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THE CONSTRUCTION OF APPEAL IN VISUAL IMAGES: A HYPOTHESIS

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I was moved almost to tears by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., surprised at the memorial's appeal for me because I knew no one killed in Vietnam and, in fact, protested the war. After watching the Talking Heads' film *Stop Making Sense*, with no prior knowledge of the group or its music, I became a Talking Heads' fan. I was amused and delighted when I encountered the Wonder Bread building in Rock Springs, Wyoming—its shape a loaf of bread, its exterior covered with the yellow, red, and blue dots of the familiar bread wrapper. These are not uncommon experiences in a culture where myriad visual images beckon and cajole, compel and coach us into new attitudes and actions. Reflection on the process by which various visual images appeal to me—some of them images to which I did not expect my response to be positive—led me to the question that was the impetus for this essay: How is appeal constructed in visual images? In other words, how do viewers come to see images as attractive and interesting—to assign a positive evaluation to them?

I am aware that my interest in the topic of visual images makes me somewhat suspect in the discipline of speech communication; in fact, one of my goals in this essay is to encourage a greater acceptance of such work in our field. The committee on rhetorical criticism at the National Conference on Rhetoric recommended in 1970 that the scope of rhetorical criticism be expanded to include nondiscursive subjects such as architecture, rock music, and ballet.[1] But even the recommendations of this prestigious committee had little effect on scholarship on visual imagery in speech communication. The committee's call for expansion led primarily to debates on the appropriateness of such

expansion rather than to substantial numbers of studies of nondiscursive phenomena.

Representative of those in opposition to enlargement of the scope of rhetorical criticism to include visual symbols was Baskerville, who suggested that the study of nondiscursive symbols by rhetorical critics made all knowledge our province and put critics "in danger of biting off more than we can conveniently chew."[2] Lack of training in visual phenomena is cited as another reason for lack of work in this area by rhetorical scholars. Rhetorical critics are less familiar with the dimensions of and appropriate terminology for studying visual symbols, as Braden suggested: "I argue that by inclination and training most of us are best qualified to study the speech or rhetorical act."[3]

One of the most persuasive arguments against the study of nondiscursive symbols deals with theory development and was particularly well articulated by Hart. The goal of rhetorical criticism, he suggested, is the accumulation of theoretical statements about rhetoric. When nondiscursive forms such as visual images are the object of criticism, "the *immediate* implementation of the theoretical threads derived in previous studies of . . . verbal interchanges" is more difficult simply because of the differences between discursive and nondiscursive phenomena.[4] I believe that theory building is not only possible as a result of the criticism of nondiscursive rhetoric but that it may be enhanced and facilitated through such criticism simply because nondiscursive symbols often offer data that are richer and more complex than words alone.

But I have another reason for working in the area of visual rhetoric. Images presented through media such as advertisements, television, MTV, films, signs, and building exterior and interior design constitute a major part of our rhetorical environment. As much as scholars who work in the area of public address may feel nostalgia for a culture in which public speeches had a primary impact, that culture is gone; visual images now have the significance that public speeches once did. To study only verbal discourse, then, is to study a minute portion of the symbols that affect us daily. To understand and influence culture, to teach students to respond critically to the symbols around them, and to discover how to create effective messages, an understanding of the process by which visual images appeal is necessary.

My effort to understand the construction of appeal in visual imagery is related to Leland Griffin's work in two ways. First, the study of

nondiscursive forms stretches boundaries, as did Griffin's early essay, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements."[5] At a time when the conventional techniques of rhetorical analysis and appraisal focused on the individual great orator, Griffin expanded the scope of our data by suggesting that movements are appropriate for analysis and broadened the methods of rhetorical analysis by proposing how to isolate and analyze movements. My interest in examining the boundaries constructed around efforts to analyze and evaluate rhetoric—in this case, a boundary defined by a focus on discursive symbols—and the effects these boundaries have on critical products and resulting theories, then, has roots in Griffin's work.

This essay is a continuation of Griffin's work in yet another way. In a 1960 essay, "The Edifice Metaphor in Rhetorical Theory,"[6] Griffin dealt with connections between rhetoric and architecture and outlined two relationships between them. The germinal relation is a reciprocal, creative connection in which discourse is the means through which a building is constructed; that structure then may inspire discourse. The second relation, the analogic relation, links rhetorical theory with the edifice metaphor from architecture as a way of conceptualizing and discussing rhetorical theory. Griffin traces the edifice metaphor in the work of rhetorical theorists from classical to contemporary times, showing how this metaphor introduced into a rhetorical theory a concern not only with arrangement but with its aesthetic dimensions. Griffin's work in this area pointed, as I attempt to do in this essay, to the importance of studying the place of nondiscursive forms in rhetorical theory.

I began my investigation of the question of how appeal is constructed in visual images by turning to the speech communication literature. I was not surprised to discover that little has been done on this topic in our field. The body of work that is beginning to emerge on this subject is characterized by two primary approaches.

Some rhetorical scholars use visual imagery as data to investigate questions related to the nature and function of rhetoric. In such studies, visual images constitute artifacts to use in illustrating, explaining, or investigating rhetorical constructs developed from the study of discursive rhetoric. Visual images, in this approach, are assumed to have essentially the same characteristics as discursive symbols. An example is Rosenfield's analysis of Central Park in New York City, in which he studies the park as an example of epideictic or celebratory rhetoric.[7]

Another example is my study of Judy Chicago's work of cooperative art, *The Dinner Party*, in which I use the piece to identify strategies used by women to empower and accord legitimacy to their own perspective.[8] Other studies in which visual data are used to illustrate or explore rhetorical constructs include Rushing's analysis of the mythic evolution of "The New Frontier" using space fiction films;[9] Haines's analysis of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to demonstrate the process of sight sacralization, in which attributes formerly reserved for holy places are ascribed to tourist attractions;[10] Campbell's study of the strategy of enactment using Peter Weir's film, *The Year of Living Dangerously*;[11] and Olson's study of the epideictic, deliberative, and apologetic functions of Benjamin Franklin's commemorative medal, *Libertas Americana*.[12]

A second approach to the study of visual imagery from a rhetorical perspective is the investigation of the rhetorical features of visual images themselves. The assumption of scholars who adopt this approach is that visual images are significantly different from discursive symbols, and their concern is with the discovery of how the particular nature of visual symbols themselves affects audiences' responses. Images, for example, do not express a thesis or proposition in the way that verbal messages do—the thesis is usually uncertain and ambiguous. Neither can visual images depict the negative—they cannot say something is *not* something else—as words can. In addition, the elements of visual images are presented simultaneously, in contrast to the linear, successive order of words.[13]

Examples of this second approach to the study of visual imagery, in which the unique features of visual images are investigated in order to develop richer and more comprehensive explanations of symbol use, include Kaplan's work on visual metaphors, which resulted in a description of three characteristics that distinguish visual metaphors from language-based metaphors.[14] My study of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is another example; it is an investigation of ambiguity in visual phenomena and the process by which it persuades.[15] My examination of body art, in which artists use their bodies as their primary means of expression, also investigates the process by which ambiguous visual messages function, with an emphasis on how unconventional referents are interpreted by an audience.[16] Rhetorical scholars, then, are beginning to investigate the rhetorical characteristics of images, although focused and coherent theories of the process by which appeal is constructed in imagery have yet to be formulated.

Oddly enough, other disciplines—ones that might be expected to deal with the question of the appeal of visual imagery—do not provide much more information. A review of the literature of the disciplines of aesthetics, art history, architecture, art education, studio art, cognitive psychology, leisure studies, marketing, and advertising revealed very little attention to the process by which visual images come to be viewed as appealing. I found snippets of explanations—for example, what constitutes style in visual imagery,[17] how unity functions in an image,[18] the nature of representation,[19] the role of intention in the interpretation and evaluation of visual images,[20] what constitutes truth in visual images,[21] and the differences between visual and verbal symbols.[22] Some of these dimensions are a part of the process of the construction of appeal in visual images, but they are not examined for the creation of a theory that describes this process. Even the semiotics literature, which I suspected would offer useful explanations of the process of visual appeal, was disappointing. Semiotics provides explanations of how signs generate meaning,[23] but the next step—the one in which my interest lies—of how the interpretation of meaning constitutes appeal is rarely of concern.

Even prescriptive essays and textbooks in areas such as retailing and advertising, which I felt certain would present information about how to create appealing images that elicit positive evaluations, contained virtually no explanation of the process. Typical were admonitions such as one from retailing, which suggested that the "image of a store must be in accordance with its merchandise."[24] In advertising, the advice is only slightly more helpful: "When persuasive images are too abstract or conceptual, too indirect and even elliptical, they lose the capacity to provoke response."[25] The author of one advertising textbook gave these suggestions: illustrations in advertisements "should attract attention," "emphasize a fact about the product or its use," "reinforce the image of the package," and "stimulate the audience's desire for the product."[26] These prescriptions may result in the creation of visual images that are appealing, but they lack a theoretical base that explains how such appeal is constructed and why it works.

Because my review of what I believed would be relevant literature was of little assistance in discovering how visual images persuade, I turned to specific visual images to use as data to begin to identify features of this process. I chose to study images in both two and three dimensions, including paintings, prints, photographs, drawings, sculp-

ture, furniture, and the interior and exterior design of buildings. I selected images in a variety of media so that any notions I formulated would not be limited by the particular characteristics of one medium. The images that constituted my data also were unaccompanied by verbal texts that might suggest specific interpretations to the viewer and were limited to ones new to an audience and appealing at their initial encounter. Images repeatedly encountered by an audience and that gradually develop appeal as a result of increased familiarity were not included. Finally, I confined my inquiry to images that have been labeled *visual art, art pictures,* or *pictorial denotation;* their distinctive feature is that the access point or central emphasis of the images is visual. In the images with which I was concerned, their visual structures or forms are less obviously the bearers of ideas and register more as visual arrangements.[27]

HYPOTHESIS OF VISUAL APPEAL

From my analysis of various images, I formulated a hypothesis of how appeal is constructed in visual images. My hypothesis, in brief, is this: A novel technical aspect of the image violates viewers' expectations; this violation functions both to sustain interest in the image and to decontextualize it. Connotations commonly associated with the technical aspect then provide an unexpected but familiar context in which to interpret the image. The result is appeal of the image, which I am defining as arousal of interest in, attraction of viewers to, and assignment of a positive evaluation to the image.

I see visual images that appeal to be characterized by elements that are presented to the viewer virtually simultaneously. The feature that appears to trigger the process, however, is technical novelty; some dimension of the form, structure, or construction technique of the image stands out as exceptional or extraordinary. This element may be exquisite detailing, superb craftsmanship, or a finely finished surface—elements that stand out in this age of mass-produced and often poorly crafted objects. The technical novelty may result from a different scale than usual—miniature or grand—so that it generates awe and admiration. Perhaps its design is refreshing or innovative and thus stands apart from most of the images in the environment—images that are, as Krier labels them, "an insult to our aesthetic sensibilities."[28] Viewers may wonder how a particular effect was achieved or marvel at the

process that produced it. For whatever reason, viewers are drawn to focus on a technical aspect of the image that is unusual or special in some way.

The technical novelty of the image surprises or violates viewers' expectations. The element of the image that is characterized by technical novelty suggests that expectations for the image are incorrect; viewers discover that the context in which they attempt to interpret the image is not appropriate. The image is defamiliarized;[20] consequently, the coding system viewers expected to use in their interpretation of the image is not appropriate.

The violation of expectations and lack of context in which to place an image could generate confusion and frustration for viewers, making abandonment of the effort to understand the image likely. Were this to occur, viewers would not be susceptible to the potential of the image to appeal. But the element of technical novelty makes abandonment of the image by viewers unlikely. They want to resolve the tension created by the technical novelty—to understand the proper context in which to place the image. In the face of the image's displacement from the expected context, then, they are inclined to react critically to the image, to seek places in which to position it, and thus to restore familiarity to their world.

Images that appeal do not simply abandon viewers at the point of tension generated by the technical novelty. They help viewers comprehend the image by clearly referencing associations that point to contexts with positive connotations for them. These associations may be generated by the form of the image, the content of the image, or both. They suggest to viewers familiar contexts of events, objects, and qualities they are likely to associate with delight, affection, nostalgia, or other positive attributes.

The positive associations elicited by the image function in two ways. First, they provide a context in which viewers can interpret the image. This context is different from the one in which they initially tried to interpret the image, but it is familiar to them. The tension felt is at least partially resolved for viewers, who have found a place in which the image becomes sensible.

A second function served by these positive associations clustered around the technical novelty is that they accord a degree of credibility to the image. The frustration or irritation that may occur because of the violation of expectation that results from the technical novelty

makes a negative perception of the image likely. Credibility is reclaimed for the image in its association with a positive and familiar context.

To summarize: Construction of appeal in a visual image is triggered by an element of technical novelty that results in a displacement of the image from its usual interpretive context. Association of the image with contexts that are positive for and known to the viewer—but different from the context originally expected—places the image in a new context. Interpretation of the image in this context is likely to result in assignment of a positive meaning to it.

The Hypothesis Supported

To illustrate and support my hypothesis of how appeal is constructed in visual images, I provide in this section three case studies of different types of visual images that appeal: a piece of furniture, the *Beverly* sideboard from the Memphis furniture collection; a work of environmental art, Christo's *Valley Curtain*; and an interior space, the pool room in Elvis Presley's home, Graceland.

Beverly Sideboard

Memphis is a style of furniture designed by a loose consortium of about thirty designers centered in Milan, Italy. Its name comes from a Bob Dylan song, "Stuck Inside of Mobile with the Memphis Blues Again," which was playing during an early planning session of the group. The Memphis 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."[30] Appropriately described as "amiably batty,"[31] the chairs, sofas, tables, bookcases, storage units, beds, teapots, and vases created by Memphis designers usually are characterized by wild colors and patterns, asymmetry, incongruous shapes and forms, hard surfaces, and use of plastic laminates and industrial materials.[32]

I have selected one piece of Memphis furniture to illustrate my hypothesis of how appeal is constructed in visual images—the *Beverly* sideboard.[33] Designed by Memphis's founder, Ettore Sottsass, Jr., for the first Memphis collection in 1981, the sideboard consists of a cabinet base constructed of light green laminate with a front inset of a dense, abstract, print design in green and yellow. On top of the cabinet is a

wooden, ladderlike structure that leans to the left. Connected both to the ladder structure and to the top of the cabinet is a curved metal pipe from which juts a red light bulb. Projected from the left of the cabinet are three rectangular blocks of different sizes in black, green, and red.

A combination of elements of the *Beverly* sideboard constitutes the technical novelty of the image. The materials of which the piece is constructed—plastic laminates, wood, and metal—are not typical materials from which home furnishings are created. The color of the furniture is also unusual. The amount of color is one source of this novelty; furniture for the home tends not to be intensely colored. But the novelty of the sideboard's color continues in the juxtaposition of red, green, and a print design in green and yellow. Rather than harmonizing with each other, these colors are placed in simple proximity without apparent regard for conventional color relationships. The result is brilliant vibration suggestive of the colors of public spaces such as Burger Kings, neon signs, motels, and K-Marts. These are not the soft, warm, and soothing colors expected in a home.

Yet another technical element that is unusual in the sideboard is its structural independence. It is not organized according to a clear theme—such as a stylistic period or a particular function—as traditional furniture is. Instead, the sideboard appears to have been designed and constructed by assemblages, clusters, and deposits of forms that overlap and intersect. The principles uniting the slanted pieces of lumber, curved chrome tube, and red, green, and black blocks are not clear and suggest "a series of accidents that come together by chance"[14] rather than any kind of unity or coherence.

The technical novelty of the *Beverly* sideboard—materials, color, and structural independence—subverts the context of traditional home furniture, leaving viewers unclear of a relevant context for interpretation. At the same time, the technical aspects of the sideboard that violated viewers' expectations function to suggest alternative contexts in which it can be interpreted. The various uncommon technical elements of the sideboard incorporate objects or designs that refer to contexts likely to be known to viewers and invite them to use those contexts to select meanings for the furniture.

One context suggested is that of a downtown strip of bars, restaurants, theatres, video arcades, stores, and gas stations, characterized by their industrial materials and paints, juxtapositions of color, disparate

graphics, giant illuminated and neon signs, and spraypainted graffiti. It brings to the interpretation of the sideboard a sense of infinite choices and possibilities—a sense that everything is available; adventure; and a night on the town that includes a touch of raunchiness. The context of the child's world of play is also referenced in the sideboard through the incorporation of the red, green, and black blocks—the child's toys—and the plastic laminate—a material likely to appear in a child's room. These contexts suggest that the seriousness and status usually associated with home furnishings should be replaced by the qualities of adventure, exploration, joy, lightheartedness, and fun.

Through the associations viewers are encouraged to make between novel technical elements in the sideboard and familiar contexts, they are provided with means for interpreting the piece in a positive manner. The introduction of the contexts of the strip and childhood play into the *Beverly* sideboard suggests that viewers are to reference, in combination, the vitality of the strip and the joy of the child's play. Associated with these contexts, the sideboard appeals in its reminder of contexts in which viewers once spent a great deal of time—days spent in play as a child and nights spent exploring the strip as an adolescent and young adult. Both are contexts in which viewers relished the discovery of the world and its infinite possibilities. But the sideboard pushes viewers beyond simple nostalgia for their earlier ways of living and asks that they question the routine, repetitive ways in which they currently live. It asks viewers to become subversive agents, transforming their humdrum, everyday routines into deliberate new ways of living that incorporate the adventure and joy that have been lost.

Valley Curtain

Christo's *Valley Curtain* provides an image framed in the context of the visual arts with which to illustrate the hypothesis of how appeal is constructed in visual images. Bulgarian-born artist Christo [Javacheff] is known for art works in which he drapes or wraps common objects. He has wrapped Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art in a dark brown tarp; covered a million square feet of coastal rocks with polypropylene near Sydney, Australia; erected twenty-four miles of white fence through the hills of Sonoma and Marin counties in California; wrapped three miles of paths in a park in Kansas City, Missouri, in nylon; and wrapped Florida's Biscayne Islands in hot pink polypropylene.

While any of Christo's projects could be used to illustrate my hypothesis, I have chosen his *Valley Curtain*, completed in 1972, which consisted of the hanging of an orange nylon curtain between the two mountainsides of Rifle Gap, seven miles north of Rifle, Colorado. The curtain hung from the top of the mountains down to the valley floor, broken only by a hole, 100 feet wide by 20 feet high, cut in the curtain to permit uninterrupted traffic flow on Highway 325, which lay in the curtain's path. The curtain was shredded (and the art work thus dismantled) twenty-seven hours after its unveiling by a freak forty-mile-per-hour wind.

Clearly, the technical novelty that is the trigger for the process I am describing is present in the *Valley Curtain*. A curtain hanging across a valley is uncommon: "Billowing in the midst of a country so majestic, yet so wild and craggy, stood this perfectly clean, perfectly manufactured, orange nylon curtain. It was mind-boggling."[35] The technical novelty is produced primarily through its huge size; the curtain measured 1,250 feet across and 200 feet long. Wonderment at the process used to construct and hang the curtain is a second source of novelty. These technical aspects of the curtain generate surprise and wonderment for viewers; they also confuse. How are viewers to interpret a curtain between two mountains? Certainly, a context of the wilderness is not appropriate, even though the object appears in that environment; the curtain is foreign to the mountains and trees that surround it.

Connotations referenced by the curtain provide guidelines for viewers about how to interpret the work. A number of contexts are suggested by associations generated by various aspects of the curtain. It is in the shape of a curtain and constructed of nylon, suggesting a shower curtain in a bathroom or home setting—a comfortable, private, interior space. Even a Halloween context is suggested both by the bright orange color and the smile-like shape, referencing the gaping smile of a jack-o-lantern. Interpreted in these familiar contexts, connected with comforts of the home and childhood fun, the curtain becomes nonthreatening. Another way in which the curtain may be read is through a framework of adventure. The orange color and the nylon fabric recall parachutes and life vests, suggesting that adventure, risk, and danger may be appropriate interpretive codes in the contexts suggested by these associations. The curtain shape also may generate images of a theatre, where the audience waits expectantly for the curtain to rise.

Associated with the contexts of home, childhood holidays, adventure, and entertainment, the *Valley Curtain* becomes familiar or at least knowable to viewers. The foreignness suggested when viewers attempt to interpret it within an art context disappears. The introduction of such notions as adventure and drama into viewers' interpretations of the *Valley Curtain* encourages them to see the curtain as fun, dramatic, invigorating, and stimulating.

Pool Room in Graceland

Elvis Presley's home in Memphis, Tennessee, which opened to the public after his death in 1977, offers a vast array of visual images for analysis: the exterior of the house and its landscaping; the carport with several of Presley's automobiles; the interior rooms of the house; various exhibitions of memorabilia in the house and souvenir shops; the rock wall around the house covered with messages from fans; and the Meditation Gardens, where Presley and his relatives are buried. While touring Graceland, I was struck particularly by my positive response to one room, the pool room, and I will use it as my third sample in support of the hypothesis of how appeal is constructed in visual images.

Centered in the room is a large pool table with a light blue playing surface and bright red sides. The carpet in the room is a bright royal blue. Above the pool table are two stained-glass lamps, patterned in a leaf-and-floral design in yellow, blue, and green. An odd assortment of furniture rings the walls of the room—bright red Naugahyde chairs, dressers and tables in the French provincial style, and ordinary, block-style sofas in a bold, patterned fabric of red, blue, and yellow. The major feature of the room is the fabric that completely covers all four walls and the ceiling of the room—the same fabric with which the sofas are covered. The fabric covering alone would be visually stunning, but it is made more so because it is pleated. Even folds only a few inches wide run vertically along the walls; on the ceiling, the pleats come together in a circle in the center of the ceiling.

In the pool room, the fabric is the element of technical novelty to which viewers are immediately drawn. The fabric signals that viewers are not to interpret the pool room in the expected pool-room contexts. Inappropriate is the casual, dark, smoky, perhaps dirty bar, where patrons huddle around the pool table, beer in hand. Equally inappropriate is the dank basement of a suburban home, where family mem-

bers and friends infrequently and indifferently shoot a few games for casual amusement. The fabric surprise not only tells viewers what contexts are irrelevant to their interpretation of the room but compels them to wonder who devised the decorating scheme, how the pleats are held in the fabric, and how the fabric is attached to the walls and ceilings. Appreciation of the technical skill needed to accomplish the effect is part of viewers' responses to the room.

Interest in the technique of the fabric covering encourages viewers to attempt to make sense of the technique and thus the entire room—to discover an appropriate context in which to interpret them. The fabric itself provides the clue: it suggests the elaborate garden tents of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe as well as the tents of the Great Gatsby and garden parties from U.S. cultural heritage. The yards of fabric enfold viewers, closing them off from the external world, creating a special world of richness, elegance, and elitism.

The fabric covering not only suggests a new interpretive context for the pool room but diminishes the impact of the elements that are incongruous with the fabric. The pool room's chairs are made of cheap and low-class Naugahyde. The royal blue of the carpet suggests an effort at communicating elegance by someone who doesn't know elegance and only is able to imitate its surface details. The apparently stained-glass lamp shades very well may be plastic. But these factors diminish in importance for viewers and are irrelevant to their interpretation of the room because of the technical novelty of the fabric. Viewers are guided to focus on the richness, taste, civility, and extravagant consumption associated with high-class, cultured social events and to use such associations to emancipate them from their routine, everyday, and middle-class lives. The pool room becomes, in viewers' interpretations, truly a room fit for the king.

Extending the Hypothesis

The three examples of the *Beverly* sideboard, the *Valley Curtain*, and Elvis Presley's pool room have illustrated the features that I propose contribute to the construction of appeal in a visual image—technical novelty, decontextualization, and references to new interpretive contexts. I see the hypothesis I have proposed as only a bare outline for understanding the process of visual appeal, but it constitutes a starting place for scholars in speech communication who wish to explore this

process. I would like to see the hypothesis extended in a number of areas so that it is able to describe the complexity of the construction of appeal in visual imagery.

Research needs to be done to test the hypothesis. While the hypothesis explains the process of appeal in the visual images I examined, its application to other images will suggest whether it provides a relevant and useful explanation of the processes in other situations. In particular, images that show how the hypothesis accounts for lack of appeal of images need to be analyzed. The jungle room in Graceland provides one such example. A family room of sorts, this room includes a fake waterfall, furniture covered with fuzzy fabric, and lacquered burl tables. The room as an image fails to meet a stipulated feature of the hypothesis: the connotations suggested by the uncommon technical dimensions of the fuzzy fabric and burl wood do not elicit connotations that have positive associations for most viewers. The fabric and the tables suggest polyester, cheapness, and tackiness. This image, then, disappoints—it neither intrigues nor attracts viewers. Exploration of other such examples where images fail to create appeal will be particularly useful in refining and modifying the hypothesis.

The hypothesis needs to be extended, as well, so that the process by which appeal is constructed can be explained in other types of visual images. The hypothesis applies to visual images that are limited in important ways—are unaccompanied by verbal text and have a visual rather than a verbal focus, for example. Many types of images are not covered by the hypothesis, and a delineation of various types of images, perhaps on a continuum from diagrams to abstract art, with a detailing of the differences in the processes of appeal involved, is needed.

The relationship between the features of the process I have described and other characteristics of images needs to be pursued in an extension of the hypothesis. A start can be made in this area by proposing relationships on the basis of the literature that offers explanations of other aspects of visual images. Questions useful to investigate in this way, for example, might be: How does style relate to the process of visual appeal? Are different processes involved when images differ stylistically? Style is only one of the issues that have been explored in other disciplines concerning the nature and function of visual symbols; connection and integration of the literature of those disciplines on such issues will turn the bare outline that is the current hypothesis into a more useful explanatory device.

The audience is not taken into account in the current hypothesis, and inquiry into the role of the audience in the process of visual appeal is vital. In the hypothesis, I simply assume that how I view an image is how others view it and that what is appealing to me appeals to all viewers. What is needed is an exploration of the requirements or conditions that must be met by an audience in order for the image to be seen as appealing. Is there, for example, a particular level of visual literacy that the hypothesis requires of viewers if appeal is to occur? Is knowledge of particular cultural contexts necessary? How does the hypothesis account for the cultural diversity that exists among potential viewers of an image? What is the role of personal taste in this process?

I would like to see an exploration of the history and sources of the features that the hypothesis suggests characterize visual appeal. My suspicion is that the process described by the hypothesis is a relatively recent one. The element of technical novelty as the trigger feature seems to be an element that would not necessarily have characterized visual images even half a century ago; it now seems required perhaps because of the visual technical effects to which contemporary viewers are accustomed through the mass media. Have the mass media—particularly television—created as a requirement for visual appeal technical novelty? Are contemporary viewers no longer able to be influenced by the commonplace? Does appeal result only from the spectacular, the uncommon, and the exceptional? If so, what are the implications for cultural change in the construction of visual appeal, and how should the changes that have occurred be evaluated?

The research area involved in the study of the process by which appeal is constructed in visual images is vast. Recognition of its scope almost seems to trivialize the contribution I have attempted to make in this essay because I have described only a small part of the process by which appeal is constructed in visual images. I hope, however, that the hypothesis I have formulated will serve as a starting point for others who recognize that our current rhetorical theory is largely inarticulate about visual symbols and who want to help it address both verbal and visual symbols.

event erupted" (Robin Erica Wagner-Pacifici, *The Moro Morality Play: Terrorism as Social Drama* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], 14).

51. Cherwitz and Zagacki, 317, 318.
52. Ibid., 310, 312.
53. Ibid., 312, 314, 316.
54. Heisey, "Reagan and Mitterrand," 332.
55. See note 2.
56. Heisey, "Reagan and Mitterrand," 327–29, 332.
57. Rowland, 208, 109.

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21. Illustrative is an essay by Marcia Eaton, "Truth in Pictures," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 39 (Fall 1980): 15–26.
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23. Excellent sources on semiotics include: Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (New York: Methuen, 1980); Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, ed. and trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977); Pierre Guiraud, *Semiology* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975); Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Arthur Asa Berger, *Signs in Contemporary Culture: An Introduction to Semiotics* (New York: Longman, 1984); and Sol Worth, *Studying Visual Communication*, ed. Larry Gross (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981).
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