

Image Events, the Public Sphere, and Argumentative Practice: The Case of Radical Environmental Groups*

JOHN W. DELICATH

*Department of Communication
Center for Environmental Communication Studies
University of Cincinnati
Cincinnati, OH, 45221, U.S.A.*

and

KEVIN MICHAEL DELUCA

*Department of Speech Communication
Institute of Ecology
University of Georgia
Athens, GA 30606, U.S.A.*

ABSTRACT: Operating from the assumption that a primary dynamic of contemporary public argument involves the use of visual images the authors explore the argumentative possibilities of the 'image events' (staged protests designed for media dissemination) employed by radical ecology groups. In contextualizing their discussion, the authors offer an analysis of the contemporary conditions for argumentation by describing the character and operation of public communication, social problem creation, and public opinion formation in a mass-mediated public sphere. The authors argue that image events are a form of postmodern argumentative practice, a kind of oppositional argument that creates social controversy, and animates and widens possibilities for debate. They further suggest that image events are a postmodern form of argument involving acts of protest which deliver images as argumentative fragments. Employing the tools of traditional argument theory the authors describe how images are capable of offering unstated propositions and advancing indirect and incomplete claims in ways that function to block enthymemes and advance alternatives. In concluding, the authors discuss the implications of image events for our understanding of the public sphere and the possibilities for argumentation in a postmodern age.

KEY WORDS: controversy, image events, oppositional argument, postmodern public communication, public sphere, radical ecology groups, visual argumentation

'Image events' are staged acts of protest designed for media dissemination and they have been a central argumentative practice of radical ecology groups, especially Greenpeace and Earth First!.¹ The next few paragraphs describe, only briefly, some of the image events of Greenpeace and Earth First! that we interrogate for their argumentative possibilities.

On June 27, 1975, off the coast of California the Soviet whaling ship *Vlastny*, armed with a 90-mm cannon loaded with a 160-lb exploding



Argumentation 17: 315–333, 2003.

© 2003 Kluwer Academic Publishers. Printed in the Netherlands.

grenade harpoon, departs in pursuit of sperm whales. Unlike any previous hunt, though, the *Vlastny* is pursued by six Greenpeace activists in three inflatable rubber dinghies intent on confronting the whaler. One Zodiac, bobbing in and out of sight on the rough swells, manages to position itself between the harpoon ship and the nearest whale. Without warning, the harpoon gunner fires over the heads of the activists, striking the whale. Though Greenpeace's direct action failed in its most immediate goal of saving the whale, it succeeded as an image event. Greenpeace caught the confrontation on film and it became the image seen around the world, shown by CBS, ABC, and NBC News and on other news shows spanning the globe. The consequence of this image event for Greenpeace was, as Hunter, director of Greenpeace at the time and one of the activists forced to duck by the harpoon observed, that '[w]ith the single act of filming ourselves in front of the harpoon, we had entered the mass consciousness of modern America' (1979, p. 231).

Since then Greenpeace has performed thousands of image events on issues ranging from whaling to nuclear testing to hazardous waste. Greenpeace activists have steered rubber rafts between whaling ships and whales, chained themselves to harpoons, spray-painted baby seals to render their pelts worthless, and plugged waste discharge pipes. They hung a banner from an observation tower over Niagra Falls gorge that read 'Save Ancient Forests,' the famous border site being an apt location from which to criticize the logging policies of both the United States and Canada. During the recent confirmation hearings for Interior Secretary Gale Norton, Greenpeace, in protest of prospective Bush/Norton policies, graced the Interior Department headquarters with a banner reading, 'Bush & Norton: Our Land, Not Oil Land.' A picture of the draped headquarters illustrated *The New York Times* coverage of the hearings (Jehl, Douglas, 'Interior Choice Faces Sharp Questioning,' 1/19/01, A22).

On the 1981 spring equinox, members of Earth First! unfurled a 300-foot long plastic ribbon down the Glen Canyon Dam in order to simulate a crack in the dam; symbolically cracking the monument to progress clotting the Colorado River. With this image event, Earth First!, a radical, no-compromise ecological group debuted in the public consciousness. Since the protest in Glen Canyon, Earth First! has deployed an array of tactics, most notably ecotage or monkeywrenching (sabotaging of machinery used to destroy natural areas), in defense of natural ecosystems. Image events, however, have been one of the more central rhetorical activities of the group as they attempt to change the way people think about and act toward nature. In their efforts to stop such practices as the clear-cutting of ancient forests, the damming of rivers, the depredations of ranching, oil, and mineral interests on public lands, the loss of biodiversity, and the general exploitation of wilderness, Earth First! activists have resorted to sitting in trees, blockading roads with their bodies, and chaining themselves to logging equipment. Extensive tree-sits (occupying the upper reaches of a tree to

prevent its being chopped down) throughout the Northwest have provoked public awareness and saved ancient forests, most notable among these efforts being the Headwaters Forest tree-sits, the Cascadia tree-village, and Julia 'Butterfly' Hill's two-year sojourn in the redwood tree named Luna. In Texas, Bugis Cargis used a bicycle U-lock to lock his neck to a 52-ton tree crusher, stopping logging for 24 hours in the beginning of a successful effort to halt the logging of 2,600 acres of pine forest in Sam Houston National Forest. In Florida, Earth First!ers immobilized a mobile home appropriately festooned with slogans to block the siting of a cement kiln near the Ichetucknee River in an effort to protect the river as well as the air and water of the local community. To encourage Home Depot to do the right thing, Earth First! activists unfurled a banner off a crane at their headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia reading, 'Stop Selling Old Growth Wood.'

The image events of Greenpeace, Earth First!, and other radical ecology groups bear directly upon a complex set of issues concerning the practice of argument in a visual culture and the possibilities for radical politics in a postmodern age. To explore these issues, we follow the lead of others in what can best be described as a 'visual turn' in argument studies,² and investigate 'the possibility and actuality of visual argument' (Blair, 1996). We seek, however, not to answer the question of whether images can be arguments. Nor do we advance a comprehensive theory of visual argument capable of accounting for the complex ways in which images may argue or the argumentative functions they may perform in the context of public deliberation. We agree with Shelley (1996) and Barbatsis (1996) who recognize that there are different kinds of visual argument and that different conceptual tools are necessary for analyzing different kinds of visual materials.³ Our discussion here is unique to image events – staged acts of protest intended for media dissemination.⁴ Our thesis is that image events are best understood as a form of argumentative practice – the implications of which can be meaningfully understood by investigating the argumentative function of images of protest.

Serving as rough maps for our travels through the landscape of contemporary public argumentation and the possibility of visual argument are the works of G. Thomas Goodnight and Michael Calvin McGee. Following Goodnight (1991) and Olson and Goodnight (1994) we argue that image events are a form of postmodern argumentative practice, a kind of oppositional argument that creates social controversy and which animates and widens possibilities for debate. Following McGee (1990) we suggest that image events are a postmodern form of argument that employs acts of protest to deliver images as argumentative fragments that serve as inventional resources for public deliberation and which shift the responsibility for argument construction to audiences. Employing the tools of traditional argument theory we describe how images, operating as argumentative fragments, are capable of offering unstated propositions and advancing indirect

and incomplete claims in ways that function to block enthymemes as well as advance alternatives.

DETOUR THROUGH THE CONDITIONS OF CONTEMPORARY PUBLIC COMMUNICATION

In order to understand image events as a form of postmodern argumentative practice and to explore the argumentative functions of images, we must first take note of the unique conditions for public argument and deliberation in postmodern society. We do so by discussing three features of the landscape of contemporary public communication: the possibilities for participation in the public sphere; the texture of public communication; and the dynamics of social problem construction and public opinion formation.

The public sphere

The mass media represent one of the, if not the most, pivotal institutions of the public sphere. In an electronic age, the televisual public sphere occupies prime real estate in the landscape of public deliberation. Of course, television is not a level playing field; it is not Habermas' (1962) idealized bourgeois public sphere of undistorted communication. Subaltern publics, social movements, and environmental groups in particular, face a number of obstacles in terms of their access to the media and the control of their image. In order to participate in the most important arena of public discourse, in order to be more than an enclave, activist groups must use the tactic of image events.

Within the conventional usage of Habermas' (1962/1989, 1974) liberal public sphere, however, image events do not register. That is, they neither count nor make sense within the rules, the formal procedures, of such a public sphere. They are not talk by preconstituted rational subjects directed toward consensus, the deliberative rhetoric that according to Goodnight (1982) is characteristic, even constitutive, of the public sphere. Indeed, Habermas would likely point to image events as further evidence of the disintegration or refeudalization of the public sphere – a return to the spectacle of the Middle Ages. We would disagree. While image events of radical ecological groups are often spectacular, they are not the displays of the rulers, but rather, the rhetoric of subaltern counterpublics (Fraser, 1992, p. 123) who have been excluded from the forums of the public sphere by the rules of reason and the protocols of decorum.

In a social field characterized more by the conflictual process of hegemony than communal deliberation and community consensus, the public sphere needs to be understood not as a civic forum, but as 'the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among

a variety of publics takes place' (Eley, 1992, p. 306). This conceptualization of the public sphere avoids restricting it to the medium of talk characterized by rationality and recognizes that the 'public sphere was always constituted by conflict' (Eley, 1992, p. 306). In other words, while today's televisual public sphere is not the liberal public sphere of which Habermassians dream, wherein a reasonable public through deliberative discussion achieves rational public opinion, neither is it simply the medieval public sphere of representative publicity that they fear, a site where rulers stage their status in the form of spectacles before the ruled.

As Gronbeck reminds us, the 'telespectacle [image event], for better or for worse, is the center of public politics, of the public sphere . . . we must recognize that the conversation of the culture is centered not in the *New York Review of Books* but in the television experience' (1995, p. 235). And while the civil rights movement of the 50s and 60s was catalyzed by powerful pictures *and* eloquent words, radical ecology groups rely extensively on image events to argue against environmental destruction and in favor of alternative ecological futures.

The texture of contemporary public discourse

A variety of scholars have noted the changing nature of public communication in an electronic age, and specifically, the centrality of images and the visual to questions of social issue creation and opinion formation (Goodnight, 1991; Gronbeck 1990, 1993, 1995; Jamieson, 1988; Nelson and Boyton, 1995; Olson and Goodnight, 1994; Szasz, 1994). Perhaps not surprisingly, many authors making such observations couch their discussion in terms of the debased nature of politics in an age of media spectacles (Bennett, 1992; Entman, 1989; Hogan, 1991; Postman, 1995; Sabato, 1991; Zarefsky, 1992). These authors similarly agree that the changing nature of public communication and, inevitably, public argument, are the result of the technologies and practices of the mass media, the centrality of access to the media for political action, and the conditions of a public regarded as fragmented and distracted, bombarded by media messages. Debased or not – a question we will take up in a moment – public communication takes place in a context dominated by mass communications technology and charged by the prominence of dramatic visual imagery. Andrew Szasz (1994), for example, explains that 'political communication increasingly relies on the production and display of political icons rather than symbols, iconography rather than rhetoric, both because the means of communication require it stylistically and because it is assumed that displays of spectacular images are the only way to break through the indifference of the intended audience' (pp. 62–63). Kathleen Hall Jamieson's investigations of contemporary political rhetoric lead her to conclude that 'in the age of television, dramatic, digressive, visual moments are replacing memorable words' (1998, p. x). Such changes in even tradi-

tional political rhetorics necessitate a different approach to public argument – one that can account for the rhetorical dimensions and argumentative functions of images. As Szasz (1994) points out, ‘approaches continue to emphasize the word-centered production of meaning – with central terms such as *claims*, *rhetoric*, and *discourse* – at a time when . . . political communication and the production of meaning is increasingly accomplished through images, not words, through visual rather than verbal representation’ (p. 57). Theories of rhetoric and argument that would too readily dismiss image events as debased forms of more authentic, reasoned, debate fail to understand the need to explore social problem construction and opinion formation in terms of the way people actually gather and process information.

Social problem construction and public opinion formation

The changing dynamics of public communication have had significant effects on the process of social issue construction and public opinion formation. The centrality of rhetoric in the construction of social problems and public opinion has been well documented in the work of Murray Edelman (1977, 1988) and others, many in the field of communication and argumentation. However, so profoundly has public communication and cognition changed in a televisual public sphere that the analysis of political discourse must now account for the argumentative functions of images. Szasz (1994) argues there is a ‘qualitative newness to the issue-creation process in the contemporary United States’ noting that ‘the texture of the process of “social problems construction” is qualitatively transformed as claimsmaking rhetoric increasingly takes the form of iconography’ (pp. 57, 63). Graber (1988) argues in her discussion of how audiences make sense out of and use television news that ‘the television age demands a reconsideration of our print-age value structure, which routinely prizes abstractions conveyed through words more than the realities and feelings conveyed through pictures’ (p. 174). The implications are clear; we need to find a way of theorizing how images give meaning to social problems and the role they play in contemporary public argument. Following Szasz (1994) we suggest that,

[W]e need to find a way of thinking about opinion formation that recognizes the distinctiveness of a process that relies more on image than the word, a process that is more figural than discursive, a process that creates ‘meanings’ in which the cognitive content is underarticulated and is dominated by highly charged visual components (p. 57).

What we’ve done in taking this detour is really to have just scratched the surface of complex and fascinating relationships concerning much broader questions about the changing nature and operation of public discourse in the postmodern condition. We limit our already abbreviated discussion to recognizing the existence of what Jenks (1995) calls a ‘visual

culture.’ We suggest that in a ‘visual culture’ there is necessarily visual argument. More specifically, we argue that conditions are such that images are capable of operating as claims-making, reason-giving, opinion-shaping communication and therefore instrumental to the practice of public argument.

IMAGE EVENTS AS ARGUMENTATIVE PRACTICE

Far from being stunts of the disillusioned, image events are best understood as a form of argumentative practice, the rhetoric of subaltern counterpublics who have been purposely excluded for political reasons from the forums of the public sphere. Image events and other critique performed through spectacle comprise a central argumentative practice of groups forced to exploit the economic and technological dimensions of the mass media and to struggle to control their image and message in the televisual public sphere. Responding to the historical conditions as they are: ‘the explosive growth of the instruments of mass transmission and the tragic silence, fragmentation, and alienation of publics who might be heard’ (Goodnight, 1990, p. 193); they reflect the attempt of groups to empower themselves while working in hostile territory (DeLuca, 1999; Cassidy, 1992). In today’s mass mediated public sphere corporations and nations stage spectacles certifying their status before the public while subaltern counterpublics participate through performing image events (among other tactics), employing the consequent publicity as a social medium through which to hold corporations and nations accountable, help form public opinion, and constitute their own identities as counterpublics. We argue that image events constitute a form of oppositional argument (Olson and Goodnight, 1994) uniquely capable of generating social controversy in that they challenge norms of public participation as well as widen the possibilities for argumentation and deliberation.

As is the case with oppositional argument, image events challenge the ‘appropriateness of social conventions’ and ‘draw attention to the taken-for-granted means of communication’ (Olson and Goodnight, 1994, p. 250). The tactic of affecting public debate through the act of protest, an act of confrontation and agitation, is to articulate ‘disagreement over the speech acts that implicitly define the parameters of argument contexts and grounds’ (Goodnight, 1991, p. 5). More specifically, dramatic acts of protest like image events challenge norms as to what constitute acceptable means of communication. As such, image events make the implicit claim that direct action protest, non-violent civil disobedience, and critique performed through spectacle are acceptable forms of political participation. The significance of this cannot be overstated. To dismiss image events as rude and crude is to cling to ‘presuppositions of civility and rationality underlying the old rhetoric,’ a rhetoric that supports authority and allows civility

and decorum to serve as masks for the preservation of injustice while those marginalized or underresourced are silenced (Scott and Smith, 1969, p. 7). Indeed, we adopt Anne Norton's stance that 'critical readings, directed at giving voice to the silent language of the image, are necessary for the self-determination of the subaltern and any approach to political equity' (1993, p. 168).

IMAGE EVENTS AS ARGUMENTATIVE FORM

We preface our discussion of 'form' by noting our uneasiness with such a category, especially the elements of classification and closure that it brings to the table. Nevertheless, a better conceptual schema for comparing what characteristics image events share with traditional argument currently escapes us. We explore the possibility that image events are a form of visual argument by investigating the proposition: 'The image is the argument.' We take as a given the fragmentation of society and discourse characteristic of the postmodern condition. Following McGee (1990), we suggest that contemporary argumentative practice reflects this fragmentation. And while Hogan (1991) laments the situation, we argue he is correct in noting that 'the "electronic age" encourages memorable phrases and visual images – "mere shards" of political argument that can be telegraphed to the national audience by the news media' (p. 101). We suggest that image events are an argumentative form characterized by fragmentation. Image events communicate not arguments, but argumentative fragments in the form of unstated propositions, indirect and incomplete claims, visual refutation, and implied alternatives. These fragments constitute intentional resources capable of assisting public argumentation and deliberation. That is, images provide fodder for argumentation and a source for generating arguments. In one sense, intentional resources are quite literally the elements (claims, data, warrants) with which to formulate arguments.⁵ In another sense, intentional resources are those materials that serve to inspire argumentation and provide ammunition for novel and innovative arguments.⁶

To characterize image events as a form of argument we must first note that fragmentation or incompleteness is not inconsistent with claimsmaking and refutation. Scholars of argument have previously recognized that messages can operate as arguments incompletely and indirectly (Hazen, 1991). Along such lines, Gronbeck (1995) has suggested that images are propositional. He argues that 'if we think of meanings as called up or evoked in people when engaged in acts of decoding, then not only words but also pictures, sounds, and other sign systems certainly can offer us propositions of denial or affirmation' (p. 539). We read image events as delivering unstated propositions, offering indirect claims, and advancing objections with dramatic imagery.

Delivering a dead seal to politicians and chaining one's self to a tree do

not express arguments completely, nor do they express direct disagreement. However, they are propositional in that such acts advance claims about the practices in question. The images of such acts incompletely and indirectly make claims that suggest the illegitimacy of seal hunting and clear cutting. Although unstated, indirect, and incomplete, image events are fundamental to claimsmaking in the media.⁷

To continue to make the case that image events constitute an argumentative form – or at least share important characteristics of traditional argument – we suggest that postmodern arguments may no longer operate in discrete entities. In a landscape where public communication is characterized by fragmentation it is difficult to expect that arguments will be constructed with the singular components of claim, data, and warrant. Here we note that images of protest may function as any one of the three elements in Toulmin's (1958) model of argument. The image of an Earth First!er buried in a road can be read as (1) a claim: 'there should be no more roads built into wilderness areas'; (2) a warrant for claims such as: 'there should be no more roads built into wilderness areas' offering the reason 'it's worth getting arrested or hurt to prevent it;' or (3) as evidence for claims such as: 'there should be no more roads built in wilderness areas,' or, 'direct action to save wilderness is justified/necessary.'⁸ A close reading of the images on television news suggests that visual arguments comprise an argumentative form that is really a form only in the most generic sense of the word. Image events constitute a form of visual argument that operates in fragments: dramatic images that advance indirect, incomplete, and unstated propositions; refute unstated assumptions; operate as evidence for claims; or otherwise serve as inventional resources for future deliberation.

Finally, consistent with Olson and Goodnight's (1994) description of oppositional argument, the claimsmaking of image events functions in ways that may block enthymematic discourses about Nature, Humanity, and Progress. Earth First!'s protest at Glen Canyon Dam clearly rejects the association of the dam with Progress. Earth First!er's passionate embrace of trees, wildlife, and ecosystems defies dominant assumptions that Nature is a storehouse of resources and that Progress consists of exploiting the storehouse. Greenpeace activists placing themselves between whales and harpoon guns challenge the hierarchy that places humans at the top of the food chain and disrupts assumptions about the value of human and animal life. In the next section, we continue our discussion of the argumentative function of image events by exploring the larger implications that image events suggest for argumentation in a postmodern public sphere.

THE ARGUMENTATIVE FUNCTION OF IMAGE EVENTS

The argumentative functions of image events are best explained in terms of their operation as inventional resources and the possibilities they afford

generative argument. We use the term generative argument based upon Zulick and Laffoon's (1991) discussion of generative rhetoric, although they do not use the term specifically. In one sense, we simply mean to suggest that particular opportunities, forms of advocacy, and kinds of arguments can serve to 'generate' argumentation and debate. In a manner consistent with Zulick and Laffoon's application, we also use the term generative argument, more specifically, to locate opportunities to increase the number of participants in the public sphere, expand opportunities for public advocacy, and broaden the horizon of possible ideas in social controversies. Generative argument involves animating the possibilities for public debate and generating new lines of argument. Zulick and Laffoon (1991) suggest that generative argument may subvert or re-invent the boundaries of public discourse and empower disenfranchised groups to speak.

Image events create opportunities for generative argument as they are sources of confrontational and creative claims-making and refutation. They may spark the imagination, inspire argumentation and debate, and promote innovative argumentative practices. Environmental image events create opportunities for generative argument by increasing the visibility of environmental issues, subverting the privilege of dominant environmental discourses, and expanding the range of thinkable thoughts with regards to environmental matters. To the extent that they challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and disrupt the existing grid of intelligibility, environmental image events are uniquely capable of animating public argument and re-articulating the rhetorical boundaries of environmental knowledge.

We identify three significant functions of image events with regards to their ability to create social controversy, animate and widen the possibilities for public argument, expand the opportunities for participation in the public sphere, and enhance public deliberation.

(1) Image events broaden the scope of participation in the public sphere to include subaltern counterpublics. In a public sphere that has been for too long, both in theory and practice, constrained by narrow notions of rationality and civility, visual argument, and image events in particular, challenge what are appropriate, acceptable, and legitimate acts of participation, and extend the margins of the public sphere to include counterpublics who employ dramatic acts of protest in order to perform critique through spectacle.⁹ The past decade was witness to increasingly frequent uses of image events. Image events became a common tactic in the repertoire of protest for many advocacy organizations. AIDS activists, animal rights organizations, anti-consumer culture advocates, and grassroots environmental justice groups have all engaged in dramatic acts of protest staged for media dissemination in order to more effectively articulate their positions. Most recently, the democratic globalization movement has made effective use of image events at meetings of the WTO, the IMF/World Bank, the Summit of the Americas, and at counter-summits like the World Social

Forum in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Shut out of the decision making processes of the institutions of the world's economy, activists and advocacy organizations have taken to the streets, employing image events (among other tactics), to force their way on to the public agenda and into the public debate about world trade and the global economy. The growing popularity and, to some extent, legitimacy of image events in the past few years has increased the range of participants in the public sphere, expanded the kinds of issues on the public's 'radar screen,' and broadened the scope of public argument on many important issues.

(2) Image events deliver argument in powerful ways capable of creating opportunities for debate and producing moments of generative argument. Image events are provocative gestures that function as oppositional arguments to 'widen and animate the nondiscursive production of argument' (Olson and Goodnight, 1994, p. 252). An important dimension of oppositional argument is its delivery in the act of protest – in placing bodies on the line – in the performance of critique, and in the case of image events, the dissemination of images of protest in the televisual media. To explain the significant role of delivery in the argumentative function of image events we explore Nelson and Boyton's (1995) suggestion that 'the argument is in the delivery.' The expression, 'the argument is in the delivery,' is intended to emphasize the inherent role of delivery in the articulation, evaluation, and effectiveness of argumentation. Delivery is no less central when it comes to understanding the argumentative functions of image events. The fact that it is acts of protest and subsequent images of such actions circulating in the mass media which *deliver* argumentative fragments makes the delivery of image events significant.

First, image events *deliver* argument in the *act* of protest. The fact that protest is the mode of delivery of image events calls attention to form and performance. Image events do not merely attract attention for a more traditional form of argument, but, rather, they constitute the site and substance of the argument. Image events enact an alternative form of argument that contests more conventional norms of argumentation. In short, an image event, like other forms of oppositional argument, 'unsettles the appropriateness of social conventions, draws attention to the taken-for-granted means of communication, and provokes discussion' (Olson and Goodnight, 1994, p. 250).

Second, in image events it is an action, an image, not words, that serves as the basis for claims-making and refutation. Argumentative fragments are *delivered* in the form of *images* and those images are *delivered* (disseminated) on television news. What is significant here is the unique operations of images in the current context of public communication. The visual modes of argumentation characteristic of image events are well suited to the conditions of contemporary public debate and current patterns of social issue construction and public opinion formation. More specifically, the very process of making sense of television news highlights the centrality of

images and the role of visual communication in shaping our understanding and awareness of issues. Image events are an effective tool for addressing the problem of the 'distracted and disinterested' audience. Here the issue is not simply getting the public's attention, but communicating to them in a manner that is consistent with how they process information and formulate opinions. To the extent that image events communicate fragments of argument in the form of highly charged visuals they are possibly quite effective in shaping public discourse and affecting public debate. Andrew Szasz (1994) explains:

Addicted to the consumption of superficial imagery, habituated to a state of distraction, deaf to complexity and subtlety, the news consumer watches, hears, or reads news stories in a way that preserves, even enhances their iconic quality: the strong visual and emotional components dominate; attitude formation takes place without much need for detail in the cognitive component (p. 63).

The televisual qualities of dramatic acts of protest may have another advantage in shaping public opinion. Audiences are likely to have powerful, visceral responses to images of protest delivered in television news. Based upon their analysis of visual and aural argument in political campaign ads, Nelson and Boyton (1995) suggest that 'the principles of political cognition' imply that 'visual and aural argument is more vivid, visceral, and effective than the verbal phrases that it sometimes complements and other times overpowers' (p. 547). Indeed, Andrew Szasz's (1994) analysis of toxic waste and Kathleen Hall Jamieson's (1988) work on the effectiveness of images in political discourse both suggest that images of dramatic acts of protest are likely to generate strong viewer response. This increases the likelihood that image events will spark, inspire, or otherwise motivate audiences to confront issues and also increases the possibility that these argumentative fragments will be remembered and stored as intentional resources for deliberation and argumentation.

Third, image events *deliver* arguments in one of the few forms likely to make their way to mass audiences. Image events deliver argumentative fragments capable of presenting ideas that otherwise would probably not receive a hearing in the public sphere. In an era where more lengthy and involved challenges to the dominant order rarely receive the public time and space to be fully (or even partially) articulated – image events may be a promising form of argumentative activity, one capable of crystallizing more complex political positions into a visual signifier. We suggest that image events operate as 'synoptic moments' where more complex political and philosophical positions are encapsulated in the only form likely to be articulated in the electronic mass media. Image events reduce 'a complex set of issues to symbols that break people's comfortable equilibrium, get them asking whether there are better ways to do things' (Veteran Greenpeace campaigner quoted in Horton, 1991, p. 108). Image events are crystallized fragments, mind bombs that work to expand 'the universe of

thinkable thoughts' (Manes, 1990, p. 77). While radical environmental groups inhabit a difficult space within the corporate-controlled, mass mediated public sphere, it is not a hermetically sealed space. There are cracks and opportunities for resistance, aberrant sense-making, counter discourses, and new lines of argument. Image events deliver the kinds of inventional resources in a manner uniquely able to capitalize on such opportunities and to exploit the cracks in dominant ideologies necessary for moments of generative argument.

(3) Image events and other critiques performed through spectacle animate the possibilities for public discourse and expand the range of relevant rhetorics in social controversies by generating new lines of argument. This has much to do with the unique dynamics of argumentation characteristic of image events. First, image events implicitly advance alternatives. Images of acts of protest are more than moments of refutation. Unstated claims, indirect refutation, and incomplete arguments do more than negate or affirm propositions. A single image of a dramatic act of protest can implicitly advance alternatives to the practice being protested. Greenpeace, by spray painting the fur of baby seals and sailing between whaling ships and whales, argues against reducing animals to economic resources and instead proposes that animals have intrinsic worth and inalienable rights. Earth First! activists sitting in trees and buried in roads contest accepted notions of property and speak for the preservation of wilderness.

Second, even in moments of refutation image events may function as more than acts of negation. With image events the act of negation creates opportunities for generative argument. As they block enthymemes, image events seek to create disidentification. The Earth First!ers at Glen Canyon Dam wanted the public to reject the identification of the dam with Progress and to call into question the manipulation of Nature. Creating disidentification is a creative gesture. Breaking the association of the dam with Progress not only challenges the value of the dam, it calls into question the larger principle of Progress predicated on the exploitation of Nature. Thus acts of negation may open up possibilities for the creation of new lines of argument and new ways of thinking. Image events are 'resistant gestures' (DeLuca, 1996a, p. 76) designed to 'throw sense off track' (Biesecker, 1992, p. 357). DeLuca argues that image events, because they do not make sense according to the logic of the established order, force reflection and may crack open the door to new modes of thinking. That is, image events may work because they are outside the sense-making rules or grid of intelligibility established by a society's dominant discourses. By calling into question the assumptions of the established order image events may not only refute dominant articulations, but may create opportunities for new identifications.

Third, image events shift the responsibility for argument construction to the audience. Image events do not produce immediate persuasion. Rather,

they serve as inventional resources for future argumentation and deliberation. Image events, as they operate in the televisual public sphere, have a quality that suggests they may be stored, become a part of a public's memory, and later serve as fodder for argument. Images of protest are likely to be remembered and activated by subsequent encounters with related rhetorics. Images on television news become a source of 'visual knowledge' that will be decoded and perhaps employed in ways that are central to public argument and opinion formation (Jenks, 1995, p. 10). As inventional resources, images necessarily require assembly into discursive arguments. As such, the responsibility for argument construction shifts to the audience. Following McGee (1990), we suggest that when it comes to argumentation in the televisual public sphere, argument construction is something required as much by audiences as advocates. As fragments, unstated propositions, moments of refutation, and implied alternatives, image events function as incomplete and indirect arguments that require construction. We have argued that images, as argumentative fragments, can function as claims, warrants, or data. If it is true that images can function to make claims, refute assumptions, and advance alternatives then how image events impact public argumentation depends largely on how the audience encounters, assembles, and utilizes the fragments.

The indirect and incomplete nature of what are largely unstated propositions makes image events host to a variety of argumentative possibilities. By locating the responsibility for argument construction with the audience, image events create opportunities to combine popular and formal political discourses and thereby expand the possibilities for public argumentation. The fact that audiences will engage these claims in relation to other argumentative fragments gives them a unique and quite possibly fruitful role in issue creation and opinion formation. As inventional resources that may be combined with other political and popular discourses, images events constitute a meaningful opportunity for generative argument. Gurevitch and Kavoori (1992) suggest,

in an age when images are all pervasive, the entry of 'issues' into the public sphere becomes a question of the degree and power of images to reach the largest possible audience, to draw sustenance from the range of genres that saturate the viewer while at the same time contextualize the image in culturally and politically fundamental ways (p. 418).

The boundaries of arguments included in the public sphere are expanded by image events that require an audience to make sense out of them as they resonate with other cultural and political rhetorics. It is in this sense that Gurevitch and Kavoori (1992) speak of the 'unique capacity of images as constructors of texts': 'while in the immediate institutional sense, media spectacles may be seen as "disruptive," in the larger culturalist sense, television spectacles, seen as social texts, should be regarded as playing a role

in expanding and configuring' the horizon of possibility with regards to what information and opinions may come to play a role in the creation and resolution of social problems (pp. 415, 418).¹⁰

While Hogan (1991) argues that 'televisual rhetoric' 'supplants both the technical and public voices in national and political dialogue' (p. 105), it is not so clearly the case that all visual argument involves 'the substitution of drama for analysis and reason' (p. 104). Far from being something that undermines 'real' argument and debate, visual argument, especially in the form image events, fosters and compliments important forms of public deliberation. Indeed, what our analysis of radical ecology groups, Olson and Goodnight's (1994) examination of anti-fur advocates, as well as Szasz's (1994) account of the toxic waste movement, suggest is that the rhetorical force of images and the production of political icons, in their ability to exploit the conditions of the mass communication technology that defines the televisual public sphere, can enhance public deliberation.¹¹

CONCLUSION

It is interesting that Goodnight (1991) expressed the need to analyze *controversy* in terms of coming 'to see controversy with fresh eyes' because it is exactly in analyzing the argumentative functions of visual imagery that we can advance our understanding of social controversy, political argumentation, and public deliberation. In performing such an analysis, our point is neither to valorize nor condemn images. Rather, with the morphing of the public sphere into the 'public screen'¹² of our televisions and computers, our move is a recognition of the now-dominant role of images in public argumentation. Consequently, our response is not a moral judgment (images as 'good' or 'bad'), but an attempt at critical understanding of the new terrain of public discourse and politics. To that end, though we analyze the image events of environmental activists, our examples are meant to be illustrative of a much wider process. Our analysis of environmental image events is applicable to image politics in general and is particularly relevant to contemporary social movement politics, whether of the left or right. Clearly, constructing image events was a crucial strategy of activists at the anti-WTO protests in Seattle – hard hats and turtles marching arm in arm remains a lasting, poignant image. Similarly, pro-life activists have deftly exploited the opportunities in a mass-mediated public sphere by using images of fetuses to provoke emotions and garner support. Image events are an argumentative strategy and practice uniquely suited to the contemporary televisual public sphere/public screen.

NOTES

* An earlier version of the essay was presented at the Eleventh NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation, Alta, UT, USA, August 1999.

¹ The term image event was coined by DeLuca (1996a). The choice of the term 'image event' is deliberate. There are related terms at work in various literatures. However, none of these terms emphasize the rhetorical texture of images, discuss the qualitative differences in imagistic and other symbolic discourses, or treat the visual rhetoric of media disseminations in positive terms. For a complete account of related terms and the distinctiveness of image events see DeLuca (1999).

² We locate the visual turn in argument studies in previous scholarship at the Alta conferences on argumentation (Simons and Birdsell, 1989; Hogan, 1991; Gronbeck, 1995; Nelson and Boyton, 1995) and the special issues of *Argumentation & Advocacy* (1996, vols. 1 & 2). We suggest that visual argument is better understood within the broader context of visual communication. Related are a host of recent developments: the study of visual literacy, visual persuasion, visual manipulation, visual rhetorics, visual ideographs, and visual metaphors with objects of inquiry such as advertisements, art, architecture, cartoons, documentary films, museum displays, photographs, political campaign spots, presidential debates, television, music videos, and DeLuca's (1996b, 1999) previous work on image events.

³ We also suggest that televisual imagery should be addressed 'independently and own its own terms' (Barbatsis, 1996, p. 69).

⁴ Image events are distinct from other visual imagery analyzed in previous studies of visual argument. Image events are distinct for many reasons: they are acts of social protest; the participants are clearly advocates; they are intended to shape public opinion; they are designed for media dissemination; they are broadcast on television news and photographed for newspapers; and the images are of acts of protest.

⁵ In this sense, 'inventional resources' belong to the traditional rhetorical category of invention: the discovery (locating the resources of argumentation, i.e. topics, appeals, evidence) and formulation of argument (choosing particular resources, composing arguments, and arranging them). Specifically with regards to invention, we point out that image events communicate argumentative fragments that are potentially stored and activated later. Operating like seeds of argumentation, image events constitute a resource that can be remembered, and a source of invention for those television news audiences in the future. In this case of image events, invention must include, as Francis Bacon suggested, discovering the sources of argument based upon remembrance. Only here, invention becomes the task of the audience. This is consistent with our claim that image events shift the responsibility for argument construction to audiences.

⁶ This use of the term 'inventional resources' is consistent with Zulick and Laffoon's (1991) discussion of 'enclaved publics' and how 'resources' like identity, community knowledge, and distinct languages can generate possibilities for new political discourses.

⁷ Lake and Pickering (1998) go so far as to suggest that refutation is possible with images in what they describe as visual, nonpropositional, argumentation.

⁸ For more discussion of how images can provide reasons for claims see, Blair (1996); Lake and Pickering (1998).

⁹ For a more exhaustive account of the implications of image events, as social protest designed for participation in a mass mediated public sphere, on the study of social movements (especially within communication studies) see DeLuca's (1999) theoretical diagnostic and overhaul of social movement theory.

¹⁰ It is important to note that while there are differences in what Gurevitch and Kavoori define as 'television spectacles' and what we regard as image events, our research suggests that both (spectacles and image events) rely on context and the assembling of other relevant discourses and images for their rhetorical force, and in so doing, bring together public and popular discourses which we both agree expands the possibilities for deliberation in the public sphere. It should also be noted that we agree with Gurevitch and Kavoori's conclusion that

the line, theoretical or otherwise, separating public and popular discourses is impossible to maintain. It is blurred by the very conditions of communication in an electronic age. Our argument is that the blending and blurring of information types and sources does not necessarily undermine healthy deliberation, but rather may expand the horizon of possibility with regards to what information and opinions may come to play in the creation and resolution of social problems.

¹¹ There is good cause to suggest that Hogan's findings about the operations of visual argument are not inherent in image politics. Hogan's arguments are based on an analysis of the nuclear freeze movement. That the nuclear freeze movement, and their most credible and influential spokesperson (Helen Caldicott), substituted images for what Hogan considers real argument, in no way serves as evidence of an inherent function of the imagistic rhetoric of political communication to substitute for and undermine deliberative argument. We find the case of images used in the nuclear freeze movement to be unique not only in terms of the issue itself (nuclear arms reduction and nuclear war), but also in terms of: why images were employed rather than other rhetorics (for their value as fear appeals), the nature of the images employed ('up-close' images of devastation after a nuclear war), the arguments that those images were supposed to reinforce (that nuclear war is an unimaginable horror), the other arguments available to the nuclear freeze movement that were supposedly ignored in favor of employing images (technical discourse, including issues of verifying a nuclear freeze agreement), and how the movement approached their audience ('as patients needing treatment').

¹² For an introduction and development of the concept of the public screen, see DeLuca and Peeples, 2002.

REFERENCES

- Aden, R. C.: 1994, 'The Enthymeme as Postmodern Argument Form: Condensed Mediated Argument Then and Now', *Argumentation and Advocacy* **31**, 54–63.
- Barbatsis, G. S.: 1996, 'Look and I Will Show You Something You Will Want to See': Pictorial Engagement in Negative Political Campaign Commercials', *Argumentation and Advocacy* **33**, 69–80.
- Bennett, W. L.: 1992, 'White Noise: The Perils of Mass Mediated Democracy', *Communication Monographs* **59**, 397–400.
- Biesecker, B.: 1992, 'Michel Foucault and the Question of Rhetoric', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* **25**, 351–364.
- Blair, J. A.: 1996, 'The Possibility and Actuality of Visual Argument', *Argumentation and Advocacy* **33**, 23–39.
- Cassidy, S.: 1992, 'The Environment and the Media: Two Strategies for Challenging Hegemony', in J. Wasko and V. Mosco (eds.), *Democratic Communications in the Information Age*, Garamond Press, Toronto.
- Chase, K. R.: 1992, 'The Challenge of Avant-garde Argument', *Argumentation and Advocacy* **29**, 16–31.
- DeLuca, K. M.: 1996a, 'Constituting Nature Anew Through Judgment: The Possibilities of the Media', in S. A. Muir and T. L. Veenendall (eds.), *Earthtalk: Communication Empowerment for Environmental Action*, Praeger, Westport, CN.
- DeLuca, K. M.: 1996b, *Meditations on Image Events: The Possibilities and Consequences for Rhetorical Theory*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Department of Communication Studies, University of Iowa.
- DeLuca, K. M.: 1999, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism*, Guilford, New York.
- DeLuca, K. M. and J. Peeples: 2002, 'From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the Violence of Seattle', *Critical Studies in Media Communication* **19**(2), pp. 125–151.

- Edelman, M.: 1977, *Political Language: Words That Succeed and Policies That Fail*, Academic Press, New York, NY.
- Edelman, M.: 1988, *Constructing the Political Spectacle*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Eley, G.: 1992, 'Nations, Publics, and Political Cultures: Placing Habermas in the Nineteenth Century', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Entman, R. M.: 1989, *Democracy Without Citizens: Media and the Decay of American Politics*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Fraser, N.: 1992, 'Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy', in C. Calhoun (ed.), *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, MIT Press, Cambridge.
- Goodnight, G. T.: 1982, 'The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation', *Journal of the American Forensic Association* **18**, 214–227.
- Goodnight, G. T.: 1990, 'The Rhetorical Tradition, Modern Communication, and the Grounds of Justified Assent', in D. Williams and M. Hazen (eds.), *Argumentation Theory and the Rhetoric of Assent*, University of Alabama Press, Tuscaloosa, AL.
- Goodnight, G. T.: 1991, 'Controversy', in D. Parson (ed.), *Argument in Controversy: Proceedings of the Seventh SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.
- Graber, D.: 1988, *Processing the News: How People Tame the Information Tide*, Longman Inc., New York.
- Gronbeck, B. E.: 1990, 'Electric Rhetoric: The Changing Forms of American Political Discourse', *Vichiana*. 3rd series, 1st year, Loffredo Editore, Napoli, Italy, 141–161.
- Gronbeck, B. E.: 1993, 'The Spoken and the Seen: Phonocentric and Ocularcentric Dimensions of Rhetorical Discourse', in J. F. Reynolds (ed.), *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery: Classical Concepts for Contemporary Composition and Communication*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Hillsdale, NJ.
- Gronbeck, B. E.: 1995, 'Unstated Propositions: Relationships Among Verbal, Visual, and Acoustic Languages', in S. Jackson (ed.), *Argumentation and Values: Proceedings of the Ninth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.
- Gurevitch, M. and A. P. Kavoori: 1992, 'Television Spectacles as Politics', *Communication Monographs* **59**, 415–420.
- Habermas, J.: 1962/1989, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT Press, Cambridge. Trans. Thomas Burger.
- Hazen, M. D.: 1991, 'Interpersonal Argument Processes: Implicit Argument in Japan and the United States', in D. Parson (ed.), *Argument in Controversy: Proceedings of the Seventh SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.
- Hogan, J. M.: 1991, 'Between the Public and the Technical Spheres of Argument: The "Televisual" Rhetoric of the Nuclear Freeze Campaign', in D. Parson (ed.), *Argument in Controversy: Proceedings of the Seventh SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.
- Horton, T.: Sept. 5, 1991, 'The Green Giant', *Rolling Stone*, 42–48, 108–112.
- Hunter, R.: 1979, *The Storming of the Mind*, Doubleday, Garden City, NY.
- Jamieson, K. H.: 1988, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*, Oxford University Press, New York, NY.
- Jehl, D. 'Interior Choice Faces Sharp Questioning', *The New York Times*, 1/19/01, A22.
- Jenks, C. (ed.): 1995, *Visual Culture*, Routledge, New York.
- Lake, R. A. and B. A. Pickering: 1998, 'Argumentation, the Visual, and the Possibility of Refutation: An Exploration', *Argumentation* **12**, 79–93.
- Manes, C.: 1990, *Green Rage: Radical Environmentalism and the Unmaking of Civilization*, Little Brown, Boston.
- McGee, M. C.: 1990, 'Text, Context, and the Fragmentation of Contemporary Culture', *Western Journal of Speech Communication* **54**, 274–289.

- Nelson, J. S. and G. R. Boynton: 1995, 'How Music and Image Deliver Argument in Political Advertisements on Television', in S. Jackson (ed.), *Argumentation and Values: Proceedings of the Nineth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.
- Norton, A.: 1993, *Republic of Signs: Liberal Theory and American Popular Culture*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
- Olson, K. M. and G. T. Goodnight: 1994, 'Entanglements of Consumption, Cruelty, Privacy, and Fashion: The Social Controversy over Fur', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **80**, 249–276.
- Postman, N.: 1985, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*, Viking, New York.
- Sabato, L.: 1991, *Feeding Frenzy: How Attack Journalism has Transformed American Politics*, Free Press, New York.
- Scott, R. and D. Smith: 1969, 'The Rhetoric of Confrontation', *Quarterly Journal of Speech* **58**, 1–8.
- Shelley, C.: 1996, 'Rhetorical and Demonstrative Modes of Visual Argument: Looking at Images of Human Evolution', *Argumentation and Advocacy* **33** 53–68.
- Simons, H. W. and D. S. Birdsell: 1989, 'What If Arguers Could Show as Easily as Tell?', in B. E. Gronbeck (ed.), *Spheres of Argument: Proceedings of the Sixth SCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.
- Szaz, A.: 1994, *EcoPopulism: Toxic Waste and the Movement for Environmental Justice*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN.
- Toulmin, S.: 1958, *The Uses of Argument*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Zulick, M. D. and E. A. Laffoon: 1991, 'Enclaved Publics as Inventional Resources: An Essay in Generative Rhetoric', in D. W. Parson (ed.), *Argument in Controversy: Proceedings of the Seventh NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, SCA, Annandale, VA.

Copyright of Argumentation is the property of Springer Science & Business Media B.V. and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.