

FROM BURNING MONK TO BURNING PUN: THE RHETORICAL
TRANSFORMATION OF SELF-IMMOLATION

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Chapter 1: The Rhetoric of Self-Immolation

Silently and unflinchingly, the Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc sat in the lotus position and burned as Buddhists around him looked on. Malcom Browne, an American reporter, took pictures of Duc's self-immolation. This 1963 self-immolation revealed the oppression of the South Vietnam government, shocked and inspired Americans, and changed the course of the Vietnam War (Skow and Dionisopoulos 395). Possibly inspired by Duc, others began self-immolating in America for different causes and reasons. Two recent self-immolation examples are Daniel Shaull and Cecilia Casals.

"There are animals dying, animals dying," Daniel Shaull yelled before he died in 2010 from self-immolating. Different media analyzed his intentions. The fur commission called him a terrorist and said he tried to enter and burn down a fur store ("Terrorist"). The animal rights movement said he died for animal rights and is a martyr (Young). The Associated Press said he was mentally ill and imply in their articles and in user responses to their articles that he and his family should be given condolences due to Daniel's death (Crombie; Scoggin).

In 2009, Cecilia Casals self-immolated in a mall. While some attempted to help extinguish her, many simply took pictures with their cell phones. Like Shaull, the news

articles mention mental issues as an explanation for the why she self-immolated. But unlike Shaull, there is much less evidence pointing to a specific cause. Still, one news article chose the title “‘Human Torch’ Had Issues Burning Inside” (Wright) to report Cecelia Casals’s self-immolation.

More recently, Mohammed Bouazizi self-immolated in Tunisia to protest economic conditions. As of January 2011, at least thirteen others followed across the Middle East (Rosenburg). This proliferation of self-immolations suggests that the rhetorical implications should be explored because self-immolation involves multiple forms of rhetoric such as body rhetoric, rhetorical discourse, and performative rhetoric. To show this, I connect self-immolation to audience responses that involve body rhetoric and a possible ensuing rhetorical discourse in a reciprocal and transformative relationship that Kristie Fleckenstein has often described in her articles. Due to the intense pain and ensuing death, self-immolation often challenges dominant ideologies, which are culturally instantiated ideas that affect the mass consciousness of a given culture. Thus, self-immolation involves the relationship of communication, rhetoric, ideology, and Micheal McGee’s concept of ideographs. Furthermore, I attempt to elucidate audience responses to self-immolation through mediation, identification, and protest. These attributes form a unique relationship to help elucidate how audiences rhetorically respond to self-immolation.

Self-immolation is complicated by mediated and audience responses to body rhetoric using rhetorical discourse that navigates dominant ideologies in a search for meaning. Even as the audience and media strive to identify what the protest cause is and identify with the protest cause of a specific self-immolation, the cause ultimately moves

beyond reason, studied discourse, and traditional forms of protest since the protest ends in death. The almost guaranteed death, perhaps more than any particular element mentioned thus far, is what gives self-immolation a unique rhetorical urgency unlike other studied rhetorical discourse. While the discourse of living or dead writers and scholars is, has been, and will be rhetorically studied, the need to study and interpret the protest discourse and audience reaction to one who willfully dies to share a message creates an urgency that not only exists through language but also through situated bodies. Both body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse are present in a painful and urgent discourse that must not only be interpreted through the specific cause advocated by the self-immolator but by the life that person chooses to give.

Methodology

My overarching research question is: how and why does self-immolation change from Duc's influential, powerful, and now iconic performance to an instance where self-immolation cause(s) is disputed, mental issues are often the reason, and desensitized responses, such as puns, are frequent? Another important research question is: how do internet discourse and ideologies affect current rhetorical dialogue about self-immolation? Yet another question is: how does the meaning and value of the public body change if self-immolation, one of the most extreme forms of protest due to the excruciating pain and almost guaranteed death it causes to the protestor, fails to be taken seriously? A final research question is: how do the mediation, identification, and protest self-immolation attributes function in online discourse about self-immolation? These research questions guide my inquiry into the transformation of self-immolation; they also concern how audiences perceive self-immolation today.

Audience responses to self-immolation reveal important reflections on body rhetoric such as audience sensitivity to bodies in public pain and in willful death. The death in self-immolation also challenges established Judeo-Christian ideologies about respecting those who have died, for example. Studying the phenomenon of self-immolation in America means that most audiences typically do not often have direct experience with willful, violent, and painful deaths to fire. Thus, audience and media reactions reveal their ability to negotiate, question, and/or uphold marginalized or dominant ideologies; their identification with or sensitivity to bodies willfully welcoming pain and death; their ability to interpret protest causes and personally identify with embodied causes; how mediations contribute to user responses both from the story reported and from interaction with both professional and amateur mediators; and finally how all of the above reactions inform continued rhetorical discourse about self-immolation.

To account for self-immolation in our current digital age, I plan to analyze the discourse of various media and user responses to stories about Daniel Shaull's and Cecelia Casals's self-immolation. Since most media have moved to online locations and have available spaces for users to respond, I look at self-immolation news media that allow for user comments as well as blogs and forums that relate directly to the self-immolation story. Both spaces created on the news media websites for user comments and spaces created for users in different places such as forums and blogs give users the opportunity to potentially engage in rhetorical discourse. I note how these different environments prompt certain responses and attract certain users.

Additionally, I note how the story, in comparison to other stories, portrays the self-immolator and the self-immolation cause, and influences the audience. To consider the self-immolations of Cecelia Casals and Daniel Shaull, I chose websites, articles, and internet pages located in distinct online spaces that prompt a variety of user responses. By sampling a variety of online spaces and articles, user responses represent a diverse internet audience. A diverse internet audience means I have more opportunities to consider, analyze, and compare different mediations and responses to Cecelia Casals and Daniel Shaull.

For Cecilia Casals I consider six website articles that I divide into three categories. One category involves self-immolation stories that reflect the mainstream media; seattletimes.com and justnew.com represent this category. Another category is website articles that give a more desensitized approach to Casals' self-immolation; nbciami.com and a prisonplanet.com forum responding to the nbciami.com article represent this category. The final category has articles that promote a sensitive understanding of Casals' self-immolation; guanabee.com and a blog named "The Trouble with Spikol" represent this category.

For Daniel Shaull, I consider nine website articles that can be divided into four categories. One category contains articles produced by the mainstream media; katu.com and oregonlive.com represent this category. Another category represents the anti-fur campaign; voiceofthevoiceless.com represents this category. A third category represents the fur commission; furcommission.com represents this category. The final category contains unique internet spaces that each have their own niche; dreamindemon.com and reddit.com represent this category.

To analyze the discourse, I count and categorize summarized user responses. However, I also consider responses more specifically and directly quote or paraphrase responses that are more complex than other responses that can be easily categorized. Responses may signify desensitized responses such as the use of puns or humor, adherence to the media's ideology presented in the story, questioning the media's ideology, responding to other users, and more. This part of my methodology is similar to Mary Teresa Seig's discourse analysis of living history museums because I treat applicable user dialogue as a conversation and consider how their meaning is being understood by other users. I acknowledge that this dialogue happens in a particular online space where irresponsible anonymity is a factor for both users responding to self-immolation stories and users responding to those responses. Even though users are anonymous, I still address them as embodied and situated partially based on the online space where they respond and the manner in which they respond.

When I set forth categories and count responses I use a method similar to corpus-based research. Douglas Biber and Susan Conrad explain in "Quantitative Corpus-Based Research: Much More Than Bean Counting" that quantitative language research is not simply about numbers but can indicate behavioral, social, and cultural patterns. While I am counting phrases rather than words and while these phrases go beyond typical corpus based categories, I do set guidelines and examples for how I categorize the responses. By counting and commenting on the number of responses in certain online spaces and by using discourse analysis to understand user responses as embodied, I hope to more accurately and meaningfully analyze anonymous user responses and furthermore

understand how the meaning and influence of responses relates to the self-immolation story and to other user responses.

What I hope to find is a general idea of how audiences are responding to self-immolation, mediations of self-immolation, and what manner of rhetorical discourse proceeds from various online spaces. I want to observe and respond in this research through connections informed by the history of self-immolation I trace and by scholars who have studied rhetorical, social, cultural, and similar phenomenon. Through being informed by a historical, cultural, religious, social, and a theorized view applied to self-immolation, I analyze and consider the implications of current online audience responses to self-immolation stories as a tentative sample representation of audience response to self-immolation. I essentially want to know how and why self-immolation has transformed and what that means from a rhetorical perspective based on audience responses.

In the next chapter I provide a theoretical framework for self-immolation rhetoric. Integral concepts that shape my study are explained and examined in this chapter, such as mediation, identification, and protest. In chapter 3, I give a historical, cultural, and religious context to self-immolation outside of the United States. By looking at India and Buddhist relations to self-immolation, my study encompasses a broader understanding and context of self-immolation. This context enhances our understanding of more recent self-immolations and contextualizes the transfer of self-immolation into America. In Chapter 4, I examine the transfer of self-immolation into America. I also consider the historical, cultural, and religious self-immolation context in America. Additionally, I

provide examples and analyze the most recent American self-immolations. In Chapter 5, I integrate the different self-immolation contexts to analyze the self-immolations of Cecelia Casals and Daniel Shaul. I also analyze online user responses to various articles and online spaces mediating their self-immolations to answer my research questions.

Chapter 2: Theorizing Self-Immolation Rhetoric

To elucidate the current nature of self-immolation and trace the historical transformation of self-immolation, I note attributes that reoccur and define the rhetorical context of self-immolation throughout history, culture, and religion. These attributes are mediation, identification, and protest. Each attribute is interconnected and inseparable from the other attributes, but each one has a separate function that distinguishes it. These attributes also interact through both body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse. The focus then is on the reception of self-immolation and not specifically on the self-immolator, unless focus on the self-immolator helps elucidate the audience reaction.

My central concern is connecting Duc's 1965 self-immolation to the more recent acts in 2009 and 2010. A related question is: how does self-immolation change from Duc's influential, powerful, and now iconic performance to an instance where the cause is disputed, mental issues are often the reason, and desensitized responses, such as puns, are frequent? Self-immolation's transformation may be similar to Kathleen M Jamieson's discussion of rhetorical genre. Jamieson states that the "perception of the proper response to an unprecedented rhetorical situation grows *not merely from the situation but* also from antecedent rhetorical forms" (163). Self-immolation involves a rhetorical discourse and

performance that is transformed through cultural, religious, and historical influences and situations. Former rhetorical forms, such as Duc's self-immolation, may influence current self-immolations. However, the self-immolation also results from a specific situation. After the situation of the specific self-immolation, audiences continue to talk about, mediate, and engage in discourse about the self-immolation informed by ideologies, religion, culture, and more. Audience reaction even changes due to the changing rhetorical situation and from other audience responses around them.

My contention is that body rhetoric induces an audience to engage in continuing rhetorical discourse about the cause of the self-immolator. However, the cause and continuing rhetorical discourse is dependent on the three attributes I mentioned earlier that explicate audience reception. The self-immolator's body and cause can exist without the audience but the cause will not be influential without audience intervention. Although even audience intervention does not guarantee an accurate portrayal of the self-immolator's cause. To better understand the integral but complex audience reaction to self-immolation we first must understand the definition and application of rhetoric I use with self-immolation and the concept of ideologies as they relate to the attributes.

Body Rhetoric and Rhetorical Discourse

In 1997 Randi Patterson and Gail Corning produced an annotated bibliography for rhetorical studies connected to the body. They immediately state that ever since Ancient Greek rhetoric, the body has been implicitly included in rhetoric (5). For example, if in the study of self-immolation I acknowledge there is a body present for each self-immolation then a body is implicit in self-immolation rhetoric. The body is present but only in the sense that a body must burn for self-immolation to occur. Patterson and

Corning then note that French feminists began exploring the body as explicit (5). The explicit study of the body means that the body becomes the subject of critical focus. The body critically considered means that the body, as a material, symbolic, social or historical entity is itself able to attain meaning and value. Corning and Patterson then recognize three fields that rhetoricians can look to when considering different ideas about how the body relates to meaning and value: Philosophy, History, and Sociology. Each field has some influence in my study.

For philosophy, I look at Judith Butler's explanation of performativity which is grounded in postmodern philosophy and sexual identity. Performativity applies to body rhetoric since the material body itself can communicate, have meaning, and respond to language through "a stylized repetition of acts" (Butler 519). Repeated stylized action helps explicate body rhetoric since it is explicitly concerned with what the body does. What the body does refers to anything from what clothes one wears to what one eats to how one acts based on socio-cultural reinforcement. Even beyond the use of spoken or written language, body rhetoric inscribes meaning upon the body and the stylized actions the body engages in. One application of body rhetoric to self-immolation involves how the body acts while burning. For example, Duc sat calmly while self-immolating, Cecelia Casals was reported to have walked very slowly, and some reports say Daniel Shaull attempted to break into a fur store while burning and/or resisted those who tried to extinguish him. The body influences the self-immolation greatly because it inscribes an additional meaning that the protest cause, if one is available, cannot express.

For history, I analyze the self-immolated body situated in different cultures, time periods, and religions. In this trace I note how different self-immolations reveal the value of the body in a given time, culture, and/or religion. For example, India and the United States value and give value to the body differently in part due to Christian and Hindu influences and in part due to ideological cultural influences such as industrialism. In these sections, I consider how the particular audiences react to the self-immolation and what the act of self-immolation means to that culture or religion. By understanding the historically located body with self-immolation, we can observe similarities or differences not only from audience perspectives but from cultural and religious viewpoints. Thus, the body and, by extension, self-immolation can change meaning based on how it is given value and what value it is given in a certain situation.

For sociology, I mostly consider ideologies and Micheal McGee's concept of ideographs. Ideologies, as I will elaborate later, are social, influential, and often powerful constructed ideas instantiated in social situations through attitudes, performances, and more. Thus, ideologies can use the body as a vehicle of influence, meaning, and also power depending on how the body is used and what it is used for. Furthermore, self-immolations are often especially influential due to the shocking, spectacular, and permanent nature of the body burning and the painful death. When I consider Daniel Shaull, for example, I look at different media with different ideologies which attempt to use his self-immolated body and performance as a vehicle for their cause.

Body rhetoric has many more applications to other fields and, therefore, is not limited to the three mentioned here. For example, body rhetoric and the existence of the

body came under question when a post-human consciousness emerged inspired by cyborg and cybernetic studies. These studies consider how entities and relationship systems mesh, such as humans with digital information. They examine if this transforms the relationship between entities and systems, such as what the human body means when constantly connected to digital information. For example, Allison Muri notes how, since the 1980s, the idea of a new cyborg and cybernetic human consciousness had ushered in a disembodied post-human state. At that time, human consciousness was believed by some to have moved beyond the body and into interaction with information due to a perpetual state of connectivity to information, mostly from the internet. If human consciousness is radically changed then it changes how we approach body rhetoric. However, Muri argues that this idea refers to canonical Western Christian narratives about human identity. In other words, the idea is not new so there is no new consciousness. While the increased interaction of humans with information may affect mass consciousness, the idea of a radically different post-human consciousness is unfounded.

While a radically new post-human consciousness does not seem to exist, body rhetoric may still be applied to cybernetic and cyborg studies to determine the degree to which human identity changes for users responding to online information. Therefore, I consider situated bodies that produce responses to online information. Both bodies and the language they use exist and influence each other. However, the internet itself is also influential. For example, because a user may not imagine other situated human users on the internet and/or may disconnect information on the internet from reality, his/her responses may be different than other social interactions, such as face to face interaction.

Internet users have the option to imagine a body or not. Either way, most responses on the internet do not require users to respond responsibly because there are no consequences.

Lack of responsibility from anonymity may contribute to desensitized audience reactions to self-immolation stories and the self-immolator's body. When I consider desensitized audiences, for instance, the focus is on how users value the self-immolator's body and his/her life as well as how they react to the death. Due to mediations typically happening through either TV or the internet, I must also consider cybernetic implications of how bodies are portrayed. While this at first may seem to only involve the audience's body, I apply the concept of online disembodiment and anonymity to the portrayal of the self-immolator's body and the self-immolation performance as well. Therefore, if the users believe they and others involved are anonymous, they may react to the self-immolation with a desensitized and disembodied response. This response may view all bodies involved as disembodied information or even entertainment, particularly for the self-immolator's body.

Does this mean that the internet is a place where no coherent meaning and sensitive rhetorical dialogue happens due to desensitized anonymity? While my study will attempt to answer this question for select self-immolation stories and user responses, I also use Jeff Pruchnic's essay "Rhetoric, Cybernetics, and the Work of the Body in Burke's Body of Work" to provide insight into how the ecosystem and internet are similar through Burkean concepts. I make this symbolic connection due to Pruchnic's awareness of "Burke's project to determine human 'symbolic behavior as grounded in

biological conditions” (287) which I explain shortly. First, Pruchnic considers Kenneth Burke’s application of cybernetics in several of his early works, saying that Burke is “conceiving the world as a meshwork of bacteria and gene in addition to (and before) one of wires and circuits [known as] the Gaia hypothesis: earth as ‘cybernetic system’” (Pruchnic 286). The Gaia hypothesis is another application of cybernetics which emphasizes humans being part of the ecosystem through system pathways similar to human access of digital information. System pathways in cybernetics refer to how one entity, such as humans, are connected within a system such as an ecosystem or a digital environment. The relationship between any two entities is dependent upon the nature of the pathways in a cybernetic system. In other words, all cybernetic relationships within a system do not just depend upon the two entities but also upon the pathways of the relationship. Due to the pathways of the relationships being interconnected with many other similarly connected relationships, both digital and natural environments can be cybernetic systems.

Burke’s cybernetic application also applies to how participants within a system change their relationships. Pruchnic writes that “species and ecological change emerge not from a capacity to endure or overtake but to productively *respond*” (Pruchnic 286). For both biological and digital cybernetic systems, species and users respond to changes. For internet users, any event that questions their personal beliefs and values could result in a change. In particular, self-immolation may question and shock users and thus prompt a response. This response may be informed by Burke’s concept of Incongruity. Incongruity occurs when oppositional elements are compared and then their relationship is transformed. For instance, Pruchnic notices that “Burke’s Perspective by Incongruity

would draw vectors from the seemingly oppositional dynamic of self-direction and interdependence” (Pruchnic 290) when considered with cybernetics. The oppositional “Incongruity” disrupts typical associations and meanings associated with the elements and seemingly forges a new relationship pathway between elements which transforms both.

For instance, “Incongruity” can apply to the ecosystem and the internet. The ecosystem is natural; can exist outside of humanity; is material; and organic. However, the internet is unnatural; is constructed, used, and given meaning solely by humans; is immaterial; and inorganic. However, when the two seemingly opposing ideas are compared, a new relationship pathway can exist that consists of transformed meaning, meaning that meshes the ecosystem and the internet. Both systems produce and react to changes as relationships change. Both react to a complex system of pathways and relationships that consist of communication. My point is that humans may wish to respond productively on the internet due to their “real life” social interactions and connections. The internet and ecosystem, or the natural world, are not just opposing entities. Seen this way, the internet is a place to interpret not just information but shared information. However, this information is available because situated bodied share them. Thus, information is also embodied. The embodied shared information from users and mediation affects how meaning is applied to self-immolation stories. Therefore, I must consider what ideologies mediators adhere to and how or even if these belief systems are disrupted by the radical nature of self-immolation.

Self-immolation is compelling enough to draw in users who are interested in such a spectacular and devastating act. The act also provides an excellent opportunity to

consider how bodies and collaboration happens in rhetorical dialogue or discourse and how those dialogues construct or impede the construction of meaning. Rhetorical discourse, for the purpose of my study, involves constructing meaning online through collaborative dialogue or discourse with mediators, other users in the audience, or mediator information. *Critical* rhetorical discourse is evident when users address fundamental ideological conceptions in American culture either in response to other users or to mediations. Critical rhetorical discourse may also construct meaning with other users in conjunction with their sensitivity to different possible meanings behind a self-immolation. Critical rhetorical discourse may also include considerations of the body that go beyond a reaction to the pain. The relationship between critical rhetorical discourse and body rhetoric should be reciprocal. In other words, the two intensify and give meaning to each other as they react to each other. Fleckenstein considers this reciprocal/recursive relationship and suggests that it is a transformative relationship.

Self-Immolation Rhetoric as Performative “Bodysigns”

The reciprocal and transformative relationship between rhetorical discourse and body rhetoric about self-immolation corresponds to Fleckenstein’s bodysigns. A complete Bodysigns rhetoric involves both “materiality,” which includes bodies, locations, and performances (762) and “semiosis” which includes any patterning of reality such as sign systems, art rituals, even language (762). For self-immolation to be most effective, both the body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse must recursively/reciprocally interact with one another. Body rhetoric refers to Fleckenstein’s materiality and discourse rhetoric refers to semiosis. Recursive action refers to how self-immolation and the body continue to signify each other as distinct but interrelated aspects

of bodysigns. Performative rhetoric, which Fleckenstein refers to as performances, is explored by both John Sloop and Judith Butler and is viewed as integral for a complete rhetorical application to self-immolation.

Butler provides a definition and examples of gender performativity that relate to self-immolation and John Sloop applies gender performativity to rhetoric. First, Judith Butler develops a fluid application of body rhetoric through the concept of performativity. A performative insight into self-immolation can reveal how and why the audiences react to the act of self-immolation itself. These reactions relate to Butler's description of performative gender: "gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceede [sic]; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time-an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (519). Identity, through gender, self-immolation, or other influences, is fluid and constantly being defined through actions. Also, identity, through gender and self-immolation, adheres to dominant ideological conventions. However, gender has a much more established performative history than self-immolation. Thus, it is difficult to judge a self-immolator because there is often no known performative history and because of dominant ideological influence. However, in self-immolation the self-immolator is still performing a protest against some cause, depending on mediation and audience interpretation.

The audience often constructs a meaningful identity from specific performance(s). For self-immolation's one-time performance audiences must often draw more conclusions from their own values and beliefs as do those who give meaning to sexuality. Similarly, Butler recognizes that "the authors of gender become entranced by their own

“fictions whereby the construction compels one's belief in its necessity and naturalness” (522). Audiences may not consider the body by itself but focus more on what the performance means. For example, since self-immolation is not a natural act, audiences may attempt to dismiss the performance by assigning it an explanation they can accept, such as mental illness. Butler addresses a similar issue involving the perception of transvestites in public, saying “one may want to claim, but oh, this is *really* a girl or a woman, or this is *really* a boy or a man, and further that the *appearance* contradicts the *reality* of the gender, that the discrete and familiar reality must be there” (527). When audiences are troubled by a certain public performance, even if they are not familiar with the person, they still want the performance to match expectations they are familiar with. The helps audiences make sense of the act. Therefore, even though self-immolation performances are unlikely to be viewed by audiences as they happen, audiences must still construct meaning through news reports from TV and the internet.

Conceiving the performance online means a change in mediation compared to the eyewitness transvestite example Butler gives. However, Butler has another applicable transvestite example: “the sight of a transvestite onstage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage, even violence” (527). The place that a performance happens can radically change audience reaction. For example, the internet as a place for anonymous internet users to respond to self-immolation may involve desensitized reactions. User reactions may include burning puns and humor even though a human being performed an extremely painful action that resulted in death. Perhaps this reaction happens because an audience must imagine the performance and thus likely alter its meaning to make sense of

it. The performance of a self-immolation, which includes excruciating pain, burning flesh, and willful death, must be difficult for an American audience to fully imagine and empathize with because such an act seems impossible for them to empathize with or witness.

Butler also considers what a body can do, saying that the body is a materiality that has meaning and is dramatic, meaning that the body is “a continual and incessant *materializing* of possibilities” (521). While the image and idea of self-immolation became a possibility with the transference of Duc’s picture, the actual implication and meaning of its performance is not a possibility since it contradicts dominant American ideology. Furthermore, even self-immolation performances like Shaull’s and Casal’s are not typical of Duc or other similar self-immolation performances that possessed a clear and unmistakable cause. This is not to say that Shaull and Casal had no cause, but that the meaning of their more recent self-immolations, when compared to Duc and other protest self-immolations are more difficult to accurately mediate. Considered this way, “the body is a historical situation...and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and *reproducing* a historical situation” (Butler 522).

If Butler’s work is considered in conjunction with Jamieson’s notion of rhetorical genre the fusion creates the understanding that an embodied rhetorical performance may be given meaning and give meaning based on the historical situation. From Duc to Shaull and Casals, the meaning and value assigned to the body rhetoric, rhetorical discourse, and performance of self-immolation changes. To more fully realize the rhetorical application to self-immolation performances, we now consider John Sloop.

John Sloop's introduction to *Disciplining Gender* provides examples of sexual orientation identity conflicts that result from audiences reactions. The person's orientation is body rhetoric both in how he/she looks and how he/she acts and thus relates to rhetorical performativity. Sloop's examples also consider the way audiences rhetorically respond in accordance to specific socio-cultural views of how sexuality should be enacted.

Sloop's goal, like mine, is to investigate how dominant ideologies limit alternatives to thinking about the meanings behind a particular performative rhetoric. His performative rhetoric is gender and mine is self-immolation. While some of what he says is similar to Judith Butler, his application allows us to see that performativity is a rhetorical act infused with meaning both in rhetorical discourse and body rhetoric. Audiences as embodied language users contribute to different rhetorical dimensions of self-immolation and thus can react to performances with their own performances. This also applies to an internet users' use of language in an online response. For example, when audiences react to a self-immolator who may be mentally ill, they question the performed identity of the self-immolator and react both from the rhetorical dimensions of what one should say and what one should do. The performed identity of the audience then affects the cause of the self-immolation if any is available.

While it is possible for someone who is mentally ill to self-immolate for no cause, as is debated with Shaul and Casals, the audience may still apply meaning to the self-immolation that relates to a protest cause. However, it is also possible for the explanation of mental illness to prevent audiences from constructing meaning and searching for reasons for the self-immolation; instead, it might prompt them to perform as they would

to any unfortunate death. The self-immolation performance of someone with mental illness may be dismissed and replaced with an audience performance for someone who painfully died. Specifically, the audience may wish to perform actions such as mourning, grieving, or revering the death and life of the self-immolator and/or an unfortunately mentally ill individual.

The audience then identifies with the cause or lack of one and/or mourns/reveres the death of a person whose performed identity caused his/herself pain and death. Furthermore, the audience may prompt those close to the dead to mourn his/her death. Mourning or revering the dead and the bereaved is one example of an audience performative response to the performance of a self-immolator. The audience is also performing according to socio-cultural ideologies. Judeo-Christian traditions emphasize mourning the dead and respecting the bereaved. To refuse to adhere to this dominant ideology by using desensitized responses like puns, for example, can sadden and enrage others who follow the dominant ideology. It also may silence responses that do not adhere to the dominant ideology. The example of Judeo-Christian tradition for the dead and bereaved assign a certain performance for people to follow. Online discourse is to be considered embodied and thus related to performative rhetorical actions. Discourse/language and body rhetoric through performativity is reciprocal in Fleckenstein's bodysigns also. Yet, this reciprocity is complicated when considering audience responses.

Although performative, self-immolation is not always recursive or reciprocal because the audience may entirely ignore rhetorical discourse or body rhetoric. The loss of rhetorical discourse means the audience must produce meaning in their mediation and

may not identify as effectively. For instance, if the self-immolator's cause is unknown body rhetoric may not prompt rhetorical discourse. The discourse may not happen because rhetorical discourse connected to a cause invites audiences mediating the self-immolation to identify with the protest in self-immolation. This discursive situation involves a rhetorical discourse that speaks through the body rhetoric and the body rhetoric speaks through the rhetorical discourse in a mutually fluid, dynamic, and transformative manner. The discourse continues to speak beyond yet through the pain of the body.

Integral to self-immolation rhetoric is how body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse directly connects to Fleckenstein and her biorhetoric: "From the perspective of a biorhetoric, individuals exist only within the spirals of a particular network of logics joined at a particular moment. They live double: as a single loop but one that constitutes and is constituted by the intricate array of loops within which it is imminent" (780). Each person has their personal networks that necessarily connect to other people's networks so they become one. So a person may also see themselves within the burning body in one moment and immediately afterward seek a meaningful explanation to justify the unnatural pain the self-immolator self-inflicted. The power of body rhetoric in self-immolation is an immediate communal relationship or "spirals/loops of logics."

When speaking of logics, Fleckenstein notes that we shift back and forth between semiosis and materiality: "we constantly shift back and forth between a logic that makes distinctions (semiosis) and a logic that unmakes distinctions (materiality). In human culture, language is the dominant ordering system that parses and arranges material

potential into distinctive units, into names and “not” names... A word or name is treated *as if* it were real. But it is not real. It is, instead, merely a point within an interlaced network of points” (771-772). Similarly, the protest cause is just words, but the self-immolation connection gives the seemingly immaterial protest cause a body to inhabit. The body of the self-immolator thus becomes a place for the protest to exist and then be threatened by an imagined painful opposition that demands the life of the protestor. The person is simultaneously cause and body through recursive movements between semiosis and materiality.

While both cause and a body, the self-immolator sacrifices his/her life physically and possibly symbolically since the body may become the cause and as a personified cause attain empathy for the cause itself. The intense suffering and the consuming fire can be a powerful metaphor if it represents protest opposition since it involves slow, agonizing pain and irreversible damage/death. By envisioning the body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse as recursive/reciprocal one can begin to develop a more holistic understanding of the unique and extreme nature of self-immolation. This recursive nature means the understanding of self-immolation necessarily transforms and takes on different meaning as different cultures, religions, and societies react to it. In American society, self-immolation challenges ideologies and ideographs.

Self-Immolation as Rearticulating/Disarticulating Ideologies

The act of self-immolation has the ability to inspire and/or horrify audiences into challenging and/or questioning dominant ideologies. Ideology applied rhetorically refers to Michael McGee’s notion of the Ideograph. In “The Ideography: A Link Between

Rhetoric and Ideology,” McGee asserts that if any mass consciousness is to exist it may exist in language (4). Since I plan to consider the mass consciousness in America, McGee’s concept of Ideograph is a place to begin considering the relations between dominant ideology and the general public. McGee begins by suggesting that “ideology in practice is a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate public belief and behavior” (5). He then calls the use of political language in ideology “ideographs” (5), thereby establishing that the rhetorical connection to ideology is through political language. Because society is so inundated with these ideographs and because ideographs reflect dominant ideology, McGee contends we are unable to think beyond them: “ideographs— language imperatives which hinder and perhaps make impossible ‘pure thought’— are bound within the culture which they define” (9). However, I believe that self-immolation disrupts dominant ideologies thus giving us, the audience, an opportunity to experience what McGee calls “pure thought” which I call critical rhetorical thought. Additionally, self-immolation invites us to think beyond the use of political language influenced by dominant ideologies and consider how ideographs move beyond language and into the actions of a situated body.

If Fleckenstein’s biorhetoric, performative rhetoric, and body rhetoric are applied to ideographs, then mass consciousness includes a massive amount of situated audience bodies who respond to self-immolation through both the body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse. This understanding of bodies is especially important when analyzing anonymous users who participate in online discourse, particularly since a body is not immediately known or available. I also explore this mass consciousness by not only considering how the American population and various media respond to self-immolation

in online discussions but also by looking at how other cultures and religions historically responded to self-immolation. I am not trying to create a consensus of what self-immolation should mean, but want to consider how the self-immolation attributes of mediation, identification, and protest have moved within different cultures and societies throughout history. Ideographs then become more than political language in ideology or even language in ideology; they become bodysigns in ideology. In other words, when considering ideographs within self-immolation both rhetorical discourse and body rhetoric are represented through the attribute of protest, which may or may not be political. Additionally, through the attribute of protest, self-immolation disrupts dominant ideology.

Kevin Deluca's "Image Politics: The New Rhetoric of Environmental Activism" considers McGee's ideas about how social movements change the meaning of ideographs and affect human consciousness. However, Deluca extends McGee's ideas to state that social movements disarticulate and rearticulate links between ideographs (45). Self-immolation is a social movement because it can inspire others to engage in self-immolation and is a form of protest that can aid social movements. To show self-immolation as a social movement, I look at the influence of Duc's self-immolation on future self-immolators. Historically, self-immolation is a protest and a social movement that advocates causes and uses body rhetoric in a manner that opposes dominant ideologies and thus clashes with the mainstream media.

Drawing upon McGee's conception of ideology, Deluca contends that the mainstream media upholds the industrialism ideology. Industrialist ideology influences the media first through the demand to gain sponsors by receiving good ratings. To receive

good ratings, the news program must entertain their audience but also support the industrialist ideology that both sponsors and audiences often uphold. One example of upholding industrialist ideology is when environmentalist protestors are displayed as disrupting business, violent, and even as terrorists (89). This bias may also explain their attempts to discredit or ignore acts of self-immolation which disrupt consumerism. For example, the media failed to report the self-immolation of Malachi Ritscher because his protest cause spoke against dominant consumerist attitudes.

Even without the media interfering in self-immolations, all audiences imbued in dominant ideology may find it difficult to view or think about self-immolation. For example, Michel Foucault observed that the body is meticulously maintained in our modern times, so it can be devastating to see the body willingly destroyed. Blatantly contradicting industrialist ideological notions to consume and preserve the body, self-immolation invites incredible self-inflicted pain that disorients audiences who are preoccupied with maintaining the body. This means that self-immolation can be received in many different ways at different times when audiences are viewing or thinking about self-immolation. For at least a moment, the audience may be disoriented by dominant ideological assumptions about consuming products and preserving the body. In this moment, they must decide how to react with thoughts that move beyond dominant ideology. The audience may rearticulate the ideology with critical rhetorical discourse, return to the dominant ideology with silence, or even continue to think about the event and react later. Whether the audience continues to consider or decides not to consider, the

body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse of a self-immolation also depends on the self-immolation attributes of mediation, identification, and protest.

Mediation

Mediation involves any transfer and/or reinterpretation of self-immolation body rhetoric and/or rhetorical discourse from one medium to another. For self-immolation, this transfer or reinterpretation can occur through multiple mediums that interact through and with one another. Mediation can involve various media, bloggers, word of mouth, and even photography. The function of mediation is to see how the cause or lack of cause of self-immolation is transferred through language, body rhetoric, and/or image use and is thus rhetorical.

Self-immolation transforms and most certainly becomes political through mediation. Mediation involves relaying discourse, images, and videos through various mediums such as the digital, paper, or even voice. The mediation of self-immolation can often provide information, offer context, or advocate a cause. Mediation contributes to the symbols and attributes that define self-immolation. When considering the symbols and attributes of self-immolation, I employ a form of McKerrow's doxastic rhetoric. McKerrow contends that "rather than focusing on questions of 'truth' or 'falsity,' a view of rhetoric as doxastic allows the focus to shift to how the symbols come to possess power –what they 'do' in society as contrasted to what they 'are'" (104). Symbols within self-immolation and the mediated discourse essentially define self-immolation in a given context through what they are doing. The meaningful function given to symbols

contributes to an understanding of how and why self-immolation is received and what function it plays in society.

While symbols of self-immolation can be considered in a given context, mediation often must analyze, discover, or invent that context. For example, Skow and Dionisopoulos trace the reception of Duc's self-immolation image in America. They say that Americans had no context with which to understand the image and therefore the mainstream media had to provide an explanation. The American media often framed the act of self-immolation to speak against communist oppression (397). However, Michele Murray notes that North Vietnam and China implemented the picture to speak against American imperialism (8). The mediation of self-immolation can be knowingly or unknowingly inaccurate and unreliable due to the influence of ideologies and the use of ideographs. Thus, the audience that is aware of a self-immolation through mediation may identify differently with the self-immolation than eyewitnesses do. This identification happens after the mediation occurs and involves a more personal response. While mediation involves a constructed reaction to self-immolation intended for some audience, identification concerns the individual audience response.

Identification

Identification involves how an audience, including the media, that directly witnesses or mediates the event personally responds to the act. While both mediation and identification are tied to reactions and interpretations of the event, identification is concerned with how the audience is influenced by the act or mediation. For example, identification can involve the audience viewing the self-immolation as potentially selfish or simply tragic hence linked only to suicide. If self-immolation is linked to suicide or an

unknown cause then the identification may end with body rhetoric and often involves sympathy for the person in pain. However, if the self-immolation is linked to a cause, then the audience reacting to the body rhetoric will look to the cause which then may prompt a rhetorical discourse.

Identification is useful when considering how the audience looks beyond or within mainstream mediation and associated dominant ideologies. Particularly when considering user responses to Casals' and Shaull's self-immolations, users have the opportunity to give their own interpretations based on their own knowledge and/or eyewitness experience. While still mediating, the users give a more personal response that challenges the various professional media, especially the mainstream.

Clay Shirky also recognizes this challenge from users in "Here Comes Everybody." Shirky says that the biggest threat to newspapers is amateur journalism. This threatens both the monetary and ideological currency of newspapers (60-61). Many newspapers have migrated to an online form because the demand for printed newspapers is dwindling. The demand is dwindling because the internet provides the media with an inexpensive and essentially unlimited amount of space for text and images. This also means that an essentially unlimited amount of user comments can appear in response to a news report. In these user responses, the audience typically adopts more personal identification that can shape the rhetorical discourse about the self-immolation. While identification and mediation seem nearly the same, the most distinct difference may concern whether the response is professional or amateur. Professionals, according to Shirky, "see the world through a lens created by other members of their profession" (58). Amateurs may necessarily conflict with or adhere to the professional media because of

their ideologies or lenses. However, identification responses can happen for journalists or users; the difference depends on how self-immolation or other users are addressed.

Jay Arnston's application of the Burkean negative can also be helpful when considering the self-immolation attributes of identification and mediation. The negative involves symbols invented by humans to establish significance. Significance establishes meaning to bridge isolation between people. The negative in self-immolation involves ways in which self-immolation discourse and attributes are or are not communicated effectively. The Burkean negative and McKerrow's doxastic rhetoric together form a theoretical and political/cultural frame from which to better understand how self-immolation happens and is responded to in society. In other words, when understood together, both self-immolation attributes/symbols in society and the significance of how and why people use these attributes can be considered. Whether responding through an online self-immolation story or supporting the cause of a self-immolator, audiences of self-immolation have specific connections and identification to the self-immolation that must be defined and explored. One such connection is to identify what the cause is and thus establish meaning for the act of self-immolation and possible rhetorical discourse. Within the rhetorical discourse, the audience then looks to what I call the protest attribute of self-immolation.

Protest

Protest in self-immolation is not necessarily tied to traditional types of protest or definitions of protest. Instead, the function of protest involves how the violent and disruptive nature of self-immolation influences an audience to construct meaning from the self-immolation, often through searching for a cause or explanation. While any

suicide may involve a search for a cause, self-immolation is often more compelling because of the intense personal violence done to the body by fire and the public and spectacular nature of the sight. The inherently violent nature of self-immolation often compels or repels viewers. If compelled, then the audience may come to identify with the cause of the self-immolator. However, if a cause cannot be found, or if mental illness is the only explanation for the self-immolation, then viewers may be repelled, believing the self-immolation is not worthy of further rhetorical discourse.

While self-immolation may not seem related to traditional protest, similarities do exist between non-violent protest and self-immolation. In “Rhetoric of Agitation and Control,” Bower and Ochs section on non-violent protest lends insight into self-immolation. Self-immolators intend no harm to others but just to themselves and are non-violent towards others. Other similarities to self-immolation are revealed through Martin Luther King's insights about the non-violent protestor. Bower and Ochs note that King says the non-violent protestor can expect to suffer and that the body is the dominant symbol in the protest. Still, self-immolation is also much more than traditional protest and thus is similar to image events.

Deluca introduces the idea of an “image event” when examining environmental protesting. One example of an environmental protest image event involves protestors living in a tree to prevent it from being cut down. The protestors embody the perspective of the tree and even risk their own lives for the tree. To show what is needed for a successful image event, Deluca quotes a green peace member who says, “success comes in reducing a complex set of issues to symbols that break people’s comfortable equilibrium, get them asking whether there are better ways to do things” (93). As a

method of protest, self-immolation involves a similarly strong use of image and symbols and can occur in meaningful locations, such as Norman Morrison's self-immolation at the Pentagon (King 127). Whether the self-immolation has a meaningful location or not, the body and consuming flames becomes the symbol that a complex set of issues are reduced to. A willful death that occurs in such a painful manner also "breaks people's comfort equilibriums." Deluca also indicates that "image events challenge... the notion that rhetoric ideally is 'reasoned discourse' with 'reasoned' connoting 'civil' or 'rational' and 'discourse' connoting 'words.'" (14) Similarly, self-immolation and its rhetoric do not exclusively resemble reasonable and traditional protest. However, self-immolation does differ from environmental protests and even image events since self-immolation is typically a stationary act which does not always depend on the location but on the mediation.

As a form of protest, self-immolation emerges between the metaphoric and emotional image event of the environmental protestors and the suffering body symbol King outlines for non-violent protestors. While self-immolation bears similarities to both, it is ultimately a different type of protest that is even more absolute and physically painful due to death. The death in self-immolation does disrupt typical assumptions associated with other common forms of protest. When self-immolation rhetoric is connected to Fleckenstein's bodysigns, the extreme nature of self-immolation functions on an emotional level; the rhetoric moves beyond words and even body rhetoric to create a transformative relationship between the two. However, after the self-immolation can be thought about and the discourse considered, then words and reasoning may happen. Still, the burning body and death influences and perhaps even heightens the discussion, as long

as the audience acknowledges it. To further explore and explain the attributes, the next section elucidates the attributes relationship.

Enacting the Attributes

One example of the three attributes interacting can be found in Aishwarya Lakshmi and Young-Cheon Cho's discussion of the public but private suffering of the self-immolator. Lakshmi argues that in Sati self-immolation, private suffering is made public through the self-immolation itself. This suffering applies to protest because it metaphorically shows their private suffering through public pain and therefore protests the cause of their suffering. Cho extends this idea by saying that the weakness of the disintegrating body is paradoxically also a strength because it stands for the oppressive nature of whatever force opposes the protest of the self-immolation. However, Cho does recognize that personal experiences cannot be known. So while the private experience of the self-immolator cannot be known by the audience, the audience will then try to identify through their own experience by using empathy and/or relating to the cause.

Private suffering can relate to protest because their suffering indicates a personal cause that the self-immolator wishes to protest. However, protest with a private suffering and a private and/or unknown cause may require the audience to interpret the protest cause. Thus, the protest cause is affected by mediation of both the professional mainstream media and by amateurs. However, the public nature of the pain also invites anyone to respond to mediations or to mediate. The public pain can also be considered by itself and the audience may just react to the pain and not form any personal identification with it. However, the entire process of identification with the private pain reinterprets the

pain as public or known to the audience. In that sense the audience, through identification, can embody the self-immolator to a certain extent. The body rhetoric may then encourage the audience to relate it to a protest cause of some sort. This does not have to be a formal cause such as finding a cure for AIDS. It also could reflect the self-immolator's inability to receive care for a mental illness, refer to the status of the healthcare system, and/or reference how a person's life was lost when death could have been prevented. Body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse based on a more personal interpretation involves how identification happens through the mediation. Mediation that happens directly from the protest cause is often associated with professional journalism because a more personal approach suggests bias. However, amateur journalism is often personal.

In amateur mediations, the protest cause can be based on identification. Thus, the self-immolation becomes an embodied performance for a cause. The protest cause meaning can also be shared. Thus, an individual viewing a more personal mediation can also have identification with that mediation and adopt it as well. However, it may not be mediated through identification but just through the protest cause. Mediations can also invite rhetorical discourse about the accuracy of mediations and in particular challenge identification based mediations. For example, in the case of Daniel Shaull there are at least three ideological mediations that conflict with each other and argue for how to react to the protest cause and question even whether a protest cause exists. Complications such as these prompt an explanation of the audience's and mediator's mindset when considering online responses, dialogue, and information about self-immolation. In the

next section, I consider current ideologies that influence mediators and audiences and their perception of self-immolation.

The Current Situation

Despite the possibility of disrupted ideologies, the consumerism that Foucault observes encourages the audience to continue to consume the entertaining violence portrayed in the mainstream media. Jean Baudrillard's "The Violence of the Image" addresses how the audience may, in the process of seeing increasingly more mediated violence, become less sensitive to it. Also, if the audience becomes more and more desensitized, the media may need to report more and more violence to boost its ratings and satisfy viewers. Baudrillard would call this the consumption of banality, a concept that self-immolator Malachi Ritscher addressed and which may have subsequently led the American media to ignore him entirely. Both in the proliferation of violence and the refusal to cover and/or intentionally discredit self-immolation, the media's mediation may attempt to profitably influence the self-immolation even if it possesses additional contradictory information.

Despite the media's attempts to censor, discredit, and/or reinterpret the cause of the self-immolation and preserve dominant ideology, online discussions about stories of self-immolation still involve rhetorical discourse. Here audiences interact with each other and the media. This interaction invites a more critically based discussion which promotes the continuing rhetorical discourse about the body rhetoric of self-immolation. For example, with Daniel Shaull's and Cecilia Casals's self-immolation, online forums question the mediation, audience identification, and protest in self-immolation. By doing

so, they demonstrate self-immolation's innate ability to speak beyond the cause at hand and question even deeper held assumptions about what death means and demands in American culture, how insanity and even emotion contribute to arguments instead of just reason, how the body contributes to arguments instead of just words, how competing ideologies utilize and exploit the body rhetoric of the human body for their rhetorical discourse, and even what the human body is worth and what is its value when consumed for causes.

Based on the potential of critical rhetorical discourse and actual user generated self-immolation rhetorical discourse, my contention is that self-immolation is a unique and powerful rhetorical discourse that implements both body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse to disrupt dominant ideologies. Furthermore, self-immolation goes beyond even the political language of an ideograph and into use of body rhetoric. This charges it with an extremely powerful discourse that provides an opportunity to act outside of dominant ideology even as ideologies attempt to harness the rhetorical influence of self-immolation. Self-immolation is a unique rhetorical discourse that can show how contemporary American society empathizes with public protest and public pain while also providing insight into what news stories the media finds valuable.

However, both professional and amateur mediations can involve a desensitized view of self-immolation by using the self-immolator's body for personal gain such as entertainment or ideological influence. This prompts the question: how does the meaning and value of the public body change if self-immolation, one of the most extreme forms of protest due to the excruciating pain and almost guaranteed death it causes to the protestor,

fails to be taken seriously? This failure may indicate the difficulty to spread protest or the awareness of or engagement in rhetorical discourse. Furthermore, the failure may show a devaluing of the body and an erosion of basic identification with those who publicly experience pain.

While self-immolation may indicate lack of empathetic identification or the need to consume more violence and entertainment, results from my study hint that it may also initiate and sustain critical rhetorical discussion. Still, if desensitization and commodification are becoming more and more widespread in American society, then more extreme performances are called for to jar the mass consciousness from dominant ideographs and ideology. While I do not advocate suicide and the widespread use of self-immolation, I do advocate that the human body in self-immolation be used to question the dominant ideological structures in whatever society self-immolation occurs. I advocate a continuing rhetorical discourse based on a more holistic understanding of language that uses not only language, reason, and words, but a situated, rhetorical, emotionally sensitive, personal body.

While my stance may seem to exploit the body of any self-immolation for a cause as do those who attempt to exploit Daniel Shaull, I critically explicate all causes including my own. Thus, I believe that any self-immolation performance should be given the opportunity to be interpreted in multiple ways and especially through engaging in critical rhetorical discourse which is necessarily recursive/reciprocal and transformative through body rhetoric. I call for rhetorical awareness and critical thought regarding self-immolation instead of desensitized responses or the political exploitation of a self-

immolation body that does not allow for other protest causes and may intentionally limit the meaning self-immolation. If any human being decides to willfully and painfully die in self-immolation, let them not only be remembered and considered for their cause or only mourned for their tragic death. Instead, I advocate that we allow their body and discourse to become a continuous and critical rhetorical discussion that lives on beyond them.

Chapter 3: The Self-Immolation Situation in India and Buddhism

To apply and understand the different instantiations of self-immolation to the relation of identification, mediation, and protest with body rhetoric and rhetorical discourse, I adopt a historical perspective that moves from India and Buddhism into Christianity and the United States. Culture and religion impact the use of self-immolation, but self-immolation can also contradict or paradoxically relate to the religious practice. Thus, self-immolation can even rearticulate ideologies within religion. Self-immolation as historically situated in various cultures and religions further contextualizes and reveals how the attributes surprisingly and repeatedly appear and profoundly influence the audience. For example, India historically ritualized self-immolation through cultural and religious use. However, the Indian government would later struggle with the widespread use of self-immolation.

Self-Immolations in India: Sati and Protest

Self-immolation was once a more prevalent practice in India than it is today. One example was Sati, the religious practice where a widow self-immolated on her husband's

funeral pyre. This cultural and religious practice mimicking the deity named Sati became so prevalent that the Indian government adopted measures to prevent it in the mid to late 1980s. The government added new language to already existing legislation that penalized women who tried to commit Sati self-immolation and others who supported the Sati practice. These new policies enabled the government to close and/or remove sati temples and sacred shrines (van den Bosch 179, 180). However, this ban required the delicate balancing of human, cultural, and religious rights.

The Sati practice, a once strictly cultural and religious issue, then became a political one. The issue addressed the aspect of Hindu society in which the Sati widow “only can choose between physical death or social death” (van den Bosch 187). If a widow refused to self-immolate, then she would be isolated from her social, cultural, and religious community. To change cultural and social attitudes about the Sati practice the government had to “make religion subordinate to more general human principles and restrict the freedom of religion” (van den Bosch 187). This is the first of many conflicts between dominant ideologies and self-immolation. To gauge why the Sati practice was banned and how this relates to self-immolation, the Sati practice is examined from a feminist perspective to better understand the performers and the audience response.

Aishwarya Lakshmi’s “The Liminal Body: The Language of Pain and Symbolism around Sati” critiques the Sati practice from a feminist perspective. She argues that, although the widow’s willful self-immolation testifies that the Sati is still serving her husband even after his death (Lakshmi 86), the widow can transcend the Sati practice in the meaningful spectacle and unique discourse of self-immolation (Lakshmi 92). The widow’s private sufferings are made public. The oppression of her husband and the

cultural/religious practice is symbolically witnessed in the nature of self-immolation. Self-immolation contains an emotional dimension that compels those witnessing it to experience both horror and empathy for the person self-immolating, leading to identification. Perhaps this identification, which protests against the oppressive religious/cultural Sati practice, inspired the Indian government to take proactive measures against Sati self-immolation. Protest for the Sati is more related to identification than mediation, especially when also considering the English travelers who witnessed the Sati self-immolations.

Monika Fludernik notes that English travelers writing of the Sati were also profoundly influenced by protest through their identification with Sati self-immolation: "witnesses of suttee are obsessed with the woman, with her body (her youth, beauty, health) and with her agony which they can only vaguely and thrillingly imagine" (430). The beauty of the Sati widows implicitly protests against the oppressive Sati practice since self-immolation's real violence and suffering can symbolize the cultural and religious oppression of the widow. This implicit protest may further explain what prompted the Indian government to outlaw the Sati practice. Note also that the English travelers misread symbols associated with the rhetoric of the self-immolation. English travelers did not understand the widow's faithfulness or sorrow for her husband but instead are fixated upon the lost youth and beauty. This confused and inaccurate audience reaction to a self-immolation applies to when Duc's self-immolation was introduced to the United States audience. Since the English travelers were fixated upon the pain and loss of beauty, but did not necessarily understand the deeper cultural implications, their

response seems to be a reaction to body rhetoric which does not prompt rhetorical discourse.

Young-Cheon Cho, in “The Body in Pain in the Public Sphere: Embodiment, Self-suspension, and Subaltern Couterpublics” also recognizes the complicated pain aspect of self-immolation. He says that “the political and perceptual complications surrounding the body in pain come at least partially from the difficulty of expressing physical, private pain: Words can be exchanged, experiences cannot” (12). The disconnection between trying to understand the public but private experience of pain can encourage identification and prompts the audience to try to understand why the self-immolation happened. Cho considers the suffering body within private and public rhetorical dimensions which immediately relates to the English travelers’ reactions to the Sati. The body in pain can form a deep and powerful identification with an audience that feels empathy for the sufferer’s anguish (Cho 8). This identification may be emotional and sudden, but the body still functions as a persuasive language itself (Cho 10). Even if the self-immolation does not prompt rhetorical discourse, identification with the self-immolator’s body in pain is still powerful.

Cho also addresses the weakness of the body in self-immolation as a form of protest: “The spectacle of the immolator’s disintegrating body becomes an indirect argument subverting the superior power by making it morally culpable before the larger community of witnesses” (Cho 22-23). Physical weakness paradoxically becomes strength. Self-immolation simultaneously empowers and destroys the body through the unique discourse produced by the self-immolation itself. This can encourage the audience

to identify with the self-immolator. The violent act may metaphorically show the oppression of the greater power. For example, those who oppose India's Sati practice may see a symbolic power imbalance between genders through the painful and devastating nature of self-immolation.

The Indian government was also concerned with other instances of self-immolation. In particular the SSMH (Sanjivini Society of Mental Health) "advised the press to refrain from glorifying such acts [self-immolation]" ("Suicide" 2392). 150 instances of self-immolation occurred in the early 1990s in the form of student protests. The government believed the media was partially to blame for the sudden spike in protest inspired self-immolations, thus indicating that mediation may have profoundly influenced self-immolation and inspired future self-immolators.

Mediation is integral to the Indian government because of its potential to spread, limit, and even introduce context that fits a specific agenda. Raymie McKerrow, in his "Critical Rhetoric: Theory and Praxis" explains the effect of mediation on discourse as "no longer the simple property of a speaker-audience relation" (101). To witness the way in which self-immolation speaks, we must consider mediated communication: "to approach mediated communication as rhetorical is to see it in fragmented, unconnected, even contradictory or momentarily oppositional mode of presentation... to construct addresses out of the fabric of mediated experience prior to passing judgment on what those addresses might tell us about our social world" (101). There is not only audience and speaker but intervening forces that reveal how the discourse of self-immolation, for example, is related to social, cultural, or religious practices. This means we must consider differences and influences between and within self-immolation eyewitnesses, the self-

immolator, the media audience, the media, and even the cultural and social opinions to self-immolation prior to a specific circumstance of self-immolation. Differences between audiences, mediators, and mediations greatly influence the perception, meaning, and content of discourse within certain self-immolations.

The relation of self-immolation to Sati and the Indian government demonstrates the complex self-immolation attributes corresponding to mediation and the audience reaction. First India and then later the United States recognized the power of self-immolation depending on the nature of the mediation it receives. In the case of the Indian government, mediation can either limit or extend the intentional or accidental message of the self-immolator through rhetorical self-immolation discourse. Also, a self-immolation can be either horrifying or inspiring based on the audience and their context. While the Sati is a religious/cultural practice that encourages self-immolation, other religions, such as Buddhism, do not allow it but have nevertheless had a complex relationship with self-immolation.

Buddhist Monks

While Buddhism does not permit self-immolation, there are some exceptions. Buddhist monks have self-immolated for reasons such as worship, to attain enlightenment (Fraser 29), or to stop a drought (Benn 311). Yun-hua says that, although suicide is forbidden, over 50 monks have attempted or achieved self-immolation. However, historians like Hui-chiao used “terms which literally mean to abandon or lose the body” (Yun-hua 244) to describe the action. Self-immolation was not considered suicide. Instead, the acceptance of self-immolation in Buddhism depends on the reason one self-immolates and whether others are able to accept the reason as worthy of self-immolation.

Thus, Hui-chiao says that “self-immolated monks, whatever might be the manner of their unnatural death, are worthy beings provided that they died from noble motives” (Yun-hua 261). He would also say that even though the act is wrong monastically, the intention is noble. This Buddhist interpretation contrasts with Hinduism in which one might selfishly self-immolate to reach the heavenly land of Brahma or in Taoism where one would achieve immortality (Yun-hua 254).

However, Buddhist self-immolation was influenced by politics and power struggles around the time of the Vietnam War in the 1960s. Some questioned the political application of self-immolation in militant Buddhist protest, saying it was a perversion (Fraser 28). However, self-immolation is judged as either a perversion or worthy and inspirational depending on the audience and the historical situation. Thus, not just historians and Buddhists, but United States citizens would soon become an audience. So then, cultural mediation gives meaning to the transformation of self-immolation as self-immolation potentially transforms the culture. This happens even between the Buddhist and Sati understanding of self-immolation.

Buddhist self-immolation involves the self-immolator’s discourse through self-immolation, which is more intentional than the possible implicit self-immolation protest demonstrated with the Sati body destruction and audience identification. The difference between self-immolation as suicide or sacrifice in Buddhism is how the audience understands the self-immolation protest cause as opposed to Sati ideologies in India where the self-immolation is ritualized. The Indian government may see self-immolation as an ideology but for Buddhism and later the United States, the historical situation and the manner of the self-immolation determine how the self-immolation is mediated due to

the changing historical context. However, the audience may also misread or not believe the cause is necessary for a self-immolation. For instance, the English travelers witnessing the Sati self-immolation experienced horror and identified with the body rather than the widow's cultural meaning of the act.

The English travelers were forced to create their own associations with and meaning for the self-immolation. Burke would call this the negative. The negative, according to Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives*, is invented by humans and establishes symbolic significance between humans. Self-immolation is negative since it is not natural to die by fire and especially not by one's choosing: "Self-immolation emphasizes this absence of life as the negative by emphasizing the willful attempt of sacrificial suicide. What this means is that self-immolation disrupts the order people tend to identify with suicide to establish meaning" (Arntson14). Self-immolation is often viewed as suicide when the intentions are not known to the audience or the media. While suicide is necessary for self-immolation, only considering self-immolation as suicide may disconnect the self-immolator from his/her protest cause or suggest that no cause existed at all. However, to term self-immolation a protest or a sacrifice gives additional meaning to the self-immolation by suggesting that the self-immolator had forethought. Suicide by itself can often quell any sort of possible rhetorical discourse since the protest cause may be easily overlooked, although body rhetoric identification is still possible.

Burke's ultimate nature of identification described in *A Rhetoric of Motives* also corresponds with the paradoxical self-immolation attribute: "identification attains its ultimate expression in mysticism, the identification of infinitesimally frail with infinitely

powerful” (326). Cho and Burke notice that the influential and integral attribute of self-immolation reconciles and synthesizes seeming opposites into a paradox. The beautiful horror of the Sati body which inspires identification and the forbidden alongside the circumstantially acceptable self-immolation practice in Buddhism are similar paradoxes that define self-immolation. Much like Burke’s concept of Incongruity and the relationship of bodysigns, self-immolation connections most likely transform the relationship between the self-immolator, his/her protest cause, and the audience. Therefore, self-immolation as an act would be transformed as Duc’s self-immolation is transferred to, given meaning, and performed by audiences in the United States.

The Mediation of Self-Immolation from East to West

The transfer of the idea of self-immolation from the East to the West occurred by photograph. In 1965, Thich Quang Duc, a Buddhist monk, self-immolated to protest the South Vietnam government banning the Buddhists from flying their flag. While Duc silently and unflinchingly self-immolated, Browne, a reporter, took the famous pictures. The emotional impact of the self-immolation heavily influenced Americans and American politics (Skow and Dionisopoulos 393-395). Frederick Nolting, American ambassador to South Vietnam, said “‘Browne’s photograph... shocked the world,’ and turned American public opinion ‘firmly against President Diem.... Browne himself, observes similarly that the ‘spectacular self-immolation of the Buddhist monk made headlines, helped to bring down a government, changed the course of a war and found a place in the history books’ (Skow and Dionisopoulos 395). The American public was not culturally and experientially aware of such an act and therefore “it fell to the American print media to provide a context — or encompassing structure — within which these

dramatic, but alien, images would take on rhetorical meaning” (Skow and Dionisopoulos 396). The contextual understanding gave one of two politically charged reasons for the self-immolation: a communist power struggle or a struggle for religious freedom against the communists (Skow and Dionisopoulos 397). For either reason, the people of the United States lacked a complete context: “the background knowledge and ‘points of view’ of the American audience were insufficient to contextualize these images and instill them with rhetorical meaning” (Skow and Dionisopoulos 404-405). Americans were culturally unfamiliar and shocked with the immediately emotional and seemingly violent act of self-immolation. Therefore, they demanded an explanation.

As evident from the Indian government’s awareness of the media’s influence on self-immolation, media is integral to the transmission of self-immolation. But the media may also influence the self-immolation itself, as did the Indian media’s glorification of self-immolation. Naturally then, Duc’s self-immolation was strongly influenced and sometimes exploited by the media. Duc’s self-immolation was not only mediated by Americans but by other countries that used the pictures to implement their own political agendas. Murray notes that “both the Chinese and North Vietnamese governments used the photograph of Quang Duc’s immolation as evidence of the horrors of American imperialism” (21). Also, much like the Indian government, the South Vietnam government increased censorship (Murray 8), recognizing the power of Duc’s image to inspire others to oppose the Diem government. Thus, the powerful and iconic image of Duc transformed Vietnam war protest in the United States.

Chapter 4: The Self-Immolation Situation in America

Before moving into American protest we have to situate self-immolation as protest associated with a cause. When self-immolation first was adopted from Duc, it often did resemble the influential, clear-caused protest Duc used. To situate self-immolation as protest I synthesize both Deluca's insights into environmental protests and Bowers and Ochs discussion of non-violent protest to determine where self-immolation may fit among other types of formal protest to better understand its influence in America.

Identification, Mediation, and Protest of Self-Immolation in America

Duc's self-immolation was shocking to the American public. This is similar to Deluca's observation about environmental protest image events: "they are crystallized argumentative shards, mind bombs, that shred the existing screens of perception"; they even open up possibilities to think previously unthinkable thoughts (Deluca 12). To self-inflict and willingly suffer intense pain and die for a cause through self-immolation is certainly something new that was contributed to the mass consciousness of America. This "mind bomb" was inspirational to protestors at the time. What Duc's self-immolation

demonstrated was that much press time and effort was spent on just one person's message.

As mentioned before, the picture of Duc was difficult to contextualize. This signaled one danger of self-immolation as formal protest. The difficulty of having to think so critically and question such a painful act meant that viewers may not want to see or read about self-immolation because it is difficult to process such a violent act. This is one way in which both self-immolation and environmental protest go beyond their cause through bodies: "bodies simultaneously are constructed in discourses and exceed those discourses" (Deluca 20). The willful destruction of the body in such a painful manner is disruptive of dominant ideologies. Thus, the audience is burdened with rearticulating the ideology or dismissing the self-immolator and his/her cause. Certainly, any kind of protest that is opposing dominant ideologies can seem hostile and/or confusing. But self-immolation is possibly hostile and confusing to an even greater degree due to the extreme nature of the self-inflicted pain and the resulting death.

Difficulties associated with self-immolation and audience reception are only the beginning of difficulties for the protest. The mainstream media must also mediate the cause and often does so to benefit the ideologies that support them, such as industrialism. For both self-immolation and environmental protestors, who disarticulate industrialism, this presents a difficulty. Deluca notes that the media doesn't explain the exact cause of the environmental protestors, interview them, or even cover them favorably, so the protestors must strategically use their bodies as the focal point of their argument (Deluca 10). While self-immolation is always an image event and uses the body, the cause is not

always mediated. Additionally, self-immolation must rely even more on the media because the protestor only has one chance for their message to be mediated, unlike the more creative body-centered environmental protests.

One example Deluca gives of creative body protest involves the environmental group “Earth First!” which stayed up in a tree to save the tree. Their body positioning essentially allows them to become like the tree, to see from the tree’s perspective, and to invite viewers to see from their perspective and challenge assumptions (13-14). In self-immolation, the protestor embodies whatever their message is and therefore promotes identification or personal empathy with their suffering. Thus, audiences can identify with the protest cause. While both are image events, self-immolation as a protest is again much more reliant on the media because the protest cause becomes what the flames symbolize rather than the protest cause being more obviously integrated into the protest itself.

Self-immolation is certainly similar in some ways to environmental protest. However, it also bears some similarity to traditional non-violent protest. Due to self-immolation’s more symbolic nature and impersonal style of confrontation, it is similar to nonviolent protest in which “a non-violent resister directs all his attention at flag issues, none at flag personnel” (Bowers and Ochs 32). With protest directed at the cause, self-immolation can be seen as primarily symbolic rather than dangerous or violent to the audience.

Also, both self-immolation and non-violent protest share dominant symbols: “the dominant symbol in nonviolent resistance, the body of the agitator, is on the natural end

of the continuum” (Bowers and Ochs 33). While the act of self-immolation is not natural in the traditional sense, the body becomes a possible symbol of the self-immolator protest cause. However, self-immolation, like non-violent protest still prompts people to question why someone engages in self-immolation: “according to the theory of agitators, this supplying of the answers should result in the involvement of the audience in the movement” (Bowers and Ochs 33). Self-immolation’s shocking nature creates an audience demand for explanations and answers. Thus, the audience is involved in the rhetorical discourse of the protest.

However, self-immolation is notably different than non-violent protest. Dr. Martin Luther King said that non-violent protest is a “willingness to accept suffering without retaliation, to accept blows from the opponent without striking back... to accept violence but not inflict it” (Bowers and Ochs 31). While self-immolation willingly accepts suffering and violence, self-immolation is self-inflicted violence. Thus, self-immolation is similar to but different from the body protests of environmental protestors and non-violent protest. Self-immolation then can be said to be a unique body rhetoric involving suffering and death by fire that symbolizes the opposition of their protest cause to engage the audience in rhetorical discourse about the protest cause. This protest would emerge in many different religions and protest causes in the United States.

America, if thought of religiously, is generally perceived as a Christian nation. After the photograph of Duc reached the United States, some Christians protested by self-immolating. Like Buddhism, the use of self-immolation is surprising since self-immolations have not widely occurred in the Christian faith because it equates to the forbidden act of suicide. Surprisingly, Christianity had a brief history of heavy self-

immolation use in Russia where the link between self-immolation and suicide was challenged. Over 20,000 self immolations occurred as part of the "Old Believer" movement (Robbins 2). This 17th-century forceful religious change prompted martyrdom through mass self-immolation because the apocalypse was feared. Orthodox Christians wished to peacefully yet violently resist because the changes disrupted their communities which were anchored in centuries of what was now viewed as heretical beliefs (Robbins 6). Self-immolation enabled the Orthodox Christians to achieve martyrdom and maintain their identity and faith with fellow Christian believers.

Similar to Hui-chiao's interpretation of Buddhist monks' self-immolations as acts of martyrdom, the "Old Believer" self-immolation movement did not view the act as suicide but as martyrdom. These self-immolations are also similar to the Sati self-immolations in that real religious and social consequences affected those who refused to self-immolate. The religious change meant that they would either give up their particular religion or die a martyr with fellow believers. Yet another implication is that the self-immolations happened as a form of protest. Their defiant self-immolations may have only been focused on those who enforced the religious change but the act also affirms their shared faith and martyrdom with other believers. For the Russian Orthodox Christians, self-immolation allowed them to defy the greater power of the oppressor while also maintaining their identity with the group they represent and also possibly inspire others in the group to self-immolate.

The self-immolation of Norman Morrison, an American Quaker, is a more modern example of a Christian self-immolation. Morrison said to his wife "Know that I love thee but must act for the children of the priest's village" (King 128). His self-

immolation protest focused on the terrible destruction of a Vietnamese village hit by an American bombing. In this case, self-immolation involved virtues, such as opposing injustice or supporting life and peace. But it was also a protest based on religious principles, as were the Christian Orthodox self-immolators.

A significant self-immolation controversy occurred between Vietnam War protestors Alice Hertz and Dorothy Day. Alice Hertz self-immolated to protest the Vietnam War and violence while Dorothy Day encouraged peace and nonviolence through other means. Day did not agree with Hertz's method of protest: "She [Day] could not bring herself to accept such actions, in part because they contradicted her insistence that nonviolent commitment should be an essentially undramatic affair" (Ryan 23). Ryan agrees that self-immolation itself may be concerned with emotional and possibly deceptive motives (29). Self immolation may immediately lend itself to skepticism and scrutiny because it seems so rash and sudden.

Still, Dorothy Day could not condemn self-immolation because she recognized the sacrifice and suffering in self-immolation formed a shared empathetic perspective demonstrating the destruction of violence and war (Ryan 32). Hertz's self-immolation immediately displays a type of violence even though it protests violence and encourages an understood oneness of bodies connected through empathy (Ryan 34). An audience can empathize with the suffering and understand the need for non-violence after seeing the symbolic yet real violence firsthand. As in the Sati self-immolation practice, self-immolation can elucidate cultural, religious, and power structures through the discourse of self-immolation in and through the context.

While religious, cultural, and historical understandings help elucidate the nature of self-immolation, the physical and social natures of the body as a power structure and as a medium must also be considered. Foucault argues in *History of Sexuality* that the body is valued differently than in the past, especially considering death: “this formidable power of death...now presents itself as the counterpart of a power that exerts a positive influence on life, that endeavors to administer, optimize, and multiply it, subjecting it to precise control and comprehensive regulations” (Foucault 303). The body is regulated because more consumable items and research are dedicated to preserving it. The resources related to preserving the body involve bio-power and are “giving rise to infinitesimal surveillances, permanent controls, extremely meticulous orderings of space, indeterminate medical or psychological examinations, to an entire micro-power concerned with the body” (Foucault 309). This regulation and meticulous body maintenance makes self-immolation more potent because it can show the body utterly and violently destroyed. The symbolic power of the body is suddenly and violently annihilated.

Self-immolation is repeatedly shown to be seemingly contradictory and paradoxical in performance and reception related to religion and traditional protest. Although imbued in death, self-immolation can even affirm life, as Hertz’s self-immolation did. Although suicide or self-immolation is outlawed in many religions, adherents of different religions still may practice self-immolation and encourage others to support them, or even join them. Thus, an audience may even suddenly and compellingly identify with self-immolation despite dominant ideologies typically barring them from an action like self-immolation. While self-immolation may disrupt ideologies in our current

times, the responses to self-immolation in American seem to change yet again when considering mediations of and audiences' response to self-immolation reported online.

A Contemporary Understanding of Self-Immolation

Identification with self-immolation may have changed recently since audiences often tend to be more desensitized to violence. This desensitization surfaces in puns about fire and attempts to attribute self-immolation to mental illness, even if another possible cause is involved. If the audience seems to be unable to empathize with the self-immolator, who employs the most extreme of protests and public discourses trying to inspire change, then the rhetorical value of the body and protest discourse may be insignificant. To explore exactly why and how self-immolation identification with protest discourse has changed, some contemporary examples of self-immolation are examined.

When Malachi Ritscher, a consistent protestor for some time, self-immolated on Chicago's Kennedy expressway in 2006 the media did not seem to notice. Despite this being a very public self-immolation of a relatively well-known protestor, it took three weeks before the U.S. media reported the incident according to the British *Guardian* news blog. Ritscher left a detailed, thoughtful note protesting war and pedantic politics, but also included reflections on his life and more. Ritscher also said in his note that we, as Americans, are "more concerned with sports on television and ring-tones on cell-phones than the future of the world" (Weaver).

Apparently in this case, the intention of the self-immolator may have failed to be communicated to the audience because the protest cause would disrupt industrialist

ideology: "Ritscher's immolation upsets the very hierarchy in which American perceptions typically privilege the banality of American life, interested only in cell phone tones over the sanctity of Iraqi civilians" (Arntson 15). This disrupted hierarchy may also explain MSNBC's views: "Ritscher's performance is understood as either an act of mental illness or an act performed by an unrealistic and impractical martyr" (Arntson 12). As a business, news media must cater to the specific needs of the audience. If self-immolation is an unsavory topic based on its difficult, violent, and emotional nature, then the mainstream press can choose to simply ignore and/or discredit it, especially if the protest cause disrupts ideologies the mainstream media depends on to receive funding.

Kevin Deluca made similar observations when examining how the media reacts to environmental protestors who also disrupt the banality of human life. However, for Deluca the media are engaged in more than just privileging the "banality of American life:" "as participants in and promoters of a dominant ideological perspective, the media are an ideological state apparatus designed to produce a citizenry that accepts the existing economic and social power relations" (87). The media not only accept the banality of consumption but support and defend the ideology. Furthermore, due to their involvement in the ideology, the media view the "world itself through the discourse of industrialism ...they acknowledge contradictions and challenges to the dominant ideology but only within the parameters prescribed by the dominant ideology" (89). The media needs good ratings and commercial advertisements to generate revenue. Thus, the news media may support the system that allows it to exist; they may even do so without being aware of it. After all, McGee claims the ability to think "pure thoughts" beyond ideographs is seemingly impossible (9). By ignoring or discrediting self-immolations such as Ritscher,

who speaks against materialism, the media may avoid prompting the audience to think in ways that may disrupt ideologies that produce their revenue. This ideology may then desensitize the audience since it needs to report stories that only agree with their ideology, such as entertaining stories to support their ratings.

If stories like self-immolation are mediated because of their entertainment value, then the audience may be desensitized. Jean Baudrillard's consideration of real and perceived violence is useful in explaining this phenomenon. Baudrillard's "Violence of the Image" defines three different types of violence. One is the real primary form of violence that is physical. The second is the historical, critical, and negative violence. The third is altogether different from the other two and involves a pervasive violence that is both unreal and real. One example of the third type involves technology and the violence on the screens which "has a neutralizing power, counterbalancing the direct effect of the violence on the imagination...I would say: the violence of the third type annihilates the violence of the first and second type - but at the price of a more virulent intrusion in the deep cells of our mental world" (Baudrillard). Society in general may be exposed to this violence even though it is not of a physical nature. Instead it influences the mind, making real violence less shocking. What Baudrillard describes is the process of becoming desensitized to violence.

Baudrillard also notes how the unreal violent nature of the image can especially occur in the media: "particularly in the case of all professional of [sic] press-images which testify of the real events. In making reality, even the most violent, emerge to the visible, it makes the real substance disappear" (Baudrillard). The average American's overexposure to violence in media through movies, video games, and the news detracts

from the impact of violence. Particularly in news stories, which present the real experience of violence, the effect is dissipated by the mediation of screens and the analysis of what happened. The audience is made to believe they are closer to the real experience of the violence when news analysis, experts, limited still photographs, and the matter-of-fact tone of news anchors actually further removes them. Mediation, which the Indian government had feared was a powerful influence for the use of self-immolation, may actually detract from the impact of self-immolation in America. This desensitized reaction may not only influence the audience, but also the actions of self-immolators such as Kathy Change.

Kathy Change self-immolated in 1996 and said “call me a flaming radical burning for attention, but my real intention is to spark a discussion of how we can peacefully transform our world” (“Who Was”). While her pun may have triggered more insensitive responses to her self-immolation than Morrison or Hertz self-immolation received, she still died for a cause. However, Wikipedia describes her as committing suicide instead of dying for a cause (“Kathy Change”). Like Ritscher, self-immolation is possibly more and more understood as suicide before it is considered a sacrifice or dying for a cause. This differs greatly from the Chinese historians who termed worthy self-immolations as “losing the body.”

From the term “losing the body” to the puns “flaming radical” and “sparking a discussion” self-immolation has certainly transformed. “Losing the body” suggests a more sacrificial tone and describes self-immolation as acting upon the person. Change’s term “flaming radical” suggests her personal political approach to self-immolation while

“sparking a discussion” suggests what she wants from the self-immolation. For Kathy Change, her views and intentions, rather than the self-immolation, are paramount. Notice Hertz and Morrison never personally reveal information about themselves but seem to embody the virtues or vices they upheld or protested and also are more specific about the causes they are dying for. By focusing on herself, Change’s self-immolation bypasses the paradoxical and rhetorical attributes that the self-immolation has on the body. Punning both of the phrases may seem to be effective ways to reach out to a desensitized audience but then the rhetoric exists only in her words. If the self-immolation is not seen and thus the public but private pain of the body cannot be seen to speak, then her self-immolation cannot be as clearly influential as those before her. The self-immolations of Daniel Shaull and Cecelia Casals also demonstrate that self-immolation is not always clearly articulated and/or influential.

Chapter 5: The Self-Immolations of Daniel Shaul and Cecelia Casals

When examining the cases of Cecelia Casals and Daniel Shaul I first summarize the background of their stories and their respective mediations. Then I analyze specific results from different websites related to the respective self-immolation. Finally, I critically analyze the self-immolation based on various mediations and user responses. I hope to understand exactly how online users react to professional mediations online and conclude by considering what this means for the rhetoric of self-immolation.

Daniel Shaul

In late January 2010 Daniel Shaul self-immolated in front of the fur store “Nicholas Ungar Furs” while yelling “there are animals dying! Animals dying!” (Song). According to different websites and user responses the story happens with a few variations. I will examine each variation and analyze how the variations affect mediation, protest cause, and audience identification. One variation involves Shaul attempting to break into “Nicholas Ungar Furs.” Another variation claims he self-immolated near the store and then began running and screaming for someone to help him. Also important to the story is how a police officer mistook a can of mace for a fire extinguisher when

attempting to help Shaull. Other variations of what Shaull did include him either screaming nothing or screaming about the end of the world. The variation that Song reports is most popular; this variation involves him yelling about animals dying. The Portland anti-fur campaign would often protest in front of the store; they denied any association with Shaull saying, “it is really unfortunate that one would feel as if they must take such drastic measures, yet, this Fur Store has continued their bloody business despite protests outside for 3 years now” (Song). This response seems strangely self-serving and suspicious since the campaign used the self-immolation as an opportunity to protest the “bloody business” of the store. Still, Shaull had never been an animal rights activist but did have a history of suicidal issues. Since suicidal issues and mental illness appear to be the only conceivable explanations for self-immolation from the mainstream media, the purpose of this self-immolation was not further investigated and the story is about a suicide.

Like Ritscher’s and Change’s self-immolation, Shaull’s self-immolation is not fully explored. Ritscher received no help from the news media, Change’s self-immolation is viewed as suicide, possibly because her pun focused on her personal political nature, and Shaull certainly has a cause, but it is not known exactly what it was. Also it is not known whether the Portland anti-fur campaign may have manipulated Shaull and even the self-immolation act in the process. For the Sati, Buddhist monks, and even early American Vietnam War self-immolations, self-immolation was more of a premeditated personal performance with specific cultural or religious significance. However, if the Portland anti-fur campaign did manipulate Shaull, then self-immolation can be a tool for political power and influence.

While Shaull's self-immolation cause is unknown, what some report he said before self-immolating certainly supports the cause of Portland anti-fur campaign. And while the Portland anti-fur campaign regrets his death, they did mention not only their cause for protest but that their protest has a three year history. Unfortunately, the confusing purpose and the possible manipulation behind Shaull's self-immolation means the audience cannot empathize with the self-immolator and must view mental illness and suicide as the primary explanation.

Another problem with the media portrayal of the incident is similar to the problem that Deluca notes with image events: the mainstream media describes what is happening rather than explaining what it means (92). Therefore, motives and other possible connections are not connected to Shaull. The mainstream media may even purposefully not further investigate Shaull's death because it may be connected to the protest of a fur company which opposes the Industrialist idea that all of earth is a commodity to consume. My research on the online discussion of Shaull's death also reveals the media's tendency to censor and prompt and threaten to delete user comments that fail to adopt their stance of how everyone should feel sympathy for the family and Shaull's death, especially since they claim he was insane. This censorship happens on the oregonlive.com website when one user engages in critical rhetorical discourse.

In addition to the mainstream media advocating their agenda under the façade of neutrality, other media like the Animal Rights movements and the Fur Commission advocate their agenda. Once again, this is similar to Deluca's observations about the media coverage of environment protestors. Deluca notes that the media's reports on Earth First, an environmental protest group, implement war terms. They call the protestors

terrorists, indicating that they are believed to be very harmful, and say they are outlaws (16). While the mainstream media calls Shaull insane, the fur commission calls him a terrorist, and the Animal Rights movement calls him a martyr. The study of Shaull's self-immolation illustrates the intersection of influential ideologies with different agendas, each of which carefully chooses its tone.

Depending on the information included, the viewpoint of the mediator can be gleaned and thus the influence on the audience considered. Important information includes whether Shaull was only insane or suicidal, whether the location where he self-immolated was reported and whether he tried to break into the fur store, whether Daniel died for or intended to die for a specific cause, whether the police officer who mistook a mace canister for a fire extinguisher is mentioned, whether Shaull's father is established as a credible source, and whether Shaull is recognized as a vegan or related to any anti-fur groups. I also note how the article ends. This sets the tone for the reader to consider the self-immolation of Daniel Shaull and can heavily influence rhetorical discourse.

To begin, I consider the website "The Dreamin Demon" which reports true stories that reflect how crazy and horrific the world is. Setting a tone of dark humor that is evident throughout the website, the article about Daniel Shaull is titled "Daniel Shaull Was All Fired Up." The article itself quotes Daniel Shaull screaming about how "The world is ending" before he says animals are dying. This is the only instance in which Shaull is reported to have said this among the other articles I analyze. The inclusion of it obviously favors the explanation that Shaull is insane. Shaull is also reported to have tried to enter the fur store. Also, Shaull's father reports that his son had mental issues and

does not believe political factors influenced his final words. Yet, more than half of the article focuses on how the police officer mistook the mace for a fire extinguisher, whether the mace accelerated the burning, the similarities of the size and color of mace and the fire extinguisher, and promises by the police chief to make efforts to better differentiate between the two. Due to the website focus on the crazy and horrific events of life, the story is effectively crafted.

User responses to the story reflect the tone of the website and article. Six users empathized with the pain and suffering of just the body. Four debated the mace and fire extinguisher mix-up. Another four are entirely unrelated to the story. Based on these results and the article itself, readers are invited to mediate and identify through the chaotic moments in which the self-immolation happened. Since the majority of the article concerns the pain of not only fire but also the mace mistake, which was possibly caused by the urgency of the moment, viewers can fixate upon the pain, suffering, and violence of the self-immolation as it happened. The only picture included in the story was of an officer finally extinguishing the charred body of Daniel Shaull.

That same image is reproduced from the katu.com website, but the Dreamin Demon website cropped the bystander out. The users seem to replace the bystander and remain fixated by the frantic antics of mace, fire extinguishers, and incredible pain. Death, in both the article and the user comments, is only mentioned twice and attributing any possible cause to Daniel Shaull's act is not likely due to the father's remarks at the end of the article in which he stated he didn't believe any political factor was involved. This story effectively portrays the self-immolation as a freak event that emphasizes the

chaos and incredible pain of the moment. Additionally, the picture invites the users to be in the moment as it happens, viewing the finality of the self-immolation as when the body is extinguished and not with Shaull's death.

Another website with user responses is katu.com and involves reports similar to the mainstream press. [Katu.com](http://katu.com)'s stories may receive longer, more elaborate responses due to the site's eight house rules for commenting. They encourage clean, knowledgeable, and responsible feedback; the site indicates that those who violate rules may be permanently banned. Although the site contains a few articles covering Shaull's self-immolation, the article titled: "Father: Son who burned himself alive was a troubled genius" is the only one that includes an email that the "The Portland Anti Fur Campaign" sent to katu.com. As the article title suggests, most of the article focuses on the reaction of Shaull's father, Warren, which was solicited through on a phone interview. Warren described Daniel as a generous but troubled genius due to his faculty scholarship at a college. The father also "repeatedly stressed that his son told him he was upset with violence in the world and was frustrated with the world's social ills and the apparent inability to solve them" ("Troubled Genius"). If Shaull self-immolated because of the world's ills, then perhaps the cause of his self-immolation is about more than furs and resembles the self-immolation cause of Norman Morrison. However, this information comes from Warren, who also speculates that Daniel may have been persuaded to self-immolate but said nothing more.

The interview with Warren contrasts with the anti-fur campaign email which seems to imply that Shaull certainly died for a purpose even if that was never his

intention. They establish this by a series of statements. First, they state that they support him “if his intentions were to raise awareness of unnecessary animal suffering and killing done in the fur industry.” This statement includes their personal agenda and establishes a possible link to Shaull protesting the fur industry. Second they say, “It is really unfortunate that one would feel as if they must take such drastic measures, yet, this Fur Store has continued their bloody business despite protests outside for 3 years now.” This second statement adds integral information. First, they describe the situation as if Shaull was prompted to self-immolate due to the business of the fur store. Second, the business of the fur store is bloody and undesirable. Third, the store is stubborn and unyielding to the protest history of the “Portland Anti-Fur Campaign” and also very likely was unyielding to Shaull who most likely protested there. Thus, the fur store is possibly responsible for Daniel Shaull’s death while the anti-fur people are both offering condolences for Daniel Shaull and promoting their cause.

The user responses for the article and email follow trends such as three responses opposing the anti-fur company. Two of these are directly responding to the email. Another response supports the purported cause of Shaull with one saying that his efforts paid off because he/she would personally not buy fur again. Yet another response to the article is similar to the email in that it promotes the anti-fur agenda and only mentions Daniel Shaull as some guy who did something. Another trend in the responses is users who offer condolences. The highest rated comments are those that offer condolences or speak against the Portland fur company. The offering of condolences is also highly valued by the website oregonlive.com.

Oregonlive.com is similar to Katu.com in that user comments are regulated and the articles mimic those that appear in the mainstream press. Here Shaull's story is entitled "Father of man who set himself aflame said son was suicidal." Immediately, the word suicidal at least implies a lack of cause for the self-immolation or even implies mental illness. This new article mostly considers information and explanation given by Warren, Shaull's father. Warren gives information about how and why Daniel Shaull, who was suicidal, left his home in Kansas to immediately get help from a religious group in Portland. The rest of the article was about his death and ends with Shaull's father saying that Shaull was mentally ill and "tired of living."

The user responses to this article differ from other user responses to other articles. First, the most complicated and critical responses come from this article. Second, as will be explained shortly, it seems that site administrators directly interfere and try to steer the conversation towards a certain direction. Third, most users respond to the critical but unpopular user who begins the controversial discussion. The user who begins the critical and controversial discussion, who I will reference as VL, says that Daniel Shaull could be a posthumous terrorist meaning to burn down the clothing store and additionally may have been almost entirely controlled by Animal Rights movements. Additionally, he then criticizes the father for allowing his suicidal son to make a trip to Portland, noting that the son even had to ask for a sleeping bag to stay warm in the streets at night.

Three users immediately dislike VL's first comment. VL responds to accusations about his lack of class by saying that one just needs the ability to think, to put forth a position, and debate it instead of simply insulting him. Then John Killen, a Breaking

News editor, steps in and says that it is inappropriate to make fun of the man and that he should consider what his family is thinking. He also says to “consider if you are showing perhaps a lack of courage by taking advantage of the anonymity to make fun, make a political statement or just plain make a cruel statement.” Other users say similar things to attack VL’s character; they call him “a mouth hiding behind a computer” or saying how he wouldn’t make the same arguments if he were speaking to the family. Another tells him to step away from the keyboard for a few days and reflect on what it means to be a human in a society. This brings up the importance of location and identity in online spaces. Users believe that VL is somehow less of a human than users who revere the dead. VL then argues that they are not in the family’s home, a church, or an obituary. He/she should not have to automatically care about a family who let their unstable child go homeless a few states away.

VL understands the accusations are inspired by adherence to a Judeo-Christian reverence for the dead and thus responds, “I’ve seen just about every reporter on this site complain about essentially the same thing, inappropriate comments on stories involving dead people, I’m left wondering why you guys leave comments open for them?” While comments are left open it seems that only comments about offering condolences or thinking about the family are valued. A small side conversation did question how much the news organization was censoring VL since he/she had every opportunity to be heard elsewhere and does have a blog dedicated to his/her dialogue that questioned the status quo at katu.com. Even if VL’s comments are not removed, he may still not be heard if users don’t visit his blog. If users reduce him to a “mouth hiding behind a computer” or

say he has no class or that he does not know what it means to be a human in a society, they have essentially censored him in their minds.

Susan Gage, the managing editor, eventually closes the discussion by saying “Unfortunately, the level of discourse has degenerated to the point of attacking a mentally ill man, so I am closing comments on this story.” As more and more comments involved jokes about mentally ill and/or homeless people, administrators at oregonlive.com no longer receive the responses they believed were appropriate. This suggests that reverence for the dead can impede the rhetorical discourse about a self-immolation due to ideological constructs.

From different variations of the story in different online spaces we now move to how different articles depict Daniel Shaull. This probes deeper into the protest cause behind Daniel Shaull’s self-immolation. Oregonlive.com has another article that focuses on why Daniel Shaull self-immolated entitled “Portland authorities investigate why man set self afire near fur store.” The article mostly provides already-established information such as the time of the event, the anti-fur protest history at the fur store, and that police officers extinguished Shaull. But it also focuses on eyewitnesses Mike Cheema and Jessica Moody. Mike Cheema associates Shaull with protestors and says that Shaull said that animals were dying and the world was ending. The article ends with Jessica Moody, who works near the area, saying "They've [Anti-fur protestors] never done anything crazy." The article does not speculate much on the self-immolation protest cause nor use the word self-immolation; rather it just reports on eyewitnesses and that the group “In Defense of Animals” does not protest there but their spokesperson knows other groups

who do. There is no attempt to speculate or investigate if any other related group may have been involved. This tendency was noted earlier when Deluca indicated that the news just presents information. By not investigating what groups protest at Ungar Furs and by only quoting eyewitnesses who were disturbed by the act, oregonlive.com avoids giving any answer. However, by ending with a quote about “they,” referring to protestors, associated with the word “crazy,” oregonlive.com again establishes that Daniel Shaull and also any protest groups involved are perhaps now “crazy” due to the self-immolation.

User responses to this article range from saying how crazy Shaull is to demanding people stay respectful because Shaull is dead. Similar to another user response on Katu.com, one user questions why one would die for the cause of animal rights and not a better cause. Another user states that “using fear and horror to force your opinion on other people is terrorism.” This user cannot differentiate between what Shaull did and what suicide bombers do since he intended to burn the shop down. The user concludes by indicating that his/her consumer choices will not be influenced by a terrorist. Two users oppose this post. One of these users says that because Shaull died, he should be respected. The other user directly opposes the likely consumer habits of the first user. Another user claims to be an eyewitness who said that Daniel Shaull did not say anything but was just screaming and that a charred rosary also was found at the scene. Another says that the media needs to still cover the whole story and not walk away from it. So users are aware that there seems to be something removed or omitted from the story. Also, this is a time when amateur journalism directly challenges professional journalism. If the amateur journalist’s claim that Daniel said nothing is accurate and /or influential,

then it lessens the influence of the mainstream media's implication that he was insane and the Animal Rights' argument that he was a protestor.

The next article is from katu.com and is entitled "Friend of burning man: Judeo-Christians 'complicit' in his death." The article states that Ruth Eisenbud, a fellow animal activist and Jainist (i.e., a person who believes all life is sacred), says that Daniel Shaull died to protest fur. Shaull is portrayed as both an animal activist and a Jainist by katu.com and in Eisenbud's message. While Shaull's father, Warren, never mentioned Shaull's religion, a user who contributed to oregonlive.com's investigative article claims to have been an eyewitness and saw a charred rosary where Shaull was burning, suggesting Shaull may have been Catholic.

Ruth Eisenbud goes on to say Shaull set himself on fire "to protest the wasteful and cruel abuses of the fur industry. Not much accurate information has been released about the life of Daniel Shaull..." After talking about the lack of accurate information she claims that the fur industry responded to Shaull with "slurs of terrorism" and that they attributed the event to "the victim's mental status and vegan diet." She then says the fur industry engaged in "mumblings" about high unemployment in Portland and its ability to provide jobs. The hostile approach to the fur industry is expected, but Eisenbud is also trying to claim information about Shaull by asserting that she must have been a friend due to her being a fellow animal rights activist and Jainist. However, much like the Portland Anti-Fur campaign email to katu.com, she and other activists use the occasion of Shaull's death to espouse their cause.

Eisenbud then blames Shaull's death on the Judeo-Christian religious mandate of human dominion over all animals from the book Genesis in the Torah/Bible. She contends that this mandate gave Shaull no choice but to self-immolate. She then says to Daniel, "Thank you for your courage and empathy for the suffering of ALL living beings... Your gesture will not be forgotten....It is tragic though that you did not see the value of your own life; it too was worth preserving." This statement is conflicting especially if users tend to see him as being exploited by animal rights groups, especially if he was easier to exploit due to his mental health issues.

While no users commented on this article, it is important to note that [katu.com](#) offers a different depiction of Shaull's protest cause than did [oregonlive.com](#). [Oregonlive.com](#) dismisses Shaull as insane and without a cause. However, [katu.com](#) reports him as an insane and possibly an exploited animal rights protestor. Either way, Shaull is someone the users would be made to feel sorry for. The [katu.com](#) article ends with Eisenbud's words: "It is tragic though that you did not see the value of your own life; it too was worth preserving." Again, the reverence for life is stressed and not necessarily the cause of the animal rights activist. Even though animal rights activists can use [katu.com](#) to promote their agenda, the online space is not theirs and [katu.com](#) seizes this opportunity to restrict and influence what the users see and can respond to.

The complicated religious entanglement of Jainist vs Judeo-Christian is not entirely incompatible. Due to Jainist reverence for all life and Judeo-Christian reverence for the dead, Eisenbud can appeal to the user audience responses that revere the dead. However, she can also criticize another aspect of the Judeo-Christian religion that fits

into her animal rights agenda. Another interesting concern is the exotic influence of the Indian religion Jainism. If the fur commission is criticized from a secular perspective, users on Katu.com and oregonlive.com respond. However, through religion the cause may be able to survive. But, if the religion is exotic, then users may simply leave it alone, as they have presumably done here since no one responded.

Still, like other animal rights groups recognizing Shaull, there are inconsistencies. Why would Eisenbud praise a death or why would Shaull die if his religion reveres all life? Whether Shaull is catholic or Jainist, the identification of him will be tweaked by Eisenbud, just as the absolute reverence for life is tweaked by Eisenbud to include those who die for life. However, historically this paradox or contradiction is possible since self-immolation has been active in Christianity and Buddhism which both forbid suicide.

The website voiceofthevoiceless.org is a journal of the Animal Liberation Movement; it also comments on Daniel Shaull's self-immolation. One of these commentaries is entitled "Giving Our Lives For Theirs: In Defense of Daniel Shaull." Website creator Peter Young writes that the cause for Animal rights is why Daniel Shaull sacrificed himself. One of the most integral quotes is the following:

Debates over the strategic value of self-immolation are irrelevant. As are discussions of Shaull's mental health. I don't think it is the place of anyone, myself included, sitting behind the safety of a computer to cast stones at someone who broke out of that safety zone and did *something*. Especially someone who is dead. (Young)

First, Young dismisses discussion about self-immolation while still using the picture of Thich Quang Duc in his article. He may wish the iconic photo to work a subliminal influence on the reader. Still, by not allowing this, he limits more critical comments on the nature of self-immolation while allowing the body rhetoric of Duc to remain. The calm picture of Duc in the lotus position gives Shaull a favorable position by association. This is especially true considering some reports that Shaull attempted to enter Ungar Furs.

Second, he comments about “casting stones” thus taking a similar censorship approach that reduces the influence of or disallows certain comments. He limits the discussion to be only about the cause of Daniel Shaull, even targeting users who are “hiding behind a computer” to disempower their ability to respond in a way that may damage the animal rights cause. Also, he attempts to relate to the Judeo-Christian cultural sanctity of the dead. Still, Young says Shaull did something. He places the word in italics as if to encourage others take action.

Third, Young questions why life taken in solitude is tragic but in public is crazy. This advocates that Daniel Shaull is not insane and should be taken seriously. He again reiterates the importance of Daniel Shaull’s cause and the possible damage done by calling him crazy in his final statement: “I will not rob Daniel Shaull of his last statement to this earth with such dismissiveness.”

Young seems to be either very successful in his argument or is speaking to agreeable users since eight responses to the article say how great it was that Shaull gave his life for a great cause and revere his sacrifice; this is possibly influenced by a Judeo-

Christian reverence for death. However, one user says that animal protesting will never do anything to stop the natural order of the food chain. However, no users questioned the nature of the self-immolation or think of Daniel Shaull as anything other than a martyr. Restricting considerations like this is something Young seems to want to achieve based on the implications within his writing.

Another article by Peter Young is entitled “Man Sets Himself on Fire at Portland Fur Store.” In this article, Young provides basic information about Shaull but also says that no activists he has talked to know him. This contrasts with the Eisenbud article at katu.com where Shaull is depicted as a fellow activist and friend. Still, Shaull is known to have most likely died for animals even if he was not an activist. This article is different from other basic news articles in that Young tries to defend Shaull’s action as if it were illegal or meant to be illegal: “When every legal channel to affect change is closed, people will increasingly be driven to actions which bring both attention to the plight of animals, and a disruptive effect to those who kill them.” He then compares Shaull to William Rodgers and Alex Slack who both committed suicide to avoid prison time or trial for the destructive and illegal acts they committed for Animal Rights, such as bombings. If this comparison is to be made, then Shaull is no longer simply a protestor but more recognized as a terrorist or eco-terrorist. Therefore, his self-immolation is secondary to his intention to do harm. Audience identification would be extremely difficult when the self-immolator intends to do harm to others. The protest cause would then be the major influence.

User responses are mostly in favor of Shaull. He is declared a hero for showing the cruelty of fur companies and fur companies are blamed for his death. However, some question the immediate desire to declare Shaull a martyr and others question how he may have been more valuable to the organization alive. Only one user is informed about self-immolation, saying that it either goes unnoticed or the person is thought of as being crazy.

An additional discussion of the self-immolation in response to this article opened up on reddit.com. The discussion revolved around whether ethics justifies Shaull's suffering for the combined suffering of so many animals. Other users then question if it is right for him to be made a hero when he may be mentally ill. If mentally ill, the self-immolation becomes completely different and users say that he should have been helped instead of being exploited. Whether he did the act conscientiously can affect the response to the self-immolation protest, which users understand have a long history. The conversation on reddit.com does discuss the tactics of self-immolation itself and comes to question the value of life in society and the valid or effective forms of protest and their possible effects.

One last website that provides a completely different perspective is furcommission.com. Their press release article is entitled "Terrorist Sets Himself Ablaze in Attempt to Torch Shop and Those Inside." The first sentence sets the tone of the article by saying that Portland Oregon has an unemployment rate of nearly 12% and then proceeds to describe the attempt of Shaull to enter the fur store in great detail. The article even states that the "pull to enter" doors prevented the store's destruction as well as

customer injury or death. Furthermore, Shaull disobeyed police orders to “stop, drop, and roll” opting to run away instead. After establishing an almost comical description of how Shaull couldn’t open a door or take orders from police officers, the fur commission finally notes that “the terrorist - who is most likely vegan” has the name of Daniel Shaull. They do so only after mentioning that he died. The article then immediately addresses Portland leadership and animal rights groups for “not promoting tolerance within the small groups of vegans who violently reject the lifestyle of the majority.”

The article then mentions the history of animal rights groups engaging in numerous criminal acts that now include “attempted arson and murder by self-immolation.” When recognized, self-immolation is categorized as a terrorist act. As a terrorist, Shaull may not prompt much rhetorical discourse in America; audience identification also may not be possible. However, the death of Shaull may be reflected upon in the final words of the article: “only prayers can be offered for Daniel Shaull’s soul and for the grieving family he leaves behind.” As this quotation suggests, to reflect upon Daniel Shaull’s death, one must adopt the dominant ideology that includes Judeo-Christian connotations about revering and mourning the dead. Prayer is the only possible hope for Shaull since he has done wrong as a terrorist. Still, even while recognizing and speaking against animal rights terrorism, the fur commission shows sympathy by saying that even terrorists are not beyond the power of prayer. However, the webpage does not have a space for users to respond. Thus, the fur commission does not seem to invite responses of any kind.

Throughout the articles analyzed, a few unifying characteristics appear. First, the online stories often match the space given to them. Dreamindemon.com had a story, website, and user responses that all matched. The mainstream media offered plenty of space for users that seemed to reflect their openness to all information yet used administrators and other users to socially censor certain responses. The fur commission seemed to give itself unquestioned authority by not allowing responses. Animal rights groups often included graphic web page borders of animals being tortured and pictures that subliminally advocated their cause. Within these websites, it is difficult to focus on the self-immolation due to the often influential rhetorical attempts of mediators to control the influence of their space. Second, Judeo-Christian ideologies were most influential in user responses through the offering of condolences for Shaull and his family. This suggests that the body rhetoric may be reached but not necessarily the rhetorical discourse.

Third, at least two examples of critical rhetorical discourse occurred. The user VL met many hostile reactions when attempting to critically consider the effect of dominant ideologies on both mediators and other users. Reddit responded to an article but did so within its own space. Additionally, space and censorship affected VL's rhetorical discourse. The administrator's ability to indicate what content was acceptable by closing the forum shows that self-immolation can provoke dialogue the mainstream media finds dangerous to its ideologies. However, no user, not even on Reddit.com, seems to be as critically aware of dominant ideologies and similar social constructs as VL. Still, VL's example shows the importance of online spaces as embodied and constructed with political ideologies. Even if many users may have been effectively silenced from

thoughts that diverted attention away from dominant ideologies, critical rhetorical discourse did occur.

Cecilia Casals

In August 2009 Cecilia Casals self-immolated in a mall. The mainstream media reported that she had been dealing with mental issues involved with her attempted murder. Also important, at least in an nbcmiami.com article, is the definition of self-immolation: “investigators believe this was a suicide attempt known as self-immolation” (Wright). This writer suggests that suicide is not defined as part of the protest of self-immolation, instead self-immolation is a form of suicide. While self-immolation is suicide the emphasis is placed on self-immolation being *only* suicide. The article about Casal’s is titled “‘Human Torch’ Had Issues Burning Inside” (Wright). Immediately the readers are influenced by humor, which can be especially influential given its use by professional journalists. The mainstream media can thus exacerbate a desensitized understanding of self-immolation as can an amateur audience.

Despite lacking a purposeful self-immolation like Ritscher, Casal’s self-immolation provides the opportunity to consider more elements of a critical mediated rhetoric focused on self-immolation. We must understand the response to a self-immolation that may not be influenced by a cause and how it may relate to suicide. Self-immolation with an unavailable or misrepresented cause allows us to consider the impact of self-immolation's body discourse and even the public's perception of the violence of self-immolation. Whether the audience is empathetic with the suffering of the body and violence, as were the English travelers who witnessed the Sati, can determine whether

more self-immolations that have a clearly defined cause, such as Ritscher's, are effective. If the body in pain cannot inspire empathy or horror in an audience, then the body as a medium may no longer be effective for carrying the discourse of causes.

The websites I consider that report on Casal's self-immolation include important details such as what eyewitnesses say, how witnesses react to the situation, whether any cause or further speculation than mental illness is given, whether she used accelerant to speed up her death, whether self-immolation is mentioned, and whether her death was reported at the time. Like with Shaull, different stories are crafted in specific ways to influence an audience. While Casal's story generated fewer and less complicated user comments compared to Shaull, her self-immolation possibly has no cause and is most likely be affected by mental illness; thus the audience may be less likely to feel a need to respond.

The first two websites represent more of a mainstream media or Associated Press approach. Justnews.com reports on Casals in an article titled "Woman Sets Self On Fire At Mall." The article says that one other woman is reported to have injured herself while trying to help save Casals and Casals is reported to have used accelerant. However, the article is mostly about eyewitness Jose Morales. Morales said that people screamed when Casals walked through the mall on fire. At the end of the article, Morales is quoted saying that the experience was like something in a movie. Morales also says of Casals that "they [sic] were on fire and not saying, not one word."

Three of the seven comments deal with the pun getting lit and/or reaction to it. Two user responded with shock at what happened and one of them hopes Casals gets

better from the burns since she had not been pronounced dead yet. One user was amazed it happened so close to where they work. The final comment refers to another news source that reports Casals supposedly placed red and white roses near the counter where she began her self-immolation. This may possibly point to a cause. Also, the reactions are different since at the time of posting Casals had not been announced dead. This may prompt users to engage in more puns. Especially compared to most of Shaull's mediation, there are more puns. Additionally, self-immolation is mentioned nowhere.

Seattletimes.com reports on Casals in the article "Woman who set self afire in busy Miami mall dies." She is reported to have covered herself in flammable liquid and witnesses are reported using fire extinguishers to put out the flames. The article does report that Casals had a history of mental illness and even had been convicted of prescription drug trafficking charges but received probation. Also, Morales is again quoted as an eyewitness; he said that Casals was walking really slowly and that nothing could be seen but fire.

Two of the three user comments to this article are glad she no longer has to experience the pain and are sad for her loss. The other user wonders why the article states that Morales was about to buy earrings for his girlfriend before hearing a scream. The user wonders why the press would bother to report that; he/she says it is worthless information. Again, self-immolation is mentioned nowhere. Similar to the mainstream media reports of Shaull's self-immolation, users have the opportunity to challenge the mediation of the professional media. Perhaps the extended history of Casals and the fact that she died when this article was released changed user responses. The other similar story had three of the seven responses involving puns while none of the three responses

punned the self-immolation. Again, most users who commented on articles about Shaull and Casals adhered to the Judeo-Christian tradition of expressing reverence for death and condolences for the bereaved.

The next two websites portray a more desensitized mediation of Casal's death. Nbcmiami.com reports on Casals with the title "'Human Torch' Had Issues Burning Inside." Before reporting on Casals' violent and troubled criminal past, Wright likens her past to "some serious demons burning inside of her." At the time of this article Casals was not yet dead. The article allowed users can choose a local user reaction to the article without responding in a comment. As of March 2011, 46% were sad, 21% laughing, 18% intrigued, 7% bored, 5% furious, and 4% thrilled.

Although not reported dead, many user comments react to Casal's act as if it was a suicide. Around thirteen users who responded insulted Casals, used self-immolation puns, or included responses that do not indicate the user believes the situation is serious. Seven comments are more sensitive and include one user who says he/she prays that Casals is okay but this user is then called an idiot by another user. Similarly concerned, another user is disgusted by how many locals inappropriately respond to the article by choosing "laughing." One person said the incident reminds them of some kind of protest and then says that "things must change." One reacts to the selfishness of another user who is annoyed that the arcade is shut down for a few days. Another is glad that two people tried to help. Yet another mentioned that he/she is a mental health counselor and that those who are troubled can attempt to set themselves on fire. One user also wishes there was more of a focus on compassion.

A forum from prisonplanet.com responds to the article from nbcmiami.com and thus extends the user responses. Two users wonder about spontaneous combustion and whether her action is suicide or murder or something else. Another thinks it is a reminder of how mentally ill humanity is. And another post puns the self-immolation. Despite the influence of the punning article topic, some users still wish for empathy and compassion, thus forming identification with Casals. Another seems to connect this story to self-immolation protest but cannot remember why exactly. However, the result is that the user believes that “things must change.” This is an important response because it suggests that audiences might perceive the protest aspect of self-immolation if connected to protest at all. Even if the protest cause is unknown or non-existent, it seems that for at least one user, self-immolation affected them to action or thoughts that go beyond body rhetoric.

The next two websites approach Casals from a more sensitive and understanding approach. Guanabee.com is a website that reports news about Latinos. It reports on Casals under the title “Cecilia E. Casals Dies After Setting Herself Ablaze In Miami's Mall Of The Americas.” The writer of article, Alex Alvarez, mentions that when Casals self-immolated she walked out of the store where her eldest daughter was employed and then mentioned that Casals also had a 4 year old. One witness reports the scene was like from a movie; whether this is Morales again is unknown. However the witness who said this did help Casals by grabbing a fire extinguisher; Morales is not reported to have done this so it may be another witness. Alvarez then goes much more in depth about Casals’ violent past by discussing an ex-boyfriend who she attacked with a knife and criminal charges mentioned in other articles. Casals also attempted to receive psychiatric help three times. Then, Alvarez mentions the people at the scene who stared and/or took out

their cameras to take photos. However, she reacts by saying, “The reaction seems shocking and callous but, then again, what could these bystanders have done, other than, as one did, attempt to get a fire extinguisher? We're not sure how we would have reacted.” Finally, Alvarez connects this article to two others about mentally ill women who harmed themselves and/or others through possible drug abuse.

The author of the article interacts with some users who comment and thus creates a more personal environment. This is reflected in the article when the author said that “we” would not have known what “we” would have done in the situation. Most of the comments revolve around the reaction of the eyewitnesses and the user agreeing he/she wouldn't have helped also, being sad that if he/she needed help in public only pictures would be taken, not knowing what to do, and thinking that everyone is now a paparazzi thanks to the internet. Only one user responds with a self-immolation pun. Self-immolation is nowhere mentioned. The article creates a more embodied atmosphere where the actions of the eyewitnesses are empathized. Users are thus invited to more intimately consider the actual self-immolation and also are given more information about Cecelia Casals. By doing so, the users can more accurately understand Casals as an embodied person with a troubled past and interact more with the idea of being at the self-immolation performance.

A blog named “The Trouble with Spikol” also contains a brief blog reflection by Liz Spikol. She writes that “I want to note the death of someone who has only been written about as a freak show.” The blog post is written after Casals' death and discussed how Casals has been insensitively punned by the nbcmiami.com article. Spikol also

commends John Torres and others who tried to help Casals instead of taking out their cell phones for a picture.

Users respond with support for John Torres, are saddened by those who only pulled out their phones, and disgusted by the [nbcmiami.com](#) article. One user even responds with a detailed account of Casals' struggle as an immigrant and reveals that Casals' had become emotionally distressed because her boyfriend was dating her daughter. While the user does not detail how they know the information, the account goes into more detail about Casals' life than any other source. Both the [Guanabee.com](#) article, Spikol's blog, and user responses to both seem to overall form identification with Casals. Additionally, the identification does not end with empathizing with the pain of the body or revering the death of the body but more fully embodies the person Cecelia Casals was.

Evident in the more sensitive articles is that Casals self-immolation protest cause may be implicit like the Sati symbolically demonstrating patriarchal cultural oppression. One implicit cause for Casals can be the lack of psychiatric help she tried to receive; thus her act may speak to the healthcare system. She also might have been motivated by the difficulty of being an immigrant and thus being marginalized in American society. Additionally, the flowers left at the counter of the store where her oldest daughter worked may even acknowledge that Casals realized what she was doing. Even if mentally ill, the meaning possible in the flowers and information about her personal struggles embodies her. Thus, those who form identification with her may then create protest meaning.

Two interesting tendencies happen throughout the mediation and user responses to Casals' self-immolation. One is that users and eyewitnesses both mediate to distance themselves from the self-immolation and the other is that mental illness and suicide are

used to describe Cecelia Casals and her self-immolation. Justnews.com and other mediations report eyewitnesses who say the self-immolation was like a movie. This suggests that the self-immolation violence seemed unreal. When eyewitnesses explain the event as a movie and/or take pictures with their phones they essentially mediate the self-immolation through screens. Baudrillard's thoughts about desensitized violence apply to the people at Casal's self-immolation who pulled out their cell phones to take pictures or mediate the memory of it through the experience of watching a movie. The audience may wish to or need to approach violence only when mediated through screens and therefore mediate it themselves. Perhaps this also relates to how online users react to the self-immolation story online. While online users are already mediated by the presence of a screen and the media itself, they may additionally mediate the story even further if needed. This mediation perhaps functions as a coping mechanism.

Baudrillard also mentions that the media overexposes violence and therefore the real effect of the violence seems to disappear. Perhaps those who see the images online or through the news can simply remove themselves from violence since violence is regularly reported by the media. This constant reporting of violence also may signal that violence ceases to have much significance: "people are fascinated, terrified and fascinated by this indifference of the Nothing-to-see, of the Nothing-to-say, by the indifference of their own life, as of the zero degree of living. The banality and the consumption of banality" (Baudrillard). Much like Ritscher's statement that American culture is more concerned with cell-phone ringtones and sports than the horrors of war, reported violence has seemingly become an everyday event that estranges the audience from the impact of real violence.

While it seems that Casals' mental illness is the most likely explanation for her suicidal self-immolation, other websites like Spikol's blog suggest a much more complex explanation. First of all, the explanation based on mental illness reinforces the mainstream media belief, which Arnston notes, about how suicide, and therefore self-immolation, requires some form of diagnosable mental illness. Yet, many amateurs responding to the story did not seem satisfied with the explanation of mental illness and thus looked for more information about Casals as a person. While the mainstream news media could afford to investigate deeper into the person of Cecelia Casals, they didn't. Instead, amateur journalism revealed far more information about Casals and treated her as a troubled individual who is a situated human being with certain aspects such as mental illness. The mainstream news media can only say Casals is mentally ill because they may consider this factual information to unbiased reporting. Yet, by excluding any personal information about Casals, such as Casals leaving flowers in the store where her daughter works, the mainstream news media presents the story as something to be entertaining and easily consumed. Whether focusing on the horror of the eyewitnesses who saw a mentally ill person burn or humorously punning the self-immolation, the mainstream news media intends to entertain.

Considering the Self-Immolation of Cecelia Casals and Daniel Shaull

While the mainstream media has tremendous influence, the audience still has the opportunity to engage in critical thought and discussion to challenge the mainstream media. Throughout the articles on the KATU.com website, Spikol's blog, reddit.com, and others, we find numerous examples of critical rhetorical discourse that questions the

mainstream news media ideology. Whether questioning what is included in the online article, creating another narrative, or questioning the ideologies themselves, amateur journalism disrupts and rearticulates dominant mediation. When VL was threatened with censorship and when that same article was closed to responses, the mainstream media realized that the content was no longer theirs. Instead the critical rhetorical discourse was shared and meaning was constructed but not from dominant ideologies. Self-immolation, as Deluca points out when discussing environmental protestors, disrupts and rearticulates ideologies. Therefore, the examples examined in my study demonstrate that critical rhetorical discourse centered around the radical act of self-immolation can challenge and rearticulate ideologies.

Even though Cecilia Casals was mentally ill, online users still investigated her motivation or cause. Thus, self-immolation's body rhetoric prompted critical rhetorical discourse through considering the personal life of Casals. Even considering the personal life rather than relying only on information disrupts the dominant ideology of the mainstream media; this ideology equates factual information with unbiased reporting. Hence, factual information is believed to make more valuable meaning and more profitable stories. However, Spikol's blog, Guanabee.com, and feminists recognize the importance of accounting for the situated body. Casals is also not only marginalized as a woman but as an immigrant. Thus, when more personal information about Casals reveals that she was "desperately trying to get psychiatric help, to no avail" (Spikol), the audience who recognizes her position must question the motivation behind a system that provides help to some but not to others.

Empathy for Daniel Shaull is difficult to analyze. Although many users seemed to offer condolences to his family and demonstrated respect for Daniel's death, this action is bound by Judeo-Christian ideology. The ideology does not necessarily make user empathy for Daniel any less but it does change how users relate to Daniel. Users focus more on adopting the proper social performance instead of considering what Shaull's death means. However, the mainstream media offers little additional information outside of what Shaull's father, Warren, says. Still, like a wake, it seems that the online users saunter in and offer condolences. However, they do not really know Daniel. Understood this way, no further meaning and consolation is really given to Shaull's family beyond that of a typical cultural performance. However, the user VL goes beyond ideological meaning. VL questions how Daniel was treated and why he was allowed to travel alone for hours on a bus if he was mentally ill. Most notably, VL wonders why Daniel Shaull has no place to stay in Portland and didn't even have a sleeping bag with which to sleep in the streets. Other online users and news media administrators attack and/or try to censor VL with Judeo-Christian and other ideologies. While VL questioned Warren's parenting, VL seemed to show a deeper concern for the person of Shaull by considering his well-being when alive, especially since VL recognized he could be classified as a terrorist.

For VL, Spikol, and reddit.com, an online space is integral to the critical rhetorical discourse each attempts. VL is ideologically censored by most users and threatened by news media administrators. Spikol creates her own space with which to consider Casals' self-immolation. Reddit.com is similar to the prisonplanet.com forum in

that it extends the amount of user responses. However, the reddit.com space is within yet distinct from the webpage it is responding to, even given that the page has area for users to respond. In this way, users of reddit.com create a space completely for themselves. Guanabee.com even creates their own space about stories related to Latino women. In all of these spaces, users become embodied through what the space means and their responses related to the spaces and the information.

Conclusion

If suicide and expressions of humor can influence the understanding of self-immolation then what has happened to the audience identification with the performer? Unlike the Orthodox Christians, Buddhists, anti-violence protestors, or Sati, self-immolation may now lack groups to unite and give it context. Without an understanding of the intention of the self-immolators “the public cannot measure the motivation of the self-immolators; they can only see the outward act and understand this act to be endorsed. This opens the door to imitation with no controls over the motivation of those who commit the act” (King 143). It is easy to misunderstand self-immolation when one is misinformed and unaware of the connections between self-immolation and protest causes.

Deluca notes that environmental groups should be understood in the history of social activism but are “decontextualized, isolated, commodified images indistinguishable within a commercial system of juxtaposed images that lack connection (153). In similar confusion, self-immolation is juxtaposed with insanity, death, unreal violence, and entertainment. The audience needs to consider his/her and the self-

immolator's contextual identity when they decipher the self-immolation rhetoric and “engage in a socio-historical process that produces many meanings” (Deluca 145). Since self-immolation has many meanings depending on the context of the cause of the self-immolation, audiences should be encouraged to consider the situated nature of self-immolation instead of doing what the media wants by accepting mental illness and death as an end of the rhetorical discourse.

Still, even the self-immolation of the mentally ill Casals shows that the audience still does care for her even if some of the media denigrates Casals to a “human torch.” However, if self-immolations continue to happen for nebulous intentions, then self-immolation may no longer have the impact that Thich Quang Duc's self-immolation did. Still, even in the case of an arguably failed self-immolation like Casals, attributes of self-immolation remain such as empathetic identification. Some eyewitnesses empathized with Casals' self-immolation so much that they were injured trying to extinguish her. Thus, while the desensitized effects of violence may be pervasive in our society, they are certainly not absolute and critical rhetorical discourse involving the body rhetoric of self-immolation still happens.

Even though Shaull's self-immolation cause is disputed along with possible mental illness, critical rhetorical discourse occurred. Even with three different ideologies competing for influence over Shaull's body, users looked deeper into the cause. What none of the ideologies accounted for was what users were moved to delve deeper into: discovering the person who Shaull actually was. Users also attempted to consider and give meaning to self-immolation as a form of protest. By engaging in critical rhetorical

discourse, some users were able to identify and thus disrupt and even rearticulate dominant ideologies. Users questioned dominant professional mediation and formed their own spaces and identities online to forge their meaning.

Self-immolation is a unique situation where the finality of the self-immolator's role creates urgency for critical rhetorical discourse. As seen with the discussion of and conflict between the ideologies claiming Daniel Shaull, many attempted to exploit the unique rhetorical influence of self-immolation. This is because the protest cause was punctuated by death that both defines and heightens the discourse of those who self-immolate for worthy causes. Also, self-immolation violence does not harm others but instead involves and unites others through inspiration, empathy, and identification, especially when the intention is to die for a cause beyond oneself. While certain causes may attempt to glorify self-immolation, they do so only in their political terms and for their political cause. To fully consider self-immolation, we must look beyond just advocating a cause and invoke a more critical rhetorical discourse which considers the cause alongside the value of a human being who has sacrificed him/herself and what this means in our society. Because of the extreme and unique nature of self-immolation, we are afforded a more involved critical discourse and questioning of dominant ideologies that are both enacted and embodied in our society.

Sometimes self-immolation lacks ample critical rhetorical responses due to a lack of cause, such as with Cecilia Casals, or is burdened with many possible mediation causes that are formed to exploit the influence of self-immolation, as happened with Daniel Shaull. In this case, we must be aware of and perhaps reconsider how mediated

discourse through displays of protest, body rhetoric, and violence are valuable and meaningful when critically and rhetorically considered. Even when a cause is not present, the value of a human life, the impact of emotion, and violence in body rhetoric can be considered. Just the body rhetoric of self-immolation can encourage empathy through revering life and non-violence. If anything can still be shocking and confusing to our society constantly drenched in violence, it would have to be the self-immolation protest paradoxes where violence can encourage non-violence and death affirms life.

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