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Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Quarterly Journal of Speech

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713707519>

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Online publication date: 16 February 2011

To cite this Article Murray Yang, Michelle(2011) 'Still Burning: Self-Immolation as Photographic Protest', Quarterly Journal of Speech, 97: 1, 1 – 25

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/00335630.2010.536565

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2010.536565>

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Still Burning: Self-Immolation as Photographic Protest

Michelle Murray Yang

Examining Malcolm Browne's photograph of the burning monk as well as appropriations of it by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee, I argue that self-immolation is a powerful rhetorical act that utilizes self-inflicted violence as a means of performing a visual embodiment of violence done by an "other." I assert that the power and resonance of Browne's photograph stem from its freezing in time of what Barbie Zelizer terms "the about to die moment." Additionally, this study expands Zelizer's concept by examining how appropriations of the burning monk image demonstrate the resonance of images of the dead and their potential to promote agency and civic engagement.

Keywords: Buddhist; Burning; Monks; Photographic Protest; Self-Immolation

On the evening of June 10, 1963, American news correspondent Malcolm Browne received a cryptic phone call from Thich Duc Nghiep, who informed the reporter of a large protest planned for the following day by South Vietnamese Buddhists. Nghiep mysteriously added, "I would advise you to come. Something very important may happen."¹ The next morning, over 200 Buddhist monks marched through the streets of Saigon to protest the Diem regime's oppressive sanctions against Buddhist followers. Halting at the intersection of Le Van Duyet Street, the monks formed a circular barricade to thwart possible interruptions by police and fire fighters. At the center of this circle was Thich Quang Duc, an elderly monk who quietly took a seat on a small cushion that had been placed on the street. Two younger monks poured a mixture of gasoline and diesel fuel over the man, covering his body and his long saffron robes. Suddenly, Duc struck a match and was immediately engulfed in flames. As dumbfounded police and fire personnel gaped at the horrific scene, Browne shot roll after roll of film.

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Duc's self-immolation was a turning point in the escalating conflict between South Vietnamese Buddhists and the American-backed Diem regime. The monks began large-scale demonstrations in May 1963 to protest the restrictions Diem had placed on their religious worship. The Buddhists were harassed by the police and angered by the regime's favoritism towards Catholics. Forbidden from publicly flying their flag to commemorate Buddha's birthday, the Buddhists took to the streets, marching to a radio station where they demanded that an audio recording of a protest meeting criticizing the government be publicly broadcast. Diem responded by ordering the military into action. Protestors were wounded and killed by grenades and crushed by military vehicles. The demonstrations continued throughout the month with rumors circulating that two monks would commit suicide in order to protest the government's actions. By that point, the Buddhist demonstrations had become commonplace, and the majority of reporters paid little attention to such threats, writing them off "as an idle threat, on grounds that the nonviolent Buddhist faith would never condone suicide."²

Since that June morning in 1963, Browne's shocking photograph of Thich Quang Duc has become one of the defining images of the Vietnam War. Robert Hariman and John Lucaites label the photograph as one of the iconic images of the Vietnam War.³ The image is continually referenced in studies dealing with images of war and violence by scholars such as Marita Sturken, who discusses the picture in her analysis of US war photography practices during the Vietnam War, Sallie King, who refers to Quang Duc's image and death in her analysis of self-immolation's place in Quaker and Buddhist religions, and Jan Yun-hua, who tries to explain the monk's actions by tracing the historical precedent of self-immolation in Buddhism.⁴ George Dionisopoulos and Lisa Skow provide the only rhetorical study of the photograph, which analyzes the American print media's competing interpretations of the photograph and how reporters framed widely diverging public perceptions of the event.⁵ While their insights are extremely helpful in illuminating how Browne's photograph was interpreted by the American media, they do not analyze the rhetorical nature of the picture itself or the act of self-immolation.

This study attempts to fill this research gap by analyzing both the image and the act of self-immolation. First, it provides a rhetorical analysis of Browne's photograph and the subsequent appropriations of it by other Vietnam War protestors. Specifically, the study will examine Browne's photograph as it appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* because it was the first American newspaper to print the image. This study will also analyze two advertisements created by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee, which used another photograph Browne took of Duc's immolation to gain support for the anti-war movement. Second, this study explores the theoretical implications of self-immolation as a rhetorical act. I argue that self-immolation is a powerful rhetorical act that utilizes self-inflicted violence as a means of performing a visual embodiment of violence done by an "other." By using Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation as a case study, I assert that the power and resonance of Browne's photograph stem from its freezing in time of what Barbie Zelizer terms "the about to die moment." Browne's image suspends and postpones Duc's fiery death, and this suspension contributes to

the photograph's strength as an iconic image of the Vietnam War. The photograph continues to shock and affect viewers because it perpetuates the spectacle of his death. In short, Thich Quang Duc is still burning. This inquiry also expands Zelizer's discussion of the about to die moment by examining how appropriations of the burning monk photograph demonstrate the resonance of images of the dead and their potential to promote agency and civic engagement.

The photograph of Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation constitutes an important rhetorical artifact, which warrants academic study for several reasons. First, Browne's photograph is an iconic image of the Vietnam War, which has come to symbolize the horrific violence and the political complexities of this volatile historical time period. Indeed, Robert Hariman and John Lucaites identify it as one of the four most iconic and widely disseminated images emerging from the war.⁶ The scholars have analyzed two of these images—the photograph of a young napalm victim running in terror and the picture of a female college student screaming in horror as she crouches over the body of a shooting victim at Kent State University. According to Hariman and Lucaites, these iconic images:

reflect social knowledge and dominant ideologies, they shape understanding of specific events and periods (then and subsequently), they influence political action both topically and by modeling relationships between civic actors, and they provide figural resources for subsequent communicative action.⁷

Conducting a rhetorical analysis of Browne's photograph illuminates the intricacies of the image and the power underlying its status as an iconic photograph. Simultaneously, it provides an opportunity to contribute to prevailing conceptualizations of iconic rhetoric. By fusing iconic image studies with Zelizer's concept of the subjunctive voice, this study seeks to broaden scholarly research of the iconic image of the burning monk.

Second, Browne's photograph provides scholars a unique opportunity to explore different forms of visual performance. Self-immolation is a rhetorical performance, whether it is captured on film or only experienced by first hand witnesses to the burning and those who learn of it via news coverage.⁸ Self-immolations that are photographed, like Duc's, are rhetorical performances in which the immolator, photographer, and viewer all participate. Self-immolations caught on film provide a photographic opportunity to capture, and subsequently, to explore the about to die moment. Zelizer argues that photographs which capture the moments immediately preceding their subjects' deaths "help us remember the past by freezing its representation at a powerful moment already known to us."⁹ Applying this concept to Browne's photograph aids in explaining the rhetorical power of such shocking images to transfix viewers, and it also provides a means for gaining deeper insight into the intricacies of self-immolation's rhetorical potential as a visual performance.

Third, the image of Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation warrants scholarly attention because of its profound effect on both its immediate and removed audiences. Although Duc was the first monk to burn, he was not the last. At least six more Buddhist followers would perish in fiery deaths in order to decry the Diem regime's oppression of their religion. However, Duc's was the only protest that was

meticulously planned as a public spectacle, and it was one of the few to be captured on film. While American reporters tried to take pictures of another monk's self-immolation, police officers thwarted their attempt by beating them into submission.¹⁰

Imitators of Duc's death were not limited to Vietnam. From 1965 to approximately 1970, at least eight Americans self-immolated to protest the war in Vietnam. These individuals included Alice Herz, an elderly widow, Celene Jankowski, a young wife and homemaker from Indiana, Roger LaPorte, a member of the Catholic Worker movement, Florence Beaumont, a homemaker from a suburb of Los Angeles, Norman Morris, a Quaker who self-immolated outside the window of Robert McNamara's Pentagon office, and George Winne, a college student at the University of California at San Diego.¹¹ For those desperate to call attention to the horrors of the Vietnam War, self-immolation became a means for ensuring that their cries would not go unheard.

Indeed, Browne's photograph of Quang Duc's death profoundly affected the Kennedy administration's support for the Diem regime. The image shocked people across the globe, providing visual evidence of the dark side of the regime that could no longer be ignored. Browne's picture drew international attention to the Buddhists' plight, it depleted American support for Diem, and it helped set a chain of events into motion which ultimately culminated in the American-backed coup that ended the South Vietnamese leader's reign.

Browne's photograph also provides an opportunity to expand our understanding of rhetoric by investigating the nested nature of rhetorical artifacts as they evolve over time. This essay examines how one rhetorical artifact, in this case the photograph of Duc's fiery protest, can function as a resource for future rhetorical acts in varying contexts. Browne's photograph made the monk's performance of self-immolation a material resource that could be duplicated and appropriated by multiple parties for diverse and often conflicting purposes. As a result, the photograph becomes a new rhetorical act that is influenced by the prior historical context of the monk's fiery protest while simultaneously providing the basis for future rhetorical acts such as the advertisements created by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee. I refer to such acts as nested rhetorical artifacts as they are informed by multiple contexts in which they are re-appropriated and their meanings are amplified or altered. The photograph of Duc's immolation that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* and the one used by the committee in its ads provide a unique opportunity to examine how photographs of the about to die moment can heighten the visual impact of images of the dead in terms of the nested nature of the rhetorical artifact. The various rhetorical contexts build upon one another, ultimately amalgamating the image's power and resonance to accommodate multiple meanings and fulfill diverse purposes.

This essay will examine four contexts pertaining to the nested rhetorical act of Duc's self-immolation. It will begin by examining the context of evolving media practices during the Vietnam War, which helps explain Browne's coverage of Duc's protest and the initial reticence of news editors to publish the horrific photograph. From there, this study transitions into a discussion of the cultural context of self-immolation in the Buddhist religion, which explains how Duc's death served as a

reclamation of agency for South Vietnamese Buddhists. Next, it provides a rhetorical analysis of the image of the burning monk, which will draw upon the two historical contexts previously discussed as well as Zelizer's concept of the about to die moment to illuminate the rhetorical power of Browne's photograph. The third context will focus on subsequent appropriations of the photograph by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee and how the organization utilized images of the deceased monk to spur its counterpublicity efforts. Finally, this essay will conclude with a brief discussion of the fourth context, which examines the continued resonance of Duc's immolation as a rhetorical resource for appropriation.

Paper Minefields: American Journalists' Contentious Relationship with the US Government and the Diem Regime during the Vietnam War

In order to gain a better understanding of the context surrounding the initial creation and dissemination of Browne's photograph of the burning monk, including the context in which he worked, it is important to examine the complex relationship involving American journalists, the US government, and the Diem regime during the Vietnam War. The tenuous relationship between these parties functions as one context in the nested rhetorical artifact of the burning monk photograph that informs not only Browne's coverage of Duc's self-immolation, but also reactions to the photograph by news editors reluctant to publish the shocking picture. Understanding the American press' relationships with both the US government and the Diem regime, in addition to changes in how reporters covered war, helps historically situate the artifact for analysis.

During the Vietnam War, conflict was not limited to the battlefield; it also permeated the newsroom. Reporters covering the war faced several formidable obstacles. In the early 1960s, the US military was committed to keeping the extent of its involvement in combat operations secret as military personnel were only supposed to be serving as advisers to the South Vietnamese army. According to Daniel Hallin, President Kennedy reportedly initiated public information policies "to play down the whole issue of Vietnam, to keep the extent of US involvement out of the headlines."¹² Reporters complained of being given inaccurate information by the military regarding the United States' role in the conflict as well as the progress of South Vietnamese troops in their efforts against the Vietcong.¹³ Journalist Morley Safer noted that the Saigon military's "version of events was almost always at variance with what actually happened in the field."¹⁴ According to Browne, the misinformation continually supplied by US military officials, coupled with the reporters' experiences on the ground, led correspondents to become highly skeptical of all official statements.¹⁵ For many reporters, distrust of military officials soon bred skepticism of the United States' handling of the conflict in general. As early as 1962, reporters including veteran correspondents such as Peter Kalischer and relative newcomers such as Neil Sheehan had taken "an unfavorable view of the war."¹⁶

Compounding this lack of accurate information was the shared assumption among many military and Kennedy administration officials that American reporters were an

extension of the US mission in Vietnam, and therefore should be supportive in their reporting. According to journalist Homer Bigart, reporters were “regarded by the American mission as tools of our foreign policy.”¹⁷ US officials wanted reporters to emphasize “Diem’s successes against the Vietcong and to play down American military involvement.”¹⁸ However, many correspondents refused to heed Washington’s directive, as it did not reflect what they were seeing and experiencing in the field. Reporters like Browne who questioned the establishment’s handling of the mission were told to “get on the team.”¹⁹ However, as journalist John Hohenberg notes, many, including Browne, “never did make it to the team.”²⁰ As a result, some correspondents became targets of both the Kennedy administration and the Diem regime.

The deteriorating relationship between the press and the administration was perhaps no more aptly displayed than during the Buddhist crisis of 1963. Considered by many as one of the most contentious periods of American media coverage of the war, it was during this time that the media came under fire for “shaping events rather than reporting them” and were subsequently credited for “wrecking American policy.”²¹ Critics claimed that coverage of the conflict was compromised by reporters’ personal dislike of the Diem regime and by Buddhist efforts to manipulate the press to reflect Buddhist sympathies.²² *Time* magazine criticized correspondents for covering “a complex situation from only one angle, as if their own conclusions offered all the necessary illumination.”²³ Veteran journalists such as Joseph Alsop and Marguerite Higgins derided US coverage of the crisis, characterizing correspondents’ efforts as a “high-minded crusade” against the government and alleging “reporters here would like to see us lose the war to prove they’re right.”²⁴

Such charges were echoed by the Diem regime. By the end of 1962, relations between the press and the South Vietnamese government deteriorated to such an extent that Madame Nhu, wife of Ngo Dinh Nhu, who was brother and chief adviser to South Vietnam President Ngo Dinh Diem, declared that American reporters were “intoxicated by communism.”²⁵ There were reports that Diem officials attempted to silence US reporters critical of the regime by censoring all news stories and photographs that went over the news wires. Browne explained that the “most important dispatches were circulated not only among key Vietnamese officials, but also, secretly and illegally, among American officials.”²⁶ As the challenges facing the Diem regime mounted, it became increasingly difficult for reporters to get their stories out of Vietnam, and delays became more prevalent and lengthy.²⁷ During the Buddhist crisis in 1963, Diem resorted to threats of violence in order to silence reporters critical of his government. Browne recalled that during the crisis, Tran Van Khiem, Madame Nhu’s brother, “let it be known that a list of foreign correspondents slated for assassination had been prepared by the government.”²⁸

Both the Diem regime and the Kennedy administration were troubled by the startling photographs captured by American reporters. The horrific images coming out of the jungles of Vietnam and captured in the streets of Saigon marked a significant shift in how the American media covered war. Photographers were inspired by art photography’s “snapshot movement” in which “the seemingly random, alienated images captured by television and the snapshot mirrored what

appeared to be the alienating, haphazard nature of the war.”²⁹ Advances in technology contributed to this change in war coverage. The 35mm camera granted photographers greater autonomy due to its versatile lenses, faster shutter speeds, and the option of using black-and-white or color film. In addition, photographers had greater access to facilities and resources for covering stories and transmitting prints or film overseas.³⁰ As a result, images of the wounded, dead, and dying entered the living rooms of Americans across the country each evening via television news reports and graced breakfast tables each morning via the daily papers. Although published news photographs from World War II and the Korean War showed the corpses of soldiers who died in combat, it was not until the Vietnam War that newspapers “brought their readers into the life of the troops and made their viewers watch the day-long, step-by-step events leading to a man’s death.”³¹

However, many gruesome images illustrating the horror of combat never made it past the news wires. Resistance to such images came from some senior news editors in the United States who often “altered or killed stories that criticized the establishment opinion.”³² Pressure to produce articles and images supportive of the US cause in Vietnam mounted as news editors were pressed to creatively edit negative articles or replace them entirely with more positive stories.³³ The *Philadelphia Inquirer* was the only newspaper initially willing to publish Browne’s photograph of the burning monk. Declaring the image “unfit fare for the breakfast table,” the *New York Times*, along with many other US newspapers, refused to publish the image.³⁴

Madame Nhu was so incensed by the publicity and outcry prompted by the image of the burning monk that she offered “gasoline and a match if David Halberstam and some of the other reporters would follow the example” of the immolating monks.³⁵ Of course, such utterances did little to detract from the damage inflicted by Browne’s photograph. The image of the burning monk had already permeated households and outraged people around the world. The Buddhist crisis and Browne’s image of Duc’s fiery protest shifted the balance of power between opposition to and support for Diem. Criticism and skepticism of the Diem regime became more prevalent in both Saigon and Washington.³⁶ Continuing its persecution of Buddhists, Diem officials issued a raid on Saigon pagodas in August 1963. As a result, hundreds of priests were arrested. In the same month, Frederick Nolting, US ambassador to Saigon and a staunch supporter of Diem, was replaced by Henry Cabot Lodge, who favored the ousting of Diem. By October, the Kennedy administration agreed with Lodge and was actively looking for the South Vietnamese leader’s replacement.³⁷

Browne and his fellow correspondents faced great obstacles in their efforts to effectively report from Vietnam including the initial secrecy surrounding the US mission, American and South Vietnamese officials’ efforts to censor the wires, and the Diem regime’s attempts to silence reporters with threats of violence. However, with advances in camera technology and changes in how journalists covered the war, Americans were increasingly exposed to the everyday horrors of combat via shocking photographs such as those produced by Browne in his coverage of Duc’s immolation. While it is important to understand the historical context in which Browne worked and the journalistic practices characteristic of that time period, it is equally vital to

explore cultural and religious factors which inform Duc's self-immolation as not only a religiously inspired act, but also as a political reclamation of agency for South Vietnamese Buddhists. The precedent of self-immolation in Buddhism comprises the next context in the nested rhetorical artifact of the burning monk photograph.

Those Who Burned Before: The Precedent of Self-Immolation in Buddhism

Exploring the religious context encapsulating the actual act of Duc's self-immolation aids in culturally situating the act itself and helps explicate the religious and political factors underlying his immolation. Understanding how self-immolation has served as a form of both religious sacrifice and political protest in the context of Mahāyāna Buddhism produces a more detailed comprehension of how Duc's public death functioned as a hybrid religious act and political protest. In turn, gaining a more culturally nuanced perspective of the monk's immolation illuminates how his fiery death served as a reclamation of agency for South Vietnamese Buddhists in their struggle against the oppressive Diem regime. Thus, the historical precedent of self-immolation in Buddhism serves as the next context in the nested rhetorical artifact of Browne's photograph of the burning monk. This religious context helps inform our understanding of the burning monk image as the photograph springs forth from Duc's performative act of self-immolation. Interpreting the rhetorical artifact of the photograph in light of the context surrounding Duc's performative act and its religious and cultural underpinnings helps provide a more comprehensive analysis of Browne's photograph.

After Browne's photograph appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on June 12, 1963, scholars of religion grappled with understanding how a Buddhist monk could commit self-immolation, an act that seemed so antithetical to Buddhist doctrine. Although such a violent act may initially seem to go against the teachings of Buddhism, Quang Duc was not the first Buddhist to burn. Religion scholars such as Sallie King, Jan Yun-hua, and Russell McCutcheon all acknowledge that the practice has a long history in the Buddhist religion. King notes that the act of self-immolation in Vietnam dates to 455 CE and is part of a tradition of "sacrificing oneself, often by burning, with such intentions as to make an offering to the Buddha, to imitate the bodhisattvas and, notably, to protest oppression of the Dharma."³⁸

One of the first Buddhists to self-immolate was Fa-yü, a Chinese monk who was inspired by the teachings of the Lotus Sutra doctrine in approximately 397 BC "to burn his body as a performance to worship."³⁹ Many of the first monks to self-immolate were inspired by religious texts such as the Lotus Sutra and the Avatamsaka-sūtra scriptures to burn in hopes of becoming Bodhisattvas. Bodhisattva refers to a person who sacrifices his chance to attain Buddha status in order to help others. In Mahāyāna Buddhism, of which Duc was a follower, a Bodhisattva is believed to have perfected six types of virtue, referred to as pāramitās. Dāna, or alms-giving, is the first virtue. In order to achieve this virtue, one must "give away one's worldly wealth, son or wife, or even one's own life."⁴⁰ By sacrificing one's body to help another being, the Buddhists sought to achieve Dāna.

Although many of the first self-immolations were motivated by the desire to make a religious sacrifice of oneself, Jan notes that there is a historical precedent for monks to utilize self-immolation as a form of protest against religious persecution. The first such case occurred in 574 AD when the Chinese monk Tao-chi self-immolated in protest of Emperor Wu's plans to oppress Buddhist followers.⁴¹ By tracing the historical precedent of self-immolation among Buddhist monks, Jan concludes that the self-immolations of monks during the Vietnam War are in accordance with Buddhist religious doctrine.

Other scholars have used evidence of self-immolation's Buddhist roots to differentiate between immolations enacted by Buddhists and Westerners during the Vietnam War. Carl-Martin Edsman's entry on "fire" in the *Encyclopedia of World Religions* interprets the Buddhists' burnings during the Vietnam War based on religious texts and asserts that "unlike the suicides of their Western imitators—they [the Buddhists] do not constitute purely political protest actions."⁴² Similarly, Marilyn Harran's entry regarding suicide in the same publication also bases its understanding of self-immolation on Buddhist religious texts that characterize "religiously motivated suicide as an act of sacrifice and worship."⁴³

McCutcheon takes issue with understanding the Buddhists' deaths primarily through the lens of religion. He asserts that the term "self-immolation," coupled with the US media's framing of the event as a protest against religious oppression, serves to localize the scope of the problem and omits reference to possible underlying transnational causes such as American imperialism, which helped facilitate such oppression in the first place. McCutcheon claims that framing the Buddhists' deaths as "self-immolations" fosters an incomplete understanding of the burnings because it isolates the events as "being exclusively concerned with issues of religious sacrifice" rather than focusing on the possible military, economic, and political motivations and implications of the act.⁴⁴

While I agree with Edsman's assertion that the Buddhist immolations are not solely political protests, scholars need to take into account that the action captured by Browne on film was a hybrid protest—one that was religiously grounded but also politically motivated, which functioned as a reclamation of agency for South Vietnamese Buddhists. In order to analyze and understand the rhetorical resonance of Browne's photograph of the burning monk, this inquiry will take into account both the contrasting religious and political motivations at play in Duc's immolation. In addition, this study will also analyze how these contrasting motivations helped lend the photograph to conflicting appropriations and counterpublicity efforts in subsequent contexts of this nested rhetorical artifact.

Burning from Within: Analysis of Malcolm Browne's Photograph of the Burning Monk

Browne's photograph appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* on June 12, 1963, with the caption, "An elderly Buddhist monk, the Rev. Quang Duc, is engulfed in flames as he burns himself to death in Saigon, Vietnam, in protest against persecution."⁴⁵ In

the center of the image, Duc sits on the street as flames lap at half of his body and his face. To the monk's left sits the gasoline container used to transport the fuel, which ignited his body. Behind Duc is the sedan that he and three other monks rode in during the processional through the streets of Saigon. In the background is a line of Buddhist monks and nuns witnessing the event unfold. While one can faintly make out some of their features, it is impossible to accurately view their facial expressions. To the right of the sedan, one sees the lower half of a monk's body who appears to be walking away or walking towards the burning man. It is difficult to discern the direction of his movement as the upper half of the monk's body is hidden by the cloud of smoke and flames radiating from Duc. Browne describes the scene in the following excerpt from his book *The New Face of War*:

From time to time, a light breeze pulled the flames away from Quang Duc's face. His eyes were closed, but his features were twisted in apparent pain. He remained upright, his hands folded in his lap, for nearly ten minutes as the flesh burned from his head and body. The reek of gasoline smoke and burning flesh hung over the intersection like a pall.⁴⁶

Browne's photograph (Figure 1) of the final moments of Quang Duc's life provides the viewer with a visual suspension of the monk's death and, thus, creates the possibility that his ultimate demise may somehow be averted. Barbie Zelizer's concept of the relationship between the subjunctive voice in visual images and the about to die moment provides a theoretical lens through which to analyze and view the implications of this suspension. While many studies in visual rhetoric have examined the power of the visual to serve as evidence of the here and now, Zelizer asserts that visual scholars have failed to study how photographs can also be instruments of contingency and liminality. By examining the relationship between the subjunctive voice and contingency, Zelizer states that scholars can also illuminate Roland Barthes'



Figure 1. Malcolm's Browne's photograph of the burning monk in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 12, 1963, reprinted with permission of the Associated Press.

concept of the “third meaning.” According to Barthes, images possess a third meaning which “compels viewers after they encounter and deplete both its literal/informational side and its symbolic dimensions.”⁴⁷ The third meaning is problematic as it is difficult to pinpoint its location since “it is not situated structurally or in a certain place of the image.”⁴⁸

For Zelizer, the subjunctive voice provides an avenue for exploring the connection between the visual’s third meaning and contingency. Concerned with the “what if,” the subjunctive voice “creates a space of possibility, hope, and liminality through which spectators might relate to images. Images that might not be inherently uncertain, hypothetical, or emotional become so due to the attitude of spectators.”⁴⁹ Zelizer claims that this is uniquely true of those images that capture individuals in the moments leading up to their deaths, which she terms the about to die moment. Studying photographs of people jumping from the World Trade Center to their deaths in the immediate aftermath of the September 11 terrorist attacks, Zelizer asserts that the about to die moment illustrates that the power of such images lies in their ability to suspend the onslaught of death and provide a space of time in which questions of contingency can arise. Despite this visual postponement, the viewer of the image knows the event’s inevitable outcome. She explains that “the image tells the story of what happened at a point before the end of its unfolding. The power of the images is magnified by the deaths to which they lead, with death built on to accommodate broader subjunctive messages.”⁵⁰

More recent visual scholarship has drawn on Zelizer’s concept of the subjunctive voice and the about to die moment to help further explore and understand rhetorical responses to the September 11 attacks. Ekaterina Haskins analyzes how an anniversary display created by The September 11 Digital Archive which contains images and testimony from the public regarding the twin towers in the moments immediately preceding their collapse creates what Zelizer describes as “a space of (im) possibility, whereby spectators were able to linger in a moment when the full scope of the tragedy was not yet upon them.”⁵¹ In so doing, Haskins contends that the Archive display represents a “symbolic refusal to come to terms with the events of 11 September.”⁵² Similarly, Kevin Jones, Kenneth Zagacki, and Todd Lewis examine how the “Missing Person Posters” which plastered the city in the first days after the attacks represent both a connection to and a departure from Zelizer’s idea of the about to die moment. Unlike the images of the Twin Towers before their imminent collapse, which according to Zelizer ease viewers “into acknowledging death in liminality” through the subjunctive voice’s questioning of the “what if,” the posters utilized the subjunctive by portraying the missing persons as if they “were in fact still living.”⁵³ By providing personal information about the hobbies they enjoyed, the jewelry they wore, and the places where they worked, the posters rhetorically postponed the deaths of those pictured.

Zelizer’s theorization of the subjunctive voice and the about to die moment can also illuminate Browne’s image of the burning monk. The photograph of the fiery protest provides a time, space, and image in which the potential postponement of death can arise. From the angle that the picture was taken, it appears that only half of

Quang Duc's body is engulfed in flames. The viewer can clearly see one of his tightly shut eyes and half of his gaunt mouth. In this instant, the monk's death is indefinitely suspended in time. The flames have not yet overcome his entire body; his demise is not yet complete. For a brief moment, captured by film, it appears that the outcome of this event can be altered. Quang Duc is not yet dead; there is a chance that the events which caused him to take such drastic measures can somehow be ameliorated.

The photograph begs the question of who *can* and who *should* intervene. By doing so, it simultaneously raises questions of responsibility and blame. Who and what is responsible for driving Quang Duc to make himself a human torch? Who should be blamed for causing his death? Why did they not intervene to "save" him? The powerful visual image of Quang Duc in the moment preceding his death functions rhetorically to implicate several distinct audiences with a shared sense of responsibility. One is compelled to view his act of self-immolation as both a religious and political protest against the oppressive Diem regime and the American government. As such, it simultaneously indicts the South Vietnamese government for harshly oppressing the Buddhists and the US government for setting such a government in place.

Quang Duc's immolation helps construct this indictment by serving as a visual representation of the violence and oppression that the South Vietnamese Buddhist monks and nuns suffered at the hands of the Diem regime. By enacting violence against himself, he illustrates the violence done by an "other." According to sociologist Michael Biggs, the act of self-immolation "provides a real signal about the extent of injustice" suffered by the collective that the individual is representing.⁵⁴ Similarly, anthropologist Karin Andriolo notes that during the act of self-immolation, the burning body "becomes the site on which self-destructive mimesis denounces the wrongs that humans have wrought."⁵⁵ Self-immolation is powerful due in part "because it provokes pity for a victim whose unjust death is attributed to the opponent."⁵⁶ Simultaneously, the act also evokes "admiration for a hero who willingly died for the cause."⁵⁷

The monk's silence during his immolation aids in conveying the violence committed by both the South Vietnamese and the US government against the Buddhist collective. *New York Times* reporter David Halberstam describes the situation:

Behind me I could hear the sobbing of the Vietnamese who were now gathering. I was too shocked to cry, too confused to take notes or ask questions, too bewildered to even think . . . As he burned he never moved a muscle, never uttered a sound, his outward composure in sharp contrast to the wailing people around him.⁵⁸

Quang Duc's silence mirrors the silence of the United States in response to reports of the Diem regime's brutality. Prior to Quang Duc's death, the South Vietnamese government resisted the Buddhists' demands and either crushed their protests through military violence or ignored their demonstrations. The event highlights the silence implicit in the US government's support of the regime. By staging a public self-immolation, the South Vietnamese Buddhists ensured that their demands could

no longer be ignored. The horrific image of a human-being engulfed in flames could not be easily dismissed.

Quang Duc's silence and defiance also function to challenge the Diem regime's authority. Marita Sturken asserts that iconic images challenge dominant ideological narratives.⁵⁹ The act of Quang Duc's immolation and the image of it simultaneously challenge the Diem regime's policies and complicate the ideological narrative used to justify the US government's support of the regime. Hariman and Lucaites explain that the monk's stoic silence and lack of expression of pain "becomes the vector for projecting a power that can be used either to extend or resist state control."⁶⁰ By burning in silent defiance of the regime's policies, Quang Duc shows the South Vietnamese government "to be not only illegitimate, but so powerless that it could not conquer the body as it burned."⁶¹ Due to the precedent of self-immolation in Buddhism, Duc's fiery death is a religious act of defiance. By visually enacting the violence suffered by the Buddhists because of the Diem regime's actions, his self-immolation serves as a reclamation of agency, not only for himself, but also for South Vietnamese Buddhists as a whole.

Although Browne's photograph creates a visual space in which potential can arise through the possibility of intervention, part of the power of the image itself lies in the knowledge that such potential can never be fulfilled. Thus, one reason Browne's photograph is so compelling is due in part to its illustration of the tension between potentiality and inevitability. Zelizer claims this tension between the "what if" and the "what has been" is a central component in images of the about to die moment as the "image tells the story of what happened at a point just before the end of its unfolding. The power of the images is magnified by the deaths to which they lead."⁶² Ultimately, intervening in the immolation is impossible; the flames overtake Quang Duc and end his life. While Browne's image only shows the moments preceding the monk's death, part of the photograph's strength lies in what it does not show—the certitude of the event's outcome. Even viewers unaware of the image's historical context can surmise from the physical trauma captured in the photograph that Quang Duc did not survive. The knowledge of this outcome serves to intensify the level of responsibility that is placed upon those indicted by the photograph. Although the potential for intervention existed, they did nothing.

In the aftermath of the immolation, Browne himself dealt with similar questions regarding responsibility, intervention, and blame. The photographer grappled with the extent of his own culpability for Quang Duc's death. While Browne acknowledges that it would have been nearly impossible for him to stop the immolation, he notes that:

in the years since, I've had this searing feeling of perhaps having in some way contributed to the death of a kind old man who probably would not have done what he did—nor would the monks in general have done what they did—if they had not been assured of the presence of a newsman who could convey the images and experience to the outer world.⁶³

However, the image itself attests to the fact that it would have been virtually impossible for anyone to intervene, including Browne. Peering behind the parked

sedan and the cloud of flames are the faces of Buddhist monks and nuns. One can see that they are standing side by side as they bear witness to Quang Duc's immolation. According to eyewitness accounts, they formed a circle around the burning monk in order to thwart any attempts by outsiders to stop the event. Acting as a human barricade, they blocked a fire truck from reaching the scene.⁶⁴ The impenetrable wall of people obfuscates the viewer's ability to see South Vietnamese onlookers or fire personnel running to the site. By doing so, it literally and visually prevents the potential for intervention. In light of Zelizer's concept of the subjunctive voice, one can interpret the Buddhists' enactment of a human barrier as re-enforcing the about to die moment. Part of the image's power lies in the fact that the viewer knows the outcome of the event and that Duc's fiery death is inevitable.

Zelizer's theorization of the subjunctive voice and the about to die moment helps illuminate the tension between potentiality and inevitability in Browne's photograph. By examining the image of the burning monk through the lens of the subjunctive voice, questions of blame and responsibility arise which aid in engaging the issues of potential intervention and certain death within the artifact. As we shall see, subsequent appropriations of images of the burning monk complicate Zelizer's concept of the about to die moment in understanding and interpreting Duc's image. Indeed, I argue that appropriations of the image, such as the one used by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee, illustrate the power of images of the dead to create spaces for a different type of potential. Instead of opening potential sites for suspension and intervention, images of the dead can be positioned to create rhetorical spaces for potential agency and action through asking the "what now" question.

Appropriations of the Burning Monk: Counterpublicity and the Anti-War Cause

By capturing Duc's immolation on film and disseminating the stunning image to a larger global audience, Browne transformed the monk's performance of self-immolation into a material resource imbued with the capability of being duplicated and appropriated. As a result, disparate groups employed the image for diverse and often conflicting purposes. In this context, the image can be viewed as a turning point in a calculated counterpublicity campaign crafted by South Vietnamese Buddhists. Rita Felski explains that counterpublics are marginalized groups within society that facilitate "processes of discursive argumentation and critique which seek to contest the basis of existing norms and values by raising alternative validity claims."⁶⁵ Erik Doxtader asserts that "counterpublic is a verb."⁶⁶ He explains that counterpublics "may use speech and action to recover the public's capacity for speech and action" which he refers to as counterpublicity.⁶⁷

Such counterpublicity was evident at Quang Duc's immolation. As the smell of burning human flesh saturated the air, the assembled protestors hoisted banners reading "A Buddhist Priest Burns for Buddhist Demands" while "monks with portable electric loudspeakers harangued onlookers, both in Vietnamese and English, with a highly emotional explanation as to why the suicide had taken place."⁶⁸ Others

distributed copies of Quang Duc's biography to members of the crowd that had gathered. By using banners and materials translated into English, the Buddhists tailored their counterpublicity to a broader global audience. Quang Duc's immolation was not solely targeted to members of the Diem regime. Rather, the monks tried to ensure that their message would be heard and understood by a broader Western audience. Browne explains that the event "was clearly theater staged by the Buddhists to achieve a certain political end."⁶⁹

Not only did Browne's photograph function as a means of counterpublicity in the Buddhists' campaign, it also came to be co-opted by other groups that provided conflicting interpretations of the image's meaning. Both the Chinese and North Vietnamese governments used the photograph of Quang Duc's immolation as evidence of the horrors of American imperialism.⁷⁰ The Ministers' Vietnam Committee, an association comprising American religious leaders representing both the Christian and Jewish faiths, also used Browne's photograph to protest the American government's involvement in Vietnam. Members of the organization included prominent religious leaders such as Reinhold Niebuhr, an influential Protestant pastor who would later go on to earn the 1964 Presidential Medal of Freedom, and Harry Emerson Fosdick, considered one of the most significant liberal Baptist ministers of the twentieth century.

On June 27, 1963 and September 15, 1963, the Ministers' Vietnam Committee placed a one-page ad in the *New York Times* that featured an image of Quang Duc's immolation. It is important to note that the committee chose a different image taken by Browne of the burning monk to include in its ad. Unlike the photograph that appeared in the *Philadelphia Inquirer* of Duc with half of his body engulfed in flames, this one shows the monk completely consumed by fire. Browne took the photo as he shot roll after roll of film, which captured the various stages of the monk's immolation.⁷¹ I assert that this choice in picture, along with the text that accompanies it, demonstrate an expansion of Zelizer's concept of the about to die moment. Zelizer contends that "the moment *before* death, rather than after," is "the most powerful and memorable moment of representation in the sequencing of events surrounding human demise."⁷² However, I argue that the ads placed in the *New York Times* by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee illustrate the power and transformative potential of images of what has been, or images of the dead. Such images can help construct rhetorical spaces for agency and civic engagement to take place. Additionally, photographs of Duc's immolation and his ultimate demise provide a unique opportunity to examine how images of the about to die moment can heighten the visual impact of images of the dead in viewers' collective consciousness.

Unlike the original photograph of Duc's protest, the image chosen by the committee resists classification as an about to die moment. Zelizer specifies that images of the about to die moment suspend action at "the moment at which an individual or group is going to die, but not after they are already dead."⁷³ Owing to the presence of overpowering flames and the inability to distinguish any of Duc's human features short of the darkened outline of his body, it can be assumed that the monk was already dead when this photograph was taken. The act of death is already

complete. Instead of capturing individuals in the moments immediately prior to their deaths, photographs such as this capture the moments immediately after their deaths. This study refers to them simply as images of the dead.

Images of the dead help expand, complement, and contrast Zelizer's idea of the about to die moment. According to Zelizer, images of the about to die moment compel viewers to question the events leading up to the moments immediately preceding an individual's death. In so doing, the about to die moment aids viewers in thinking through questions concerning responsibility and blame, as the earlier rhetorical analysis of Browne's photograph demonstrates. What if these deaths could have been prevented? Who or what could have prevented them? Who is responsible—partially or fully—for causing or contributing to these individuals' deaths? While images of the dead can prompt similar questions concerning issues of blame and questioning what has been, they obfuscate the concepts of suspension, postponement, and intervention that are at play in images of the about to die moment.

Images of the dead can be used to provoke questions concerning future action. As illustrated by the Ministers' Vietnam Committee's ad (Figure 2), images of the dead can be positioned to ask questions pertaining to the future. If, as Zelizer asserts, about to die images ask "what if," I argue that images of the dead ask "what now?" How should we respond to this death? How do we move forward from this death? By asking "what now," images of the dead can be used to construct sites for potential agency and action. In the context of the Ministers' Vietnam Committee's ad, committee members use the photograph of Duc's burning corpse to create a rhetorical space for counterpublicity and civic engagement.

Committee members accomplish this by providing an explicit answer to the "What now?" question posed by the image of Duc's burning body. In large, bold letters in the middle of the page, the ad reads, "We, too, protest."⁷⁴ How should viewers respond to the photo of Duc's fiery death? The committee answers that they should join the protest against the Diem regime. The committee's ad illustrates Hariman and Lucaites' assertion that iconic photographs "provide figural resources for subsequent communicative action."⁷⁵ The use of Quang Duc's image in the ad enables supporters of the campaign to rhetorically join the monk's visual protest through textual discourse. By declaring "we, too, protest," and including an image of the monk's immolation, the organization is rhetorically entering into Quang Duc's act of protest. Although the Ministers' Vietnam Committee takes a less radical approach in expressing its protest than Duc, the organization identifies its cause and concerns with those of the burning monk and, therefore, conveys a sense of solidarity with the South Vietnamese Buddhists. In turn, the ad invites viewers to do the same.

According to sociologists and anthropologists, eliciting support from the public for a larger cause is critical to ensuring the success of self-immolation protests. Biggs explains that one of the purposes of self-immolation is "to exhort greater commitment from others who share the collective cause" through "galvanizing them to engage in protest."⁷⁶ Thus, he concludes that self-immolation "relies on the public's understanding of their obligation to respond."⁷⁷ If the public fails to view the protest as evidence of a larger problem, "it fails as a call to action."⁷⁸ Andriolo echoes



Figure 2. Ministers' Vietnam Committee's ad in the *New York Times*, September 15, 1963.

this sentiment. Self-immolation cannot further the cause on its own; "others are needed to take up the torch."⁷⁹

The committee's appropriation of Duc's fiery image demonstrates these characteristics by using the immolation to appeal to a larger public for support. The committee's decision to use the photograph of Duc's burning corpse rather than the image of the monk's about to die moment is significant in appealing to the public for support as it rhetorically precludes the possibility of intervening on the monk's behalf. Unlike images of the dead, images of the about to die moment "activate impulses about how the 'world might be' rather than how 'it is.'"⁸⁰ While images of the dead emphasize the here and now, photographs of the about to die moment question what could have been by drawing viewers "into an illogical spectator position that is simultaneously naïve and all-knowing."⁸¹ According to Zelizer, this "all-knowingness coaxes us to review what we know is about to happen and to think

about what might have been had things happened differently.”⁸² As a result, viewers cultivate an “irrational hope that death may not occur.”⁸³ Unlike the photograph in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, the image of Duc in the committee’s ad precludes the possibility of activating impulses concerning how the “world might be.” Viewers of the monk’s burning corpse are unable to take refuge in a spectator position characterized by naïveté as they are made aware by both the image and the text that accompanies it of Duc’s death. The possibility for intervention and the suspension of death is precluded by the image and the ad’s positioning of it.

By reminding readers that Duc’s protest culminated in his own death, the ad further indicts the viewer with responsibility in responding to the “what now” question via emotional engagement. Zelizer’s work illustrates how emotional engagement can serve as a significant function of such images as it affords a different avenue for relating to and experiencing public events.⁸⁴ As Hariman and Lucaites explain, iconic images “concentrate and direct emotions,” which can result in “emotional responses such as civic pride or outrage that are overtly political.”⁸⁵ Such images also provide feelings of collective identity and a sense of agency. In so doing, Hariman and Lucaites believe iconic photographs provide avenues of civic action.⁸⁶ Both the content and typeface of the ad function as personal appeals, which simultaneously engage and confront the reader in asserting the committee’s answer to the “what now” question. Framing both sides of the monk’s picture in the ad are messages scrawled in handwritten typeface. One asks “17,358 American clergymen of all faiths have joined this protest. Will you?” while the other implores readers to “please send a contribution.”⁸⁷ The ad also reminds readers that Duc “died to protest South Vietnam’s religious persecution of Buddhists (70% of the population).”⁸⁸ By captioning the photo in this manner, the committee frames Duc’s death as a sacrifice already complete, not as an act in process. As a result, this helps emphasize the grave nature of the situation in South Vietnam. The Diem regime’s persecution of the Buddhists had become intolerable, to a point where monks willingly burned themselves to death to protest the injustices suffered by their people.

Awareness of Duc’s demise is heightened by the fact that Browne’s photograph of the monk’s about to die moment had already been in circulation for nearly two weeks when the committee published its first ad. One can argue that Browne’s initial image of the burning monk and subsequent news coverage of the Buddhist protests augment the resonance of the committee’s ad for American viewers. News coverage of the Buddhists’ protests placed the fiery demonstrations in Americans’ collective consciousness. By using the photograph of Duc’s burning corpse in the ad, the committee reminds viewers of Browne’s earlier image and of news coverage of the topic. Just as the image and act of Quang Duc’s immolation implicates viewers with a sense of responsibility, so, too does the ad. Duc sacrificed his life—won’t you make a small sacrifice for the cause? There are two choices implicit in this challenge—either the reader will act responsibly by contributing to and joining the protest or she will remain silent and therefore serve as a complicit supporter of the US government’s policy.

Additionally, the committee's ad asserts that joining Duc's protest is the proper response to the "what now" question by framing the conflict in Vietnam and the United States' support of the Diem regime as antithetical to Western democratic values. The ad emphasizes that the larger issue at stake transcends the plight of the South Vietnamese Buddhists. Rather, it affects us all. In the reasons listed in the ad to explain why committee members chose to join Duc's protest, it states that the Diem regime's oppression of the monks is an attack on the right to religious freedom. The committee asserts that they are protesting "our country's military aid to those who denied him religious freedom."⁸⁹

Similarly, the other indictments listed in the ad also emphasize the undemocratic nature of the conflict in general, including "the immoral spraying of parts of South Vietnam with crop-destroying chemicals and the herding of many of its people into concentration camps called 'strategic hamlets.'"⁹⁰ The committee members protest "the loss of American lives and billions of dollars to bolster a regime universally regarded as unjust, undemocratic, and unstable."⁹¹ And, finally, they protest "the fiction that this is 'fighting for freedom.'"⁹² By listing their reasons for joining Duc's protest, the Ministers' Vietnam Committee indicts the Diem regime and the United States government for failing to abide by liberal democratic ideals. Accompanying this indictment with the photograph of Duc's fiery sacrifice creates a visual metaphor for the enervation and destruction of Western democratic values. The burning monk comes to visually represent the blatant immoral and undemocratic nature of the Diem regime and the United States' support of it. This is not just an attack on South Vietnamese Buddhists: This is an attack on the right to religious freedom. This is an attack on the Western ideal of freedom itself. According to the Ministers' Vietnam Committee, the only appropriate answer to the "what now" question is to take up Duc's torch and join the protest against religious persecution and the enervation of Western ideals.

The Ministers' Vietnam Committee's ad is significant, as it provides points of engagement with Zelizer's concept of the about to die moment in relation to photographs of the burning monk. It affords an opportunity to forge connections and expand the boundaries of the about to die moment to examine a different set of photographs—those capturing the dead in the moments immediately after their passing. By using both approaches to analyze two different photographs of Duc's protest, a deeper understanding of Duc's act of self-immolation, the images of it, and subsequent appropriations of them is gained. As the case study of the Ministers' Vietnam Committee's ad illustrates, images of the dead can be positioned to prompt viewers to ask the question of "what now." Instead of opening sites for potential suspension, postponement, and intervention, as in Zelizer's theorization of the subjunctive voice and the about to die moment, images of the dead can be used to create rhetorical spaces, which promote potential agency and civic engagement.

It is not known how much money the Ministers' Vietnam Committee was able to raise through the *New York Times* ads. However, what is certain is that Browne's photograph of the burning monk was and continues to be a powerful resource for appropriation, counterpublicity, and protest. Subsequent efforts to display,

appropriate, and engage the image create new contexts in the nested rhetorical artifact of the burning monk photograph. As we shall see, the monk's protest continues to burn brightly for a new generation of viewers in the digital age.

The Fire Still Burns: Implications of Analysis

Malcolm Browne's photograph of Quang Duc's self-immolation remains one of the most moving iconic images from the Vietnam War. To the United States, it serves as a graphic reminder of the casualties of a horrific war in which peace with honor would come much too late for far too many. A testament to the repercussions of American imperialism, Browne's photograph serves as a cautionary warning to future generations about entering into entangling alliances abroad. The image also functions as a visual assurance that the suffering and sacrifice of those who did not live to witness the conflict's end will not be forgotten.

By capturing Duc's fiery protest on film, Browne indefinitely suspends the monk's about to die moment and provides an opportunity to examine the intricacies of self-immolation as a rhetorical act. According to Barbie Zelizer, images of the about to die moment provide a unique avenue for exploring Roland Barthes' concept of the "third meaning" as they illustrate the powerful connection between the subjunctive voice and contingency. Concerned with questions of "what if," the subjunctive voice creates a space of uncertainty where issues of possibility and potentiality can arise. Zelizer asserts that this is especially true of images of the about to die moment. By suspending the deaths of those pictured, such images raise questions of contingency. About to die images demonstrate the tension between potentiality and inevitability as part of their power derives from the knowledge that the events depicted ultimately concluded in the deaths of those pictured.

Zelizer's concept of the about to die moment helps illuminate Browne's photograph of the burning monk. Browne's image shows Duc only partially engulfed in flames. The monk's tightly shut eyes and clenched mouth indicate that he has not yet succumbed to the fire. By freezing the moments before Duc's death, Browne's image creates a space in which questions of contingency can arise. Who drove Duc to undertake such a desperate act? Who can and who should intervene to save him from the flames? Although the photograph of the burning monk provides a space for the subjunctive "what if," part of the image's power stems from the knowledge that intervening was impossible and that the protest ultimately resulted in Duc's death. The certainty of his demise provokes questions of responsibility and blame. Who is responsible for the monk's death? Duc's use of self-inflicted violence served as a performative embodiment of the pain and suffering inflicted upon South Vietnamese Buddhists by the American-backed Diem regime. As a result, the monk's immolation and Browne's photograph of it function as an indictment of both the US government and Diem officials.

Subsequent appropriations of Browne's photograph of the burning monk help expand Zelizer's conceptualization of the about to die moment, and they simultaneously elucidate the nested nature of rhetorical artifacts. By capturing

Duc's immolation on film, Browne transforms the monk's protest into a material resource for future rhetorical acts. While it becomes the impetus for a new rhetorical act, the photograph is still influenced and informed by the previous context of the monk's protest. Multiple groups such as the Chinese and North Vietnamese governments as well as the Ministers' Vietnam Committee appropriated images of the burning monk in varying contexts for diverse and often conflicting purposes. The committee's use of an image showing Duc in the moments immediately after he was overtaken by the flames demonstrates how photographs of the about to die moment can heighten the visual impact of images of the dead. Unlike photographs of the about to die moment, images of the dead preclude the possibility for suspension and intervention. While photographs of the about to die moment ask viewers "what if" by creating sites for potentiality and contingency, images of the dead prompt viewers to ask "what now." In so doing, photographs of the dead can be used to promote agency and civic engagement. The committee's decision to use a photograph of Duc in the moments immediately after his death strengthened the persuasive appeal of its advertisements. The image of Duc completely engulfed in flames reminds readers of the monk's ultimate sacrifice and thus precludes the possibility of suspending and avoiding his death. By coupling this dramatic image with a list detailing the immoral nature of the United States' involvement in Vietnam, the Ministers' Vietnam Committee provides viewers with an explicit answer to the "what now" question. Given Duc's willingness to make the ultimate sacrifice, won't they make a monetary donation to the anti-war cause? Either viewers will honor Duc by joining the cause, or they are guilty of supporting the oppressive system that drove him to burn.

As evidence of the image's continued resonance and relevance, Browne's photograph of the burning monk continues to be appropriated and disseminated, thereby contributing new contexts to the nested nature of the rhetorical artifact. The rock band Rage Against the Machine used Browne's image as the cover for its 1992 self-titled debut album. More recently, the photograph has reached a new generation of viewers with the advent of social networking websites such as Facebook. A Facebook page has been created in honor of Thich Quang Duc, which displays Browne's photograph as the monk's profile picture. Providing contextual information regarding Duc's immolation, the profile becomes a locus of both remembrance and education.⁹³ Those who previously knew of Duc's sacrifice post messages of deference and appreciation to honor his memory while new generations of viewers express feelings of shock, disbelief, and outrage after viewing the photograph and learning more about the circumstances that compelled Duc to become a human torch. The profile page is not the only digital site that keeps the monk's memory alive. Other websites devoted to the categorization and display of iconic images include Browne's photograph in their collections and remind viewers of its visual and political impact.⁹⁴

The continued power and resonance of Browne's photograph lies in its compelling visual image of human pain and resolve as well as its suspension of potential. Illustrating one human being's determination and resilience, the image represents the horrors of oppression and the human will to overcome it. Simultaneously, its

suspension of the about to die moment conveys a sense of potential that functions as a challenge to the viewer. Forever suspending the moments immediately preceding Quang Duc's death, Browne's photograph perpetuates the monk's immolation. In short, Quang Duc is still burning.

This suspension and, therefore, continuance of his immolation, can be viewed today as a protest against the continued existence of oppression in the world. The haunting image of the burning monk implores viewers to take note of the cries of those who go unheard, to challenge the dominant forces complicit in perpetuating inequality, and to take action to help end oppression. Fellow monk Thich Nhat Hanh explains that Quang Duc's "act expressed the unconditional willingness to suffer for the awakening of others."⁹⁵ Through Malcolm Browne's photograph of his fiery protest, Quang Duc continues to awaken viewers to the cries of those who are oppressed.

Notes

- [1] Malcolm Browne, *The New Face of War* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965), 175.
- [2] Browne, *The New Face of War*, 177.
- [3] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in US Iconic Photography: The Image of 'Accidental Napalm,'" *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 20 (2003): 35–66. According to Hariman and Lucaites, photojournalistic icons are "photographic images appearing in print, electronic, or digital media that are widely recognized and remembered, are understood to be representations of historically significant events, activate strong emotional identification or response, and are reproduced across a range of media, genres, or topics." See Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, *No Caption Needed: Iconic Photographs, Public Culture, and Liberal Democracy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 27.
- [4] See Marita Sturken, *Tangled memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS epidemic, and the politics of remembering* (Berkeley: University of California, 1997), 55; Sallie King, "They who burned themselves for peace: Quaker and Buddhist self-immolators during the Vietnam War," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 127–50; and Yun-hua Jan, "Buddhist Self-Immolation in Medieval China," *History of Religions* 4 (1965): 243–68.
- [5] See George Dionisopoulos and Lisa Skow, "A Struggle to Contextualize Photographic Images: American Print Media and the 'Burning Monk,'" *Communication Quarterly* 45 (1997): 393–409.
- [6] Hariman and Lucaites, "Public Identity and Collective Memory in US Iconic Photography," 55.
- [7] Robert Hariman and John Louis Lucaites, "Dissent and Emotional Management in A Liberal-Democratic Society: The Kent State Iconic Photograph," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 31 (2001): 7.
- [8] For example, although the immolations of Americans Alice Herz, Norman Morrison, Roger LaPorte, Celene Jankowski, Florence Beaumont, and George Winne were not captured on film, they reportedly left an indelible impression on witnesses according to first hand accounts reported in the *New York Times*. In reporting the fiery deaths, newspapers also circulated the immolations to a larger public, which became aware of the individuals' actions and the motivations that compelled them to burn.
- [9] Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 158.
- [10] Browne, *The New Face of War*, 180.

- [11] While Western immolators had complex motives, at least six of the immolators were documented by newspapers as being at least partially driven to burn as a protest against the war in Vietnam. See Associated Press, "Mother Attempts Suicide by Burning," *New York Times*, November 12, 1965, 3; David R. Jones, "Woman, 82, Sets Herself Afire in Street as Protest on Vietnam," *New York Times*, March 18, 1965, 3; Thomas Buckley, "Man, 22, Immolates Himself In Antiwar Protest at U.N.," *New York Times*, November 10, 1965, 1; "War Critic Burns Himself to Death Outside Pentagon," *New York Times*, November 3, 1965, 1; and Harold Keen, "San Diego Student Who Set Self Afire in War Protest Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, May 12, 1970, 3.
- [12] Daniel Hallin, *The "Uncensored War: The Media and Vietnam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 29.
- [13] See John Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence: The Great Reporters and Their Times* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995), 272; and David Halberstam, "The Role of Journalists in Vietnam: A Reporter's Perspective," in *Vietnam Reconsidered: Lessons from a War*, ed. Harrison E. Salisbury and Larry Ceplair (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 113.
- [14] Morley Safer, "How to Lose a War: A Response from a Broadcaster," in *Vietnam Reconsidered*, 161.
- [15] Malcolm Browne, "Viet Nam reporting: three years of crisis," *Columbia Journalism Review*, Fall (1964): 6. For further discussion of Browne's dissatisfaction with the Kennedy administration's attempts to keep US involvement in Vietnam secret, see Malcolm Browne, *Muddy Boots and Red Socks: A Reporter's Life* (New York: Times Books, 1993), 95.
- [16] Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence*, 271.
- [17] Phillip Knightley, *The First Casualty: From the Crimea to Vietnam: The War Correspondent as Hero, Propagandist, and Myth Maker* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 375.
- [18] Phillip Knightley, "How To Lose a War: A Response from a Print Historian," in *Vietnam Reconsidered*, 155.
- [19] Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence*, 271.
- [20] Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence*, 271.
- [21] Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 43.
- [22] Hallin, *The "Uncensored War,"* 42.
- [23] Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence*, 273.
- [24] Hohenberg, *Foreign Correspondence*, 273.
- [25] Clarence R. Wyatt, *Paper Soldiers: The American Press and the Vietnam War* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 103.
- [26] Browne, *Muddy Boots and Red Socks*, 98.
- [27] Browne, "Viet Nam Reporting," 5.
- [28] Browne, "Viet Nam Reporting," 5.
- [29] Susan D. Moeller, *Shooting War: Photography and the American Experience of Combat* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 390.
- [30] Moeller, *Shooting War*, 372.
- [31] Moeller, *Shooting War*, 394.
- [32] Moeller, *Shooting War*, 387.
- [33] For discussions of the Kennedy administration's attempts to influence press coverage during the Vietnam War, see Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 234–35; and Knightley, *The First Casualty*, 376.
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