

Visual Wellbeing: Intersections of Rhetorical Theory and Design

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In her recent book *Classical Rhetoric and the Visual Arts in Early Modern Europe*, Caroline 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*). 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 in the field of design. In this paper, we speak from within two intellectual traditions—rhetoric and visual design—that have developed separately. Despite this separation, 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 (Figure 1).

Indeed, Twyman¹ and Bonsiepe,² both of whom write from a design perspective, argue that ancient rhetoric resembles modern design because 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, because all of these arts are arts of production.³ They conclude that theories of rhetoric are theories of design. Meanwhile, 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.⁴

Twyman and Bonsiepe also argue that ancient rhetoric did in fact consider, and therefore address, the visual. Gronbeck,

- 1 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.
- 2 Gui Bonsiepe, “Visual/verbal/rhetoric,” in *Ulm*, 14 (1965): 23–40. Bonsiepe is one of the leading theorists in Design.
- 3 Kaufer and Butler, *Rhetoric and the Arts of Design* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1996).
- 4 Hanno Ehses, “Rhetoric and Design,” in *Design Papers 5: Rhetorical Handbook*, E. Lupton, ed. (Halifax: Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1988).

Figure 1
Comparison of Design and Rhetoric.

- 5 Bruce Gronbeck, "Celluloid rhetoric: On genres of documentary," in *Form and Genre: Shaping Rhetorical Action*, K. K. Cambell & K. H. Jamieson, eds. (Falls Church, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1978): 139–61.
- 6 Olson, Finnegan, and Hope, *Visual Rhetoric: A Reader in Communication and American Culture*. (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008).
- 7 Tim Steffensmeier, "Aristotle's Energeia and Grain Farming: Adding Value by Bringing a Community 'Before the Eyes,'" in *NCA Annual Convention* (2005): 5.
- 8 Kenneth Burke, *Grammar of Motives* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1945). Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1950). Also, Kenneth Burke, *Language as Symbolic Action* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). Also, Kenneth Burke, *The Philosophy of Literary Forms: Studies in Symbolic Action* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).
- 9 Kenney and Scott, "A Review of the Visual Rhetoric Literature" in *Persuasive Imagery: A Consumer Response*, Linda M. Scott and Rajeev Batra, eds. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003): 17–56.
- 10 Herbert Simon, *The Sciences of the Artificial*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996).
- 11 Bruce Archer, "Design as a Discipline," in *Design Studies*, 1:1 (1979): 17–20.
- 12 Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," in *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, 1:1 (1968), 1–14.
- 13 Michael Leff, "Hermeneutical Rhetoric" in *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics in Our Time: A Reader*. Walter Jost and Michael J. Hyde, eds. (1997): 196–214.
- 14 David Sless, "Reading Semiotics," in *Information Design Journal* 4:3 (1986):179–89. Also, Kirt Wilson, "Is There Interest in Reconciliation?" in *Rhetoric Public Affairs*, 7:3 (2004), 367–77.
- 15 Richard Buchanan, "Design Research and the New Learning," in *Design Issues*, 17:4 (2001), 3–23.
- 16 Ibid.

| DESIGN | RHETORIC |
|---|---|
| <p>"Design is devising actions that are aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones"¹⁰</p> <p>"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"¹¹</p> | <p>"Rhetoric responds to imperfect situations which are capable of positive modification by rhetorical actions"¹²</p> <p>"Rhetoric is... a process that inheres in all discursive practices and that influences social consciousness at every level of its manifestation"¹³</p> |
| <p>Values or goals:</p> <p>Achieving the functional, the pleasurable, and the moral—the three senses of good¹⁴</p> <p>Accomplishing human beings' individual and collective purposes¹⁵</p> <p>Power of conceiving, planning, and making¹⁶</p> | <p>Values or goals:</p> <p>To enlighten the understanding, please the imagination, move the passions, influence the will¹⁷</p> <p>Means of self-discovery or to come to self-knowledge¹⁸</p> <p>A force for civilization and human advancement¹⁹</p> |

writing from the rhetorical perspective, agrees, arguing that the ancient world was fascinated with sight and seeing.⁵ In particular, Aristotle's treatise on memory illustrates this fascination. According to Gronbeck, Aristotle argued that "humans use *phantasmata*, mental images or pictures, in the construction of memory."⁶ Steffensmeier, also writing from a rhetorical perspective, suggests that a re-reading of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* reveals the centrality of the visual to his theory of rhetoric, particularly in the canon 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 *progymnasmata*."⁷

Despite scholarship that suggests a strong thread of what Gronbeck refers to as ocularcentrism in the rhetorical tradition, rhetoric's commitment to the visual did not become the focus of scholarly work until the latter decades of the twentieth 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.⁸ Burke argues 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 purview not only literature and speech but also "culture, art, and even science."⁹

By the last third of the twentieth century, visual theorists were beginning to assert a "pictorial turn" in intellectual and social life (or the "iconic turn," per Gottfried Boehm). Mitchell made the distinction between the pictorial turn as a mass perception—a collective anxiety about images and visual media—and the turn to images in intellectual disciplines not only in the human sciences but

also in the natural sciences (e.g., medicine, biology, physics, natural history, etc.).²⁰ 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.”²¹ Such dimensions included the efforts both 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 move is significant for visual designers because 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, that there are means for assessing/evaluating it, and that we see it as a separate area of human activity that 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 our everyday 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, because there are established means for assessing/evaluating it, and because it is a separate area of human activity that 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. (However, as our analysis demonstrates, design is being reconceptualized in the twenty-first century as much more democratic, based at least in part on the digital technology revolution and the increasing popularity of audience-centered approaches. Service design, for example, is 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.²² This distinction is directly related to the generation

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- 17 George Campbell, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. (Boston, MA: Adamant Media Corporation, 1849).
- 18 Sonja Foss, *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice, 3rd Edition*. (Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press, 2004).
- 19 James Jasinski, *Sourcebook on rhetoric: Key Concepts in Contemporary Rhetorical Studies*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc., 2001).
- 20 Grønstad and Vågnes, “An Interview with W.J.T. Mitchell” (2006). Accessed 2/8/2009, from http://www.imageandnarrative.be/iconoclasm/gronstad_vagnes.htm.
- 21 Olson, Finnegan, and Hope, *Visual Rhetoric*.
- 22 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 Conference*, C. Swann & E. Young, eds. (Perth: School of Design, Curtin University, 2001): 178–84. Also, Donald Schön, *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc., 1987). Also, R. E. Weiss, “Designing Problems to Promote Higher-Order Thinking,” in *Problem-Based Learning in the Information Age*, D. S. Knowlton and D. C. Sharp, eds., (2003): 25–31.

of new knowledge in the two fields. Rhetorical scholars generate new knowledge by engaging in rhetorical criticism and philosophical inquiry, as well as through practice. For designers, new knowledge is generally achieved through practice; in particular, insights are 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 to be considered well-established programs or manifestos. In other words, design theories are often only “testable” in relation to practice, to professional acceptance, and to longevity.²³

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)

Enargeia (enargia) is a historical concept in rhetorical theory that has received little attention from contemporary scholars in either design or rhetoric. This concept is one aspect of classical rhetorical theory that stresses the similarity of painting or the visual arts to rhetoric because it refers to the author’s ability to (re)create a vivid description, or to present evidence so that it seems to appear before the eyes of the audience. It combines all of the possibilities suggested by such terms as “graphic,” “active,” and “representing actuality.”²⁴ As Cicero explains, *enargeia* does not seem to speak but to show. It involves visual clarity, immediacy, self-evidentia, and strong emotional appeal.²⁵ In Aristotle’s theory of tragedy, only a vivid image (*enargeia*) was able to evoke contrary emotions of empathy or terror.²⁶

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. Although *enargeia* is inherently visual,

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- 23 Gary Moore, “Toward Environment: Behavior Theories of the Middle Range,” in *Advances in Environment, Behavior, and Design: Toward the Integration of Theory, Methods, Research, and Utilization*, G. Moore and R. W. Marans, eds. (1997): 1–40.
- 24 W. J. Jordan, “A Psychological Explanation of Aristotle’s Concept of Metaphor,” in Dissertation, Wayne State University, 29, (1969).
- 25 Ingunn Lunde, “Rhetorical *Enargeia* and Linguistic Pragmatics,” in *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 5:1 (2004): 49–80.
- 26 Thijs Weststeijn, “Rembrandt and Rhetoric: the Concepts of *Affectus*, *Enargeia*, and *Ornatus* in Samuel Van Hoogstraten’s Judgement of his Master” in *The Learned Eye: Regarding Art, Theory, and the Artist’s Reputation*, M. van den Doel, N. van Eck, G. Korevaar, A. Tummers, and T. Weststeijn, eds. (2005): 111–32.

Figure 2
Enargeia.

| Characteristics of Enargeia (vividness) |
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| Brings in to presence, to the sight and mind, that which is absent ³⁶ |
| Full, exhaustive, vivid, visual depiction of experience ³⁷ |
| Conveys invisible significance through visual depiction ³⁸ |
| Gives pleasure to the viewer ³⁹ |
| Persuasive capacity related to ideas ⁴⁰ |
| Evokes a sense of wonder ⁴¹ |
| Combines theatrical description with authentic account ⁴² |

- 27 Cara Finnegan, "Doing Rhetorical History of the Visual: The Photograph and the Archive," in *Defining Visual Rhetoric*, M. Helmers and C. Hill, eds., (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004): 195–214.
- 28 A related concept, *energeia*, has a received a bit more attention. *Energeia* is defined as bringing before the eye, as making visible to a community.
- 29 Ezio Manzini, "Prometheus of the Everyday: The Ecology of the Artificial and the Designer's Responsibility," in *Discovering Design: Explorations in Design Studies*, R. Buchanan and V. Margolin, eds. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995).
- 30 A characterization of eudaimonic wellbeing is based on interpretation in psychology and social studies literature.
- 31 Ryan and Deci, "On Happiness and Human Potentials: a Review of Research on Hedonic and Eudaimonic Well-Being," in *Annual Review of Psychology* 52 (2001): 146.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 146.
- 33 Des Gasper, *Human Well-Being: Concepts and Conceptualizations* (United Nations University: World Institute for Development Economics Research, 2004): 3.
- 34 Kashdan and Julian, "Gratitude and Hedonic and Eudaimonic Wellbeing in Vietnam War Veterans," in *Behavior Research and Therapy*, (2005).
- 35 Aristotle, as cited in Kashdan, 2005.
- 36 Ingunn Lunde, "Rhetorical Enargeia and Linguistic Pragmatics," in *Journal of Historical Pragmatics*, 5:1 (2004): 53.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 54.
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Gerard Sharpling, "Towards a Rhetoric of Experience: the Role of Enargeia in the Essays of Montaigne," in *Rhetorica*, 20:2 (2002): 174.
- 40 *Ibid.*, 175.
- 41 *Ibid.*
- 42 *Ibid.*

recent studies using methods of visual rhetoric have not referred to *enargeia* (or *energia*), with the exception of Finnegan, who references "*enargia*" in a footnote explanation of her use of "*ekphrasis*," a subcategory of *enargeia*.²⁷ Occasionally, literary criticism and dissertations will use *enargeia* to inform their analyses.²⁸ From these works, we can play out a series of features or elements that may reside in or be evoked by visual images (Figures 1 and 2).

As this survey indicates, *enargeia's oculos subiectio* (to bring before one's eyes) is not an end in and of itself; rather, it is a means to achieve an end. Visual experience of design objects and images in the world may be distressful or pleasurable—one might feel confronted with "visual pollution"²⁹ or one might experience some moments of "pleasurable looking" that are not tied to consumption. In institutions and public spaces, such as public parks or museums, the source of visual pleasure (or distress) could be not just the art works and paintings, sculptures, and interactive displays, but also the environment, its ambience, or the atmosphere. As indicated earlier, in both design and rhetoric, a fundamental 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*³⁰ 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*.³¹ Waterman suggests that *eudaimonia* involves *personal expressiveness of deeply held values*.³² Significantly, the Aristotelian tradition theorizes the term wellbeing as essentially social and ethical in its inflections.³³ *Eudaimonic wellbeing*, then, is the experience of *enriching activities*, of *vitality*, in people who live in groups³⁴—a condition for *human flourishing*.³⁵

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*,⁴³ a eudaimonic theory of visual wellbeing focuses on *meanings* and *self-realization* and is “*inherently culturally rooted*.”⁴⁴ 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 because 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,”⁴⁵ can be manifested in any specific life domain, we argue that visual-based wellbeing⁴⁶ 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 the 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” that is different from, and therefore able to account for the limitations of, the looking associated with *visual pleasure*; such looking has been theorized primarily through such concepts as *scopophilia*⁴⁷ and *gaze*⁴⁸ to describe the kinds of pleasures related to *voyeurism*, *fetishism*, and *narcissism*.⁴⁹ Visual pleasure, theorized in this manner, is hedonic, somewhat momentary, “controlling and even sadistic.”⁵⁰ 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 and for which looking can be a source of pleasure. 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) (Figure 2) and *eudaimonia* (human wellbeing) (Figure 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 into the process and context favorable to the realization of visual wellbeing.

We apply this framework to two brief case studies to illustrate its theoretical, critical, and practical potential. The two cases

43 Ryan and Deci, “On Happiness and Human Potentials,” 145.

44 Christopher, as cited in Ryan and Deci, 2001, 159.

45 Ryan and Deci, “On Happiness and Human Potentials,” 141–66.

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

47 Scopophilia is the translated concept of Freud’s reference to “Schaulust” from “The Origin and Development of Psychoanalysis,” from the fourth lecture, first published in *American Journal of Psychology*, 21, 181–218 (1910).

48 Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, 1964*. Trans. Alan Sheridan, (London: Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977). Here, Lacan refers to Sartre’s “the look.”

49 Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in *Screen* 16 (1975): 6–18. 1975.

50 Laura Mulvey. *Visual and Other Pleasures*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

Figure 3
Eudaimonia.

| Characteristics of Eudaimonia (wellbeing) |
|---|
| Expression of virtue |
| Enriching activities, of vitality, in people who live in groups |
| Personal expressiveness of deeply held values |
| Fulfillment |
| A condition for human flourishing |
| Inherently culturally rooted |
| Focuses on meanings and self-realization |

represent points on a continuum that ranges 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 both 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.’”⁵¹ 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.

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 (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.”

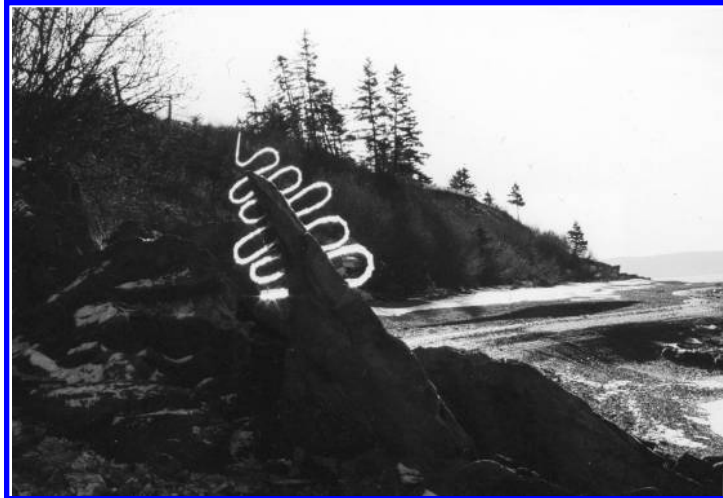
This is one of the opening scenes in the 2001 film, *Rivers and Tides*, a film shot by German filmmaker Thomas Riedelsheimer, who followed the artist, Andy Goldsworthy, for over a year. Produced by Skyline Productions, the film took top prizes in Germany’s Lola film awards, as well as in several international festivals.⁵²

The film follows Goldsworthy—a soft-spoken, bearded man creating sculptures that illustrate the cycles of creation and change—throughout his professional travels. Goldsworthy works without paint brushes, chisels, knives, or canvases and yet brings into being highly inventive sculptures from the artifacts and materials he finds in his surroundings.

51 Thomas Reese, “Andy Goldsworthy’s New Ruins,” in *Mortality Immortality?: The Legacy of 20th-Century Art*, M. A. Corzo, ed. (Los Angeles: Getty Conservation Institute, 1999): 25–34.

52 J. Latimer, “ARTS ABROAD: in a Film Festival’s Winners, a Focus on Artists at Work,” in *The New York Times* (October 1, 2002): 2.

Image 1
Ice Sculpture.



In terms of the elements of *enargeia* and *eudemonia* (Figures 2 and 3), what is of interest to us is the way in which Goldsworthy's art, as represented in *Rivers and Tides*, appears to be a quite thoroughgoing illustration of these concepts. Certainly, the art is mediated by the techniques and practices of filmmaking, but it is the art and its ephemeral, time-based creation and evolution that is the object of our analysis. Goldsworthy's 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 series of scenes is just one example by which the film displays more fully, even than photographs of Goldsworthy's work, an *exhaustive, visual depiction of experience*. Instead of seeing only the final image of color and contrast, viewers receive, from the filmmaker, scenes which cover the entire experience, so that they come to understand how the slow, mundane acts of searching, picking, and arranging are necessary to create the final sense of *pleasure* and *wonder*. The art-making practice captured in the film enables viewers to experience vicariously 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 audience members have come along for the journey, the sense of aesthetic contrivance is lost, and instead they share Goldsworthy's aesthetic vision as if they were enacting it with him.

Image 2

Sculpture of Twigs in Penpont.



This energeic 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 and then a quick look away, the viewer is actually led through a more ongoing, deeper visual experience that engages *memory*. For instance, there are 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; such images evoke memories of childhood activity and *wonder*. The contrast of electric yellow dandelions sprouting from a less-than-nurturing, grey-brown rock might indeed give the viewer pleasure—a pleasure likely to be heightened by memories of leisure *activities of vitality* often associated with childhood, such as picking wildflowers. In short, Goldsworthy's process and art, as illustrated in the film, encourage the audience toward a deeper kind of looking, thereby demonstrating characteristics of both *enargeia* and *eudemonia*.

A scene in Penpont, Scotland, like several others scattered throughout the film (especially those in Nova Scotia), illustrates the one characteristic of *eudemonia* that *Rivers and Tides* manages to complicate—namely, the issue of *fulfillment*. The same process that evokes 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 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 (Image 2). Viewers inwardly collapse along with Goldsworthy as he pauses in silent frustration. Only when the film continues on to other projects, indicating that Goldsworthy has detached himself from the lost work on his own terms, do viewers begin to regain their sense of *fulfillment* from the experience of being engaged in Goldsworthy's creative process. Viewers might not have experienced this sense of fulfillment as vividly without those earlier feelings of

loss. The film enables audience members to see and experience Goldsworthy's creative journey, and not just to look at or consume the end result. In this way, *Rivers and Tides* demonstrates how film (and potentially other media) can 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 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.⁵³ This long-term housing policy was seen as a social improvement measure, providing low-cost rental homes for a majority of the population. Today, more than half of Hong Kong's 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 need to provide shelters that meet spatial and utilitarian needs has been generally satisfied, attention has turned to the aesthetic attractiveness, conditions and the values considered essential to human flourishing. 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 after the construction of a new international airport. In Hong Kong, 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 create a unique rhetorical situation.

Sculptures in Yat Tung Estate adopt themes that reflect the history and cultural heritage of Tung Chung; they are designed, purportedly, in line with the needs of residents. The villagers who have been relocated to the Yat Tung Estate must deal with leaving their homes, which were small, one-story houses, to live in high-rise buildings; the relocation represents an enormous change for residents' day-to-day existence, both physically and mentally.

"Working at Dawn" and "Harvesting" (Images 3 and 4, respectively) 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; the crops have been

53 *Hong Kong Housing Authority Annual Report, 1996–97.*

Image 3
Working at Dawn.



Image 4
Harvesting.



cut out from, and then placed on top of a dark, curved, matte steel plate, creating both positive and negative spaces. 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. The technical treatment of cutting out shapes creates a visual effect like that of the traditional Chinese folk art of paper-cutting. "Harvesting," meanwhile, is made of greenish bronze. It portrays members of a farmer's (or fisherman's) family holding hands, joyfully dancing as they encircle a tree of some sort.

Because Tung Chung had been a rural community where residents lived simply and in simple styles, the transformation to a modernized new town has meant 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 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 as well as the unbroken connection between the farmer and his land via the visual line of the plow in "Working at Dawn." 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. Just as the residents now live within greater physical proximity 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.

In a manner distinctive from that of "Working at Dawn," "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 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 on working the land and, in this case, also the sea), as well as the changing family relationships in the present and future. This diachronic orientation

Figure 4
Comparison of Visual Pleasure and Visual Wellbeing.

| VISUAL PLEASURE | VISUAL WELLBEING |
|--|---|
| Male gaze of female subject | Varied audiences' experience of design objects |
| Psychoanalysis, Psychology, Film studies, Feminist studies | Visual design, Rhetorical theory |
| Hedonic wellbeing | Eudaimonic wellbeing |
| Voyeurism, fetishism, narcissism, gaze, scopophilia | Enargeia, vividness, eudaimonia, sight |
| Bodily pleasure, self-interest, consumption | Meanings, sense-making, and self-realization within community |
| Subjectivity – individualistic | Intersubjectivity – social/cultural |
| Momentary | Sustained |

is accomplished by the direction of the gaze and the posture of each of the figures in relation to the grouping as a whole, all of which suggest different orientations to past and present or, at least, different modes of self-realization. For residents who are experiencing instability as the result of dramatic change to their lived experience, such images may serve both to comfort and to provide models for living and relating in new spaces and contexts.⁵⁴ The level of detail of the figures, their roles, and their physical relationship both with one another and with their surroundings create a rhetoric of stability, so that they serve as an example of the persuasive capacity of images and of how they might inspire a sense of vividness through *full, exhaustive, vivid visual depiction* of experience.

“Harvesting” and “Working at Dawn” function rhetorically to remedy the “imperfection”—that which is something other than it should be—brought about by relocation; it does so through the creation and evocation of meanings that influence residents’ perceptions about their reality. Visual design makes values visible 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; they inventively represent community development, forming and reinforcing the basis upon which residents might 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.

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 (Figures 2 and 3), provide distinct criteria for analyzing and assessing artifacts and design objects, such as Goldsworthy’s artwork as illustrated in the film and the public art sculptures in Hong Kong. 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. Figure 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.

Second, analysis of these cases using the visual wellbeing framework indicates that artists and designers—those who seek to create visual objects that are meaningful and significant to the

54 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.

viewers and residents—can be rhetorically successful by providing objects that employ the constituent concepts of visual wellbeing. For instance, analyses of the two cases demonstrate that each met various design goals: achieving a vivid depiction of art in nature (in Goldworthy’s art works and the film *Rivers and Tides*); and providing resources for making values visible and, as a result, addressing the “defective” nature of the environment by communicating ideas and ideals to the community (in the Hong Kong estate art). Thus, our work demonstrates the inventional 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 give 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 is in hospital environments. Although studies have shown that attractive physical surroundings are very important to a patient’s health, little guidance is available to help in making design decisions.⁵⁵ When studies are conducted to formulate these answers, the components of both *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 an example of the type of design challenge that future research in visual wellbeing might address. Sustainable design, designing for democracy or civic participation, and questions of emotion and design are other potential areas of research that deal with the betterment or fulfillment of individuals or the cultural community and that would also benefit from further development and application of the visual wellbeing framework.

55 H. Dalke, J. Little, E. Niemann, N. Camgoz, G. Steadman, S. Hill, and L. Stott. “Colour and Lighting in Hospital Design,” *Optics & Laser Technology*, 38 (4–6), 343–65.

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