

Make Your Own Effigies

A Tactic for Delegitimizing Authority and Rendering Dissent Visible

CrimethInc.

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Fourteen years ago, at the onset of the occupation of Iraq, one CrimethInc. cell set out to break the illusion of jingoistic pro-war unity in their small conservative city. To accomplish this, they built an effigy of George W. Bush and staged “boxing matches” throughout downtown on Halloween night so everyone could see how much rage and disrespect was felt towards the so-called Commander in Chief. Theatrics like this can delegitimize and demystify the reigning authorities, making it increasingly difficult for them to count on the obedience of the general population. Now, a week ahead of Halloween, we offer this how-to guide from our anarchist cookbook *Recipes for Disaster* so you can make effigies of your own to deploy against today’s tyrants.

Make Your Own Effigies

In the US, effigy-making has a rich radical heritage that stretches back to before the first American Revolution. If you can’t actually pummel or set fire to your oppressor, it can be heartening to do so to a surrogate; this is good for morale and helps to make discontent visible. In this regard, the effigy is the opposite of the monument: it serves to demystify and delegitimize the target. Authorities and counter-revolutionaries will do their best to enforce even symbolic respect of their idols, so be sure to deploy your effigy with plenty of supporters around or a plan for escape.

One well-known effigy format is the piñata. Filled with candy or other goodies, piñatas can be at once radical and festive. Piñata-beating is a participatory game that everyone wins. Trump piñatas became wildly popular after his racist comments about Mexico. At every public gathering, children of all ages should be smashing away at an effigy of the President of the United States.

Paper maché is one of the best materials for constructing piñatas. To make it, heat three parts water and two parts cornstarch until it becomes thick; let it cool a bit, and apply it to newspaper to make it stick together. Set up a wire frame, stretch the wet newspaper over it, let it dry, and repeat until the layers are durable; now you can paint it. Leave a hole in your piñata through which to fill it with goodies; that can be the last part you seal up. You can also make piñatas out of painted cardboard boxes, in a pinch. In either case, make sure it’s not too sturdy to break open with a few strong blows.

One doesn’t just beat effigies; one may also burn them. The day a war starts or the results of a rigged election are announced, it could be appropriate to take to the streets and set fire to an effigy of a political or military figure. Corporate news outlets will be hard-pressed to play that off as liberal disapproval! Indeed, what does it mean to burn an American flag? This is simply burning in effigy a hypocritical value system and genocidal legacy.

Keep a fire extinguisher on hand if you’re burning an effigy in a public place. Even if the fire doesn’t necessitate it, you can always use it to cover your retreat if need be, the same way a squid shoots out a cloud of ink.

For a more ambitious project, make an effigy that moves: a puppet effigy. Costume stores may have masks of your favorite subjects ready-made for you, especially around Halloween. Here’s a story about how we did this, once, many years ago.

Make Your Own Puppet Government

We stole the rubbery, full-head mask from a corporate store. The body was double-layered cardboard with tons of industrial staples and construction adhesive. This rigid understructure was wrapped in lots of soft foam rubber like that found in cheap sofas. The head was the same foam rubber, sculpted into the appropriate shape and “upholstered” with a tightly fitting double layer of cloth. The head was made large enough that it had to be squeezed into the mask. This helped the mask stay on, sort of. The extra cloth of the neck was stapled and glued to the torso. The legs were stuffed tubes of cloth with thin pieces of wood built into them like bones so they would bend at the knees. There was no such bone structure in the upper arms. The lower arms were made of long poles: at one end there were homemade red cloth boxing gloves stuffed with foam, while at the other end of the arms wood stuck through the elbows of the shirt and suit to about three feet of extra length—these enabled a puppeteer behind the effigy to operate the boxing arms. Because our dummy had no hips, the shirt and pants of his dumpstered dress suit were sewn together at the waist—this is highly recommended for the brawling effigy.

The whole thing hung from a pole on a thin rope; one person carried the pole, suspending the marionette in the air, while another stood behind it, operating the arms. When the pigs seized the pole from us at one demonstration, we were able to go on operating him for hours, the former pole bearer now holding the dummy aloft by means of the rope alone—although he nursed sore hands for days afterwards.

Account

“Fuck you George—this one’s for my brother!” The war cry came from a stocky gentleman in a leprechaun suit whose uplifted elbow was headed straight for the President’s eye. Bush and the leprechaun toppled over into a messy heap on the asphalt. We helped the two of them up and the leprechaun stumbled away. I had just barely gotten the commander in chief of the US military dusted off when another blow, this time a crushing uppercut, came out of nowhere and sent the President’s rubber face sailing out over the crowd. The megaphone squealed and H—’s voice boomed out “Oooooooooo, that one had to hurt, ladies and gentlemen! Now whooooo’s next?” Meanwhile, B— had run off into a little cluster of sumo wrestlers to fetch the weary face of the 43rd president of the United States of America. It was the fight of the decade!

Ringside seats to political theater aren’t exactly in high demand among the general public. But as luck would have it, the famously huge Halloween crowd in our town handled all the logistics for us. Voilà, 75,000 people ready for a wild night. And hell, we’ve all been to enough of these things to know how predictable they are: way too many cross-dressing frat boys, Supermen by the dozen, fairies, fairies, fairies, and that guy who just runs around screaming, “Wooooo!” The scene was set for something—anything—to go down.

That’s where George came in—hanging on the end of a rope. Our effigy had a cloth-covered foam rubber head stuffed into a rubber Bush mask. He wore a dumpstered business suit (public figures sometimes dress down for the masses) and a pair of red boxing gloves. For an entourage, he had drummers, banner-bearers, stilt-walking capitalist puppeteers and their corporate marionettes, and, of course, the ladies and gentlemen of “the press.” One of our number played the ringside announcer, dressed in a tux and wielding a megaphone. He was the ham: “Get into the

ring and take a swing at the king!” “Introducing—in the left corner, we have the challenger—uh, what’s your name, sir?” “Texas, Afghanistan, Iraq... YOU’RE NEXT!”

In fact, to our delight, we found that the crowd needed very little encouragement. On our way to the event, a taxi driver with limited English pulled over just to give the commander in chief a tidy thumping. With a little coaching and encouragement, chuckling liberals would give a symbolic tap on the nose—but most folks took it to the Prez with vicious abandon. The tightly fitted mask was knocked clean off the “dummy” too many times to count. Over and over the puppet was ripped from our hands by a hail of fists. When he crumpled to the ground, the crowd would commence kicking and jumping on his body in a manner we are more accustomed to seeing cops use on poor people. Each individual’s response to the effigy seemed to reflect the particular level of repression he or she suffered at the hands of the regime: members of the demoralized and depressed but safe classes would give a little tap; those demographically most likely to face state violence were themselves ultra-violent.

After three hours of continuous assaults, our dummy was almost completely demolished. Hundreds had dealt blows. Thousands had watched in astonishment at the anger his presence inspired. Everyone knew how things would go down if the head of state found himself on the mean streets of our little town without his bodyguards.

As usual, what carried the event was humor and good cheer. I hardly stopped laughing for three hours straight. This atmosphere left little opportunity for the few pro-Bush folks to try anything, and the spectacle of the vast majority of the crowd doing violence to their figurehead of choice helped deter them from threatening violence themselves. Every now and then a troubled Republican would come up to the Prez, saying something like, “You’re a good man, you’ve got my vote in ’04.” Bush would respond by *socking them in the face!* Such realism!

In sum: as keen observers, we feel that it is our patriotic duty to report what could be construed as latent feelings of violence, resentment, and readiness to brawl directed at the President of the United States of America.

Now let’s get something straight: we do not suggest or condone engaging in fisticuffs with the President. When dealing with the President, we strongly advise against uppercuts, crushing rights, left hooks, jabs, roundhouse kicks, knuckle sandwiches, resounding smacks, boots in the ass or crotch area, blows to the ribs or face, haymakers, boxing of ears, or any combination of bonks, thwacks, swats, or pokes. If you are concerned about the world and want to effect change, such roughhousing is simply unacceptable. We recommend going through the established channels: being ultra-rich, rigging elections, and cashing in on terror attacks to spread hatred and nationalism.

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