Visual Wellbeing: Intersections of Rhetorical Theory and Visual Design

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Abstract
This paper demonstrates that where rhetorical theory intersects with visual design studies, it creates opportunities for invention and generates analytic power to illuminate meanings and evaluate visual phenomenon. Particularly, rhetorical theory provides historical concepts and constructs—such as enargeia and eudemonia—that speak to the realm of visual practices in unique and important ways, and enable critics to explore transcendent and universalistic assumptions about aesthetics and human wellbeing within the limits of situated human experience and creativity. A survey of literature in design and rhetoric results in the development of an overarching critical framework referred to as visual wellbeing. The framework is applied to analysis of several different types of visual design projects to illustrate its critical and practical potential.
Visual Wellbeing: Intersections of Rhetorical Theory and Visual Design

In her recent book *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe*, Van Eck argues that classical rhetoric influenced both the producers and consumers of visual art and architecture in early modern Europe through concepts related to vivid representation. Indeed, according to Van Eck, both oral communication and image making share the goal of establishing vivid representation (or enargeia), although different methods are used to achieve it. In addition, she argues that both rhetoric and the visual arts work “to bring to life that which is absent.” Building upon her work and also following the work of Buchanan (2001) and Kaufer & Butler (1996), we suggest that an even stronger argument can be made for the interrelatedness of rhetoric and the visual arts particularly the field of design. In this paper, we speak from within two intellectual traditions—rhetoric and visual design—that have developed separately. Despite this, we argue that what emerged as two distinct fields of study are intricately related, as reflected in their assumptions, goals and functions. For instance, scholars in design and rhetoric define their practices and objects of study similarly. In addition they have similar values and goals particularly related to the possibility of changing an imperfect situation and instigating a level of social consciousness. Furthermore, both fields work toward human advancement in both functional and moral senses (Refer to table 1 for more detail).

Indeed, Twyman¹ and Bonsiepe², both of whom write from a design perspective, argue that ancient rhetoric resembles modern design since both arts deal with functional, contextual, and social aspects of language and symbol systems and thus are well suited to design issues. In their book, *Rhetoric and the Art of Design*, Kaufer and Butler suggest that rhetoric belongs to the family of design arts like architecture and graphics, since all of these are arts of production.³ They conclude that theories of rhetoric are theories of design. And Ehses, a design educator,
argues that rhetorical theory is relevant for information design because of the applicability of the three operational functions of rhetoric—to instruct, to move, to please—to the nature of design.\textsuperscript{iv}

Twyman and Bonsiepe also argue that ancient rhetoric did in fact consider, and therefore address, the visual. Gronbeck, writing from the rhetorical perspective, agrees, arguing that the ancient world was fascinated with sight and seeing.\textsuperscript{v} In particular, Aristotle’s treatise on memory illustrates this fascination. According to Gronbeck, Aristotle argued that “humans use \textit{phantasmata}, mental images or pictures, in the construction of memory”.\textsuperscript{vi} Steffensmeier, also writing from a rhetorical perspective, suggests that a re-reading of Aristotle’s \textit{Rhetoric} reveals the centrality of the visual to his theory of rhetoric, particularly in the cannon of memoria: “For instance, the handbook tradition’s treatment of memory relies heavily on visualization as do key parts of the rhetorical paideia exemplified by the progrymnasmata”.\textsuperscript{vii}

Yet, despite scholarship that suggests a strong thread of what Gronbeck refers to as occularcentrism in the rhetorical tradition, rhetoric’s commitment to the visual did not become the focus of scholarly work until the latter decades of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Many scholars credit the work of Kenneth Burke as essential to the re-introduction of the visual into the study of rhetoric, particularly his definition of rhetoric as the use of symbols to persuade creatures who by nature respond to symbols.\textsuperscript{viii} Burke argued that all human symbol use (whether visual or not) is “symbolic action” characterized by motive and, therefore, that it may be analyzed in rhetorical terms. The field of rhetoric expanded to include within its prevue not only literature and speech but also “culture, art, and even science.”\textsuperscript{ix}

By the last third of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century, visual theorists were beginning to assert a “pictorial turn” in intellectual and social life (or the “iconic turn” as referred to by Gottfried Boehm). Mitchell made the distinction between the pictorial turn as a mass perception—a collective anxiety about images and visual media—and a turn to images in intellectual disciplines in the
human sciences as well as the natural sciences (medicine, biology, physics, natural history, etc.).

As Mitchell was trying to make connections between the increasing amount of visual-related scholarship in philosophy, social theory, and the visual arts, he noted, significantly, that the pictorial turn was characterized by its “rhetorical dimensions”. This included both the effort to understand pictures as a form of communication and to recognize audiences’ reception of the images as conditioned by their personal experience and culture. Like semiotics and other related approaches to the visual, a rhetorical approach considers images as rational expressions of cultural meaning and examines the relationship between images and text. However, visual rhetoric also adds the element of invention, wherein the interpretive insights of the critic result in enhanced sources of invention for both practitioners and theorists. This is significant for visual designers since invention is an element essential to the work of design practitioners.

The comparison between rhetoric and design can be taken further. For instance, rhetoric is both an art and a practice: It is an art to the extent that, there are principles of rhetoric that may be learned, there are means for assessing/evaluating it and, we see it as a separate area of human activity which we can observe and upon which we can reflect. It is a practice to the extent that we engage in the creation of rhetoric in both our public and every-day discourses through the exchange of symbols. Similarly, Design is both an art and a practice. It is an art because it, too, has a set of principles that can be taught and learned, there are established means for assessing/evaluating it, and it is a separate area of human activity which we can observe and upon which we can reflect. It is a practice to the extent that designers and others participate in it by designing visual and material artifacts/objects.

Despite these similarities, there are differences worth noting. Rhetoric is a bit more democratized as a practice than the practice of design—while there are certainly individuals who are more skilled in the art of rhetoric, and there is a long tradition of instruction in rhetoric, all
individuals are understood as being able to produce or engage in rhetoric. Historically, design as a practice has been understood as a bit more restricted to “experts” or “designers” than to the public at large (Although, as our analysis will demonstrate, design is being re-conceptualized in the 21st century as much more democratic, based at least in part on the digital technology revolution and increasing popularity of audience-centered approaches such as service design, a collaborative process where the designer researches and plans through multiple interactions with the customer). In addition, rhetorical education tends to have a dual focus on both theory and skill development whereas design education historically has been weighted more heavily toward skill development.\textsuperscript{xii} This is directly related to the generation of new knowledge in the two fields. Rhetorical scholars generate new knowledge through engaging in rhetorical criticism and philosophical inquiry as well as through practice. For designers, new knowledge is generally achieved through practice, particularly, insights gained through the creative or inventional process. Designers often distinguish their knowledge and research from that of scientists and social scientists by pointing out their lack of interest in testable theories. While designers do have theories, these theories do not have to be tested empirically in order to be considered well-established programs or manifestos. In other words, design theories are most often only ‘testable’ in relation to practice, to professional acceptance, and to longevity.\textsuperscript{xiii}

It is the purpose of this paper, then, to demonstrate that where rhetorical theory intersects with visual design studies, it creates opportunities for invention and generates analytic power to illuminate meanings and evaluate visual phenomenon. Particularly, rhetorical theory provides historical concepts and constructs that speak to the realm of visual practices in unique and important ways, exploring transcendent and universalistic assumptions about aesthetics and human wellbeing within the limits of situated human experience and creativity. We begin with a discussion of two ancient rhetorical concepts that, we argue, provide important insight for
rhetorical scholars and visual designers. We then move to the development of an overarching critical framework that we refer to as visual wellbeing and apply that framework to several different types of visual design projects to illustrate its critical and practical potential. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of this work.

Rhetoric and the Visual: Key Concepts

Enargeia/Enargia (Vividness)

An historical concept in rhetorical theory that has received little attention from contemporary scholars in either design or rhetoric is enargeia (enargia). Enargeia is the one aspect of classical rhetorical theory that stresses the similarity of painting or the arts to rhetoric because it refers to the author’s ability to (re)create a vivid description, or present evidence as if it is present before the eyes of the audience. It combines all of the possibilities suggested by such terms as graphic, active, and representing actuality.\textsuperscript{xiv} As Cicero explains, enargeia does not seem to speak but to show. It involves visual clarity, immediacy, self-evidentia and strong emotional appeal.\textsuperscript{xv} In Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, only a vivid image (enargeia) was able to evoke contrary emotions of empathy or terror.\textsuperscript{xvi}

A term often referenced in conjunction and sometimes conflated with enargeia is energeia (energia). However, energia refers to the energy, movement, efficiency or force of an expression and is not necessarily visual. Though enargeia is inherently visual, recent studies using methods of visual rhetoric have not referred to enargeia (or energia) with the exception of Finnegan who references “energia” in a footnote explanation of her use of “ekphrasis”, a subcategory of enargeia.\textsuperscript{xvii} Occasionally, literary critism and dissertations will use enargeia to inform their analyses.\textsuperscript{xviii} From these works, we can play out a series of features or elements that may reside in or be evoked by visual images (See table 2).
As this survey indicates, Enargeia’s *oculos subiectio* (to bring before one’s eyes), is not an end in and of itself but rather a means to achieve an end. Visual experience of design objects and images in the world may be distressful or pleasurable—one may feel confronted with ‘visual pollution’ or, experience some moments of ‘pleasurable looking’ that are not tied to consumption. In institutions and public spaces like public parks or museums—not only the art works and paintings, sculptures and interactive displays, but also the environment, its ambience or the atmosphere—can be the source of visual pleasure (or distress). As indicated earlier, in both design and rhetoric, a key end or goal is the good and/or the pleasurable. In rhetorical theory, there is a strong emphasis on the good as being a communal experience, enacted via symbolic exchanges where a congruence of values is achieved.

**Eudaimonia (Flourishment)**

Eudaimonia is a rhetorical concept that originated in Aristotle’s thinking about wellbeing, pleasure and happiness. Aristotle conceptualizes true happiness as fulfillment of a deep nature, as opposed to merely pleasurable sensations, and as the expression of virtue. Waterman suggests that eudaimonia involves personal expressiveness of deeply held values. Significantly, the Aristotelian tradition theorizes wellbeing as essentially social and ethical in its inflections. Eudaimonic wellbeing then is the experience of enriching activities, of vitality, in people who live in groups a condition for human flourishing.

The relevance of eudaimonia as a component concept in a theory of visual wellbeing is motivated by the relationship it indicates between pleasure and wellbeing, which is distinct from the individualistic, hedonistic depictions of visual pleasure in other contemporary critical theories of images. Whereas hedonic theories of pleasure related to visual images emphasize bodily pleasure and self-interest a eudaimonic theory of visual wellbeing focuses on meanings and self-realization, and is, as well, ‘inherently culturally rooted.’ The emphasis on culture
and meaning substantiates visual images and artifacts, along with verbal forms, as possible vehicles for promoting wellbeing of a eudaimonic nature since cultural meanings are created and sustained rhetorically and are central to contemporary visual communication.

In short, eudaimonic pleasure evokes human wellbeing. Based on the idea that wellbeing, ‘the optimal psychological functioning and experience’ xxviii can be manifested in any specific life domain, we argue that visual-based wellbeing xxix is a possible human condition and that visual experience is an important life domain. We seek to demonstrate how the articulation of visual wellbeing as a positive consequence or goal of visual design, as well as a critical/theoretical framework rooted in the rhetorical tradition, can inform the work of designers and critics and thus contribute to the knowledge base of both disciplines.

Visual Wellbeing

Visual wellbeing is defined as a state of feeling healthy, happy and content, of sensing vitality and prosperity, recognized precisely in one’s experience of objects through the visual sense. It refers to a kind of ‘pleasurable looking’ different from, and therefore able to account for the limitations of looking associated with visual pleasure, which has been theorized primarily through such concepts as scopophilia xxx and gaze xxxi to describe the kinds of pleasures related to voyeurism, fetishism and narcissism. xxxii Visual pleasure, theorized in this manner, is hedonic, somewhat momentary, ‘controlling and even sadistic.’ xxxiii As a result, this body of theory is limited in its ability to illuminate diverse circumstances and audiences, characterized by different power relationships and purposes, in which looking can be a source of pleasure. For, as suggested above, people also experience visual pleasure that sustains them, that involves intersubjectivity and conscious experience. Thus, there is a need to examine how visuals might work to promote eudaimonic pleasure.
We suggest that a concept of visual wellbeing can be formulated using rhetorical concepts of *enargeia* (energy, vividness) (see table 2) and *eudaimonia* (human wellbeing) (see table 3), supplemented by basic rhetorical concepts of cooperation/influence/persuasion (the general purposes of rhetoric) and exigence (a problem or gap, marked by some urgency, that calls forth rhetoric). The latter concepts provide insight on the process and context favorable to the realization of visual wellbeing.

We apply this framework to three brief case studies in order to illustrate its theoretical, critical, and practical potential. The three cases represent three points upon a continuum from more explicitly aesthetic to more explicitly persuasive in nature. In this way, the projects focus attention on the question of universal versus situated notions of vividness and wellbeing, pleasure and human flourishing. Our analysis problematizes universal notions by demonstrating the situated character of all three projects. The first case study examines the artwork of Andy Goldsworthy, particularly as presented in the 2001 film, *Rivers and Tides*. Goldsworthy is described variously as a nature artist, a sculptor, a photographer, and an environmentalist. He produces two types of work: “(1) ephemeral explorations, which he generally documents in photographs, and (2) ‘larger works,’ which he defines as ‘environmental sculptures,’ ‘temporary installations,’ and ‘permanent monuments.’”xxxiv The film includes examples of each of these types and of their subcategories, providing a sense of Goldsworthy’s oeuvre and his approach. The second case study examines several works of public art in Hong Kong public housing estates, part of a larger program initiated by the Hong Kong Housing Authority. This initiative features purposeful environmental alterations intended for social improvement in an urban setting. The third case, examines the August 22, 2005 edition of *New Yorker* magazine that featured, on the front and back covers as well as throughout the magazine, artwork and graphic design associated with the Target store logo and advertisements. As part of a larger advertising
campaign, “Design for All,” initiated in 2002, these images are characterized by principles of design and consumption.

Visual Wellbeing as a Critical Framework

Case 1: Rivers and Tides

Just as the artist finishes arranging icicles in a swirling pattern around a jagged rock, the sun rises over a cliff to brightly illuminate the sculpture (see Image 1). The moment is vivid, breathtaking, dazzling, but as the artist points out, “the very thing that brought it [the sculpture] to life will cause its death.”

This is one of the opening scenes in the 2001 film *Rivers and Tides*, a film shot by German filmmaker Thomas Riedelsheimer, who followed the artist, Andy Goldsworthy, for over a year. Produced by Skyline Productions, it took five years to find the funding for *Rivers and Tides* but due to Goldsworthy's appeal in the United States and Europe and Riedelsheimer's approach, allowing long silences which give Goldsworthy's process an aura of spirituality, the film took top prizes in Germany's Lola film awards as well as in several international festivals. xxxv

The film follows Goldsworthy's professional travels throughout the province of Nova Scotia, the state of New York, the country of France, and the countryside of his home, Penpont, Scotland. Goldsworthy, a soft-spoken, bearded man, makes art mostly outdoors, creating sculptures that illustrate the cycles of creation and change. Goldsworthy works without paint brushes, chisels, knives, or canvases and yet brings into being entrancing and highly inventive sculptures from the artifacts and materials he finds in his surroundings. “Goldsworthy calmly demonstrates over and over that the forms, styles, and media available to the artist are approximately infinite.” xxxvi

In terms of the elements of enargeia and eudemonia (see tables 2 and 3), what is of
interest to us here is the way in which Goldsworthy’s art, as represented in the film, *Rivers and Tides*, appears to be a quite thorough-going illustration. Certainly, the art is mediated by the techniques and practices of film making but it is the art and its ephemeral, time-based creation and evolution that is the object of our analysis. His artwork as depicted in almost every scene brings into sight and mind that which is absent, namely, constructed forms in nature and natural forms in human experience. All of the art and art making shown throughout the film evokes elements of pleasure, an authentic account of the relationship between nature and human beings, and a sense of wonder. For instance, in one of his most simple projects, Goldsworthy meanders around his small hometown gathering dandelion blossoms as he reflects on the relationship between rootedness and change. He then carefully arranges the dandelions in a field so that they appear before the eye of the viewer as a vivid circular pattern of bright yellow contrasting sharply with the green field. This is just one example where the film displays more fully than photographs of Goldsworthy’s work an exhaustive, visual depiction of experience. Instead of viewers receiving only the final image of color and contrast, the filmmaker provides the audience with scenes from the entire experience so that they understand how the slow, mundane acts of searching, picking and arranging are necessary to create the final sense of pleasure and wonder. Similarly, in another scene, Goldsworthy carefully arranges dandelions in a bowl-shaped crevice of rock beside the rushing water of the ocean. The yellow of the flowers in contrast with the grays, browns, and white of the rock and the rushing water of the sea is starkly, entrancingly vivid—indeed, beautiful. The art making practice captured in the film, enables viewers to experience vicariously the difficulty of getting to the top of the slippery rock as well as the painstaking patience necessary to arrange the flowers, leaving them with the memory of how this vivid visual feast was created out of the most simple and natural materials and forms—an apparently truly authentic account. Because the audience has come along for the journey, the
sense of aesthetic contrivance is lost and instead the audience shares Goldsworthy’s aesthetic vision as if they were enacting it with him.

This enargeic element of *authentic account* also illuminates the distinction between gazing and looking as they are evoked in viewers. Instead of a brief hit of pleasure with a quick look away, the audience is actually led through a more ongoing, deeper visual experience that engages *memory*. For instance, the scenes in the film showing Goldsworthy crumbling bits of iron rock into a river resulting in a blood-red stream, and throwing snow in the air just to watch the beauty of it as it dissipates, evoke memories of childhood activity and *wonder*. The contrast of electric yellow dandelions sprouting from the less than nurturing gray-brown rock may indeed provide the viewer pleasure, a pleasure which is likely to be heightened by memories of leisure *activities of vitality*, often associated with childhood, such as picking dandelions and wildflowers. In short, Goldsworthy’s process and art, as illustrated in the film, provide the audience a deeper kind of looking, thereby demonstrating characteristics of both enargeia and eudemonia.

Less these experiences be understood as an aestheticization of nature or a kind of adoration of transcendent forms, the scenes in Goldsworthy’s hometown illustrate how he works with nature to create inherently culturally rooted personal expressions. For instance, when working with bracken in Penpont, Scotland, Goldsworthy is already aware of the various strengths and drawbacks of this material. He appreciates its strength but also explains how it makes his hands bleed. Despite this, he continues to work without gloves, needing to feel the delicate textures of his work to create the rootedness, the situatedness essential to it.

However, another Penpont scene, like several others scattered throughout the film (especially those in Nova Scotia), also illustrates the one characteristic of eudemonia that Rivers and Tides manages to complicate, namely, the issue of *fulfillment*. The same process that evoked
a sense of memory and an exhaustive depiction of experience also creates a sense of frustration when a work created so painstakingly collapses as a final piece is added or attached. In a scene where Goldsworthy holds a sculpture of twigs, hung by thorns from the outstretched branches of a tree, to prevent its collapse, the audience begins to feel he may have saved the sculpture as the screen minutes pass by. Unfortunately, all expectations of recovery are dashed when he removes his hand and the entire sculpture breaks apart (see Image 2). Viewers inwardly collapse along with Goldsworthy as he pauses in silent frustration. Only when the film continues with other projects where Goldsworthy has detached himself from the work on his own terms does the audience begin to regain a sense of fulfillment from the experience. And perhaps this sense of fulfillment could not have really been experienced as vividly without those earlier feelings of loss. Thus, Goldsworthy’s commitment to combining process and product in his artwork illustrates characteristics of enargeia and eudemonia. But the film enables audience members to see and experience Goldsworthy’s creative journey and not just the end result at his point of designated release, demonstrating how film (and, potentially, other mediations) may function to heighten the experience of fulfillment.

Case 2: Public Art in Hong Kong Housing Estates

“Public Art in Estates” is an art promotion scheme initiated by the Hong Kong Housing Authority. The Authority is the largest landlord in the world. The Authority was established in the 1950s in response to a tragic fire that left 53,000 people homeless. In 1972, the Governor, Sir Murray MacLehose, announced a ten-year housing program to provide self-contained housing for 1.5 million people. This long term housing policy was seen as a social improvement measure, providing low cost rental homes for a majority of the population. Today, over half of the overall population lives in the 380 or so estates.
Typically, in the design and planning of public housing, so much stress is placed on economic feasibility, durability, and ease of maintenance, that consideration of the visual appeal or quality of the residents’ lived experience is often disregarded. However, in Hong Kong, as the efforts to provide shelters that meet spatial and utilitarian needs have been generally satisfied, attention has turned to the aesthetic attractiveness and the values considered essential to human flourishment within housing communities. In recent decades, efforts have been made to improve the environment of what locals call ‘low-cost estates’. For example, a number of site-specific sculptures, as part of the ‘Public Art in Estates’ scheme, were commissioned in 1999 for installation in Yat Tung Estate in a new town called Tung Chung. This new town is situated on the northern coast of a large outlying island west of Hong Kong. In the past, a paddy field and fishing village had occupied this land, but it underwent development due to the construction of a new international airport. In the United States and several European democracies, the imposition, by cultural and political elites, of art into public spaces has often evoked controversy. In Hong Kong, however, the sheer scale of the public housing project and the experiences of residents who share a cultural memory of the monotonous uniformity and institutional look of earlier housing projects of the 1950s and 1960s, creates a somewhat different rhetorical situation.

Sculptures in Yat Tung Estate adopt themes that reflect the history and cultural heritage of Tung Chung as well as promoting its new image and reality. The sculptures are designed, purportedly, in line with the needs of residents as well as community development. The villagers who have been relocated to the Yat Tung Estate must deal with significant change in their lives. For example, leaving their indigenous houses, which were small and had one story, to live in high-rise buildings represents an enormous change for residents’ day-to-day physical, let alone mental, existence.
Two sculptures in the Yat Tung Estate—“Working at Dawn,” and “Harvesting”.

“Working at Dawn” and “Harvesting” are particularly notable in terms of enargeia, bringing into presence that which is absent, both to the sight and to the mind, in a way that addresses or expresses virtue. “Working at Dawn” features silhouettes of a farmer, ox, plow, and crops cut out from, and then placed on top of a dark, curved, matt steel plate creating both positive and negative spaces (see Image 3). The curved plate is attached to a pedestal and also features the cut out shapes of crops so that the sculpture as a whole resembles a paddy field being worked by a farmer with a plow pulled by an ox. The technical treatment of cutting out shapes from the steel plate creates a visual effect like that of the traditional Chinese folk art of paper-cutting.

“Harvesting” is made of greenish bronze. It portrays members of a farmer’s (or fisherman’s) family holding hands, joyfully dancing as they circle a tree of some sort (see Image 4). The child is carrying a water container made out of a dried-squash. The man has a rattan sun-hat resting on his back. The woman has a baby carried over her back in a traditional Chinese cloth baby carrier. One of her hands is holding that of an older woman who looks to be a grandmother.

Because Tung Chung had been a rural community where residents lived in simple styles—‘work at dawn, rest when the sun sets’, xxxix—becoming a modernized new town means the disappearance of many traditional ways of life and raises questions about what it means to be virtuous in this new environment. The figures of people working in the paddy field and celebrating the harvest serve to evoke cultural heritage, potentially arousing residents’ memory, conjuring up images in their minds of ways of life now absent. In addition to creating nostalgic attachment, the sculptures serve to provide an expression of virtue. Deeply held values, such as stratified and harmonic relationships, are visually depicted by the unbroken circle of hands among different generations of a family in ‘Harvesting’, and in the unbroken connection between the diligent farmer and his ox via the visual line of the plow in ‘Working at Dawn.’ Unlike a real
farmer, however, this farmer never ceases in his work and the use of the cut out technique, while making him both visible and present, also establishes him as an imprint in the memory, an absence within presence. He is a reminder both of the physical toil of farm life and also direct attachment to the land and the soil. Just as the residents now live within greater physical proximity and, therefore, physical attachment, to cement, steel, and glass than to crops and the soil, the farmer is fabricated, literally cut from steel, a material that bespeaks the present urban landscape rather than the organic rural past. The sculpture of the farmer thus provides a way of moving from the virtues of the past into the fabric of the present—hard work, diligence, harmony relearned and reapplied in a newly constructed context.

Whereas the cut out of the farmer connects viewers (residents) to a sense of the past juxtaposed onto the present, ‘Harvesting’ focuses attention on meanings and self-realization within deeply held values related to family and work. This work exemplifies theatrical depiction that is fabricated rather than authentic, since the ritual of dancing around a tree at harvest time is not recorded or noticeable in local customs. Yet the treatment of the figures is realistic and therefore, apparently, representational of enriching activities in the past. As a result, the work functions metaphorically, providing a sense of harmonious family relationships of the past based upon working the land (and in this case, also the sea) with, simultaneously, changing family relationships in the present and future. This is accomplished by the direction of the gaze and the posture of each of the figures in relation to the grouping as a whole, which suggest different orientations to past and present or, at least, different modes of self-realization in the present. The father and grandmother figures are looking down toward the ground (the past?), seemingly gazing at their feet. The grandmother’s feet are rooted in the ground—they are not in motion but instead, are planted together. One of the father’s feet is raised just slightly and crossed in front of the other to signify a step forward, even as the other foot remains rooted. Compare this to the
positioning of the feet and gaze of the child, whose head is thrown back in exuberance, eyes skyward, feet jumping up onto the pole. The water gourd hangs off of his back as he balances between his mother and his father and the pole. The direction of the father’s gaze, his stance and the distribution of weight suggests that he is trying to pull the child both forward and back down to earth, where as the mother is arching her back to help the child balance, looking horizontally, over her shoulder, with her opposite foot raised. The child’s gaze upward suggests an exuberance and openness to the future, while the mother’s gaze suggests attention to the present reality of the housing estate, even as she provides a structural support, a bridge perhaps, for her child, with his eyes on the future. These types of roles and relationships between generations within families cut across many cultures and epochs. Incorporating them into a sculpture that appears to celebrate the joys of rural life creates a rhetoric of stability, a visual depiction of roles and relationship that are repeated no matter, or in spite of, the context or locale. This is an example of the persuasive capacity of visual images. For residents who are experiencing instability as the result of dramatic change to their lived experience, such images may serve to comfort as well as provide models for living and relating in new spaces and contexts. The level of detail of the figures, their physical relationship with one another and with their surroundings also serves as an example of how visual images may construct a sense of vividness through full, exhaustive, vivid visual depiction of experience. The depictions of these bodies are energetic; they vividly evoke the intersubjectivity of social worlds, the self-realization of people who live in groups.

These sculptures represent the Housing Authority’s attempt to remedy the perceived imperfection experienced by residents who have been relocated or resettled into the housing estates and who may experience a sense of loss and disorientation as well as an urge to prosper within the new context. “Harvesting” and “Working at Dawn” function rhetorically to remedy that imperfection through the creation and evocation of meanings which influence residents’
perceptions about their reality. Visual design makes visible values and, as a result, becomes a means for altering the “defective” nature of the environment by communicating ideas and ideals to the community. The sculptures depict past experience or historical heritage with positive connotations, bringing into presence that which is absent, or inventively represent community development, forming and reinforcing the basis upon which residents may develop a sense of individual self-realization and cultural sustainability. Here, then, identifying and interpreting characteristics of visual wellbeing within the sculptures provides a means for better understanding the rhetorical situation as well as a means for evaluating how the resulting exigence is addressed via design practice.

Case 3: The Target Edition of The New Yorker Magazine

In August, 2005, The New Yorker made the controversial decision to allow Target Stores to sponsor an entire issue – the first time a single advertiser ever sponsored the magazine in its 80-year history. In order to match its style with The New Yorker’s, Target hired more than two dozen very well-respected artists like André Dubois, Milton Glaser, Robert Risko and Ruben Toledo to illustrate the 21 advertising pages. The goal of the sole-sponsored issue was to draw attention to the company by uncluttering the environment and, according to vice president and creative director Minda Gralnek, to salute the people who live and shop in New York City. Artists were given a set of guidelines for the advertisements: use only three colors, red, white and black, use the Target logo, and have a New York theme. The advertisements were also purposely designed to be easily differentiated from the black and white comics/cartoons that pepper the magazine. The following three advertisements/illustrations are interesting to consider because they simply and clearly highlight the Target logo in the New York setting, they were widely used in news stories about the advertising issue, and they are located on pages with the greatest potential for viewing traffic:
1. In this advertisement illustrated by Milton Glaser, the Empire State Building is illustrated at night with a spattering of stars in the background (see Image 5). Red Target logos fly through the air and three circle the building horizontally resembling a ring toss. Because the rings are hovering and because of the nighttime setting, the advertisement also suggests flying saucers taking off into outer space. In the top left hand corner the traditional Target logo faces the viewer in white, like one of the stars.

2. One of the most popular advertisements from the issue (it was widely distributed over the internet and as such became a kind of trademark symbol for the issue) depicts the Brooklyn Bridge as a high heel Mary Jane shoe as illustrated by André Dubois (see Image 6). The shoe is red with Target logos and has suspension cables extending from the front of the shoe to the rear, almost like laces. The rest of the illustration is in black and white with thin clouds covering most of the sky. Except for the shoe, and the shoe’s reflection in the water, the city looks very gray. The Target logo appears in the lower right hand corner within what looks like a shadow print of a floral stem fading into the water behind the logo—the logo is positioned so that it could be one of the stem’s blooms but is a clearer, more vivid white.

3. The third advertisement, illustrated by Yuko Shimizu, features a woman on a motorcycle coming at the viewer head-on through the Brooklyn Bridge (see Image 7). The viewer looks up at the front of the motorcycle and the chin of the dark-haired woman who is wearing a red helmet. The illustration is perfectly centered around the motorcycle, with the woman’s legs straddled on either side and hitting the lower bottom corners of the advertisement. The suspension cables of the bridge shoot outward from the top of the bridge resembling a spider web. In the center of the background behind the bride a red imposing Target logo illuminates the majority of the sky. Except for part of the motorcycle, the woman’s helmet and the huge Target logo, the rest of the advertisement is gray, sepia brown, and black. The woman appears happy.
with a smile on her face and her hair and scarf are blowing in the wind. A small white Target logo appears in the top right hand corner.

One of the reasons many initial critics of the Target-sponsored-*New Yorker* eventually complimented the advertising campaign may have to do with the way in which the ads featured a key element of enargeia, namely, *bringing into sight and mind that which is absent*. By using a variety of artists and matching the style of the advertisements with the style of the magazine, Target managed to add something to the magazine that would not otherwise have been there and, in that way, rhetorically set up a “fair exchange” for the reader. The advertisements, illustrated as a tribute to New York and those who live there, provide a sense of pleasure because they bring the viewer into the process of “seeing” their city in new ways: the bridge is both there and not there, the Empire State Building is both there and not there within the illustrations. In the same way, the anticipated “sell” of a more typical advertisement is both there and not there—it is brought to mind even as it is left absent. xlii

All three advertisements also succeed at evoking a *sense of wonder*. Seeing a New York City bridge depicted as a red high heel shoe constructs a sense of fiction and playfulness. The illustration may also support an implied argument, namely, that Target brings its style and fashion to the masses even in New York City. Metaphorically, Target acts as a bridge between sophisticated urban style and smartly designed products at smart prices. The Empire State Building image evokes a sense of wonder by presenting both the possibilities of flying saucers and a kind of giant ring toss. Though most viewers of both the Brooklyn Bridge and the Empire State Building approach these landmarks with their own interpretative connotative meanings, here Target has employed playful connotations of these iconic structures, thereby producing a visual *theatrical description*.

The image of the woman on the motorcycle is also *vivid*, but in the sense that it illustrates
a strong persuasive capacity related to ideas. The bottom-up angle of the motorcycle promotes
an image of personal power further reinforced by the impressive size of the motorcycle and the
focus on the woman’s boots. Readers get the sense, by this positioning as well as by the large
smile on her face, that the woman is on top of the world, both figuratively and literally: the curve
of the picture suggests the curve of the earth, the bridge exists above this, and she and the
motorcycle she is riding, are at the highest point of the bridge’s span. The motorcycle and her
wide open stance as she sits upon it suggest freedom from constraints that might otherwise
control or contain her. And the Target logo, acting as the setting sun over her shoulder apparently
blesses her ride to freedom or, becomes the mean for expressing herself—truly, Design for All.
The style of the image, evoking a comic book hero, may also lead the viewer to feel a sense of
wonder and a longing for that same experience and sense of fantastical power (if only there were
a place where they could buy it!).

And here is where the Target project, unlike the two earlier cases, functions quite
differently, rhetorically. The Target advertisements/illustrations, while achieving elements of
enargeia fall short in elements of eudamonia, especially in terms of expressing virtue. For if the
Target advertisements are expressions of culturally rooted deeply held values, then New
Yorkers’ values appear to consist of play and fantasy, fashionable goods, and temporary
satisfaction independent of companionship. If these truly are New Yorkers’ values, then perhaps
the advertisements do promote meanings of self-realization, but if New Yorkers also participate
in enriching activities other than fantasizing (the ring toss Empire State Building), and more
fantasizing (or fashionizing as in the Mary Jane shoe-bridge that literally feeds us into the city
through its fashionable tip), and traveling alone via motorcycle (the “freedom rider” on top of the
bridge), they are not apparent here.
Yet approaching the images from a broader stance by considering the overall goals of the “design for all” campaign, provides an alternate interpretation. As stated earlier, the Target advertisements satisfied the harshest critics through superior design, visual creativity, and aesthetics. By doing so, the designers kept in line with the official Target mission statement, “great design is more than aesthetics and style; it’s about promoting creativity and innovation that leads to extraordinary products, processes and experiences. Great design should help improve lives…” The advertisements may not depict extraordinary products or processes but they do provide an extraordinary experience for a magazine readership and demonstrate innovation in bringing together the top designers in the world to fill the pages of a popular periodical. Furthermore, by attractively illustrating a discount store to a typically upscale audience, the Target illustrations, within the overall campaign, allude to the message that great design can be for all—especially if a discount store is bestowing this message on culture-savvy urbanites with a median income of $78,000. Looking at the advertisements from this perspective, the advertisements could be seen as “improving lives.” The question is, does such improvement of lives through well-designed, inexpensive products produce conditions for human flourishing? Certainly, Target would have us think so.

Contributions

Analysis of these case studies indicates two primary contributions that a theory of visual wellbeing offers to both rhetorical scholars and designers of visual artifacts. First, characteristics of enargeia and eudaimonia as outlined in the framework developed here (see tables 2 and 3), provide distinct criteria for analyzing and assessing artifacts and design objects such as Goldsworthy’s artwork as illustrated in the film, the public art sculptures, and the Target advertisements. These criteria recognize the centrality to human existence of meanings and self-realization that are culturally and socially rooted rather than rooted in either universalistic
aesthetic principles or in the body/self. Table 4 further demonstrates the distinctiveness of these criteria by contrasting conceptualizations of visual pleasure as presented in the scholarly literature with the rhetorical conceptualization of visual wellbeing articulated here.

Secondly, analysis of these cases using the visual wellbeing framework indicates that artists and designers—who seek to create visual objects that are meaningful and significant to the viewers, residents, and readers—can be rhetorically successful by providing objects that employ the constituent concepts of visual wellbeing. For instance, analyses of the cases demonstrated that all three met various design goals such as achieving a vivid depiction of art in nature (Goldworthy’s art works and the film Rivers and Tides); providing resources for making values visible and, as a result, altering the “defective” nature of the environment by communicating ideas and ideals to the community (the Hong Kong estate art); and, finally, evoking a sense of wonder to enhance persuasive capacity (the Target ads). Thus, our work demonstrates the invention possibilities of applying this type of framework to the design process.

In terms of implications for future research and practice, the theory of visual wellbeing and the components of enargeia and eudemonia as discussed and applied here, provide designers another “set of tools” to aid them in their process of investigating, developing, and eventually analyzing the final outcomes of a design challenge – especially one that is rooted in self-realization or culture as opposed to bodily pleasure and self-interest. One possible set of design projects that could benefit from the theory of visual wellbeing outlined here is in the visual development of hospital environments. Though studies have shown that an attractive physical surrounding is very important to a patient’s health, there is little guidance available to assist design decisions. When conducting studies to get at these answers, both components of enargeia and eudemonia could be considered in the research design as well as in the evaluation following the implementation of findings.
Changing the visual ambience of healthcare environments is one example of the type of design challenge future research in visual wellbeing might address tackle. Other issues such as sustainable design, designing for democracy or civic participation, questions of emotion and design are all potential areas of research that deal with the betterment or fulfillment of individuals or the cultural community and would also benefit from further development and application of the visual wellbeing framework.
Appendix A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Design</th>
<th>Rhetoric</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Design is devising actions that are aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.</td>
<td>Rhetoric responds to imperfect situations which are capable of positive modification by rhetorical actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design...is defined as the area of human experience, skill and understanding that reflects man’s concern with the appreciation and adaption of his surroundings in the light of his material and spiritual needs.</td>
<td>Rhetoric is...a process that inheres in all discursive practices and that influences social consciousness at every level of its manifestation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Values and goals:

- Achieving the functional, the pleasurable, and the moral – the 3 senses of good.
- Accomplishing human beings’ individual and collective purposes.
- Power of conceiving, planning and making.

Values and goals:

- To enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passions, influence the will.
- Means of self-discovery or to come to self-knowledge.
- A force for civilization and human advancement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of Enargeia (vividness)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brings in to presence, to the sight and mind, that which is absent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Full, exhaustive, vivid visual depiction of experience.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conveys invisible significance through visual depiction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives pleasure to the viewer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Persuasive capacity related to ideas.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evokes a sense of wonder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combines theatrical description with authentic account.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Comparison of design and rhetoric.

Table 2. Enargeia.
Characteristics of Eudaimonia (wellbeing)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Expression of virtue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enriching activities, of vitality, in people who live in groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal expressiveness of deeply held values</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fulfillment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A condition for human flourishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inherently culturally rooted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focuses on meanings and self-realization</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3. Eudamonia.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Visual Pleasure</th>
<th>Visual Wellbeing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male gaze of female subject</td>
<td>Varied audiences’ experience of design objects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychoanalysis, Psychology, Film studies,</td>
<td>Visual design, Rhetorical theory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hedonic wellbeing</td>
<td>Eudaimonic wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voyeurism, fetishism, narcissism, gaze,</td>
<td>Enargeia, vividness, eudaimonia, sight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>scopophilia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bodily pleasure, self-interest, consumption</td>
<td>Meanings, sense-making, and self-realization within community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjectivity – individualistic</td>
<td>Intersubjectivity – social/cultural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Momentary</td>
<td>Sustained</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4. Comparison of visual pleasure and visual wellbeing.
Images

Image 1. Ice sculpture.

Image 2. Sculpture of twigs in Penpont.


Image 5. Empire State Building. 


Image 7. Motorcycle girl.
Endnotes

i Michael Twyman, “Criteria for education in ‘schrift and leser,’” in *Typographic* [USA], 11:3 (1979). Twyman is a historian of typography and professor emeritus at the University of Reading at Berkshire.


xii Davies and Reid, “Uncovering problematics in design education—learning and the design entity” in *Re-Inventing Design Education in the University: Proceedings of the International
visual wellbeing 29


xviii A related concept, energeia, has a received a bit more attention. Energeia is defined as bringing before the eye, of making visible to a community.


xx A characterization of eudaimonic wellbeing is based on interpretation in psychology, and social studies literature.


xxii Ibid., 146.


Christopher as cited in Ryan & Deci, 2001, p. 159.


It is product-based, and access-based wellbeing, instead of visual-based wellbeing, that dominate discussion of the idea of wellbeing in design studies (Manzini, *Design Philosophy paper*, 2003).


Mulvey, 1975.


*Hong Kong Housing Authority Annual Report 1996-97*

Leisure and Cultural Services Department, Hong Kong

A Chinese proverb describing the typical lifestyle of rural people.

Interviews with residents in 2006 suggested that they had understood the sculptures largely in sentimental ways. Interpretations of the visuals were centered on personal, emotional feelings rather than practical concerns. For example, an elderly man, who had been a farmer in Southern rural China, expressed his responses to the vivid realistic sculpture ‘Harvesting’, using terms such as ‘rootedness and family loyalty’. He also indicated that ‘solidarity and harmony within
family is a Chinese virtue,’ values which he taught his grandchildren using ‘Harvesting’ as a visual model.

The entire issue consisted of 14 full-page advertisements, 7 one-column advertisements (The New Yorker has a three-column layout) always along the edge of the page and a 1 column “thank you” to the artists from Target.

Through her analysis of over a hundred advertising illustrations, Judith Williamson first made this point in her 1978 book Decoding Advertisements where she explains that the obvious function of an attractive advertisement is to “make us buy things” but that its more subtle function is to entice the individual to actually help perpetuate capitalistic ideals. As an admirer of the The New Yorker illustrations, the reader is likely to make a similar assessment of the Target stores, inevitably promoting society’s economic ideals as an individual.


Ibid.

George Campbell, The philosophy of rhetoric. (Boston, MA: Adamant Media Corporation, 1849).


Ibid., 54.
lvi Ibid., 54.


lviii Ibid., 175.

lix Ibid., 175.

lx Ibid., 175.