group; 6. persuading and convincing the adversaries of necessary change; and 5. healing the crisis in society. Two other functions play a role as well, since the performance for sure is: 1. entertaining for the participants; as well as 7. dealing with the sacred and the demonic, in addressing the division between good and evil, between justice and injustice. The only function that the effigy performances decidedly not do is: 2. to make something beautiful. On the contrary: staging conflict and violence, they create the ugly, the vile, the demonic, and the deformed. That does not mean that there are no moments of beauty and wonder in the many images I have collected. But these moments seem to appear rather accidentally and unintended in the course of a performance.

9 Schechner, Performance Studies, 46.
10 Schechner, Performance Studies, 35.
11 Schechner, Performance Studies, 76.
12 Schechner, Performance Studies, 46.
specific kinds of performances, “collective memories encoded into actions,” that have an increased potential to transform the social structure of a community. Rituals occupy a specific time/space outside the normal state of being, which ritual scholar Victor Turner calls their “liminality.” In the liminality of a ritual, participants can form interpersonal bonds—to use Turner’s term, “communitas”—that allows for an experience of community beyond normative social constraints. The time/space of a ritual has the potential to transform social structures and identities.

As a form of ritual, political protest creates a similar liminality. It affords the creation of communitas and opens up the possibility for social change. When a person decides to join a protest, they step out of their ordinary life and assume the role of protester engaging in ritualized actions and forms of speech: marching, chanting, gesturing, or burning effigies. Similar to participating in a ritual, protesters gain experiential knowledge by embodying “assumptions about their place in a larger order of things.” Butler calls this liminal time of the protest a “time of the interval,” an anarchist passage with the potential to install a new order. Among protesters, common grievances and objectives are formulated and expressed while being

20 Butler, “Bodies in Alliance.”
present, speaking, and acting in public space. Acting together, protesters perform the potential for an alternative order of relationships in the space they contest: “Through the acts of protesting and demonstrating, new identities and subjectivities are performatively constituted.” Here both the staging and enacting involved in performance is made clear. While performances are imagined and then acted out by participants, they “make beliefs,” that is, they construct a belief system for the participant community.

Performance theorists stress that the hypothetical and conditional, the “as if” and the “what if” are the fundamental qualities of performance. The performance of protest proposes alternative political imaginaries and social relations, staging them as though real. The experience of communal action creates social identities and memories, which can form the basis for future action. In that way, these performances can have a lasting effect on the communities involved.

During the 2011 uprising in Egypt, activists in Tahrir Square, Cairo staged a mock trial, mock execution, and mock funeral with three effigies of President Hosni Mubarak and two other members of the government. The effigies were made from stuffed fabric, with painted faces, suits, and ties, and covered with slogans and signs considered

21 Butler, “Bodies in Alliance.”
23 Schechner, Performance Studies, 42.
to be defamatory in that context: the Star of David and dollar notes stuck out of one of the figure’s pockets. In an Associated Press video, an activist can be seen reading the indictment of the president and a “judge” writing a note, with the public intently watching proceedings. Later, two of the effigies were hanged from the crossbeams of the traffic lights high above the crowd—one bearing a sign reading: “The people want a trial for the murderous president.” These hung there for at least a week and were featured in many press photographs. The third effigy was carried around the square in a mock funeral and eventually torn to pieces. Similar mock trials were repeated either with effigies or actors.

The staging of the trials raised a fascinating question: what if Egypt had an independent judicial system and the president was subject to the rule of law? Employing the discourse of formal justice, the protesters drew on the legitimacy of the rule of law and the letter of the constitution as a strategy of resistance against the extra-legal state of emergency that characterized Mubarak’s regime. By reconfiguring the ritualized scenario of the trial, protesters accessed the normative qualities of official political ritual and gave the protesters’ demand to unseat the president a socially and politically acceptable form. Mubarak faced the people he was accountable to in a substitute body, his crimes were announced and the protesters’ objectives

The mock trial projected the image of the authoritarian ruler as subject to the rule of law, and educated the audience about the limits of government. The audience in the square became the audience at the president’s trial, both delivering justice and participating in legal procedure. Together with the larger protest, the performance staged an alternative reality demanded by the protesters, making it visible and imaginable. Repeatedly staging Mubarak’s trial created an imaginary, a memory, which projected its force into the future and seemed to influence reality: six months after the first mock trial in the square, Mubarak stood trial before a real judge.

While the scenario of the performance is not predictive of the future—and it often fails to become realized—it can open up, in Diana Taylor’s words, a “framework within which thinking takes place.” As such it creates the space where alternative orders can be imagined. The rituals of official political manifestations (military parades, a coronation, a trial) present and perform the political order as the legitimate one and as if it was the only one possible. They close off the space of possibility. The performances of protest on the other hand, open up


28 Schechner, Performance Studies, 321.

29 In 2012, Mubarak was sentenced to life imprisonment for his responsibility in the death of peaceful protesters during the 2011 revolution. After several appeals and retrials, his conviction was overturned in 2017 and he was released from detention.

30 Taylor, Performance, 140.

this space and create alternative imaginaries in the social memory. They contest existing power relations, present alternative orders, and negotiate for change.32

**Scenario**

To understand how effigy protests are structured, communicated, and remembered, it is useful to look at the protest scenario as a condensed description of a performance. Taylor describes the scenario as “a paradigm that is formulaic, portable, repeatable, and often banal because it leaves out complexity, reduces conflict to its stock elements, and encourages fantasies of participation.”33 A scenario is a compact narrative and semantic structure that describes all constituent elements of a performance: the social setting, plot, attitudes, and affective reactions.34 In the social arena, scenarios offer social actors a framework by which to guide their action through familiar and recognizable structures. Taylor suggests analyzing the scenario of social dramas to understand the underlying behaviors and social structures, since it is not based on only verbal expressions “but demands that we also pay attention to milieux and corporeal behaviors such as gestures, attitudes, and tones not reducible to language.”35

By investigating the scenario, three aspects of performance

come into focus: the narrative within a specific social setting; the plot as a structure for the action; and the range of corporeal and emotional engagement prescribed for the actors in the “gestures, attitudes, and tones” transmitted with the scenario.

In terms of social relations, the narrative of an effigy protest can be described as the symbolic punishment of a perpetrator by the community in order to establish or reestablish the just order of society. The perpetrator could be an individual, in the political sphere it is often a group, a party, or abstract entity like the government. The figure is not necessarily targeted for individual crimes, but as a representative of a group. The scenario suggests a specific social setting: an antagonistic conflict between two opposing groups and the lack of alternative means to address grievances. It suggests a community in crisis, in a state of injustice, and in need of change that the ritual-like performance can help to bring about.

The emotional and affective charges prescribed by the scenario of protest can include anger over perceived injustice, righteousness or jeering sense of superiority, exhilaration from participation in the performance, unifying sense of community, outrage over hurtful performance, relief in playing out redressing injustice, or ironic resignation over the performance’s lack of effect. While depending on place in conflict and disposition with each case, the emotional charge differs for actors and audience members, a narrative of capital punishment invariably produces violent images and elicits strong emotional response.
The scenario of an effigy protest develops in six more or less pronounced stages that are practically or semantically fundamental: (1) making; (2) dedication to the figure it represents through inscribing the name and/or attaching a picture and other identifying traits and symbols; (3) presentation to an audience; (4) animation through interaction, suggesting a degree of agency; (5) debasement through defaming inscriptions, attributes, or symbolic actions; and (6) execution.
These stages (except the fourth) are clearly visible in the series of photographs from a demonstration in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, in 2012, where hundreds of students protested against the massacre of sixteen civilians by a US Army sergeant two days before in Kandahar province: (1) the body is made from grey pants and a green shirt sewn together wrapped in a warm brown coat and stuffed with straw, with a head of white cloth covered with a green cap; (2) no markings appear during the march, as the effigy’s representation is revealed as US President Barack Obama only at the final point of assembly, visible in a photograph of a protester inscribing the green shirt and a piece of paper with the name; (3) a protester carries the effigy at shoulder height with a stick stuck through the crotch, presenting it to marchers and onlookers; (4) the protesters in this case don’t interact with the effigy as if it was alive; (5) its mouth has devilish pointy teeth, tears flow down from his eyes, and the text on the paper reads: “OBAMA Son of the Bitch”; and (6) the protesters have arranged themselves in a circle around the burning effigy on the ground, raising their fists and shouting slogans, presenting themselves and their performance to the photographers.
Although there is no prescription for producing an effigy, its intended purpose sets up a framework: it needs to be light so that it can be carried in marches; it must be big enough to be visible to an audience; and it should catch fire quickly and thoroughly if meant to burn so no remnant of the despised figure remains lest it spoil the purification. Making begins with the body, the medium, the physical carrier of the depicted. It is often made of old clothes—pants and a shirt sewn together or overalls—stuffed with light, flammable material like straw, paper, or plastic foil. Sometimes the whole body is sewn from cloth, making it even more of a medium, like an empty canvas upon which the image is painted. The head is often made with a greater degree of attention: using a pillow, ball, stuffed plastic bag, or meticulously sculpted from papier-mâché.

Currently, as printers are readily available, photographs of the depicted are regularly added. A sheet of paper with a portrait is attached, usually to the head, sometimes multiple images are used. In some cases, the creator makes an effort to shape the two-dimensional photograph into a three-dimensional head. These likenesses evoke a vivid but strangely distorted liveliness. The figures seem present and somehow complacent, engaged, but unperturbed by the excitement going on around them.
Most protest effigies look like scarecrows improvised by amateurs, but some show real craftsmanship. In many Latin American countries, papier-mâché effigies for traditional celebrations at New Year and Easter are widely available in local markets. In India, specialized craftspeople use bamboo and paper to fabricate immense effigies of Ravana for the festival of Dussehra in the north, or straw and clay to make Durga effigies in the east. The quality craftsmanship and style of some protest effigies makes evident their professional manufacture.
The making is often collaborative. In some of the relatively few photographs I was able to source that show the process, people work together and the conviviality between them is palpable. Indeed, the making is the first stage of the communal action constituting an effigy protest. Most effigies are life-size, evoking bodily presence in opposition to the protesters, making the performance that much more effective. The smaller they are the less possible to call them effigies, but rather dolls as their destruction lacks the corporeal quality of an effigy. Effigies can, depending on the makers’ ambition, be very large. Conducive to gigantification is that effigy protests tend to become communal traditions fueling the competition with earlier iterations or competing protest groups. This can be observed, for instance, in the Philippines, where artist collectives, like UGATLahi, have produced gigantic effigies on elaborate floats for their protests against successive presidents since the 1980s.37

It is fascinating to study the photographs in detail and imagine the creative process that goes into making effigies. This alone is deserving of a book-length study on techniques and materials, as well as the mindset, effort and dedication, and richness or lack of imagination of these artists. One could then reflect on the decision to represent the head of an American pastor with a plastic watering can, or admire effigies as canvases covered in drawings and calligraphy. One striking image shows a dark hooded figure made from tar paper or the like, attached to it a photo of Bashar al-Assad; how else could you depict a president who sacrificed his people to stay in power? Another shows Ban Ki Moon’s oversized head carved from Styrofoam, an enigmatic but friendly smile on his face while being burned. Many feature Obama, whether smiling out from a picture stuck onto his effigy that lies crumpled at protesters’ feet, or as an effigy with a crudely drawn, expressive face, photographed as if shouting out slogans with his companion protester. Zoomed in, one digital photograph of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown shows him as an abstract ecce homo, the grotesque character of the effigy is echoed in the way the images falls apart into disjointed pixels as we get closer to it.
For the performance to make sense, the effigy needs to be associated with the specific figure being targeted. In many cases, the identity of the effigy might be clear from the context of the performance, but most often significant efforts are made to ensure this. The image is grafted onto the dummy through drawing, painting, or attaching a photograph. But to unambiguously connect the dummy to the depicted personality, most often their name is inscribed on the body of the effigy. Other symbols and attributes help with identification, like flags, organizational acronyms, briefcases, or specific items of clothing.
With the beginning of the performance, the effigy is presented to participants and spectators, itself a participant of sorts joining in the parade, carried by a protester, or riding along on a stick like a banner. Alternatively, the effigy can be installed on a pedestal, or hanged from a rope. The depicted is made present in the effigy in anticipation of the ritual of reversal, debasement, and punishment. This presentation paradoxically confirms the depicted figure’s position of power, unavoidably affirming status since the ritual of demands their presence.

animation

At some moment during the process of dedication, the effigy is animated, it comes to life. It is a form of consecration not only instigated by the makers, but even more through the actions and perceptions of the performer-participants and observers who interact with the puppets as if they had a life of their own. Most inscriptions refer to the effigies, state the names of the depicted and add insulting descriptors like “dog” or “monster.” Some inscriptions address the effigy in third person and through it the one it depicts: “Hassan Rot Op!” (Hassan, get lost!), or “Go Back to Africa Where You Belong.” In some cases, effigies speak themselves in the first person: “Soy Ruben Costas, Vende Patria” (I am Ruben Costas, Traitor), “I am Shetan Rushdie,” “The World is Mine,” or “I’m Bush, Kill Me.” The effigies acquire a form of agency, the ability to speak and interact with the protesters as animated, physical semi-beings with the possibility to influence their human companions, aiding in the lifelike characteristic that makes this form of protest so engaging.

39 Schechner, Performance Studies, 205; Belting, Bild-Anthropologie, 149.
40 Horst Bredekamp describes this form of animation through first-person inscriptions for antique sculptures and artifacts. Horst Bredekamp, Theorie des Boldakts (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2010), 59-69.
I'm White
I'm Black

Go Back to Africa Where You Belong

I am Ruben Costas, Traitor

I am Satan Rushdie

I am Batista, the Assassin

The World is Mine

1962_10_03_USA-MA: African-American student

2006_12_15_Bolivia: Governor Costas

1953_05_00_Cuba: President Batista

1989_02_19_India: author Salman Rushdie

2004_08_25_Pakistan: US President Bush

2004_11_03_Iran: US President Bush

1960_03_02_USA-TX: author John Howard Griffin

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Debasement

In presenting the effigy to a public, it is often demeaned: spectators are invited to participate and contribute to its punishment by kicking, punching, hitting, defiling with paint, having things thrown at it, and other threatening gestures like raised fists or guns pointed its way. Signs of the reversal of status are often added to it: devil’s horns or teeth, nooses, or shackles. In Muslim countries hitting and decorating the effigies with shoes is popular. This debasement recalls the practice of humiliating a convict at the pillory, during which spectators’ participation contributes to the punishment.

41 For more detail see chapter 7, “Resemblance and the Grotesque.”
1996_10_28_India: BSP chief Ram

2011_06_24_Turkey: Syrian President Assad

2013_02_08_India: Rajya Sabha chairman Kurien

2007_07_01_Pakistan: author Salman Rushdie

2013_11_19_Afghanistan: US President Obama

2009_07_13_India: Union Carbide CEO Anderson

2013_01_16_India: US President Obama

2017_05_23_Palestine: US President Trump
Execution

At the end, the climax of the performance, the effigy is executed. Most often, it is doused with a flammable liquid, set on fire, and burned down to a heap of smoldering ashes. Alternatively, it is hanged on improvised gallows or from trees, bridges, and cranes. Sometimes it is burned after hanging, and at others left as a lasting sign of humiliation.\(^{42}\) Other forms of execution also occur: decapitation, stabbing, and beatings, even being dragged by cars or torn to pieces.

\(^{42}\) See also chapter 4, “Effigy Protests in the History of the United States.”
executed

1930_03_11_USA-MI: strike breaker Frank Curry

1903_11_19_USA-MI: strike breaker Frank Curry

1982_03_11_Israel: Premier Begin

1973_06_17_Italy: Premier Andreotti

1982_05_13_France: policeman

1973_06_17_Italy: President Soleh

2010_03_02_Yemen: President Saleh

2016_09_15_USA-OH: presidential candidate Hillary Clinton

2012_06_07_Egypt: former President Mubarak and government members

2012_07_30_Ukraine: politicians

2012_06_07_Egypt: former President Mubarak and government members
The Stage

When the dramatic part of the performance is about to begin, protesters turn their attention toward the effigy. An open circular space forms around it: a stage. Participants are divided into roles: stage managers encouraging actors and communicating with the audience; protagonists engaging actively with the effigy, beating, hitting, and setting it on fire; and observers. Antagonistic participants might be present—counter-protesters and policemen guarding or policing the protest. Since members of these groups usually remain on the periphery, they are not often visible in photographs of effigy protests. Nevertheless, even if they are not physically present, the antagonistic actors and the general public are addressed by protests. As Taylor points out: “the scenario places spectators within its frame, implicating us in its ethics and politics.” As the demand that the general public take sides is inscribed in the scenario of a political protest, it implicates sympathetic, antagonistic, and neutral audiences. The ritual-like performance of a political protest binds the whole social and political community. It stages the social constellation of involved groups, the conflict, and its emotional effects, and publicly proposes a possible solution to the community.

2011_10_07_Lebanon: Syrian President Assad

2012_09_21_Sri Lanka: US President Obama

2013_04_17_UK: former Premier Thatcher

1968_09_05_USA-MO: male student

1911_03_00_France: Council President Monis
Communication of a political protest is vital for it to become visible and lay claims in a public sphere. Mediation is the only way to communicate with a wider audience. As an archaic and low-tech genre of protest that produces spectacular symbolic images, burning effigies is successful in attracting the attention of the news media. This is true not only of the visual mass media of the twentieth and twenty-first century—print media have been vital to the success of political protest and in forming a public sphere for centuries.\(^4^4\) The first protest against British colonial policies in Boston, at the onset of the American Revolution on August 14, 1765, featured an elaborate effigy performance. It was reported in detail in the *Boston Gazette* and reprinted in newspapers across the colonies.\(^4^5\) The newspaper reports served as the blueprint for further protests in New England and effigy performance became a favorite revolutionary protest practice.

A report or a photograph of an effigy protest is already evidence that the news media were present. We must keep in mind that the very presence of the photographer and camera influences the course of the event.\(^4^6\) In many effigy protests, the camera’s presence makes the space’s division into a stage and audience area even more distinct. Initiators and active participants often assemble behind the burning effigy with placards and flags, presenting


\(^{45}\) *Boston Gazette*, August 19, 1765.

themselves to the camera, forming themselves into an image of protest.\textsuperscript{47} Their demands address not just the immediate audience, but to an equal degree the representatives of the news media.

The staging and framing of photographs suggest different kinds of recipients. Some photographs employ a first-person shooter perspective, making the viewer a participant in the action. Other photographs take a distant point of view, constructing the viewer as a disinterested observer. Many, however, show the effigy burning, as though staged for the camera, making the viewer the addressee, the antagonistic recipient provoked by the effigy. Similarly, the framing caters to media outlets’ different audiences. Since specific outlets are situated in the contested social and political sphere, they are positioned on one or the other side of the protest and often frame the report accordingly, participating in creating antagonistic and sympathetic recipients.

In some cases, a photograph makes obvious that the division between the stage and media audience was planned. During a protest rally organized by followers of Shia cleric Muqtada al-Sadr in Baghdad in 2008, effigies of US President George W. Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice were burned. In the background, cordoned off by a fence, is what reports describe as thousands of participants attending the rally. The effigy burning itself would have hardly been visible to protesters, appearing to be staged for the cameras and a few dignitaries. The main addressee is not the audience present in the square, but those reached by news media.

Even in small and seemingly less organized protests, the main addressee can be mediated audiences. In this photograph, we see a small protest in Bangladesh, staged apparently in the semi-public space of a madrassa with participants dressed alike, possibly all students at the school. Nevertheless, the presence of a large number of cameras in the upper left corner of the crowd suggests that the production of images was the main aim of the performance, attesting to the organizers’ intention to reach their audience through media.

Another example in which organizers were well aware of the media’s importance involve the protests against successive governments in the Philippines. Over the last two decades, National Democratic Front of the Philippines (NDFP) activists have developed the burning of effigies into a carnival-like spectacle. Large numbers of artists, artisans, and volunteers work collectively. They choose a theme and create large effigy floats with an elaborate pictorial
program, visually narrating the political issues they protest against. In well-organized theatrical processions, they move the effigies along a route. In a moving performance, groups of actors engage with the effigies in different ways, of which burning is only the last cathartic act. Over the years, organizers have more and more refined the choreography of the performances with the media in mind, to provide spectacular images and insure the most broad coverage possible. 48

Embodied protest and its mediation have become tightly entangled. Today, more than ever, it is impossible to imagine a protest without its mediation. Even though the physical dimensions of political protest in public space are considered paramount to making political claims, the mediated protest becomes an extension of the space of the protest. 49 As Butler puts it: “the media is the scene or the space in its extended and replicable visual and audible dimensions.” 50 That does not mean that the experiences of protest on the street and through media are the same. Even though both immediate and mediated audiences are addressed, their experience and involvement differs. The potential of the mediated protest to implicate the audience is diminished: it becomes more of a choice whether to engage, even though contemporary social media affords a degree of involvement and supportive action. Some mediated audiences sympathetic to protesters can spread reports of the events and influence public opinion through

49 Butler, “Bodies in Alliance.”
50 Butler, “Bodies in Alliance.”
sharing and commenting. Antagonistic audiences are also emotionally affected, and possibly activated to engage further. But to audiences unaffected by the protest, the reports and images might be just more in a row of spectacles, emptied of urgency and disconnected from the conflict at hand and the social context. Additionally, since the different news media have their own agenda, the protesters’ message is easily reframed or distorted.

While the news media have been identified as part of the public sphere in the framework of the nation-state in the past, political philosopher Nancy Fraser points out that the recent rapid expansion of the media allowed for new, if uneven and weak, transnational public spheres to emerge. In these transnational public spheres, identities and imaginaries can be negotiated, and, to a degree, the existing order can be challenged beyond the limits of the nation-state. To cite Butler again: “The media requires those bodies on the street to have an event, even as the street requires the media to exist in a global arena.”

53 Butler, “Bodies in Alliance.”
Memory

Reports on political protests in the media extend the embodied performances on the street. In addition, reports form an entry point to the stabilized memory of the “archive”: the vast collection of supposedly unchangeable records including texts, pictures, buildings, and artefacts. Taylor stresses that cultural memory is constituted not just by the institutionalized knowledge of the archive, but also the embodied knowledge of the “repertoire,” comprised of reiterative practices, acts, and performances. Both the repertoire and archive are “in a constant state of interaction” and subject to change. What enables the movement of embodied social knowledge from repertoire to the archive and back again is in her view, the scenario. Its compact form makes it suitable for transfer and adaptation to new situations.

The embodied performance of effigy protests enters the media in the form of reports and photographs, condensed descriptions of the performance that are forms of the scenario. Reading, listening, and watching a report becomes the experience and memory for distant audiences. The protest is transferred to their memory through the scenario. On the one hand, the media are the extended space of embodied protest and the reports are one form in which the protest is experienced. On the other hand, mediation transposes the event into a stable medium: a text or an image. In that sense, the media are part of the

archive, albeit less stable than institutionalized forms of the archive, like the library, the museum, or the canon of political ritual. The news media might be characterized as intermediary storage spaces continually in flux, containing reports that are being written, re-written, partly discarded, and partly solidified as social memory. In the creation of social memory, mediating scenarios is crucial to moving from embodiment to archive.

The scenario of protest is retrieved from embodied memory, re-enacted in the performance of protest, mediated by the media, and rewritten into the archive not as a copy, but as a reinterpretation.56 A given scenario is always adapted for a specific occasion, taking into account context, actors, conflict, etc. Due to its generality, the scenario allows for considerable improvisation and elaboration. While the scenario remains the same, each effigy performance varies in form, mood, social and political configuration, meaning, and effect.57 Even though the media report on specific events, their descriptions point back to the general scenario and inscribe it into the archive.

The form in which the scenario is inscribed is often just a photograph or short sentence about the protest in a news report: a snapshot in an ongoing conflict even more compressed than a scenario. An effigy protest conjures up the image of a burning figure surrounded by agitated protesters demanding justice. This image is not necessarily based on the memory of an actual single photograph,

56 Taylor, *Performance*, 139.
but is rather a vivid mental image distilled from multiple reports and/or photographs. Art historian Caroline van Eck describes the close relation and interaction between metaphor, ekphrasis (description of images), mental images and memory based on texts from ancient Greek rhetoric and philosophy. And also Rosalind Krauss evokes the link between photographic image and collective memory by citing photographer Gisèle Freund: “It’s always the still image and not the one in motion that stays etched in our minds, becoming ever after part of our collective memory.”

I would argue that the whole practice of burning effigies as the expression of political protest can be compressed into a single iconic and formulaic image. Like the scenario, this mental image includes the basic structure and narrative, social setting, and emotional charge. For instance, the 19th century engraving showing an effigy of New Hampshire’s stamp master Meserve on a pole, a few stones in the air, and a group of revolutionaries cheering on the performance. Many news photographers would probably be inclined to take a picture of that moment, when all elements combine to match the mental image: an assembled crowd in a public space, acting together, expressing their shared emotions in a symbolic gesture of

60 Gotthold Ephraim Lessing writes on the need for the artist to depict the decisive moment of a dramatic occurrence. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Laokoon oder Über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2004), III.
punishment.

This formulaic image compressed in the scenario falls under art historian Aby Warburg’s pathos formulas, which philosopher Giorgio Agamben defines as the “indissoluble intertwining of emotional charge and an iconographic formula in which it is impossible to distinguish between form and content.”61 Warburg searched for shared expressions of heightened emotions in Renaissance art and Renaissance Festwesen (culture of celebrations), finding them in the formulaic images of bodily gestures that Renaissance artists recuperated from art from antiquity. In Warburg’s view pathos formulas are the vehicles of our collective memory.62 Visual culture theorist W. J. T. Mitchell describes them as film stills, “snapshots of emotional life, that have left the image behind as a clue.”63 The images of effigy protests, pathos formulas of protest, transmit the scenario of the performance and a complex interplay of emotions related to the outrage over injustice. They show a perpetrator being punished as a communal action and the relief following the cathartic resolution. Even if few photographs of these protests precisely match this iconic image, most conjure it.

A characteristic of pathos formulas is the ability to travel. Even more compressed than scenarios, they can

survive multiple moves across cultural spheres, and can adapt to various contexts. The practice of hanging or burning effigies as a theatrical form of political protest, transmitted through its images, has crossed over from traditional ritual practices to contemporary politics. As shown in the following chapters, it has traversed cultural borders, from European ritual to Philippine politics, British political ritual to Middle-Eastern counter-protests, Shia mourning rituals to international politics. Each time, the practice is reactivated, reinvented, and re-inscribed with a new context-specific meaning. Nevertheless, its basic structure and emotional effect remains intact, surviving manifold iterations in local communities as well as globally mediated conflicts. The scenario of a ritual-like performance that expresses communal outrage is part of a repertoire shared across time and cultures, that can be activated, as Taylor suggests, to imagine and embody alternatives to the existing order.

Warburg collected examples of pathos formulas in the *Mnemosyne Atlas*, described in the introduction. In the Atlas, the contours of the pathos formulas of triumph, of destruction, of suffering, and of grief, become visible. While other pathos formulas also appear, though less clearly, a pathos formula of protest, as art historian Georges Didi-Huberman remarks, appears to be surprisingly absent.

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In 2016, Didi-Huberman attempted to capture the pathos formulas of protest in the exhibition *Uprisings* at the Jeu de Paume in Paris, where he assembled hundreds of images that show gestures of uprising. Designed as a research tool, the images are arranged in a vast montage in the spirit of Warburg’s Atlas. In the catalog, Didi-Huberman asks: “How do images draw so often from our memories in order to give shape to our desires for emancipation? And how does a poetic dimension manage to be created in the very heart of our gestures of uprising and *as a gesture of uprising*?”

Effigy protest belongs, I believe, to these gestures of uprising. But, as it will become clear in the following chapters, it is too simple to associate them only with resistance. As a symbolic visual form, it is too ambiguous in its semantics to claim it as a gesture of a specific progressive political form. In chapters 7 and 8, I investigate how desires and imaginaries are articulated in the gestures and images of effigy performances, and how their specific grotesque appearance relates both to violence and laughter. First, however, I trace the genealogies of effigy protests in a number of countries to detail how effigy protests are situated in specific political constellations and how they affect them.