

Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics in Scenic Design: A Pedagogical Analysis

A Thesis Presented for the

Master of Science

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Chris Guzzardo

August 2017

Abstract

Scenic designers are professionals in theatre who design sets for the stage that communicate aspects of a performance, such as time of day, location, and era. Sets are supposed to lay a foundation to performances as they communicate information to audiences through visual design. Since visual rhetoric and semiotics play a big part in the successful completion of transmitting messages, knowledge of both concepts should be taught to scenic designers. This thesis provides a content analysis of ten popular books used by scenic designers and their respective education programs. The analysis provides a structured search for visual rhetoric and semiotic content as it relates to the literature on the subjects. The major problem to the scenic design books is the nonexistent visual rhetoric and semiotic content. Options are discussed for potential solutions to the lack of information problem among the texts.

Keywords: visual rhetoric, semiotics, scenic design, theatre, audience communication.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Literature Review	3
Scenic Design	4
<i>Figure 2.1: A set with realistic props</i>	5
<i>Figure 2.2: A set designed for lighting focus</i>	6
Principles of Rhetoric	8
Visual Rhetoric	10
Areas of focus	12
Semiotics	14
<i>Figure 2.3: A Coca-Cola advertisement from the 1890s</i>	18
Elements of semiotics	19
Sign	19
Semé	20
Isotopy	22
Icon	22
Chapter 3: Method	25
Content Analysis	25
Coding Sheet	26
Book Attainment	27
Analysis Process	27
Chapter 4: Results	29
<i>Table 4.1: Book Findings</i>	30

Chapter 5: Discussion.....	32
Relevant Book Findings	32
The Element of Color	32
Communicated Action	35
Stylistic Nature	36
Symbolism	38
Potential Benefits of Rhetoric	39
Potential Benefits of Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics	40
Pedagogical Solutions	41
Overhauling Existing Books	42
Creating New Books	42
Restructuring Program Requirements	43
Interdepartmental Collaboration.....	44
Conclusion	44
Study Limitations	46
Future Research	47
References	48
Appendices	53
Appendix A	
Amazon.com Top Ten Scenic Design Books.....	54
Appendix B	
Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics Coding Sheet.....	56
Vita.....	59

Chapter 1: Introduction

The ability to inform and persuade entire auditoriums of hundreds to thousands of patrons is a powerful ability, which some people believe is possible to accomplish in theatre. The power to inform and persuade audiences is a phenomenon studied by scholars since the times of Aristotle (Kennedy, 1994). Informing and persuading audiences effectively is a power that can benefit many fields, including theatre.

I have personally been involved in theatre since 1991, when I first took an acting class in high school. After eleven years in the Marine Corps, and about five years in the workforce afterwards, during which I participated in theatre as an actor-combatant, I returned to college to complete my bachelor's degree in theatre. During my undergraduate program, I found a focus in scenic design, where I designed three shows with the limited knowledge I gained. After graduating, I began teaching theatre for middle and high school students, where my focus was teaching technical theatre and design, including scenic design.

Scenic designers are the theatre professionals responsible for designing the imagery capable of transmitting messages through visual design, conveying various performance elements such as location, environment, era, and time of day. Scenic designers work in various fields including film and television, music, and theatre. However, where film, television, and music are mainstream venues, theatre needs attention.

Incorporating visual rhetoric and semiotics into scenic design is one way of bolstering the impact of messages transmitted through scenery on stage. Visual rhetoric and semiotics are studied in various fields, such as advertising, cross-cultural communication, and multimedia (e.g., Foss & Kanengieter, 1992; Hocks, 2003; McQuarrie & Mick, 1999; Piamonte, Abeysekera, & Ohlsson, 2001). However, few have studied visual rhetoric and semiotics in the field of theatre, especially the scenic design profession.

Overview of Thesis

This thesis conducts a content analysis of the top ten scenic design books sold on Amazon.com, specifically searching for elements of visual rhetoric and semiotics elements in each book. The thesis contains five chapters, including the current introduction chapter. Chapter 2 provides a literature review discussing scenic design, visual rhetoric, semiotics, and visual communication in scenic design. Chapter 3 provides methods of the content analysis. Chapter 4 discusses the results of the content analysis as they relate to the thesis. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the research, findings, and ideas for moving forward with the findings to improve the education programs around the country as well as stabilize design concepts for communication efficiency in their applications to theatre.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

People typically learn about various topics by being taught by other people, reading manuals or published literature, or learning by trial-and-error experience. Scenic design is one of the various professions in theatre, specifically focusing on visually communicating through objects. The following discussions include

Chapter 2 includes an overview of scenic design and its relevance to audience communication, followed by how both semiotics and visual rhetoric apply to the profession. The first section, discussing scenic design, is a discussion to gain a basic understanding of how the scenic design profession works. Through the literature review following the scenic design section, the key elements of visual rhetoric and semiotics are identified.

Chapter 2 also reviews the visual communication literature relevant to scenic design in theatre audience communication. The literature review aims to identify elements of visual communication that can be used to educate scenic designers in theatre to assist in creating and sharing messages through visual means, such as those used in graphic print, television broadcast, and visual communication via the internet.

In addition, Chapter 2 reviews visual rhetoric as it relates to communicating with audiences in theatre from a scenic design point of view starting with an examination of rhetoric and how it relates to communication as a core element to the research project. Rhetoric leads into visual rhetoric, followed by covering semiotics (the study of signs), an element of visual rhetoric

that is related to how scenic design communicates to audiences in theatre.

Scenic design is the first element to understand to provide a baseline understanding of the profession and its relevance to visual communication with audiences.

Scenic Design

Imagine if a car mechanic, with no other knowledge than that of vehicle maintenance, were to design a women's dress. What might the dress look like? Would the dress have the quality of those dresses found in fashion shows? Although there is a slim chance that some raw talent resides within everyone, the dress would most likely be unsuccessful.

Effective design tasks take talent, creativity, and a know-how to be successful. Scenic design is one of the fields in which communicating messages is just as important as having an architecturally interesting design. The current section examines the scenic design profession and discusses elements such as portrayal of location, and selection of elements and objects, to accomplish both realistic and abstract goals of visual communication.

Scenic design is the profession in theatre that visually communicates through scenery. The term scenery encompasses all the set props on a stage visible during a show and part of a set. Set props—which is short for set properties—are scenery objects belonging to the stage with which an actor can interact. Scenery also includes objects on a stage that is part of the show during a performance. Examples of props include furniture, working lamps, structural objects (i.e. doors, windows, and pillars), and decorations, among

other objects and materials. A set is the area on stage that encompasses all scenery. A set can portray location, atmosphere, era, and other environmental details appearing in various styles including realistic and abstract.

An example of a realistic design includes specifically chosen elements to portray an environment. Consider *Figure 2.1*.



Figure 2.1: A set with realistic props.

Photograph provided courtesy of Wiki Commons by designer Glenn Davis

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Scenic_Design_by_Glenn_Davis,_Hospital_Set_2013.jpg

Figure 2.1 shows an example of set props signifying a hospital room. A scenic designer may ask if all those props are necessary to convey that message as the set may appear too busy, cluttered, or distracting, which may take away from the show's immersion. A simpler approach to portraying a hospital scene could

very well be designing the stage to appear with only a hospital bed and IV stand.

Another example of scenic design work includes abstract designs. Consider *Figure 2.2* as an example of an abstract scenic design focusing on the ability to openly use color to alter the state of the stage, which is used to communicate feelings or mood to audiences.



Figure 2.2: A set designed for lighting focus. (See color image for better results.)

Photograph provided courtesy of Wiki Commons

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MICHALSKY_StyleNite_stage_01_2010.jpg

Figure 2.3 represents an abstract approach to a runway for models in an annual fashion show in Germany. In *Figure 2.3*, the runway on which the models stand is practical in the sense that its functionality exists alongside some visual abstractions (e.g., the walls and floating platforms) which appear

to be unusable except for the platform over the four models on the right side of the picture. The key visual element in *Figure 2.3* displays the use of an all-white set. Using a white set allows for various elements of color to take part through lighting.

In the current state of mostly a lighter shade of blue light, *Figure 2.3* gives a cool feeling, which is sometimes used in theatre to create a cold winter scene, whereas a nighttime scene uses a darker shade of blue. As another example, daytime scenes generally display warmer colors, wherein yellow typically signifies morning and orange typically signifies afternoon or evening.

Scenic designers decide whether to use realistic or abstract methods (or a combination of the two) when approaching design jobs dependent upon a few factors, such as director choices, script requirements, and intended messages. Scenic designers also decide how to use lighting to aid in telling a scene's story, as mentioned by the nighttime and daytime examples above. Although lighting designers typically handle all lighting involved in a production, scenic designers may choose to use lights instead of paint for instances such as the examples discussed herein.

Making a statement via scenery is a task that first requires the ability to communicate effectively. Thus, rhetoric is important to help understand how to communicate messages to audiences in theatre. The following section covers principles of rhetoric to establish a baseline understanding to move into visual rhetoric.

Principles of Rhetoric

Delivering an intended message may prove difficult if people do not understand how to effectively or persuasively communicate. Rhetoric is an important stepping stone towards effective or persuasive communication. Rhetoric allows for an understanding of messages and how messages affect people.

To better understand visual rhetoric, an understanding on rhetoric must be obtained. Rhetoric dates to ancient Greece (Kennedy, 1994). Aristotle (2006) describes the usefulness of rhetoric as follows:

Rhetoric is useful (1) because things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites, so that if the decisions of judges are not what they ought to be, the defeat must be due to the speakers themselves, and they must be blamed accordingly. Moreover, (2) before some audiences not even the possession of the exactest knowledge will make it easy for what we say to produce conviction. For argument based on knowledge implies instruction, and there are people whom one cannot instruct. Here, then, we must use, as our modes of persuasion and argument, notions possessed by everybody, as we observed in the Topics when dealing with the way to handle a popular audience. (p. 6)

Aristotle's consideration of the speakers being blamed for the outcome of a judge's decision allows us to place responsibility on scenic designers to accomplish message delivery, not as verbal speakers, but as visual

communicators. In addition, rhetoric can be used not only to portray locations and eras accurately, but also to use a people's knowledge to communicate with audiences.

In conjunction with Aristotle's description of rhetoric's usefulness, Poulakos' (1983) interpretation of rhetoric focuses on the artistic expression of rhetoric and applies to scenic design:

Rhetoric is the art which seeks to capture in opportune moments that which is appropriate and attempts to suggest that which is possible. Very briefly, this definition intimates that rhetoric is an artistic undertaking which concerns itself with the how, the when, and the what of expression and understands the why of purpose. (p. 36)

Rhetoric has obvious implications and benefits to fields such as journalism, public relations, politics and others. Using Poulakos' interpretation, rhetoric can potentially benefit the world of theatre as well.

Understanding rhetoric is not only important to understand how to develop effective or persuasive messages for audiences, but also a better understanding of messaging in general. Since rhetoric is based around words and text, visual rhetoric is the area which focuses on imagery and objects (Foss & Kanengieter, 1992). The following section on visual rhetoric discusses its relevance to scenic design and how impactful visual rhetoric can be in the profession and education programs for scenic designers.

Visual Rhetoric

Nearly 15 years ago, Foss and Kanengieter argued that today's world is at a level of visual saturation with advertisements, billboards, television, and the internet to such an extent that when people seek knowledge about something, they often turn to imagery—Google Images, for example—when they seek answers to various questions. Since imagery is becoming a focus for understanding concepts and ideas, scenic design should prove to be an important medium of communication. The following discussion reviews visual rhetoric as it relates to scenic design for theatre, a few visually communicative examples are shared, and a progression of knowledge in visual rhetoric is discussed as to how it can benefit scenic design.

If a scenic designer in theatre who uses symbols on stage to portray messages about an element of the play, location in which a play is set, or even how a location feels, the designer is communicating through visual rhetoric. One such example is a stereotypical Hell depicted by a red, rocky, steamy set versus Heaven depicted as a white, fluffy, cloudy set.

Foss (2004) defines visual rhetoric in a two-part approach:

In the first sense, visual rhetoric is a product individuals create as they use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating. In the second, it is a perspective scholars apply that focuses on the symbolic processes by which visual artifacts perform communication. (p. 304)

Both of Foss's (2004) senses hold true to the world of theatre and can help to inform how visual rhetoric is useful in scenic design, which will help to advance visual rhetoric in both an empirical as well as a scientific manner.

Considering Foss's (2004) first sense of visual rhetoric, a scholar can argue that scenic designers are visual rhetoricians since they both "create and use visual symbols for the purpose of communicating" (p. 304). An example might include a scenic designer indicating a work site of a new mine by placing a stack of railroad ties and an unfinished railroad track leading into the side of a hill which has shovels, mining picks, and wheel barrows in front of a newly dug hole.

In Foss's (2004) second sense, scenic design scholars might discuss best practices for the placement of physical elements on stage to communicate a message more efficiently. Thus, focusing on Foss's (2004) two approaches hold value to scenic designers. Also, scenic designers might be labeled as visual rhetoricians since scenic designers also focus on the visual nature these elements communicate to audiences.

Since scenic designers contemplate and discuss how to piece together visual elements to form the message they attempt to create, Foss's (2004) scholarly approach can be applied to their work. Extending the knowledge of visual rhetoric into the field of scenic design in theatre can help to increase the efficient message creation and delivery that designers strive to create in each of their designs.

The progression of knowledge in visual rhetoric has allowed for its advancement, such as visual communication in advertising via signs and symbols (e.g., Scott, 1994). Although language barriers exist across cultures, some signs may be interpreted universally, such as a sign to indicate that smoking is prohibited (e.g., Piamonte, Abeysekera, & Ohlsson, 2001). However, subtle approaches to implying messages through signage and the placement of visual objects is along the lines of the scenic design approach in theatre. Just as Foss (2004) has three senses of visual rhetoric, three areas of focus also exist.

Areas of focus. Visual rhetoric contains three areas of focus: nature of the artifact, function of the artifact, and evaluation of the artifact (Foss, 2004). Regarding the nature of the artifact, Foss (2004) wrote, “To explicate the function of or to evaluate images or objects requires an understanding of the substantive and stylistic nature of the artifacts being explored” (p. 307). Figuring out the nature of a designed artifact is typically the first step scenic designers take because they need to understand the style in which each play is being staged.

However, the function of the artifact is equally important since “the function of a visual artifact is the action it communicates” (Foss, 2004, p. 308). Furthermore, Foss (2004) explains that an artifact’s function “might range from memorializing individuals to creating feelings of warmth and coziness to encouraging viewers to explore self-imposed limitations” (p. 308). Since scenic designers create messages through imagery and objects, establishing each

object's nature and function are both equally important to establishing an intended message.

The third area Foss (2004) discusses about visual artifacts, the evaluation of an artifact, is more on the critical analysis side of each design. When evaluating an artifact, scenic designers should analyze the chosen object(s) as Foss (2004) suggests:

Some scholars choose to evaluate an artifact using the criterion of whether it accomplishes its apparent function. If an artifact functions to memorialize someone, for example, such an evaluation would involve discovery of whether its media, colors, forms, and content actually accomplish that function. (p 309)

The evaluation phase is probably the most important phase when the time comes to analyze scenic designs, because if an intended message is not getting across to an audience, then the work is unsuccessful, and thus the scenic designer is not doing his or her job effectively. Therefore, learning about Foss's areas of focus should prove beneficial to scenic designers, especially if they learn about them as part of their education programs and not by trial and error as professionals.

After reviewing visual rhetoric through a scenic design lens, the impact visual rhetoric can have on theatre is substantial. The discussion in the current section demonstrates the importance of visual rhetoric in the scenic design field. Developing the knowledge of visual rhetoric to accommodate various cultures and further develop semiotics will not only expand the field of

rhetoric and visual rhetoric, but also semiotics by focusing on scenic design as an educational means to both extend the literature in the field and develop better educational programs for scenic designers. The next section discusses the role semiotics plays on visual rhetoric and how semiotics relates to the scenic design profession in theatre.

Semiotics

Theatre professionals do not want to hear an audience describe performances as boring or state “I didn’t get it” when referring to any element of the show, such as set, lighting, and costume choices, let alone the acting or script. Scenic designers can alleviate the risk of hearing such language by using subtle, yet precise, imagery to depict conditions, relay emotion, and connect thoughts to moments during a performance.

Semiotics has been defined by Eco (1976) as “everything that can be taken as a sign” (p. 7). Eco’s definition is very broad, which leaves a lot of room for interpretation. Chandler (2007) indicates that signs can be found in speech, body language, and visual signification alike. Generalizing the use of signs, another approach to semiotics might include communicating a message inside a message using various signs, indicating subtext or further meaning of messages. Anyone can deliver messages as subtext while delivering another message as a top layer of actual text. The same concept is true for images. While an image can contain signs and symbols identified as separate elements, the overall compilation of signs and symbols can translate to another message.

In conjunction with Eco (1976), Hébert (n.d.), a prominent semiotician, scholar, and professor at the University of Québec at Rimouski wrote, “semiotics (or semiology) is the field of study that is concerned with signs and/or signification (the process of creating meaning)” (para. 2). Therefore, studying how objects can be placed on stage to represent something other than that which they stand alone to be is semiotics—such as a tattered couch either representing poverty or feline companionship depending on its design. The major elements of semiotics discussed by Hébert pertinent to this thesis include sign, *semé*, isotopy, and icon.

A discussion of semiotics aims to reveal its uses and benefits to scenic design in theatre and how knowledge of semiotics can bolster scenic designers’ education programs, which should increase their abilities to communicate efficiently throughout their careers. Looking at signs through a theatre lens, a soot-covered brick tenement apartment building is more than what appears on the surface. The soot-covered building is also a sign of the times—perhaps a low-income neighborhood in an industrial society about which its local government cares little about its image or the health of its population.

Typically, a set does not contain only one element without an accompanying element to help make meaning of the objects in question. For example, a soot-covered building accompanied by burn marks on the walls above windows and doorways could be signs that the soot came from a building fire, whereas a background image or projection containing industrial buildings and factories signify that the soot came from the local industries.

Meaning-making and semiotics work together when formulating designs since various descriptors can be given to objects standing by themselves.

Audiences also generate various semantic meanings for objects on stage, which can deflect a designer's intention for those objects. Accordingly, culture should be considered, as well.

Culture and interpretation of signs and symbols are important to understand how to effectively and efficiently inform or persuade an audience regardless of the culture from which each member of the audience comes. Semiotics is a more specific area of visual rhetoric, which looks at communication and interpretation of messages via signs and symbols.

Semiotics is a widely studied area. Eco (1976) wrote a book specifically focusing on a theory of semiotics, wherein he explored how culture plays a part in sign interpretation. As he explains:

If every communication process must be explained as relating to a system of significations, it is necessary to single out the elementary structure of communication at the point where communication may be seen at its most elementary terms. Although every pattern of signification is a cultural convention, there is one communicative process in which there seems to be no cultural convention at all, but only . . . the passage of stimuli. This occurs when so-called physical "information" is transmitted between two mechanical devices. (p. 32)

To illustrate his communication process example, Eco relates mechanical devices to a vehicle's dashboard indicators (e.g., how a gas gauge signifies the

level of fuel a vehicle contains, where the E and F on the gauge are signs that the car is either empty or full of gas).

On a scenic design level, we relate the physical information to the interpretation of objects on stage and each member of the audience, allowing for significance of each object placed on stage. Consider the following example of objects signifying poverty and struggle through the placement of people and objects on stage: people wearing tattered clothing huddled around a metal trash can to get warm by burning trash in a back alley.

Consider *Figure 2.3* as an example of subtle messages underlying overt messages. *Figure 2.3* indicates subtext messages such as the following: the product is rich and elegant, represented by the style of dress and expensive-looking plate upon which the logo and price are displayed; the product is consumed by wealthy and proper people, indicated by the form with which the girl holds the cup and her style of dress; the product is affordable, as displayed by the price on the plate, even in the 1890s; and the advertisement creates a lively, attractive, colorful feel as displayed by the choice of bright and complementing colors.

Figure 2.3 also communicates ownership and professional service, represented by the written text on the paper placed on the table disclosing corporate office locations. Although busy and loud—which is probably the goal of the advertisement—*Figure 2.3* was intended for a specific period and culture. In theatre, scenic designers must also remain vigilant when making decisions about using visual objects, colors, and elements in their designs.



Figure 2.3: A Coca-Cola advertisement from the 1890s.

Photograph provided courtesy of Wiki Commons

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Advertising#/media/File:Cocacola-5cents-1900_edit1.jpg

Regardless of the methods a scenic designer uses to illustrate his or her intended messages, semiotic value not only adds intrigue and depth to a design, but it also allows for an audience to find meaning more clearly and feel certain ways about scenes, sets, and a performance. Through semiotics, a scenic designer can alleviate his or her fear of an audience not receiving an intended message by applying semiotics and other visual rhetoric elements to each design.

Elements of semiotics. Most scholars define semiotic terms very similarly; however, the origin of semiology seems to stem from the 1890s when Peirce (1985) first wrote about semiotics. Understanding semiotic terminology will help ground designs in theory to form a practical method of creating meaning from objects on stage. The four pertinent terms defined for this thesis are: sign, *semé*, isotopy, and icon.

Sign. The first semiotic term is sign, and is defined as “A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity” (Peirce, 1985, p. 5). In the sense of visual communication, an illustration of a sign might include displaying an image of two competing sports players shaking hands which might stand for good sportsmanship.

A sign can be an object which represents another element, as suggested by Peirce’s definition. In scenic design, one example might include a stained-glass window. To some people, the window may simply represent a gothic design; but for others, the window may hold religious meaning.

Using Foss's (2004) function of the artifact, specifically the stylistic nature of the artifact, a scenic designer needs to design the window in a way to focus on the intended function—either gothic or religious in this example—for the sign to achieve its intended message since each style is unique. Since signs can hold various meanings, subject to viewer interpretation, understanding signs to aid in effective visual communication is important to develop effective or persuasive messages for audiences. Another important semiotic term is *semé*.

Semé. *Semé*, pronounced: suh-mey (www.dictionary.com/browse/semé) is another term at the core of semiotics that focuses on the semantic value or features of objects and probably requires the most attention to discuss its use and meaning. Although difficult to find a scholarly definition of *semé*, the term appears to originate from Eric Buyssens in his 1974 book *Semiologia & Comunicação Lingüística*. Rafael Venancio (2015) provides a brief English translation of the definition: “the word *semé* [designates] any conventional process whose concrete realization (called *semic act*) allows communication . . . the *semé* is only a functional part of the *semic act*, and noticeable action is only *semic act*, if it is the realization of a *semé*” (p. 10).

To put *semic act* into perspective, Thibault (1998) included the example of a comparison between man and woman as they relate to stallions and mares. In his example, Thibault portrays the *semic act* of each term as follows: man includes human, male, and adult; woman includes human, female, and

adult; stallion includes equine, male, and adult; and mare includes equine, female, and adult.

Each term has a unique semantic feature but also a collective one depending on the group to which it belongs. Species separates both sets of terms; but sex creates a new set of terms. For example, man and stallion are together just as woman and mare belong together. At the same time, all four terms relate to the adult category. Therefore, when grouping objects together on stage, *semé* provides us the ability to clarify meaning of the objects for audiences by associating them together in recognizable groups.

Regarding *semé*, various audience members may assign different semantic meaning to objects on stage if not grouped properly. As the horses and humans example demonstrates, multiple combination of meanings can be assigned to objects if the semantic meaning is not assigned properly by a scenic designer. For example, if a scenic designer attempted to portray an abstract design attempting to represent the Parthenon by placing pillars of different period styles (e.g. one Greek column, one Victorian column, one Mayan column, and one contemporary concrete column), then the attempt would most likely fail due to inconsistent objects. However, by using all ancient Greek columns, the abstract attempt at representing the Parthenon might be successful.

Understanding *semé* and how objects can portray various meaning, a scenic designer can design more concrete examples to communicate intentional messages. For example, if a scenic designer wants to communicate an

overarching message of masculinity in a performance, perhaps the masculine and feminine examples discussed earlier can help the designer achieve the intended message by associating objects in a similar manner.

Isotopy. Isotopy is a bit different from the term *semé* since it focuses on a single level of descriptor, but is similar in the sense that isotopy still has semantic value. As Bouissac (1998) explains, “Coined from the Greek *isos* (‘equal,’ ‘same’) and *topos* (‘space,’ ‘place’), *isotopy* can be translated literally as ‘single level’ or ‘same plane’” (p. 323).

Bouissac illustrates the definition of isotopy by discussing the difference between “two contrary terms, such as *boys* and *girls* or *boys* and *men*” (p. 323). In his example, Bouissac points out that the isotopy of the first set (boys and girls) is sex, whereas the isotopy of the second set (boys and men) is age. Going back to *semé*, the example discussing man, woman, stallion, and mare show three isotopies per object, whereas Bouissac’s gender and age example focus on contrasting sets of terms forming isotopies for each set on a singular level.

Like the example of scenic designers using an understanding of *semé* to relay messages, isotopies can help categorize objects on stage. Perhaps using an object’s isotopy may be better than grouping objects according to *semé* in certain situations and performances. For example, using singular objects to communicate liberty may justify the use of an iconic object (e.g., the Statue of Liberty).

Icon. Icons are probably one of the most commonly used objects in scenic design since icons are much more commonly understood than subtle

objects. The term icon is defined by Sonesson (1998) as “a technical term derived from ancient Greek *eikōn* (image, representation), in its most common religious sense, and in art history, *icon* refers to a pictorial representation of persons or events derived from the tradition of Christianity” (p. 293).

More importantly, “when used to stand for themselves, objects are clearly iconical: they are signs consisting of an expression that stands for a content because of properties that each of them possess intrinsically” (Sonesson, 1998, p. 294). For example, The Eiffel Tower placed in the background of a cityscape universally identifies Paris, or France at the very least. On the other hand, a high-rise building might indicate various cities.

Without an icon to identify the exact setting, an audience will have difficulty associating objects with their exact locations. Theatrically, when icons are used, regardless of their purpose (e.g., religious or locational), they should form a meaning and a clear purpose for their presence on stage.

Elam (1981) had one of the first discussions of visual rhetoric in theatre, wherein he specifically examines semiotics—the element of visual rhetoric focusing on the study of signs and symbols, such as meaningful interpretations of various layouts of visual imagery. In the visual communication sense of visual rhetoric for theatre, the term sign includes objects that have a different meaning than that which they physically represent.

Now that an understanding has been provided about the importance of visual rhetoric and semiotics to scenic design in theatre, this research moves forward to explore visual rhetoric and semiotic application in scenic design

education programs in the United States. Specifically, this research examines how much of the content appears in texts used in classes at universities across the country and an account for why the theoretical content discussed herein should be taught to bolster the visual communication capabilities of scenic designers.

Chapter 3 focuses on the method used to explore the thesis, which is content analysis. The content analysis will include analyzing the texts for the key elements of visual rhetoric and semiotics relevant to scenic design defined by the literature review. The key elements include the three areas of focus for visual rhetoric, the key elements of semiotics, and the elements commonly used by scenic designers. The three areas of focus for visual rhetoric are nature of the artifact, function of the artifact, and evaluation of the artifact. The key elements of semiotics are sign, semé, isotopy, and icon.

Chapter 3: Method

Preliminary research shows that neither visual rhetoric nor semiotic knowledge has been taught in most scenic design programs. Visual rhetoric and semiotics suggests value to the field of scenic design in theatre, thus I have conducted a content analysis of the top ten scenic design books listed on Amazon.com in search of elements of visual rhetoric and semiotics.

Searching for elements of visual rhetoric and semiotic elements in scenic design books will provide a baseline of knowledge that discloses the inclusion or exclusion of information, thus allowing a discussion of the findings to offer a better solution for educating scenic designers. For this thesis, I conducted a book search on Amazon.com for scenic design books by setting the search window to the Books category and searching for the term “Scenic Design” with “Relevance” selected in the “Sort By” drop-down menu. The search was conducted on March 15, 2017.

I chose the first ten books (ranked highest for sales by Amazon.com) that were relevant to designing for the stage and excluded drawing or rendering books since the focus of this research is to analyze communication content. The ten resulting books are listed in Appendix A.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was used because it reveals the amount of visual rhetoric and semiotic information in the books. Content analysis allows for qualitative or quantitative examination of data as it compares to an area of interest like this thesis investigates scenic design (Elo & Kyngäs, 2007).

Content analysis is also useful where qualitative results are sought, such as where topics and their discussion are analyzed for content, not just the appearance of terms. Since the exact terms visual rhetoric and semiotics most likely do not appear in scenic design books, a content analysis was used to find words, phrases, and topics which may discuss the elements of visual rhetoric and semiotics.

The content analysis includes analyzing the texts for the key elements of visual rhetoric and semiotics relevant to scenic design as defined by the literature review. The key search terms include the parent terms visual rhetoric and semiotics, the three areas of focus for visual rhetoric, and the key elements of semiotics. A coding sheet was developed to assist and standardize the content analysis process.

Coding Sheet. To standardize the content analysis, I implemented a coding sheet (See **Appendix B**) based on the literature review to analyze the scenic design books. I created three categories, seven subcategories, and various key elements of each category in conjunction with the definitions provided by the literature review. The major categories are rhetoric, visual rhetoric, and semiotics.

Rhetoric and visual rhetoric both include five key elements used to analyze the content for the relevant terms and topics: rhetoric, argument, persuasion, expression, and messages. Visual rhetoric included three subcategories: nature of the artifact, function of the artifact, and evaluation of the artifact. Nature of the artifact included two elements: substantive nature

and stylistic nature. Function of the artifact included five elements: communicated action, memorialization, creating feelings, atmosphere/ambience, and self-exploration/impact. Evaluation of the artifact included five elements: effectiveness, media, colors, forms, content.

The key elements of semiotics included sign, semé, isotopy, and icon. Sign had three elements: symbolism, representation, and perception. Semé had three elements: semantics, communicative, and action. Isotopy had two elements: single level and contrast. Icon had three elements: pictorial representation, expressive sign, and intrinsic possession.

Book Attainment. To standardize the process, I used the University of Tennessee's Interlibrary Loan system. I requested the book titles and ISBNs as they appeared on the Amazon.com search results. One of the books requested was unavailable to loan from anywhere and too costly to purchase. So, upon consent from my thesis advisor, I used a previous edition.

Analysis Process. I used the coding sheet to cross-reference each element by searching both the index and table of contents of each book for key terms and topics relevant to each of the categories, subcategories, and their respective elements of the coding sheet. If a book contained a term or topic suggesting the content contained any of the elements from the coding sheet, the text was analyzed to determine its relevance. Each book's bibliography was also reviewed for references to any books relevant to visual rhetoric and semiotics.

During the search of the indexes, tables of content, and bibliography, as objects of relevance to any of the elements on the coding sheet were identified, I looked up each entry, read each section, and cross-referenced each bibliography citation. I analyzed each item for qualitative value by reading the details of each entry in the text. Then, I made note of the findings on each book's coding sheet, which was transcribed onto a master sheet for the results and discussion sections, illustrated by *Table 4.1*.

All the books focused on discussing techniques and methods to design sets rather than communicating messages via design. However, one book was a collection of an artist's work; and another book was formatted unconventionally (i.e. vague table of content and nonexistent index) as it relates to typical texts found in university classes.

The two outlier books also did not contain indexes or detailed tables of contents. In both instances, the material was reviewed for relevant content just as the index and table of content entries from the other books were reviewed.

All relevant findings are collected, analyzed, and discussed in the next two chapters. Chapter 4 contains the results of the content analysis process; and Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the data and relevant research.

Chapter 4: Results

As discussed in the previous chapters, a content analysis was conducted in search of visual rhetoric and semiotic content among the top ten scenic design books found on Amazon.com. The discussion below encompasses the findings of the content analysis explained in the previous chapter.

Very few findings were relevant to visual rhetoric and semiotics. The purpose of the study was to find the amount of content each book contained that was relevant to educating scenic design students on visual rhetoric and semiotics. As noted in the Introduction, the premise was that the books would contain very little to no content on visual rhetoric and semiotics.

The following table shows the elements from the coding sheet that appeared and the number of books in which they appeared. *Table 4.1* reports the results of the content analysis of the scenic design books.

Analyzing the data, I found that the hypothesis to the study was true and that the content related to visual rhetoric and semiotics was discussed in very little to no detail. Chapter 5 provides a discussion on the findings and how they either relate or do not relate to visual rhetoric and semiotics.

Table 4.1: Book Findings

VISUAL RHETORIC AND SEMIOTICS CODING SHEET		
BOOK TITLE		
CATEGORIES/TERMS	RELATED ENTRIES IN THE BOOK	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
<u>Rhetoric</u>		
Rhetoric	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Argument	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Persuasion	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Expression	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Messages	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
<u>Visual Rhetoric</u>		
Rhetoric	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Argument	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Persuasion	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Expression	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Messages	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Nature of the Artifact		
Substantive Nature	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Stylistic Nature	3 relevant findings in 10 books.	Notes discussed in the next chapter.
Function of the Artifact		
Communicated Action	2 relevant findings in 10 books.	Notes discussed in the next chapter.
Memorialization	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Creating Feelings	1 relevant findings in 10 books.	Notes discussed in the next chapter.
Atmosphere/Ambience	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Self-exploration/Impact	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Evaluation of the Artifact		
Effectiveness	1 relevant findings in 10 books.	Notes discussed in the next chapter.
Media	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Colors	7 relevant findings in 10 books.	Notes discussed in the next chapter.
Forms	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Content	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	

Table 4.1. (Continued)

VISUAL RHETORIC AND SEMIOTICS CODING SHEET		
BOOK TITLE		
CATEGORIES/TERMS	RELATED ENTRIES IN THE BOOK	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
Semiotics		
Sign		
Symbolism	2 relevant findings in 10 books.	Notes discussed in the next chapter.
Representation	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Perception	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Semé		
Semantics	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Communicative	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Action	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Isotopy		
Single Level	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Contrast	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Icon		
Pictorial Representation	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Expressive Sign	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Intrinsic Possession	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	
Notes		
Bibliography	0 relevant findings in 10 books.	

Chapter 5: Discussion

As previously mentioned, few of the findings in the content analysis were related to educating designers in the art of better communication. When communication was mentioned in the scenic design books, the focus was on communicating with co-workers, production staff, and advertising designers' work on websites and in portfolios. The limited content considered relevant to audiences dealt with designing styles, such as time and place, era, locale, and architecture.

The following discussion elaborates on the relevant book findings, potential benefits of rhetoric, potential benefits of visual rhetoric and semiotics, and potential pedagogical solutions. The relevant book findings are discussed first to highlight the limited knowledge regarding visual rhetoric and semiotics taught to scenic designers.

Relevant Book Findings

As displayed on *Table 4.1*, seven elements from the coding sheet made appearances in the books; and three of the seven elements only appeared in one of the books. The relevant findings discussed in this chapter are the element of color, communicated action, stylistic nature, and symbolism.

The Element of Color. The content analysis revealed the most commonly appearing element to be color. Five of the most prominent appearances are discussed in this section to illustrate the focus each of the books places on the element of color.

In the first discussion, the term “colour” and its context appears on 14 pages of Thorne’s (1999) 208-page book. Thorne wrote a six-page chapter called “Using Colour” covering mechanical topics such as hue, intensity, tone, and the color wheel; but offered no information on how to use color to communicate with audiences, although Thorne mentioned, “Colour Theory needs to be learned to be understood” (p. 29). From experience, I know that typically, students are expected to learn about color theory and other design concepts from courses in art departments.

These findings indicate that color is discussed as an artistic element, but not one of a communication element to help scenic designers establish effective messages. As a communication tool, expanding knowledge on color theory and its psychological effects might prove very useful to designers in establishing effective messages.

A second discussion of note comes from Brewster and Shafer (2011), wherein they wrote three pages discussing color and its basic knowledge (primary, secondary, and complementary colors, cool and warm colors, etc.) and only one paragraph on the psychology of color in their 284-page book, which points the reader to an appendix on color theory terms and informs the reader to research the psychology of color independently.

Instead of including vital and relative information on color theory and its related psychological factors, Brewster and Shafer direct students elsewhere. Including these lessons in a scenic design program might prove useful for ensuring an all-encompassing lesson and program plan for scenic designers.

Collaboration with a psychology department might also prove a viable solution here, too.

In a third discussion, Rowe (2007) wrote about color relationships in her book outlining how hue, intensity, and complementary colors can help to attract and deflect a viewer's eyes. The information about drawing eyes from one element and receding them from another can help scenic designers create visual focus in their designs. However, the six paragraphs of text about color relationships provide only a basic understanding of technical elements of color theory, for which designers need to look elsewhere to learn about theory.

Although Rowe (2007) did not completely ignore the psychological elements of color, the limited content still forces students to research the information elsewhere or attend classes in another college or different university to attain the relevant information. The question of how students are to know relevant information if they are not taught the material through their program is asked, especially in graduate programs, where students specialize in various topics.

Crabtree and Beudert (1998) provided a fourth discussion of color in a chapter titled "Color and Paint." Crabtree and Beudert also discuss color theory in a brief, somewhat detailed, context regarding the physics involved with color as it relates to average human eyesight. As the chapter's title suggests, the focus of the discussion around color is based on how to use and mix color with paint; thus, the chapter fails to mention how to use color to visually communicate with audiences.

Finally, a fifth discussion of color comes from Halsey's (2010) four pages on color, wherein Halsey briefly informs readers about aspects of color, such as hue, brightness, purity, and color mixing. In his concluding paragraph, Halsey (2010) used the term rhetoric, noting, "Aside from simply understanding the basics of color, there are two practical reasons a designer needs to understand this rhetoric" (p. 90).

Obviously, the term rhetoric is not used in any theoretical sense to describe the concept or its function. Instead, the term is used to capture the previous discussion about the aspects of color. The results of these findings show that audience communication is not considered when creating lessons on color for scenic designers.

Perhaps, if audience communication was considered in lesson plans and relative book discussions regarding color and its psychological effects, scenic designers might gain the knowledge to effectively persuade audiences. My own undergraduate theatre program did not require any classes on color, composition, or any other art class.

However, when later applying to more than ten universities for MFAs in Scenic Design, I learned that each university expected applicants to have previously had art classes to be admitted into their program. Learning about color, composition, and other art-based topics as communication tools should be required as part of all theatre education programs.

Communicated Action. The second most common element appearing in the books was communicated action. Brewster and Shafer (2011) wrote nine

pages covering communicating design ideas; however, the information only discussed how to communicate design ideas to technical staff working on the play, not communicating to audiences.

Similarly, Winslow (2006) mentioned the action of scenic elements as they relate to their function, but not in the sense of visual rhetoric. For example, Winslow (2006) mentions how objects can appear as realistic elements, such as “distant mountains, trees or houses,” not how to communicate action to an audience (p. 108). While Winslow’s examples might help a designer to communicate the existence of artifacts to an audience, his examples do little to teach readers about rhetorical principles.

As with color, educating scenic designers on the communicated action of artifacts, as they relate to visual rhetoric and semiotics, may help designers communicate to audiences more effectively. As communicated action deals with the action of an artifact on stage, each artifact’s style matters just as much to audience communication. The next section discusses the appearances of stylistic nature in the books.

Stylistic Nature. Stylistic nature is the third most common element, also appearing in three books. Each of the three books discuss style differently, but with the same focus on objects, thus each book is discussed in this section.

The first discussion of style considers Brewster and Shafer’s (2011) 16-page chapter on researching designs, in which they cover thematic elements (such as time, period, mood, and style), giving general examples and indicating

the importance of the research. The book serves as a baseline to understand the fundamentals of design, not focusing on communicating with audiences. Scenic designers' abilities to communicate effectively may benefit by the books including the results of how style affects culture, or how style is indicative of various attributes.

On a second note, Klingelhoef (2017) discussed various stylistic choices for designers to consider when designing sets in his chapter titled "Design and Redesign," including the typical areas of interest for designers: realism, minimalism, and abstraction (pp. 141–162). Klingelhoef's discussion of styles can help designers communicate setting, location, and locale to audiences. The ability to effectively communicate locational elements is a stepping stone towards visual rhetoric and semiotics, thus these elements are important to learn how to effectively communicate to audiences.

For the third discussion, Winslow (2006) wrote a chapter named "Style and Creativity," which covers 12% of the book's content of 192 pages. In the chapter, Winslow discussed various design styles (realism and naturalism), methods (colour, texture, and form), and practical applications of design (imagination, furniture, and projections) to achieve a style.

In a sense, Winslow fulfills the objective of visual rhetoric by attempting to persuade an audience to believe the play is set in a period and style. However, the chapter is still lacking in visual rhetoric and semiotic elements as outlined in *Table 4.1*.

Symbolism. As important as symbolism is to semiotics, symbolism only appeared in two books. Winslow discussed symbolism as a design style, wherein he stated the style “holds traps for the set designer: a concept that may intellectually appear to be ideally appropriate to a production can easily prove inadequate or even completely ridiculous when brought to a logical conclusion on stage” (p. 98). While Brewster and Shafer (2011) wrote one paragraph with an accompanying image discussing visual metaphors, and informing readers that metaphors are used in productions. Neither discussion provides details regarding how to apply visual metaphors nor where to learn more about the visual metaphor concept.

Symbolism is a prominent factor of semiotics; thus, symbolism should be mentioned far more often than it has been mentioned in these books. Like the neglect symbolism received, effectiveness is another important element lacking in attention.

Effectiveness. Effectiveness only received one mention in all the ten books. Klingelhoef (2017) defined successful designs with three elements:

The scenic design supports and extends ideas in the play. The scenic design *effectively* and creatively solves problems of presenting the play in the given space and production circumstances. The scenic design seems of the present, a contemporary view of the play, valid and interesting for a contemporary audience. (p. 4, emphasis added)

Aside from the first point implying a potential communication factor, communicating effective ideas and the elements of Foss's (2007) function of an artifact regarding visual rhetoric are absent.

Creating Feelings. Creating feelings was also only mentioned in one book. Brewster and Shafer (2011) wrote two paragraphs on "Theme and Mood," wherein they encourage designers to research visual imagery to "find works that are evocative of the thoughts (theme) and emotions (mood) of the play in question" (p. 59). Therefore, this element of Foss's (2007) evaluation of the artifact concept is encouraged, but is missing as well.

Potential Benefits of Rhetoric

Rhetoric has implicit benefits to communication in general. Perhaps the time is right to extend rhetorical value to fields in which have not received the attention it deserves. This section discusses some of the viable benefits rhetoric offers theatre, specifically scenic design.

One of the potential benefits rhetoric offers theatre is an activist ability to inform or persuade audiences, change their lifestyles, and become returning patrons of the theatre. Some studies of theatre include researching pleasurable and meaningful entertainment, which show some promise to benefit theatre (e.g., Oliver & Raney, 2011). For example, Oliver and Raney "conceptualized and developed measures to illustrate that entertainment can be used as a means of experiencing not only enjoyment, but also as a means of grappling with questions such as life's purpose and human meaningfulness" (p. 1).

Since, as uses and gratifications literature suggests, people tend to find reason and meaning in their entertainment choices, theatre professionals attempt to develop a season of shows to create and support messages to influence certain social and political views (Rubin, 2009). Perhaps with more focus on conveying messages efficiently through good design, theatre may grow in popularity.

Since theatre is a storytelling field in which people produce each show through a lot of time and effort, one might wonder how often theatregoers assess a performance's message(s). If rhetoric could be integrated into the curriculum in a way that allowed students in theatre to learn how to effectively or persuasively communicate in a theatre setting, perhaps more theatregoers would respond and react to the message(s) of each performance.

Rhetoric can benefit theatre by assisting in effectively communicating messages. The rhetorical elements of persuasion can also help to create more eloquent play scripts, set designs, and overall layout of a theatre. Visual rhetoric and semiotics also holds value for use in scenic design, and theatre in general.

Potential Benefits of Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics

As shown by the research and analysis provided in this document, visual rhetoric and semiotics show promise to the field of scenic design in theatre. This section discusses the potential benefits of both visual rhetoric and semiotics as they relate to scenic design, and theatre altogether.

Foss (2005) wrote, “Human experiences that are spatially oriented, nonlinear, multidimensional, and dynamic often can be communicated only through visual imagery or other nondiscursive symbols” (p. 143). Thus, visual rhetoric should serve as the major method of communication for scenic design in theatre. Since this thesis focuses on the perspective that scenery is designed with semiotic value to communicate messages to audiences—both overtly and subtly—a need exists to understand visual rhetoric and semiotics as well as how both concepts inform scenic design programs and courses. Education on semiotics should increase scenic design students’ abilities to portray messages more clearly to audiences, achieving their desired results.

Learning to communicate visually will help to reduce the concern many designers have about audiences potentially not receiving their intended message(s). Designers can use various techniques to assist in communicating their intended messages to audiences, such as conscious choices in color, organized object placement, and audience relevance.

Pedagogical Solutions

Various solutions can be constructed and orchestrated for the problems highlighted by the research conducted in this thesis. This section discusses four potential pedagogical solutions. The options include: overhauling existing books, creating new books, restructuring program requirements, and interdepartmental collaboration. The first solution to discuss is overhauling existing books.

Overhauling Existing Books. One of the potential solutions includes overhauling the existing books used in the scenic design education programs, including some of the books included in Appendix A. This solution includes adding relevant visual rhetoric and semiotic content, as outlined in this thesis. The value of adding visual rhetoric and semiotic content to scenic design books is evident by this research.

In this sense, the natural value of visual rhetoric and semiotic information is indicative of successful designs, especially when audience communication is the focus of designs for theatre. After all, if messages are not received by their intended recipients, the work put into each design was for naught.

This solution might not be the best solution since it would require the current authors and professors to take an unknown amount of time to learn all the relevant information, which may take years to master; and the authors cannot be compelled to do it. Another option is creating new books.

Creating New Books. As with overhauling the existing books, creating new books might prove a viable solution as well; however, getting new books into a saturated book market is difficult. Perhaps new books created for scenic design programs can include visual rhetoric and semiotics to encompass all facets of effectively communicating through scenic design.

While this solution would allow new and current students to gain new and improved knowledge to help them improve their design skills, the solution would leave the authors of the current books with books that are only

somewhat relevant to a developing field of study. However, with this solution, new books be used to educate a new series of scenic designers with additional material to help them effectively communicate to audiences.

At the same time, new books might not be the best solution since, at this stage of the developing research, value in writing and publishing new books most likely will not be acknowledged by enough people to support the idea. A third solution might include restructuring current program requirements.

Restructuring Program Requirements. Program requirements could be restructured to accommodate visual rhetoric and semiotics classes for students in scenic design. This solution provides an opportunity for students to enroll in electives covering visual rhetoric and semiotics.

A problem might occur with this solution if a university offering a degree in scenic design does not have classes already in place or professors who do not know visual rhetoric or semiotics. However, upon getting hired to teach at a university, I could create a curriculum designed to implement and test the addition of visual rhetoric and semiotics classes.

Comparing communication efficacy of students who take visual rhetoric and semiotics classes against those who do not take the classes could prove valuable to the data collection process. Once tested, assumptions can be made towards future research in this area. In addition to restructuring program requirements, perhaps another viable solution would be interdepartmental collaboration.

Interdepartmental Collaboration. Another solution might entail collaborating with professors in other departments, such as communication, art, and psychology. Collaboration would also allow students to learn from additional outlets, gaining various points of view, learning multiple approaches to design and visual communication. Collaboration will also strengthen a student's knowledge base to not only effectively communicate with audiences, but also with their colleagues and production teams.

The ideal situation includes a professor in a scenic design program understanding the application of visual rhetoric and semiotics. However, the collaboration solution provides opportunities for faculty, staff, and students to network with one another. Collaborating and networking might provide opportunities not only for students to learn and grow professionally, but also for faculty and staff to learn and grow alike.

In weighing out the solutions discussed above, it appears that interdepartmental collaboration seems to be the most attractive solution. As a long-standing teacher and aspiring professor, I would love to be part of the process in educating students to communicate more effectively.

Conclusion

Over the past decade, working in theatre and observing the work of fellow scenic designers, I observed how scenic designers create their set designs through past experiences, methods learned in school, and by borrowing ideas from other designers. However, I never witnessed fellow designers develop their

designs through methods tested by theories and application such as visual rhetoric and semiotics.

Therefore, I feel that scenic designers will be more successful in communicating to audiences by using visual rhetoric and semiotics to develop their designs. Thus, a need exists for both visual rhetoric and semiotics to appear in scenic design books. I hope this research allows for more compelling messages to be crafted by visual design as well as bringing value and potential to scenic designers around the world while expanding the literature on visual rhetoric and semiotics from a pedagogical viewpoint.

Per my own personal experience throughout more than a decade in theatre, I have observed scenic designers creating their own images through various forms of media, including painting on canvas or another surface used on stage (such as wood, plastic, or fabric), digitally painting in computer programs such as Adobe Photoshop and Microsoft Paint, and building sets like sculptors fabricating art with canvas and papier-maché among other materials.

This study has shown that visual communication theory important to effectively communicate is nonexistent in current scenic design books, which are intended for a visual communication-based profession and field of study. Visual rhetoric and semiotics are important to scenic design just as the current knowledge belongs in the profession and education programs.

Bolstering scenic design education programs with visual rhetoric and semiotics content could dramatically increase the communication efficacy of

scenic designers. Scenic designers need to know and understand visual rhetoric and semiotics to effectively communicate to audiences if they wish to successfully communicate their ideas through visual design.

In the words of Hans Dieter Schaal (2016), a prominent German scenic artist, “Unfortunately, the results [of designs] usually look like inevitably abstract patches. Nothing fits together, no story is told” (p. 132). The major problem is the fact that visual rhetoric and semiotics are not currently taught to scenic design students and professionals.

The solutions provided herein offer a chance to increase effective audience communication of scenic designers. As an exit remark, and hopefully one that will maintain momentum, visual rhetoric and semiotics via interdepartmental collaboration can potentially ensure that students learn as much as they can to become highly successful visual communicators.

Study Limitations

This study was completed under time constraints of one graduate semester. The university had deadlines that needed to be met to graduate in time. I had to file an extension for a later graduation date due to the time constraints and could not afford to stay any longer than the new deadline. Therefore, the extent to which I could study the topic was limited, especially since I used the interlibrary loan (ILL) service.

The ILL service not only took a couple weeks to obtain the reviewed books after gaining approval for the proposed research, but the service also had a short loan length, requiring the books to be returned in two weeks from

delivery. One major reason for using the ILL service is due to financial constraint to purchase or rent the books required to analyze the content. Therefore, funding is required to better explore the research, too.

Future Research

One option for researching visual rhetoric and semiotics in scenic design includes the same content analysis, but focused on books used in scenic design programs at various universities providing degrees in scenic design. Analyzing these books would provide a focus on the specific books used in the scenic design programs instead of books with scenic design content sold worldwide.

Another research option includes testing the results of groups of students who receive visual rhetoric and semiotics education as part of the scenic design program against students who do not receive visual rhetoric and semiotics education. Testing these groups of students may prove useful to finding a differing level of communication efficiency of the two groups.

A third research option includes interviewing successful scenic designers in the field to learn how they feel about visual rhetoric and semiotics as part of scenic design. In addition, interviewing successful scenic designers may also provide value to justifying whether or not visual rhetoric and semiotics can help to improve designers' communication efficiency.

References

- Aristotle. (2006). *Rhetoric. On rhetoric: A theory of civil discourse (2nd ed.)*. (W. R. Roberts, Trans.) New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Bouissac, P. (1998). Isotopy. In P. Bouissac (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Semiotics*, (323–325). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Brewster, K. & Shafer, M. (2011). *Fundamentals of theatrical design*. New York: Allworth Press.
- Chandler, D. (2007). *Semiotics: The basics (2nd ed.)*. New York: Routledge.
- Crabtree, S. & Beudert, P. (1998). *Scenic art for the theatre*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Eco, U. (1976). *A theory of semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elam, K. (1981). The semiotics of theatre and drama. *Critical Arts*, 2, 66–78.
- Elo, S. & Kyngäs, H. (2007). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115.
- Foss, S. K. (2004). Framing the study of visual rhetoric: Toward a transformation of rhetorical theory. In C. A. Hill & M. Helmers (Eds.), *Defining visual rhetorics* (303–313). Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Foss, S.K. (2005). Theory of visual rhetoric. In K. L. Smith, S. Moriarty, K. Kenney, & G. Barbatsis (Eds.), *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods, and media* (141–152). Mahwah, New Jersey: Routledge.
- Foss, S. K. & Kanengieter, M. R. (1992). Visual communication in the basic course. *Communication Education*, 41(3), 312–323.

- Halsey, T. (2010). *Freelancer's guide to corporate event design: From technology fundamentals to scenic and environmental design*. New York & London: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Hébert, L. (n.d.) Elements of semiotics. Retrieved from www.signosemio.com/elements-of-semiotics.asp
- Hocks, M. E. (2003). Understanding visual rhetoric in digital writing environments. *College composition and communication*, 54(4), 629–656.
- Kennedy, G. A. (1994). *A new history of classical rhetoric*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Klingelhoef, R. (2017). *The craft and art of scenic design: Strategies, concepts, and resources*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- McQuarrie, E. F., & Mick, D. G. (1999). Visual rhetoric in advertising: Text-interpretive, experimental, and reader-response analyses. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 26, 37–54.
- Oliver, M. B., & Raney, A. A. (2011). Entertainment as pleasurable and meaningful: Identifying hedonic and eudaimonic motivations for entertainment consumption. *Journal of Communication*, 61(5), 984–1004.
- Piamonte, D. P. T., Abeysekera, J. D. A., & Ohlsson, K. (2001). Understanding small graphical symbols: A cross-cultural study. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, 27(6), 399–404.
- Peirce, C. S. (1985). Logic as semiotic: The theory of signs. In R. E. Innis (Ed.), *Semiotics: An introductory anthology* (4–23). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

- Poulakos, J. (1983). Toward a sophistic definition of rhetoric. *Philosophy & Rhetoric*, 16(1), 35–48.
- Rowe, C. P. (2007). *Drawing and rendering for theatre: A practical course for scenic, costume, and lighting designers*. New York: Taylor & Francis Group.
- Rubin, A. M. (2009). Uses and gratifications: An evolving perspective of media effects. In R. L. Nabi & M. B. Oliver (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of media processes and effects* (147–159). Los Angeles, CA: SAGE.
- Schaal, H. D. (2016). *Scenic architecture*. Stuttgart, Germany: Edition Axel Menges.
- Scott, L. M. (1994). Images in advertising: The need for a theory of visual rhetoric. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 21(2), 252–273.
- Smith, K., Moriarty, S., Barbatsis, G., & Kenney, K. (2005). *Handbook of visual communication: Theory, methods, and media*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Sonesson, G. (1998). Icon. In P. Bouissac (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Semiotics*. (pp. 293–294). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Thibault, P. J. (1998). Binarism. In P. Bouissac (Ed.) *Encyclopedia of Semiotics*. (pp. 76–82). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Thorne, G. & Moiseiwitsch, T. (1999). *Stage design: A practical guide*. Ramsbury, England: The Crowood Press.

- Venancio, R. D. O. (2015). *Man ray and photography as a poetic communication technology*. Retrieved from www.researchgate.net/publication/286368596_Man_Ray_and_Photoigraphy_as_a_Poetic_Communication_Technology
- Winslow, C. (2006). *The handbook of set design*. Ramsbury, England: The Crowood Press.

Appendices

Appendix A

Amazon.com Top Ten Scenic Design Books

1. Klingelhoef, R. (2017). *The craft and art of scenic design: Strategies, concepts, and resources*. New York, NY: Routledge. (ISBN: 9781138937642)
2. Brewster, K. & Shafer, M. (2011). *Fundamentals of theatrical design*. New York: Allworth Press. (ISBN: 9781581158496)
3. Winslow, C. (2006). *The handbook of set design*. Ramsbury, Marlborough: The Crowood Press. (ISBN: 9781861268136)
4. Rowe, C. P. (2007). *Drawing and rendering for theatre: A practical course for scenic, costume, and lighting designers*. New York & London: Taylor & Francis Group. (ISBN: 9780240805542)
5. Crabtree, S. & Beudert, P. (1998). *Scenic art for the theatre*. New York & London: Taylor & Francis Group. (ISBN: 9780240812908)
6. DeVries, C. F. (2011). *Alice through the proscenium: More scenic set design*. Lexington, KY: Wing'd Tower Press. (ISBN: 9781458381149)
7. Halsey, T. (2010). *Freelancer's guide to corporate event design: From technology fundamentals to scenic and environmental design*. New York & London: Taylor & Francis Group. (ISBN: 9780240812243)
8. Napoli, R. & Gloman, C. (2006). *Scenic design and lighting techniques: A basic guide for theatre*. Waltham, MA: Focal Press. (ISBN: 9780240808062)

9. Thorne, G. & Moiseiwitsch, T. (1999). *Stage design: A practical guide*.
Ramsbury, Marlborough: The Crowood Press. (ISBN: 1861262574)
10. Schaal, H. D. (2016). *Scenic architecture*. Germany: Edition Axel Menges.
(ISBN: 9783936681970)

Appendix B

Visual Rhetoric and Semiotics Coding Sheet

VISUAL RHETORIC AND SEMIOTICS CODING SHEET		
BOOK TITLE		
<u>Rhetoric</u>		
Rhetoric		
Argument		
Persuasion		
Expression		
Messages		
<u>Visual Rhetoric</u>		
Rhetoric		
Argument		
Persuasion		
Expression		
Messages		
Nature of the Artifact		
Substantive Nature		
Stylistic Nature		

VISUAL RHETORIC AND SEMIOTICS CODING SHEET		
BOOK TITLE		
Function of the Artifact		
Communicated Action		
Memorialization		
Creating Feelings		
Atmosphere/Ambience		
Self-exploration/Impact		
Evaluation of the Artifact		
Effectiveness		
Media		
Colors		
Forms		
Content		
Semiotics		
Sign		
Symbolism		
Representation		
Perception		

VISUAL RHETORIC AND SEMIOTICS CODING SHEET		
BOOK TITLE		
Semé		
Semantics		
Communicative		
Action		
Isotopy		
Single Level		
Contrast		
Icon		
Pictorial Representation		
Expressive Sign		
Intrinsic Possession		
Notes		
Bibliography		

Vita

Chris Guzzardo was born in Queens, NY. He graduated from Nova High School, in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. After graduation, he joined the Marine Corps, wherein he served for eleven years. After serving his country, Chris completed his Associate of Arts degree in Mass Communication from Broward Community College. He obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree from Nova Southeastern University in Theatre. Chris is graduating with a Master of Science degree in Communication Studies from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.