

A RHETORICAL SCHEMA FOR THE EVALUATION OF VISUAL IMAGERY

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In this essay, a schema is proposed for the evaluation of visual imagery from a rhetorical perspective. In the schema, judgments of quality about a visual image are made in terms of the function communicated by the image. Three processes are involved in such judgments—identification of a function or functions communicated by an image, assessment of the degree to which substantive and stylistic dimensions of the image support the communication of the function, and evaluation of the legitimacy of the function. The schema is illustrated in applications to a chair from the Memphis design consortium and to The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt.

The "conception of rhetoric as propositional, verbal text . . . in which public controversy primarily took oral or written form . . . is fading," asserts Brummett (1991, p. xi). In its place is a rhetoric of the visual image, manifest in texts of "architecture, paintings, sculpture, drawing, photography, and in urban, graphic, landscape, and industrial design." This is a rhetoric "recorded in the dialects of marble, steel, clay, glass, paper and ink, not to mention oils, pastels, and acrylics" (Brown, 1983, p. 11). Although rhetorical critics may feel nostalgia for a culture in which public discourse had primary impact, they are recognizing that to confine their study of symbols to speech making is to miss a great many of the symbols that affect us daily.

Rhetorical scholars are responding to changes in rhetorical practice by expanding the data they analyze to include visual symbols. In the last several years, they have used visual imagery as data for the application, illustration, and explication of various rhetorical constructs. Such data have included, for example, public and private spaces, including Central Park (Rosenfield, 1989); Disneyland (Foss & Gill, 1987); Michael Graves' architecture (Kanengieter, 1991); the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (Haines, 1986; Foss, 1986; Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991); and interior decoration of the home (Twigg, 1992). Deliberately persuasive visual artifacts such as advertising (Kaplan, 1990); editorial cartoons (DeSousa, 1984); and commemorative medals (Olson, 1990) have been analyzed from rhetorical perspectives. Works of art also have served as visual data for rhetorical scholars, exemplified in Reid's (1990) study of Hieronymus Bosch's painting, *The Hay-Wain*, and in my own studies of Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (Foss, 1988), body art (Foss, 1987), and Christo's *Valley Curtain* (Foss, 1993). Finally, numerous films, including *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (Medhurst, 1982); *E.T.* (Rushing, 1985); *Primate* (Benson, 1985); *The Year of Living Dangerously* (Campbell, 1988); *Gremlins* (Brummett, 1991); and *Jaws* (Frentz & Rushing, 1993), have been used to explore a variety of rhetorical phenomena.

The study of visual imagery from a rhetorical perspective may make contributions beyond providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of rhetorical processes. In some cases, such study may contribute to the formulation or reconceptualization of aesthetic notions that unnecessarily restrict definitions of, and approaches to, visual phenomena. I hope to make such a contribution in

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this essay. My purpose is to apply a rhetorical perspective to the issue of evaluation of visual imagery in order to offer an alternative schema of evaluation to those developed in aesthetics. I will attempt to reconceptualize, in other words, the notion of evaluation of images using rhetorical constructs.

A variety of perspectives on the evaluation of visual imagery have been offered in aesthetics. One such perspective defines judgments of quality solely as idiosyncratic response—judgments about quality mean simply preference, rooted in individual whim or fancy (e.g., Bayley, qtd. in Fuller, 1984). Another view suggests that judgments of aesthetic objects are located in a faculty of the individual, and those in whom the faculty is the most highly developed are the ones who determine standards for quality (e.g., Gerard, 1759/1963). Yet another perspective on the evaluation of images is characterized by the view that universal criteria or general principles exist for making such evaluations—principles such as coherence, novelty, continuity, mastery of technique, and authenticity (e.g., Beardsley, 1962; Bongard, 1983; Reimer, 1984).

Although perspectives such as these are useful for judging imagery from an aesthetic perspective, they are less so for rhetorical evaluations of images. When evaluation is seen as an idiosyncratic preference that cannot be applied outside of the individual, for example, the rhetorical critic's efforts to evaluate seem irrelevant and even silly. When evaluation is seen as a faculty that develops through practice in viewing images, the rhetorical critic is seen to lack the necessary practice to have developed the appropriate sensitivity. Similarly, when evaluation is a process governed by aesthetic standards, the efforts of rhetorical critics to apply them result in critical products that are naive and simplistic in comparison to those who make such judgments on the basis of aesthetic training. Even more important, however, what makes aesthetic perspectives on evaluation unsatisfactory for application in a rhetorical realm is that their aim is to identify artistic merit or aesthetic excellence; they are not concerned, as are rhetorical critics, with the influence of images on audiences and the way images are constructed to affect such influence.

Even aesthetic perspectives that might seem more closely related to the concerns of rhetoric turn out, on closer examination, to be unsatisfactory. Kant's (1790/1911) theory of aesthetic judgment, for example, appears to be a possibility with potential for rhetorical application. Although Kant sees judgments of taste as subjective (1790/1911, pp. 139–140), he also views such judgments as soliciting the assent of others, with their reasonableness apparent once those others detach themselves from the limitations of their own subjective perspectives (1790/1911, pp. 144–154). Although the negotiation that appears to be required among individuals with unique tastes seems to point to a role for rhetoric in Kant's theory, he disallows such a role because of rhetoric's teleological dimension. For Kant, aesthetic judgments are unrelated to ends: "the judgement of taste is simply *contemplative*, i.e., it is a judgement which is indifferent as to the existence of an object" (1790/1911, p. 48). He discounts rhetoric in general, in fact, because it has a purpose or end (1790/1892, pp. 206–220). Kant's perspective, then, despite its apparent potential, cannot be used as the starting point for a rhetorical evaluation of images.

Similarly, semiotics, which deals with how meaning is constructed from signs, would seem to offer a rhetorically oriented approach to the evaluation of visual imagery. But semiotics provides no means for judging or evaluating the meanings

that are identified in an analysis—it is not concerned with “judgments of effect or accuracy” (Sillars, 1991, p. 126). As Berger (1991) acknowledges,

in its concern for the relationship of elements and production of meaning in a text, it ignores the quality of the work itself. That is, semiology is not really concerned with art, but rather with meaning and modes of cognition (the codes needed to understand a text). It is as if one judged a meal by the quality of the ingredients, without any concern for how the food was cooked or what it tasted like. (p. 27)

The need remains for a schema of evaluation that allows for judgments to be made about images from a rhetorical perspective.

The inadequacies in aesthetic theories for the rhetorical evaluation of images led me to develop this proposal for a rhetorically centered schema. I will present the schema in three steps, beginning with an identification of the primary concepts of the schema. Next, I will apply it to two artifacts—a Memphis chair and The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt—to demonstrate its applicability in the evaluation of images from a rhetorical perspective. In the conclusion, I will suggest the contributions the schema makes to various issues in both aesthetics and rhetoric. As will become evident in the illustrations and examples I will cite, I see my proposed schema as applicable to a broad array of visual images—to two- and three-dimensional images (paintings, sculpture, furniture, interior design, and architecture) as well as to aesthetic and functional images (works of art, billboards, and furniture).

I propose that judgments of quality about visual imagery be made in terms of the function of an image. I have chosen the term *function*, rather than *purpose*, because *purpose* involves an effect that is intended or desired, and I do not wish to suggest that the criterion for the judgment of an image is the intention of the image's creator. The schema I propose is clearly in opposition to the intentionalist view, which suggests that a creator's intentions are relevant to or determine the correct interpretation of a work, a view based in the critic's “desire to meet the work on its own ground, to understand the artist's motivations before judging” the work (Sirridge, 1978, p. 140). A primary argument in support of the intentionalist view is that what “distinguishes art as human creation is precisely the presence of intentions, goals, or purposes to be achieved. . . . Why define art as a product of human endeavor if we are not interested in what the human beings who created it were endeavouring to do” (Feagin, 1982, pp. 65–66)?

A number of challenges have been raised to the intentionalist perspective, many of which derive from pragmatic considerations. The critic may not have access to biographical or historical evidence about the intentions of artists. Artists may not be able to give clear verbal accounts of their intentions and, even if they can, they may be mistaken about what motivated them. To decide which of artists' pronouncements are genuine statements of intent and which are merely retrospective critical comments on their work also is difficult. Finally, the intentionalist view privileges artists' interpretations at the expense of others, resulting in a “disregard of any possible new values and ways of experiencing a work of art, and hence rationale for interpreting it, that may be introduced in the future” (Feagin, 1982, p. 72).

In part because of such difficulties, the anti-intentionalist stance, which undergirds my proposed schema, suggests that a work, once done, stands independent of its production, and the intentions of artists or creators are irrelevant to critics' responses to their works. Lyas (1983) states the position as one in which apprecia-

tion and evaluation require "no knowledge of and should involve no reference to the intentions of artists . . ." (p. 291). A weaker version of the position is to acknowledge "the relevance of the author's intentions" but to deny "that these determine the evaluation of the work (Davies, 1982, p. 72). Function, which I have made central to the evaluation of imagery from a rhetorical perspective, is not, then, the function its creator intended but rather the action the image communicates, as named by the critic. Images thus do not determine their own interpretation but require interpretation, with the result that the image will "have more meanings for its collective audience than it does for its producer" (Shapiro, 1974, p. 39).

A view of function as communicated in the image itself suggests that three primary kinds of judgments are involved in the process of evaluating an image from a rhetorical perspective. The first is identification of a function communicated in the image, accomplished through the critic's analysis of the image itself; this function is a product of the critic's interpretation of the physical data of the image. A critic may see the function of a painting of Elvis on velvet, for example, as a loving memorial to Elvis; the function of a kitchen painted a sunny yellow as the expression of warmth; and the function of a non-representational painting of maroon, blue, and gold forms as an invitation to viewers to break old patterns and to transcend the limitations they represent. As with any act of criticism, the function the critic names is but one possible function—it is by no means the correct one—and the critic's responsibility is to support the function proposed by showing the steps taken from the physical data to the claim concerning the function. More than one function also may be assigned to an image by a critic.

Identification of function is followed by an assessment of how well that function is communicated and the support available for that function in the image. This process involves exploration of the connections made between the identified function and the means available in the image to support it. The critic's concern here is with the various stylistic and substantive dimensions of the image. Dimensions such as the subject matter, medium, materials, forms, colors, organization, craftsmanship, and context, for example, are examined by the critic for their contributions to the communication of the function. Some of these dimensions may support the function; others may detract from it.

The geese that adorn the front yards of homes in suburbs of Columbus, Ohio, allow me to illustrate analysis of the connections between dimensions of an image and its function. These are gray concrete geese, approximately two feet high, that their owners dress in clothing. The clothing is changed to fit seasons or holidays, so the geese appear in witch and pumpkin costumes at Halloween, snow costumes at Christmas, raincoats and hats for spring, and Ohio State University sweatshirts during the football season. Many functions could be supported by the critic for the geese, but one might be a celebration of suburban life in that the geese appear to embody the desired benefits of life in the suburbs. They communicate that suburbia is a place for play, relaxation, and entertainment (suggested by the geese's reference to the dressing of dolls in children's play); is characterized by natural elements not available in cities (suggested by the geese's reference to animals); and is a place of community (suggested in the repetition of the basic form of the geese in yard after yard).

I argue, however, that the function of celebration of suburbia conveyed by the geese is not as effectively communicated as it could be because the same dimen-

sions that point to a celebration of suburbia point, as well, to the down side of suburban life. The dressing of the geese suggests that suburbs are devoid of activities such as theatres, arenas, restaurants, and bars that entertain people and foster community; the dressing of the geese becomes one of the few forms of live entertainment available to suburban dwellers. The concrete material of which the geese are made suggests that natural elements are not present in the suburbs—they were destroyed with the pouring of the concrete when the suburbs were built. Similarly, the community suggested by the repetition of the geese is a false one, based not on real communication and connection with neighbors but on the purchase of an icon. In this case, then, a major function the geese appear to communicate is mitigated because some of their substantive and stylistic dimensions do not support that function.

Analysis of the various components of the image to discover their contribution to the communication of a particular function can be supplemented with a comparative analysis, but the comparison is not made to an ideal standard external to the image. Rather, the image is compared to other images with the same or a similar function in an effort to highlight available options in communicating such a function. If the critic determines that the decor of a living room, for example, has as a function the creation of a warm, comfortable environment in which to relax, the critic might suggest that the early-American style of furniture in the room does support that function. A comparison of the dimensions of the early-American style with those of other kinds of furniture, however, might suggest to the critic that another kind of furniture would perform that function more successfully. The critic could argue that the references of early-American furniture to restraint, confinement, and the American pioneer heritage—inferred from elements such as the furniture's predominance of wood at the expense of upholstery, its spindly arms and legs, and the small prints and muted colors of its fabrics—detract from the communication of warmth. A contemporary, overstuffed style of furniture, the critic might suggest, would communicate the function of a comfortable, relaxed environment more effectively because of its references to nurturing, abundance, and envelopment.

A third process of assessment in the schema involves scrutiny of the function itself—reflection on its legitimacy or soundness, determined by the implications and consequences of the function. This assessment is made according to the critic's initial reasons for analyzing the image—the critic might be interested, for example, in whether the image is congruent with a particular ethical system or whether it offers emancipatory potential. If the function is judged to be problematic in terms of its likely consequences, other functions may be suggested as more legitimate than the one communicated by the image. A trailer house covered with a siding of plastic "rock," for example, could be seen as communicating, in part, the status and wealth associated with stone houses and fences (although, of course, its plasticity detracts from communication of this function). In this case, a critic might argue that the siding also communicates a function of mocking nature and encouraging a disconnection from it, functions inexcusable in a world where this kind of disconnection is severely damaging the earth's resources. Functions that encourage a respect for, and connection to, natural elements, the critic might argue, are superior to those that communicate wealth because the pursuit of wealth in a consumer economy is largely responsible for the destruction of the earth's resources.

In the proposed schema, the notion of taste is addressed in this assessment of function.¹ Judgments of personal taste are seen as synonymous with acceptance of function. Personal dislike for an image, then, derives from disagreement with the function of the image. Analysis of an opera performance, for example, might suggest that it deserves to be judged of high quality, according to the proposed schema, because one of the primary functions it communicates—to integrate art forms in a complex fashion—is well supported. A personal dislike of opera, however, can be explained by disagreement with its function. The critic may not believe that the piling up of art forms is a particularly valuable function for a work of art to perform. In the schema, then, taste equates with personal acceptance of a function.

APPLICATION OF THE SCHEMA

The rhetorical schema I have suggested for the evaluation of visual imagery centers on the critic's identification of the function communicated by an image, assessment of the support provided for the function, and evaluation of the legitimacy of that function. If the image communicates a function through the development of its various elements that the critic considers to be legitimate, it is effective from a rhetorical perspective—in traditional terms, it would be considered to be of high quality. A brief application of the schema to two different images will clarify it and suggest the different sites of tension that are likely to arise in its application in the rhetorical evaluation of images.

The first image I have selected for this purpose is the First chair,² designed by Michele de Lucchi for the 1983 Memphis collection. Memphis was a style of furniture designed by a loose consortium of about 30 designers centered in Milan, Italy. Founded in 1980 by Ettore Sottsass, Jr., the group's name came from a Bob Dylan song, "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again," which was playing during an early planning session. The designers later came to appreciate the allusions of the name "to both the ancient capital of Egypt and the birthplace of Elvis Presley—a juxtaposition of the ancient and exotic and the contemporary and banal . . ." (Horn, 1986, p. 21). Appropriately described as "amiably batty" (Horn, 1986, p. 35), the chairs, sofas, tables, bookcases, storage units, beds, teapots, and vases created by Memphis designers were characterized by wild colors and patterns, asymmetry, incongruous shapes and forms, hard surfaces, and use of plastic laminates and industrial materials. Until the design group disbanded in the middle 1980s, Memphis furniture was sold in the United States by Artemide.

The First chair, the subject of my analysis, has a flat, black disk for a seat and four legs of circular metal tubing. The same kind of tubing circles from one front leg of the chair up and around to the other to create the chair's back. In the middle of this tubing is a small, flat, blue disk that forms the chair's backrest. Two plastic, black, round spheres, positioned lower on the tubing, serve as the armrests for the chair.

Of the variety of functions that are communicated through the First chair, one seems primary: to launch the user into activity. The chair visually denies and disrupts the effort to rest, insisting that the viewer/user keep moving. A number of the chair's components contribute to the communication of this function. The materials of which the chair is created—the cold, hard, metal surfaces that do not yield to the body and the omission of functional supports for back and arms—suggest discomfort, disruption, alertness, and movement. The various compo-

nents of the chair suggest various contexts, including an industrial context—a world of aluminum, industrial paints, and tubing that is hard and cold and competitive. The hybrid conglomeration of the chair's form, added to the hard, industrial surfaces, references the chaotic, incoherent, stimulating, varied world of the commercial strip, with its traffic, movement, giant illuminated and neon signs, and graffiti. Yet another context the chair references is the carefree world of children's play. The chair's incorporation of toy-like, whimsical elements is evident in the blue disk at the chair's back—close in appearance to a frisbee—and in the two black balls—resembling bowling balls—of the armrests. A high-tech, futuristic space age is suggested by the black balls, as well—they could be the controls of a spaceship, carrying the user to a Disneyland tomorrow where efficient, hard designs fit robots more than they do people.

The site of tension in an evaluation of the First chair lies not in the communication of the chair's function: its components work together to support contexts outside of the home that have chaos, busyness, lack of control, and discontinuity in common and thus support a function of launching into action. Similarly, comparison of the components of the chair with other available options does not produce a negative evaluation of the chair. Few types of furniture serve this same function; the few that do, such as airport furniture, designed to move people to shops and restaurants to spend money, do not communicate as thoroughly the function of movement.

In the case of the First chair, the site in the schema that is likely to engender debate is the legitimacy of the function; critics who respond negatively to the chair are likely to do so on the basis of disagreement with the function. The chair's function violates the function typically communicated by furniture of providing a place for leisure and relaxation. A question the critic evaluating the chair would want to explore is how the violation of function operates. Such a violation of function could be read as elitism and consumerism in that few people can afford to possess expensive, dysfunctional chairs whose primary purpose is something other than to provide a place to sit. An equally supportable interpretation suggested by the chair's various elements is that the violation encourages a questioning of the nature of life in the home and the nature of relaxing in the home. The function communicated by the chair challenges conceptions of what is done in homes, questions the need for refuge from the outside world, and encourages interaction with rather than withdrawal from it. The function also encourages questioning of whether functional objects such as chairs work in ways other than to enable users to sit, eat, work, and relax. In this example, then, the critic's focus would be on an assessment of the function's soundness.

My second application of the schema is to a more complex image, The NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt. In this application, the site of critical tension is not legitimacy of function but whether the various components of the image provide sufficient support for that function. Conceived by Cleve Jones, the Quilt is a collection of fabric panels, created by friends and family members, that commemorate individuals who have died of AIDS. For display, the panels are joined into eight-panel blocks, with the blocks separated by white fabric walkways. The Quilt first was displayed in Washington, D. C., in 1987 and last was displayed as one unit in October, 1991, in that same city; it continues to be circulated and displayed in smaller sections. As of December, 1993, the Quilt contained 26,013 panels and weighed 30 tons without and 36 tons with the fabric walkways (Broder, 1994).

Although many dimensions of the Quilt clearly are involved in any reading a critic makes of it—its weight and bulk are such dimensions, for example—I will treat it for the purpose of illustration of the schema simply as an image, focusing on its visual dimensions.

One function communicated by the Quilt is a love for, and caring about, people who have died of AIDS. This function is communicated in the quilt form itself—quilts are associated with qualities of warmth and homeyness. The love those who made the panels feel for those who have died of AIDS is evident in the care and attention manifest in the technical dimensions of the panels. Letters of names formed in neckties (Ruskin, 1988, p. 91); intricate trimming of the letters of names (Ruskin, 1988, p. 38); faces of the deceased created in needlepoint (panel for Gene D. Fowler); three-dimensional objects created of fabric—a carton of French fries (Ruskin, 1988, p. 118), trees (Ruskin, 1988, p. 72), and hands (Ruskin, 1988, p. 86), for example; and complex designs reflect a great deal of care taken with the creation of the panels, a care that honors those who have died with the creativity, attention, and time they suggest. The love felt for those who have died is explicit in many of the panels in messages such as "Love from Mom and Dad" (Ruskin, 1988, p. 40), "From your lover. He misses you very much" (Ruskin, 1988, p. 63), "Love you Dad" (Ruskin, 1988, p. 82), and "I love you forever" (Ruskin, 1988, p. 84).

That the people who are the subjects of the love and care communicated in the Quilt have died is shown in the various elements in the Quilt associated with death. The panels are three by six feet, the size of coffins. The arrangement of the panels suggests a graveyard, with grave markers separated by paths, and the panels often bear the birth and death dates of individuals, as tombstones do. Many individual images in the Quilt include symbols of death or the afterlife, such as that of Robert Filomeno, which includes the Mexican tree of life, symbol of rebirth (Ruskin, 1988, p. 129), and of Jim McCreary, whose panel contains a rainbow with "somewhere" written under it (Ruskin, 1988, p. 125).

Although many dimensions of the panels clearly support communication of the function of loving and caring for those who have died of AIDS, one dimension of the Quilt does not—the specificity of data that characterizes most of the panels. Some panels depict the actual physical appearance of the person in photographs or drawings, as do the panels for Paul Fitzsimmons (Ruskin, 1988, p. 146) and David Aurano (Ruskin, 1988, p. 147). The occupations of the individuals often are included, as in Neal L. Monaco's panel, which includes the words, "cellist" and "Sacramento Symphony," and features the image of a cello (Ruskin, 1988, p. 60). Greg Smith's panel includes his name and address, cut out from a friend's address book (Ruskin, 1988, p. 122), and a favorite pair of jeans is part of the panel of Terry van Laar (Ruskin, 1988, p. 133).

The specificity of the panels may mitigate communication of the function of demonstration of love and care for people with AIDS, particularly for potential audience members who do not personally know anyone who has died of the disease (Nordstrom, 1990). The specificity allows them to see the people commemorated as unrelated to them and the love and care shown as irrelevant to them and their lives. Consequently, because they do not know any of the particular people depicted, viewers are able to remain detached from them and to feel, perhaps, aloofness, indifference, or relief that their lives have not been affected by the disease. The love and care for the specific individuals the panels may be seen to

communicate, then, may not transcend the boundaries of those panels to influence audience members to show that same care and love to others with AIDS.

A cursory comparison of the specificity of the Quilt with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial highlights the effects of the specificity of the Quilt and its role in diffusing the communication of its function. In the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the various dimensions that constitute the Memorial are able to suggest very different referents for viewers, derived from disparate perspectives; the black color and the V shape alone, for example, reference multiple interpretations (Foss, 1986). Consequently, viewers are drawn into the image, welcomed into it, and made part of it because it encompasses and affirms their individual perspectives. Even the listing of names on the Memorial, which gives some information about specific individuals, does not engender a focus on individual personalities to the degree that the Quilt does. The names are identical in form, suggesting sameness, generality, and inclusiveness. Because the unique differences among the people listed are not elaborated, viewers may be able more easily to see their lives as connected with and to care about those who have died than they are when viewing the Quilt. Greater abstractness in the presentation of lives in the Quilt, then, may serve the function of communicating and generating love and care for people with AIDS more effectively.

IMPLICATIONS

A rhetorical schema for the evaluation of visual imagery has implications both for conceptions of judgment in aesthetics and rhetoric. The proposed schema, for example, disrupts notions about aesthetic or artistic images that typically are a part of aesthetic perspectives. The schema eliminates, for example, the option of making critical judgments about categories of images. In contrast to the view taken in works such as *The Encyclopedia of Bad Taste* (Stern & Stern, 1990), a rhetorical schema suggests that only if all images in a category fail to support the communication of their functions and those functions are argued to be illegitimate can categorically negative judgments be made about them. Low-rider cars, tattoos, velvet paintings of Elvis, and plastic statues of religious figures, then, cannot be seen as inherently of low quality unless they do not provide sufficient support for the functions they communicate and the critic is able to argue that those functions are not legitimate or sound.

A second implication of the schema for aesthetics is that the arbitrary, hierarchical distinctions typically made between high and low art, high and mass culture, or art and craft—and the evaluations typically made of them—are irrelevant. To assert that a work of high art derives from "an individual's insights, skills, inspiration, sensitivity, taste and sometimes genius," while the popular arts "are corporate efforts in which the individual's initiative is starkly circumscribed by commercial, ideological, and corporate considerations" (Novitz, 1989, p. 216) reveals nothing about the images' success in communicating and supporting their functions or the legitimacy of those functions for particular critical purposes. Such distinctions suggest different ways in which images are produced, but means of production are relevant to rhetorical judgments of quality only if they have an impact on the nature of the image's presentation of its function or the critic's interpretation of the legitimacy of that function.

A rhetorical perspective on the evaluation of images also provides a means for those without the benefit of training in aesthetics to be comfortable judging visual imagery. One of rhetoric's strengths is that it is available for use and is used by those without specialized training and knowledge, status and privilege. As a result, a rhetorical schema offers a means for lay viewers—those not educated in art, design, or aesthetics—to feel comfortable making judgments about visual images. Such is not the case with traditional aesthetic schemata, in which lay viewers are seen to lack the necessary practice or aesthetic training to have developed the appropriate sensitivity. In its applicability to the untrained viewer, the rhetorical schema thus contributes to Brummett's (1991) call for criticism that increases individuals' "*repertoires* of how to experience by increasing their knowledge of ways to order experience" (p. 101).

Yet another contribution made by the proposed rhetorical schema for the evaluation of images is that it provides one answer to postmodern theorists' calls for the formulation of some means for critical judgment given the current "crisis of cultural authority" (Owens, 1983, p. 57). A hallmark of the postmodern age is a questioning of the authority of universal standards of aesthetics, manifest in a lack of hierarchy in aesthetic judgment, the breakdown of the distinctions between high and low culture, and the gravitation of the arts toward entertainment and commodity. Aesthetic images, as a result, exist in a state of pluralism, which "grants a kind of equivalence; art of many sorts is made to seem more or less equal—equally (un)important" (Foster, 1985, p. 15). "How can the committed critic respond to this state of affairs?" asks Foster (1985, p. 5). "Are we to accept all voices . . . as espousing equally valid claims? If not, then how do we discriminate between them?" ask Best and Kellner (1991, p. 289). A rhetorical schema such as that offered here provides one answer to visual pluralism and the issues of assessment it raises; consequently, it may meet Foster's (1985) plea "to invent new truths or, more precisely, to reinvent old truths radically" (p. 31).

The proposed schema may make a contribution to rhetorical theory as well as to aesthetics. It allows for the development of a more positive view of visual symbols by rhetorical critics. Some scholars of rhetoric and contemporary culture believe that imagery as a rhetorical form is tainted in comparison to discourse in the effects it produces on the nature of public communication and the modes of critical processing it engenders in audiences. Postman (1985), for example, argues that the visual epistemology of television "pollutes public communication" (p. 28) and contributes to the decline of "the seriousness, clarity and, above all, value of public discourse . . ." (p. 29). Similarly, Zarefsky (1992) suggests that visual images "stand in for a more complex reality" (p. 412), contributing to the decline of a "rich and vibrant concept of *argument*, of public deliberation" (p. 414). Jamieson (1988) asserts that images are particularly susceptible to a truncation of argument (p. 240) and that the cognitive processing of images is less conscious and critical than the sort that occurs in the processing of verbal discourse (1992, p. 60).

This proposal for a rhetorical schema for the evaluation of images may provide other criteria by which images can be judged—ones that result in more positive views of their nature and function. The introduction of new criteria, I hope, will disabuse rhetorical scholars of the notion that visual symbols are inevitably inferior to verbal ones. In fact, I hope the schema directs rhetorical scholars to explore the ways in which the study of visual imagery provides access to a range of human

experience not always available through the study of discourse. In Audigier's (1991) words,

discursive language has definite limits to its usefulness. Because it employs conventional meaningful units according to rules of grammar and syntax, because each word has a relatively fixed meaning and the total meaning of this type of discourse is built up along a linear and logical pattern, it can only refer to the neutral aspects of our world of observation and thought. But there is another side of existence which escapes the control of discursive language. (p. 4)

Domains of experience that escape the control of discursive language often are communicated only through visual imagery, and the study of such forms provides access to those domains by rhetorical theorists and critics.

Finally, I hope that the proposed schema and the two sample applications model the ease with which rhetorical constructs may be applied to visual imagery and thus encourage rhetorical critics to join in the analysis of visual data from rhetorical perspectives. Rhetorical critics may be ill equipped to study visual imagery from the perspectives and for the purposes that aestheticians or art historians do, but they study visual imagery for different purposes than do aestheticians or art historians. Rhetorical critics who analyze visual imagery are not second-class critics, doing poorly or, at best, adequately what art and architecture critics and art historians have the training and expertise to do well. To answer the questions they ask—questions about rhetoric and the effects of images on audiences—rhetorical critics do possess the necessary tools to make important contributions to an understanding of the nature and function of visual symbols.

NOTES

¹This definition of taste differs significantly from those offered in aesthetics. For essays that provide comprehensive views of taste from these perspectives, see Gracyk (1990) and Fenster (1991).

²All Memphis furniture is named after hotels.

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