

# “Sighting” the Public: Iconoclasm and Public Sphere Theory

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*This essay considers the ways that iconoclasm, or the will to control images and vision, appears in canonical and contemporary public sphere theory. John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas enact a paradoxical relation to visibility by repudiating a mass culture of images while preferring “good” images and vision. Yet even when advocating for good vision, both theorists activate a subtle iconoclasm that operates as a perennial tension in their work. The essay concludes by considering the ways in which iconoclasm manifests itself in more recent scholarship in rhetorical studies and suggests circulation as an analytic concept with some promise for helping public sphere theorists develop a more iconophilic relationship to images and vision.*

*Keywords: Public Sphere; Iconoclasm; John Dewey; Jürgen Habermas; Circulation*

Public sphere theory is increasingly invested in the idea that the public is best theorized as a discursive construction. Seyla Benhabib observes that the public “comes into existence whenever and wherever all affected by general social and political norms engage in a practical discourse.”<sup>1</sup> G. Thomas Goodnight locates the public sphere in the activities of discourse itself, which constitute “the grounds upon which arguments are built and the authorities to which arguers appeal.”<sup>2</sup> Gerard Hauser advocates a rhetorical model of the public that highlights the discursive aspects of exchanges relying on “critical norms ... derived from actual discursive practices.”<sup>3</sup>

The turn to a discursive model of the public has been a valuable one. When the public is studied through analysis of discursive practices, then membership in the public does not depend on one’s social location (Habermas’s bourgeois citizen),

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access to particular spaces of political engagement (Aristotle's and Arendt's citizen of the polis), or commitment to predetermined rules and topics (the proceduralism of the liberal model).<sup>4</sup> Reductionism takes place when we essentialize publics or counterpublics as persons, place, or topics; thus, it is productive to abandon an essentialized commitment to these categories.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, privileging the discursive also enables public sphere theorists to move beyond limiting procedural models of deliberation that inevitably marginalize, oppress, and exclude. In rhetorical studies specifically, scholars have theorized the discursive model in ways that move beyond thick, proceduralist norms in favor of an orientation that emphasizes instead that discursivity is constitutive of publicness.<sup>6</sup> Arguing that "the public is a creature of controversy," Erik Doxtader concludes that public sphere theory needs to make a rhetorical turn: what is needed is a discursive construction of publicity that pays attention to "the rhetorical processes by which the grounds of argument are cultivated."<sup>7</sup>

There has been a tendency in rhetorical studies for the call for discursivity to slip into a largely talk-and-text model of communication, however. Hauser, for example, offers a model of a public sphere maintained by talk: "Our daily conversations with coworkers, neighbors, superiors, subordinates, community and church contacts, group members, friends, and family provide countless opportunities to exchange views on public matters. Each exchange opens a discursive space that exceeds the boundaries of entirely personal and private matters."<sup>8</sup> Others privilege a talk-and-text model of discursivity more implicitly. Offering an illustration of his "explication of a discursive orientation," Robert Asen gives the example of the verbal testimony of a welfare recipient, Margaret Prescod, before the Senate Finance Committee, which is used to illustrate that "as a dispersed ephemeral phenomenon, the public sphere manifests [itself] in moments of social dialogue and discursive engagement among and across constructed boundaries of social, cultural, and political affiliation."<sup>9</sup> These not isolated examples convey the impression that publics are best conceived as linguistic constructs formed via speech, writing, and conversation. Of this tendency in scholarship on the public, Michael Warner writes:

The usual way of imagining the interactive character of public discourse is through metaphors of conversation, answering, talking back. Argument and polemic, as manifestly dialogic genres, continue to have a privileged role in the self-understanding of publics. Indeed, it is remarkable how little work in even the most sophisticated forms of theory has been able to disentangle public discourse from its self-understanding as conversation.<sup>10</sup>

Writing of our metaphors for communication generally, John Durham Peters concurs: "Dialogue still reigns supreme in the imagination of many as to what good communication might be."<sup>11</sup> To the extent that rhetorical scholars rely on a largely talk-and-text model of communication, they may be blind to other ways of envisioning publicity, and their ability to embrace the hybridity and multiplicity of discursive forms will remain limited.

Just as scholars have situated public sphere theory with regard to concepts such

as gender, race, or class, we seek to “sight” public sphere theory by situating it with regard to vision and images.<sup>12</sup> By shifting to a perspective that investigates public sphere theory through the lens of images and vision, this essay contributes to scholarship about the ways in which our theories of the public frame (and often constrain) our ability to think productively about citizenship and democracy. We are not advocating that public sphere studies abandon the notion of a discursive construction of the public, nor do we wish to offer an alternative metaphor for the public sphere. Rather, we want to work inside public sphere theory, investigating both its canonical and more recent formulations with respect to questions of visibility. Indeed, to paraphrase Nancy Fraser, we believe some conception of a discursively constructed public is necessary.<sup>13</sup> The term “discourse” has a unique *dynamis*, a capacity to reference multiple dimensions, argument fields, and modes of communication, enabling us to engage questions of hybridity, hypertextuality, materiality, and performativity. Our argument is this: if the fullness of that capacity were embraced, if we shifted perspective and situated public sphere theory in a less iconoclastic, and more iconophilic way, we might be in a better position to rethink (and perhaps retheorize) our understanding of how images and vision operate in the public sphere.

Our call to investigate public sphere theory with regard to images and vision is not simply a call to rhetorical scholars to study the products of visual communication; indeed, such a call has been issued and taken up many times in the past 30-odd years.<sup>14</sup> Since the 1970 Wingspread conference when the Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism recommended broadening our critical scope, rhetoricians have understood that “the non-discursive as well as the discursive, the non-verbal as well as the verbal” fall “within the critic’s purview.”<sup>15</sup> Scholars engaged in rhetorical studies of visual artifacts continually expand and challenge the domain of what we consider to be properly rhetorical, but in our view they can no longer justify doing so merely because visual discourse remains marginal in the field. In rhetorical studies, it is no longer useful simply to “add images and stir.”

One way to move beyond such an orientation is to enact the perspectival shift of framing public sphere theory with regard to images and vision. When we “sight” the public, we necessarily foreground questions of visibility. Such an approach is not essentialist. We do not claim that public sphere theory may only be situated with regard to images and vision nor do we advocate a separation of visual discourse from the broader discursive formations in which it participates. Rather, such an approach is interested in theorizing or speculatively observing what happens when rhetoricians bring questions of visibility to bear on ideas about the public.

Scholars in visual studies have long explored the implications of the intense anxiety regarding images and vision that historically has been part of the Western tradition.<sup>16</sup> Although some scholars have suggested that iconophobia—defined as anxiety about images—and iconoclasm—the will to control images—stand at the very foundation of the Western philosophical tradition (and thus also lie at the heart of public sphere theory as it has been theorized in the West), we are more interested

in exploring the ways in which iconophobia operates as a perennial, yet largely unthematized tension in our theories of the public. In this essay we “sight” the public by exploring the iconoclastic tensions in public sphere theory. We argue that the will to control images and vision manifests itself in canonical public sphere theory and in some recent scholarship that, paradoxically, purports to reject iconoclasm.

We begin by considering two canonical theorists of the public, John Dewey and Jürgen Habermas. It makes sense to begin with these two figures for a number of reasons. Habermas’s conception of the bourgeois public sphere is a jumping-off point for nearly all rhetorical studies of the public (whether grounded in acceptance or critique), and Dewey’s voluminous work in the U.S. context is receiving increased attention in rhetorical studies of late.<sup>17</sup> In particular, the discursive turn in public sphere studies is indebted to Dewey’s professed commitment to local conversation and Habermas’s quest for communicative rationality. Furthermore, and of importance for our purposes, both Dewey and Habermas explicitly thematize questions of vision and images in their theories of the public. Each makes these concepts central not only to his diagnosis of the problems of the public, but also (though perhaps less famously) to his solutions.

Dewey and Habermas offer seemingly contradictory arguments about the proper role of vision and images in public. On the one hand, each mounts a well-known critique of vision in the form of a repudiation of a mass culture of images. This repudiation enacts what we call a “gross iconoclasm,” a blunt, general critique that argues that images are dangerous to the practice of healthy public communication. Yet although both theorists appear to repudiate vision and images, they also are careful to prescribe a more positive place for them. In this essay we explicate this apparent contradiction to argue that it is no contradiction. Even in carving out a space for “good” images and vision, Dewey and Habermas construct perspectives that are consistent with an iconoclastic view, which we term “subtle iconoclasm.” The final section of the essay takes up three recent concepts that implicitly and explicitly seek to bring visibility to bear upon public sphere theory: the public screen, imagining, and circulation. We argue that subtle iconoclasm like that found in Dewey and Habermas is also a feature of this recent rhetorical scholarship, which rejects the gross iconoclasm of traditional public sphere theory. Of these three concepts, the concept of circulation seems to offer the most promise for helping public sphere theorists develop a non-iconoclastic relationship to images and vision. Our analysis concludes that it is not enough to dismiss canonical theories as iconoclastic. If rhetorical scholars want to formulate a theory of the public that is more iconophilic or image-friendly, they need to be aware of the ways in which even the most image-aware scholarship may subtly reinscribe iconoclasm.

### **Iconophobia and Iconoclasm**

W. J. T. Mitchell notes that he intended his book *Iconology: Image, Text, Ideology* to offer a theory of images. What he discovered was that it was really a book

about the fear of images, because any theory of images is "deeply bound up with a *fear* of imagery." Mitchell realized that one could not attempt to synthesize a theory of images "apart from a confrontation with iconoclasm."<sup>18</sup> According to Mitchell, iconophobia may be defined as anxiety produced by the "duplicity of the image, ... its capacity for both truth and illusion."<sup>19</sup> As a result of this duplicity, the iconophobe believes that the image is "a site of a special power that must either be contained or exploited."<sup>20</sup> Scholars of visual culture tend to use the terms "iconophobia" and "iconoclasm" interchangeably, but the distinction between them is an important and useful one. Although iconophobia is a generalized state of anxiety about images (one might call it a social, psychological, or cultural condition), iconoclasm is the active attempt to suppress or abolish images. Whereas iconophobia is a relatively passive anxiety about images, iconoclasm can be conceptualized as anxiety about vision coupled with an active will to control vision.

Despite much gnashing of teeth over the apparent prevalence and danger of today's image culture, anxiety about images is not uniquely postmodern. Iconoclasm has a long and complex history, one inextricably tied up with Western politics, religious movements, and philosophy.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the rationalist paradigm to which public sphere theory has typically been wedded is founded on the privileging of the rational, textual, linear, and deliberative—a privileging that often has marginalized the image. What Martin Jay has termed antvisual discourse "is a pervasive but generally ignored phenomenon of twentieth century Western thought."<sup>22</sup> Mitchell argues that "the long history of political and religious strife in the West could almost be rewritten as a history of iconoclasm."<sup>23</sup> Indeed, one may locate iconophobia across the whole of Western history, although historical and cultural circumstances give it different guises. For example, it is the "suspicion of the illusory potential of images,"<sup>24</sup> the fear that the representation will be mistaken for the thing itself, that grounds Plato's repeated warnings about the dangers of appearance. The history of the Christian church, too, is steeped in iconophobia and rife with examples of iconoclasm, much of it firmly institutionalized. By the time of St. Augustine, the conviction that "ocular desire" diverted the masses from more spiritual concerns was firmly in place.<sup>25</sup> Yet at the same time a belief developed in the church that images had their place and function, primarily that of educating the masses of the illiterate faithful. Thus, the church was always walking a fine line between iconophobia and idolatry.<sup>26</sup> Art historian David Freedberg notes that iconoclasts often were forced to declare the "superior spiritual status of the word" while acknowledging the deep power of images to influence and persuade.<sup>27</sup>

"The iconoclast," Mitchell writes, "prefers to think that he worships no images of any sort, but when pressed, he is generally content with the rather different claim that his images are purer and truer than those of mere idolaters."<sup>28</sup> Today, an iconoclastic rhetoric is distinguished by two moves.<sup>29</sup> First, the iconoclast repudiates the image in question and stigmatizes it by invoking charges such as "artifice, illusion, vulgarity, irrationality."<sup>30</sup> The idolater is commonly an object of pity, one who needs to be "cured" by the iconoclast, whose relation to images is more "advanced."<sup>31</sup> Second, the iconoclast must introduce and valorize an alternative

mode of vision, one “honored by the titles of nature, reason, and enlightenment.”<sup>32</sup> Thus, modern iconoclasm consists not only of stigmatizing and bringing down idols, but also of raising up other, “better” images.<sup>33</sup> Throughout this essay, we call the former kind of iconoclasm gross iconoclasm, and the latter subtle iconoclasm. In anatomy, gross motor skills are understood to be blunt, general skills of movement, such as the ability to move one’s thumb, while fine or subtle motor skills consist of more complex but less obvious abilities, such as the ability to manipulate needle and thread. Subtle motor skills may not directly determine life and death, but they guide complicated behavior that is socially meaningful. Sophisticated embroidery on one’s garment, for example, does not protect its owner from cold, but may represent his or her social status. In other words, our distinction between gross and subtle iconoclasm recognizes that while all iconoclasm is not equivalent in degree, they each perform meaningful functions. The tensions produce what David Freedberg calls the “deep paradoxes of iconoclasm ... We love art and hate it; we cherish it and are afraid; we know of its powers.”<sup>34</sup> Iconoclasm produces itself in the tension between the will to cherish images and the will to destroy them.

Martin Jay provocatively suggests that iconoclastic tendencies may be located in U.S. pragmatism (“with its distrust of spectatorial epistemology”) as well as in the communicative rationalism of Habermas.<sup>35</sup> Because of his focus on French theory, Jay does not elaborate this critique, yet it is a critique worth elaborating. Given the extent to which our contemporary theories of the public derive from Dewey and Habermas, it is vital to explore the ways in which the tensions of iconoclasm appear in their work. Only then can we know what to look for in our contemporary concepts.

### **Passive Spectatorship or Engaged Seeing: Images and Vision in John Dewey’s Theory of the Public**

Our interest in this project was sparked by repeated encounters with Dewey’s proclamation at the end of *The Public and Its Problems* that “vision is a spectator; hearing is a participator.”<sup>36</sup> Coming at the end of Dewey’s firm assertion that local, face-to-face conversation is the best model for effective public communication, Dewey’s charge seems to suggest no healthy place for vision in prescriptions for the public. Yet just six years after *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey published *Art as Experience*, which offered a theory of aesthetic experience and boldly proclaimed that art was “the only media of complete and unhindered communication” possible “in a world full of gulfs and walls that limit community of experience.”<sup>37</sup> In this section of the essay we show that the paradox of iconoclasm constitutes a core tension in Dewey’s theory of the public. First, we explore the ways in which Dewey’s critique of media culture constitutes gross iconoclasm, then we argue that his work on art and aesthetics is iconoclastic in a subtler sense as well, subsuming vision and images into a theory of the omniscient citizen.

Dewey admitted that he wrote *The Public and Its Problems* primarily in response to Walter Lippmann’s criticisms of the public in *Public Opinion* and *The Phantom*

*Public*. In those texts, Lippmann argued that the public was a "mystical fallacy," that the concerns of politics and citizenship were nearly incomprehensible to the average, busy American, yet the demands of modern citizenship required her/him to be an "omnicompetent citizen."<sup>38</sup> In *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey agrees with Lippmann's assertion of the problem for the most part, although he disputes the solution. For Dewey, social and cultural conditions have produced a public that cannot find itself. Believing that social action happens when people come to recognize that the consequences of action are shared, Dewey argues that the "primary problem" of the public is that it has failed to achieve such recognition; that is, people no longer see "matters of common concern."<sup>39</sup> In a new world of modern media the democratic public remains "largely inchoate and unorganized."<sup>40</sup>

One result of the machine age is that media prefer to distract citizens from the activities of the political public rather than foster their participation. Observing that "the power of 'bread and the circus' to divert attention from public matters is an old story," Dewey notes that there is too much competing for the public's attention. Movies, radio, popular magazines, and books constitute "cheapened and multiplied access to amusement" that inhibit the public's ability to find itself.<sup>41</sup> A "publicity culture" of advertising and public relations, "sensationalism" and "propaganda," has arisen.<sup>42</sup> Hence, the circulation of mass culture forms is more a burden than a blessing; it creates a false sense of community. The only solution to this problem of the public is to perfect "the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest ... may inform ... direct action."<sup>43</sup> Yet modern media have failed to accomplish this.

Dewey's critique activates a gross iconoclasm that stigmatizes the idols of modern media culture and rejects its potential to do anything but distract and divert. He rejects disembodied modes of engagement (vision) in favor of those that foster engagement (conversation). Visuality stands in the way of the creation of the Great Community; images are superficial products of a media culture that misplaces its faith in the disembodied eye. Vision separates us; conversation unites us. Vision objectifies; conversation subjectifies. If Dewey's Great Community is to have any interpretive power, it must set itself against that which limits the possibilities for the discovery of the public.

Yet the more obvious, gross iconoclasm of *The Public and Its Problems* is not the only way that Dewey engages questions of vision or images in this text or in later work. In that book, and more explicitly in *Art as Experience*, Dewey locates space for different modes of vision, those based not on spectatorship but on engaged modes of seeing. These modes of vision stand counter to the gross iconoclasm of Dewey's mass culture critique; hence, the story is more complicated than it first appears.

Toward the end of *The Public and Its Problems*, Dewey argues that we need relevant social scientific inquiry if we are to meet the political challenges of the day and that that inquiry must reach the public: "A genuine social science would manifest its reality in the daily press, while learned books and articles supply and polish the tools of inquiry."<sup>44</sup> Here Dewey departs from Lippmann because although Dewey believes in the role of experts in the technical sphere, he wants the press to

make this work available via interpretation for the general public. One of the features of genuine social science, then, must be its clear and artful presentation to the public: "A newspaper which was only a daily edition of a quarterly journal of sociology or political science would undoubtedly possess a limited circulation and a narrow influence." Artists, Dewey notes, "have always been the real purveyors of news, for it is not the outward happening in itself which is new, but the kindling by it of emotion, perception, and appreciation."<sup>45</sup> Thus, even in *The Public and Its Problems*, where Dewey blasts vision for its problematic privileging of spectacle, Dewey opens up space for a different mode of seeing based on participation. When Dewey argues that the public is defined not just by our associations with others, but by our "perception of the consequences" (our emphasis) of those associations, we see the hints of a privileging of another mode of vision that Dewey develops to a much greater extent in *Art as Experience*.<sup>46</sup>

For Dewey, aesthetic experience is as much, if not more, about the consumer of art than about the producer of art. In *Art as Experience* Dewey disputes the conception of art as something necessarily removed from everyday experience. Art and the genius of artists should not be the sole focus of our attention. For Dewey, statues, poems, and paintings are the *products of art*. The *work of art*, by contrast, is the activity of meaning-making on the part of audiences. Thus, Dewey argues that art is not only the product of creative activity, but also the process by which that creative activity is embodied in experience. Such a conception endows the audience with an important (and relatively democratic) role: that of co-creator of meaning, "engaged seer."<sup>47</sup> If the audience for art is to fulfill Dewey's criteria for aesthetic experience, it must be more than a passive spectator. Throughout *Art as Experience* Dewey offers up this mode of "good vision," which stands in marked contrast to the models of spectatorship he opposes.

Dewey's orientation to images and vision may be understood in relation to pragmatist epistemology. At first glance, pragmatism's concern for the social would seem to preclude its interest in art. As Richard Shusterman puts it, "The pragmatic, of course, is inextricably wed to the idea of the practical, precisely that idea with which the aesthetic is traditionally contrasted and even oppositionally defined as purposeless and disinterested."<sup>48</sup> Given its orientation to the practical, pragmatism framed the idea of vision differently than did other paradigms of thought. Emily Fourmy Cutrer observes that late nineteenth-century Americans "did not adopt a static model of vision.... Rather, they explored and adapted characteristics" of several scopic regimes. What Cutrer calls the pragmatic mode of seeing "acknowledged, even embraced, the 'slipperiness' of vision, the possibility that sight was subjective and unstable, at the same time that it affirmed the significance of the visual sense in perceiving an external reality."<sup>49</sup> Unlike a Cartesian model of vision, which emphasized the "regular, mathematical order and distanced, dispassionate observer," the pragmatic mode of seeing was "operational and contingent, finding its truth in action, consequences, and practice."<sup>50</sup> Pragmatism eschewed the idea of distanced spectatorship in favor of engaged seeing.

If we revisit Dewey's proclamation that "vision is a spectator; hearing is a

participator," then the paradox of iconoclasm emerges. Dewey does not reject all vision or all images, just those that do not conform to the pragmatic mode of seeing. It is specifically the act of *spectatorship* that Dewey finds problematic. In *Art as Experience*, Dewey distinguishes *recognition* from *perception*. Recognition, he writes, "is perception before it has had a chance to develop freely." Perception, by contrast, involves moving beyond "bare recognition. There is an act of reconstructive doing, and consciousness becomes fresh and alive." Perception, then, is the opposite of passive spectatorship. One who does not do the active work of perception to "create his own experience ... one who is too lazy, idle, or indurated in convention to perform this work will not see or hear."<sup>51</sup> Perception is the activity by which we create our aesthetic experience.

Dewey's arguments about perception suggest a refined requirement for this mode of vision. When we think of the viewer of art as merely a passive recipient of what has been painstakingly produced by the artist, he notes, we fail to realize "that this taking in involves activities that are comparable to those of the creator."<sup>52</sup> For Dewey, then, perception is embodied, emotional, and involves surrender: "Perception is an act of the going-out of energy in order to receive.... We must summon energy and pitch it at a responsive key in order to take it in."<sup>53</sup> This notion of pitching "at a responsive key" suggests a level of engagement that is a requirement for good vision and, hence, good citizenship.

Such taking in requires "apprenticeship." It is not that Dewey believes we need to see conventionally or that we need to be educated to believe that art has certain fixed meanings, but we must apprentice to the act of seeing itself: "Every one knows that it requires apprenticeship to see through a microscope or telescope, and to see a landscape as the geologist sees it."<sup>54</sup> The ability to perceive is a subtle ability that must be cultivated through critical training. Yet although critics need criteria of judgment, those criteria should not constitute hard and fast rules, but rather loose categories informed by the critic's knowledge of the traditions and history of art as well as social and cultural understanding. Good criticism, Dewey argued, should foster good modes of vision: "The function of criticism is the re-education of perception of works of art; it is an auxiliary in the process, a difficult process, of learning to see and hear."<sup>55</sup>

Critics of Dewey's arguments about art often have objected to the way in which his approach appears to displace the image as the unique work of a genius creator, yet Dewey does not so much reduce the importance of the artist as he increases the importance of the audience for art. Dewey's requirements are firm: we must apprentice ourselves to vision. Thus, Dewey offers us a conception of the public as embodied in the activities of fully engaged citizen critics. This apparently more positive view of vision and images has not gone unremarked by scholars. Both Mark Mattern and Martin Jay, for example, have commented on the emancipatory potential of Dewey's views about art and the public.<sup>56</sup> Yet we interpret Dewey's call for engaged seeing as the activation of a subtle iconoclasm, an attempt to control or guide practices of seeing. Dewey embraces engaged seeing not only as the way for citizens to engage art but also as the salvation of the Great Community; such seeing

depends on an omniscient vision practiced by an engaged, omniscient citizenry. Thus, Dewey offers what Lippmann explicitly rejected in his work on the phantom public: a theory of the omniscient citizen. Dewey's theory of the public features an unresolved tension: a conception of citizens as either passive spectators or engaged see-ers. His apparent valorization of "good" modes of vision over the bread and circus of mass culture replaces gross with a more subtle iconoclasm, both operating in the service of Dewey's larger goal of articulating a communication-based theory of the public.<sup>57</sup>

### **Rejection of the Image and the Fetishism of Rationality: Jürgen Habermas's Theory of the Public**

Throughout his oeuvre, Jürgen Habermas seeks to rejuvenate the public sphere via a hermeneutic of communicative interaction and to envision a democracy that is built on conversation and rational deliberation.<sup>58</sup> Paradoxically, that goal concerns images. In Habermas's historical account, images have the power to threaten and allure the reasoning public. In feudal society, theatrical representation displayed an absolute power; in republics, representative democracy usurped public authority; and, currently, mass-mediated images are mesmerizing people with manufactured pleasure. Thus, as scholars such as John Durham Peters have observed, Habermas is a *Bilderstürmer*; that is, his modernity project appears on its face to be iconoclastic.<sup>59</sup> It proceeds with a will to purge images and vision and to open a path to a more rational, dialogic public sphere. Yet Habermas does not reject images in favor of critical rationality; he cherishes some images and vision as emblems of critical rationality. For him, aesthetic experience is the embodiment of ideal rationality, and autonomous art is endowed with the task of reintegrating the lifeworld with the system. Thus, images and vision refeudalize the public sphere and bring hope for an ideal public sphere. This seeming paradox, as we saw with Dewey, is not really so paradoxical; underneath the gross iconoclasm of rejection of a refeudalized public sphere lies a more implicit, subtle iconoclasm tied explicitly to Habermas's project of critical rationality.

According to Habermas's narrative in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the bourgeois public sphere emerged by detaching itself from "(theatrical) representation at the prince's court" and by constituting critical-rational debate as the means of self-governance.<sup>60</sup> Although absolutism controlled the public through spectacle and deception, the public sphere was liberated from repressive images and flourished with words—the circulation of newspapers and the culture of deliberation among literary men. Furthermore, just as representation undergirded historical feudalism, Habermas believes that images in modern society reproduce the feudal system by producing passive subjects who are vulnerable to propaganda. Habermas attests that the modern public sphere has declined with the rise of images and representation. Contemporary society, in which mass media are a primal means of communication, operates through "manipulation and show" that can only create manipulative publicity.<sup>61</sup>

His more philosophical works on communication, such as *The Theory of Communicative Action* and *Between Facts and Norms*, restate this distrust of image and vision. According to Habermas, modern capitalism is projected onto the dichotomy between true and false communication and language and image. (True) communication takes place in the lifeworld, and the system "produces" (pseudo) communication through cultural institutions sustained by money and power. In this model, linguistic interaction maintains the public sphere, whereas images are products of the system. As products of the culture industry, images "depoliticize public communication,"<sup>62</sup> and even when they appear to engage in politics and convey information, they do not facilitate public actors but "appear before the public" with the façade of false empowerment.<sup>63</sup> For Habermas, images are deceiving theatricality as opposed to empowering citizenship; they are enticing entertainment as opposed to resources for critical reasoning; and they facilitate the imposition of manipulative power as opposed to the public's bottom-up public opinion building.

As we saw with Dewey, Habermas's anxiety about images and representation produces a gross iconoclasm that seeks to deprive the image of its power. For mass media to become a respectable part of the public sphere, "the power of the media should be neutralized," and media must passively receive the "public's concerns and proposals" and "take up" the issues that are already perceived by the public.<sup>64</sup> The logic of gross iconoclasm denies the possibility that images and representation can contribute positively to communication in the public sphere or to the construction of public opinion.

Yet Habermas elsewhere presents vision as a cure, contending, again, like Dewey, that "appropriate" vision will save the public sphere from the feudalizing force of images. He not only conceives of autonomous bourgeois art as a legitimate component of the public sphere, but he also envisions an aesthetic utopia made possible by art as moral educator. In doing so, Habermas commentators argue, his aesthetic theory reinscribes Enlightenment ideals.<sup>65</sup> In *Legitimation Crisis*, Habermas argues that art can reclaim culture from the pseudo-culture produced by the culture industry. Only bourgeois art, however, which is independent of capitalistic demand, can represent "the victims of bourgeois rationalization" and be a "refuge for a satisfaction of needs that have become illegal in the material life-process of bourgeois society."<sup>66</sup> With its revelation of and challenge to oppression, bourgeois art can transform the dispersed discontent within the capitalist system into "explosive ingredients."<sup>67</sup> Ortilia Arantes and Paulo Arantes explain these ambivalent expectations and fear of images as an inheritance from Adorno and Benjamin.<sup>68</sup> In a response that resembles the Frankfurt school's philosophy of negation and hope for avant-garde art, Habermas believes that autonomous modern art will prepare the "transformation of bourgeois art into the counterculture."<sup>69</sup> Unlike the Frankfurt school, however, Habermas assigns a more active role to images and to the public than does the philosophy of negation.

Habermas theorizes his aesthetic utopia in two essays published in the 1980s. In "Modernity versus Postmodernity" and "Habermas: Questions and Counter-Questions," he advances the notion of "aesthetic rationality" as a reconciliation between

critical rationality and culture. These works represent the shift in his modernity project from societal modernity, which is penetrated by system-driven modernization, to cultural modernity, which still preserves everyday life not subsumed by societal modernization. Cultural modernity, Habermas writes, can restore society and its rationality while avoiding the cruelty of societal modernity. An aesthetic utopia can be realized in two ways: first, by art that reintegrates what societal modernization separated.<sup>70</sup> Habermas describes the end of the eighteenth century as a time when fine art, music, and literature were liberated from courtly and religious institutions, publicly institutionalized, and provided popular moral enlightenment.<sup>71</sup> This nostalgic account imagines the original status of art not commodified by market, leading to popular moral enlightenment in which the ethical, cognitive, and aesthetic aspects of the society are harmoniously connected to one another. Habermas criticizes the philosophy of negation for failing to save the totality of everyday life by narrowly focusing on art and argues that life's totality lies in "unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements."<sup>72</sup> Here Habermas acknowledges the emancipatory potential of images by entrusting aesthetic rationality with the role "of passing on cultural tradition, of social integration, and of socialization."<sup>73</sup> Habermas's endorsement of art can be understood as subtly iconoclastic, an attempt to make images serve the needs of Enlightenment rationality.

Habermas observes further that aesthetic utopia can be realized when "the reception of art by the layman" absorbs art into everyday life.<sup>74</sup> Habermas contends that art and the reception of art can overcome the sharp contrast between commodified art and questions of truth and justice and between expert culture and lay culture:

The reception of art by the layman, or by the "everyday expert," goes in a rather different direction than the reception of art by the professional critic.... The aesthetic experience then not only renews the interpretation of our needs in whose light we perceive the world. It permeates as well our cognitive significations and our normative expectations [*sic*] and changes the manner in which all these moments refer to one another.<sup>75</sup>

Similar to Dewey's notion of experience, "the aesthetic experience" can educate the layperson to behave as a competent consumer who relates art to his or her own life problems and achieves a cognitive and ethical sophistication as well as an artistic one.<sup>76</sup> Habermas expresses his hope for reintegrating the experts' culture into the lifeworld and emphasizes the public's aesthetic training to appreciate culture from the standpoint of the lifeworld. In between anticipation and imposition of the public's embodiment of aesthetic experience, Habermas distinguishes desirable experience (of relating art to everyday life) from the detrimental kind (of driving the public into the capitalist feudal realm). This anticipation-imposition amounts to a subtle iconoclasm that assigns the "right" place and role for art and the public. As philosopher David Ingram notes, Habermas's conception of aesthetic experience

requires “holistic preunderstanding, or illumination of a world, in which cognitions, moral expectations, and needs interpolate one another.”<sup>77</sup>

As with Dewey, Habermas’s endorsement of images and vision enacts a subtle iconoclasm. In particular, Habermas theorizes aesthetic rationality as an instance of pragmatic and linguistic logic and defines art according to his linguistic model of rationality: “I believe that a *pragmatic logic of argumentation* is the most appropriate guiding thread through which the ‘aesthetic-practical’ type of rationality can be differentiated over and against other types of rationality” (our emphasis).<sup>78</sup> When art enters the public sphere, it abandons its characteristics as art and “enters into a language game ... and belongs to everyday communication practices.”<sup>79</sup> This transformation is desirable because the role of art is to follow the logic of language—in particular, argumentation—and to facilitate intersubjectivity in communicative action. Hence, Habermas’s subtle iconoclasm—his desire for “good” images and vision—finds its model in the logic of argumentation and his apparent approbation of images and vision ultimately reaffirms linguistic rationality as the ground for legitimate appreciation of art. In this regard, Peters’s assertion quoted earlier—“Habermas is a *Bilderstürmer*, an iconoclast,”—is pertinent in more ways than one.<sup>80</sup> The picture commonly evoked by iconoclast, that of a fanatical idol-smasher, may be misleading or at least incomplete in the case of Habermas. As with Dewey, Habermas’s apparent veneration of “good” images and vision embodies a subtle iconoclasm that runs underneath the more easily recognizable iconoclasm of his mass culture critique.

In seeking out the roles that images and vision play in Dewey and Habermas, we have elaborated a complicated tension in the relationship of these theories of the public to images and vision. On a superficial level, both Dewey and Habermas express anxiety about the power of images in public, focusing specifically on mass-mediated images and passive modes of vision. For both Dewey and Habermas, these modes of communication need to be purged for anything like a healthy public sphere to emerge. Yet we do a disservice to the complexities of Dewey and Habermas, and potentially misunderstand rhetorical studies’ own contemporary public sphere projects, if we assume that simply identifying these theorists’ gross iconoclasm fully accounts for their orientation to images and vision. The relatively emancipatory role for vision offered by both men ends up theorizing vision in a way that upholds models of communication based largely in talk and linguistic rationality. Recent attempts to account for visuality in public sphere studies for the most part depart from Dewey and Habermas by rejecting gross iconoclasm. As we show below, however, these newer forms are still susceptible to more subtle forms of iconoclasm that need to be recognized if the field is to articulate a discursive publicity that is able to move beyond iconoclasm.

### **Public Screen, Imagining, Circulation: Recent Attempts to Thematize Visuality in Public Sphere Studies**

Discursive models of the public sphere have challenged many norms now thought to

be exclusionary and challenged theorists to conceive of the public in ways more representative of “actually existing democracy” and more potentially emancipatory.<sup>81</sup> By “sighting” the public through the frame of images and vision, we have sought to problematize another set of norms prevalent in public sphere theory: those of iconoclasm. Earlier in this essay, we noted that rhetorical studies needs to do more than “add images and stir.” Similarly, our analysis of Dewey and Habermas demonstrates that we must pay attention not only to the ways in which our theories enact gross iconoclasm, but also to more subtly iconoclastic moves that purport to embrace vision and images. Ideally, in our view, public sphere theory should depend neither on the denigration of images nor the valorization of particular modes of vision to sustain itself. Recently some scholars have taken up the challenge of building a less iconoclastic public sphere theory. In this final section of the essay, we explore three concepts that explicitly and implicitly seek to open up space for visuality in our theories of the public—the public screen, imagining, and circulation—and consider the extent to which these attempts to “sight” the public offer potential for a more iconophilic, or image-friendly, public sphere theory.

### *The Public Screen*

Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples introduce the term “public screen” as a supplement to the idea of the public sphere. Their impulse for doing so shares some affinities with our project of explicating and challenging iconoclasm. Expressing their frustration with a version of public sphere theory they contend is broadly inhospitable to image culture, DeLuca and Peeples observe, “The dream of the public sphere as the engagement of embodied voices, democracy via dialogue, cloisters us, for perforce its vision compels us to see the contemporary landscape of mass communication as a nightmare.”<sup>82</sup> To counter a decline narrative that limits the role of images to that of foe, DeLuca and Peeples suggest the public screen as a metaphor for thinking about the potential for political activity in today’s “hypermediated” context. The public screen recognizes that “public discussions take place via ‘screens’—television, computer, and the front page of newspapers.”<sup>83</sup>

While admitting that a face-to-face model of communication is a “deep impulse and a beautiful dream,”<sup>84</sup> the authors contend (following Jacques Derrida and John Durham Peters) that dissemination rather than dialogue is the metaphor most “characteristic of contemporary communication practices.”<sup>85</sup> The concept of dissemination emerges from critiques of logocentrism articulated by social theorists interested in challenging the notion that all “good” communication is necessarily verbal, embodied, and focused in direction. In contrast to dissemination, models of the public grounded in dialogue are said to be unable to account for the proliferation of images and image events in media culture.<sup>86</sup>

The authors’ explicit engagement with the question of the image merits attention. They demonstrate via a case study of the 1999 WTO protests in Seattle the potential value of embracing the public screen. The metaphor of the public screen takes up the diversity of communication in ways that make explicit questions of hypermediacy,

performativity, and dissemination. The public screen accepts and embraces the notion of "critique through spectacle, not critique versus spectacle."<sup>87</sup> In short, they offer the public screen as an alternative to the gross iconoclasm of a Habermasian bourgeois public sphere. In Seattle, violent protest was an image event that produced welcome public discourse on issues of globalization on the public screens of television, newspapers, and the Internet; DeLuca and Peebles compellingly illustrate that the very mass-mediated images feared by many theorists of the public might in some cases facilitate rather than deter the operations of the public sphere.

The public screen would appear to avoid the paradox of iconoclasm, yet we are troubled by some aspects of the authors' argument. First, in focusing exclusively on Habermas's early work on the bourgeois public sphere, their analysis is unable to account for the more complex roles images and vision play in Habermas's work. They implicitly align the notion of the public screen with the mass-mediated culture that Habermas rejects, rather than consider more broadly how the communicative performances of the protesters in Seattle might also embody logics of aesthetic rationality that Habermas develops in his later work. Accordingly, they miss the opportunity to engage (and perhaps avoid) more subtle manifestations of iconoclasm as they introduce their concept of the public screen.

Of more importance, by juxtaposing the public screen to the public sphere, DeLuca and Peebles leave in place the logic of iconoclasm. The public screen is grounded in a problematic dichotomy. The authors' starting premise is that "television and the Internet have fundamentally transformed the media matrix that constitutes our social milieu, producing new forms of social organization and new modes of perception."<sup>88</sup> They then tie this premise to the idea that, in W. J. T. Mitchell's words, there are differences between "a culture of reading and a culture of spectatorship."<sup>89</sup> Yet without further discussion of how these changes constitute a wholesale transformation, DeLuca and Peebles turn a theoretical claim (we should supplement the public screen with the public sphere) into an unsupported historical one (new technologies have moved us from a culture of reading to one of spectatorship). Historical questions about the accuracy of such a claim aside, our concern is that by aligning a culture of reading with the public sphere and a culture of spectatorship with the public screen, DeLuca and Peebles create for the reader a false choice that reinforces divisions between image and text, visual and verbal, deliberation and dissemination, consensus and dissent. They critique the gross iconoclasm of the logocentric view by privileging its alternative (dissemination), but do not step entirely outside the logic of iconoclasm.

### *Imagining*

In "Imagining in the Public Sphere," Robert Asen offers the concept of imagining as a way to engage questions of inclusion and exclusion in the public. Asen argues for "a concept of imagining as a collective, constitutive, and active force that forms part of our shared social world."<sup>90</sup> By focusing on imagining as a public process emerging "in intersubjective relations," Asen endorses the role of the visual in structuring our

social reality: “The polysemic character of ‘image’—which denotes a physical likeness, optical reflection, mental representation, figure of speech, and public perception—suggests the multimodality of imagining.”<sup>91</sup> Although not devoted explicitly to challenging deliberative models of the public in the manner of DeLuca and Peebles, Asen’s concept of imagining attempts to step outside of narrow definitions of discourse as linguistic or textual.

Asen observes that imagining, both individual and collective, is closely tied to the question of representation: “Our attitude toward and treatment of others depend crucially on how we imagine others, and representations express our collective imagination.”<sup>92</sup> Representations are powerful because they naturalize our imaginings, making them appear as truth or fact. As a result, marginalized groups are often at the mercy of deeply entrenched representations that are difficult to change. Imagining participates in the process of valorizing a certain representation over others and, Asen contends, is a counterpublic resource against dominant representations. Asen’s discussion of imagining constitutes an important supplement to a discursive orientation to the public. Rather than valorize the “purity” of the argumentative interaction that takes place in the public fora of deliberative democracy (such as the congressional hearing room), Asen uses the concept of imagining to remind us that such deliberative moments are not governed solely by critical rationality as traditionally conceived.

Imagining, thus, contains some potential to move public sphere theory outside the paradox of iconoclasm. It shifts us outside the strict boundaries of critical rationality, side-stepping the need to tie practices of decision-making to rule-bound, argument-based verbal discourse. Furthermore, imagining embraces the polysemous nature of discourse, challenging a linguistic-rational model of public deliberation. By recognizing that “processes of collective imagining may employ linguistic and visual modes of representation,” Asen creates room for exploration of both.<sup>93</sup>

Although there are benefits to thinking about the public in terms of imagining, we also see a potential matter of concern. Asen argues that collective imagining may operate in one of two ways: as a background process constituted by shared assumptions about topics of discussion, or as a point of active engagement in public deliberation when publics and counterpublics interact.<sup>94</sup> He offers the example of the “welfare queen” to illustrate the way that imagining worked in congressional deliberation on welfare legislation. Those counterpublic agents (some of them recipients of public assistance themselves) who wished to engage in the congressional forum were often stymied by the image of the welfare queen, forced to construct arguments to respond to an imagined scene in which the negative image had taken center stage. Sometimes, as Asen vividly shows, those who testified directly contested that image in their testimony, but whether made explicit or not, the collective imagining of the welfare queen was a powerful force. Although the illustration is helpful for showing how imagining works in the materiality of discourse, Asen’s choice of an example related primarily to a verbal deliberative forum unfortunately limits our ability to see how imagining might operate outside a linguistic site of engagement. When imagining is figured via analysis of verbal congressional testi-

mony, the broader sense of the "image" of imagining is a background process that operates in the service of a verbal deliberative context. Imagining is thus framed as a supplementary, behind-the-scenes process that influences a traditional forum of deliberation.

In addition, Asen's interest in the contestation of dominant publics and counterpublics means that he frames imagining as a tool to reveal the battle of images that influence public policy debates. As Asen observes, imagining can be a counterpublic's strategy "to assert their interests and identities as they see them, and ... to counteract negative images representing counterpublics."<sup>95</sup> Attention to imagining cultivates in the critic the ability to locate and recognize how competing images enable or disable counterpublics from successfully communicating their message. Although we do not believe that imagining as Asen figures it precludes attention to things other than this battle of images, as currently configured it is unclear how imagining might inform public sphere theory outside of the dichotomy of "bad" dominant public images and "good" counterpublic images. Despite Asen's interest in counteracting the uncritical exclusion of images and vision from our thinking about the public, the notion of imagining as currently illustrated enacts a logic of subtle iconoclasm by privileging traditionally linguistic discursive arenas and employing the logic of dividing "proper" from "dangerous" images.

### *Circulation*

The final term to which we wish to turn is "circulation," a concept currently being explored by a diverse group of scholars including Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, Michael Warner, and Bruno Latour. Readers of the *Quarterly Journal of Speech* will be most familiar with the work of Michael Warner. Although Warner's contribution to the scholarly discussion on circulation has received deserved attention, his is not the only contribution. We wish to bring in other perspectives on circulation, particularly that of Bruno Latour, because they enrich our notion of circulation and modify what we view as a pervasive textual bias in Warner's use of the term.<sup>96</sup>

Scholars working with the concept of circulation are eager to move beyond its definition as the passive transmission of ideas or people; instead, they conceive of circulation as a constitutive process. Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma argue that we must abandon the idea that circulation is a process that merely "transmit[s] meanings";<sup>97</sup> instead, circulation should be viewed as a "cultural process" through which its own forms of interpretation, evaluation, and cultural principles and instruments are "created by interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretive communities built around them."<sup>98</sup>

Similarly, Michael Warner has tied the very definition of the public to the constitutive properties of circulation: "a public is the social space created by the reflexive circulation of discourse."<sup>99</sup> In "Publics and Counterpublics," Warner points out that public argument consists not of isolated exchanges of conversation, but of the act of "projecting the field of argument itself," an act that includes being able to construct an "imagined scene of circulation."<sup>100</sup> For Warner, it is circulation, not

conversation or deliberation, which enables the formation of public discourses and the emergence of publics. Warner outlines several characteristics of circulation. First, he observes that circulation is at once *notional* and *material*. We can *imagine* that ideas circulate in public, yet circulation is also material: newspapers have subscribers, magazines are passed around the beauty shop, a real person reads our letter to the editor. In addition, Warner notes that circulation is *temporal*: it is indexed punctually by the rhythms of publication and display, such as newspapers that appear daily. Finally, circulation is *reflexive*: it is not just that discourse circulates, but also that we *recognize* that it circulates. In other words, Warner's point is that a public thinks of itself as a public because it recognizes and imagines the fact of circulation.<sup>101</sup>

Rhetoric scholars are finding Warner's conception of circulation provocative. Robert Hariman and John L. Lucaites, in their ongoing project on iconic photography, employ the idea of circulation to illustrate how liberal democracy is constructed: "The norms, interests, political effectivity, self-awareness, and substantive claims characterizing public culture are defined by the composition and *circulation* of texts (*including words and images*) through mass media or similar practices of *dissemination*" (our emphasis).<sup>102</sup> Ronald W. Greene reads Warner's concept of circulation as "similar to Derrida's dissemination"<sup>103</sup> and "delivery,"<sup>104</sup> and suggests that circulation "challenges the assumption of the communication models to explore the idea of a public through its relational understanding of self and other and the norms envisioned for this communicative encounter."<sup>105</sup> Melissa Deem finds implicit in Warner's conception of circulation a compelling though not unproblematic articulation of the ways in which norms of "stranger sociability" are constituted in publics and counterpublics.<sup>106</sup> David Wittenberg locates in Warner's commitment to circulation a transformation of the notion of public space from something traditionally considered material to something metaphorical.<sup>107</sup> For these scholars, circulation is an attractive concept because it destabilizes commitments to the linguistic rationality of a dialogic model. Warner endorses the differences in participants, their vernaculars, and texts as resources for upholding multiple publics—and counterpublics—as the basis from which a public extends the circulation of its discourse to strangers.<sup>108</sup>

As Hariman and Lucaites and others cited above recognize, for Warner circulation is only constitutive of publicness if it is *reflexive*: "Only when a previously existing discourse can be supposed, and when a responding discourse can be postulated, can a text address a public."<sup>109</sup> For circulation to be more than diffuse movement, there must be an imagined scene of exchange between writers and readers, as well as a text as the vehicle for communication, which provides the "ability to address the world made up by the circulation of cross-referencing discourse."<sup>110</sup> The operative terms here are "text" and "readers." Warner's conception of circulation necessitates the "reading subject"<sup>111</sup> who recognizes the circulation of a text and retains an awareness of the "indefinite others to whom the text is addressed."<sup>112</sup> Although the notion of circulation as a mechanism of discursive public-making may move our notions of publicness away from iconoclastic postulations (Hariman and Lucaites seem to be moving in this direction), Warner himself confines his own propositions to a

relatively limited definition of discursivity. In fact, he makes explicit that he grounds his model of publics in a linguistic model: "The discourse of a public is a *linguistic form* from which the social conditions of its own possibility are in large part derived."<sup>113</sup> For all its interest in abandoning dialogic, conversational models of the public, Warner's conception of circulation privileges a linguistic model of the public, enacting a subtle iconoclasm that limits the breadth of the discursivity that circulates and creates the public.

We suggest supplementing Warner's notion of circulation with the perspective of Bruno Latour. Latour treats circulation as synonymous with two other terms: "re-presentation" and "mediation." In doing so, Latour offers a parallel grammar that retains Warner's emphasis on reflexivity—the recognition of circulation that makes circulation more than simply passive—while avoiding the subtle iconoclasm of Warner's textualism.<sup>114</sup> For Latour, mediation endlessly creates new discourse from old. Accordingly, every image contains within it a history of its own circulation. That history, however, is often concealed or inaccessible. Latour observes that many dominant discourses, including the discourses of science and nature, rely on the concealment of their history of circulation so they can be perceived as "the truth." Maps, for example, must bring with them the air of truth and accuracy if they are to be effective, yet there is no "true" map; only representations that shift and change with mediation.<sup>115</sup> For Latour, the recognition of mediation/circulation as a principle inherent in the image liberates us from the need to see images as true or false. When we can see human hands in an image rather than an immutable object of adoration or fear, we can question the iconic status of any discourse.<sup>116</sup>

Such is for Latour the activity of the iconophile, a term we view as parallel to Warner's notion of reflexivity. We are iconophilic when we recognize the image's circulation or mediation. For Latour, an image is always in the process of making via the hands of public agents. Iconophilia liberates us from the binaries of love and hate, idolatry and iconoclasm, because it embraces mediation: "Iconophilia is respect not for the image but for the movement of the image."<sup>117</sup> Iconophiles are interested in challenging gross iconoclasm, but what they fight is not images themselves, but rather the act of "*freeze-framing*, that is, extracting an image out of the flow, and becoming fascinated by it, as if it were sufficient, as if all movement had stopped."<sup>118</sup> In contrast to those who fetishize the freeze-framed image (who might be termed idolatrous), Latour argues that iconophilia dictates that we "pay even more respect to the series of transformations for which each image is only a provisional frame."<sup>119</sup>

Unlike Warner's interest in tying reflexive circulation to a linguistic model, Latour challenges the privilege of iconoclasm and marks out another path for studying circulation, one that enables publics to come to terms with images without becoming trapped in the paradox of iconoclasm. Latour's conception of iconophilia, a friendship with images that respects their movements and transformations, challenges conceptions of image culture as a scene in which passive viewers are captive to an endless stream of images passing before their eyes (à la the residents of Plato's cave). Circulation is person-making. Latour's conception of circulation suggests that publics are themselves on the move, actively making sense of the stream of images,

not captive to their power but participating in meaning-making: publics are reflexive, hence iconophilic.

Taken together, these discussions of circulation point to a range of ways in which public sphere theorists might be able to step outside of the paradox of iconoclasm. Circulation enables us to avoid untenable distinctions between images and texts, focusing not on individual types of discourse, but on their movement in a scene of circulation. Circulation as iconophilia recognizes the multiplicity of discourse and (at least in Latour's formulation) does not privilege the linguistic and textual over the visual. A focus on circulation cultivates an iconophilia that, by embracing the movement of images rather than images themselves, frees us from the paradox of "good" and "bad" images, from the will to cherish them and the will to destroy them. Finally, Latour's notion of circulation as person-making—the idea that we, too, circulate—underscores Lee and LiPuma's notion of "cultures of circulation,"<sup>120</sup> interpretive communities that mitigate against the iconoclastic assumption that images unduly influence audiences, that "non-rational" modes of vision leave us unable to reason properly. Moving beyond the false choices of determining whether the image delivers or conceals reality, whether it mesmerizes or educates the public, circulation may offer public sphere theory a way to reconcile itself with images and vision.

## Conclusion

Images and vision are not absent from public sphere theory. Indeed, when we "sight" the public, we see that visibility has been an important part of our theories of the public. Our analysis has shown at least three ways that images and vision are thematized in public sphere theory. First, the power of images is recognized unequivocally by theorists of the public. Sometimes that power is greeted with gross iconoclasm, as in the case of Dewey's and Habermas's critiques of mass-mediated culture forms. At other times, that power is treated as central, as in DeLuca and Peoples's articulation of the public screen. Second, as our analysis of canonical and contemporary conceptions of the public has shown, images and vision often are interpreted through a logic of subtle iconoclasm that makes visibility subservient to dominant linguistic/rational norms. Finally, we have gestured toward a particular understanding of circulation that offers possibilities for thematizing vision and images in a more iconophilic way. Embracing as it does movement and flow, circulation might be an analytic term that can free us from the impulse to freeze-frame all types of discourse, not just images. Such a shift may be powerful. Circulation, we believe, will be best understood through the lenses of rhetorical criticism and rhetorical history; that is, by making circulation a theme of our study of discourse (as opposed to freeze-framing specific instances of discourse), we would learn how pictorial and linguistic discourses illuminate the landscape of the public sphere as well as learn more about the nature and function of circulation itself.<sup>121</sup>

We have shown in this essay the importance of making questions of visibility explicit in public sphere theory, of engaging the ways that the paradox of iconoclasm

circulates in our scholarly discourse about the public sphere. This engagement should not be the end of the journey, but rather the first step. As the examples of Dewey, Habermas, and others show, even when our models of the public account for images and vision, they may still operate in an irreconcilable tension with the iconoclastic tendencies of linguistic/rational models. We claim only to have started the conversation by encouraging the recognition of iconoclasm's powerful conceptual force and urging public sphere theorists to be reflexive and iconophilic about the ways in which their theories may (often unwittingly) enact it. It is our hope that public sphere theorists might take up what we have offered and apply it in their pursuit of a lively discursive theory of the public that can, if not overcome, at least account for, iconoclasm.

## Notes

- [1] Seyla Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Jürgen Habermas," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 87.
- [2] G. Thomas Goodnight, "The Personal, Technical, and Public Spheres of Argument: A Speculative Inquiry into the Art of Public Deliberation," *Journal of the American Forensic Association* 18 (1982): 253.
- [3] Gerard Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Sphere* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1999), 61.
- [4] On proceduralism, see Benhabib, 81–5.
- [5] On counterpublics, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 109–42; Rita Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: Feminist Literature and Social Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory* 10 (2000): 424–46.
- [6] On reductionism, see Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter'." See also Robert Asen, "Toward a Normative Conception of Difference in Public Deliberation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 35 (1999): 115–29; Erik Doxtader, "In the Name of Reconciliation," in *Counterpublics and the State*, ed. Robert Asen and Daniel Brouwer (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001); and Hauser, *Vernacular Voices*.
- [7] Doxtader, 61–2.
- [8] Hauser, 65.
- [9] Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter'," 441.
- [10] Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 90.
- [11] John Durham Peters, *Speaking Into the Air: A History of the Idea of Communication* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 62.
- [12] The literature engaging these concepts in relation to the public sphere is too voluminous to list here. A useful bibliography that traces the development of these topics, among others, is Arthur Strum, "A Bibliography of the Concept of *Öffentlichkeit*," *New German Critique* 64 (1994): 161–202. Discussions of these concepts that have become almost canonical include Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere"; Felski, *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*; Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge, *Public Sphere and Experience: Toward an Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972/1993); and the Black Public Sphere Collective, *The Black Public Sphere: A Public Culture Book* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

- [13] Fraser argues that some conception of a public is necessary in order to theorize democracy. See Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere."
- [14] An incomplete list of such work includes the following. On the hybrid genre of documentary, see Thomas Benson and Carolyn Anderson, *Reality Fictions: The Films of Frederick Wiseman* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989). Lester Olson takes up a multiplicity of visual forms in *Emblems of American Community in the Revolutionary Era: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1991). See also Sonja Foss's work on rhetorical criticism of visual communication: Sonja K. Foss, "Visual Imagery as Communication," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 12 (1992): 85–96; Sonja K. Foss, "A Rhetorical Schema for the Evaluation of Visual Imagery," *Communication Studies* 45 (1994): 213–24. Bruce Gronbeck's work on televisual spectacle has sorted out the impact of media on politics. See Bruce Gronbeck, "Reconceptualizing the Visual Experience in Media Studies," in *Communication: Views from the Helm in the 21st Century*, ed. Judith Trent (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 289–93; Bruce Gronbeck, "Rhetoric, Ethics, and Tele-Spectacle in the Post-Everything Age," in *Postmodern Representations: Truth, Power, and Mimesis in the Human Sciences*, ed. Richard Harvey Brown (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 216–38. In a related field, the debate in argumentation studies about the nature and function of visual argument has been productive; see David S. Birdsell and Leo Groarke, "Toward a Theory of Visual Argument," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 33 (1996): 1–10; J. Anthony Blair, "The Possibility and Actuality of Visual Arguments," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 33 (1996): 23–39; David Fleming, "Can Pictures Be Arguments?" *Argumentation and Advocacy* 33 (1996): 11–22; and Cara A. Finnegan, "The Naturalistic Enthymeme and Visual Argument: Photographic Representation in the 'Skull Controversy,'" *Argumentation and Advocacy* 37 (2001): 133–49. Recent relevant case studies in visual rhetoric include Carole Blair and Neil Michel, "Reproducing Civil Rights Tactics: The Rhetorical Performances of the Civil Rights Memorial," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30 (2000): 31–55; Kevin M. DeLuca, *Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism* (New York: Guilford Press, 1999); Kevin M. DeLuca and Anne Teresa Demo, "Imaging Nature: Watkins, Yosemite, and the Birth of Environmentalism," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 17 (2000): 241–60; Cara A. Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, 2003); Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 35–66; John Louis Lucaites, "Visualizing 'The People': Individualism vs. Collectivism in *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 269–88; and Barbie Zelizer, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- [15] Thomas O. Sloan and others, "Report of the Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism," in *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, ed. Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 221–2.
- [16] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995); David Michael Levin, ed., *Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
- [17] See the special issue of *Argumentation and Advocacy* on John Dewey, vol. 39 (Winter 2003).
- [18] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 157.
- [19] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 121.
- [20] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 151.
- [21] Mitchell, *Picture Theory*, 15.
- [22] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 14.

- [23] W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Violence of Public Art: *Do The Right Thing*," in *Art and the Public Sphere*, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 33.
- [24] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 13.
- [25] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 13.
- [26] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 41.
- [27] David Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 405.
- [28] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 198.
- [29] Art historian David Freedberg chronicles violent acts of iconoclasm, events in which individuals physically assaulted great works of art with knives, acid, and other destructive tools. Because of "the tendency to conflate image and prototype," that is, the danger of mistaking the representation for some embodiment of the thing itself, "when critical pressures are brought to bear on this tension, men and women break images, as if to make clear that the image is none other than just that: it is not living, no supernatural embodiment of something that is alive. We fear the image which appears to be alive because it cannot be so; and so people may evince their fear ... by breaking or mutilating the image." David Freedberg, *Iconoclasts and Their Motives* (Maarsten: G. Schwartz, 1985), 35. See also Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 378–428.
- [30] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 165.
- [31] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 197.
- [32] Mitchell, *Iconology*, 165.
- [33] Bruno Latour observes playfully that there are five types of iconoclasts, which he terms "Type A" through "Type E". All in various ways participate in the dialectic of bringing down "bad" images and raising up "good" ones. See Bruno Latour, "What is Iconoclasm? Or is There a World Beyond the Image Wars?," in *Iconoclasm*, ed. Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel (London: MIT Press, 2002), 26–30.
- [34] Freedberg, *The Power of Images*, 388.
- [35] Jay, *Downcast Eyes*, 14–15.
- [36] John Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems* (Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 1927/1954), 219.
- [37] John Dewey, *Art As Experience* (New York: Minton, Balch, and Co, 1934), 105.
- [38] See Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Macmillan, 1922) and *The Phantom Public* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1925).
- [39] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 27, 77.
- [40] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 109.
- [41] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 137, 139.
- [42] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 168–9.
- [43] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 155.
- [44] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 180.
- [45] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 184.
- [46] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems*, 188.
- [47] Dewey, *Art as Experience*, 134.
- [48] Richard Shusterman, *Pragmatist Aesthetics: Living Beauty, Rethinking Art* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), viii.
- [49] Emily Fourmy Cutrer, "A Pragmatic Mode of Seeing: James, Howells, and the Politics of Vision," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, ed. D. C. Miller (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 261.
- [50] Cutrer, 260–1.
- [51] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 52–4.
- [52] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 52.
- [53] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 53.
- [54] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 53.
- [55] Dewey, *Art As Experience*, 324.

- [56] See Mark Mattern, "John Dewey, Art and Public Life," *Journal of Politics*, 61 (1999): 54–75; Martin Jay, "Somaesthetics and Democracy: Dewey and Contemporary Body Art," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36 (2002): 55–69.
- [57] James Carey is prominent among communication scholars who advocate largely Deweyan theories of communication; see James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989). By contrast, Ronald Greene offers a critique of Dewey that contends that scholars should question their use of Dewey to ground aesthetic-moral theories of communication; see Ronald Walter Greene, "John Dewey's Eloquent Citizen: Communication, Judgment, and Postmodern Capitalism," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 39 (Winter 2003): 189–200.
- [58] See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1984); Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Vol. 2. Lifeworld and System*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1989); and Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, trans. William Rehg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
- [59] John Durham Peters, "Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere," *Media, Culture, and Society* 15 (1993): 563. See also Miriam Hansen, "Early Silent Cinema: Whose Public Sphere?" *New German Critique* 29 (1983): 147–84; Benjamin Lee, "Textuality, Mediation, and Public Discourse," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, ed. Craig Calhoun (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989), 402–18; Dana Polan, "The Public's Fear: Or, Media as Monster in Habermas, Negt, and Kluge," in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 33–41.
- [60] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 29.
- [61] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation*, 249.
- [62] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 377.
- [63] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 375.
- [64] Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms*, 378–9.
- [65] See Ortilia B. F. Arantes and Paulo E. Arantes, "The Neo-Enlightenment Aesthetics of Jürgen Habermas," *Cultural Critique* 49 (2001): 43–57; David Ingram, "Habermas on Aesthetics and Rationality: Completing the Project of Enlightenment," *New German Critique* 53 (1991): 67–103.
- [66] Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon, 1975), 78.
- [67] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 78.
- [68] Arantes and Arantes, 45.
- [69] Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, 84.
- [70] Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 2 (1981): 9.
- [71] Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," 9–10.
- [72] Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," 11.
- [73] Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," 7.
- [74] Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," 12.
- [75] Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," 12.
- [76] Habermas, "Modernity Versus Postmodernity," 11–12.
- [77] Ingram, 87.
- [78] Jürgen Habermas, "Questions and Counter-Questions," *Praxis International* 4 (1984): 235.
- [79] Habermas, "Questions and Counter-Questions," 237.
- [80] Peters, "Distrust of Representation," 563.
- [81] Fraser, 109.
- [82] Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19 (2002): 130.

- [83] DeLuca and Peeples, 131.
- [84] DeLuca and Peeples, 129.
- [85] DeLuca and Peeples, 130.
- [86] On image events, see Kevin M. DeLuca, *Image Politics*; Kevin M. DeLuca and John W. Delicath, “Image Events and Argumentative Practice: The Case of Radical Ecology,” in *Argument at Century’s End: Selected Papers from the Eleventh NCA/AFA Conference on Argumentation*, ed. Thomas A. Hollihan (Annandale, VA: NCA, 2000), 244–52.
- [87] DeLuca and Peeples, 134.
- [88] DeLuca and Peeples, 131.
- [89] DeLuca and Peeples, 131.
- [90] Asen, “Imagining in the Public Sphere,” *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 35 (2002): 347.
- [91] Asen, “Imagining,” 357.
- [92] Asen, “Imagining,” 357.
- [93] Asen, “Imagining,” 357.
- [94] Asen, “Imagining,” 351.
- [95] Asen, “Imagining,” 360.
- [96] See “The Forum: Publics and Counterpublics,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 410–54, edited by Dilip Gaonkar. The forum includes a truncated version of Warner’s essay, “Publics and Counterpublics,” originally published in *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 49–90. We cite the *Public Culture* version.
- [97] Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma, “Culture of Circulation: The Imaginations of Modernity,” *Public Culture* 14 (2002): 192.
- [98] Lee and LiPuma, 192.
- [99] Warner, 62.
- [100] Warner, 63.
- [101] Warner, 63.
- [102] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, “Performing Civic Identity: The Iconic Photograph of the Flag Raising on Iwo Jima,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 364.
- [103] Ronald Walter Greene, “Rhetorical Pedagogy as a Postal System: Circulating Subjects through Michael Warner’s ‘Publics and Counterpublics,’” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 435.
- [104] Greene, “Rhetorical Pedagogy,” 440.
- [105] Greene, “Rhetorical Pedagogy,” 435–6.
- [106] Melissa Deem, “Stranger Sociability, Public Hope, and the Limits of Political Transformation,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (November 2002): 444–54.
- [107] David Wittenberg, “Going Out in Public: Visibility and Anonymity in Michael Warner’s ‘Publics and Counterpublics,’” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88 (2002): 426–33.
- [108] Warner, 75–6.
- [109] Warner, 62.
- [110] Warner, 64.
- [111] Warner, 75.
- [112] Warner, 66.
- [113] Warner, 75.
- [114] See Bruno Latour, “How to Be Iconophilic in Art, Science, and Religion?” in *Picturing Science Producing Art*, ed. C. A. Jones and P. Galison (New York: Routledge, 1998), 418–40; Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds., *Iconoclasm* (London: MIT Press, 2002). Latour’s key term is “mediation”; however, given Latour’s interest in mediation as movement, what he describes as mediation can, in our estimation, be termed “circulation.” Latour hints at as much when he describes the mediation of art as “a circulation ... which provides meaning not only for a painting but for the whole setting—theological, institutional, cultural—in which the mediators are gathered, reshuffled, and assembled” (“How to Be Iconophilic,” 436).

- [115] Latour, "How to Be Iconophilic," 418–9.
- [116] Latour, "What is Iconoclasm?" 7.
- [117] Latour, "How to Be Iconophilic," 421.
- [118] Latour, "What is Iconoclasm?" 26.
- [119] Latour, "How to Be Iconophilic," 421.
- [120] Lee and LiPuma, 191.
- [121] For rhetorical studies of visual culture that explicitly address the question of circulation, see Finnegan, *Picturing Poverty*; Janis Edwards and Carol Winkler, "Representative Form and the Visual Ideograph: The Iwo Jima Images in Editorial Cartoons," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83 (1997): 289–310; and Hariman and Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in U.S. Iconic Photography."