Visual Communication in the Public Sphere

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ABSTRACT

In his *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991) Jürgen Habermas emphasizes rational-critical discussion and writings while negating the *visual* form of communication. He associates such discourse with the rise of mass media and the end of the public sphere. This paper presents a case study of the 2008-2009 Bible Across America (BAA) project, which drew over 37,000 people together from around the nation to partake in visually-imbued compilation of an otherwise common text—the Holy Bible. While Habermas lamented this kind visual adornment as degrading to rational-critical thought, this case suggests the power of the visual to raise publics.

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Introduction

Jürgen Habermas' *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1991) paints a picture of rational-critical discussion as used by citizens of Western Europe in the 18th century. The book describes how writings and dialogue brought a community of citizens together to form the utopian bourgeois public sphere. Within this dialogic and textual space, citizens discussed matters of public importance, most of which ran counter to the status quo. Ultimately, this discourse carried potential to bring forth change. Habermas scantly mentions visual communication, placing less emphasis on this style of discourse. When he does mention visuals, he associates this mode of communication with the rise of mass media and the dissolution of the public sphere. By negating visual discourse, he omits discussion of important discursive methods. Such an omission is significant, since visual communication can raise vibrant publics, as will be demonstrated in this article. Visuals are deeply communicative, carry community-gathering potentials, hold and invoke emotion, and tend to attract viewers toward texts. As a demonstration of the way a visual can raise a public, this paper concludes with a case study of the 2008-2009 Bible Across America (BAA) project. BAA drew over 37,000 people together from around the nation entirely due to a visual project. The gathered people participated in a unique compilation of an otherwise common text—the Holy Bible. The uniqueness of this case lies in the fact that a book within which the content has remained stagnant for over 2,000 years drew attention based exclusively upon an enhancement of its visual presentation. All of the textual-dialogic content, which has for centuries remained lukewarm in popularity, remained identical. Yet the visual enhancement alone garnered dialogue and bridged a gap of textual interest. While Habermas lamented this kind of adornment as degrading to rational-critical thought, the fact that a visual augmentation attracted readers to important literature suggests otherwise.

Habermas ignores the visual

Despite emphasizing discourse as a vital ingredient in public-sphere making, Habermas ignores the visual facet of such discourse. He instead glorifies verbal and textual modes of communication. In *Structural Transformation*, for example, he writes of competent partakers rationally debating in salons and coffeehouses about important matters learned through the world of letters. This activity is the lifeblood of the public sphere. A "reading people" is included at the prohibition of the illiterates who he dismissed as having "relatively little education" and lacking the "guidance of an enlarged public" (Habermas, 1991, p. 165). Among his critics in this regard, Deluca and Peeples (2002) find fault in Habermas's "privileging of dialogue and fetishization of procedural rationality" as the heart of the public sphere (p. 128). Because these rational dialoguing citizens are the only portrayals of public discussion described by Habermas, they are assumedly his idea of the quintessential assets of a competent public participant. His dissertation never mentions rational people as being members of the public who enjoy illustrated magazines, radio, or any other mode of communication other than that of typed texts and the dialogue that follows.

According to Barnhurst and Nerone (2001), the design of the bourgeois newspaper reflected Habermas' acclamation of reading and dialoguing. They say that a pragmatic and uniform presentation of the text with unobtrusive typography and evenly spaced columns filled the pages of all of the newspapers around this time period. Photographs and other embellishments were almost entirely missing and the pages were monotone gray. Printers developed specific conventions to ensure this style was universally followed. This certain presentation of relevant news and information matched Habermas's illustration of rational-critical discourse in the bourgeois public

sphere—largely textual in substance and in disregard for the visual facet of communication. At that point, newspapers made no attempt to reach specific interests, paralleling the bourgeois ideal of objectivity. Barnhurst and Nerone (2001) describe the typeface and layout as "an ideal conduit for rational critical discourse, the central component of the public sphere" (p. 45). There was a clear and obvious parallel between the design of news and information and the ideals of the Habermasian public sphere. The layout was certainly ideal according to Habermas's preference of pure text and dialogue at the expense of the visual.

So obvious and important is the nonvisual presentation of news and information in the Habermasian public sphere that subsequent attempts toward its revitalization as per his description have required that designers mute the visual. A case study of graphic design in the 20h century is demonstrative. During this time, the Dutch government strove to restore the bourgeois public sphere and therefore, they rationalized, also revitalize the importance of reading. In undertaking this attempt at revitalization, designers retained the "classic" bourgeois outward presentation of the book. That is, the physical form lacked any creative visual adornments including photographs, graphics, and specialized headline treatments (Boekraad, 1997, p. 226). Another example of how designers have essentially scrapped design in an attempt to restore the public sphere as described by Habermas illustrates his disdain of visual embellishment of news and information.

Stanley Morison, world-famous designer of the visually bromidic typeface, *Times New Roman*, describes the role of the graphic designer as a public servant. He asserts that ego-driven creativity is not the ideal role of a designer. His strategic objective of this plain and purpose-driven design is the realization "of the model of public domain as shaped by bourgeois culture" (Boekraad, 1997, p. 227). These intentions at recreating the bourgeois style attest to the way Habermas glorified text and dialogue and the expense of the visual in his description of the public sphere. The flourishing visual transformation of the media that coincided with the structural transformation of the public sphere serves as a metaphor: The dry, conformed, and exclusive style of media prominent during the height of the bourgeois public sphere is comparable to the conformed and exclusive discourse during the height of what Habermas considered the ideal.

Because of these stylistic conventions, newspaper reading was an uninviting activity during the reign of the Habermasian sphere. Even today, people prefer reading visually-enhanced information. The popularity of colorful and infographic-rich *USA Today* suggests this fact. In the time of the height of the bourgeois public sphere, this effect was probably magnified due to poor literacy. The exclusiveness of reading was certainly self-induced due to poor literacy rates, but was also most likely also due to a lack of interest in the above-described mundane form. Supposedly this bland presentational style was conducive to serious and rational debate, but it was also assumedly offsetting to citizens. Design is, after all, imperative in gaining the attention of readers and aids in cognitive processing. Newton (2001) even believes that humans have a natural instinct toward learning through the visual, just as infants have a natural sucking instinct. Thus, as a result of this visual exclusion, an exclusionary public sphere emerged. Just as the reality of the public sphere ironically had specific rules of inclusion, including property ownership and literacy (Habermas, 1991), so also did this particular design of news have subtle rules of inclusion. The medium was only useful to literate, communicatively competent, and monetarily secure people, but was probably attractive to even fewer. The lockout of some citizens from the public sphere was a result of both the formal rules of property ownership and literacy as well as the informal exclusions because of the uninviting design.

Visuals as destructive to the public sphere

Although scarcely mentioned in *Structural Transformation,* visual media is evidently troublesome to Habermas. Since he emphasizes books and the old world of letters as the substantive activity par excellence, visuals are a menacing distraction from more important matters and degrade citizens. He asserts, for instance, that only within *texts* can "critical discussion of matters of general interest" occur (p. xi). This discourse includes art criticism, and therefore his appreciation of the art was not entirely lacking. However, visuals are not appreciated as a useful communicative tool with the possibility to enhance news and information consumption. In fact, Habermas insinuates that visuals' presence in the post-bourgeois era of culture is fully destructive. In what seems to be obliviousness to their enlightening potential, the latter half of *Structural Transformation* presents an argument of how the inherently visual mass-mediated culture was a major cause of the deterioration of the bourgeois public sphere. During this time period, changes took place in the state and economy and "social power became concentrated in private hands" (Habermas, 1963, p. 144). This privatization along with increasingly partisan politics precipitated a shift in the motives of news and information companies toward profit seeking. And because of the partisan emphasis, newspapers also gained an "elevated sense of their own powers," which in turn influenced the advertising and public relations companies (Botein, 1981, as cited in Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Mass media were born. And laden with visuals.

Habermas's antagonistic description of the market and media changes that led to a "consumer culture" illustrates his distaste for the new model of mass communication. He wrote, for example, that "capitalism was traded for protectionism" leading to an increase in leisure time and a "sham-private world of culture consumption" (p. 143, p. 160). Every mention of the new mode of communication is negative in tone. Making clear his resistant position toward both the mass media and its subsequent visual presentation, he laments: "the culture that came about as a result of the mass media is a public sphere in appearance only" (p. 171). He claims the main culprits of this new culture are the businesses of public relations practitioners (who "engineer consent," [p. 192]); the newspaper editorial (which has become "a dealer in public opinion" [p. 182]) and the advertising industry (leading to the assumption that "the future occupation of all moppets is to be skilled consumers" [p. 192]). Habermas makes an explicit mention of the rise of nonverbal communication as a malignant byproduct this new culture:

> Nonverbal communications of those that, if they had not been translated into picture and sound altogether, were facilitated by optical and acoustic support, replaced to a greater or lesser extent the classical forms of literary production. These trends can also be observed in the daily press which is still closest to them. By means of variegated type and layout and ample illustration reading is made easy at the same time that its field of spontaneity in general is restricted by serving up the material as a ready-made convenience, patterned and predigested (p. 167).

> Disdain is obvious in this description of the new visual design of news and information.

One essential mode of visual communication, graphic design, rose in clear alignment with the modern mass communication so loathed by Habermas. Boekraad (1997) observes, "graphic design is tied to the decline of the bourgeois public domain as described by Habermas" (p. 226). Around the sphere's collapse, a parallel makeover indeed occurred in the press (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). As an increasingly partisan press felt pressured to win support for government

institutions, competition, yellow journalism, and the visual adornment of the newspapers followed. Publishers experimented with different layouts, typefaces, and headline treatments. The subsequent change attracted the masses into the public sphere. Habermas would no longer call it the public *sphere,* however. Instead, he would refer to this group of people as a leisure-seeking, consuming culture, interested only in illustrated magazines; a group who "no longer trust the power of the printed word" (Habermas, 1991, p. 162).

He criticizes editors' new concern with mass taste, appearance, ease of use, and convenience (Habermas, 1991, p. 167). While John Dewey (1927; 2012) asserts "artists have always been the real purveyors of news…" (p. 183), they were passed off as unimportant to Habermas. He instead grieved this physical transformation of media as indicative of a degraded mass culture that had evolved and rendered any public discussion "carefully cultivated" instead of rational and critical (p. 164). His argument is that the inherently-visual mass media pandered to the citizens' "general attitude of demand" and transformed news and information into the mere "exchange of tastes and preferences" (p. 211, p. 205). Essentially, the enhancement of the media is associated with the degradation of the citizen.

Critics of Habermas recognize his objection to visual communication that came with the rise of mass communication. In addition to disliking the way visual communication pandered to citizens, he fears that visuals can reverse the public to its pre-bourgeois modes of representational discourse. Finnegan and Kang (2004), for example, note that he actually thought image-ridden information would "reproduce the feudal system by producing passive subjects who are vulnerable to propaganda" and allure the formerly "reasoning public" (p. 386). The authors conclude that he attributed the decline of the public sphere to the rise of images. They directly accuse him of iconoclasm in the name of a more rational, dialogic public (p. 387). Deluca and Peeples (2002) similarly observe Habermas' reference to the image as "a return to the spectacle of the Middle Ages" (p. 128).

By largely ignoring and sometimes criticizing the increasingly pervasive visual aspect of communication, Habermas fails to recognize a highly-communicative, community-building form of discourse. Deluca and Peeples (2002) attest that this Habermasian "dream" of the bourgeois public sphere that solely encompassed dialogue and text "compels us to see the contemporary landscape of mass communication as a nightmare (p. 130). Indeed, the current state of mass communication is saturated with visuals produced through television, cheap digital photography, emoticons and graphics on computers and cell phones (e.g. Lüders, 2008; Newton, 1997; Rosen, 2005). If text and dialogue are glorified, the current state of mass communication would certainly be a nightmare. Numerous scholars attest, however, that such a negative outlook upon the visual is at the expense of some key components of communication. Finnegan and Kang (2004) agree that "the non-verbal as well as the verbal" should be under critical purview (p. 379). Deluca and Peeples contrarily react to the typical preference for the verbal in public sphere studies by writing a theory of the public *screen* which encompasses the "constant current of images and words, a ceaseless circulation abetted by the technologies of television, film, photography, and the Internet" (p. 135). The power and pervasiveness of the visual is well known. Since communication is a key component of public sphere-making and because communication is contemporarily laden with the visual, all modes thereof must be considered.

Because of their unique conversable abilities, visuals can be viewed as instrumental to the creation of informed publics. Although visuals are communicative, Habermas argues that the

corporeal, visually imbued changes in media that accompanied the structural transformation of the public sphere into "a passively-consuming society" was an editorial degradation (Habermas, 1991, p. 160). Regardless of whether the processing of information is active or passive, art has been called the most effective mode of communication that exists (Dewey, 1934). In fact, the human brain has been proven "better wired" for visual information processing than verbal (Grabe & Bucy, 2009; Newton, 2001). Visual experiences remain the most dominant mode of human learning. These findings are contrary to the frequent preference of theorists such as Habermas for a rationally engaged public that relies on nonverbal reasoning to make informed decisions (Grabe & Bucy, 2009, p. 13). Rational thought occurs through the medium of the visual.

Habermas offers no positive consideration of this stylistic, visual form within discourse. His failure to do so is counter opined by some communicators and other public sphere theorists. Informed decisions and rational dialogue are based upon information. Habermas would concur. But he fails to recognize that a graphic designer is an arranger of such information. She works to accommodate cognitive processing by using logical arrangement, photographs, and color. According to Dewey (1934) such graphic art can, "express meanings that are simply not accessible through words alone" (Mattern, 1999, p. 57). Increasing accessibility leads to a more informed public. Campbell (2005) also posits that information *form* and visual presentation possesses agency. Adding to the list of scholars and communicators who stress the importance of the visual presentation of information, Warner (2005) says that discourse says not only "'let a public exist' but 'let it have this character, speak this way, see the world in this way'" (p. 114). Among other attributes, the character of a public to which Warner refers can manifest visually. Essentially, publics prefer to gather around discourse that has style.

Visuals raise publics

Dewey argues that the communicative capacity of art can be used in the raising of a community and vibrant public life (Mattern, 1999, p. 56). Through sharing experiences using the universal language of art, community can to form. In particular, inclusive creation of art can be harnessed to bring people together who otherwise have little to say to one another. Visuals surpass language barriers, bypass cognitive processes and communicate directly. Regardless of a person's mental ability, education, and background, visuals speak. Dewey (1934) too noted that art can "tear away the veils" of custom and increase perception (p. 325). Art can speak to people in unique ways that verbal and textual information cannot. The word "art" as used by Dewey is somewhat vague, but what he seems to deem as important is that a presentational style outside of bare textual information is important in involving the public into discourse. Outside of the explicit meaning of words on a page or verbalized aloud, presentation speaks across boundaries. Using a case study of the creation of the national AIDS quilt, Mattern (1999) demonstrates that the communicative ability of visual art goes beyond the literal presentation of the finished product and also includes "the active work" that occurs through its physical creation (p. 58). In this case, the process of its creation brought people together to share meaning and identify commonalities (p. 59). Regardless of their backgrounds and experiences with AIDS or lack thereof, people gathered around this visual. Similarly, Coleman (2007) looked at the trend of visual-civic journalism to highlight how photography and design can improve the quality of public debate. Visual-civic journalism, she says, brings readers toward information as well as into a relationship with one another. The idealized public sphere as outlined in *The Structural Transformation* heeds no recognition of the public-gathering potential carried within the visual mode of communication. Evidence of visuals' effectiveness at bringing together publics is not hard to find within the online world of social media. Sites such as

Pinterest, Flickr, and Instagram illustrate the manner by which people gather around the visual self-expression allotted by these sites. Pinterest, a social media site whereby people share visuals of their favorite recipes, do-it-yourself projects, and design inspirations, was the fastest growing site ever for a period in 2012 (Rosoff, 2012). And Instagram, a quirky visual social site that allows users to take photos, apply filters to them, and share them with friends and a broader audience, reached five billion photo posts in just two years (Media Culpa, 2012).

Visuals attract

A person must first be motivated to access information before making use of it. Visuals direct a person toward information. They are highly communicative, shape and gather publics, and also attract readers toward the information to initially induce the reading and rationalizing process. Habermas stresses the importance of an informed public in constituting the ideal public sphere, yet he does not recognize that visuals are instrumental in the process of informing the public. Without significant *visual* enhancements to the presentation of information, however, improvements to the content of the news is incapable of informing people and changing public life (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2001). Only visual changes can transform and improve public life, precisely because visual cues attract members of the public to news, texts, and information to begin with. Dewey (1934) knew this attractiveness, suggesting that presentation through art captures peoples' attention and gives them a desire to read. Visuals are indeed the singular most important element in capturing a viewer's attention toward textual information (Adam, Quinn, & Edmonds, 2007; Knobloch, Hastall, Zillmann, & Callison; 2003; Wolf & Grotta, 1985; Brumberger, 2003). The Poynter Institute conducts periodic eyetracking studies of peoples' reading patterns and consistently finds that people are more attracted to alternative story forms with timelines, lists, and graphics. Furher, the headline of the photo is the most common „first stop" for readers (Poynter, 2013). This attractive role of the visual is imperative in informing a public and in creating a potential for rational-critical debate. After all, the public cannot be informed by news that they never read (Coleman, 2007, p. 26). Visuals *make you look*.

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Case study: The Bible Across America

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Thus far, I have presented evidence that Habermas largely ignores visual communication in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* and that he even associated the rise of visual communication with the public sphere's demise. I have also offered criticisms and counter-opinions about these Habermasian assertions. Finally, I have given evidence of the communicative, attractive, and public-gathering capabilities of visuals. In order to fully illustrate these conversable visual capabilities and to highlight the consequences of their exclusion in *Structural Transformation*, this paper will now focus upon a case study, The Bible Across America (BAA) to showcase an instance whereby a visual mode of communication alone functioned to bring together otherwise dispersed and apathetic persons. In contrast to Habermas's assertion that public togetherness and recognition of commonalities is achieved around dialogic and letter-based discussion, this case shows otherwise. Instead of visuals being a by-product of and contributor to the demise of the public sphere, I will show that even out-moded matters of public interest are reignited solely through addition of the visual ingredient and the active work that surrounds its creation. The important point in this case is that a public gathered as a direct result of the visual aspect. The object of analysis, the Bible, has remained identical in literary substance for thousands of years. As this case study will show, however, an alteration of *only* its visual presentation changed peoples' attitudes toward the book and subsequently gathered a public. This project isolates the visual aspect by offering a direct compare-

and-contrast instance whereby a textually-identical version of the same exact scriptures that have existed for centuries, when altered only in appearance, dramatically alters in public popularity and ignites conversation. Thusly, further criticism is offered to the ignorance of Habermas in his blind eye toward the visual.

Background

Statistically speaking, few books share as wide of a common public interest among all members of the nation than the Holy Bible. Roughly 80 percent of Americans identify themselves as Christians (Pew Research), for whom this book offers guidelines around which they must live. However, few of this demographic actually reads the book. Anecdotally, one might assume that the reason lies in the utter dryness, unstylish reputation, and difficulty of the text. So while no one single book carries the kind of public interest than the Bible—the public interest Habermas envisioned as being conducive to discussion in the public sphere—the actual dialogue is lacking. Discussion about this book of shared public interest is not discussed in the public at all. Dialogue instead takes place within Bible studies or perhaps it is recited for an hour on Sundays. Although the specifics as to which dialogues and texts constituted rational-critical debate in the bourgeois public sphere remains vague, I argue that the world's best selling, longest-printed book fits the criteria. Past research has found that different designs of the book offer different shades of meaning and interest. The physical appearance of the text within the book renders the *visual*, as opposed to blatant imagery or art, meaningful. The visual design actually "impacts how people react to an accept scripture more than 2,000 years old" (Watkins, 2008, p. 18). Further, Mattern (1999) posits that the power of the design can be enhanced through "the active work … in which its meanings are created, contested and changed; and to include the social relationships and practices that swirl around the art piece …" (p. 58).

Bible Across America

Demonstrating precisely this active work in art's creation as well as the power of design to enhance discussion around texts of public interest is 2008/2009 The Bible Across America (BAA) tour. This tour can be seen as a circulatory, participatory project whereby the public created a visual. The public that ensued was similar to that Warner described—completely reliant upon circulatory discourse and one which lies outside of the mainstream. Although not necessarily "counter" to the main public sphere, the group that formed in some ways rendered a previously private type of communication public. Ironically, the publics about which Warner writes as needing a place to gather unashamedly consisted of social and political opposites of Christians. But Christians, too, see themselves as marginalized individuals within the main public sphere. Matters to which Christians relate are rarely broadcast on mainstream network nor public television, nor published prominently in any mainstream newspapers. This BAA project spawned a public that allowed these somewhat "marginalized" people to have a very public voice.

The Bible is the best-selling book in the world. Its content has not historically been novel enough to exist as a phenomenon around which to bridge a nation. Rather, the book is so universally well known that it has become bland, cherished by many but most frequently in the private enclaves of church or in the privacy of one's home. What caused the public bridging of Americans around this archaic text in 2008 is the visual uniqueness this particular variation in design. While Habermas would argue that the verbal builds a public, this case study demonstrates that a visual can also build a public.

As conceived by publisher Zondervan, the Bible Across America project began October 1, 2008, as a mission to involve the public in the physical creation of the Bible. While some other Bible's have been created with the intention of making it more visually appealing (e.g. the red letter Bible, the Rainbow Bible, and the Quest study Bible), this particular Bible was truly unique in its visual appearance. Because it was handwritten, it was uniform, personal, and truly unlike any other text published. A search for "Bible Across America" reveals dozens of public news stories accompanied with photographs of people writing verses as covered in the news in small towns and large cities alike. Just over one year later, the completed product was made available for public purchase. To accomplish the mission, Zondervan sent a tour bus to 44 states all around the United States and invited 31,173 Americans to partake in writing one scripture each by hand. Public involvement was a key component of the project. Mike Vander Klipp, Associated Publisher of Zondervan said he wanted "people from all walks of life to be involved in the writing of these verses" (personal communication, October 30, 2009). The motivation of the project included connecting people with one another and allowing them to participate in a very public project. Construction took place in very different cultural spheres such as consumerism retail stores, religious spheres of churches, educational spheres of college campuses and at one point, a NASCAR race—an entirely different public. These cultural public spheres form whereby people share their voices in varying kinds of public communication, including the arts (McGuigan, 2009). Within these spheres, people are able to find space for publicness. For the BAA, there was no selection process involved. Anybody could participate, regardless of his or her indwelled cultural sphere. In a sense, varying cultures mixed through the project, joined through a visual.

One function accomplished through the BAA tour was the building of community through a gathered sense of making history. Warner (2005) attributes the "active participation" of "historical belonging" as constitutive of a public (p. 89). Dewey hinted at a pragmatic use of art to organize community—through the visual personal participation of tens of thousands of Americans joining together to create this personal and visual book, a sense of making public history was invoked and community was organized. This function is communicated through the people who partook. One participant said: "To have the common folks be a part of it is just an historic thing for me to be a part of and I couldn't resist it" ([YouTube] video). Numerous other participants shared the same sentiment. The promise that the book that will be preserved in The Smithsonian Museum offers proof of how truly public and historic this endeavor was. Interestingly, history is intricately related to the reading and writing of which Habermas exalted as the core of a perfect public sphere. History began when writing began; all events prior to writing are *pre*history. But this case study demonstrates an irony; the visual-uniqueness of this project is historical.

Having a personal visual mark in such a public and historical compilation of thousands of others' marks fostered a sense of togetherness among participants and encouraged conversation. When members of the public are given the opportunity to be personally and tangibly involved in a very public display, their motivation to speak increases. The two couples that drove the BAA bus witnessed excited discussion all during the tour and concur that being a part of a public project through personal contribution is effective. People traveled hundreds of miles just to write a singular verse. The drivers agreed that the process of creating a personal visual brought people together. One driver said: "It's been great for us to see the community that this builds on kind of a nationwide scale... these people coming together to create this project" (Bible Across America, 2009). Through the personal touch of this book—unique only in its appearance—people nationwide were drawn together. Therefore, a second function of the Zondervan handwritten Bible is public gathering; a sense of being a part of something bigger. Conversation surrounded the project and participants felt

the gravity of their personal contribution to a public project. Having a visual stake in the compilation of this book of historic public interest mattered.

Even after the actual creation, the Internet allowed continued discourse and captured reactions via YouTube videos of the tour. The medium of the Internet was just another facet of the project that evidences a sense of togetherness. The effectiveness of the Internet in public sphere creation has been debated, but the conversation surrounding this tour showcases at least one element in the formation of public sphere, the act of attention, the act of "showing up" (Warner, 2005, p. 88). The Internet and new media allows for these new forms of social organization (Deluca & Peeples 2002, p. 131) and permits "all spheres of life," even the marginalized spheres, to form publics (Dahlberg, 2005). Following the tour, people from this marginalized sphere of life shared their stories and responded to one another. Videos circulated via YouTube and Facebook and caught the attention of thousands. One participant demonstrated her desire to share her contribution on a [YouTube video]. She said, "I'm going to tell everybody I know that I got a chance to write Exodus five, verse ten in the Bible." Another girl appearing to be about 12 years old expressed how meaningful it was for her to have her own, visually-unique writing publically published for everybody to see. She explained: "This is my handwriting. I wrote this down. This is important to me. I'm going to tell all my friends from school." These Internet videos, because they are naturally "anchored at the level of citizens' lived experience" (Dahlgren, 2005, p. 158) cultivated a dialoguing public. Dahlgren (2005), also noting that Habermas biases a certain type of communication and tended to "discount a wide array of communicative modes" (p. 156) asserts that in "new public sphere trends" "the Internet clearly makes a difference" (p. 155). Such is evident in this case study.

Importantly, this gathering through conversation flourished as a result of the visual aspect of the book; the actual literature that Habermas exalted was completely unimportant. A book is a bland object, and the Bible is arguably one of the most worn, untrendy books in the opinion of much of mainstream America. The pages are gray with monotonous lines of type, engineered to ensure reading efficiency and ease of use. Visually, the Bible is generally lacking any appeal. And textually, it is not frequently a hot topic of conversation, either. But the BAA finished book is very personal through its visual presentation. A sense of connectedness was evoked not only in the creation process, but also through the pages of the finished product. The handwritten words evoke a sense of personal connection between the reader and the writer. Emotions are triggered. Mike Vander Klipp of Zondervan described this personal bonding when he said "it can actually be a little emotional— reading about hope and promise in a child's hand, or reading about God's faithfulness in the shaky hand of a senior citizen" (personal communication, Oct. 30, 2009). Vander Klipp emphasized the purely visual aspect of the words, making no mention of the syntactical meaning within the text. Within a visually-bland version of the same exact text, this emotional triggering would not take place; an emotional connection between the reader of a book and its printing press operator is unheard of. When a window shopper at Barnes and Noble flips through the pages of various versions of unillustrated books, he or she will generally *see* the same thing on each page. This book, however, instantly catches the eye and strikes at the heart. Other readers of the finished book reported experiencing this emotional reaction to the BAA scriptures. The sense of connectedness with those who handwrote the verses is accomplished through its presentation.

When closely connected to peoples' everyday lives, a visual "is a form of communication through which people learn about each other's similarities and differences, break through some of the barriers to understanding and awareness, and develop some of the commonalities that define

community" (Mattern, 1999, p. 55). Regardless of religion, the Bible tends to be a part of people's might have a copy by her bedside. Gideons give away miniature versions on sidewalks. Random strangers bring a copy to your home at inconvenient times of the day; International controversy ensues when one is mishandled. Because this book is a part of everyday lives, the Bible was particularly suitable to break through barriers and bring people together. Those who were not participating, but witnessed its creation, were able to see writers moved to tears through the creation of the pages, to attest to how it spoke to them, and consequently be moved themselves. What ensued was a participation of people who normally would want nothing to do with the Bible. This gathering is more than a gross scheme toward the goal of so-called "conversion." This gathering was a demonstration of the ways in which visuals have the power to bring people together into an otherwise nonexistent community. The embracement of images "liberates us from the binaries of love and hate" (Finnegan & Kang, 2004, p. 395) and helps people find commonalities.

Conclusion

Although Habermas mostly ignored the importance of visual communication in the *Public Transformation of the Public Sphere,* and has even attributed the demise of the public sphere in part to the rise of mass media and its accompanying visual presentation of information, this case study shows the public-bridging capabilities of a visual medium and presents one way in which Habermas' idealized public sphere, built upon a foundation of dialogue, was missing an entire dimension of powerful communication. The case offers further evidence that Habermas' narrow view of the elements comprising the public sphere is not fully sufficient. The visual, as I have demonstrated through literature and the 2009 Bible Across America case study, stands alone as a communication around which publics gather. The gathering occurs both through the active participation of its creation and through commonalities gained through the finished product.

Visuals' attractiveness, cognitive aiding, and emotional invocation transformed a text that has been metaphorically sitting on the shelf for thousands of years into a public-gathering, hot-selling item entirely due to its visual adornment. Absolutely everything else remained the same. The words, the content, the literature–so imperative to Habermas–were identical to previous versions. Through both active participation in its creation and through discussion surrounding the finished product, this case study makes clear the dialogic capabilities of the visual, which were not a part of Habermas' public sphere. The Bible Across America project demonstrates that a huge and scattered group of people who identify themselves as sharing a common textual interest, came together only as a direct result of a the active, visual participation of the supposed book comprising their commonality. The verbal was not the gathering force; the visual prevailed.

Graphic design, the practice of taking information and visually enhancing it to induce mass appeal has been accused of being "a lavish aesthetic feast but low on nutritional content" (Howard, 1997, p. 195). Habermas certainly agreed with this metaphor in *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere.* But if textually-cultivated rational-critical debate is the ultimate goal of the public sphere— which I believe it was—then this case study demonstrates that visuals are imperative in bringing people together toward that text to begin with. Encouraging people to read, in the words of John Dewey, is as important as what the reading has to say.

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