Looking Into Aristotle’s Eyes: Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Vision

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This article culls a theory of rhetorical vision from Aristotle’s Rhetoric by examining the cluster of terms that bears on his theory of visual style. Rhetorical vision stands apart from but complements visual rhetoric in that it attends to the rhetorical and linguistic conjuring of visual images—what contemporary neuroscientists call visual imagery—and can even affect direct perception. The article concludes by examining rhetorical vision in Demosthenes’ Epitaphios. At stake in this investigation is the visible and visual liveliness of rhetoric and its ability to alter sense perception.

“In everything I say there will be vision.”—Oedipus to the Stranger, Oedipus at Kolonos 1.74

“And, as we were saying before, visions appear to us even when our eyes are shut.”—Aristotle, De Anima 428a.15–16

When Sophocles’ Oedipus assures the Stranger at Kolonos that as a blind man he (Oedipus) can still be useful; he does so by pointing out that there is vision in all that he says. It is tempting to read this line as yet more evidence of a Sophoclean—even a uniquely Greek—fascination with the visual. And while that is probably an accurate reading, to stop there would be to miss the theoretical implications of Oedipus’ observation: words—in this case, Oedipus’ words—can stand in for or facilitate vision; they can help others see, horonta.

Writing in the century after Sophocles, Aristotle had much to say about the unique and multidirectional relationships among vision, the

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eyes, and words. In the Poetics, for example, Aristotle invokes Sophocles when he instructs dramatists to “elaborate the plot by language (καὶ τῇ λέξῃ συναπεργαζεσθαι) and by keeping the material before the eyes (πρὸ ὀμματῶν τιθημένον) as much as possible” (1987, 17.1.1.1455a). Yet the idea of words as visual apparatus is by no means limited to the ancient stage. Indeed, this communicative synesthesia marks one of several crucial places where Aristotle’s Poetics overlaps with his Rhetoric, producing both arts as wordy arts that tap into bodily and visual faculties. A few historians of rhetoric, including Aristotle’s main rhetorical translator, George Kennedy, have begun to notice in the Rhetoric such visual-rhetorical concepts as phantasia, bringing-before-the-eyes, and energeia or activity. It is my aim to augment their efforts by drawing together these and other concepts in order to form a dynamic theory of what might be called rhetorical vision. Rhetorical vision, I contend, is not merely a passing notion in Aristotle’s Rhetoric, one that ties the Rhetoric to the more animistic and sense-related treatises in the Aristotelian corpus—in other words, De Anima and the Parva Naturalia. As a theory that appears in all three books of the Rhetoric—beginning with a discussion of pleasure in book I, tying vision to the pathē in book II, and culminating in a robust discussion of visual style in book III—rhetorical vision lends unity to the treatise’s famously various parts. More broadly, though, rhetorical vision—and rhetors’ ability to summon that vision—inivgorates the art of rhetoric in ways that scholars have yet to recognize.

By offering the idea of rhetorical vision, I mean to notice the ways that language interacts with vision directly. At stake in such a consideration is rhetoric’s role in sense perception and the importance of developing a rhetorical style that infuses words with perceivable movement and life, with visualizable action. Rhetorical vision stands apart from, but is complementary to, the perhaps more familiar term visual rhetoric. While visual rhetoric focuses on the rhetorical force of plastic, photographic, televisual, and other visual arts and media to consider the rhetorical work of the visual, rhetorical vision considers the visual work of rhetoric and language, the complex ways that words—oral or written—form perception. Put most simply, through rhetorical vision, words come to life.

Analyses in visual rhetoric tend to focus on material objects such as paintings, film, photographs, and posters, thereby limiting the visual to an encounter with pictorial objects. Such a restrictive definition of the visual tends to omit considerations of visual capacity itself. A recent essay by visual rhetoric scholar Cara Finnegan, however, stands as an important exception with its twofold definition of “image” as “both pictorial representation (i.e., a concrete image such as a photograph) as well as the broader understanding of image as mental picture, appearance, or product of the imagination” (2008, 14). Both parts of Finnegan’s definition are necessary; otherwise, theorists are left with an object-centered notion of vision that holds little regard for the physical and rhetorical processes that occur on the part
of viewers. This article therefore explores the importance of visual capacity, that which aligns with what contemporary neuroscientists call *mental imagery*, and what Aristotle called *phantasia*. A robust theory of rhetorical vision, I contend, will show how existing theories—of visual rhetoric and even of rhetoric more generally—will remain impoverished until they begin to attend more explicitly to the way words and the physical senses interact.

It is important to say at the outset that rhetorical vision does not strictly operate on the level of metaphor, with “seeing” serving as a metaphorical placeholder for semantic understanding, as in, “Ah, now I see what you mean.” For Aristotle, while knowing and seeing are intimately bound, rhetorical vision nevertheless occurs very near and sometimes at the level of direct sensory perception, and I will attempt, first, to show how this is so and, second, to explain why a nonmetaphorical notion of rhetorical vision might help enliven rhetorical theory and criticism. All of this can be achieved—preliminarily, at least—by looking into the eyes of Aristotle.

Most of this article, then, is devoted to elucidating the faculty of *phantasia*, which I argue is the central faculty for rhetorical vision, a crucial yet under-considered component of Aristotle’s theory of rhetoric. *Phantasia* is a complex sort of visuality that shifts throughout the *Rhetoric*, at times operating on a strictly social level and at other times feeding directly into a theory of rhetorical style. A full understanding of the rhetorical features of *phantasia* is not possible without attention to the visual concepts and associated faculties that feed, tap into, or otherwise entwine with *phantasia*, such as pleasure, density, the *pathē*, bringing-before-the-eyes, and *energeia*, and so these notions figure prominently in the following analysis as well.

After a connective discussion of these concepts, I conclude by briefly examining a speech that elucidates Aristotle’s principles through its performance: Demosthenes’ *Epitaphios*, or Funeral Oration. To consider the material and political contours of Demosthenes’ rhetorical situation is to better understand the pressing need for an art and theory of rhetorical vision.

**PHANTASIA AND RHETORIC**

The scholarship on *phantasia* is extensive, and an exhaustive treatment of it is beyond the scope of this article. Even so, it is necessary to offer an overview of this visual faculty, its definitions and contexts, with an eye to the qualities and impulses *phantasia* shares with rhetoric. As several scholars have noted, *phantasia* is rather difficult to translate into English. The most common translation—*imagination*—has been called into question; classical scholars such as Malcolm Schofield (1992, 251), Gerard Watson (1982, 100), and philosophers Victor Caston (1996, 20–21) and Deborah Modrak (1986, 47n1) discuss the ill fit of the term *imagination* and opt, as I will, to leave the word untranslated after discussing its component meanings. As a translation of *phantasia*, imagination would be sufficient if it were possible
to disarticulate the word from its romantic (interior, private) associations, to stress instead the “image” part of imagination. Modrak and Martha Nussbaum (1985) both put forward competing but equally compelling readings of Aristotelian phantasia as a crucial part of the meaning-making process. Modrak defines Aristotelian phantasia as the “faculty through which images are presented, stored, and recalled” (2001, 227). Phantasia, that is, includes but goes beyond sense perception (Everson 1997, 166); it involves movement, merges with desire, and strains toward action and judgment. In De Anima’s canonical account of phantasia, Aristotle observes:

If phantasia is (apart from any metaphorical sense of the word) the process by which we say that an image (phantasma) is presented (gignesthai) to us, it is one of those faculties or states of mind by which we judge and are either right or wrong. Such are sensation, opinion, knowledge, and intelligence. It is clear from the following considerations that phantasia is not sensation (aisthēsis). Sensation is either potential or actual, e.g., either sight or seeing, but phantasia occurs when neither of these is present, as when objects are seen in dreams. (3.3.428a.1–8)

Noteworthy in this passage is Aristotle’s categorization of phantasia as a faculty (dunamis) on the order of sensation, opinion, and so on, but as distinct from each of these. What gets less attention in this passage, however, is the particular way that phantasia hovers around the categories of sensation, opinion, knowledge, and intelligence: these are interconnected means by which judgments get made. A few lines later, Aristotle notes that “phantasia is different from either perceiving or thinking, though it is not found without perception, nor judgment without it” (trans. Everson 1997, 166, 3.3.427b.14–16). Phantasia is not the same thing as judgment; but it nevertheless functions as judgment’s “intermediary” (Everson, 1997, 166), providing the materials on which judgments are built (Watson 1982, 108), and forming “a link between perception and thought” (Modrak 2001, 230). In Nussbaum’s words, “Phantasia ties abstract thought to concrete perceptible objects or situations” (1985, 265): it traffics between the immaterial and the material. Through phantasia, the less-than-visible becomes visible, as Aristotle’s (somewhat dubious) etymology suggests, “Phantasia is derived from phaos (light),” because, he observes, “without light it is impossible to see” (De Anima, 3.3.429a.4–5).

The previous long passage from De Anima also mentions the main distinction between phantasia and aisthēsis, or direct perception. Put most simply, the faculty of phantasia is activated when viewable matter is not immediately at hand and must be otherwise conjured, as with dreams, delusions, and memories. Aristotle believes that other visual phenomena requiring one to exercise one’s phantasia—to phantasize—include a reflection in water or in a mirror; the bright trace that remains after staring at the
sun and then closing the eyes; a hazy figure in the distance that may or may not be a man.

What these instances of phantasia have in common is a kind of fuzziness—ancient mirrors, we must remember, were roundish disks made of burnished metal (usually bronze) that were usually convex or concave, and so they were not as sharply reflective as the glass mirrors used subsequently (Richter 1915, 251). The example of a man in the distance is interesting because it involves what would otherwise be considered direct perception; only the distance and the limits of direct vision draw on phantasia’s capacity to conjure as an aid in recognition. Phantasia therefore enters the picture when vision happens at some remove or is otherwise limited (as with a bronze mirror). Everson refers to phantasia as “perceptual thought” (1997, 210), and Modrak notes that phantasia encompasses a range of cognitive activity “from sensory illusions to practical decision-making” (1987, 99). The vision of phantasia, by definition, is fuzzy and uncertain, and so it is no surprise that it appears with some frequency in Aristotle’s Rhetoric, where actions and events described by rhetors tend to be blurry and (at least temporally) distant. The upshot of this component definition, and the prominence of phantasia and other related words derived from phainein in the Rhetoric, is this: words themselves, not unlike faces reflected in burnished bronze or a distant moving torch, can activate the faculty of phantasia.

Aristotle hints at a connection between phantasia and speech in De Anima when he observes that “not every sound made by a living creature is a voice (for one can make a sound even with the tongue, or as in coughing), but that which even causes the impact, must have a soul, and use some phantasias; for the voice is a sound which means something” (2.8.420b.29–33). This passage explicitly links phantasia to voice as opposed to sound or noise (psophos), and thereby to the faculty of meaning-making, sémantikos.13 The role of phantasia in the context of voice, language, and rhetoric is significantly expanded in the Rhetoric, as the next section demonstrates.

The fit between phantasia and rhetoric has not been taken up in classical scholarship, where the Rhetoric is only lightly consulted in favor of Aristotle’s animistic texts (De Anima and the treatises on senses, dreaming, and memory contained in Parva Naturalia and De Motu Animalium). Apart from Modrak’s fascinating discussion of phantasia and language, suggestions of the connection between phantasia and rhetoric only flicker in the margins of scholarship in classics and philosophy.14 Even so, perception, interpretation, desire, action, and judgment all cluster around the faculty of phantasia, thereby positioning phantasia as potentially one of the most important critical faculties for the art of rhetoric. If rhetorical scholarship is bracketed, rhetoric has been by and large omitted from the scholarly catalogues of phantasia’s contexts, which are often limited
to dreams, delusions, and memories. Gerard Watson (1982) comes tantalizingly close to acknowledging rhetoric as an important context for *phantasia* when he concludes a discussion of *phantasia*’s central role in an animal’s memory system, “by adding, even though Aristotle does not do so here, that the most convenient way of sharing such a system between human beings would be language” (111). Aristotle’s discussions of *phantasia* in *De Memoria*, *De Anima*, and *De Motu Animalium* combine with his discussion of *phantasia* in the *Rhetoric* to prove Watson right: if *phantasia* is the faculty by which images can be both conjured and communicated, and if it figures prominently in desire formation, the moving of affections, and judgment itself, then rhetoric stands as a major context for the exercise of *phantasia*, for the transmission of *phantasmata*, images.

Despite this tantalizing linkage between *phantasia* and rhetoric, discussions of *phantasia* in the context of rhetorical studies are also surprisingly rare. Ned O’Gorman (2005) offers the most thorough and head-on examination of *phantasia* in the context of epideictic discourse and, following Frede (1992), uses the phrase “after-image” to discuss *phantasia*, which is particularly apt in the instance of memory. Quintilian, in his *Institutes of Oratory*, reads the plural (*phantasiai*) as *visiones*, or “visions,” a translation that captures *phantasia*’s rather haunting, fleeting nature. More recently, Michele Kennerly (2010) culls from Aristotle a civic of *phantasia* framed by a lively theory of rhetorical transport and kinesis.

As O’Gorman’s and Kennerly’s studies indicate, *phantasia*, the fuzzy, distant, or indirect visual faculty, is a crucial faculty for rhetoric. Whereas the psychological treatises considered by the scholars in fields other than rhetoric describe the contexts for and characteristics of *phantasia*, the *Rhetoric*, by contrast, contains an applied discussion of *phantasia*. An examination of *phantasia* and its cluster of visual concepts in the *Rhetoric* establishes the crucial roles played by rhetorical vision in each of the treatise’s three books, even as it undoes the assumption, apparently made even by George Kennedy, that a notion of rhetorical vision is strictly metaphorical, with “seeing” standing in for understanding.¹⁵

**PHANTASIA AND THE RHETORIC**

If scholars in classics and philosophy consult the *Rhetoric* for their discussions of *phantasia*, they usually refer to the line in book I, chapter 11, where Aristotle mentions *phantasia*’s relationship to *aisthēsis*, the well-known term for direct perception or sensation: “*Phantasia* is a kind of weak sensation,” *phantasia estin aisthēsis tis asthenēs* (1.11.1370a.28–29).¹⁶ Examining this line in isolation and reading it as a kind of oracular commentary about *phantasia*’s essence, however, eclipses the larger point of *phantasia* vis-à-vis
rhetoric: one cannot begin to account for human motives, desires, or suasion more generally without reference to the way people see, or *phantasia*.

It is no coincidence, then, that the famous line about *phantasia* appears in the chapter offering topics about pleasure in the context of judicial rhetoric, that is, how pleasure relates to motives of those who commit wrongdoings. Aristotle makes clear the purpose of 1.11 at the end of the preceding chapter when he notes, “In short, all things that people do of their own volition are either goods or apparent goods or pleasures or apparent pleasures” (1.10.1369b.18–20), and so “things that are advantageous and pleasurable, their number and nature, should therefore be understood” (29–31). In addition to providing useful commentary for inventing arguments in a judicial context, the chapter also details *phantasia*’s relationship to suasion and desire more generally, as indicated by an explanatory remark inserted before the famous line about *phantasia* being a weak perception: “[I call things] in accordance with reason what people long for on the basis of persuasion; for they desire to see and possess many things after hearing about them and being persuaded [that they are pleasurable]” (1.11.1370a.25–27; emphasis in Kennedy). *Phantasia* therefore becomes central to this discussion of pleasure because of the desire to see and possess—*theasthai kai ktēsasthai*—those things that are deemed pleasurable by others. That desire is facilitated by the fuzzy vision of *phantasia* as presented through words. Rhetors therefore ought to understand the range of apparent pleasures (*bē phainomena hēdea*) according to Aristotle. An understanding of pleasure, that is, is tightly yoked to an understanding of how things appear as pleasurable. The short chapter on pleasure and apparent pleasure in fact contains five references to *phantasia* and therefore offers an instructive applied account of *phantasia* in relation to rhetoric and human motives. The account of apparent pleasure and motives in book I is of course complementary to the account of emotions in book II, as Aristotle points out at the end of chapter 10, and which I discuss later in this article.17

*Phantasia* first appears in the pleasure chapter as part of a complex syllogism beginning at the aforementioned line 27:

Since to be pleased consists in perceiving (*en tō aisthanesthai*) a certain emotion (*pathous*), and since *phantasia* is a kind of weak perception, and since some kind of *phantasia* of what a person remembers or hopes is likely to remain in his memory and hopes—if this is the case, it is clear that pleasures come simultaneously to those who are remembering and hoping, since there is perception there, too. (1370a.27–31)

While this passage helps most scholars clarify Aristotelian *phantasia*’s status vis-à-vis *aesthēsis*, the passage does much more than that. First, it folds time into the distinction. Just as spatial distance causes vision to grow fuzzier, thereby tapping the faculty of *phantasia*, temporal distance from the object
of perception also necessarily calls on *phantasia*. It is also important to note what is getting perceived in this instance: not a man or a dog but a certain emotion, *tinos pathous*. Such pleasurable *pathē* are not of course limited to the brighter or happier *pathē* in Aristotle’s catalog (e.g., calmness or kindliness), but they also (and especially) include the pleasure of recalling an intensely negative *pathē*, such as flying into a rage. The temporal distance is in fact what enables the remove necessary for one to glean pleasure from a memory of a sorrowful or terrifying moment. “The cause of this,” observes Aristotle, “is that not having an evil is also pleasurable” (1.11.1370b.7). As Aristotle puts it in *De Anima*, “In *phantasia* we are like spectators looking at something dreadful or encouraging in a picture” (3.3.427b.23–25): there is visual contact with the past event, and with the formerly intense *pathē*, but such contact nevertheless happens at some remove and can therefore be admired or even enjoyed.

Much more is going on in the “weak perception” passage than is typically discussed. *Phantasia* brings pleasure with distance, and its time is, like the time of rhetoric, the past, the present, the future, or (more commonly) a mixture of these three. A good example of how the *phantasia* of memory mingles with the prevailing *pathos* and perceptions of the now appears in the discussion of mourning: “For the grief applies to what is not there, but pleasure to remembering and, in a way, seeing [the dead] and what he used to do and what he was like” (1.11.1370b.25–26). Here Aristotle offers lines from the *Iliad* (23.108) and the *Odyssey* (4.183) following the funerary speeches of Patroclus and Odysseus, respectively: “Thus he spoke, and raised in them all the sweet longing of tears” (1.11.1370b.27). The example here indicates Aristotle’s belief that rhetoric—in this case a formal funeral oration—is often the medium by which *phantasia* and *pathē*, and *phantasia* of *pathē*, mix and mingle simultaneously, forming a complex and at times compound set of competing but often complementary visions, thereby intensifying the *pathē* overall.

*Phantasia* appears again, later in the chapter, in key discussions of perceived superiority (*hyperochē*), first in the context of victory: “And winning is pleasurable not only to those fond of it but to all; for there is a *phantasia* of superiority for which all have desire either mildly or strongly” (1.11.1370b.33–34), and then in the context of friendship, where “the good is present to someone in his *phantasia*, which all who perceive desire” (1371a.18–20). In both of these instances, which again link *phantasia* to desire, Freese translates *phantasia* aptly as *impression*, thereby capturing the physicality of *phantasia* that Aristotle discusses in *De Memoria*: “One must consider the affection which is produced by sensation in the soul, and in that part of the body which contains the soul . . . as a kind of picture; for the stimulus produced impresses a sort of likeness of the percept, just as when men seal with signet rings” (1975, 1.450a26.450b1) (see Carruthers 2008, 372n5). The *phantasiāi* of victory and goodness are in this
way stamped onto the soul or vital life force, leaving a visible and lasting
imprint, a kind of picture, zôgrâphêma. One with such an impression there-
fore repeatedly pictures oneself as good, or superior, as the case may be,
and this pressed-in, visual mode of self-perception is not metaphorical. It is
material.

In the same chapter, Aristotle also invokes phantasía in the more gen-
eral context of honor circulation: “And honor and reputation are among the
pleasantest things, through each person’s phantasía that he has the qual-
ties of an important person; and all the more [so] when others say so who,
he thinks, tell the truth” (1371a.8–10). In this instance, phantasía is again
sutured to rhetoric, especially to the étéos of the person giving an account
of one’s reputation whose saying heightens the seeing. The reputation of the
speaker or witness can therefore clarify the phantasía.\textsuperscript{18} Aristotle goes on at
some length about who is qualified to speak reliably about one’s reputation,
discounting those who live at a distance in favor of fellow citizens who are
more able to attest to someone’s regular behavior, the foolish in favor of
the wise, and the few in favor of the many. Those named in the passage
are, according to Aristotle, “more likely to tell the truth than their opposites,
since no one pays attention to the honor or reputation accorded by those he
much looks down on, such as babies or small animals” (1.11.1371a.13–16).
The use of babies or animals as those who can witness but not reliably tes-
tify is worth noting, because it appears again in a passage from book II that
I will discuss later.

It is well known to scholars of phantasía that animals possess the fac-
ulty of phantasía; Aristotle makes this clear in De Anima (3.3.427b.7–8).
Kennedy glosses this line in the Rhetoric in particular by noting that babies
and animals are unable to speak about someone’s reputation (90n202) and
so are unable to bolster one’s reputation: they can see but they cannot
say, and this crucial rhetorical act of vouching enlivens—and as important,
spreads—the images that will cohere around someone’s reputation. Multiple
acts of vouching are also important for Aristotle, as indicated by his favoring
of the many over the few: the more images that can be gathered under one’s
honor, the better. Indeed, so many testimonies, operating as they do on a
quasi-visual register, create yet another visual effect that is best described as
density.

In chapter 14 of book I, still elaborating the topics related to judicial
rhetoric and wrongdoing, Aristotle describes how rhetors might heighten
the perception of criminal activities: “Rhetorical techniques adaptable to
this are [to say] that a person has broken many norms of justice and
gone beyond [a single crime], for example, [breaking] oaths, handshakes,
promises, marriage vows; for this is a heaping up (huperochê) of wrongs”
(1.14.1375a.8–11). This “heaping” strategy involves a near-visual component
itself in that actions are piled on actions. The word that Kennedy translates
in chapter 14 as “heaping up” (huperochê) appears repeatedly in book I
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in its more customary meaning of superiority or excess. *Hyperechē* appears as well in Aristotle's discussion of amplification (*auxēsis*), which he claims “is most at home in [speeches] that are epideictic” (1.9.1368a40.27) for, as a figure of speech, amplification “aims to show *huperechē*” (1.9.1368a.23). *Hyperechē* combines the familiar prefix *huper-* (English *hyper-*) meaning excessive, above, or beyond, with the root -ochē, which means support or prop, so the word itself denotes something like excessive support. The word conveys a strong sense of superiority, eminence, or prominence and therefore is often translated (as in the previous passages about reputation) as superiority. With specific reference to language, it moves toward periphrasis or proximity (Liddell, Scott, and Jones 1996, 1867), and so in a rhetorical context, superiority is captured through excess—a “heaping up” or piling on of active descriptions. To produce overwhelming evidence of wrongdoing or excellence is to crowd out images of other kinds of action. In rhetoric, the word *huperechē* therefore has something of a built-in visual component of its own, one that captures density because of the way multiple images—especially *phantasic* images—can be seen and held in the mind simultaneously.

Aristotle discusses the phenomenon of drawing several *phantasic* images into one dense and complex purview in *De Anima*, when developing a notion of deliberative *phantasia*, *phantasia bouleutikē*:

*Phantasia* in the form of sense (*aisthētikē*) is found, as we have said, in all animals, but deliberative *phantasia* only in the calculative (*logistikoi*); for to decide whether one shall do this or that calls at once for calculation, and one must measure by a single standard; for one pursues the greater good. This implies the ability to combine several images (*pleionōn phantasmatōn*) into one. (3.11.434a.6–11)

This sort of calculative weighing of multiple *phantasic* images—deliberative *phantasia*—is also mentioned in an earlier passage: “Sometimes by means of the images or thoughts in the soul, just as if it were seeing, it [the soul] calculates and plans for the future in view of the present” (3.7.431b.6–8). According to Nussbaum, who otherwise argues against a purely imagistic reading of *phantasia*, this passage suggests on the contrary that “deliberative *phantasia* can also involve picturing, or at least some sort of envisaging” (1985, 264). Writing in 1935, philosopher Harry Wolfson discusses *phantasia bouleutikē* as a unique combination of imagining and reasoning in humans, which results in what he calls a “compositive sort of imagination” (92) or *phantasia*. Deliberative *phantasia*, the ability to construct a composite image involving images of past, present, and future events, encompasses all three branches of rhetoric that Aristotle describes in the *Rhetoric* (deliberative, judicial, epideictic) and is almost certainly the faculty at work that enables both rhetor and audience to process the “heaping up”
(huperochē) of wrongs, thereby forming a composite sketch of an alleged criminal’s—or a revered person’s—actions.

More generally, then, deliberative phantasia approximates the comparative approach recommended with the technique of amplification, auxēsis:

Thus, even if there is no comparison with the famous, one should compare [the person praised] with the many, since superiority [even over them] seems to denote excellence. In general, among the classes of things common to all speeches, amplification is most at home in those that are epideictic; for these take up actions that are agreed upon, so that what remains is to clothe the actions with greatness and beauty. But paradigms are best in deliberative speeches; for we judge future things by predicting them from past ones.” (1.9.1368a.25–30)

When Aristotle elaborates epideictic speeches as those which “take up actions that are agreed upon, so that what remains is to clothe the actions with greatness (megethos) and beauty,” it is not a stretch to say that megethos, a word of loftiness, also invokes measures, and frequently excessive ones: in Homeric epic, for example, it always denotes stature, and in astronomy the word indicates a magnitude of stars. So the very task of epideictic or judicial rhetoric is to rhetorically—through a host of images furnished by memory, by vivid comparisons, and projected into the future—produce magnitude, thereby achieving huperochē or density by calling up multiple images, and piling on excessive details. This is why Aristotle, as discussed earlier, favors the praise of many rather than few.

The appearance of phantasia in book I of the Rhetoric establishes its importance as a faculty for rhetorical interaction. In the instances discussed so far, phantasia functions as the visual capacity that can set actions next to actions and that partners with logical capacities to feed into a deliberative process. Phantasia traffics in desire, belief, and action, sharing crucial patterns with rhetoric.

DISPOSITIONAL VISION: PHANTASIA AND THE PATHĒ

The discussion of auxēsis, huperochē, and phantasia toward the end of book I bleeds into the book II’s treatment of pathos and êthos, with book II’s opening gambit following the transition from book I:

But since rhetoric is concerned with making a judgment (people judge what is said in deliberation, and judicial proceedings are also a judgment), it is necessary not only to look at the argument, that it may be demonstrative and persuasive but also [for the speaker] to construct a
view of himself as a certain kind of person and to prepare the judge; for it makes much difference in regard to persuasion (especially in deliberations but also in trials) that the speaker seem to be \((\text{phainesthai})\) a certain kind of person and that his hearers suppose him to be disposed toward them in a certain way and in addition if they, too, happen to be disposed \((\text{echein})\) in a certain way [favorably or unfavorably to him]. For the speaker to seem to have certain qualities is more useful in deliberation; for the audience to be disposed in a certain way [is more useful] in lawsuits; for things do not seem the same \((\text{ou gar tauta phainetai})\) to those who are friendly and those who are hostile, nor [the same] to the angry and the calm but either altogether different or different in importance. (2.1.1377b20–1378a1)

This passage presents the extra-logical aspects of rhetoric as a layering of dispositions on dispositions, \(\text{echontes on echontes}\), a meeting of appearances. The first chapter of book II is replete with various forms of the verb \(\text{phainein}\): to show, to disclose, to bring to light, to appear. It is one of the verbs from which the verbal noun \(\text{phantasia}\) is derived, and its various forms in turn locate the action of appearing with rhetoric, audience, and judge alike. As the final line of this passage suggests, such appearances, created through a combination of words and actions, are frequently filtered through \(\text{pathê}\), the feeling side of rhetoric. Because the \(\text{pathê}\) are seen through \(\text{phantasia}\)—recall from earlier the lasting impressions or \(\text{phantasiai}\) left by affections or \(\text{pathê}\)—the idea of rhetorical vision figures prominently in book II as well, most notably in the instances of anger and shame.

\(\text{Phantasia}\) figures into Aristotle’s famous definition of anger in chapter 2: “Let anger be [defined as] desire, accompanied by [mental and physical] distress, for apparent retaliation because of an apparent slight that was directed, without justification, against oneself or those near to one” (2.2.1378a.30–32). At the heart of this definition is \(\text{phainomenês/n}\), one of the verbs from which \(\text{phantasia}\) is derived. The definition twice turns on this notion of perception-as-interpretation (Nussbaum’s [1985] preferred reading of \(\text{phantasia}\) insofar as the slight and the desired retaliation need to appear as such in order for anger to be present. This strong sense of appearance and the relative weakness of the word \text{apparent} here is likely why Kennedy chose to translate \(\text{phainomenês}\) as \text{conspicuous} in his translation’s first edition.\(^{21}\)

After defining anger, Aristotle moves rather quickly to \(\text{pathos}\)’s ties to pleasure, the hope of retaliation leads to “a kind of pleasure . . . because people dwell in their minds on retaliating; then the \(\text{phantasia}\) that occurs creates pleasure, as in the case of dreams” (2.2.1378b.8–10). This vivid, dreamlike state that anger invokes rests on double perceptions: perception that one has been wronged and the desire for visible or perceivable retaliation. Retaliation in private, though pleasurable to imagine, will not suffice: anger, as Aristotle
makes quite clear, is at once personal and public, and therefore depends on the visible world of external relations.

Shame offers an even better example than anger of how phantasia and pathē interact, because it could not exist outside a matrix of phantastic visibility. Here is Aristotle: “Since shame is phantasia about a loss of reputation and for its own sake, not for its results, and since no one cares about reputation [in the abstract] but on account of those who hold an opinion of him, necessarily a person feels shame toward those whose opinion he takes account of” (2.6.1384a.21–24). This passage echoes the long passage from book I, chapter 12, considered earlier, in which Aristotle enumerates the kinds of people qualified to expound upon one’s reputation. In the discussion of shame, it matters both where and before whom the shameful acts are committed, for people “feel more shame at things done before these people’s eyes (ophthalmois) and in the open; hence, too, the proverb ‘Shame is in the eyes.’” For this reason, Aristotle continues, “people feel more shame before those who are going to be with them and those watching them, because in both cases they are ‘in’ their eyes” (2.6.13974a.33–35). Here once again, the vision of phantasia mingles with direct visual perception: the witnessing of the act is observed by the actor who in turn perceives or phantasizes the witnessing itself as loss of reputation. The doer of the shameful act is “in” the eyes—or line of sight—of those whose judgment matters. As Daniel Gross observes of this chapter, “Shame as Aristotle describes it is irreducibly social” (2006, 41), and I would add that this is because it is also irreducibly visual in that it must be visible: shame is transmitted socially through the eyes of others into the faculty of phantasia—perceptions layer onto perceptions, dispositions on dispositions, shameful actions on actions.

The visibility of shame has a crucial rhetorical dimension as well, as Aristotle notes that people feel more shame “before those inclined to tell about it to many others (kai tous exaggeltikous pollois); for not to tell the tale is no different from not thinking it [a fault]” (2.6.5–8). The word exaggeltikous means to proclaim or to tell out, and so it is not a mere telling (which would be aggeltikous, sans the ex-), but a broadcast of sorts, to many others, pollois. Here again, the perceived loss of reputation depends on the perceived likelihood that someone will broadcast one’s shameful actions. Again, the saying heightens the seeing, in this case by spreading tales of the shameful act witnessed.

Later in the passage, Aristotle reiterates this point when he observes that “on the whole” people “are not ashamed before those whose reputation of telling the truth they much look down on (no one feels shame before babies and small animals)” (2.6.1384b.22–24). Once again, babies and animals stand in for those who are without the capacity for speech. Just as he mobilized babies and small animals in his discussion of honor circulation in book I, Aristotle returns to them as the limit cases for those who are able to shame someone. Shame is therefore simultaneously in the eyes and in the mouths
of others. In book II, then, phantasia moves closer to the way Nussbaum (1985) figures it—as interpretation, but it is interpretation that is grafted onto direct perception: rhetorical vision depends upon both simultaneously.

If books I and II establish that so much of rhetoric—desire, pleasure, the pathē—depends upon phantasia, book III shows rhetors how to tap this faculty with language. That is, book III, the book most concerned with words qua words, is where everything falls together: a cluster of related visual terms is introduced and explained, a robust theory of rhetorical vision takes shape, and the potential vividness of words itself comes into sharp focus.

**RHETORICAL VISION THROUGH LEXIS**

Book III’s discussion of metaphor contains a (relatively) rare mention of a sophist, this one called Licymnius, whom Plato mentions in the Phaedrus as having written a treatise on how to make beautiful words, poies ineuteias (Phaedrus, 267c2). Of Licymnius, Aristotle writes, “The source of the metaphor should be something beautiful (kai apo kalōn); verbal beauty (kallos de onomatos), as Licymnius says, is in the sound or in the sense, and ugliness the same” (3.2.1405b.5–7). Licymnius’s idea of beautiful language leads Aristotle to refute another sophist, Bryson, who asserted that words with similar meanings can be easily substituted for one another. “This is false,” Aristotle responds. “One word is more proper than another and more like the object signified and more adapted to make the thing appear ‘before the eyes,’” (poieinto pragma pro ommatōn) (12). The beauty of words therefore lies in their appeal to the senses of sight, hearing, or both. Aristotle concludes the discussion begun with reference to Licymnius by emphasizing the importance of perception to successful metaphors, citing Homer:

> These are sources from which metaphors should be taken: from the beautiful either in sound (phōnē) or in meaning (dunamei) or in visualization (opsei) or in some other form of sense perception (aisthēsei). It makes a difference whether the dawn is called ‘rosy-fingered’ or ‘purple-fingered’ or worse still, ‘red-fingered.’ (17–20)

The sensations mentioned in this passage are direct as opposed to strictly phantasic.²⁴ Opsei, for example, is a form of the verb horao, which means “to see” in the physical sense, and aisthēsei of course derives from aisthēsis, which is counterposed to phantasia in book I’s “weak perception” passage. Even so, the interpretive perception invoked by the words “rosy-fingered dawn” would no doubt fall into the category of phantasia; and yet Aristotle’s language in book II begins to move to the sense organs for its discussion of style and perception. The examples from Homer help to cinch the point:
unlike “rosy-fingered,” a “red-fingered dawn” would be harsh on the eyes and, perhaps simultaneously, the ears.

As Sara Newman has demonstrated, this sort of bringing-before-the-eyes “helps metaphors, and thus rhetoric, to achieve their desired effects by prompting audiences to visualize images before them” (2002, 8–9). The idea of bringing-before-the-eyes rests not only with creating good and sensuous metaphors (though that is one of its crucial functions to be sure); it goes further, partnering with metaphor to apply to style more generally, as is clear in the discussion of asteia or urbanity in chapter 10. There, Aristotle comments that urbanity is achieved through “bringing-before-the-eyes [pro ommatón poiein]; for things should be seen as being done rather than as going to be done” (3.10.1410b.33–35). As the discussion of pro ommatón poiein reveals, at stake in bringing-before-the-eyes is not merely the change from future to present tense, but the animated gathering of both future and past images into the now by rendering them lively, vivid, and kinetic. Chapter 10 ends with a flurry of examples that shows metaphor partnered to bringing-before-the-eyes. In the words of Athenian general Iphicrates, “My path of words is through the midst of Chares’ actions” (1411b.1–3), Aristotle locates metaphor in the language of the path and, in “through the midst,” a bringing-before-the-eyes. When thinking of the phrase through the midst as an aid to visualization, it helps to recall Aristotle’s use of hyperochē to describe the creation of a dense heap of actions. Iphicrates’ phrase “through the midst of Chares’ actions” achieves a similar effect, and here the words themselves cut a path through them; they help organize—and make more visible—the pile. He also offers as an example of before-the-eyes Isocrates’ too-flattering characterization of the Persians in Panegyricus “‘in every way practicing lowly thinking’; for ‘to practice’ is to increase something, auxein” (11–12). In this instance, as with the words cutting “through the midst,” bringing-before-the-eyes reaches back to auxēsis in that it achieves a kind of visual accumulation.

In chapter 11, Aristotle backs up and offers a definition of bringing-before-the-eyes as well as an account of “what makes this occur” (3.11.1411b.22–23): “I call those things ‘before-the-eyes’ that signify things engaged in activity.” The word for “activity” here is a form of energeia. Not all metaphor features energeia, though, as he makes clear straightaway:

For example to say that a good man is “foursquare” is a metaphor . . . but it does not signify energeia. On the other hand, the phrase “having his prime of life in full bloom” is energeia, as is “you, like a free-ranging animal” and “now then the Greeks darting forward on their feet.” Darting is actualization and metaphor; for he means “quickly.” (3.11.1411b.26–32)

A description such as “foursquare” invokes geometrical dimensions and is somewhat flat and lifeless, but the remaining descriptions either discuss life
directly or depict kinetic styles of movement, roving and quick. The distinction between metaphor sans *energeia* and metaphor partnered to *energeia* makes all the difference for stimulating the eyes of hearers. *Energeia*, in Aristotelian philosophy, is opposed to *dunamis*, potential or capacity, and as he observes in the *Metaphysics*, it names something like physical presence: “*Energeia* means the presence of the thing” (9.5.1048a.32–34). Similarly, in the context of rhetorical style, *energeia* approximates its English cognate, *energy*, as evidenced by Aristotle’s own energetic illustrative discussion of Homer:

In all his work he gains his fame by creating activity (*energeian*), for example, in the following:

Then to the plain rolled the ruthless stone, and “the arrow flew” and [also of an arrow] “eager to fly” and [of spears] “They stood in the ground longing to take their fill of flesh,” and “The point sped eagerly through his breast.” In all of these something seems living through being actualized; for being “ruthless” and longing” and the other examples constitute *energeia*. (3.11.1411b.33–34–1412a.1–5)

With such vivid descriptions, the zipping and quivering arrows can’t help but be visualized as such. Aristotle’s lively praise of Homeric style continues, culminating with this observation: “He makes everything move and live, and *energeia* is motion” (1412a.9–10). Movement and life, *kinēsis* and *zōos*, are what confer rhetorical presence; such a lively style therefore pours words as lively images into the eyes, creating “presence” and giving the impression that the description is now. That impression of course resides with *phantasia*.

The lifeblood of lexis, bringing-before-the-eyes and *energeia*, therefore stand in book III as the leading stylistic strategies for tapping *phantasia* and stirring the *pathē*. In a commentary on metaphor, classical philosopher Richard Moran points out that *energeia* occurs as much in the audience as it does in or around the metaphorical subject (1996, 393), and in order to stress the importance of what he calls the “imagistic” over the “discursive” in this context, Moran turns to Kenneth Burke, whom he reads as “echoing Aristotle’s language of ‘setting before the eyes’” (1996, 394). He offers a long quotation from *A Rhetoric of Motives* in which Burke, referring obliquely to Aristotle, begins to theorize how rhetorical vision works. Here is an excerpt from the Burke passage that Moran quotes at length:

There is a difference between an abstract term naming the “idea” of, say, security, and a concrete image designed to stand for this idea, and to “place it before our very eyes.” For one thing, if the image employs the full resources of the imagination, it will not represent merely one idea, *but will contain a whole bundle of principles*, even ones that would be
mutually contradictory if reduced to their purely ideational equivalents. (Burke [1950] 1969, 86–87; Moran 1996, 394; emphasis added)

Though he does not use the term, Moran offers a reading of Burke’s account that aligns nicely with deliberative phantasia previously discussed. “In presenting his audience with an image for contemplation,” writes Moran, “the speaker appears to put them in the position of working out the meaning of a phenomenon rather than in the position of believing or disbelieving something they are being told” (1996, 395). As a result of this multi-sided image engagement, Moran observes that, when something is brought before the eyes, “the mind of the hearer is provoked, set into motion, and engaged imaginatively with the metaphor. Energeia is thus not only on the side of what is depicted, but what is depicted is specifically figured as a living thing demanding some set of responses from the audience” (1996, 395–396). The production of rhetorical vision, in other words, occurs on the part of the audience as a result of the “bundle” of ideas contained in the image. What is more, when considered in the context of deliberative phantasia as the connecting of multiple images, if each image, to use Burke’s words, “contains a whole bundle of principles,” then what is being placed before the audience is not a single, discrete image or idea but a dense and simultaneous proliferation of both images and ideas. Finally, in such a scheme, invention can no longer be said to rest with the rhetor alone but spreads to the audience members engaged in deliberative phantasia. The capacity of phantasia therefore maximizes the efficiency of words.

RHETORICAL VISION IN DEMOSTHENES’ “EPITAPHIOS”

Before concluding, I wish to examine Demosthenes’ “Epitaphios” (Funeral Oration) as a brief illustration of rhetorical vision in action. Doing so adds a new dimension to prevailing arguments about funeral orations in general, of which the “Epitaphios” attributed to Demosthenes is one of the few complete extant examples.26 I have chosen this speech in particular because it contains explicit references to the kinds of capacities discussed in this article, even as it performatively taps them.

Consider the rhetorical challenges faced by the state-appointed orator when in 338 BCE he delivered the oration to honor the men who had died in a fierce and unsuccessful battle at Chaironeia that summer. The setting was a lofty stage erected at the public cemetery. By the time Demosthenes ascended that stage, much had happened with the bones of the dead. If custom as outlined by Thucydides (2.34.1–8) was followed, three days prior, the bones were laid out beneath a tent so that everyone might bring offerings to their own dead. The remains were then placed in cypress chests—one
for each tribe of Athens—and carried in a mass procession by means of hearse along with a single empty bed with a shroud for those whose remains were not recovered. The procession of the bones was open to everyone, and at this time women of the city performed their laments as the funeral proceeded to the public cemetery in a beautiful city suburb, where the remains are buried. Then, after three days of ceremonies and lamentations, Demosthenes, appointed by the state, ascended the stage above the burial site to deliver the culminating event of the elaborate funeral: a funeral oration, an epitaphios.

As commentators on Demosthenes’ “Epitaphios” observe, “It was not an enviable task to be asked to praise the fallen after such a disastrous defeat” (1949, 4–5). More generally, the challenge of the funeral oration was to shift the focus from the entombed, lifeless bodies that had been materially present for the duration of the ceremonies: first laid out, then placed in cypress chests, then laid into earth. The orator must bring the focus back to activity, past and future, by conveying honor on the activities of the men before and during battle, then sending the people back to their homes with thoughts of more than just corpses. Nicole Loraux’s classic study of funeral orations situates the challenge as requiring “the effacement of all sensory vision, correlative to that of the materiality of bodies, always already transmuted into ashes,” which resulted in a process of abstraction, what she calls “an imaginary without image” (2006, 13, 343). Katharine Derderian, whose study of Greek mourning practices does not differ markedly from Loraux’s, nevertheless characterizes the epitaphios in this way: “Situated within the context of burial, the epitaphios takes its generic identity from its situation as a speech carried out at the gravesite (epitaphios) while it often attempts to override the significance of the inscribed monument” (2001, 166). Loraux, too, wrote about Pericles’ funeral oration, the first of these state-sanctioned speeches famously documented by Thucydides, noting that “it reverses the order of values by substituting for the soldiers’ real grave . . . a purely symbolic monument (taphos)” (2006, 121). Both Loraux and Derderian position the epitaphios in agonistic relation with material, written, and other oral mourning practices (Derderian 2001, 166–168; Loraux 2006, 271–273). Even so, neither Loraux nor Derderian considers exactly how the epitaphios is able to compete with the material, visual practices of mourning, the viewing of and making offerings to the bones, the tribal caskets that smelled of fresh cypress. Or more accurately, both settle for a reading that turns on the ability of words and symbolic acts to effectively “trump” the material and visible corpses and grave, one that diminishes the “reality” of the present, replacing it with the abstraction of speech (Loraux 2006, 121). And yet the speech deserves further consideration in the context of rhetorical vision. Demosthenes’ epitaphios exploits words’ ability to tap the visual capacity of phantasia, thereby effecting a shift in focus from the corpses of the present to activities of the past and future. The lifeless, sacred bodies
of the war dead are reanimated, their memory vivified, *energeia* projected into the future, all by means of rhetorical vision, all before the eyes of the audience.

Demosthenes makes his challenge clear when he sets his speech’s primary task as “making visible (*dèloun*) the deeds of these men” (1949, 13). Later, Demosthenes’ speech references directly—and just once—the “dear bodies” of the warriors, lamenting how the removal of the warriors’ souls from their bodies resulted in the removal of the very “self-esteem of Greece.” He continues:

> For just as, if the light of day were removed out of this universe of ours, all the remnant of life would be hard to grasp and fierce (*duscherès kai chalepos*), so, now that these men have been taken from us, all the old-time radiance of the Greeks is sunk in gloom and profound obscurity. (1949, 24)

This passage is noteworthy for its sheer number of references to light and life as light. The central analogy of the passage goes something like this: the removal of *life* from the warriors’ bodies results in the removal of *light* from the city-state. Radiance thus becomes gloom; presence, absence. In Demosthenes’ self-admitted “exaggerated” metonymy, even perception itself vanishes, leaving Athenians, and especially mourners attending the speech, groping in the dark. If considered next to Aristotle’s etymology of *phantasia* as derived from light (*phaos*), Demosthenes’ description of Athens as dark and lifeless might be read as a preparation for *phantasia*, much as when a stage darkens before a new act.

How to mitigate such a painful extinguishing? How to help the bereft see again? Such was the double challenge faced by Demosthenes and, for that matter, all orators elected to perform the public duty of delivering the funeral oration, Pericles and Aspasia among them: to transform pain into pleasure, darkness into light. No small task, it would seem. Early in his funeral oration Demosthenes attests to a profound aporia. And yet it is not the kind of aporia one would expect in a funeral oration—a kind of soul-sucking grief, a loss in the face of loss. Instead it is an aporia caused, curiously, by excess. Here is the relevant passage: “Though many deeds of these men are at hand because of which they will be justly eulogized, I am at a loss what to mention first when I come face to face with the facts. For thronging into my mind as they do, all at one and the same time, it becomes difficult to make a choice among them” (1949, 15). Here, Demosthenes both exploits and reverses the “weakness” of *phantasia*, narrating its ability to see multiple deeds simultaneously. The sheer density of the simultaneous visions is captured by the translator’s choice of the verb *thronging*. The Greek here is simply the word for coming into (*prosistantema*), yet the translation as *thronging* captures the force of the word *panta* (“all”) which follows the
verb. So “all coming into my mind at once” is rendered more efficiently and perhaps more elegantly as “thronging.” The images of the soldiers’ past activities charge into sight, as if into battle. What is more, the subsequent phrase that is translated “at one and the same time”—*eis hena kairon*—might perhaps be better rendered “on this one occasion,” to get at the rhetorical effect of Demosthenes’ particularly cunning move. Demosthenes presents his own memory as overcome—infested would not be too strong a word—with the lively memories of the past. And it is the very cumulative density of active, kinetic, visual, and visible memories—memories of lively bodies, infused with *energeia*—that overtakes the motionless dead bodies before the eyes of the hearers. Recall the discussions of deliberative *phantasia* that confirm the *phantasic* mind’s ability to see multiple images at once, an ability corroborated in the *Metaphysics*: “Numerous memories of the same thing eventually produce the effect of a single experience” (981a4). The cumulative effect of such memories can be powerful indeed.

Demosthenes’ narration of his own inventional act—his own *phantasia*, because it remains at the level of the *energeia* of the images themselves, rather than any specific details—also allows room for listeners to fill in their own images of these men’s actions. Such narration partners then with the chronological narration that follows, in which Demosthenes notes the collective greatness that distinguished the dead through their lives, depicting them as “engaging in the exercises appropriate to each stage of life” (1949, 16), up to and including answering the call to battle, even when the call resulted from circumstances that might have been averted: “These men did not bear a grudge but stepping forward and eagerly offering their all, bodies, money, and allies, they entered upon the ordeal of the contest, in which they were not sparing even of their lives” (18). The images presented in this passage, though not metaphorical, are nevertheless full of *energeia*; the men’s lives full of activity, always displaying what Demosthenes at one point calls “sound judgment joined with public spirit” (18). The prominent metaphor in the passage, however, has to do with memory itself and occurs between the discussion of the men’s actions in school and their arrival in manhood: “Therefore, just as if recognizing footprints, the memory of those who were near and dear to them now turns to these men every hour in fond recollection, finding many a reminder of occasions when they knew in their hearts that these lads were of surpassing worth” (16). This metaphor of footprints enables Demosthenes to present memory itself as the act of visually locating the imprints left by the activities of the dead. Furthermore, insofar as footprints convey the image of past movement, this metaphor qualifies as a bringing-before-the-eyes for its implied *energeia*, even as it once again allows room for listeners to tailor the memories, to visualize individual footprints, much in the way that they were, days earlier, able to make individual offerings to the bones of their own sons, brothers, and husbands. The footprint description also lends further *energeia*
to the descriptions that follow at 17–18, in which the men are seen displaying “public spirit” and “stepping forward and eagerly offering their all” (18).

Demosthenes’ oration thus provides a crowded density of visual images, enabling the orator to pull off the monumental task of enlivening the war dead, of replacing the corpses with visions of active, lively bodies performing remarkable deeds. The “throng” in Demosthenes’ speech thus invades the occasion—the kairos—itself. And through an intricate production of rhetorical vision, Demosthenes secures a lucid collective memory, thereby preventing the mourners/listeners (and by extension the city) from being “sunk in gloom and profound obscurity” (24)—in other words, rendered at once invisible and without vision. Thus rhetoric taps into phantasia, and phantasia enables the words of Demosthenes to overtake the scene before them.

CONCLUSION

Demosthenes’ “Epitaphios” offers an instructive instance of how rhetorical vision might work in a speech, and while this speech serves as a representative anecdote, it need not unnecessarily restrict rhetorical vision to a rhetor’s explicit narration of images’ energy or of the importance of seeing life in imprints left behind. Instead, as Aristotle’s own examples in book III suggest, rhetorical vision resides in short bursts of language, in vivid turns of phrase, in lively and lifelike metaphors. And herein lies the theoretical upshot of such a robust theory of rhetorical vision: words facilitate vision. They have the capacity, in bringing energetic images before the eyes, to compete with, or perhaps even overtake, what is already before the eyes of the audience, to lift them out of the present by flooding their eyes with active images from the past or projected into the future. The net effect is an active, vivid engagement with the rhetor’s words, such that hearers begin to engage in deliberative phantasia, leading to belief formation and decision making.

Lest this intervention seem to rest strictly on the level of history of rhetorical theory, it bears mentioning once again the convergence between Aristotle’s notion of phantasia and the debates about visual imagery in contemporary neuroscience. Recent studies have shown that visual mental imagery activates the areas of the brain known as the primary visual cortex, named so because they are the first parts of the brain to receive and begin to process information from the eyes (Kosslyn and Thompson 2003, 723). Indeed, according to Harvard researchers Stephen M. Kosslyn and William L. Thompson, one set of theories holds that “the same neural structures used in language are also used in imagery” (2003, 725), and a separate study suggests that vivid descriptions activate the visual cortex in
the congenitally blind (Prasad, Thomas, and Aguirre 2008). This is not to say that Aristotle anticipated neuroscientific findings made possible through fMRI and EEG technology. Rather, Aristotle’s ruminations on phantasia, its complex entwinement with memory, with the pathê, with deliberation, and with direct or actual vision, is not simply an archaic relic but a provocative set of observations about how words, and the images they carry, find their way into the mind’s eye (or visual cortex), bringing before the eyes that which is not otherwise immediately visible. As suggested by the Oedipal epigraph, saying has the capacity to facilitate seeing, and this theory of rhetorical vision is a prominent and unifying feature of Aristote’s Rhetoric that has for too long gone unnoticed.

NOTES

1. See also Auerbach (1968, 3) for a discussion of the visual in ancient Greek philosophy; see also Jay (1994, 24ff). John T. Kirby (1997) considers the “textualization of the visual” in the ancient world, which is nearly the obverse of what I propose to examine: the visual capacities of language.
2. This translation is my own. For translations of passages from De Anima, I have relied on Hett unless otherwise noted, and for the Rhetoric, Kennedy, with slight amendments that “detranslate” words like phantasia and energeia, and with discussions of the particular Greek words where relevant.
3. As it is well known, Aristotle’s Poetics offers Sophocles’ Oedipus the King as the epitome of tragic form.
4. For others, see Fortenbaugh (2002) and Walker (2000a,b).
5. For Kennedy’s discussions, see especially his headnote to chapter 11 of book III, 221–222, where he notes the “emphasis on the visual, which is characteristic of Aristotle” (2007, 222), as well as his treatment of what he calls “Aristotelian words with visual imagery” (2007, 170), and his meditation on possible connections to neurolinguistics (1996, 171–172). The two recent noteworthy examinations of Aristotle’s visual concepts are by Sarah Newman (2002) and Ned O’Gorman (2005). I make more extensive use of each of these articles later.
6. Scholars who have weighed in with arguments about the unity of Aristotle’s Rhetoric include Gross and Dascal (2001); McAdon (2004); Poster (1997); Ross (1995, 285); and Barnes (1995, 263–264). These last two are also cited in Gross and Dascal (2001, 275).
7. Similar theoretical work has been done with a focus on sound. See Porter (2004) and Graff (2001).
9. David Blakesley and Collin Brooke, in an introduction to a special issue on visual rhetoric in Enculturation, mention phantasia briefly in their meditation on the intersections between the rhetorical and the visual, as well as Gorgias’s recognition of “the power of the word to conjure images” (2001, node 2). See also Catherine L. Hobbs, who mentions phantasia in the context of visual rhetoric and ocularism, attributing its development primarily to the Epicureans (2004, 63–64). Joshua Gunn (2003) and James P. McDaniel (2000) both mention phantasia in their recuperation of psychoanalytic strands of imagination. Finnegan, Blakesley, Brooke, Hobbs, Gunn, and McDaniel aside, though, the scanty regard for Aristotle’s emphasis on the language and the visual is especially curious given the affinity that visual rhetoric scholars have for terms in Aristotle’s rhetorical toolbox, often adopting familiar concepts such as enthymeme, pathos, and topos. See, for example, Valerie Smith’s (2007) discussion of the uses and misuses of enthymemes in visual rhetoric scholarship. Joshua Gunn (2005) discusses iconic topos in the context of Satanism, and Finnegan’s work, especially “The Naturalistic Enthymeme” (2001) and “Recognizing Lincoln” (2005), turn on the notion of enthymeme. Hariman and Lucaites deploy enthymemes (2007, 33, 165–166) and pathos (140–141, 166, 351n11, and 258n62). I want to acknowledge here the work that has been done on written words as graphic images (e.g., Kress and Van Leeuwen 2006, and in the ancient context, Graff 2001) and to note at the outset, even though it will become clear as I define
terms that this kind of direct vision, while important and fascinating, is not my main focus. Of this work, my contribution potentially intersects with Craig Strope’s article “Visualizing English,” which crosses the “visual/verbal border” (2000, 609)—only I am crossing at a different place. The end of the article contains a brief discussion of neuroscientific findings along these lines of visual imagery.

10. A theory of rhetorical vision is not of course confined solely to the pages of the Rhetoric; its residue can be found in other texts, Aristotelian and non-Aristotelian. Since I began working on this concept, I have noticed something like rhetorical vision, for example, in the writings of Quintilian, Augustine, Giambattista Vico, Joseph Priestley, Kenneth Burke, and others. It is Aristotle, however, who first offers an array of tools and terms for considering how words enable sight, and an elucidation of rhetorical vision in Aristotle may help shed light for work on subsequent theorists whose accounts mobilize or augment a notion of rhetorical vision: Quintilian (1960), Institutio Oratoria 4.2. For Vico, see especially Luft (1997). Joseph Priestley’s (1777) 1965 commitments to Hartelian associationist psychology make for a lively and vivid account of how “things” make lively imagistic connections in the mind which yield thought. His discussion of amplification flickers on the edges of a notion of rhetorical vision (26–32; see also Hawhee and Holding 2010, 280–281). Mary Carruthers’s Book of Memory (2008) describes medieval memory systems and their dependency on what I am calling rhetorical vision. See especially chapter 2, 18–15. For Kenneth Burke (1950), see especially the Rhetoric of Motives passage excerpted by Moran (1996) and discussed later in this article.

11. Modrak (1986) writes: “Our notion [of imagination] seems to exclude the immediate awareness of objects in our environment and to include the manipulation of ideas.” Aristotle’s notion of phantasia, I shall argue, includes the former and excludes the latter. Kevin White (1985) notes this same difficulty and observes, “The physiological study of the ‘imagination’ seems to have its origins in Galen’s medical researches, which make use of Aristotle’s remarks on to phantastikon” (484n4); in other words, there is a link, but later uses of the term imagination do not by any means correspond to phantasia: “We must bear in mind the extreme inappropriateness of these post-Aristotelian connotations of the term” (White 1985, 484).

12. Martha Nussbaum (1985) and Victor Caston (1996) would probably disagree with my wish to stress “image” here; Nussbaum argues that images have been overstressed in contemporary interpretations of phantasia, and she opts instead to emphasize its ties to the verb phainesthai, “to appear”; Caston follows a similar logic by linking Aristotle’s phantasia to Plato (21n3). Most other scholars discussed in this essay, however, foreground images rather strenuously.

13. For a book-length discussion of Aristotle’s theory of language and meaning-making replete with references to phantasia, see Modrak (2001).


16. González (2006), whose treatment of phantasia in book III of the Rhetoric will be considered later in this article, is an important exception here.

17. 1.10; 1369b 11–15: “Through anger and desire [come] things that are vengeful. But revenge and punishment differ; for punishment is for the sake of the sufferer, revenge for the sake of the doer, that he may get a sense of fulfillment. What anger is will become clear in the discussion of emotions, and through longing is done whatever seems pleasurable.”

18. I have written previously about the antagonistic relationship between saying and seeing in the ancient world (see Hawhee 2004); here, I wish to examine how the two work in tandem.


20. My reading of huperochē as a rhetorical strategy complements O’Gorman’s reading of epideictic in terms of sight and scale (2005, 30) rather than restricting it to belief and value. Considering phantasia as the link between rhetoric and belief, hyperochē as a kind of piling up of images good or bad helps to make the link between magnitude and value.

21. A 1997 article by W. V. Harris is likely the reason Kennedy amended his translation for the second edition. Harris asserts that “it is thoroughly implausible, as well as philologically indefensible, to attribute to [Aristotle] the opinion that anger is provoked only by slights that are conspicuous or notorious” (1997, 454). Even so, if “conspicuous” is read as a strong version of “apparent,” a case could
still be made for this translation, and it appears as well in Roberts’s translation and commentary by Cope and Sandys (Harris 1997, 452).

22. It should be noted that Gross’s account is not new. David Konstan refers to the “classical view of pathe as arising primarily in and from social interactions” (2007, 39).

23. Kennedy’s note (2007, 135n50) corroborates this: “This parenthesis really applies to those who cannot speak at all, infants and animals.”

24. For a discussion of opsis in Aristotle, with particular focus on the Rhetoric and the Poetics, see Stanford (1936, 109–110).

25. Sara Newman too, briefly characterizes bringing-before-the-eyes as happening immediately (2002, 13). While her useful analysis of bringing-before-the-eyes is designed to elaborate Aristotle’s notion of metaphor, I wish to present the concept as working more broadly in the service of rhetorical vision.

26. While the authorship of the “Epitaphios” has been called into question because of its inaccuracies and similarities to other authors, the fact that Demosthenes (1949) delivered the funeral oration for the dead at Chaeronea is taken as a given; see “On the Crown,” 285–288. On this point, see also Loraux (2006, 36) and Derderian (2001, 163).

27. For a study of the importance of visual properties of written words, see Cohen et al. (2002). For a neuroscientific account of language, see Mildner (2008).

28. The imprint of energeia can be seen in common syntactic and semantic constructions too, as finds Dan Slobin’s (2008) study of the prominent occurrence of “paths of vision” alongside paths of motion, as embedded in such expressions as “looking beyond, over, or towards.” He also observes that “linguists, starting at least with Gruber in 1967, have noted that verbs of perception appear in the same syntactic and semantic constructions as verbs of motion” (2008, 1).

REFERENCES


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