

Protest as Radical Performance: Signposting the Performativity of the 2020 EndSARS Movement in Nigeria

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Abstract

Performance, understood as structured, culturally coded behaviour, is not confined to the stage; it extends to everyday social action and public dissent. This article interrogates the 2020 EndSARS protests in Nigeria as an instance of radical performance, analysing how spatial tactics, embodiment, symbolism, choreography, sound, costume, props, lighting, and digital mediation produced heightened performativity. Using qualitative methods and drawing on Social Movement Theory and Performance Theory, we examine how structural strain, collective organization, and direct action coalesced into a repertoire that blurred boundaries between art and politics. We argue that EndSARS was not only a reaction to police brutality but also a dramaturgically rich social drama that mobilized audiences in real and virtual spaces and cultivated a carnivalized counter-public. The analysis demonstrates that protest practices showcased “twice-behaved behaviour,” improvisation, and aesthetic agency that amplified visibility, solidarity, and claims-making. We conclude that attending to protest’s performative nuances can sharpen critical understanding of political communication and enrich creative methodologies for social engagement in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Performance; Protest; EndSARS; Performativity

Introduction

Protest is best understood not only as interest aggregation or grievance ventilation but also as performance: a public, embodied staging of claims that reorganizes attention, space, and affect. Social movement scholarship explains when and why contention

erupts, emphasizing opportunities, repertoires, framing, and collective identities (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 2011), while performance studies elucidate how bodies, symbols, and scripts make politics sensible and persuasive (Schechner, 2003; Turner, 1982). Reading protest through this dual lens shows that strategic choreography, scenography, and ritualized repetition (“twice-behaved behaviour”) can amplify visibility and legitimacy by transforming ordinary streets into theatres of contention. Such an approach has gained salience in the age of networked communication, where images travel rapidly and publics assemble across physical and digital stages. Our analysis builds on these insights to argue that protest’s efficacy often hinges on its dramaturgy—how it frames, feels, and looks—as much as on the propositional content of its demands.

Nigeria provides a consequential setting for this argument because recurrent allegations of police impunity have strained the social contract and catalysed cycles of contention. Reports by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch documented patterns of extortion, torture, unlawful detention, and excessive force associated with the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), culminating in the nationwide EndSARS protests of October 2020 (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Scholarly assessments likewise link the protests to broader legitimacy crises, youth precarity, and the repressive turn in civil policing (Iwuoha & Anichie, 2021). Beyond cataloging abuses, however, EndSARS mattered because of how protesters orchestrated scenes—chants, placards, vigils, livestreams—that dramatized accountability and citizenship in ways audiences could see and join. In this sense, the movement is an instructive case for examining protest as radical performance rather than as a merely instrumental tactic.

This article advances three contributions at the intersection of social movement and performance theory. First, it integrates framing and emotions research with aesthetic analysis to show how humour, satire, music, and choreography operated as “claim-amplifiers” (Benford & Snow, 2000; Jasper, 1998). Second, it links performativity to democratic spectatorship, arguing that protest images redistribute the sensible—what is visible, sayable, and thinkable—thereby reconfiguring political subjectivities (Butler, 1988; Rancière, 2004). Third, it situates EndSARS within networked contention, where connective media infrastructures shape scale, tempo, and credibility through real-time witnessing and crowd-sourced logistics (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). By synthesizing these strands, we recast EndSARS as a dramaturgically rich social drama whose performative tactics intensified persuasion, solidarity, and transnational reach. The sections that follow elaborate this claim through a qualitative analysis of spatial staging, symbolism, sound, choreography, lighting, and organization.

Theoretical Framework

We conceptualize protest through a dual lens that integrates social movement theory with performance theory. Political process and resource mobilization approaches explain *when* contention becomes possible by emphasizing opportunities, organizational capacity, and repertoires of contention (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001; Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 2008; della Porta & Diani, 2020). Framing scholarship clarifies *how* actors package grievances and solutions, aligning diagnostic, prognostic, and motivational frames to recruit participants and allies (Benford & Snow, 2000; Snow, Rochford, Worden, & Benford, 1986). Emotions research shows that indignation, hope, and solidarity are not epiphenomena but constitutive forces that shape risk, resilience, and tactical choice (Goodwin, Jasper, & Polletta, 2001; Jasper, 1998). We acknowledge early crowd psychology (Le Bon, 1895) while centering contemporary accounts that

treat participants as strategic, affective, and interpretive agents rather than irrational masses.

Performance theory complements these insights by specifying the dramaturgical mechanics through which movements make politics sensible. Schechner's notion of "twice-behaved behaviour" situates protest within a continuum of ritual, play, and restored actions calibrated for public display (Schechner, 2003). Turner's ideas of liminality and social drama illuminate how contentious moments suspend quotidian order and reassemble social relations in symbolic scenes (Turner, 1982). Goffman's frame analysis helps explain the staging of situations, roles, and audiences in street encounters (Goffman, 1974), while Butler's account of performativity and citationality clarifies how embodied acts reiterate and resignify norms (Butler, 1988, 1997; Austin, 1962). Taylor's archive-repertoire distinction underscores how live acts, not only documents, transmit political memory, and how carnivalesque inversions can recalibrate power (Taylor, 2003; Bakhtin, 1984; Kershaw, 1992).

Because contemporary contention is deeply mediatized, we embed connective action and affective publics into our framework. Digital infrastructures enable personalized, loosely coordinated action that scales through low-threshold participation and visibility logics (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012). Platforms also function as stages for real-time witnessing, where user-generated images authenticate claims, circulate symbols, and knit dispersed audiences into felt communities (Papacharissi, 2015; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014; Mortensen, 2015). Visual rhetoric scholarship shows how iconic images crystallize narratives and moral judgments, shaping reception beyond the immediate protest site (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). These dynamics refine performance analysis by showing how camera-facing tactics, livestreams, and meme-able scenes extend the theatre of protest across on- and off-line arenas (Tufekci, 2017).

Finally, we theorize protest as a politics of spectacle, policing, and ethical care. Spectacle is not mere glare but a terrain where power and counter-power script competing scenes and audiences (Debord, 1994/1967; Edelman, 1988; Rancière, 2004). Policing strategies—negotiated management, strategic incapacitation—co-produce the dramaturgy of contention, affecting pacing, risk, and narrative arcs (della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Gillham & Noakes, 2007). At the same time, backstage logistics—crowdfunding, medical aid, legal support—constitute an ethical dramaturgy that sustains participation and models alternative civic orders (Scott, 1990; Cefai, 2009). Attention to affect and embodiment clarifies how fear, anger, and care circulate through scenes, converting personal pain into collective presence (Ahmed, 2004). Bringing these strands together, we treat protest as a structured, aesthetic, and relational practice that articulates claims by arranging bodies, objects, sounds, and images in consequential configurations.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative, interpretivist design to analyse EndSARS as radical performance. The approach integrates thematic analysis with performance-analytic reading of scenes, scripts, and symbols. Our goal is explanatory depth rather than statistical generalization (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). We therefore privilege thick description, triangulation, and transparency.

The corpus comprises publicly available texts and visuals: newspaper features, NGO and human-rights reports, peer-reviewed scholarship, op-eds, livestreams, and curated social-media videos. Items were eligible if they (a) documented EndSARS

events or tactics and (b) contained analysable performative features (space, embodiment, sound, symbolism, audience, or tempo). We emphasized materials dated October–December 2020, with selective follow-ups on aftermath and inquiries. Preference was given to verifiable sources with identifiable provenance and time stamps.

We used purposive sampling to capture variation across sites (Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, diaspora rallies) and media types (text, image, video). Search terms combined “EndSARS” with “protest,” “Lekki,” “performance,” “police,” and “livestream,” supplemented by author bibliographies and citation chaining. Near-duplicates were removed; conflicting accounts were retained for comparative analysis. The final corpus balances mainstream media, advocacy documents, and scholarly commentary.

Coding proceeded in two cycles: a deductive pass from our framework (e.g., staging, props, sound, choreography, mediation) and an inductive pass to surface emergent themes (Saldaña, 2021; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Visual items were read using established tools from visual and performance analysis, attending to composition, gaze, proxemics, rhythm, and audience address (Rose, 2016; Schechner, 2003). We then mapped codes onto a matrix that related tactics to functions (visibility, solidarity, legitimacy, risk). Memoing documented analytic decisions and linked evidence to claims.

Credibility was pursued through triangulation across genres and outlets, negative-case testing, and an auditable chain of evidence (Miles et al., 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To reduce confirmatory bias, we actively sampled counter-narratives and critical media. Reflexive notes record our theoretical priors and role as analysts of performance. Claims are bounded to the data and avoid causal inference beyond qualitative warrant.

All data were drawn from public domains; no private accounts were accessed. Where individual non-public persons were visible, we avoided unnecessary identifications and focused on collective scenes. We follow best practices for internet research ethics regarding context, consent expectations, and potential harms (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). No institutional review was required for secondary, public data.

The analysis centers on Lagos—especially the Lekki Toll Gate—as a paradigmatic site of staging and witnessing. We also consider selected corroborating scenes from other Nigerian cities and diaspora events to test thematic transferability. Units of analysis are discrete “scenes” (chants, vigils, marches, blockades) and their mediations (hashtags, livestreams, montage). The study asks how these units operated as radical performance, not whether they alone produced policy change.

Background: The Rise and Radicalization of EndSARS

The Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) was created in the early 1990s as a mobile, plain-clothes unit tasked with combating violent crime at a time of rising urban insecurity. Over subsequent decades, SARS accrued a reputation for impunity—particularly extortion, unlawful detention, torture, and extrajudicial violence—documented by journalists, scholars, and rights groups (Amnesty International, 2020; Iwuoha & Anichie, 2021). Public trust in policing eroded as everyday encounters became fraught with the threat of stop-and-search abuse, arbitrary arrest, and ransom-like “bail” extractions (Amnesty International, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2021). Reform pledges were periodically announced, but organizational routines and

incentive structures proved sticky, and credible accountability mechanisms remained weak. By the late 2010s, a simmering legitimacy crisis set the stage for contention that would transcend sectorial grievance and crystallize into a youth-led, nationwide movement.

Catalysts coalesced in early October 2020 when viral videos and testimonies alleging killings and assaults by SARS personnel exploded across social media, pushing the #EndSARS hashtag from digital outrage to sustained street mobilization (Kazeem, 2020; Iwuoha & Anichie, 2021). Protesters assembled in Lagos, Abuja, Port Harcourt, and other cities, while diaspora rallies extended the movement's visibility in London, New York, and Toronto. Digital affordances—livestreams, real-time hashtags, and crowdfunding—helped synchronize dispersed actions, authenticate claims, and recruit allies beyond traditional organizational channels (Castells, 2012; Gerbaudo, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). Authorities announced the unit's dissolution and promised reforms, but participants framed these as cosmetic without structural accountability, judicial review, and restitution. The resulting standoff hardened collective resolve and broadened the protest's diagnostic and prognostic frames.

The Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos emerged as a symbolic epicentre where protesters curated an image of disciplined, festive, and inclusive civic action—songs, placards, vigils, legal aid, and sanitation logistics complemented speeches and chants. On 20 October 2020, security forces opened fire near the toll plaza, an event that became a defining rupture in movement-state relations and a focal point of domestic and international scrutiny. The Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry received hundreds of petitions, heard witness testimony, reviewed medical evidence, and reported unlawful use of force and rights violations in its November 2021 findings (Lagos State Judicial Panel, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2021). While political authorities contested aspects of the report, the hearings institutionalized public witnessing and elevated questions of accountability, reparations, and police reform. The moment intensified global attention and reframed EndSARS as both theatre of hope and scene of trauma.

Organizationally, EndSARS blended horizontal coordination with specialized “backstage” infrastructures—medical teams, pro-bono legal hotlines, volunteer marshals, and transparent crowdfunding led by civic collectives. This logistics layer sustained nonviolent discipline and bolstered the movement's credibility by modelling ethical care and financial transparency in full public view (Iwuoha & Anichie, 2021; Tufekci, 2017). The repertoire itself evolved from marches and sit-ins to candlelight vigils, art installations, and coordinated media drops designed for camera legibility and rapid circulation. Such dramaturgical choices—staging, symbolism, sound, and choreography—were not incidental; they were central to how EndSARS converted dispersed grievances into persuasive scenes of citizenship. In this sense, the “radicalization” of EndSARS was aesthetic as well as strategic, fusing moral urgency with a carefully curated public image that travelled across national and transnational audiences.

Analysis and Findings: Protest as Radical Performance

Staging, Space, and Temporality

EndSARS converted ordinary infrastructures—roads, toll plazas, roundabouts—into purposeful stages, enacting what Lefebvre calls the “production of space,” where social relations are materially re-scripted (Lefebvre, 1991). Sit-ins, marches, and vigils interrupted urban rhythms to force spectatorship and slow the city to the tempo of collective address, exemplifying de Certeau's tactics of spatial appropriation (de

Certeau, 1984). The daytime–nighttime alternation choreographed visibility, safety, and mood, while recurring assemblies created ritualized predictability that stabilized participation and media attention (Turner, 1982; Tilly, 2008). These stagings also redistributed the “sensible” by foregrounding bodies and claims that are often rendered peripheral in official scripts (Rancière, 2004). We find that spatial tactics did not merely house protest; they *were* the message—recasting streets as civic classrooms and time as a resource for persuasion.

Costume, Props, and Visual Symbolism

Protesters’ ordinary clothing operated as ad hoc costume once recontextualized by choreography and inscription, while placards, flags, and mock objects functioned as props that condensed arguments into legible icons (Kershaw, 1992). Visual rhetoric travelled through high-contrast typography, caricature, and satire, crafting images optimized for camera capture and circulation (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Such images worked metonymically, where a single sign—bloodied flag, raised flashlight—stood in for complex narratives of grievance and hope (Barthes, 1977; Sontag, 2003). The iterative reuse of slogans and motifs exhibited citational force, reinforcing memory and message across scenes and feeds (Taylor, 2003). We find that symbolism translated dispersed experiences into portable, affectively charged evidence that enhanced the protest’s reach and durability.

Sound, Song, and Choreography

Chants, call-and-response, and curated playlists synchronized bodies and sentiments, binding strangers into a rhythmic public through entrainment (McNeill, 1995). Music and dance operated as “claim amplifiers” by coupling pleasure with protest, sustaining morale while communicating moral clarity (Eyerman & Jamison, 1998; Turino, 2008). Refrains distilled complex demands into repeatable sonic units that were easy to learn and hard to forget, increasing stickiness in crowded soundscapes. Collective vocalization also enacted a right to appear, resonating with theories of assembly and embodied address (Butler, 2015). We find that sonic choreography was pivotal to endurance and persuasion, converting affect into coordinated presence.

Audience, Mediation, and Reach

EndSARS addressed layered audiences: co-present bystanders, security personnel, journalists, and vast networked publics. Livestreams, hashtags, and stitched clips enabled “connective witnessing,” where dispersed viewers authenticated claims and fed logistical support back into the scene (Mortensen, 2015; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014). These practices exemplify connective action dynamics in which personalized sharing scales collective visibility without centralized command (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Tufekci, 2017). In this hybrid theatre, the “fourth wall” dissolved: observers became participants through donations, retweets, and solidarity rallies, forming what boyd terms networked publics (boyd, 2010; Papacharissi, 2015). We find that mediation was not ancillary documentation but constitutive of the event’s audience architecture and credibility.

Direct Action and the Politics of Spectacle

Marches, blockades, and sit-ins arranged bodies in consequential patterns that produced immediate material effects (disruption) and potent visual effects (spectacle). Such actions dramatized accountability by staging vulnerability, endurance, and ethical care before multiple gazes, challenging official narratives through counter-

scenes (Debord, 1994/1967; Edelman, 1988). The repertoire balanced confrontation with invitation—open mic sessions, teach-ins, and prayer circles—broadening identification while maintaining pressure (Tilly, 2008; Taylor, 2003). These scenes made moral claims vivid, turning abstract rights into embodied performances that solicited judgment from proximate and distant publics (Rancière, 2004). We find that direct action's theatricality was central to legitimacy, converting risk and restraint into persuasive power.

Organization, Resources, and Collective Agency

Behind the “front stage,” distributed infrastructures—crowdfunding, pro bono legal teams, first aid, sanitation—underwrote continuity and nonviolent discipline. Rather than pure spontaneity, the movement exhibited hybrid coordination that leveraged horizontal networks while mitigating the “tyranny of structurelessness” (Freeman, 1972; Juris, 2012). Resource mobilization sustained tactical variety and rapid iteration, while transparent accounting enhanced trust and brand integrity (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012). Participatory decision practices cultivated ownership and resilience, aligning organizational form with the protest's anti-impunity ethos (Polletta, 2002; della Porta & Diani, 2020). We find that organizational labour was constitutive of the dramaturgy, stabilizing the scenes that audiences encountered and believed.

Light, Night, and the Aesthetics of Witnessing

Illumination—sunlight, streetlamps, phone flashlights, headlights—shaped mood, legibility, and the ethics of seeing. Candlelight vigils folded mourning into protest, producing solemn tableaux that solicited empathetic spectatorship without voyeurism (Zelizer, 2010; Taylor, 2003). Nighttime scenes photographed as constellations of light, crafting an aesthetic of fragile resolve that circulated as persuasive evidence (Hariman & Lucaites, 2007; Sontag, 2003). Visual theory reminds us that images are contracts between lookers and looked-at, creating obligations to witness and respond (Azoulay, 2012). We find that lighting was both practical and rhetorical: it cued affect, directed lenses, and converted gatherings into iconic testimony.

Discussion and Implications

Our findings show that reading EndSARS through performance theory reconfigures how we understand political communication and democratic agency. By choreographing bodies, props, sounds, and camera-facing images, protesters redistributed what Rancière calls the “sensible,” opening spaces for those typically marginalized to appear and be heard (Rancière, 2004). These scenes helped constitute counterpublics that contested dominant narratives while testing the limits of deliberative ideals in a stratified, mediatized public sphere (Fraser, 1990; Habermas, 1989). The dramaturgical work of assembly—standing together, repeating gestures, sustaining attention—translated affect into legitimacy and recognition (Butler, 2015; Benford & Snow, 2000; Jasper, 1998). Situated within Nigeria's fraught security landscape, the movement's scenes also confronted necropolitical logics in which sovereign power is performed through exposure to death, thereby turning fear into civic presence (Mbembe, 2003).

For activists, a performative lens clarifies how tactical design shapes persuasion, endurance, and coalition-building. Repertoires that combine disruption with invitation—open mics, teach-ins, mutual aid—broaden identification while preserving nonviolent discipline that historically correlates with movement effectiveness (Tilly,

2008; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Dramaturgical craft matters: humour, satire, music, and choreography function as “claim amplifiers” that retain attention without diluting demands (Kershaw, 1992; Eyerman & Jamison, 1998). Yet horizontal coordination must guard against the “tyranny of structurelessness” by making facilitative roles legible and accountable (Freeman, 1972; Polletta, 2002). Networked affordances expand reach but also create fragilities—visibility outpaces organization, and virality can invite strategic incapacitation or narrative sabotage (Tufekci, 2017).

For educators and researchers, protest’s performativity invites curricular and methodological shifts. Civic and media-literacy programs can teach students to analyse scenes—staging, framing, montage, and meme-ability—using critical visual and multimodal methods (Rose, 2016; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Performance-based inquiry—ethnography of enactment, practice-as-research, and repertoire analysis—can document how bodies and objects do political work beyond texts (Conquergood, 1991; Nelson, 2013; Taylor, 2003). In classrooms, dialogic pedagogy can use protest materials to cultivate critical spectatorship and ethical witnessing, situating learners as reflective publics rather than passive consumers (Freire, 1970; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007). Together, these approaches produce richer accounts of contention and more discerning civic competencies.

Policy and policing practices should be rethought with dramaturgy in view. Research shows that policing models co-produce the public script of protest: negotiated management reduces escalation, while strategic incapacitation can harden standoffs and damage legitimacy (della Porta & Reiter, 1998; Gillham & Noakes, 2007). Procedural justice—voice, neutrality, respectful treatment—improves compliance and trust and should guide protest policing, oversight, and after-action review (Tyler, 2006). In Nigeria, the Lagos State Judicial Panel’s proceedings and findings underscore the need for credible accountability, reparations, and institutional reform to rebuild confidence (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Policy actors should therefore treat demonstrations not as disorder to suppress but as civic scenes to steward, protecting rights while safeguarding life.

Finally, the implications extend to platform governance and digital witnessing. Algorithmic curation, monetization, and moderation policies shape which protest scenes are visible, searchable, and preservable, thereby structuring the political memory of events (Gillespie, 2018; Bucher, 2018). Biases in search and recommendation can marginalize claims from vulnerable groups, while surveillance capitalism exposes participants to heightened risk (Noble, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Ethics of witnessing demand attention to context collapse, doxing, and secondary trauma when circulating images of harm (Zelizer, 2010; Andén-Papadopoulos, 2014). Platforms and regulators should expand transparency, auditability, and appeal pathways for protest-related content, treating civic documentation as a protected category of public interest speech (Papacharissi, 2015). Such reforms would align digital infrastructures with democratic values and the civic significance of performance in public life.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is limited by its reliance on publicly available texts and images rather than ethnographic immersion or interviews, which constrains insight into tacit deliberations, intra-movement tensions, and backstage disagreements (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013). Media-derived corpora also introduce selection and verification challenges: what is most visible, viral, or narratively compelling can crowd out quieter but consequential practices, even when triangulation is attempted

(Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Platform logics shape the archive itself—recommendation systems, moderation, and monetization influence what remains searchable and what disappears—raising concerns about bias and survivorship (Gillespie, 2018; Noble, 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Because our analysis is qualitative and interpretive, claims are analytic generalizations rather than causal estimates, and they depend on our theoretical frame and reflexive stance (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Finally, while we attend to multiple sites, Lagos is overrepresented, which may understate regional variation in repertoire, risk, and policing response.

Future research should adopt multi-method designs that layer participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and practice-as-research to capture enactment, emotion work, and tactical evolution from within (Conquergood, 1991; Nelson, 2013). Comparative studies across Nigerian cities and across movements in West and Southern Africa would clarify how repertoires travel and how policing regimes co-produce dramaturgy (della Porta & Diani, 2020; della Porta & Reiter, 1998). Mixed-methods work combining qualitative coding with multimodal and computational techniques—network mapping of hashtags, computer vision for recurring visual motifs, and audio feature extraction of chants—can scale pattern detection while preserving contextual reading (Highfield & Leaver, 2016; Manovich, 2020). Experiments and quasi-experiments on audience reception—e.g., how specific images or soundscapes affect perceived legitimacy—could complement process tracing of tactical outcomes (Bail, 2016; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011). Finally, algorithm audits and memory studies should assess how platform policies curate protest memory, and community-led “rogue archives” can safeguard civic documentation against erasure (Sandvig et al., 2014; De Kosnik, 2016).

Conclusion

Viewing EndSARS through a performative lens reveals protest as a structured, aesthetic practice that translates grievance into persuasive scenes, mobilizing publics across physical and digital stages. The movement’s dramaturgy—staging, symbolism, sound, choreography, lighting, and ethical care—did not merely accompany claims; it amplified them, shaping visibility, solidarity, and credibility in real time. By synthesizing social-movement concepts with performance theory, our analysis foregrounds how embodiment and mediation co-constitute political communication in contemporary contention. The implications are practical as well as theoretical: activists can design scenes that balance disruption with invitation; educators can cultivate critical spectatorship; and policymakers can steward demonstrations through rights-respecting, procedurally just policing. More broadly, aligning platform governance with democratic witnessing is essential to preserving the civic value of protest performance and to ensuring that the publics constituted in the streets are not muted by the infrastructures that record them.

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