MULTIMODAL ANALYSIS AS A FRAMEWORK FOR STUDYING SOCIAL MOVEMENT RHETORIC: A COMPARISON OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE COUNTERPUBLIC DISCOURSE OF OCCUPY WALL STREET AND WIKILEAKS

by

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Multimodal Analysis as a Framework for Studying Social Movement Rhetoric: A Comparison of Theoretical Perspectives on the Counterpublic Discourse of Occupy Wall Street and WikiLeaks

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my mother and father, the best parents anyone could ask for.
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I can’t give enough thanks to the many people that helped me through this process.

My parents, who have supported me from day one. My sister Rachael, who always knows exactly how to cheer me up. My almost brother David, the main source of comic relief and also one of the few who understands how my brain works. My coworkers, who have listened to me talk about this thing for months and have put up with me through the entire process.

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George Mason University, 2012
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This thesis argues that we should adopt a theory of social movement that is based in rhetorical principles—one that accepts social movement as changes to a set of meanings, or ideology. Instead of focusing primarily or exclusively on the resources and leadership of organizations, this thesis argues that we should study the discourse of counterpublics—the entities involved in social movement activities. By critiquing and expanding upon DeLuca’s work on image events, this thesis argues that we should examine the entire process that counterpublic discourse goes through—production, dissemination, and circulation—from a multimodal perspective. This thesis identifies Occupy Wall Street and WikiLeaks
as counterpublics and examines each discourse from three perspectives—traditional, image event, and multimodal—in order to demonstrate the strengths of a multimodal theoretical framework.
INTRODUCTION

A New Perspective on the Study of Social Movement Discourse

This thesis evolved from a presentation I made at an interdisciplinary graduate conference at the University of Cincinnati in May of 2011. The conference asked us to think about how the meaning of space had been transformed, and was still being transformed, by newer formulations—such as cyberspace or queer space—that are challenging typical physical and material constructions. They asked, “How do we understand our art, our craft, our work, our relationships, and ourselves in spaces that have been transformed in a digital age?” At the time I began thinking about this theme, WikiLeaks was in its second month of publishing confidential diplomatic cables in conjunction with international newspapers. WikiLeaks caused an enormous uproar and was central to the theme of the conference: public protest without the traditional use of a physical outlet or performance. With this in mind, I began considering how rhetorical ideas of public space and dissent could be challenged or changed by this kind of digital protest. As I read Habermas’ (1989) formation of the public
sphere and waded through criticisms of his work, it became clear that even the most traditional protests—that of people gathering together in a public space with protest signs and chants—could easily be discounted by the public sphere, which is based primarily on the ideal that public discourse should be civil and reasoned. Both the Habermasian public sphere and traditional rhetorical criticism tend to marginalize the performative and emotional spectacles that are characteristic of the protest rhetoric of contemporary social movements because the participants of these spectacles do not conform to “appropriate” forms of discourse (that is, civil and reasoned discourse). If our critical tools already tend to marginalize alternative discourses, then how could we begin approach the WikiLeaks releases which are so clearly pushing the boundaries of how we understand the creation and dissemination of protest rhetoric?

As a solution to this problem, I turned to Kevin Michael DeLuca’s concept of the image event, which he developed both in his book *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* and in a series of articles (Delicath and DeLuca, 2003; DeLuca and Delicath, 2000; DeLuca and Demo, 2000; DeLuca and Peeples, 2001). Essentially, the image event is a protest staged specifically so that the media will pick up images and replay them to broader and broader audiences. DeLuca argues (and one can find ample support from both the communications
and rhetorical disciplines) that we should consider the rhetorical force of the image as seriously as we consider the rhetorical force of text or speech.

This framework worked well for the purposes of that first conference. I loosely framed WikiLeaks’ releases as image events and then looked specifically at the media’s portrayal of WikiLeaks in its coverage as a way of determining whether or not WikiLeaks’ use of the image event was a successful way to break into the public sphere. But most of the questions from the audience centered on the nature of the image event as they were unfamiliar with the concept. So, for the next conference, I decided to take a step back and start with DeLuca’s rhetorical theory of social movement as a way of explaining the image event and why it is a necessary construct. DeLuca, leaning heavily on Michael McGee, set up this theory in opposition to the sociologically based work of Herbert Simons (1972, 1980, 1991), which he considers to be the widely accepted paradigm of social movement for rhetorical study. His main argument struck me as important: If we want to study social movement from a rhetorical perspective, then we should have a framework based in rhetorical principles. So, I tried to set up WikiLeaks within this broader framework: the WikiLeaks releases are image events that should be considered one type of protest tactic within a broader social movement. However, during my presentation, the keynote speaker, Ann
Wysocki, had one crucial question for me: Where is the image? After a moment of blind panic—the keynote had just called out the biggest weakness in my presentation—I responded that I knew it was a stretch to call the WikiLeaks’ releases image events. There is technically no image that one associates directly with WikiLeaks and a strong image that is disseminated by the media is an important element of DeLuca’s theorization of the image event. But this was the best explanation I had for the WikiLeaks phenomenon within the context of protest rhetoric. She later suggested to me that I might need to abandon the image event altogether and that I should consider the concept of multimodality—a theory she works closely with—as a way of getting at the core of this phenomenon. Needless to say, when you are ambushed after a presentation by the keynote speaker, you listen to what she has to say.

I did listen and this thesis is the product of that conversation. Essentially, this thesis seeks to accomplish two things: establish a theory of social movement that is based in rhetorical principles and to propose a theoretical framework for analyzing the discourse produced by a social movement. To this end, I found it necessary to summarize DeLuca’s (1999) argument and explanation for the acceptance of a rhetorical view of social movement theory that departs from the traditionally accepted, sociologically based study of organizations. To construct
this rhetoric of social movement, DeLuca supplements McGee’s theory of ideographs with Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of articulation to explain how protest rhetoric, or what I will later identify as “counterpublic discourse,” works to dearticulate and rearticulate hegemonic public ideologies—or, the “social consciousness of a society” (1999, p. 36). That is, the true purpose of a social movement is to create and recreate collective social meaning. After outlining this foundation, I identify an important question that remains unanswered in DeLuca’s work: Who generates and employs social movement rhetoric? To answer this, I invoke the concepts of the social imaginary and the public sphere as the space where the rhetoric of social movement is generated and employed by, who I will term, social movement agents. These agents are any individuals, groups, or organizations that engage in the production of protest rhetoric with the purpose of challenging the hegemonic discourse.

After establishing the agency of a social movement in the public sphere, I briefly summarize Habermas’ bourgeoisie conception of the public sphere and consider its limitations as a framework on which to base a theory of rhetorical social movement. To combat these limitations, I examine concepts from public and counterpublic theory. I then argue that in order to study protest rhetoric we should study the discourse of counterpublics. In section three, I try to get at a
definition of counterpublic discourse by examining possible frameworks for identifying and analyzing those discourses. I argue that we must break from traditional notions of rhetorical study—that legitimate items of rhetorical study are text-based and deliberative—in order to fully comprehend counterpublic discourse. At this point, I discuss the image event, as it is an important first step toward bridging the gap between traditional, text-based rhetoric and the confrontational, and often visual, rhetoric of counterpublics. Finally, I introduce the concept of multimodality and argue for its acceptance as a framework from which we should study the entire process—production, dissemination, and circulation—of counterpublic discourse.

Finally, in section four I begin an analysis of my case examples. I begin with the 99% Movement and Occupy Wall Street even though it occurred after the WikiLeaks releases. I decided to add Occupy Wall Street to my analysis since it is more closely related to DeLuca’s examples of social movement, in the sense that the 99% Movement is more readily identifiable and its discourse exhibits both strong performative and digital aspects. This allows for an easier transition into an analysis of WikiLeaks, which is uniquely digital. For each case example, I demonstrate how each fits into the social movement paradigm constructed in sections one and two. Then I examine how the possible analyses of each
example’s counterpublic discourse changes depending on the theoretical framework we choose to adopt. I argue that, given the rate of technological change, in order for our analyses to continue to adapt we must adopt a multimodal perspective when studying counterpublic discourse.
SECTION ONE

A Rhetorical Theory of Social Movement

I am beginning this project by tracing the rhetorical theory of social movement outlined by DeLuca in *Image Politics*. To my mind, DeLuca’s suggestions explain, in rhetorical terms, what a social movement is and how it works. DeLuca makes connections between the sociological study of new social movements, McGee’s rhetorical theorization of ideographs, and Laclau and Mouffe’s articulation theory. Once I have summarized DeLuca’s work, I look to theories of the social imaginary and of publics to theorize who the agents of social movement are and where the rhetorical processes of a movement take place.

**What is a Social Movement?**

Historically, sociologists have studied social movements from an organizational perspective, and, generally, rhetoricians have followed suit. However, a group of sociologists have begun to turn to the new social movement paradigm in order explain the differences between recent social movements and
those of the past. According to Pichardo (1997), the new social movement paradigm concentrates on the roles of culture and identity, whereas past movements, as traditionally understood, were focused on economic redistribution. New social movements are understood to “question the wealth-oriented materialist goals of industrial societies,” “emphasize quality of life and life-style concerns,” and, most importantly, advocate “direct democracy, self-help groups, and cooperative styles of organization” (Picardo, 1997, p. 414). This shift has bearing on the rhetorical understanding of social movements as any rhetorical definition based in traditional sociological understanding would not necessarily be valid for new social movements.

Problems with the dominant rhetorical definition.

The rhetorical study of social movement has historically been complicated by the lack of a solid definition.¹ DeLuca argues that Herbert Simons’ sociologically based and organization- and leadership-oriented approach has dominated the rhetorical study of movements since the 1970s (DeLuca, 1999, p. 27; see also Simons, 1980, 1991; Simons, Mechling, and Schreier, 1984). Simons’ theoretical framework for the rhetorical study of social movement is focused on social collectives that portray characteristics of institutionalized organizations,

¹ See DeLuca (1999), pages 25 through 31, for an in depth discussion on the progression of the rhetorical study of social movement.
with particular attention paid to the resources of the organization and their leaders (DeLuca, 1999, p. 31). As Cathcart (1980) points out, this essentially equates the study of social movements with managerial rhetoric, which makes a social movement “hardly differ in form from that of any established collective” (p. 272). A focus on managerial rhetoric is particularly problematic for our purposes given the decentralized characteristics of new social movements. As DeLuca points out, Simons’ framework essentially renders contemporary social movements invisible to rhetorical study since their primary method of functioning subverts the traditional organizational perspective (1999, p. 31).

In *Image Politics*, DeLuca highlights the ways in which environmental groups such as Greenpeace and Earth First! have avoided typical organizational structures. He explains that Greenpeace’s largest successes in its earlier days were pulled off by what “was, at best, a ragtag group” (1999, p. 32). Greenpeace was highly decentralized and its projects were created by individuals within the group who choose to support (or to not support) individual projects. If one were to measure Greenpeace’s successes against more traditional environmental groups from an organizational perspective, then Greenpeace’s lack of organizational form or organizational effectiveness would be seen as a failure. However, it is apparent in their various victories, including nuclear testing,
whaling, and seal hunting, that Greenpeace has been successful; their successes just cannot be measured through traditional methods. From the beginning the members of Earth First!, another radical environmental group, made conscious decisions to avoid traditional organizational structures, such as having institutionalized leaders, creating a national headquarters, keeping membership lists, collecting membership dues, or maintaining a board of directors (DeLuca, 1999, p. 33). And yet, Earth First! had many successes and even managed to imprint onto the national consciousness iconic images of human bodies protecting the environment. There are similar issues of decentralization with the various groups connected to the Occupy Wall Street protests. Simons’ framework does not provide us with the means to analyze the challenges and changes to the public consciousness that are “propelled by the rhetorical acts of small groups or even lone individuals” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 34).

Not only does Simons’ theoretical framework render these kinds of groups invisible, but DeLuca argues that Simons’ framework has been inconsistent over time and therefore does not even satisfactorily explain “traditional” social movement. In essays from 1972 and 1984, Simons defines a social movement “as an institutionalized collectivity that mobilizes for action to implement a program for the reconstitution of social norms or values...from the
bottom up” and later vehemently defended this bottom-up thesis against criticisms from other scholars (as cited in DeLuca, 1999, p. 28; DeLuca, 1999, p. 30–31). However in 1991, he admits to the existence of top-down institutionalized movements related to figures such as Mussolini, Hitler, and Gorbachev, effectively reversing and rendering inoperable his earlier definition (DeLuca, 1999, p. 29). DeLuca has set up a very oppositional stance toward Simons, but for our purposes it is more important to note that DeLuca’s perspective allows us to shift our focus in such a way that we are able to “see” different things.

**Toward a new rhetorical definition of movement.**

So, in the spirit of expanding our viewpoint, I continue to follow DeLuca’s reasoning and accept that Simons’ rhetorical paradigm of social movement renders certain types of social movements invisible to rhetorical study. Then the question remains: How do we define a social movement? Again, I turn toward DeLuca’s reasoning: Cathcart (1972) argues that rhetoricians “have too readily accepted definitions from historians and social-psychologists” that relegate the rhetorical criticism of social movement to the “rhetorical components” that have been previously identified by those disciplines (p. 83). He points out that “the development of an adequate theory is dependent in part on the answer to the question ‘What is a movement?’” and argued that neither sociologists nor
historians have managed to adequately define a social movement (1972, p. 82; see also Simons, 1970; Griffin, 1952).

Despite Cathcart’s warnings that rhetoricians were leaning too heavily on sociological theory, there are sociologists we can look to help ground a new, rhetorically based, theory. Separately from Cathcart, sociologists such as Melucci (1985) and Touraine (1985) (considered a part of the identity-oriented paradigm), in recognition of the characteristics of new social movements, began to make a “clear move in their definitions from social movement as an object to social movement as an activity” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 26). These sociologists realized that the study of social action is dependent upon the study of “the process of communication engaged in by contemporary collective actors as they articulate new identities and societal projects” (J. L. Cohen, 1985, p. 704). Melucci (1985) argued that a social movement is “‘a challenge to the system’ that affects ‘collective consciousness’” and is not a “thing” (as cited in DeLuca, 1999, p. 26). Although these sociologists did not have the vocabulary to recognize it as such, this “process of communication” is rhetorical; the study of social action is dependent on the study of rhetoric.

If we begin with the notion that social movement is a symbolic activity and is not manifested in a physically existing organization, then DeLuca argues
that we must turn to Cathcart and McGee’s arguments for social movement as
meaning. Over the course of a decade, parallel to Simons, Cathcart developed a
theoretical framework based on the understanding that rhetoric is “our only
means of constructing social reality and maintaining social control” (1983, p. 70;
see also Cathcart 1972, 1978, 1980). For Cathcart (1983), social movement is
recognized in the clash between (or, in his words, the “dialectical enjoinder” of)
the movement’s rhetoric of confrontation and the establishment’s rhetoric of
identification. Dialectical enjoinder occurs when a “collective experiencing
alienation and frustration, employs a rhetoric which accesses experience in a
different way — i.e. questions the old forms and creates new symbols” (which, by
definition, occurs outside of the established order) and the established order
reacts by “[inflicting] penalties on those who use symbols in heretical ways and
those who respond to claims on their behavior” (Cathcart, 1983, p. 72). It is this
“give-and-take” of confrontation that defines a social movement.

Despite his insistence that social movements do “not ‘move’ in the
objective world” and are “perceived, created, and responded to symbolically,”
Cathcart (1980) is unable to divest fully his thinking from the sociological
concept that social movements are physically manifested in organizations and
continues to conceptualize movements as collectives (p. 268; see also 1983, pp.
71–74). This undermines his original thesis of social movement as meaning. A true rhetorical theory of social movement—one that first considers movement to be symbolic—should not be tethered to a specific physical manifestation in an organization. DeLuca notes that “the point is not that groups do not exist, just that they are not the social movement themselves” (1999, p. 36). That is, groups and individuals employ rhetoric to generate social movement, but they are not in and of themselves the movement. To repair this inconsistency in Cathcart’s theorizing, DeLuca argues that we should turn to McGee (1975, 1980c, 1983) who fully theorizes social movement as changes in the sets of meanings and not as material phenomenon.

McGee (1980c) argues that a theory of social movement must be “a ‘hermeneutic’ theory, not as purely ‘behavioral’ or ‘phenomenal’ theory” and should, therefore, be “an account of human consciousness not an account of human organizational behavior” (p. 242). He argues that social consciousness is constructed into a social reality through the discourse of a society, and that changes to that discourse are present and empirically measurable within the rhetorical discourse of the public. A social movement exists only when “we can demonstrate by a survey of public discourse that descriptors of the environment have changed in common usage” (McGee, 1980c, p. 243).
Public ideology and ideographic analysis.

Essentially, McGee was arguing for the acceptance of ideology into rhetorical terminology as a way to explain social consciousness. He defined ideology as “a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behavior” (McGee, 1980c, p. 5). This political language consists of a “vocabulary of ‘ideographs’…the basic structural elements, the building blocks of ideology” (McGee, 1980c, p. 5, 7). Essentially, ideographs are words that have no meaning in and of themselves, but are culturally defined by social consciousness. A cow is simply a cow, but what is a “liberty”? Or, as McGee put it: “No one has ever seen an ‘equality’ strutting up the driveway, so if ‘equality’ exists at all, it has meaning through its specific applications” (1980a, p. 10). Following McGee’s reasoning, DeLuca argues that “groups, as well as individuals or institutions, through their rhetorical tactics and strategies create social movements, changes in public consciousness with regards to a key issue or issues, measurable through changes in the meanings of a culture’s key terms in public discourse,” or ideographs (1999, p. 36).

McGee argued that the synchronic, or relative, relationships between ideographs should be examined and analyzed to determine changes in the
prevailing public discourse, or ideology (1980a, p. 7). The synchronic relationship between ideographs is how they are “meant to be taken together, as a working unit” in a given time period (McGee, 1980a, p. 13). DeLuca argues that this relationship is the most illuminating aspect of public ideology as it exists “presently”; however, current scholarship has favored the diachronic, or historical, relationship instead (1999, p. 36–37; see also McGee, 1980b; Charland and Lucaites, 1999; Condit and Lucaites, 1993). DeLuca argues that this is the case because McGee only tentatively began to theorize the synchronic structure of ideographs. Once the nature of the synchronic relationship between ideographs is more clearly theorized, then theorists may begin to expand the scholarship in that direction. DeLuca argues that McGee’s work on ideographs: needs to be supplemented by Laclau and Mouffe’s subsequent theorizing of articulation, antagonism, and hegemony in order to explain how ideographs, in a social field marked by contingency instead of necessity, are linked in certain synchronic structures and what conditions enable groups to challenge or even change a particular linking of ideographs, that is, the hegemonic discourse. (DeLuca, 1999, p. 37)
How Does Social Movement Work?

According to DeLuca, the concepts of articulation, antagonism, and hegemonic discourse can be used to explain how ideographs are linked together to create a public ideology (Gramsci, 1971). For Laclau and Mouffe, social relations are constituted and organized by discursive structures (DeLuca, 1999, p. 37). These discursive structures, or the discourse, are a result of articulation, which is “any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified” (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001/1985, p. 105). DeLuca’s summary of the basics of the articulation process is worth citing here:

Articulation has two aspects: speaking forth elements and linking elements. Though elements preexist articulations as floating signifiers, the act of linking in a particular articulation modifies their character such that they can be understood as being spoken anew. The linking of elements into a temporary unity is not necessary, but rather is contingent and particular and is the result of a political and historical struggle. (DeLuca, 1999, p. 38)

So, elements preexist articulations and can be combined through the process of articulation in order to create a new meaning, or a new discourse. Elements take some of their meaning from past articulations but are also “constituted anew”
each time they are used in an articulation (DeLuca, 1999, p. 40). Each attempt at articulation tries “to fix meaning within the field of discursivity and…to fix the context” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 40). The logic behind a particular linking of elements is not ruled by a “universal organizing principle or grand narrative,” there is only an open “field of discursivity, wherein numberless discourses compete to articulate free floating elements into hegemonic unities” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 38). DeLuca gives the following example to lend some concreteness to the theory:

For instance, industrialism could be considered a hegemonic discourse that temporarily defines the field of discursivity. Marxism and capitalism are two competing discourses. To simplify, they are fighting over who should own the factory. Neither questions whether the factory should be built in the first place….In a fundamental sense, they both operate within the taken-for-granted context of industrialism. (DeLuca, 1999, p. 40)

In this example, DeLuca is arguing that the discourse of industrialism—that it is the human imperative to seek progress—is the relevant hegemonic discourse. Marxists and capitalists have different notions of progress and how best to achieve it, but neither disagree that progress is the main goal.

Antagonisms are what allow hegemonic discourses to be changed. Antagonisms “point to the limit of a discourse…and occur when previously
construed ‘natural’ relations of subordination are articulated as socially constructed relations of oppression and domination” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 40, 42). That is, the ideas that allow people to accept certain conditions are turned on their heads in such a way that people’s perceptions of those conditions begin to change. Antagonisms differ from elements in that they originate and emerge from within a discourse, whereas elements are the pieces that are linked together to create the discourse. Generally, a single antagonism will not disrupt a hegemonic discourse. Instead, they are linked together in chains of equivalent antagonisms in which the aggregate of the various antagonisms work together to disarticulate and rearticulate the discourse.

DeLuca argues that McGee “offers a more complete theorization of ideographs, so his term should be incorporated into a theory of articulation” (1999, p. 43). Substituting ideographs for elements “[supplements] a lacuna in Laclau and Mouffe’s work: the absence of the role of rhetoric…ideographs [give] elements rhetorical force” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 43). Ideographs are “definitive of the society we have inherited, they are the conditions of the society into which each of us is born, material ideas which we must accept to ‘belong’” (McGee, 1980a, p. 9). The practice of articulation links these conditions, these ideas, into a hegemonic discourse. Antagonisms, brought forward by those who engage in the
rhetorical processes of social movement (who I refer to as social movement agents) allow for the disarticulation and rearticulation of the discourse, which is the ultimate purpose of social movement.

A more specific example is the notion of the “price of progress.” This ideograph is often used when referring to environmental problems that occur because of industrialism, such as toxic waste dumping or the threat of global warming. These are costs that we have accepted as “worth it” and those people affected by these problems “need to sacrifice for the common good” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 42). The social movement agent’s role is to identify the ways in which the implicit argument within the ideograph of the price of progress is invalid and to present those conflicting ideas in such a way that people begin to think differently about the acceptable costs of progress. And in the case of the environmental movement, this is exactly what happened. Agents with various environmental focuses changed people’s ideas about which costs of progress—and to what extent—are acceptable. Now the attention paid to the concepts of clean air, clean water, deforestation, pesticides, toxic waste, animal cruelty, and environmental preservation are no longer radical ideas—they are mainstream.

By following the connections made by DeLuca between the work done by McGee and Laclau and Mouffe, we can now satisfactorily define the term “social
movement” and explain how it works. Through McGee we can define social movement as the symbolic and rhetorical change (or attempted change) of accepted social meanings, or ideographs. Through the connection of ideographic analysis and articulation theory made by DeLuca, we can explain how the process of social movement works: a hegemonic discourse is articulated through the linking of ideographs and social movement agents work to disarticulate and rearticulate that discourse by employing rhetoric that emphasizes antagonisms that arise from within the discourse. As more agents bring forward related antagonisms from that discourse, the overall force creates social movement.

Who Generates Social Movement?

DeLuca has made great strides in expanding the rhetorical theory of social movement, but we are still left with some important questions. First of all, who are the agents that generate and employ the rhetoric of social movement? Even if we define social movement as a symbolic process of change in social consciousness, we cannot ignore that there must still be some agent that generates and employs (or at the very least, attempts to employ) the rhetoric that creates social movement. DeLuca acknowledges this reality in his discussion of articulation when he notes that the limits of the hegemonic discourse “must be articulated by groups as antagonisms in order to subvert the hegemonic
discourse” (1999, p. 42). Antagonisms are not passive disruptions to the hegemonic discourse; they must be identified and used by a social movement agent in order to make social change occur in reality. And secondly, who is a social movement directed at? How do we define the group of people, the audience of a social movement, who have accepted the hegemonic discourse as a given and to whom social movement agents must present antagonisms? Supplementing ideographic analysis with articulation theory still does not tell us who generates and employs the rhetoric of a social movement or to whom the movement is directed.

**A rhetoric of “the people.”**

As part of his theorization of social movements, McGee (1975) asks “how can one conceive the idea of ‘people’ in a way that accounts for the rhetorical function of ‘the people’ in arguments designed to warrant social action, even society itself?” (p. 239). He argues that rhetoricians need to do a better job of explicitly defining the concept of “the people” or “the audience” and to recognize the concept’s ties to social theory (as opposed to traditional Greek and Roman rhetorical study). According to McGee, “rhetorical scholarship presupposes a ‘people’ or an ‘audience’ which is either (a) an objective, literal extension of a ‘person,’ or (b) a ‘mob’ of individuals whose significance is their
gullibility and failure to respond to the ‘logical’ argument” (1975, p. 238). Neither of these assumptions of “the people” satisfactorily explains who employs the rhetoric of social movement or to whom it is directed. The agents of a social movement may appear to be empirically definable, but there is no way to ensure that each possible individual has been accounted for. When we refer to the “the people,” we are calling upon a term that invokes “an idea of collective force which transcends both individuality and reason” (McGee, 1975, p. 238). It is this collective force that we should look to as the agents and the audience of social movement: a people, a group, which are “made ‘real’ by their own belief and behavior, [but] are still essentially a mass illusion” (McGee, 1975, p. 242, emphasis in original). To better define this force, I suggest that we turn to the theory and terminology of the public sphere and of publics and counterpublics to better define and understand the nature of this collective social force.

The modern social imaginary and the public sphere.

In order to locate the agency of social movement, we must first ask another question: “Where does social movement occur?” Social movement occurs when hegemonic discourses are challenged, disarticulated, and rearticulated by antagonisms. Social movement agents bring forth antagonisms in an existing rhetorical process that we experience through protest rhetoric, but
to discuss the whole of the social movement process—the entire meaning-making process—we must turn to a metaphorical space: the public sphere.

Although rhetoricians typically lean on Habermas (1989) to theorize the public sphere, I think it is important to consider other theories that examine the actually existing contemporary public sphere. In order to better define the public sphere (in other words, to define the public sphere in such a way as to not be limited by Habermas’ bourgeoisie conception), I suggest looking to Charles Taylor’s (2002) conception of the modern social imaginary, which allows us to approach the concept of the public sphere from a different perspective. For Taylor, the social imaginary is “the [way] in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (2002, p. 106). The social imaginary describes how society understands itself, through “images, stories, and legends” (Taylor, 2002, p. 106). The social imaginary of society is “self-evident” and as such “we have trouble seeing it as one possible conception among others” (Taylor, 2002, p. 92).

With some adjustment, we can adapt Taylor’s language for the social imaginary to Laclau and Mouffe’s theory of articulation and say that the social
imaginary is the open field of discursivity where hegemonic discourses are socially constructed, the space where ideographs—the common ideas of a social consciousness—are created and articulated into ideologies. In his essay, Taylor outlines how a particular hegemonic discourse—what he calls the moral order of society—within the social imaginary has changed over the last three centuries, during the transition into modernity. He examines how the new moral order began as “an idea in the minds of some influential thinkers”, but later came to shape “the full-fledged doctrine of popular sovereignty under which we now live” (Taylor, 2002, p. 92, 93). Taylor describes a process, which he terms the “long march” and which we would term “rearticulation,” to describe how changes are made to the social imaginary over long periods of time. Most importantly, Taylor describes the process under which “civil society” was able to “achieve an identity independent from the polity,” which allowed for the rise of the public sphere (2002, p. 111).

In this context, the public sphere can be seen as arising from the transition from the pre-modern social imaginary into the modern social imaginary. For Taylor, the public sphere developed through an historical process to give the members of society a common space that is “self-consciously seen as being

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1 Taylor is referring specifically to the social imaginary of western society and he acknowledges the existence of alternative imaginaries that have followed different paths into modernity.
outside power” in which to meet (through speech, print, and electronic means) to “discuss matters of common interest and thus” form public opinion (2002, p. 114, 112). The common space of the public sphere is specifically “metatopical,” in that it is the compounding of local common spaces into “one larger space of nonassembly” that circulates through various discourse mediums (Taylor, 2002, p. 114). This idea that the public sphere is one space that consists of many “local” spaces is consistent with both Habermas’ conception of the public sphere and the idea of multiple publics and counterpublics as described by many public and counterpublic theorists (e.g. Warner, 2002; Asen, 2000).

If the public sphere is a component of the social imaginary, then the hegemonic discourses that are articulated within the social imaginary become the starting point or common ground of the public sphere. For any given public, the public sphere has legitimated a certain hegemonic discourse (and, therefore, the stipulations of that discourse).³ Those who refuse to accept or subscribe to the hegemonic discourse (and actively work against it) participate instead in counterpublics, which are the publics that work from outside of the legitimated public sphere to rearticulate the hegemonic discourse (to therefore allow for

³ This view of the public sphere agrees with Habermas (critical-rational discourse is the hegemonic discourse of the bourgeoisie public sphere) and explains why the public sphere has the limitations described by Fraser (1992) and other scholars and why the contemporary public sphere is different from Habermas’ bourgeoisie formation.
wider participation). Taylor has shown that the hegemonic discourses articulated in the social imaginary can change over extended periods of time as new ideas gain influence. Social movement, which happens through the contestation of publics and counterpublics in the public sphere, is one driving force of those long-term changes.

“The people” as “The public.”

Taylor’s conception of the social imaginary and his explanation of its relationship to the public sphere allow us to define the space where social movement occurs. Adapting the concept of a plurality of publics within a wider public sphere then leads us to the who, the audience, of social movement. By accepting publics as the where of social movement, we can turn to Warner’s (2002) explication of publics to explain who participates in a public.

Warner defines a public as “the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse” (2002, p. 90). The people of the public are “identified primarily through their participation in the discourse” and not through external frameworks (Warner, 2002, p. 74). This is in keeping with the notion that a social movement is not a specific organization, but happens instead within the discourse of a society. Warner acknowledges “a kind of chicken-and-egg circularity in the idea of a public” but argues that it is essential to the concept: “A
public might be real and efficacious, but its reality lies in just this reflexivity by which an addressable object is conjured into being in order to enable the very discourse that gives it existence” (2002, p. 67). Individuals or groups are part of a public when they participate in the discourse of that public. For Warner, participation requires only “mere attention” (2002, p. 87). That is, to be a part of a public, one must show “some degree of attention, however notional” (Warner, 2002, p.87). This may seem to imply that individuals are passive participants in a public, but Warner argues otherwise. An individual chooses to participate in a public. He explains that:

Public discourse craves attention like a child. Texts clamor at us. Images solicit our gaze. Look here! Listen! Hey! In doing so, they by no means render us passive. Quite the contrary. The modern system of publics creates a demanding social phenomenology. Our willingness to process a passing appeal determines which publics we belong to and performs their extension....The appellative energy of publics puts a different burden on us: it makes us believe our consciousness to be decisive. The direction of our glance can constitute our world. (p. 89)

So, the question of McGee’s rhetorical “people” or audience, or, for our purposes, who a social movement is directed toward, is answered by the composition of
publics. Public discourse is meant to address an audience and that audience comes into being in response to the discourse. That audience is comprised of those individuals who choose to pay attention to the discourse.

The agents of social movement are those who identify antagonisms and use them when employing the rhetoric of social movement. In actuality, these agents are individuals, groups of people, and organizations who engage in protest against the hegemonic discourse. As I mentioned earlier, in the parlance of public sphere theory, those publics that do not subscribe to the hegemonic discourse of the wider public sphere and actively work to change that discourse are termed counterpublics. In the next section, I expand upon the notion of social movement agents as a part of counterpublics by surveying the limitations of Habermas’ public sphere and establishing how counterpublic theory can be applied to the study of the protest rhetoric, or the discourse created by social movement agents.
SECTION TWO

Protest Rhetoric in the Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere is an invaluable conceptual tool for thinking about how public ideas are formed, disseminated, and changed. We can’t talk about protest without talking about where it happens, who is involved and who is affected; therefore, we can’t talk about protest without talking about publics. But it is important to consider the limitations of those theories with which we are working and, as time passes, to consider and adjust our theories to new developments in society and technology.

In section one, I introduced the concept of the public sphere as a public space that arose from long-term changes in the social imaginary. This is a different perspective from that traditionally used in studies of the public sphere—Habermas’ (1989) liberal bourgeoisie conception of the public sphere. I chose to do this because Habermas’ bourgeoisie conception, for reasons I will discuss in this section, does not resemble the contemporary public sphere in important ways and I wanted to demonstrate that other formulations of the public sphere are also valid. Theories of protest rhetoric in the public sphere that
start from Habermas’ assumptions must work much harder to be consistent with
the characteristics of the contemporary public sphere. Because so many scholars
rely on Habermas as a starting point, and the works I will discuss in this section
assume knowledge of Habermas, it is pertinent to review it here briefly. Then I
will discuss important limitations identified by theorists in his conception of the
public sphere by reviewing important points from the literature of counterpublic
theory. The point of this discussion is to lead us to our object of study:
counterpublic discourse.

Habermas’ Bourgeoisie Public Sphere

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Habermas (1989)
outlines how the economic and social transformation from feudalism to
capitalism (specifically, the mercantilist capitalism of the eighteenth century)
created a new divide between civic society and the state, which allowed for the
creation of a public space for the deliberation of public opinion. The distinctions
between public and private interests were considerably different in a feudalistic
society. Habermas notes that in feudalism there existed a “publicity of
representation” in which a manorial lord “displayed himself, presented himself
as an embodiment of some sort of ‘higher’ power,” which was “inseparable from
the lord’s concrete existence” (Habermas, 1989, p. 7). In this social structure, the
lord did not represent the country as Senators represent their states; the lord “was” the country. The medieval public sphere was “a site where rulers stage their status in the form of spectacles before the ruled” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 21).

By the end of the eighteenth century, feudal authority had been transformed by the advent of permanent government administration and a standing army into state authority over private individuals. Similarly, feudal modes of production had been transformed by mercantilist policies into capitalist modes of production. These changes allowed for civil society to come “into existence as the corollary of a depersonalized state authority” (Habermas, 1989, p. 19). During this period, the press evolved into a space where bourgeoisie writers were able to “think their own thoughts, directed against the authorities” instead of writing for and at the will of the ruler (Habermas, 1989, p. 25). These conditions opened up a space between civil, or private, society and state authority in which “private people come together as a public…to engage [the public authorities] in a debate over the general rules governing relations in the basically privatized but publicly relevant sphere of commodity exchange and social labor” (Habermas, 1989, p. 27).

This space—what Habermas terms the public sphere—is a space where private persons, through rational-critical debate, create public opinion regarding
matters that are of public concern, namely, those that “put the state in touch with
the needs of society” (Habermas, 1989, p. 31). Habermas argued that this
particular conception of the public sphere had the most potential, however
unrealized it may have been, for participatory democracy. For Habermas, the
contemporary public sphere’s reliance on corporatized, mediated discourse is a
sign of the decay of public opinion and participatory democracy and a return to
the spectacle of feudal society (Fraser, 1992, p. 113; DeLuca, 1999, p. 21).

Limitations of the Public Sphere

Many scholars have identified a number of problems with Habermas’
initial conception of the liberal bourgeoisie public sphere (e.g. Curran, 1991; Eley,
1992; Fraser, 1992; McLaughlin, 1993; Pateman, 1988; Peters, 1993; Phillips, 1996).
However, there is still an overwhelming sense that the theoretical structure of the
public sphere is an important critical tool for understanding and analyzing
“social theory and democratic political practice” and for “getting at the dilemmas
of democracy in an industrial/technological age of mass communication and
oligarchy” (Fraser, 1992, p. 111; DeLuca, 1999, p. 21).

In her seminal 1992 essay, “Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution
to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy,” Nancy Fraser argued that the
revisionist historiography of a number of scholars “neither undermines nor
vindicates the concept of the public sphere *simpliciter*, but that it calls into question four assumptions of the public sphere, at least as Habermas describes it” (p. 117, emphasis in original). Of these four assumptions, two are pertinent to our discussion: that it is possible for participants in the public sphere to bracket their inequalities and “deliberate *as if* they were social equals” and that a single, comprehensive public sphere is “always preferable” to competing multiple publics (Fraser, 1992, p. 117, emphasis in original).

**Open access to the public sphere.**

One of the main tenets of Habermas’ public sphere, and of the concept of the publicity in general, is that it is open to all. It is easy to see that this ideal was never realized in practice and even Habermas admits to this in a later work (Habermas, 1992). Fraser (1992) argued that simply fulfilling the requirement of open access, that is removing all formal barriers to entry into the public sphere, would not ensure equality of access. Habermas calls for participants of the public sphere to bracket their inequalities and act “*as if*” they were peers. If one could assume that this was even possible, which, arguably, it is not; then informal impediments would still reinforce status inequalities. Fraser (1992) noted that feminist political theorists have argued that “deliberation can serve as a mask for domination” and quotes Jane Mansbridge:
Even the language people use as they reason together usually favors one way of seeing things and discourages others. Subordinate groups sometimes cannot find the right voice or words to express their thoughts, and when they do they discover they are not heard. (p. 119)

This subtle domination is not limited to feminism; it is easy to bridge this argument to class, ethnicity, sexuality, and other cultural differences. This informal domination limits participation in the public sphere, which serves to “marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday contexts and in official public spheres” (Fraser, 1992, p. 120). Fraser (1992) also points out that these informal impediments are worsened by the for-profit media who circulate the discourse of the public sphere as “subordinated social groups usually lack equal access to the material means of equal participation” (p. 120). Fraser suggests that a necessary condition of participatory parity is to eliminate systemic social inequalities and calls for critical theorists to “render visible the ways in which societal inequality infects formally inclusive public spheres and taints discursive interaction within them” (p. 121). It is important to acknowledge that social inequalities exist in actuality and, therefore, we must account for those inequalities when theorizing about the contemporary public sphere if we want to be accurate. There must be some
mechanism that allows subordinated and marginalized discourses to register within the public sphere. The concept of multiple publics opens up space for alternative discourses.

**Multiple publics.**

According to Fraser’s (1992) reading of Habermas, the bourgeoisie conception of the public sphere purports to be the only public arena and implies that a multiplicity of publics is undesirable. Fraser argues, that in the case of a stratified society (like ours), the effects of social inequalities would be exacerbated by a single, comprehensive public sphere. In the absence of social equality, Fraser argued that “arrangements that accommodate contestation among a plurality of competing publics better promote the idea of participatory parity than does a single, comprehensive, overarching public” (1992, p. 122). If there is only one overarching public, then “members of subordinated groups would have no arenas for deliberation among themselves about their needs, objectives, and strategies” (Fraser, 1992, p. 123). She argues that revisionist historiographies of the public sphere and recent developments have shown that many “subordinated social groups—women, workers, peoples of color, and gays and lesbians—have repeatedly found it advantageous to constitute alternative publics” (Fraser, 1992, p. 123). To describe these alternative publics, Fraser
suggests the term subaltern counterpublics to describe “parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs” (1992, p. 123). She argues that the dual nature of counterpublics—as a space of withdrawal and regroupment and as a space of contestation toward the wider public—allows subordinated groups to offset the effects of social inequalities on participation (Fraser, 1992, p. 124).

Warner (2002) argues that Fraser has misread Habermas: Habermas did “not imagine a public unified in reality, as a constituency or a single media context,” but stressed that there were many different types of public discourse, which implies multiple publics (p. 55). For Habermas, the concept of a unitary public “is best understood as an imaginary convergence point that is often referred to as ‘the public’ or ‘public opinion’ and by virtue of that fact endowed with legitimacy and the ability to dissolve power” (Warner, 2002, p. 55). Warner argues that this idea of public opinion is “the ideal background of all possible publics,” and although Habermas increasingly “collapsed public reason into the model of face-to-face argumentative dialogue” in his later works, “there is no necessary conflict between the public sphere and the idea of multiple publics” (p. 56). Regardless of how we choose to read Habermas, accepting the notion of
multiple publics leads us toward the concept of counterpublics, which is an important step toward understanding the space in which protest rhetoric is created.

**Counterpublics**

Since *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, there has been a general movement in the field towards the multiplicity of publics (Asen, 2000, p. 444). The concept of counterpublics emerged to “illuminate the differential power relations among diverse publics of a multiple public sphere” (Asen, 2000, p. 425). Without the concepts of multiplicity and counterpublics, it would be difficult to keep intact a rhetorical theory of social movement because a single, comprehensive public sphere would not register the discourse of marginalized groups. Also, by detaching the concept of a social movement from specific organizations, we must still locate the agency of a movement in some “thing” as that detachment does not imply that a movement is totally symbolic. If we, as I argued in section one, locate the agency of a social movement within the contemporary public sphere, then we must look to the concept of counterpublics to explain how social movement works within that wider public sphere.

As I discussed above, Fraser (1992) introduced the term “subaltern counterpublics” to describe spaces within the public sphere that are
marginalized by the hegemonic discourse and that position themselves in opposition to that hegemonic discourse. Both Asen (2000) and Warner (2002) question the meaning of “counter” in counterpublic and suggest that if theorists are to use the term, it must be more specific. Warner asks:

But what makes such a public “counter” or “oppositional”? Is its oppositional character a function of its content alone; that is, its claim to be oppositional? In this case, we might simply call it a subpublic, like that of Field & Stream, with the difference that a thematic discussion of political opposition is more likely to be found in it. (p. 118)

This is an important distinction because we are looking for a specific kind of space where dissent against the hegemonic discourse takes shape and engenders social movement.

**Identifying counterpublics.**

In section one, I argued that publics were the spaces where the audience and the agents of social movement reside. If, as Warner posits, publics come into being through discourse that “openly addresses people who are identified primarily through their participation in the discourse and who therefore cannot be known in advance” then it is impossible to identify a public by its specific members (2002, p. 74). However, it is still possible to define the qualities of a
counterpublic that would determine a sense of the type of members that would choose to be a part of the counterpublic.

Asen (2000) warned theorists that tying counterpublics too closely with its members’ identities risks undermining the theoretical strength of the concept. Asen argued that if “counter” and “group” are conflated, then “counterpublics transfigure into enclaves—not involuntarily through discursive struggle among publics informed by relations of power, but at the moment of critical identification” (p. 431). He argued that Fraser’s definition of subaltern counterpublics can be read in two ways. One reading suggests that counterpublics are “social, discursive entities that may not be reduced to the identity of their participants” (Asen, 2000, p. 431). But, Asen suggests, a second reading of Fraser “locates the counter of counterpublics in the subordinated status of participants” and “dominant groups battle subordinate groups in opposing publics and counterpublics” (2000, p. 431). In this case, the alternative quality of counterpublics “necessarily arises from the common identity of the participants,” which is problematic because, although social status is often a marker of counterpublic status, making social status a necessary condition for counterpublic membership denies the fluidity of social relations and risks
imposing hegemonic group identities thereby undermining the counterpublic’s alternative quality (Asen, 2000, p. 432).

For Warner (2002), a counterpublic is identified by its discourse and the way in which that discourse is distinguished from the hegemonic discourse:

The cultural horizon against which it marks itself off is not just a general or wider public but a dominant one. And the conflict extends not just to ideas or policy questions but to the speech genres and modes of address that constitute the public or to the hierarchy among media. The discourse that constitutes it is not merely a different or alternative idiom but one that in other contexts would be regarded with hostility or with a sense of indecorousness. (p. 120)

That the discourse of a counterpublic would necessarily be received with hostility by the hegemonic public is an important theme that runs through counterpublic theory. Rhetorical theorists have also recognized the importance of the hegemonic response to contentious rhetoric. Cathcart (1983) theorized that social movement occurred in both the dialectical enjoinderment of the rhetoric of confrontation and the establishment’s rhetoric of identification. Charland (1987) explored the way in which discourse can assert an oppositional public and, based on Althusser’s notion of interpellation, argued that “acknowledgement of
an address entails an acceptance of an imputed self-understanding which can form the basis for an appeal” (p. 138). Asen (2000) noted that “Just as counterpublics seek wider circulation of discourse, so too may wider publics attempt to contain counterdiscourses” (p. 442). Warner sums up this train of thought with a simple turn of phrase:

They [members of a counterpublic] are socially marked by their participation in this kind of discourse; ordinary people are presumed not to want to be mistaken for the kind of person who would participate in this kind of talk or be present in this kind of scene. (p. 120)

This helps us to identify counterpublic discourse: The discourse of a counterpublic necessarily sets itself against the hegemonic discourse in such a way as to mark itself as different and hostile to accepted norms.

**Dual purpose of counterpublics.**

Theorists also acknowledge the duality of purpose in counterpublic discourse. Felski (1989) notes the dual nature of feminist counterpublic discourse: “internally, it generates a gender-specific identity grounded in a consciousness of a community and solidarity among women; externally, it seeks to convince society as a whole of the validity of feminist claims” (p. 168). Fraser (1992) noted the duality of counterpublics as a space to engender confrontational activities
against a wider public and as a space of withdrawal to regroup from confrontation. Asen (2000) also acknowledges this phenomenon in his theorization of the articulation of exclusion and the articulation of resolve. For Asen, counterpublics “emerge from the recognition of various exclusions from wider publics,” and that interaction with those wider publics results in the resolve to overcome those exclusions (2000, p. 438, 441). Warner (2002) also stresses that counterpublics, on some level, maintain an awareness of their subordinate status and members’ identities are “formed and transformed” by participation in it (p. 121). He uses the example of queer counterpublics to highlight this quality:

Within a gay or queer counterpublic, for example, no one is in the closet: the presumptive heterosexuality that constitutes the closet for individuals in ordinary speech is suspended. But this circulatory space, freed from heternormative speech protocols, is itself marked by that very suspension: speech that addresses any participant as queer will circulate up to that point, at which it is certain to meet intense resistance....The expansive nature of public address will seek to keep moving that frontier for a queer public, to seek more and more places to circulate where people will
recognize themselves in its address; but no one is likely to be unaware of

the risk and conflict involved. (p. 120)

Therefore, it is important that we focus on the discourse of counterpublics, since
the discourse not only identifies the counterpublic to us but also increases our
awareness of the exclusionary practices of the hegemonic public and illuminates
how counterpublics produce and disseminate their message to wider, more
hostile, publics. It is within counterpublic discourse that we can find the
rhetorical processes of social movement. In the next section, I continue this line of
reasoning by seeking to explain what counterpublic discourse is and considering
different our methods for studying that discourse.
SECTION THREE

Theoretical Perspectives of Counterpublic Discourse

If we must study the discourse of counterpublics in order to identify counterpublics and their attempts to generate social movement, then we are left with an important question: What is counterpublic discourse? McGee (1980c) states that we should study public discourse for evidence of social movement. Warner (2002) studies circulated texts to argue that publics are created by the reflexive circulation of discourse, but does not specifically define discourse. Fraser (1992) argues for subaltern counterpublics that are born of opposition to the hegemonic discourse and therefore do not conform to the hegemonic norms of discourse. So, what makes up this discourse? If we are to study counterpublic discourse we must know what exactly to study and, consequently, how to study it.

Both sections one and two are based on the notion that breaking away from traditional definitions of social movement and reasoned discourse is productive. Similarly, this section is about breaking away from the traditional
rhetorical notion of discourse as text in order to make productive changes to our analytical framework. Traditional rhetorical criticism views text as the “capital-L” legitimate object of study. In this section, I review DeLuca’s work on the image event to give one perspective on how we can expand what we consider legitimate objects of study. In the case of the image event, we are able to expand to text and image. Then, I argue that we should take this idea a step further and adopt the concept of multimodality, which is being used more and more frequently within the rhetoric and composition discipline, in order to expand what we consider legitimate objects of study to include various modes such as text, image, sound, video, performance, objects, and combinations of those modes. This approach also has the added benefit that it has a built in layer of flexibility that is absent in the image event perspective. If different modes or media become available or are created in the future (through new technology or other means) they are already acceptable objects of study and we would not need to readjust our framework in order to understand them.

What is an Image Event?

In *Image Politics*, DeLuca argues for the acceptance of the term “image event” to describe protests staged specifically for mass media dissemination. They generally begin as some form of performative action, such as sit-ins and
marches or more radical techniques such as intercepting whaling ships or splashing red paint on fur coats. Pictures or video are taken of the event and the public then experiences these actions as images on the public screen (DeLuca and Peeples, 2001). Protestors that use these techniques understand the rhetorical effect that drama and controversy have on publicity (e.g. DeLuca and Peeples, 2001; Fuoss, 1997; Harold, 2004; Johnson, 2007; Jones, 2009; King, 2009; Lasn, 1999). DeLuca (1999) stresses that it is the ability of the image event to reach the wider public and therefore contest the hegemonic discourse that is the measure of the success of an image event—not the immediate or direct effects, such as actually saving a whale or stopping a fur coat from being produced. Most importantly, the purpose of an image event is not to merely call attention to particular issues but to challenge the hegemonic discourse and to “move the meanings of fundamental ideographs” in an attempt to generate social movement (DeLuca, 1999, p. 52).

For examples of image events, DeLuca focuses on radical environmental protest groups that made their names in the 60s and 70s, in particular Greenpeace. However, protest rhetoric that could be labeled an image event did not start with Greenpeace and other scholars use different terms for very similar concepts, such as visual spectacles, telespectacles, performative protest,
carnivalesque protest, or culture jamming/pranking (e.g. Gronbeck, 1995; Harold, 2004; Klein, 2002; Bruner, 2005; Lasn, 1999). DeLuca looks to groups like Greenpeace and Earth First! because these are the first groups that used image events as their primary rhetorical tactic in their counterdiscourse.

DeLuca’s most compelling example is that of Greenpeace’s “Save the Whales” campaign in the 1970s (see Figure 1). In an effort to interfere with Soviet whaling ships, “six Greenpeace activists in three Zodias (inflatable rubber dinghies) ‘armed’ with one film camera” confronted the whalers to try to prevent the Soviet ships from harpooning the whales (DeLuca, 1999, p. 1). They filmed the event and images were then broadcast on channels such as CBS, ABC, and NBC, as well as other global networks. Although the crew was unable to save the whale, the image of the activists putting their lives in danger to save the whale spread across the “mass consciousness of modern America” challenging the notion that “nature was a threatening, powerful force that dominated humans” (Hunter, 1979, p. 231; DeLuca, 1999, p. 52). These images of whales dwarfed by Soviet whaling fleets demonstrated to the public that even such enormous animals are now “at the mercy of humans and their technology and in need of protection” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 53). Since that time, in support of a wide
range of environmental issues, Greenpeace has continued to perform image events in which activists have:

chained themselves to harpoons, spray-painted baby harp seals to render their pelts worthless, plugged waste discharge pipes, simultaneously hung banners from smokestacks in eight European countries in order to create a composite photograph that would spell out “STOP” twice,
dressed as penguins to protest development of Antarctica, delivered a dead seal to 10 Downing Street (home of the British prime minister), and used drift nets to spell out “Ban Drift Nets Now” on the Mall in Washington, DC. (DeLuca, 1999, p. 3)

These image events were the main rhetorical elements of many successful campaigns that eventually led to a number of measurable environmental changes, including bans on commercial whaling, ocean dumping of nuclear waste, and disposal of plastics at sea, by challenging and changing the accepted ideologies of the role of nature in an industrialized world (DeLuca, 1999, p. 3, 52–60).
The image event as a theoretical perspective.

For DeLuca (1999), a social movement agent who is using image events as a protest tactic is as legitimate as using more traditionally understood text- or speech-based rhetorical acts. Image events are not simply “flares sent out to gain attention for the ‘real’ rhetoric” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 17). Image events have rhetorical force. DeLuca’s point, that we should take the power of image as seriously as that of text and speech, is part of a larger, ongoing discussion in both communication studies and rhetoric and composition studies. The development
of this conversation is critical to the study of counterpublic discourse because these disciplines are beginning to acknowledge more and more types of discourse. But there is still work to be done in regards to the legitimation of these alternative forms. Speaking of the mass communications field’s approach to media analysis, DeLuca argues that, despite a recognition of the importance of image, there is a “tendency in the discipline of rhetoric to study television and other imagistic media by focusing on words to the neglect of images” (1999, p. 18). DeLuca points out that in a study of *The Phil Donahue Show* Aden (1994) “focuses exclusively on the *words* of David Duke...in order to claim that the paradigmatic form of public argument in our postmodern television age is the enthymeme” (emphasis in original, 1999, p. 18). Olson and Goodnight (1994) recognize image events, but “implicitly [instantiate] a hierarchy that privileges the discursive (words) over the nondiscursive (images)” by discussing discursive arguments before the nondiscursive and by focusing on the text of nondiscursive arguments (DeLuca, 1999, p. 18). Hogan (1994), in a study of the nuclear freeze campaign as a telepolitical movement, “performs a rhetorical criticism of a televisual social movement dependent on good visuals while neglecting the televised images” (DeLuca, 1999, p. 19). Although these scholars have acknowledged the importance of studying imagistic discourse, they are still
evaluating those discourses with standards derived for traditional rhetorical texts.

While DeLuca has not fallen into this trap, his work presents us with another problem. He has framed his argument for the legitimacy of the image within a text-image dichotomy. This focus becomes problematic when one considers the rhetorical process behind the creation of an image event and the processes of dissemination and circulation. The purpose of an image event is to create images to be displayed on television, but that image cannot be created without some first action or performance. The first thirteen pages of Image Politics are dedicated descriptions of the various spectacles performed by Greenpeace, Earth First!, and other environmental groups in order to illustrate the concept. The image does not exist without the performance. Events are performed and can be photographed or filmed, which produces images and sounds that are then displayed on televisions after having been filtered through the mass media. Although all of his examples begin with a performance, DeLuca does not focus on this distinction. He is instead concerned with the images created by the event that are then disseminated to the wider public through these mass media corporations. Certainly, DeLuca acknowledges that there is a rhetorical process that goes into creating an image event, but the framework he has created focuses
us on what happens during the dissemination of that product. In other words, the focus is on how the originally constructed message changes during the process of dissemination.

**Rhetorical process of countercultural discourse.**

However, the rhetorical study of social movement and countercultural discourse should not be focused solely on the dissemination process. Countercultural discourse goes through stages: it is produced by social movement agents, it is disseminated by agents and through various media (which may or may not be within their control), and, once disseminated, continues to circulate through various media within the public sphere. Rhetorical choices are made throughout all of these stages and our analytical framework should reflect that. The concept of rhetorical velocity underscores the need to recognize this process. In this context, rhetorical velocity “refers to the understanding and rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces” (Ridolfo and DeVoss, 2009, para. 1). Sheridan, Ridolofo, and Michel (2005) address the dynamic nature of the rhetorical decisions that go into the production of countercultural discourse (what they refer to as public rhetoric):
A grass-roots organization, in approaching a particular social exigency, does not begin with the question “What kind of paper should we write?” Instead, it assesses the available means of persuasion much more broadly and strategically in terms of the materials necessary for the production and distribution of appropriate rhetorical compositions within a particular set of circumstances... (p. 814)

Social movement agents already recognize the process their discourse goes through to be made public and they create discourse given a certain set of resources and circumstances. So, they do not approach the production of counterpublic discourse from a one-sided perspective. We need a theoretical framework that, while retaining the image event’s break from traditional, deliberative rhetoric, allows us to study the entire process of protest rhetoric.

**Expanding into Multimodality**

With the image event, DeLuca (1999) began the work of accepting non-traditional forms of discourse into the study of protest rhetoric. To avoid the image-text dichotomy that DeLuca (1999) runs into, we can introduce a more holistic approach to the study of protest rhetoric by adopting a multimodal perspective. In *Multimodal Discourse: The Modes and Media of Contemporary Communication*, Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) take a view of multimodal
discourse in which “common semiotic principles operate in and across different modes, and in which it is therefore quite possible for music to encode action, or images to encode emotion” (p. 2). Kress and Van Leeuwen (2001) argue for a theory of multimodal communication that focuses both on the resources available to us (the modes and media we use) and the communicative practices in which we use those resources, which involves both representation and interaction (p. 113–114). They recognize that advances in digital technologies often serve to collapse distinctions between modes of discourse at “some level of representation” (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 2). In other words, the rhetorical uses of different modes of communication—texts, speech, images, sounds, objects, performances—often work in tandem with each other, not separately from or against the others, within rhetorical situations.

Although the term multimodality is relatively new to rhetorical disciplines, Judith Wooten (2006), in her CCCC chair’s address, points out that the concept itself is not truly new: “What about literacy hasn’t been multimodal? Like forever?” (p. 241). For Wooten (2006), the concept of multimodality is a refocusing or renaming of existing concepts from disparate (but related) disciplines. Quoting Moje (2009), Shipka (2011) argues that the newness of multimodality is not in the nature of our texts or our literate practice, but exists
when we “[call] into question the dominance of print as a communicative and/or expressive form” (in Shipka, 2011, p. 11). What is new about multimodality is that we are challenging hegemonic ideas within the discipline about what counts, what is worth studying, what is worth our serious consideration. This idea of challenging the system translates easily into rhetorical studies of public discourse. Sheridan, Ridolfo, and Michel (2005) recognize the power of accepting the concept of multimodality into the rhetorical study of counterpublic discourse: “the material and cultural specificities of multimodal rhetoric force us to reinterrogate ongoing debates surrounding the nature of public rhetoric itself” (p. 819). In other words, to accept multimodal rhetoric we must reconsider preconceived notions of “proper” deliberative rhetoric. This is similar to the arguments made in sections one and two regarding the legitimacy of confrontational rhetoric in a discipline that is concerned with civil, reasoned discourse and the legitimacy of counterpublic discourse in a public sphere with the same expectations.

Reconsidering the image event.

So, when we view DeLuca’s formulation of the image event through this lens, we realize that the “object of study” in the medium of television is not an image, rather it is multimodal discourse. It is not technically correct to say that
we view images on a television screen. What we view on a television screen is a combination of images, sound, speech, and text. As Wooten (2006) points out, studying television cannot be just about image when “a voice and an image are providing information about one item while the scrolling words at the bottom of the screen are discussing something else” (p. 243). To study what appears on the television, and through other means of dissemination, requires us to know more about the production of that discourse. We must also ask ourselves, what happens to that discourse after it is disseminated? If social movement agents are producing discourse with rhetorical velocity—that is, they consider issues such as how that discourse will be appropriated by third parties—then we must have a way to analyze that as well. A multimodal perspective will change the questions we ask ourselves when beginning our research and, ultimately, it will change the methods that we use to explore protest rhetoric.

Conclusion

Accepting multimodal discourse into the study of protest rhetoric requires us to have a broader focus than just that of the image event. The image event asks us to focus mainly on the dissemination of rhetorically structured images (that are the result of a performance). But multimodal discourse gives us the framework to consider the rhetorical choices made in and the rhetorical impact
during all of the stages of counterpublic discourse: production, dissemination, and circulation. In other words, we can now consider the rhetorical choices made by social movement agents who are producing protest rhetoric, the rhetorical changes that happen to that discourse once it is disseminated through various types of media, and the rhetorical impact of that discourse as it continues to circulate through the public sphere.

Multimodality also allows us to reconsider the modes of print media, to study how the techniques of print media translate into digital media, and to recognize new modes, or new interactions between modes, that may become available as digital technologies advance. Since digital technology will continue to impact the production, dissemination, and circulation of counterpublic discourse, it is important to have a theoretical framework that remains flexible despite the unforeseen changes of the future. In the next section, I will examine two case examples, Occupy Wall Street and WikiLeaks. I will first demonstrate how each example fits into the social movement and counterpublic framework constructed in sections one and two; then I will examine how a multimodal perspective is better suited to study the entire process of counterpublic discourse than the traditional or image event perspectives.
SECTION FOUR

Case Examples: Occupy Wall Street and WikiLeaks

The concept of multimodality is important to the study of protest rhetoric because it allows us to define and identify counterpublic discourses and to expand our viewpoint to include the entire rhetorical process that this discourse goes through. I have picked Occupy Wall Street and WikiLeaks as two case examples to demonstrate the concepts developed in this thesis. First, I will introduce each case and explain how each example fits into the paradigm of rhetorical social movement. Then I will examine how our analyses of counterpublic discourse can change depending on which rhetorical perspective we adopt: a traditional, deliberative rhetoric perspective; an image event perspective; or a multimodal perspective.

Occupy Wall Street and the 99% Movement

In July of 2011, the Vancouver-based anti-consumerist magazine *Adbusters* sent an email to its 90,000-strong membership to propose an “occupation” of Wall Street in protest of the “growing disparity in wealth and the absence of
legal repercussions for the bankers behind the recent global financial crisis” on September 17, 2011 (Constitution Day) (Fleming, 2011, para. 2; Mitchell, 2011; Kaste, 2011). Adbusters promoted the event with posters (see Figure 2) and the Internet group Anonymous called for protesters to “flood lower Manhattan, set up tents, kitchens, peaceful barricades and occupy Wall Street” (as cited in Mitchell, 2011, “A Mini-History,” para. 3). About a dozen international activists met at 16 Beaver Street in New York months before the planned protest date and agreed to use consensus decision-making and to have no official leadership (Kroll, 2011). On August 2, 2011, this group and a few others convened the first New York General Assembly which agreed to partner with Adbusters and other organizations (Kroll, 2011). On September 17, 2011, about 1000 protesters gathered in Zuccotti Park, near Wall Street, beginning what would become an extended occupation to protest the values of Wall Street. At first, the protests were widely ignored by the mainstream media, but two incidents—the pepper spraying of female protesters on September 24 and the October 1 march on the Brooklyn Bridge—gained the Occupy Wall Street protesters wider media coverage (Mitchell, 2011). By mid-November, the word-of-mouth scale of worldwide Occupy protests was “951 cities in 82 countries,” although The Guardian was only able to confirm 750 protests (Rogers, 2011).
Figure 2: Adbusters' Occupy Wall Street poster
As of this writing, there are still protesters occupying Zuccotti Park and other public spaces around the country.

**Social movement framework.**

Since social movement is not bound to a specific organization, it is important to distinguish the terminology I will be using. Given the rhetorical paradigm of social movement from section one, it would be incorrect to name a movement after its agents. It would also be incorrect because although the Occupy Wall Street protests began in New York City, the true movement has roots going back to protests in Italy in 2008 and, later, in Greece, France, and Ireland (Klein, 2011). So, I will be referring to the OWS protesters, who are the agents of the movement; the OWS protests, which are the traditional-style protests held in various cities in the country and around the world at various times by OWS protesters; and the OWS occupation, which refers to the physical occupation of public spaces across the country by OWS protesters. I will refer to the overall social movement as the 99% Movement, which is derived from the main slogan of the movement and more fully describes the scope of the movement.4

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4 I first saw this terminology in van Gelder (2011) and I am adopting it here because it is less reductive than the term “income-inequality movement” (such as in Alman, 2011). The 99% Movement better communicates the frustration with the various negative effects of income inequality.
Despite charges from the media that the protesters have no clear agenda, a reading of the major discourse of the OWS protests reveals that the 99% Movement fits into the social movement paradigm described in section one. Much like the decentralized environmental groups, the 99% Movement displays the important characteristics of new social movements. The OWS protesters actively strive for a leaderless structure and encourage the creation of local general assemblies where OWS occupations are located and they emphasize the socially transformative nature of the message (van Gelder, 2011). DeLuca (1999) argues that the hegemonic discourse of modern society is industrialism, with a focus on the relationship between the ideographs of nature and progress. In the case of the 99% Movement, DeLuca’s argument for the hegemonic discourse of industrialism still applies; however, it is the relationship between the ideographs of capitalism and progress—and its effect on the ideograph of democracy—that are at stake. Generally, the OWS protesters are challenging the longstanding acceptance of capitalist economic policies by highlighting several important antagonisms that arise from this ideographic linkage.

The prevailing antagonism brought forward by OWS protesters is that of the unfairness of income inequality in America’s economic system and the negative impact of that inequality on society and democracy (Mitchell, 2011; van
Gelder, 2011). The protest’s slogan, “We are the 99%,” is a riff on the fact that the top one percent of income earners hold more wealth than the bottom 99 percent. This slogan communicates a number of complicated ideas, but the general notion behind this slogan is that “the minority...has undue ownership over the majority” (Alman, 2001, para. 3). The “minority” does not simply refer to that set of individuals included in “the one percent” or to just the power of Wall Street, but to those minorities that impose hegemonic control over economic systems and democratic government, which includes corporations, special interests, and financiers. Just as various environmental groups linked antagonisms together to form the environmental movement, as the occupation continues, the various groups of OWS protesters continue to refine, bring forward, and link together antagonisms that point to the instability of the current economic system. These antagonisms include the effects of corporate greed, corporate personhood, unequal distribution of wealth, unfair tax policies, unfair wages, prohibitively expensive higher education, and corporate control over the government. Because these grievances may seem unrelated at face value, the movement is often criticized for a lack of cohesiveness in its demands and its purpose (Mitchell, 2011; van Gelder, 2011). But the movement is in its early stages and is still developing antagonisms and making connections between them. If the
movement continues to grow successfully, then the various groups and individuals including the OWS protesters that comprise the 99% Movement will continue to clarify and strengthen these connections.

**Theoretical perspectives.**

Approaching counterpublic discourse from a traditional rhetorical perspective is already problematic because its focus is on reasoned and civil discourse and does not generally account for the types of confrontational rhetoric that are more typical of counterpublic discourse. So, that limits the amount of discourse that this perspective finds legitimate. Generally, we would be limited to those modes of discourse identified by rhetoricians following Herbert Simons’ sociologically based approach to social movement: the texts and speeches of organizations and their leaders. Our focus would be on what those texts say about the rhetorical choices of those same organizations and leaders.

Although the OWS protesters’ claim to fame has been the physical occupation of public space, the protesters have created several texts that would be considered counterpublic discourse from this perspective. The New York General Assembly has produced the “Principles of Solidarity,” the “Declaration of the Occupation of New York City,” and the “Statement of Autonomy,” which have been printed in the *Occupied Wall Street Journal*, a printed newsletter
produced and distributed by a couple of OWS protesters. This newsletter, which includes articles written by various people involved in the OWS protests, also appears online. The traditional perspective also typically focuses on the texts and speeches of the leaders and other individuals important to the movement. For example, when considering the civil rights movement, most rhetoricians focus on the writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr. The OWS protests complicate this notion because, like Greenpeace and Earth First!, they have specifically chosen a leaderless, horizontal structure (Mitchell, 2011). Most likely, this perspective would focus on texts created by public figures or celebrities—such as Cornel West or Michael Moore—who have become engaged in a part of the counterpublic discourse. It is easy to see how this traditional perspective misses important aspects of the OWS’s counterpublic discourse. Most importantly, this perspective has no framework for dealing with the physical occupation of public space, other than when it is discussed within a text. This major issue is solved if we take DeLuca’s approach and begin considering image events as a legitimate form of counterpublic discourse. From this perspective, the OWS occupation immediately comes forward as a legitimate form of discourse because it communicates the protesters’ intentions to take back the public voice they feel that dominant powers, such as those embodied by Wall Street, have
usurped and because it also provides the kind of performance and spectacle that typically draws the attention of, and therefore the dissemination powers of, the mainstream media. Other types of performative protests, such as the various marches carried out by protesters and instances in which the protesters are engaged in conflict with the NYPD, also spring forward as legitimate forms of discourse (see Figure 3). These events all carry the potential for producing images capable of communicating the message of the movement as they are spread to wider publics.

But even this perspective does not recognize other important modes of discourse. Now, the textual discourse discussed above—while inadequate on its own, but still an important part of the counterpublic discourse—would be relegated to a less important role than that of the image, if considered at all. There would also be less focus on the production of the performance aspect of the event and more on the dissemination of the images of that event—which may or may not have been possible for the protesters to control. This perspective also does not account for the enormous amount of discourse that occurs online. It is possible that the traditional perspective would pick up on some of this online discourse as some of it is text-based. However, a large portion of what is posted online is a combination of modes, especially text and image. Neither the
traditional perspective nor the image event perspective has a way of understanding how these modes work together. The image event perspective does not have a framework for understanding images on the web that were not produced during an image event. That is, this perspective could register images that go viral on the internet—such as the video of the pepper spray incident on September 24, 2011, since it was an event that occurred during a staged image event—but it would neglect other types of images that were not part of an image event.

Figure 3: OWS protesters on the Brooklyn Bridge, October 1, 2011
Take, for example, the Tumblr blogs “We Are the 99 Percent” and “We are the 1 percent: We stand with the 99 percent”. Tumblrs are blog spaces that are designed to emphasize short posts, often only images (Tumblr, 2012). In these particular Tumblrs people publish photos of themselves holding written explanations of their personal stories (either about their struggles as part of the 99 percent or why they, as part of the one percent, support the 99 percent). There are thousands of pictures on these blogs similar to those in Figure 4. There is a performance element to the creation of these images, but it is unlike that of the performances that DeLuca identifies. These images are not disseminated through the mainstream media, were not produced to be disseminated that way, and are more likely to be shared through social media mechanisms. The image event perspective does not give us a method to analyze how meaning is constructed in these pictures or ways to analyze the combination of text and image. Important rhetorical elements and interactions remain unaccounted for. Additionally, this perspective does not register the dissemination powers or the interactive modes of discourse that occur because of social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, or Tumblr, nor does it recognize the many discussion forums or communication tools available on counterpublic-affiliated websites.
Figure 4: Images posted to 99% Movement Tumblrs
Approaching OWS’s counterpublic discourse from a multimodal perspective increases both the breadth and depth of possible analyses. Because this perspective does not favor one mode at the expense of another, all means of communication are available to us. Both the documents published by the New York General Assembly and the physical occupation of public space are legitimate objects of study from this analytical perspective. A framework for analyzing the Tumblr posts begins to emerge.

Studying the NYGA documents from a multimodal perspective opens up a number of important analytical avenues ignored by the traditional perspective. Take the *Occupied Wall Street* newsletter as an example (see Figure 5). In addition to a rhetorical analysis of the text, we could now consider the entire document as a whole: the meaning of the text and how the interaction between text and image contributes to the overall meaning of the document. We could also analyze how these meanings change as the document is appropriated and circulated through different media.

Although the image event perspective widens our breadth of analysis to include protests, including the OWS occupation, the multimodal perspective provides us with a framework from which we can examine the various modes that interact in both the performance and dissemination of an event. The image
event perspective legitimizes these performances, but the multimodal perspective gives us the ability to look inside an image event in order to explain how and why these performances work as counterpublic discourse. The OWS protesters employ many different modes and media during performances such as the occupation and other traditional protests. They have constructed tent
cities, reminiscent of Depression-era shantytowns (see Figure 6). They have used protest signs with both text and image. The NYGA uses the “human mic” in which participants repeat the speaker’s words to amplify voices during assembly discussions. They have produced and distributed both print and digital media to promote their events. The multimodal perspective allows us to take all of these examples seriously and allows us to examine how each works individually and how they work together to generate social movement.

Figure 6: Tent city in Zuccotti Park
The most important aspect of the multimodal perspective is that it opens up our analysis to the unexpected. For example, Chilean artist Sebastian Errazuriz created folding chairs painted with text pulled from OWS protest signs (see Figure 7). The chairs can be used both practically, as a seat, and figuratively, as art. In a statement, Errazuriz explains that he created the double-use chairs to help people occupy public spaces and to “occupy the homes of the 1% with the message of the 99%” (Vartanian, 2012, para. 5). From a multimodal

Figure 7: Ocuppy Wall Street chairs
perspective, we can examine how the artist’s unique choices and combination of modes creates rhetorical meaning. Errazuriz chose to use memorable text from protest signs used during the OWS occupation and protests, which were an integral part of the images disseminated by the mainstream mass media and independent internet outlets. He put these slogans on folding chairs as a way to change the functionality and meaning of that object. The object now has new and different meanings depending on the location where it is viewed.

These, and many other examples from the counterpublic discourse of OWS, demonstrate the need for greater flexibility in our analytical frameworks. In the next case example, I establish how our increasing reliance on new media and the rapid advancement of digital technologies has an even greater impact on the viability of these frameworks.

**WikiLeaks and the Transparency Movement**

WikiLeaks.org was officially launched in 2007 as a whistleblower site to which people could anonymously leak secret and confidential documents that would then be published online with the purpose of furthering the goals of open and transparent government (“What is WikiLeaks,” n.d.), para. 1). Between 2007 and 2009, WikiLeaks obtained and published hundreds of significant documents, including confidential Congressional Research Service reports, proof of
government corruption and human rights abuses in Kenya, records of an
Icelandic bank involved in the country’s financial collapse, information about the
operations of the Church of Scientology, and Guantánamo Bay operating
procedures manuals (Sifry, 2011, Chapter 1, para. 4). Despite these significant
leaks, at the beginning of 2010, most Americans had never heard of WikiLeaks.
That quickly changed when, in May of 2010, WikiLeaks published a decrypted
and edited video of two American soldiers in an Apache helicopter shooting and
killing about a dozen Iraqi civilians and two reporters from Reuters. This
publication was also the first time that WikiLeaks had taken an editorial stance
on one of its releases (Sifry, 2011, Chapter 1, para. 7). That July and October,
WikiLeaks, in conjunction with The New York Times, Der Spiegel, and The
Guardian, published about 75,000 documents pertaining to the war in
Afghanistan and about 400,000 documents pertaining to the war in Iraq,
respectively. But the biggest shock began in November when, along with The
began publishing about 250,000 United States diplomatic cables. These releases
were, by far, the largest classified document disclosures in American history.
Social movement framework.

Although it may not be as readily apparent as the OWS case example, WikiLeaks still conforms to the paradigm of social movement developed in this thesis. The movement for open and transparent government, which for brevity’s sake I will call the Transparency Movement, has a long history of ebb and flow in American history, especially since the release of the Pentagon Papers and the Watergate scandal during Nixon’s presidency. Many have likened the WikiLeaks releases to those catalytic instances, including Daniel Ellsberg himself (the man responsible for leaking the Pentagon Papers) (Kennedy, 2012, para. 4). Government secrecy has increased over time, especially since World War II when the “American national security apparatus expanded rapidly...bringing with it a commensurately large extension of security” (Shoenfeld, 2011, Introduction, para. 10). The foundations of the Transparency Movement are rooted in an unanswered and hotly contested question of accountability: To what extent do governments or corporations have the responsibility to create and maintain within their power structures mechanisms for accountability to the wider public? Controversial leaks like the Pentagon Papers or the WikiLeaks releases bring these questions to wider public and challenge the prevailing understanding of the hegemonic discourse.
This most recent incarnation of the transparency movement has its roots in the 9/11 attacks (Schoenfeld, 2010, Chapter 1, para. 1). After 9/11, in an effort to revamp and amp up intelligence gathering, the Bush administration began a phone-tapping program through the NSA without first obtaining appropriate warrants as required by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). FISA specifically outlaws any wire-tapping by any government official without the proper warrants. The New York Times broke a story about the program on December 16, 2005 (one year after they originally approached the Bush administration about the article), which led to considerable backlash against both the Bush administration and The New York Times and once again raised the question of appropriate levels of government secrecy (Risen and Lichtblau, 2005; Schoenfeld, 2011, Chapter 1, para. 15). This backlash continued after several more incidents in which the mainstream media revealed to the public instances of the government hiding important information or releasing misleading information (such as the lack of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, failed policies regarding financial and housing markets, the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the aftermath of the BP oil spill) (Sifry, 2011, Introduction, para. 3). At the same time, distrust in the media to fulfill its widely acknowledged “watch dog” role
continued to grow as people questioned why the media had not investigated these issues sooner.

The Transparency Movement is not just an American phenomenon. Advancements in digital technology have increased our capability to collect and store larger and larger amounts of data. These advancements have also changed and increased our ability to share that same data. There has been a global push—on both large and small scales—to provide information to the wider public with the goal of enhancing small-d democracy (that is, democracy that resides in the people) (Sifry, 2011, Chapter 5). Unfortunately, these same digital technologies have negatively affected traditional media outlets, which has negatively affected the ability of those outlets to produce investigative journalism—the traditional method (at least in the United States) of enforcing transparency (About, (n.d.), “The Need,” para. 1). Because of changes in digital technologies, and because of the perceived vacuum of investigative journalism, groups like WikiLeaks, have come forward to continue (or in some areas, to begin) the “watch-dog” role of the press (albeit, often in a more radical manner than that of the traditional media).

As with the 99% Movement, the hegemonic discourse of the Transparency Movement is that of industrialism, but this movement focuses on the relationship between the ideographs of progress, privacy, security, and transparency.
WikiLeaks exposes antagonisms by collecting, vetting, and publishing secret documents that reveal the inner workings of governments and corporations. WikiLeaks has released documents on many different governments, corporations, and organizations across the globe, but this case example focuses specifically on the four major releases regarding the United States Government in 2010. The prevailing antagonism brought forward by these releases is meant to question the viability of the United States Government’s policies regarding secret and confidential information. Does the government have a right to keep this information from the public? Is the government hiding important information from the public?

The backlash against the WikiLeaks releases has been enormous. Due to pressure from the United States Government, most notably Senator Joe Lieberman, many financial companies, such as Bank of America, Mastercard, and Paypal, have cut off WikiLeaks’ ability to raise funds over the Internet and therefore sustain its ability to operate as an organization (Sifry, 2011, Chapter 1, para. 30). Amazon also discontinued WikiLeaks’ use of their considerable cloud servers (Sifry, 2011, Chapter 1, para. 29). As of this writing, WikiLeaks has found other servers, but continues to struggle with financial issues. The controversy surrounding WikiLeaks has also been complicated by the legal struggles of the
group’s founder Julian Assange. In the midst of the releases, Assange was charged with several counts of sexual assault and rape in Sweden and has been fighting extradition from Great Britain since December 2010.

One major difference between WikiLeaks and the OWS occupation is the strong central leadership and decision making of Julian Assange during the period of these releases. Despite the almost rock star status Assange has gained from the WikiLeaks releases, the criminal charges, and the conflation of the two, the example of WikiLeaks as an agent of social movement does not deviate from the social movement paradigm developed in this thesis. Assange did not develop his ideas about government transparency and whistleblowing in a vacuum, nor is he the only person involved in WikiLeaks. Similarly, WikiLeaks is not the only group working toward these goals. The many people directly involved in WikiLeaks, the people who leak documents to Wikileaks, the people and groups who gave support once the leaks were made public, and groups that have been created in WikiLeaks’ image are all a part of the counterpublic, regardless of Assange’s role in the affair. If anything, Assange’s domination of the media during that time is an important example of what we could miss if our viewpoint is focused too heavily on specific individuals or the resources of organizations. Focusing too heavily on Assange’s rhetoric or rhetoric about Assange could
potentially cloud our view of the actual rhetorical discourse of the underlying social movement, which—in this context—is the object of import. Certainly, interesting analyses could come from studying Assange, but if we are trying to identify and analyze the counterpublic discourse of the Transparency Movement so that we can understand what is actually happening within it, we are not going to find those answers by studying only Assange.

**Theoretical perspectives.**

That Julian Assange has been conflated with WikiLeaks and with its releases is the first major hurdle we would encounter with the traditional perspective. During the releases in 2010, Assange revealed himself as the founder, spokesperson, and leader of WikiLeaks. The traditional perspective would certainly follow his media appearances very closely. Because of his highly publicized legal problems, these media appearances could easily interfere with the study of the counterpublic discourse. However, even if these issues did not distract from the true counterpublic discourse, a focus on text-based discourse is still clearly problematic. For one, the first release, the Collateral Murder video, is not text. So, it would be difficult for this perspective to provide insights into the meanings created when the video was released to the public. The focus would mostly likely be on what was said about the video, which—while still
meaningful—does not explicate the rhetorical process from production to dissemination. We would face a similar problem with the rest of the releases. A traditional rhetorical analysis of the leaked texts and data, especially from the diplomatic cables, would give us immense insight into the inner workings of the United States military and government foreign relations. However, we would not be studying the counterpublic discourse of the Transparency Movement, but the discourse of the military and the government. Findings from such an analysis would not reveal how the linkages between the ideographs in question—progress, privacy, security, and transparency—are being challenged due to the release of the information.

As with the OWS occupation, the image event perspective could potentially give us a fuller analysis of the WikiLeaks releases. If we were to treat each release as an event, we could then study the media spectacle that ensued after each event. However, we are faced with two main problems from this perspective. The first, as we saw with the OWS example, is that, since this perspective asks us to focus on how the event is disseminated through the mass media, we would be missing a particularly fruitful analysis given the complicated processes that went into coordinating the three biggest releases with traditional media partners—a major departure from WikiLeaks’ established
practices. We would also miss an analysis of WikiLeaks’ editorial choices for the Collateral Murder video, which was the first time WikiLeaks became so deeply involved in the production of a release. Secondly, and arguably the biggest theoretical problem, is that there is no image to the event. It is clear from even the most cursory glance at the media during that time that WikiLeaks created a huge media spectacle. No leak of that magnitude, or such a deep breach of United States power, had ever been seen before. But the event existed mainly online and on the front pages of newspapers. Certainly, there are images of Julian Assange during press conferences. But unlike OWS, the radical environmental groups, and even the civil rights movement, WikiLeaks did not perform any physical action to gain media attention. WikiLeaks defied the United States Government by obtaining and releasing this information, thereby calling to question the notions of security and privacy. Once the documents were available for all to peruse, with revelations (and non-revelations) being published daily, the notions of transparency and progress were also questioned. WikiLeaks resists DeLuca’s conception of the image event because the tactics used by the organization are not the traditionally embodied, performative techniques of protest.

Analyzing the WikiLeaks’ releases from a multimodal perspective allows us to examine the entire rhetorical process of counterpublic discourse. This, as I
noted before, is incredibly important in this instance because of the complicated role that the relationship between traditional and new media played in order to publish these documents. Because of the immense amount of raw data, WikiLeaks relied on partnerships with various newspapers to publish and report on the documents. The relationship between new and old media is a major subject in multimodal studies of rhetoric. WikiLeaks is an unusual example because, in this instance, a new media outlet chose to (and to some extent, because of the sheer size of the information dump, was forced to) rely on the traditional media’s more substantial financial and physical resources and infrastructure. This is an important relationship that is at risk of being ignored by other theoretical perspectives.

The multimodal perspective allows us to examine the releases as important rhetorical events without requiring us to get bogged down in justifying the “image” of the image event. Instead, we could consider how digital technology has changed the ways in which people collaborate to produce and disseminate counterpublic discourse and how events like the WikiLeaks releases not only change our perspective in regards to our culture’s ideographs but also change our expectations about how people engage in protest. We cannot be certain about what opportunities for changes in counterpublic discourse will
exist in the future. It is, however, certain that there will be change. In order to continue making strong rhetorical analyses of counterpublic discourse, we need a theoretical framework that is unencumbered by the unknown. The multimodal perspective of rhetorical analysis provides the flexibility we need to respond to these unknown changes.
CONCLUSION

A Multimodal Framework of Counterpublic Discourse

When Ann Wysocki suggested that I might need to abandon the image event as way of framing the WikiLeaks releases, it inspired me to consider more deeply the frameworks on which the image event is based and the frameworks that are available to us to study social movement. The core of this thesis is based on the premise that expanding and shifting our theoretical viewpoint is productive. Choosing a theoretical lens helps us to restrict our focus so that we can understand certain phenomenon more clearly, but in doing so certain elements will necessarily sharpen in the foreground while others blur out of focus. An important part of choosing a theoretical lens is the consideration of the limitations of our methods. By considering theories and methods from different (but interconnected) disciplines we can expand and contract our viewpoint, thereby enriching our understanding of the world. To this end, I have relied on and assembled work from scholars of different disciplines—communications, public sphere theory, critical theory, rhetoric and composition, and semiotics,
which all have varying, yet overlapping, perspectives on rhetorical principles—to establish a theoretical foundation and analytical framework for studying the general rhetorical process that discourse goes through as social movement agents try to generate social change. In particular, I have attempted to assemble a framework that is capable of expanding and flexing as digital technologies continue to transform the ways in which people communicate. 

I began this process by addressing two gaps in the rhetorical theory of social movement originally developed by McGee and expanded upon by DeLuca. I posited that by substituting a theory of publics and counterpublics for Habermas’ conception of the public sphere we could theorize the agents of a social movement without having to rely on the organizational or sociological theories that McGee had previously rejected. Once I established the agency of a social movement within counterpublics, I argued that by studying their discourse we could identify those counterpublics, gain awareness of the exclusionary practices of the hegemonic discourse, and illuminate the processes that counterpublic discourses go through in order to generate social movement. Secondly, I addressed the nature of counterpublic discourse and how different theoretical perspectives change the types of counterpublic discourse available to us for analysis. I argued that the traditional notion of rhetoric—deliberative and
textual—severely limited the kinds of counterpublic discourse available to us for study. I presented DeLuca’s conception of the image event, which introduced the image as a meaningful mode of counterpublic discourse, as a possible new avenue of analysis. After examining the continuing pitfalls associated with this perspective, I then argued that we should adopt a multimodal perspective into the study of counterpublic discourse in order to ensure a holistic analysis of counterpublic discourse.

To demonstrate these concepts, I examined two case examples: the OWS protests of the 99% Movement and the WikiLeaks releases of the Transparency Movement. For both, I explained how each conformed to the social movement paradigm I constructed in sections one and two. Then I discussed how the three different theoretical perspectives discussed in section three changed the possible analyses of these counterpublic discourses. From these analyses, we can see that the multimodal perspective combines the positive aspects from the traditional and image event perspectives while allowing us to consider modes of discourse ignored by those perspectives. Most importantly, the multimodal perspective allows us to consider aspects from the entire rhetorical process that counterpublic discourse goes through: production, dissemination, and circulation.
This rhetorical process of counterpublic discourse has much potential for further study. Each step of the process has important ties to classical rhetorical principles and possibilities to rethink these principles in terms of contemporary modes and media. Ridolfo and DeVoss’ (2009) concept of rhetorical velocity—which reconsiders the relationship between invention, delivery, and kairos—is an excellent example of existing research than can enrich the study of this discourse. Viewing the classical notion of delivery through the lens of multimodality allows us to ask important questions about how agents are creating discourse, why they make the choices they are making, and whether or not their rhetorical creations are effective. I suggest that we should begin with Porter’s (2009) rethinking of delivery for Internet-based communications as starting point for rethinking delivery in terms of multimodal discourse. This reinvigoration of the canon of delivery for digital rhetoric, also leads me to ponder possible connections between the canon of memory and contemporary forms of dissemination and circulation. Lucaites and Hariman (2001) have considered the role that iconic photographs play regarding dominant ideologies and public memory. How does multimodality affect public memory? And, what effect does public memory have on the rhetorical process of counterpublic discourse? How does the public compare their memory of previous discourses to newer discourses? Another
important avenue for further research is how the process of circulation and its effects on the discourse change given different modes and media that the discourse is filtered through. Warner’s examples of discourse are centered on texts, so how would a multimodal perspective rearticulate the concept of circulation within the context of social movement discourse? These are just a few ideas for avenues of research in this field. One thing is certain: as long as social movement agents continue to generate and employ counterpublic discourse, the study of social movement will continue to produce fruitful opportunities for rhetorical analyses.
REFERENCES
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CURRICULUM VITAE

Lauren DeLaCruz received her bachelor’s degree from James Madison University in 2005 in Economics with a Writing and Rhetoric minor and will receive her master’s degree in English with a concentration in Professional Writing and Rhetoric in 2012. She has made presentations at two graduate conferences: Composing Spaces, an interdisciplinary conference held at the University of Cincinnati, and Emergence(s): A Rhetoric Symposium held at Old Dominion University.