



The Rhetorical/Visual Analysis

Suggested unit readings/texts from *Critical Encounters*, 3rd ed. (select 4-6):

“Changing the Face of Poverty,” Diana George
“The Politics of Staring,” Rosemarie Garland-Thomson
“From Poster Child to Protester,” Laura Hershey
“Faces and Bodies,” Julia Hirsch
“Selling Hot Pussy,” bell hooks
“Photography: A Little Summa,” Susan Sontag
“Epiphany of the Other,” David Levi Strauss
“A Story About the Body,” Robert Hass (poem)
“The Veil,” Marjane Satrapi (excerpt from graphic novel)
No Logo, Naomi Klein (film)
PDF excerpt from *On Photography*, Susan Sontag
PDF Faigley, Lester, Diana George, Anna Palchik, and Cynthia Selfe. “Chapter 2: Looking Closer.” *Picturing Texts*. New York, London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004.

and I really hope no WHITE   ever has cause
to write about me
because they ~~never~~ understand

BLACK  *love* is BLACK \$wealth\$ and they’ll
probably talk about my hard childhood
and ~~never~~ understand that
all the while I was quite ☺
“Nikki-Rosa” Giovanni, Nikki

For this unit, we’ll be exploring how visual rhetoric operates, and we’ll be working to expand our visual literacy. More specifically, we’ll be reading and writing about how visual rhetoric persuades. In their textbook, *Rhetorical Visions: Reading and Writing in a Visual Culture*, Wendy Hesford and Brenda Brueggemann explain the term “visual rhetoric” as follows:

We use the term **visual rhetoric** to describe how images persuade and argue. Just as we would analyze a speech—its language, structure, tone, etc.—in order to attempt to understand how it attempts to persuade, we analyze images in order to understand their effect on viewers (4).


Examples of visual rhetoric include political cartoons, advertisements, propaganda, and websites. Before you claim that you aren’t easily persuaded by visual rhetoric and that you make your decisions sans external influence, take a look at what you’re wearing: the

bag that you're carrying; that hat on your head; those shoes on your feet. Even if your apparel isn't outwardly promoting a popular brand, your decision not to conform is a reaction against fashion trends and fads. In that sense, you also have been persuaded by various types of visual rhetoric.

Today's iconographic culture informs and/or influences how we see our community (here at SU and beyond campus boundaries); how we understand our various roles within our families, schools, and larger societies; and how we make decisions within those arenas. As we begin to think about *how we see* and how we generate opinions from our visual interpretations, we will strive to attain a higher level of self-consciousness in regards to our **rhetorical gaze**. Again, Hesford and Brueggemann:


The common definition of **gaze** is to stare, or fix the eyes in a steady intent look. But in studies of visual rhetoric, the gaze more generally refers to the acts of "looking" that occur both within and around (or at) an image: who is looking, how they are looking, why they are looking, where they are looking, and who/what is being looked *at*. The gaze also refers to the particular "way of seeing" that an image can impose upon its viewers, using various rhetorical (persuasive) strategies. (11)

For our purposes this unit, we'll be making claims, supporting arguments, constructing knowledge, researching and assessing sources, and sharing our findings—all in the hopes of "seeing" our communities, our worlds, and thus ourselves. The resulting products may take diverse forms—from multi-modal projects to more traditional, text-based artifacts. By the end of the unit, we will pool our collective understandings and create a body of knowledge that represents all of our individual experiences in this visually rich context.

 **Assignment:** According to Rosenwasser and Stephen, "[t]o analyze the rhetoric of something is to determine how that something persuades and positions its readers or viewers or listeners. Rhetorical analysis is an essential skill because it reveals how particular pieces of communication seek to enlist our support and shape our behavior" (69). As a class we will consider a wide range of visual artifacts as possible topics, including a text-based artifact, an image, a television show, a song, a movie, a cartoon, an advertisement, a magazine cover, a CD cover, etc. and we will try to determine how the artifacts "position" and "persuade" us as viewers and listeners. We will also read a range of essays to help us imagine topics as well as understand how such an analysis takes shape through the qualities of claim-making and evidence. **Each of you will work with a partner throughout the invention stages of the unit.** You and your partner will select the same visual artifact to analyze; you will engage with the class heuristics and research assignments together; and you will push each other to deepen your understanding of the artifact, to keep asking "so what?" every time you think you have exhausted your observations or interpretations.

There are three phases to this assignment.

- During the first phase, you and your partner should spend considerable time analyzing the item. It is highly unlikely that you'll be able to glean a lot of detail after only encountering the item once. Think about it like this. Every successive time you watch a movie, you notice a detail that you missed during your previous viewing. The same logic applies to analysis. Remember that a key to a well-written analysis is the amount of detail it includes. Be sure to take careful notes because you'll be using these notes to write up your analysis. Afterwards, share your notes with your partner and have a conversation about areas of divergence and overlapping. Listening to a different perspective can help you as you construct your individual analysis.
- The second phase of this assignment is when the research happens. You need to look up some background information about the item—information that will enhance your analysis. Think about how research might play a role in supplementing your understanding of the image or representation. For example, if you are analyzing a political cartoon, you might consider reading some news articles or editorials that provide insight into the political controversy at hand. Once you have obtained a better understanding of the situational, historical, and/or cultural context for your artifact, then you will begin to synthesize your descriptions of the item and your research and begin your analysis.
- The third phase is when the writing takes place. On pages 114-15 in *Picturing Texts*, you will find a series of questions that can be used to frame your writing. While these questions deal with analyzing images, they also can be applied to other types of analysis. Do not regard these questions as writing prompts that can be answered in two or three sentences. If that's your approach, it's going to take you a long time to come up with 6-8 pages of solid text. Instead, use these sentences as guides. Do not feel compelled to answer each question. These questions are some considerations that might be included in a critical rhetorical analysis.

 **Audience:** Peers/Colleagues

 **Guidelines:** (Note: Every writer will hand in his/her own analysis.)

- 6-8 pages finished prose, double-spaced
- Times New Roman, 12-point font size – no smaller, no larger
- Two secondary sources (one of which is scholarly)
- Invention Portfolio
- Copies of your draft for the peer-response workshop – Failure to provide extra copies will result in a failing participation grade for that day. Three copies are required: one for me; one for your partner; and one for you.

 **Timeline (TAs fill in their own dates):**

- Peer response workshop –
- Polished draft –

Reminders or “You know that you’ve written a sound rhetorical analysis when...”

- you have gone through each of the five moves as listed in chapter 2 of *Writing Analytically*;
- you have complicated any binaries that your analysis identifies;
- you have made the “implicit explicit”;
- you have considered the questions found on pages 114-5 in *Picturing Texts*;
- you have written in a style that is engaging and creative. Remember that I’ll be evaluating your ability to analyze *and* present your findings in ways that adhere to grammatical and mechanical conventions; and
- you have met the criteria as listed in the “Guidelines” section of this handout.