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Color Rhetoric: The Social Construction of Neutrality in Real Estate Design

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COLOR RHETORIC: THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION
OF NEUTRALITY IN REAL ESTATE DESIGN

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ABSTRACT

Many interior designers believe that the key to selling a house is using conventionally labeled neutral colors. Yet, in relying solely on what convention dictates as a universal real estate rule, designers are promoting an ideology that privileges conventional standards to audience analysis, and consequently, calling into question the usefulness of their own careers. Using Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation principles, this thesis will analyze pictures taken from homes on the real estate market. Examining these pictures will establish the concept of neutrality as a rhetorical social construction that is shaped within historical, social, and cultural contexts. Moreover, this thesis presents the real estate process as a rhetorical situation in which it is the designer's responsibility as the rhetor to convey the values of neutrality in a manner that addresses the needs of potential buyers and persuades them to act.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my loving family whose confidence in and support of me was the force that kept me going throughout this process. I thank God for you all.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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1. Introduction

Many artists, psychologists, and scientists have tried to explain the nature of color and its various associations. For instance, the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who is regarded as the "father of rhetoric", believed all colors were mixtures of black and white (Crone 10). Some studies have drawn conclusions about how humans physically react to color while others focused on assigning color names. Numerous visual rhetoric scholars, such as Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts, have gone to great lengths to explore the rhetorical nature and use of visual elements in professional communication. Even advertising "how-to" books casually mention using color as a means of making products or design images more noticeable to the consumer eye. Without question, the significance of color theory and its rhetorical value is evident in its proliferation and transcendence across several disciplines. Yet, rarely, if ever, do these fields of study acknowledge the rhetorical value of the concept of neutrality as an explanation of why color is such a significant semiotic. Were this the case, neutrality would actually be seen as a form of communicative social agreement, not the absence of expression, designation of specific colors, or lack of meaning thereof.

Although many people agree that color is highly communicative and carries various interpretations, the discourse on the rhetoric of color tends to fall shy of extending these values to colors conventionally labeled as neutral. Moreover, the concept of color neutrality is usually not considered a concept that some professionals deem worthy of thought at all. In the real estate design industry, oftentimes interior designers as well as some owners who sell their homes believe that color selection in a house on the market is a trivial non-issue of what is right and wrong: beige and/ or the owner's personal style being right and everything else wrong. However, designers should think of neutrality and its place in real estate design not simply in terms of following industry mandated rules, but also as a process of exploring the available means of using of all colors in a persuasive manner that meets the needs of a particular buyer's market and seeks to convince someone in that audience to buy.

This thesis agrees that neutrality exists, but as a rhetorical social construct formed within historical, cultural, and social contexts. The concept of neutrality is neither static nor is exclusive to specific

colors; rather, it is ever-evolving and its values and appearance change depending on the context in which it is used. The method behind selecting color for the real estate market is to use colors that create a calming, comfortable atmosphere in which potential buyers will not be distracted by colors beyond their expectations, but focus on the selling features of the home. Far too often, designers turn to using beige simply because according to them, things have always been done that way. However, just because beige, which is also a social construct, can express comfort, it also can mean boring and is neither the embodiment of neutrality nor is it the only option for every situation. Like Aristotle's description of rhetoric, neutrality is useful and functions "to succeed in persuading" as well as "to discover the means" of reaching that success. Success, in this instance, is measured by a house selling, and the means, in this case, are colors.

Using rhetorical theory, this thesis will examine how the seemingly objective concept of neutrality is actually is an indeterminable, persuasive social construction that is shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts. Moreover, the process of selecting a color for the purpose of selling a house is what theorist Lloyd Bitzer describes as a rhetorical situation. This theory will be the focus of this analysis on neutrality.

Conventionally designated neutral colors are not sole means to the end of selling houses in themselves because they frequently change. Even design experts and color theorists do not always agree on what neutral colors are. Rather, the home designer who understands neutrality as a form of rhetoric will have a better understanding of why certain colors work in some situations where others do not, and hence, contribute to the sale of a property. This level of awareness bridges the gap between interior designer and professional communicator as well as neutrality and rhetoric.

Neutral Defined

Although this thesis presents neutrality as a socially-constructed concept that has multiple interpretations, it is important to understand the etymological meaning of the word itself. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* describes the word neutral in nine ways. Of these, two define it as the following:

1) "belonging to neither of two specified, implied, or usual categories; occupying a middle position with regard to two extremes; indifferent, impartial, dispassionate; in early use also, made

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up of opposing elements able to neutralize each other"

2) "having no sexual characteristics, having no functional sexual organs, neuter, asexual" (*Shorter* 1913).

The Oxford Color Dictionary defines the word neutral as "supporting neither of two opposing sides, impartial; vague, indeterminate; (of colours) not strong or positive; make ineffective by opposing force" (*Oxford* 425). Neutral, or neutralis in Latin, is a derivative of the old and modern French word neuter, or its source in Latin, neuter, which is comprised of ne "not" and uter "either (of two)" (*Shorter* 1912). The combination of the words "not" and "either", or neither, emphasizes both the "objective" and relative meanings behind this word. In summation, from looking at these descriptions, neutral is a term that has come to mean something that cannot be described, or vague. Moreover, neutral has also come to refer to earth-tone colors and/or identifying qualities about "non-neutral" colors used in specific instances. Interestingly, while the second dictionary's focus is on color, it does not specifically define what particular colors are neutral. This vague definition indicates that all colors have meaning, but are socially designated neutrality within certain contexts for certain situations.

Addressing the rhetorical nature of color neutrality in its entirety cannot be accomplished solely throughout the course of this thesis; even recognizing the rhetorical nature of color implies the difficulty of fully attempting to explain such an expansive concept. Moreover, even the word neutral in real estate terms can pertain to as narrow of a topic as making a decision about furniture style and color selection to the broader task of home staging, or decorating and preparing a house for selling purposes. Hence, as a scope for this extensive topic, this study focuses on color neutrality as a rhetorical, social construction shaped by historical, cultural, and social contexts that is an integral facet of real estate design marketing and professional communication.

Colors conventionally labeled as neutral such as beige are not "plain" means to an end simply because they are heavily used in industry: they too are rhetorical elements that greatly influence a buyer's decision. In fact, the concept of neutral varies and is based on the context in which it is used in order to suit appropriate moments or situations. These situations, in turn, determine how certain colors are used and the

persuasive nature of the neutral colors. Consequently, this moment of propriety is what gives a color its labeled "neutrality" and social acceptance. Addressing this subject matter seeks to attend to three questions about the use of color in real estate:

- How can something that has meaning and is rhetorical be neutral?
- What does "neutral" look like?
- How do real estate fundamentals about color overlap or contradict what is accepted about color in professional communication?

To address these questions, theoretical underpinning from Aristotle, Lloyd Bitzer, and Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts will be used extensively. Other theorists such as Charlotte Thralls and Nancy Roundy Blyler, Kenneth Burke, Patricia Bizzell, and Ben F. Barton and Marthalee S. Barton will be cited throughout the argument as well. Since these theorists are social-constructionists in their own respects, their works, and even this argument, assume an anti-foundational approach to understanding how knowledge is formed. The concept of anti-foundationlism will be explained in the subsequent section on rhetorical theory.

Rhetorical Theory

This study is relevant to the professional communication field because color is a major communicative and visual design element that affects how effectively a visual is received. Designers should be aware of the communicative value of all colors and not blindly rely on isolated perceptions or rules specifying what particular colors mean. While it is good to have some theories in place for guidance, designers should not strictly adhere to specific color rules for three particular reasons.

First, no two people will interpret a single color in exactly the same way. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, renowned theorist Kenneth Burke calls this difference of perception a man-made symbol system called "terministic screens", which, figuratively speaking, means that people use their life influences and experiences as filters to sift through information to determine how they understand reality and make

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subsequent observations. Similar to how a sifter is used, terministic screens both allow, or select, some aspects of reality while denying, or deflecting, others. The information that is permitted is what shapes a person's perspective, and that which is not, is outside of what he knows. The challenge with terministic screens is the very same thing that makes them an advantage: there are as many terministic screens as there are people. Designers who reduce the rhetorical value of using color down to simply selecting color from a checklist of rules isolate some members of their audience, and in some cases, render their projects or messages ineffective. Hence, the concept of neutrality is a type of terministic screen.

Secondly, adhering to a set of rules to apply to any and every situation could potentially commit professional sabotage for a designer. Specifically, where designers are able to distinguish themselves from novice D.I.Y.[1] sellers is in their ability to use proper judgment in balancing the rules of color theory with other socially-influenced factors pertaining to color. Designers who subscribe to following real estate color rules risk losing their jobs to sellers who are content with leaving their homes as they are presently or aimlessly pick a "catchy" color from a design beginner's book to simply get the job done. English professor Patricia Bizzell writes about these two extremes in her article, *Foundationalism and Anti-Foundationalism in Composition.* She defines foundationalism as the belief that "an absolute standard for the judgment of truth can be found, and that employment for this standard in evaluation of knowledge enables the individual mind to transcend personal emotions, social circumstances, and larger historical conditions, and to reflect critically on them" (39). Anti-foundationalism is the belief that this 'absolute standard' can never be obtained because the human mind is incapable of rising above "personal emotions, social circumstances, and historical conditions" (39).

Figure 1: Continuum of Bizzell's Anti-Foundationalism/Foundationalism distinction

Anti-Foundationalism   Foundationalism

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[1] An acronym meaning "do it yourself". Recently, this term has been used extensively in the design industry as those people who are not necessarily skilled in design, but assume projects themselves.

Essentially, Bizzell contends that every attempt to avoid foundationalism with anti-foundational discourse ultimately defaults back to foundationalism. She states that anti-foundationalism makes a good argument against its opposite, but offers no solid solutions. This admission, however, does not advocate following a foundationalist perspective. Similarly, if a designer wants to distinguish herself as someone who 'thinks outside the box', but also 'works within it', it would serve her well to be familiar with Bizzell's contrast of the two concepts.

Lastly, designers who need to make a case for the usefulness of their careers should be well versed in Charlotte Thralls' and Nancy Roundy Blyler's explanation of the social perspective. With this understanding about how knowledge is formed, designers could posit that the knowledge of what is 'right' in terms of design style is not necessarily found in instructional books on how to design a house to sell. On the contrary, they as members of the design discourse community rely on collaboration and interaction with others within that community to create knowledge. In essence, what is considered 'true' is based on a community consensus. Someone outside of that community would not have access to that knowledge; hence, establishing the value of hiring a designer. The social perspective, as termed by theorist Lester Faigley, "examines 'how individual acts of communication define, organize, and maintain social groups' and that writing 'can be understood only from the perspective of a society rather than a single individual'" (Thralls 4).

Blyler and Thralls' article describes three theoretical approaches within the social perspective: the social constructionist, the ideologic, and the paralogic hermeneutic. Of the three approaches, they state that the social constructionist perspective is the most widely used in professional communication. Unlike the other two approaches which focus respectively on power and the actual interaction itself, social constructionists use their shared beliefs and values to come to a consensus about knowledge (9). Designers who adopt the social constructionist ideals not only gain acceptance and support from their community, but these designers remain informed on newly formed knowledge and may stand a better chance of not losing clients to how-to design books.

Aristotle

The sheer notion that color has various meanings to many people signifies that it is rhetorical, and its use cannot be a mere black-and-white arbitrary choice of what is right or wrong. According to Aristotle, rhetoric does not belong to a single subject matter. He defines it as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (Aristotle 181). Persuasion is a major factor in both rhetoric and real estate marketing because one of the main purposes in sales is to find the best way to persuade people to "buy in", or agree to the seller's objectives. Therefore, understanding rhetoric, Aristotle's rhetorical appeals[2] and the three types of rhetoric[3] can provide sound reasoning for designers when they make color choices in designing a house to sell.

Exploring the rhetorical appeals are vital because if the ethical, logical, and emotional appeal of color is ignored, then the intended audience may ignore or misinterpret a message, which can result in the loss of revenue for real estate businesses and design firms while also preventing homeowners from selling their houses. Likewise, understanding the types of rhetoric are useful in helping the designer make an informed decision about what elements from the past or present condition of the house the designer wants to highlight or hide with color in order to affect future events - which hopefully entails the sale of the property.

Aristotle's view on the role of rhetoric is crucial to the understanding of how communication theory is studied today. The basis of audience analysis lies in Aristotle's definition of the strategies of argument that can be used in the three types of rhetoric:

- Forensic: advises about future events

- Deliberative: prosecutes/defends based on past events

- Epideictic: presents praise/blame; may remind of past or predict future

A good rhetorician knows how to relate a technical subject matter to a non-expert audience.

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[2] ethos, pathos, and logos
[3] deliberative, judicial, and demonstrative

Furthermore, Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals represent the artistic means of persuasion presently used. These appeals are

- Ethos: appeal to character

- Logos: appeal to logic or reason

- Pathos: appeal to emotion

In addition to factoring in audience analysis and the means of persuasion, a professional communicator should be able to identify the rhetorical situation. Likewise, Aristotle's communication model (reader, writer, and text) shows the inseparable relationship between each part of this rhetorical triangle. This model can be applied to analyzing this topic as well. For instance, instead of using the terms reader, writer, and text, this thesis can supplant the terms with buyers, designer, and color. This similar structure better shows the relationship between the three elements.

Figure 2: Aristotle's Rhetorical Triangle

Reader   Text

Writer
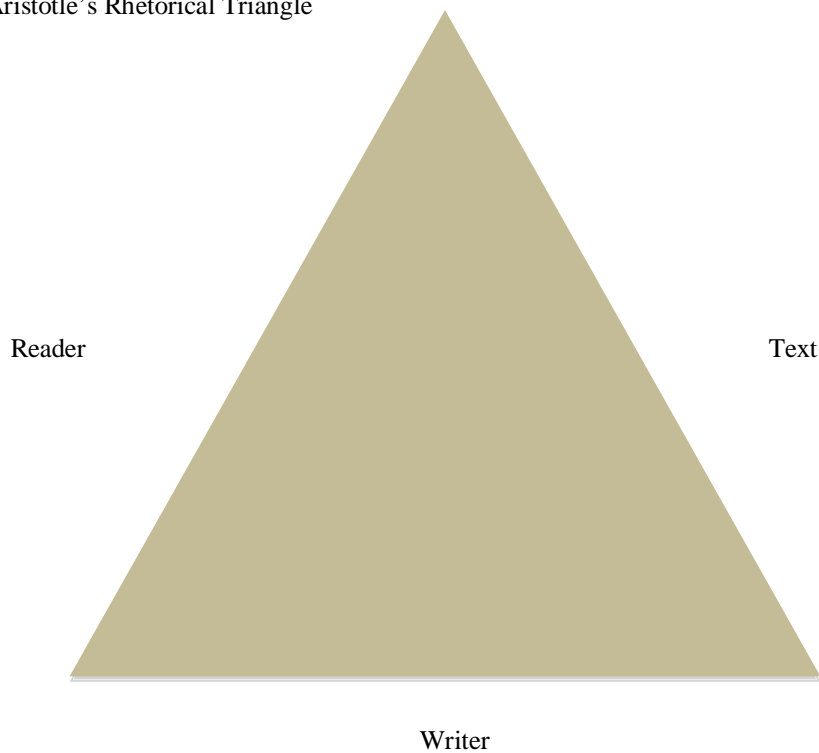
Lloyd Bitzer

According to Lloyd Bitzer, "rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action" (Bitzer 3). He believes that a work of rhetoric is "pragmatic" and that it "comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce action or change in the world" (3). In turn, a rhetorical situation is "a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence" (6). Like Aristotle's model, it too, is marked by three elements: an audience, an exigence, and constraints. However, Bitzer's model is concerned more with what causes a rhetorical situation to exist.

A rhetorical audience "consists of only those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change" (7). An exigence is an "imperfection marked by urgency; a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done". It is rhetorical when an exigence is capable of positive change. The third part of a rhetorical situation involves the constraints, which to Aristotle, are artistic and inartistic proofs. In a rhetorical situation, constraints include evidences, possible arguments, audience beliefs, or anything the rhetor must take into account that could limit his or her argument. For Bitzer, rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question. Bitzer's rhetorical situation model is a good method of examining how the designer as the rhetor conveys both the values of neutrality and how she interprets this concept as well.

Figure 3: Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation

Audience

Exigence

Constraints
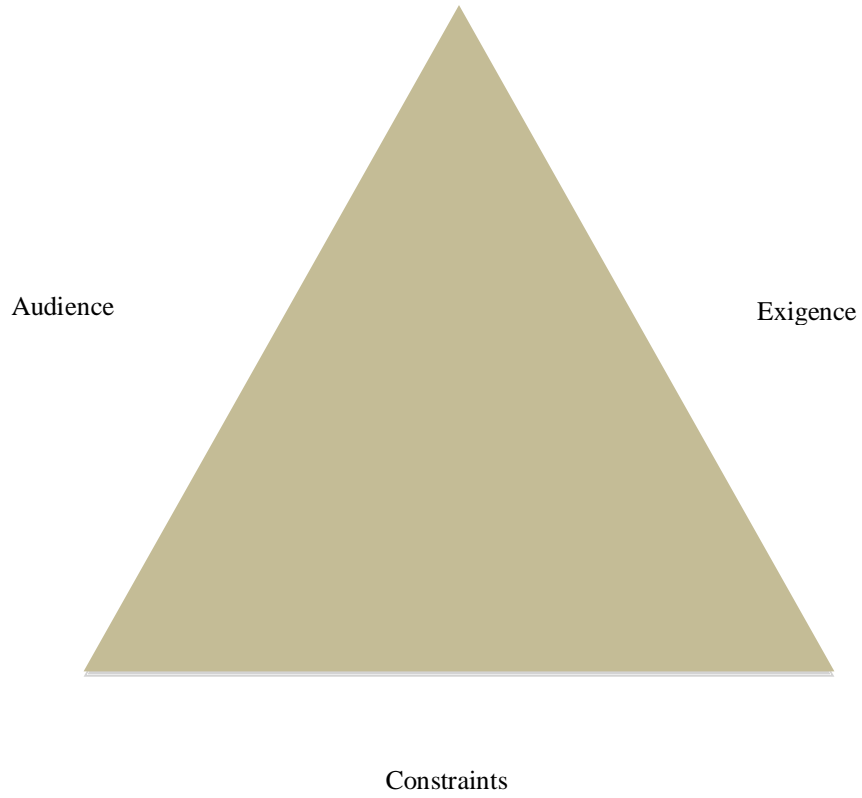
Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts

In *Rhetorical Background*, Charles Kostelnick and David Roberts present audience as one-third of their rhetorical situation: audience, purpose, and context. Kostelnick and Roberts advocate the application of the rhetorical situation to visual design. Like successful writing, successful design communication must be constructed to suit the needs of the audience, enable the message to achieve its purpose, and be appropriate for the context in which the audience uses it.

Figure 4: Kostelnick and Roberts' Rhetorical Situation

Audience   Context

Purpose
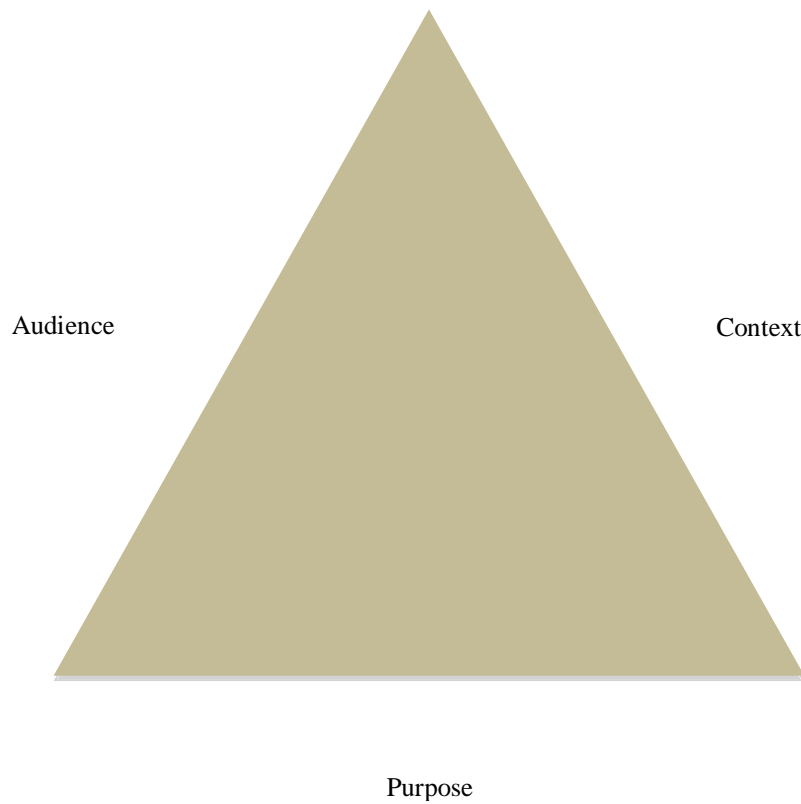
All three rhetorical triangle diagrams have a unique way of identifying elements of each rhetorical situation and explaining how they function. However, besides the title, the unifying factor across all three models is the audience. Without an audience to receive and react to the message produced from a situation, the message is rendered useless and no communication occurs. Analyzing the audience, finding alternatives, and weighing the options are the most ethical and effective ways of proceeding with any of these three situational models.

In regards to color communication in real estate design, foundationalist designers consider neutral colors simply as "quick fix" answers to sell a house and avoid this issue of ethics altogether. However, in their haste to use a neutral color as the nail to fix the problem, many designers and color theorists ignore the ethical ramifications and rhetorical value of neutrality in the process, citing that neutral colors are meaningless. Even worse, some do not hold themselves liable if the audience reacts negatively toward the colors used in the design. Instead, they turn the other cheek and write it off as merely a difference of opinion.

This thesis acknowledges the existence of color neutrality, but considers this "neutrality" as one that is both socially formed and rhetorical. The concept of neutrality

- is socially-constructed

- is rhetorical

- has communicative meaning

- sells houses

- entails and requires responsibility

To prove these points and answer the three research questions, this thesis will focus on Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation, using the aforementioned theories as support, to argue that neutrality is a rhetorical, social construction. Moreover, if it is used effectively, its use can accomplish several goals in this rhetorical situation. If the designer understands the concept of neutrality, the buyers can

- feel comfortable in a space

- notice the amenities of a house

- see themselves possibly living at the featured house

- consider buying the house

- make an offer on the property

The results of this thesis analysis will confirm that color use in real estate design is neither a means to an end nor a simple choice of "real estate beige". This analysis will serve as a guide for designers by providing more insight into why the concept of neutrality is an effective design element in real estate marketing. At the conclusion of this analysis, real estate designers, or stagers, working within this field should not only think about color beyond the conventional color theories, but to also make an argument for the usefulness of their careers as valued professional communicators and not expendable creative maids.

After discussing prior research on the topic, the thesis will cover each part of Bitzer's rhetorical situation to show the relation between rhetoric and neutrality. Also, it identifies the process of trying to market and sell a house as a rhetorical situation. After the literature review and methodology sections in chapters two and three, chapter four will relate neutrality to audience, chapter five will relate neutrality to exigence, and chapter six will relate neutrality to constraints. Lastly, chapter seven will reveal the concept of neutrality as visual rhetoric that utilizes the rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos. Collectively, these chapters will build the case of neutrality as an ever-evolving rhetorical social construction that is formed by historical, cultural, and social contexts. In turn, it will subsequently identify the values of neutrality by analyzing according to the rhetor's character, logical reasoning, and emotional appeal.

2. Literature Review

Color is a highly subjective and power means of communicating ideas. No two people translate color in exactly the same way, and they use it for many different purposes to express distinctive meanings. This difference alone signifies that it is a social-construct and not a universally held design "truth". A review of literature from the study of color meaning, perception, and bodily interaction shows that most of the studies either 1) focus solely on how the scientific community understands color or 2) admit that color perception is based on various factors, but do not outwardly say that all colors are rhetorical. Furthermore, when describing "neutral" colors, the commentary about color meaning falls short. As a matter of fact, most of the comments abandon the anti-foundational stance taken on all other colors and rely on conventional meanings specifying what colors in particular are considered neutral.

Color Combinations

The use of color is not just a means of enhancing aesthetic appeal; it is an essential, rhetorical, communicative part of real estate marketing design strategy. Bride M. Whelan (1994) confirms this notion in his description of how to set guidelines on color combinations. According to Whelan, specific emotional messages can be directly tied to 106 color choices and 1,400 color schemes and combinations. Using a twelve-segment color wheel as a foundation, Whelan describes how color combinations from numerous hues, tints, and shades elicit specific messages and feelings from the viewer. Stephen Quiller defines neutralizing a color as "dulling the purity of a full-intensity color" (Quiller 42). He specifies four ways to neutralize a color: "(a) by adding black, (b) by adding gray, (c) by adding white, and (d) by adding the complement" (42). David Dabner speaks specifically to determining how to choose the appropriate combination of colors to communicate in a stylish, original, and effective manner. It also details "ground rules" about color and how to use it in various categories and projects; however, Dabner extends this research a bit further: he addresses how color affects legibility. Kenneth Fehrman and Cherie Fehrman would probably answer Dabner's theory by arguing that color is merely an illusion and the environment only appears to be colored. Fehrman and Fehrman agree with Dabner and Whelan on topics such as the

color wheel, color mixing, and psychology. Yet, they introduce myths and biases about color, color order systems, color in culture and society, and color in advertising and marketing. Collectively, these sources cover a wide range of topics related to ways in which color grouping evokes specific moods, characteristics, legibility, settings, or status. However, they either only explain neutrality from a scientific standpoint or not at all.

Color Naming

The history of color in design parallels the sociological and political climate of the times and is widely used for personal and environmental decoration. J. B. Hutchings' *Color in Anthropology and Folklore* outlines archaeological evidence concerning early human use of color and then considers color within the context of anthropology and folklore. Hutchings categorizes the meanings of color historically and culturally by describing it in terms of life's pressures, concerns, and enjoyment. This literature also focuses on how nature strongly influences how cultures interpret color. This study yields itself to supporting my argument of neutrality as a social construct.

In *Color In Interior Design and Architecture*, Robert Ladau, Brent K. Smith, and Jennifer Place define what neutral colors are and how they should function in design. They talk about color application and describe neutrality in terms of "soft colors" (Ladau 14). This source contends that basic cream neutrals echo soft pastels and should be used to break up otherwise big and bold space while also providing a "sense of movement through it by means of rhythmic color progressions" (14). They also contend that environments with a profusion of materials need subtle colors in order to make the items look attractive and organized. This source begins to address my argument of how neutral colors are not silent, passive colors. Instead, they serve as a roadmap of sorts that guide the potential buyer's decision about a property. H. Lin, M. R. Luo, L. W. MacDonald, and A. W. S. Tarrant's article, *A Cross-Cultural Colour-Naming Study. Part: I: Using an Unconstructed Method*, describes color differences and report on how color naming and identification conventions are related to cultural uses of color.

Color Psychology

Generally speaking, many people contend that the psychological perception of color is just as important as the cultural and religious definitions. In their *Graphic Designer's Color Handbook*, Rick Sutherland and Barb Karg define color in terms of meaning, symbolism, and values. They contend that color selection is possibly a combination of random, conscious, or subconscious choices and argue that color can be ritualistic, spiritual, superstitious, and emotional. Undoubtedly, color psychology has a major impact on a number of physical reactions and bodily functions such as mood, appetite, and energy level. Years of color response research have shown that certain colors elicit specific, and often strong, responses. Margaret Livingstone explores color as it applies to luminance. Her research delves into how the brain processes the physics of light to information course. Livingstone's article gets closer to examining the why and how of my research. Margaret Livingstone explores color as it applies to luminance. My study will continue where hers stopped when I relate these ideas to color selection for homes on the market.

The role of color and certain color combinations have long been associated with particular meanings. Margo Berman's book, *Street Smart Advertising*, provides advice about various subjects such as using marketing strategies and visual treatments. This source specifically includes an entire chapter dedicated to color entitled, "Explore the Power of Color Psychology," which addresses the impact of color use across the globe and introduces the notion of "vibrating, problematic" colors. This book broadly covers color design as it pertains to advertising and visual perception, but does not expound on how color enforces the message and does not address neutrality.

Physical Perception

Robert Crone's *A History of Color* discusses the evolution of theories of light and color. This book is an intensive collection of theoretical principles, scientific knowledge, and historical records pertaining to the progress in color knowledge. This source relates classic color theories to modern color physiology and presents difficult information in a way that is somewhat easier to understand. *Color Space and Its Divisions* by Rolf G. Kuehni is an account of the history and modern applications of color order and color difference. This book also addresses the fundamentals of psychophysics, the relationship between stimuli and

experience, the results of perceptual scaling of colors according to attributes, and an analysis of agreements and discrepancies in psychophysical data describing color differences.

Frans Gerritsen's *Theory and Practice of Color* analyzes color theory based on the laws of perception. This book addresses the phenomenon of light and color, the process of seeing: light, object, eye, brain, consciousness; the measurement of light sensitivity to the eye, and the part of the eye's color sensitivities play in the formation of a given color. This book focuses more on how the human body responds to color while other references have focused more on the colors themselves. In Stephen Quiller's *Color Choices: Making Color Sense Out of Color Theory*, he provides useful visual explanations of what Crone, Kuehni, and Gerritsen discuss in their books.

A good example of the theory behind these writers' work is Quiller's explanation of black and white. Quiller identifies black, for instance, as the absence of color and absorbs light rather than reflecting light as all other colors do (Quiller 30). He labels it as a subtractive color that is the "most controversial color in painting": "(it) seems dead because black takes away form the pure color, absorbing it as well as the light" (30). On the other hand, a black background can also emphasize a color and surrounding a colored shape will make the shape seem lighter, brighter, and larger than it really is" (30). In contrast to black, white, which is the presence of all color and reflects light, makes a featured color appear darker, duller, and smaller. Also, adding white to a color lightens and neutralizes the color (31). The following example was used to show the effect color has on the human eye and how it is possible to understand how color meaning is a precarious topic that can easily be interpreted differently.

Quiller's take, while very foundational in content, is socially-constructed by nature itself. Although each person provides an interesting way of understanding color, not one of their books differs very much from that of other colleagues within that discourse community. This observation alone speaks against the notion of complete objectivity and neutrality.

Figure 5: Figure-Ground Contrast[4]
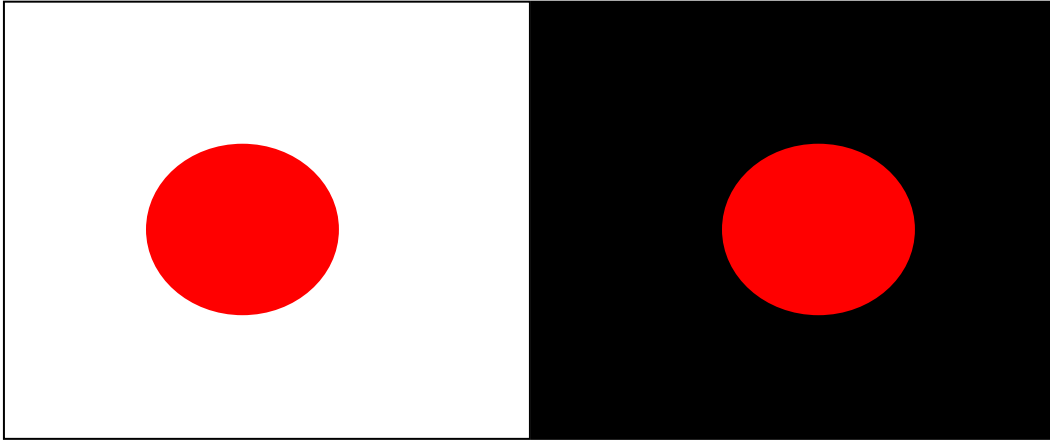
Color and Nature

  To others, neutral colors are those found in nature. Natural colors are non-offensive and seen as

neutral because they are not man made; nature can have many different appearances, but in general, refer to

the wildlife or outdoors environment. To many people, "natural, neutral" colors are various shades of

brown, green, and blue. Green, for instance, is currently a color that is directly associated with eco-

friendliness. As a matter of fact, the popular saying, "go green", is indicative of not only the push for

environmental awareness, but it is also a political statement, symbol of responsibility, and associated

recycling efforts.

  These colors are deemed "safe" to many designers and patrons alike because natural colors are

seen as pure, non-offensive, and something that all people know well. Ironically, colors that people usually

assume to be "impure" or "loud" man made hues such as purple, pink, and teal are found in flowers, animal

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[4]Gestalt "form" principle for visual design. Kostelnick and Roberts discuss figure-ground contrast as what
stands in front and what stands in the back. This concept focuses on contrast and arrangement.

camouflage, rainbows, and other natural elements (see Picture 1). So the questions now are: Are these colors neutral colors because they exist in nature? Moreover, since these colors are found in nature, why aren't they considered suitable for use in marketing a house? If the correlation here identifies neutral as referring to nature, then neon pink can arguably be as much of a "neutral" color as beige currently is labeled. However, society considers these colors highly expressive, regardless if they are found in nature.

Thralls and Blyler discuss how knowledge is formed based on consensus. As just explained, many colors are found in nature, and could arguably be considered as neutral; but ultimately, the decision rests in whether or not members of the community agree. Neon pink could potentially exist as a neutral color if it appropriately fit within the historical, cultural, and social contexts from which the discourse community would come to a consensus. If the meaning of that color is considered too strong, the community will not grant that color neutrality.

It is important to recognize that neutral colors are not void of meaning; instead, how they are understood is socially built based on various societal contexts. "Neutral" colors are social constructs and cannot be truly and completely neutral. Colors, in general, are blends of each other and neutral colors are no exception: they all have an intrinsic value, whether culturally, physically, psychologically, or otherwise specified.

Picture 1: "Loud" colors found in nature
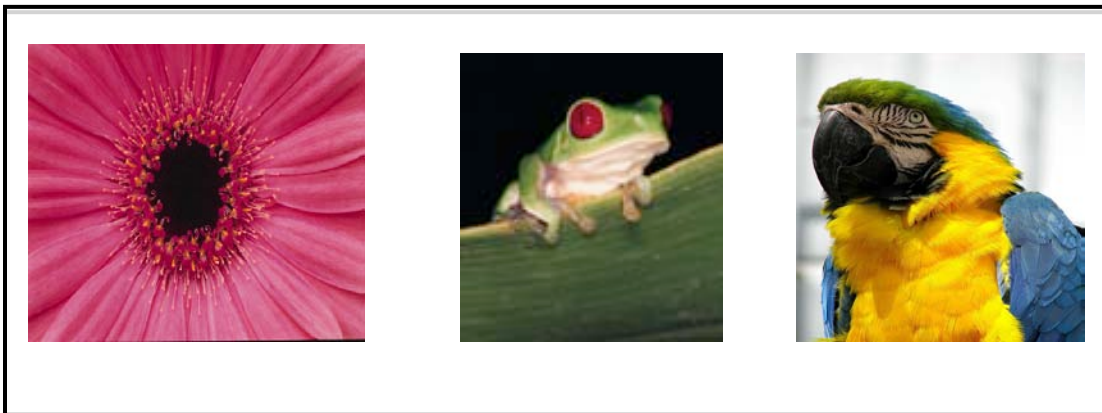
Cultural Perception

Youngsoon Park and Denise A. Guerin's article, *Meaning and Preference of Interior Color Palettes Among Four Cultures*, documents a study the writers conducted on people in Korea, Japan, England, and the United States and their partiality to certain room colors. The findings of their study supported their hypotheses: the color palettes varied in meaning among subjects, Eastern and Western cultures vary in what they believe color palettes mean, and color palette preference is significantly different across cultures. This study is a great complement to this analysis; however, it neither speaks specifically about the rhetorical value of color nor how the room colors can determine whether participants would pass over real estate based on the colors employed in that study.

J. B. Hutchings' *Color in Anthropology and Folklore* outlines archaeological evidence concerning early human use of color, and then considers color within the context of anthropology and folklore. Hutchings categorizes the meanings of color historically and culturally by describing it in terms of life's pressures, concerns, and enjoyment. This literature also focuses on how nature strongly influences how cultures interpret color. This study yields itself to supporting my argument of neutrality as a social construct.

Robert Ladau, Brent K. Smith, and Jennifer Place's book, *Color in Interior Design and Architecture*, goes more in depth about how color is reflective of culture. For instance, when thinking about ancient and present day oriental cultures, one may easily conjure up thoughts of rich treatments of red and gold (Ladau 90). In China, red is seen as a color of happiness (6), and gold, which is recognizable in most cultures, denotes wealth. In instances as such, people associate meaning with colors and easily "remember" the historic context without actually recreating the scene. Further proof of this statement is in the pejorative saying "red China", which has implications of Fascism, Communism, and bloodshed in that country. Such information could be vital in determining what colors are neutral and what to use in real estate design.

Robert Finlay's *Weaving the Rainbow: Visions of Color in World History* focuses on color vision and values as they pertain to natural and human history. It examines positive and negative attitudes toward color in leading cultures of Europe and Asia. Finlay details how people in early Eurasian society perceived and evaluated color. Moreover, this detail shows how some countries maintain some traditions as cultural

constants.

Color use in culture can also provide a sense of identity or belonging for some people. For instance, individually, the colors red, white, and blue have their own set of qualities. However, when used together, they comprise the colors of national flags such as those of the United States and Puerto Rico. The same could be said of a house that is painted pink and green. For some people, these two colors can stir feelings of nausea or thoughts of preppy, snobbish rich children; for a particular group within a culture, such as a sorority that uses these colors, they may be seen as inspiring and beautiful. Cultural influence and the various terministic screens that are associated from that factor alone is one of the main reasons why "neutral" colors are not the idle, innocuous colors void of meaning. Rather, all colors hold some symbolic value and are deeply intertwined in various cultures and livelihoods across the globe.

Color and Religion

Color is deeply entrenched in religion as well. Historically, color has been given religious symbolic meaning. For instance, in the Christian belief, followers see red as symbolic of the love shown and blood Jesus Christ shed for the salvation of mankind's sins (*King James Bible* Rev. 1:5). On the other hand, Christians also view red as representations of the devil, lustfulness, and other sins (Ladau 69). White, which is symbolic to Christians and Muslims of purity, innocence, and cleanliness, stands for mourning and sadness in other faiths and places such as in China.

Religious-based holidays are also identifiable by the colors used. For instance, generally, red and green are two colors typically associated with the Christmas season while pastel tones of pink, green, yellow, purple, and blue decorate the Easter holiday. For adults, Easter, which is the Christian observation of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, usually conjures up thoughts of white, red, and purple, which are each listed as follows:

- white: representative of his innocence as the 'sacrificial lamb' who paid mankind's debt for sin or the garb allegedly worn by Jesus during his crucifixion
- red: the blood Jesus shed during the process of being crucified

- purple: represents his royalty as the risen Son of God

However, pagan influences such as the celebration of spring as the season of rebirth began to intertwine with the Christian Easter celebration. Along with this celebration came the glamorization of fictional characters such as the Easter bunny and the annual hiding of eggs brightly painted in pastel colors for young children's enjoyment. Religious interpretations of color are obviously taught and proliferated among particular religious groups. However, age, gender, and even personality can play a role in determining how color is understood.

Personality

Color as an indicating factor of individual qualities such as personality, age, and gender is a notion steeped in cultural and social meaning. For example, someone might reference another person's demeanor as either "bright and cheerful" or "dark and dreary". Along the same lines, adolescents and teenagers tend to use color preferences as one criterion for personality compatibility and determining emotions. A prime example of this observation is the popularity of mood rings among grammar and middle school students. Although the rings change color based on the person's body temperature, and the correlation between the ring color and subsequent mood associated with each color on the accompanying legend are questionable, it interesting to see how a child's demeanor can change in an instant.

While children tend to put more emphasis on the relationship between color and personalities, adults tend to associate color with more with what is aesthetically pleasing to them. For instance, when deciding on colors to use for selling a home, designers should consider that people who are looking to move into a new home tend to be excited about starting a new phase in their lives; hence, colors associated with spring, such as lighter tones of yellow, blue, or green, are usually considered more favorably because the softer versions of the colors are symbolic of cheerfulness (Butcher 18). Kate Butcher, whose book, *Country Color Combinations*, entails setting a particular mood in a space, states that color has enormous applicability because a person's eye will inevitably be drawn to brighter colors. While this ideology is useful in trying to market a house, societal trends must also be considered.

Color can even have a more specific social connection for classifying age groups. For example, elderly people are often thought to be in their autumn or winter years while children are generally considered to be in the springtime of their lives. This correlation is even echoed with the visual elements of a new year being compared to a baby and the end of a year to an extremely aged person.

Color can also indicate sex. Roberto J. Rengel writes about how color brings with it "associations of temperature, weight, and gender" (Rengel 342). For instance, in Western culture, brown indicates masculinity and pink femininity (342). Many more people identify pink as a girlish color while blue is for boys. He continues by saying that using color successfully requires

> sensitivity and appropriate response to existing conditions, knowledge about colors and their behavior, some intuition, and the ability to balance colors harmoniously. With color, what is appropriate in one case is not appropriate in another. It is one of the aspects of design requiring proper congruence between the personality of a project and the choices made (343).

Rengel's argument about color lends itself to this argument about neutrality in that it is determined by society's agreement on that which is appropriate for a particular moment. Popular online social networks such as Facebook and MySpace enable their users to break traditional color norms and stereotypes by personalizing their individual pages with color (see Picture 2).

Picture 2: Facebook sign-on screen
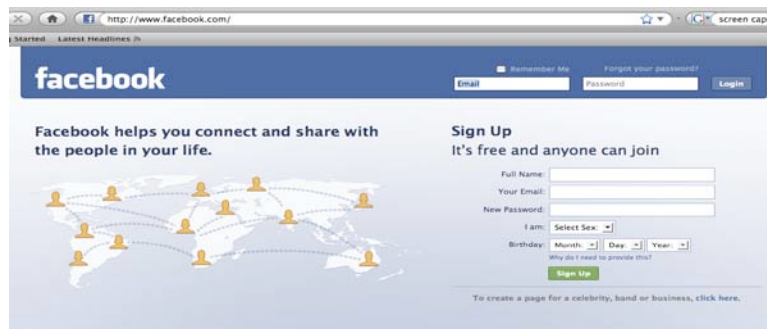
Giving users the opportunity to "paint", or decorate, their pages however they like not only makes the pages more interesting to the users, but also persuades them to see the pages as their own: in Bitzer's terms, it persuades them to do something, or "effect change". In essence, the creators of these social networks continually create ways that challenge their old designs, and as evident in their constant updates, keep audience analysis and usability at the forefront of their marketing and design efforts. Catering to their users' needs in these ways also manipulate the users to subconsciously commit to frequenting the sites. The users see visiting Facebook or MySpace as a way of keeping up with friends and maintaining the design of the page; the networking staff sees the users' updating of the sites as means to increase webpage visitation - which are the companies' overall purposes for even having the sites in the first place.

Facebook and MySpace both use blue and white 'welcome' or splash screens. Color theory suggests that blue visually translates as a cool recessive color and white as one indicating nothing. So essentially, these two colors, which assumedly are labeled as "recessive" or "blank", visually communicate to users that they can fill in the blank page with their style and make it their own. The use of these colors is persuasive because they enforce the message and purpose of the websites as ones that wants people to establish accounts and personalize pages. As a comparison, these sites mimic the same concept and use of color in the Nationwide Car Insurance picture frame logo. The slogan message that accompanies the picture frame logo, "Are you in the picture?", is reinforced by the "welcoming" cool combination of blue and white, colors which are also used on the generic Windows Operating System welcome page or on the login pages of most personal computers. The use of color in these examples appears objective, but is neither coincidental nor completely objective by any means. This thesis seeks to remove the unassuming unbiased façade of neutral.

Design Marketing

Roy Nelson's *The Design of Advertising* is geared toward presenting the creative side of advertising, focusing mainly on design aspects. Throughout the book, color use is mentioned in terms of printing and production to selection and symbolism. Although the information in this book is significantly dated, it is useful to this thesis because it provides a historical snapshot about how ideas on color have

either remained or changed up until that point in time.

Made in the Shade by Eric Konigsberg discusses the successful career of color consultant, Leslie Harrington. He writes about how Harrington sets the identify of a color based on the results from audience participants' opinion surveys that specify particular associations about items they are familiar with and the certain colors presented. For instance, one survey mentions the blue Viagra pill and how Harrington used a research firm to survey a several thousand people in twelve countries about their interpretation of twenty-seven different pill colors. Of these results, no two were the same. The results coincide with the concept of terministic screens. Her decision to conduct research about the various interpretations of color indicates that she recognizes color as highly communicative. In essence, her utilization of the Thralls and Blyler's social constructionist perspective in her audience analysis techniques enable Harrington to better learn what her audience wants by researching the way people respond to various palettes. The results of Harrington's study identify audience analysis as a good place to begin when determining how to utilize color for particular situations. Moreover, it supports the argument of color as a social construction and echoes Burke's notion about terministic screens, which shows meaning varies from person to person.

Jill Lambert's article, *Colour Schemers*, is about the Color Marketing Group (CMG), which is an influential international forecaster of color trends and one of the biggest in North America. Lambert uses this article to prove the impact that color can have on its audience. This source shows that if trendsetters query the use of color before selecting it as the 'next big thing', then professional communicators certainly need to be aware of its rhetorical influence.

Robin Williams' *The Non-Designer's Design Book* is a useful reference for this study because it discusses the use of color as it appears on paper, on the internet, or in some form of display. Williams' segment on color states that even black can be used persuasively in design. This source relates to this topic because color is rhetorical: even "neutral" colors. A large part of what the marketing field does is presenting and selling information or products to the public; therefore, it is important to identify how the color will be used so that it will communicate an appropriate message given the particular rhetorical situation.

Suzanne Topping's article excerpt, "Using colors to create high impact business presentations",

speaks specifically about stimulating an audience to action. Topping writes about using specific colors to inspire people to feel a certain way or do something. While Topping is correct in stating that color can move people to act, parts of her article resonate arbitrary marketing design decisions of "choosing color because it [just] fits". This poor judgment is what this thesis argues against: following foundational rules "just because" without assessing the rhetorical situation. People with professional jobs, such as those in business marketing or home design, need to realize that it is not their titles that make them professionals: it is the process of making informed, ethical decisions that sets them apart from machines. Without taking responsibility for one's work and making good, informed decisions, professionalism, which is essential in communication, falls out of the picture.

Authors Ashley Christofferson-Cunningham and David Cathey state in *Marketing and Selling to Generation X: A Unique Generation of Home Buyers* that, "Visual features are what makes potential buyers "ooh" and "ahh," however, often what you can't see is more important than what you can see" (Christofferson-Cunningham 35). This statement directly reflects what Kenneth Burke and Ben Barton and Marthalee Barton describe about how knowledge shaped and information presented are results of rejected ideas. Yet, the authors also urge real estate agents to stop thinking like builders and to avoid the safe "real estate beige" - which is a very foundational stance on the subject.

Choosing to ignore the rhetorical value of the color beige in the context of selling a home simply because two people consider it "safe" seems too risky if the goal is to sell quickly to buyers from an expansive, diverse audience. Designers can look at their argument from two perspectives: either 1) they consider the rhetorical situation of using beige as well as other colors or 2) they follow the authors' advice because it seems logical and innovative. The first choice would be the most advisable when deciding to market a house because neutrality is a socially-constructed concept: it does not mean beige necessarily, but should not exclude it without assessing the rhetorical situation and the context in which it is used. Contrary to the authors' stance, even beige can be multi-faceted and has an undeniable persuasive influence in home real estate design.

20th Century Aesthetics

        Understanding how color has been used in past design is necessary preparation for understanding newer trends in various settings. A good way to understand how modern colors gain popularity as well as track the progression of what is considered neutral is to look at the historical and societal evolution of color trends. Part of the intrigue of studying color is that it can recreate a historical setting without actually using historic materials. Moreover, color itself can serve to define a period during history and speak on the events of that time. In exploring the various trends and use of color over the twentieth century, it is interesting to see how certain colors in their trendiness become neutral, or acceptable, due to popularity during one time period, but later, obsolete in others. Furthermore, looking at the variety of colors used over an expansive time frame can encourage assigning color associations and stereotypes, which can either permanently identify or even maim an era.

The 1900s

The Victorian period room shown in Picture 3 can be identified by its use of deeply saturated red. Although this period style is typically recognizable by its use of dark red or hunter green, it is mainly distinguishable by heavy saturation of a particular color (Ladau 67). Without knowing very much about this time period, a person could look at this picture alone and associate the richness and intensity of these two colors with a time of royalty, prosperity, and tradition. However, the purpose of concentrating these colors was for more than just aesthetic appeal.

Specifically, cleanliness was not necessarily a value adopted by many during this time. Hence, the dark colors used could have been considered neutral because most people of this era probably had dirty houses, making it common knowledge to use dark paint to hide the filth. Using these colors in this manner can both speak to the conditions of the time and incite speculation about the importance of sanitation then. This situation goes against foundational color theories dictating that red is an innately offensive color. In this particular instance, it and other dark colors served specific functional uses.

Picture 3: Red Victorian parlor

The 1950s

Several decades later, the 1950s challenged the status quo by establishing itself as a time of modernism and used understated colors such as salmon pink, chartreuse, yellow, and brown to express this change visually (Abercrombie 115). The average United States' citizen began to recover from the Great Depression era and the expansion of industrialization aided in America's economical and emotional rebound. The bright colors typically used in homes during this time mimicked the colors associated with spring and were indicative of the country's sense of renewal: white with splashes of bright colors intermixed. This era was also famous for black and white checkered floors, bright red and sunshine yellow vinyl, and the use of chrome to reflect and enhance light (see Picture 4). Both poignant expressive colors like red and softer colors like pale green were popular during this time. This drastic use of color makes it difficult to determine what was considered neutral then. Perhaps the exploratory nature of the times was reflective in the colors: everything was within reason.

Picture 4: "Happy Days" inspired room

The 1960s

The 1960s brought with it a time when the United States' culture reached a climax socially, politically, and economically. This decade embraced the concept of home ownership, space exploration, and questioning the wisdom and authority of institutions. During this time, the nation was also in an upheaval as racial and gender tensions reached a boiling point and calls for equality were ever present. Concurrently, bright colors dominated the landscape as calls for "flower power" and anti-war messages were embraced across the country (Ladau 68). Once again, the bright array of bold colors prevalent during this time are indicative of the change in American livelihood from one of homogeneity to a melting pot of cultures, races, philosophies, and religions. This era, like the ones that immediately proceed and follow it, is one that is known as a time of challenging the status quo. Consequently, this revolutionary spirit became the norm of that time, much like the proliferation of the fluorescent, strong colors popular then.

Picture 5: Visually stimulating "flower power" design

The 1970s

The "psychedelic style" of the late 1960s and into the 1970s continued this sense of experimentation, rebellion, and self-expression from years past. The brown, orange, and green (Abercrombie 115) hues of that time echoed many people's desire to reconnect with the earth for more reasons than just spirituality and natural preservation. Heavy drug use and frivolous sexual activity was prominent during this time of societal change. The bright mixture of colors, usually presented in some patterned formation, not only mirrored the cultural chaos of that time, but also imitated the experience of what a person intoxicated with drugs could have seen. Other trends marking this era were the replacement of colorful, personalized wallpaper with dark wood paneling and the installation of brown and rust colored shag carpeting over linoleum or tile floors. Ladau et al. claim that the use of color and material reflected society's disenfranchisement with the government, "economic and energy strife, and the maturing of the industrial culture" (68). This same notion could then suggest why the sensation of the dizzying and/or mellow colors reverberate the public youths' cries for world peace. Perhaps these colors gave this group rest and a sense of comfort, which if accepted by that group, made the arrangement of these colors neutral. This trend would not last long, however.

Picture 6: The psychedelic décor elements are symbolic of the times

The 1980s

The 1980s was a period that can be understood as an "electric" time. Specifically, the neon colors popular throughout the 1980s embodied that decade known to some as the "yuppie years". The bold colors used, which were likened to a box of highlighter markers, were indicative of this wild, unrestrained time of loud parties, MTV (Music Television channel), flashy makeup, big hair metal bands, stonewashed ripped jeans, and electronic synthesizers. The bold, bright color combinations popular during this time, like pink and black polka dots, reflected the excitement engrained in the music, fashion, and art.

The 1980s was a very eventful decade. In as much as it was exciting, it was plagued with tragedy, which included the space shuttle Challenger disaster, mass hysteria resulting from public awareness of infectious venereal diseases, and global dissention among countries. As a result, the events that occurred during this decade would serve as the impetus for change in the following years, both in terms of society and social opinion about color.

Picture 7: Collage of young adults' rooms typical of the 1980s era

The 1990s

   With news of 1980's tragedies, the 1990s emerged as a very socially conscious and cautious era. During this time, people began to see an increase in public service announcements about drug use and sexually transmitted diseases, advancements in technology, and a greater emphasis placed on education, energy conservation, and health care. Yet, news about prominent, revered societal figures committing crimes or acting in poor judgment, such as famous athletes, Hollywood stars, even the president, became common occurrences and public knowledge during this period.

   In contrast to the "innocent" times of years gone by, some people appeared to grow weary of the negativity in the world and the seemingly declining sense of morality. This sense of fatigue and caution transferred to the muted, monochromatic colors popular during this era. In the 1990s, colors were paired to contrast against each other, like black and white, which were popular colors for leather couches. Also tropical, pattered prints were popular in design as some of the prominent shows on television like Miami Vice were based in these areas. This fad was possibly reflective of the increased concern for earth awareness and conservation in light of global warming advisories.

Picture 8: 1990s monochromatic inspired room with leather furniture

The 2000s

The colors of the 2000s could arguably be defined as "neutral" due to the need to avoid marginalizing any of the many groups present in American culture. Although their stance on many issues is not neutral or indecisive by any means, it is even possible that the Republican control in government during the majority of this decade had some influence on why words like "traditional" or "safe" began to be associated with the concept of neutrality. For instance, Republicans are typically viewed as conventionalists who advocate "classic American values" such as heterosexual marriage. Visually speaking, since Republicans generally do not support the homosexual community, which is represented by the six-banded, rainbow-colored pride flag, it could be interpreted that any color not found within it, like brown, black, white, or gray, is "traditional or safe". However, this implication is just one potential analysis.

On another note, the 2000s have also been both a time of self-expression spurred by social and political movements as well as unification efforts to ease the cultural, ethnic, and racial tensions in post-September 11th America. It is possible that neutral colors serve ideological purposes of taming the unruliness of self-expression; yet, it could also signify bipartisanship. Using neutral colors to control what is said could be compared to Thralls and Blyler's ideologic social perspective, which contends consensus is an instrument of knowledge building based on exerting power and excluding some information.

Picture 9: Conventional expression of neutrality during the 2000s

As evident in the literature review, public views on color change because of a number of factors, including time, trends, and culture. Although people constantly make associations and rules governing color, its meaning is not something that is innately and universally understood. The concept of neutrality is no different: it changes depending on the situation and context in which it is used. Some people would concede that what is considered neutral does change depending on the situation; yet, they generally have a difficult time understanding how something "neutral" can vary, so they comfortably default to the objective, traditional, universal industry definition indicating beige. It is possible to see, then, why discourse on the subject matter is scarce. This study seeks to help fill that gap.

The problem is not that color theorists do not think that color is communicative; the matter concerns their take on what and how they consider neutrality. Many designers and theorists have identified specific colors as neutral and abandoned the topic at that level. Others have even come close to my argument in saying that some non-neutral colors, like black, can function as neutral, just as their classification of beige does; but, they never fully forsake their foundational principles about color and how they believe it should always be used.

It is evident that when colors as a whole are considered highly communicative semiotics, that there is potentially a need for colors that function in 'saying nothing'. Although this thesis contends that even the "silent, neutral" colors are communicative, it does not dispute the usefulness in the concept of neutrality. Rather, I pose that color neutrality is a rhetorical, social construct that entails communicating a unified message to a particular audience for a specific situation in a responsible, ethical manner.

I make this argument not for the sake of itself, but to enable designers to think of the concept of neutrality as one that is directly connected to considering audience analysis. I do not intentionally advocate the use of one particular color over the other, but contend that the designer's choice of selecting a particular color should be based on how it applies to the rhetorical situation. If it happens that a color such as beige is the best possible solution of determining how the concept of neutrality should be applied, it should be because the designer thought of it in terms of rhetoric and not industry standards. Finally, I posit that just because beige is a foundational scapegoat for many designers, because it is a color and all colors are social semiotics, then its use can also be the result of the designer's careful consideration and understanding of

neutrality. Designers should not overuse it as an excuse to be lazy and hide behind industry rules. There should be good reasoning behind the use of all colors, not just picking colors because they are "neutral" or avoiding conventionally labeled neutral colors for fear of being predictable. This brief review of what color research has already been done in various discourse communities suggests that design experts themselves disagree on how color is interpreted. Even fewer care to look beyond foundational rules to investigate why these industry 'truths' exist beyond the fact that they just do. Therefore, this study will resume the conversation on the socially-constructed concept of neutrality where others have left off and pass the baton to future commentary on the subject. The following methodology section will serve as a good reference for someone interested in analyzing the subject at a later date.

3. Methodology

Neutrality can take many forms and it changes within historical, social, and cultural contexts. Even defining neutral as something that is "not either" rejects the idea that it is a foundational concept because it does not settle on one particular solution: it presents the opportunity for options and variance. As evident in the literature review, the concept of neutrality changes with people over the course of time; it is falsely presumed objective, but is actually shared knowledge shaped within a discourse community. So, the conventional tendency to label particular colors or design as neutral is really masked subjectivism that utilizes neutrality to explain how colors are socially deemed appropriate for a particular time and instance. Such an instance can be compared to what Lloyd Bitzer posits as a rhetorical situation. This model provides a closer look at just how neutrality is shaped within these contexts, and successively, are rhetorical elements of real estate.

This analysis is not intended to necessarily evaluate the effectiveness of one color over another; doing so could potentially lead to making personal judgment calls that result in foundational standards. It neither offers any suggestions as to which particular colors work best in real estate design nor takes a public survey from potential buyers about their reaction to colors used in houses on the market. Contrarily, this study analyzes the concept of neutrality and how the rhetor conveys its values by pairing examples of pictures taken from the open houses that are both in stark contrast to one another as well as showing a few controversial compromises between these differing color presentations. Since neutrality as a social construction is a somewhat difficult concept to grasp, it is useful to pair contrasting views of color use against each other to show different ways of understanding the rhetorical value of them both. Doing so will unravel the conventional, objective stance on neutrality and establish it as one that is rhetorical and socially formed.

Using Bitzer's, Aristotle's, and Kostelnick and Roberts' rhetorical situation and triangle models as the framework for analyzing the rhetorical values of neutrality and the speaker who applies them, I will continue the discourse about color explained in the literature review coupled with commentary about color theory and the pictures taken from the open houses to address the three primary questions:

- How can something that has meaning and is rhetorical be neutral?

- What does "neutral" look like?

- How do real estate fundamentals about color overlap or contradict what is accepted about color in professional communication?

Bitzer's rhetorical situation model can examine the values of neutrality as a social construction and poses the designer's task of selecting color for a house on the market as a rhetorical situation. Using audience, exigence, and constraints to analyze the pictures of some of the houses I viewed on the real estate market will answer the previous questions and accomplish two additional goals:

1) to understand a few ways in which people express the concept of neutrality
2) to make comparisons between neutrality as a social construct and rhetoric

The method of this study is intentionally malleable for three main reasons. First, neutrality is not a constant concept. For instance, identifying beige as a neutral color that can guarantee the sale of a house may very well work in some instances; however, that statement in itself is fallacious. Something that can be guaranteed is ultimately considered a foundation that is undisputable. Yet, if beige only works in selling a house in 'some instances', then it cannot be a sovereign rule. This loss of sovereignty does not deny the effectiveness of conventionally labeled colors such as beige, but presents them as rhetorical elements that serve various purposes in different capacities. Moreover, questioning the objectivity of conventionally accepted neutral colors enables designers to possibly begin to understand non-conventional, highly expressive colors as neutrals as well. Secondly, the real estate industry is not confined to any one particular area: people sell houses in a number of places. Hence, this study can be replicated in places other than the ones this thesis uses. Lastly, design professionals do not decorate all the homes that are on the market. In many cases, some sellers feel their homes are adequately decorated or that they themselves can make the changes that will appeal to prospective buyers without the cost of paying a "high-priced" designer to do it. In either case, the likelihood of any of these three scenarios being found in other areas across the country is

high. The following few pages will go into further detail about how I applied the aforementioned theory to the data collected for this analysis.

Over the course of four days during March of 2009, I took pictures of approximately fifteen to twenty homes on the real estate market in the central Virginia cities of Lynchburg and Richmond that were either hosting 'open house' events or were listed as 'for sale by owner' (see Maps 1-3).

Map 1: Proximity and size comparison of Lynchburg, Virginia and Richmond, Virginia
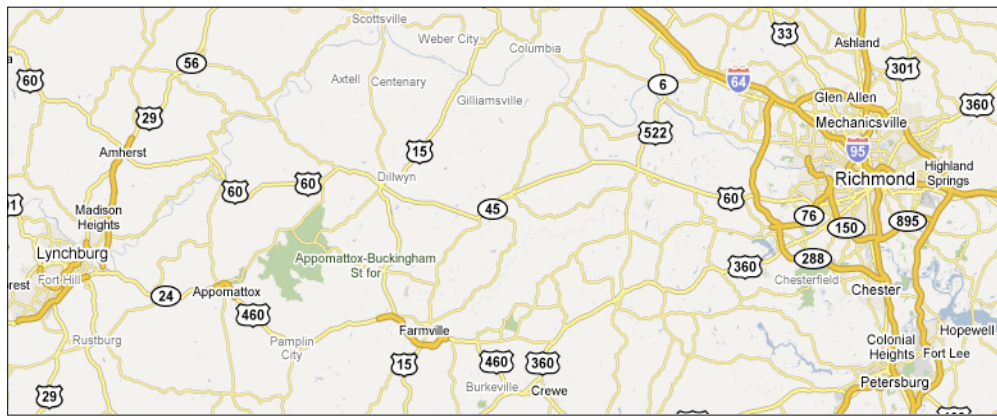
Map 2: Richmond, Virginia
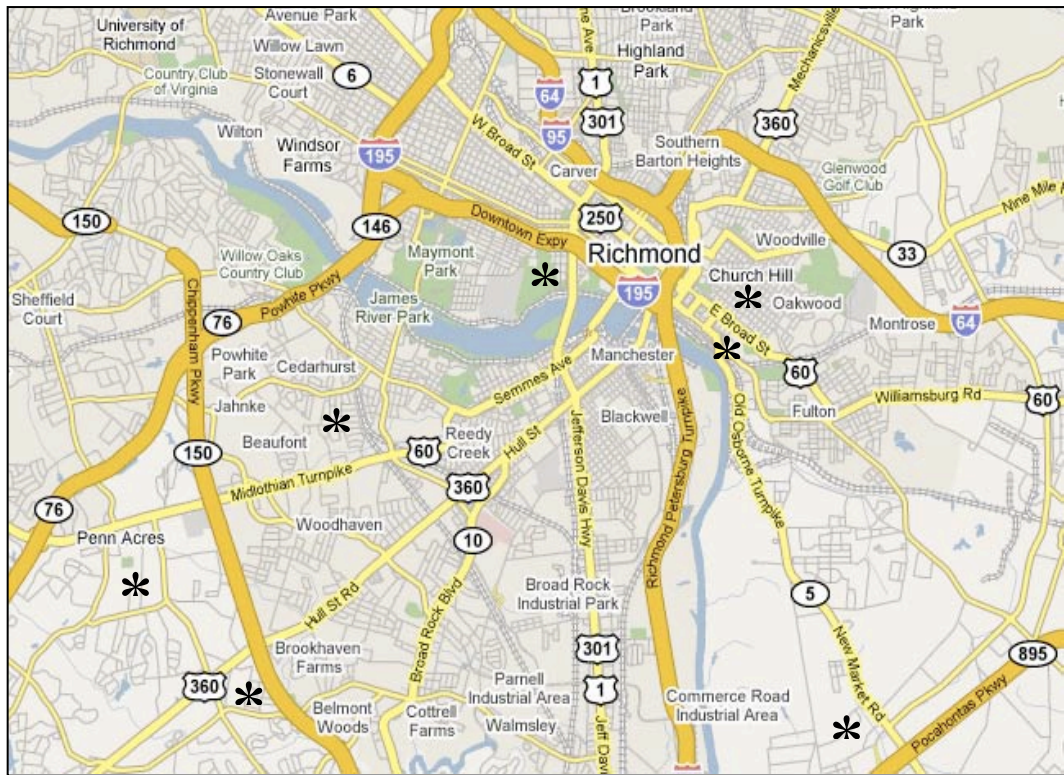
∗ Vicinity of open house locations viewed

Map 3: Lynchburg, Virginia
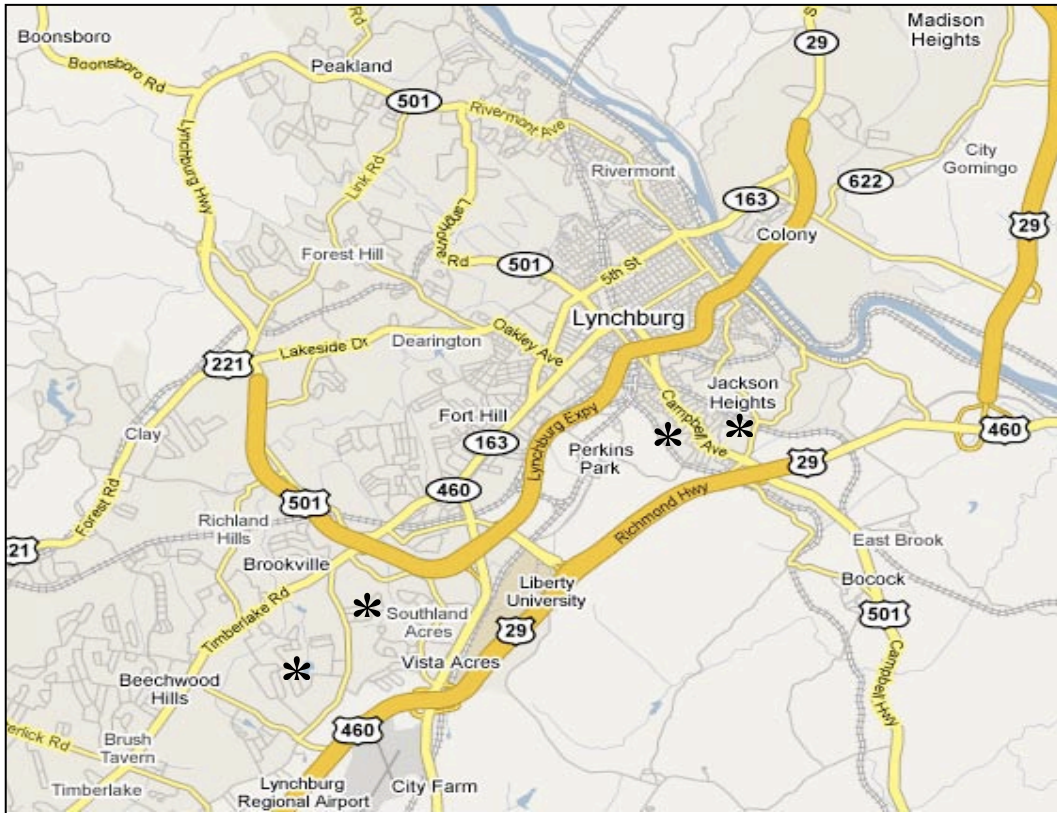
* Vicinity of open house locations viewed

I chose these two cities as foci for this research study not only because they were in relatively close proximity to one another, but also because they served as complements to each other in a few ways. First, Richmond is a larger metropolitan area than the more rural-like city of Lynchburg and is Virginia's state capital. Secondly, while the two cities are within two hundred miles of each other, Richmond is much more ethnically and culturally diverse than Lynchburg which is predominantly a community of Protestant, Caucasian young families, "empty nesters"[5], and retirees. Although analyzing the concept of neutrality as a rhetorical social construct can be achieved by exploring homes throughout one city in any location, I chose these two cities because I needed be able to visit as many houses as possible within the four days I had available over spring break. In the event that one city did not have open house events on certain days within my schedule, I was able to attend those that were hosted in the other. Traveling between two cities may pose a constraining factor for future researchers, but it was convenient for me because I have close family relatives in both cities who allowed me to lodge with them during this study.

My selection process of which houses to take pictures of was somewhat random in that I was not looking for a particular style, attractiveness, or type of house; rather, it was based on which houses were available for viewing in either city during my visit to Virginia. I organized my visits, however, by purchasing a newspaper with information about the local open houses in the areas and planning my route in advance of leaving for the events. This strategy made finding the properties much easier than simply riding around and hoping to stumble upon an open house while also enabling me to print directions to the sites if I did not know their locations. Also, for the homes that were for sale by the owner, I called in advance so that the owner would have enough time to prepare for my arrival and be able to show the property to his or her satisfaction. Looking up the locations of homes for sale ahead of time also saved on gas consumption, time wasted aimlessly driving around, and potentially missing nearby open houses because of being unaware of what time the various showings were available.

Although I was able to view a number of houses, I did not begin my research with a set number of pictures to take or houses to view. Ironically, all the properties that I viewed were located within each city's

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[5] A term generally referred to parents whose children have become of age and moved away from their childhood homes.

limits and varied in style, year built, and demographic locality (see Maps 2 and 3). Also, the estimated ages of the then current homeowners are unknown due to the fact that realtors were hosting some of the house events. I decided to take numerous photographs of the outside and inside of the houses so that I could have a selection of photographs from which I could later chose to make connections about the values of neutrality and to determine how home sellers and designers identify the concept of neutrality. While my goal was to take as many pictures as possible, I was limited by how many I could take because I could only physically attend one open house at a time. Another constraining factor was that I had four days to collect pictures from two different cities.

Since it is not unusual for potential homebuyers to take pictures of properties on the market as a way of reminding themselves about the houses they had visited, the sellers did not mind my taking pictures during tours. However, the constraints on time and the weather were factors that affected both the quality of the pictures taken and access to some of the homes. Specifically, many open house events take place on Saturdays and Sundays. The challenge with this, however, is that many sellers realize this point and often schedule their open houses during the same times as other competing sellers. Although this strategy may work competitively among the sellers, it puts a limitation on how many homes prospective buyers can visit during a set time. This constraint on time was exacerbated with a weekend of overcast skies. In some cases, some sellers cancelled their open house events to the public because of the inclimate weather. These constraints put a damper on my plans, but I still took a number of pictures.

The pictures featured in this analysis were taken from either outside of the houses or inside of them. Since color use in real estate marketing is not limited to the inside furnishings and materials, it was important for me to take outside pictures of these properties as well. In many cases, the first impression a prospective buyer has on a house is its appearance from the outside. Whether this first glance is seen in a periodical, on a television home listing program, on an online real estate website, or in person, the outside appearance of the house is going to make an impression on that audience. Hence, it was imperative that I included these types pictures also.

In writing about neutrality from an anti-foundational standpoint, I do not intend to deny its existence: I analyze this concept of neutrality from a rhetorical perspective, not as a seasoned or educated

designer. An attempt to argue otherwise will eventually lead any anti-foundationally based argument back to a foundational stance. The purpose of this analysis is also in no way scientifically based. Rather, I seek to recognize neutrality as a design element that is socially formed in discourse communities.

Colors currently identified as neutral have not always been viewed as such by all audiences. Kenneth Burke's *Language as Symbolic Action* explains how perception is literally in the eye of the beholder. As someone who appreciates design, however, it is easy to place the neutral label on the color brown, for instance, based off of "proof" of its use and success in other designs. However, what must be considered is this: the term neutral does not exist on its own without first being understood, accepted, and agreed upon by people. Moreover, the three questions I have posed can in no means exhaust the topic, but serve as a starting point for further analysis for new insight into rhetoric. Therefore, this thesis attempts to explore reasons behind the concept of color neutrality as a way of providing added value to it as a communicative design element; in turn, it will enable designers to look at color beyond the scope of stringent rules and consider neutrality as socially-influenced rhetorical staple of real estate design success.

In this chapter, I have provided an overview of a variety of ways in which color is understood, studied, and used historically. In essence, this literature review is less about scientific reasoning and more about establishing connections among color theory formation, cultural perception, and societal trends as a way to bridge the gap between social construction, rhetoric, and the concept of neutrality. Examining the interplay between these three parts, culture, history, and society, will enforce the idea that color meaning is socially shaped, and the concept of neutrality is no different. The next chapter, four, discusses neutrality in terms of one-third the rhetorical situation: audience. It focuses on audience analysis, color trends, buyer expectations, and neutrality as rhetoric. Moreover, it will address how the audience shapes concept of neutrality.

4. Potential Buyers: Mediators of Change

In *The Rhetorical Situation*, Lloyd Bitzer writes about how the writer might directly target a specific audience so that audience will, in turn, be mobilized to effect change. He states,

> The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive (Bitzer 4).

The audience he speaks of is more than merely people who sit around and receive a message; in fact, they can be influenced by a message and can effect change because of it. A message that has been delivered to an audience that is unresponsive or has no effect on them is either a wasted effort to communicate or the audience only pays attention to the material for personal enjoyment or reflection - perhaps like reading poetry or visiting an art museum. Yet, like technical writing, the purpose of color communication in real estate design is to persuade the audience to do something. Moreover, it is the job of the professional communicator to guide the audience towards understanding the message so that the audience will make an informed decision for itself and take some action as a result of the message. This concept is no different when looking at how color use affects prospective homebuyers.

Selling a home in a market in which there are more homes for sale than there are buyers requires a much more communicative effort in preparing that home than simply placing a "for sale" sign in the front yard and leaving the house as is. On the contrary, a buyer's market essentially requires that the interior designer take extra precautions in considering how the buyers will use the space and employ thoughtful design that will present the featured home in a way that is attractive to buyers meet their expectations. The challenge with this, however, is that buyer expectations can be numerous because people are unique and see things differently. Kenneth Burke's terministic screens concept is evident of this notion. Factors such as orientation, preference, physiological perception, and design trends have a dramatic impact on what buyers are looking for in homes, how they perceive the designer's message, and what action they will

consequently take thereafter. Neutral colors then become positive alternatives to the problem.

Color Trends

In *Marketing and Selling to Generation X: A Unique Generation of Home Buyers*, authors Ashley Christofferson-Cunningham and David Cathey attempt to solve the problem of how to market homes to buyers by specifying design materials to use; but in providing a solution, they expose the problem of following trends and foundational industry rules: design is inconsistent. Although parts of their plan are questionable, they began their focus on one factor of Bitzer's rhetorical triad: audience.

To address the exigence in their rhetorical situation of selling to this group, Christofferson-Cunningham and Cathey start by describing their targeted audience and then address a few exigences. They categorize people in the Generation X group as those born between 1965 and 1976 who are "fascinated with time", "distrust permanence… [and come from] broken homes and have developed hardened hearts as a result" (Christofferson 5). With this information as a starting point, they begin to develop a plan as to what will work for that audience. Like designers, professional communicators should utilize audience analysis strategies in order to have an idea of who her audience may be and what the members' general expectations are.

The following table is an abbreviated version from a longer list of trends among this group. It supports the importance of knowing one's audience, but it takes an extremely foundationalist view by labeling what will and will not work when selling a home to the Generation X group. In addition to providing a chart, the writers leave those who are studying their book with a few suggestions:

1. Generation X buyers want to know how things will look and work.

2. Include individuality throughout the overall design.

3. Use colors other than neutral colors (Christofferson 24).

Table 1: Generation X Trends

Generation X Décor Preferences in 2002	
What's In	What's Out
• Painted trim with color	• Stained trim
• Cut berber	• Plush flooring
• 1940's flair	• Dallas style
• Deep hues	• Real estate beige
• Chrome and cobblestone finished	• Polished brass
• Stainless steel	• White appliances
• Eclectic	• Matching pieces
• Glazes	• Flat paint
• Stained cabinetry	• Solid painted cabinets
• Warm fuzzy feeling	• Cool and clean
• Wallpaper murals	• Painted murals
• Drapes	• Mini-blinds
• 10-foot ceilings	• Low ceilings
• Two-person showers	• Whirlpool tubs
• More amenities	• More square footage
• Arches	• Square walls
• Anything animal print	• Anything country blue
• Silk florals	• Plants
• Box windows	• Bay windows
• Gas logs	• Wood
• Solid surface counters	• Laminate
• Space-saver microwaves	• Microwaves on counter
• Columns	• Vast openness

While this plan of communicative design action using the trends table and design tips are interesting, they are flawed. First, while they have identified one group of potential homebuyers during 2002, they omit younger and older buyers. It is possible that during 2002, Generation X consisted of the majority of people looking for homes. However, even during that time, focusing on that single group's preferences omits others in that audience and limits the number of potential buyers a seller can have. Thralls and Blyler identify this sense of monopolizing knowledge as the ideologic perspective, in which community consensus is considered an instrument of power and exclusion. Secondly, in trying to prove that they know "the answer" to getting Generation X members to purchase houses, they expose the inconsistencies in buyer expectations; even within an identifiable group, preferences change. Lastly, in specifying materials and colors to use in real estate design for this group, they essentially eliminate the designer's role in the process as a professional communicator altogether; hence, outsourcing the designer's work to an explanatory "how-to" book, leaving the homeowners to their own "creative" vices, and even calling the two author's usefulness as designers themselves into question as well.

The main problem with following trends in real estate design, especially those beyond the paradigm of what is considered "normal", is that designers run the risk of either losing audience members to a design that communicates a dissenting message or the audience is interested in the colors used, but cannot see themselves as using the space or knowing how to integrate their own style into the property. Too much personality, or in this case, bold color use in real estate design, only communicates one message to buyers: This house belongs to someone else. The concept of neutrality promotes the feeling of comfort so that the buyers can walk into a space, see the opportunity for personalizing the space to their own specifications, and act on their thoughts about buying the house. On the contrary, Christofferson-Cunningham and Cathey claim that

> When it comes to interior design, stop thinking like a builder. Practicality is meant to harmonize with style, not dictate it. Color sells, so lose the beige. Safe is an easy bet, but easy bets won't make you rich. When in doubt, shock them by going outside the box. I mean way outside the box (40).

50

In one instance, Christofferson-Cunningham and Cathey appear to take an anti-foundationalist stance against using "conventional beige", but they venture into using color recklessly in both reducing the rhetorical value of beige itself and arguing to use alternative colors to "shock" the prospective homebuyers. Deciding to "shock" the customers with color signifies the authors' adoption of a foundationalist rule to only using bold colors for real estate design – which consequently ignores the practicality they endorse and ushers in a dictatorship. In essence, they acknowledge the power that color has in selling a home, but willingly turn a blind eye to the ethical and logical use of why it is rhetorical and how it should be carefully considered and applied in particular situations. Additionally, it is possible that in their argument against using beige, they ignore the rhetorical situation altogether and the audience cannot react positively to the message communicated in their "out of the box" color choices.

Moreover, they argue, and almost revel in the fact, that by using color - and an abundance of it - the seller is "taking a 50-50 chance on people liking it", but they suggest that is not a big deal because it is just as risky as "playing it safe with real estate beige" (40). Perhaps in 2002, this 50-50 game of probability was not an issue, but at the time of this writing, homeowners wishing to sell their homes should move towards what is socially accepted for buyers in a particular market rather than what suits their own individual needs and preferences. After all, the goal of using color in real estate marketing is to persuade someone from the audience to decide to take action and move from being a participant in the foot traffic through the house to a contract-signing buyer.

Buyer Expectations

Buyers in 2009 are indicative of virtually everything governing business and livelihood in modern society: they are people who lead busy lives. It makes sense, then, why most potential homebuyers want a move-in-ready home. This type of home requires little to no work for them to do when they move into the new house, and they can easily fit their own possessions into the new space without worrying about the materials clashing. Some potential home buyers are not so concerned with a move-in-ready home because they would like to purchase it as it already is so that they can move into the house and make repairs and changes to it to suit their own tastes; even some people in this category do not want a move-in-ready house

because they plan to refurbish the home and put it back on the market for re-selling purposes. Other buyers, on the other hand, consider the amount of space a home offers as a determining factor as to whether or not they will buy a property.

Buyers are also looking for a house that does not stand out for the wrong reasons. In particularly, they do not want to purchase a home that does not fit-in with the rest of the neighborhood. For instance, if the buyer is a person who wants acceptance from his neighbors, he will want to buy a house that is similar to the others in the community or risk being negatively labeled and ostracized for buying the "weird" house (see Pictures 10 and 11). Although in some cases, the house in Picture 10 would be the norm, in this particular neighborhood, the houses that are socially accepted look like Picture 11. The owners of this house have certainly taken Christofferson-Cunningham and Cathey's advice to avoid beige-like colors (Picture 11), but in doing so, their house stands out like a sore thumb and greatly limits their possibilities for a sale in this area.

Buyers want a house that shares stylistic qualities with the other houses in the community. Regardless of the scenario, a well-designed house will enable the prospective buyers to walk into a house, envision themselves living in the space, and cause them to inquire about purchasing options. If a potential buyer has these thoughts in mind, she is fulfilling what the professional communicator intended: the buyer taking action and making plans on using the space. The concept of neutrality enables designers to choose colors that work within such a rhetorical situation.

Picture 10 : Lime-colored property near Richmond city limit

Picture 11: Cream-colored property near Richmond city limit

In certain situations, colors that are normally not considered neutral work well when selling a property. In these unique cases, the colors which are highly expressive and carry infinite meanings are used in such a way that they themselves appear to be neutral, which does not cause the potential buyer to reject the house as a possibility. For instance, neither house in Picture 12 would stand out in this historic neighborhood in Richmond, Virginia because these homes are known as period homes. These homes in this particular district of Richmond were built around the nineteenth century and the pastel colors decorating the neighborhood houses serve to highlight the craftsmanship and architectural detail of the work done during that historical period. Unlike the previous green house in Picture 10, this green house for sale in Picture 12 would not be considered "loud" because the context in which this color communicates with the purpose of the situation in the historic neighborhood. In more cases than not, however, if highly expressive colors are used in a house that is on the market, the audience will interpret too many messages from the color, possibly associate negative memories with it, or simply not like it stylistically. Doing such often runs the risk of losing a sale.

Picture 12: Period houses in downtown historic Richmond

Neutrality as Rhetoric

The anti-foundationally-based, social construction of neutrality as a 2009 real estate "truth" has become increasingly popular as evident of its use in many real estate design programs on television. However, the basis of what is now considered neutral is the need for meeting buyers' expectations. Since people looking to buy a home have a number of needs and preferences about what they want in a house, arguably, it could be said that the goal of neutrality is to "quietly" and judiciously persuade the audience to buy the property. Unlike other colors that have a number of meanings and associations attached to it, society has considered colors labeled "neutral" to be void of meaning or bias. Yet, depending on the context and purpose in which such colors are used, the colors objectively persuade people from a variety of backgrounds with numerous terministic screens to read nothing through neutrals, but ironically feel comfortable and a sense of calmness in the space. Essentially, the persuasiveness in neutrality is that in its social acceptance to be objective and all-inclusive, it hooks potential buyers by selling the opportunity and endless potential available to them in purchasing the house. Designers cannot know how to employ neutrality if they do not first analyze the audience and its needs.

A responsible real estate designer will be versed on the various cultural, social, and historical meanings of colors and also understand color theory according to Aristotle's rhetorical situation of reader, text, and writer. Each of these elements is interrelated and interdependent of one another. By researching, identifying, and understanding the meanings behind various colors, the designer considers the various needs of the audience, the message the colors communicate, and how the color dictates the audience's impression of the space. This decision, in turn, ultimately determines which color will be chosen to comprise the text, or design message. Therefore, it is essential that the house is marketed with several audiences in mind. Not all colors are appropriate to use for this particular situation because some other colors carry too much meaning and deter the audience's attention the positive attributes of the house.

In Picture 13, the home seller's reluctance to or lack of knowledge about the concept of neutrality has potentially caused this house to remain unsold. Although this room does not have many colors in it, the prominent color, red, commands attention. The problem, however, is that the red is not drawing attention to anything in this space but the chrome-finished trashcan, an empty space that should be a dining room, and

the possibility of some buyers seeing red as a negative semiotic. It is possible that perhaps some prospective buyers with more foresight could look beyond the red and appreciate the space itself. However, most buyers expect to see a space that is in move-in condition and requires little or no work.

Potential buyers want to envision living in the house themselves, placing their furniture throughout it, and making it their own. Yet, in this situation, a red wall, which is drawing attention to nothing but itself, does not present the space as an opportunity to prospects; it is actually a deterrent. For instance, if one of the buyers happens to be the victim of a violent crime in which blood was shed, this space could be a traumatic reminder of past events or a bad omen of things to come if that house is bought. Other visitors may associate the color red with hate or animosity. Even more people could consider the textured red finish of the wall too over-the-top for their preference and some may even think that the style is catered to only buyers of a particular age bracket.

On the other hand, it is possible that some visitors may agree with the homeowners' choice of color and see the space as a very welcoming, home-like environment that is appropriate to the feel of Lynchburg. Perhaps the homeowners themselves identified this use of color as country style, and assumed it would be a selling point for all prospective buyers looking at homes with the small, quaint, country-like city of Lynchburg. What they did not consider, however, was that not everyone in Lynchburg necessarily has a family of their own, wants to be associated with rural living, or even likes the combination of the colors for that matter. Had the homeowner taken the concept of neutrality into more consideration, two alternative options would have afforded themselves to the owners and possibly received fewer snares from visiting prospective buyers:

1) Continuing the space with the light blue would have been closer to considering how neutrality functions because according to color theory, blue recedes from the eye or

2) selecting a color socially identifiable as neutral. A less expressive "recessive" color would have presented that space as an opportunity for the future homeowner rather than sending the potential buyers a message that the home is already owned and occupied.

In this particular space, although the room is absent of furniture, the dining room has too much of the owner's personality and most importantly, color was not completely used with the audience's needs in mind. The homeowner chose to create an accent wall to add personality and individualism to the kitchen, which is what Christofferson-Cunningham and Cathey argue for. However, the owner's, or speaker's, blatant display of individualism or opinion is not an effective persuasive technique to use when the audience has a number of terministic screens and opinions themselves. Considering how neutrality functions would have made the space feel less obtrusive and more inviting.

Picture 13: Dining room in newly built townhome in Lynchburg

Picture 14 shows a dining room from another house on the market. Unlike the previous room with the red and blue walls, the crème colored walls, beige colored carpet, brown dining table set, and minimal splashes of orange, green, silver, white, and black make this room as one of opportunity and action. Although listing the colors of the room in this manner make it appear to follow the same pattern of using multiple colors as the dining room in Picture 13 did, it shows that using a variety of colors in real estate design is not problematic when implemented with the audience's goals in mind. Essentially, the designing rhetor of this space neither went to the anti-foundational or foundational extreme of leaving the room blank nor the extremely foundational stance of using the owner's style or conventional "truths". Rather, the rhetor seemingly implemented a combination of both extremes to achieve the sense of neutrality in this space. Also, although many of the colors listed in Picture 14 are highly expressive colors individually, none of them are dominant in this space, which could make the room appear objective to a potential homeowner. Again, this objectivity assumed with neutrality is highly persuasive and not at all coincidental.

Picture 14: Dining room in newly built townhome in Richmond

While all the colors on the wall in Picture 15 are considered neutral, they along with the patterns in the couch create visual activity in this space that may not necessarily work in the seller's favor. This example contests the design industry's argument that neutral colors sell houses. Although this new construction home has attractive selling features such as hardwood floors, nice baseboards, and a mounted high-definition television, the buyers cannot ignore the fact that the room can be likened to a circus arena or a muted scene from the movie, "Alice in Wonderland". On the other hand, it is possible that the homeowner's use of color in this manner will attract a potential buyer who shares this same preference. Yet, for the most part, this example indicates that the use of a neutral color is not an end all to the matter of selling a home: neutral colors can be used in a way that is damaging to a visual message just as easily as other interpretive colors can. Achieving neutrality cannot be accomplished by following design formulas or making unsubstantially based opinions. All colors are highly rhetorical and a designer who uses them in an ethical manner according to the rhetorical situation will likely aid in quick property sells.

Picture 15: Checkered wall in southeastern Lynchburg home

Color design is based on the interrelation between the audience and the space. In this interaction, perception and experience facilitate the communication between the design and audience. If the audience cannot understand how to use the space, then consequently, no action will result on their part. The decision to use "neutral" colors is not a trite choice made out of routine. "Neutrally" distinguished colors are useful, rhetorical social constructions with value beyond practical functions; they culturally, socially, and historically form persuasive facets of real estate design.

The concept of neutrality is assumed objective because over time, people correlate social agreement with objectivity. So in a way, if that which is labeled "objective" is actually just components originally socially constructed, then arguably, nothing is objective. Hence, "objectivity" is constructed for the purpose of being "objective". Therefore, it could be seen how people simply rely on neutral colors to just 'be neutral' and why they blindly accept them as objective. However, convention's "neutrals" are not simply bland or plain colors that do not carry meaning, but they are useful design elements with rhetorical value. The concept of neutrality is a social construction that enables a knowledgeable rhetor the ability to fashion a visual message that convinces audiences that their needs are being met, promotes the usability of a house, encourages potential buyers to effect their own change in the space, and persuades them to take action towards purchasing. To put it another way, a house on the market is comparable to that of an Etch-A-Sketch toy or coloring book: the user virtually has a blank slate, but there are also navigational guidelines to help them achieve their goal.

Interior design is only good if it is geared toward an occupant's mentality and ideas, as well as the architecture of the space and relationships between rooms. In living spaces, in particular, interior design must establish connections between people of various backgrounds, cultures, social identities, and family compositions. Developing a color design that suits an occupant and the space surrounding him or her requires an intensive analysis of the relationship between people and how they intend to use the house. "Neutral" colors serve as the common denominator among a variety of these individual needs and terministic screens.

In this chapter, I have used the housing real estate market to reveal what values the speaker (designer or homeowner) has about the concept of neutrality and how he believes the audience of the real

estate rhetorical situation will respond. In the process, I have identified the designer as a rhetor who should be aware of the audience and its needs, and then, design accordingly. As it pertains to real estate design, the designer addresses the audience of prospective buyers by using color as the message to influence their decision to buy. Chapter four will address the concept of neutrality as an urgency that requires response to two obstacles: color selection and need to sell the house.

5. Real Estate of Emergency

Color use in real estate design is not a necessary chore to complete when selling a house. On the contrary, the decision of choosing the appropriate color can be better described as an exigence, or "an imperfection marked by urgency; … a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be" (Bitzer 6). An exigence is not merely a need, but something that requires repair urgently. With regards to real estate design as a rhetorical situation, designers have to address that urgency waiting to be done; moreover, they have to actually do that very thing which is waiting to be done, which is select fitting colors for a home on the market. Another major exigence in this situation is the urgency to sell the property itself.

Bitzer states, "A work of rhetoric is pragmatic; it comes into existence for the sake of something beyond itself; it functions ultimately to produce actions or change in the world" (3). In essence, if the goal of persuasive discourse, or marketing strategy, is not possible and cannot produce an action or change, then Bitzer contends that it is not a part of a rhetorical situation. Rhetoric and the rhetorical situation cannot exist without a reason for the need of persuasion: it is inadequate without the exigence. Yet, with an exigence requiring attention, the rhetor uses rhetoric to address the urgency in a way that will move the audience to action; thus, the exigence determines the particular audience. It is important to note, as Bitzer clarifies, a rhetorical exigence is one that is able to be positively altered when the modification can be "assisted by discourse" (6).

The process of trying to market and sell a house is a rhetorical situation. Marketing strategies can be seen as responses to exigence of rhetorical situations in that they attempt to persuade the audience about a particular product or service. Bitzer attempts to create a greater understanding of the importance of the rhetorical situation. He believes that in rhetoric, the situation, which is often overlooked, is extremely important, and the participants in the situation are heavily influenced by the surrounding contexts and cannot escape them, just as Burke states about terministic screens and Bizzell states in her concept of anti-foundationalism.

Bitzer considers the situation the most important part of rhetoric and claims that rhetoric without a

situation is as futile as an answer without a question. Like the rhetorical situation, many professionals in several discourse communities overlook the value of the concept of neutrality by making blanket statements about what colors to use or not use in real estate design. However, the concept of neutrality is important because it addresses the exigence by not automatically excluding any particular color merely because it does not abide by rules; rather, it involves how the rhetor presents the arrangement of color in a way that is appropriate for the situation in which a particular audience can positively react.

Neutral Redefined

Choosing color is one of the most difficult decisions to make when trying to communicate visually and in real estate because it affects how the audience responds and ultimately can influence whether or not the house sells. Many designers looking to prepare a house to be placed on the real estate market have come to understand using neutral colors as a way of addressing the need to sell a house. Some, unfortunately, see conventional labeled neutral colors, like beige, as a quick fix, or an obvious solution to solve the urgency of how to shape a room for selling. What many fail to realize, however, is that this urgency does not have just one answer: "neutral" colors can have several meanings themselves and can address an exigence in many ways. As a matter of fact, all colors conventionally considered neutral are not necessarily suitable to respond to the same issue. For instance, in some cultures, and specifically in America during the Black Panther movement of the 60s, black was seen as a neutral color to some black Americans, perhaps even a sign of endearment to others; but black, which, typically in the United States, appears very gloomy and can signify dangerous or ominous circumstances, is considered by the design industry as an inappropriate color to paint walls or use in the design of a house on the market. As Quiller states, the color black alone has a powerful physical affect on the human eye and is even more influential when paired with other colors. Hence, this may be an explanation as to why black leather furniture was popular during the 1990s. The monochromatic trend of contrasting black with lighter colors was a popular design trend for individual households, but was not seen as fitting design for the purpose of marketing houses to the masses.

With the combined effect of its physical reaction and its social, cultural, and historical meanings, it

is understandable why many interior designers shy away from using it in real estate: it is an extremely strong semiotic that is possibly too offensive to use. Designers understand that just because certain colors used are appropriate for one group does not mean that another group will find them visually pleasant or appropriate. Yet, however, this variance of terministic screens does not justify 'fixing' the exigence of this rhetorical situation with foundational "emergency kits" or rules either. In other words, highly interpretive colors such as black or red are not necessarily design 'sins'; when used to address the exigence of selling and selecting color for a particular audience, they, too, can be used in a way that is socially acceptable. Furthermore, just because some highly interpretive colors are seen as "offensive", have certain negative (or positive) associations, or are not some buyers' favorites does not meant that the colors lack rhetorical "neutral" value. In Picture 16, for example, although the perimeter of the picture uses what Christofferson-Cunningham and Cathey would probably call "contractor white", black is used almost primarily in this model home kitchen and dinette area. Although black is thought to be a color that is too strong in meaning, overly personalized, and taste-specific, it along with other highly expressive colors such as silver/gray, beige, white, and orange collectively make this room appear welcoming (see APPENDIX). Most importantly, black and the other colors function in this situation as "neutral" colors that seek to show prospective buyers the potential in this space. In essence, neutrality functions in this space by using highly interpretive colors, and therefore, takes an anti-foundational stance on the use of color and how it is defined.

Examining this room from a physical perspective, perhaps the black the room works with the concept of neutrality in that the white, which Quiller states reflects light, quiets the powerful black in the room. From a professional communication standpoint, this picture is an example of what Robin Williams describes as contrast. While her comments are mainly pertaining to visual print media, the principles she discusses apply the same for this type of canvas as well. She states the following:

Picture 16: Kitchen and dinette areas decorated with black

The idea behind contrast is to avoid elements on the page that are merely *similar.* If the elements (type, color, size, line thickness, shape, space, etc.) are not the *same,* then make them **very different.** Contrast is often the most important visual attraction on page - it's what makes a reader look at the page in the first place (Williams 13).

Beyond obvious visual clues that seek to persuade potential buyers about the purpose and potential value of the space in Picture 16, such as the uppercased word 'FAMILY' decoration placed atop the cabinets (which also repeats the black and connects black with family), the use of white in the room also makes it appear roomy. Williams believes the contrast that white space provides makes a visual appear more organized and spacious. She defines *white space* as "the space on a page that is not occupied by any text or graphics. You might call it 'blank' space. Beginners tend to be afraid of white space; professional designers 'use' lots of white space" (10). In other words, a professional design rhetor is distinguishable from novice plug-and-chug hobbyists by their fearless, but responsible application of design theory. Design professionals who are not afraid to consider options beyond foundational traps generally are the people whose effective designs and use of color enable properties to sell quickly and with positive results.

Exigence Strategy

Real estate design is not a simple choice of using beige or white for every surface in a house; it is thoughtful and does not callously rely on foundational structures for answers. Moreover, good design is not about making a room look pretty; "looking pretty" is a personal evaluation that prospective buyers and homeowners make for themselves. On the contrary, good design is methodical and serves a purpose. It could be said that the exigence of this rhetorical situation inspires the rhetor to strategize.

In many cases, colors are used for various purposes beyond aesthetic appeal; they function in response to an exigence to relay specific communicative messages that produce specific actions. For

instance, inventors J. P. Knight[6] and Lester Wire[7] answered the urgency to regulate traffic patterns by

creating traffic signal lights. The modern electric traffic light, which is an influence of William Potts[8] and

Garrett Morgan[9] (Wikipedia), is one of the main traffic lights used in the United States and has three

colors: red, amber, and green. When used in that particular situation, red means stop, amber (yellow or

orange) is a cautionary color, and green means proceed. From a physical and psychological standpoint, the

use of these colors coincides with color theories as well as what is understood about color from a

professional communication viewpoint: red is a prominent color and commands attention; amber colors like

yellow and orange have come to signify warning, but are also warm, noticeable colors similar to red; and

green is a cool, recessive color that does not impede on the eyes, and consequently, is not considered as an

attention grabber (Williams 164).

The use of these colors in that particular situation was not arbitrarily decided upon. Red signifies

stop because the exigence of that situation demands that drivers stop at that particular moment; otherwise,

proceeding through the light is dangerous could lead to death or serious injury. Like red, amber is also a

warm, prominent color that calls attention to itself. Used in that context, amber serves as a cautionary color

for drivers to slow down. The urgency in this situation is created by the prominence of the light changing to

red momentarily. The yellow warns the driver that if he does not slow down and stop before the light

changes to red, then the driver will be breaking the law and may run the risk of driving through the red light

and either colliding with another driver's car and/or possibly getting a traffic ticket. Green functions well in

the context of regulating traffic flow because it is a recessive color that does not draw attention to the

human eye. Recessive colors are described as cool colors, which works well with it meaning 'go' because it

does not force the driver to pay attention to it; if a driver barely notices the color, then there is no need to

stop. Hence, it is obvious to see how color theory can give purpose to the exigence.

Although the exigence of a rhetorical situation compels the speaker to create a message that will

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[6]December 1868, London railway engineer J. P. Knight created the first traffic signals. The traffic signal, which was a gas lantern, showed red and green hues at night and was turned with a lever at its base so that the appropriate light faced traffic.
[7] In 1912, American policeman Lester Wire invented the first red-green electric traffic light.
[8] In 1920, Detroit police officer William Potts created the first four-way, three-color traffic light.
[9] In 1923, inventor Garrett Morgan patented a traffic signal device.

move the audience to action, the rhetor must remember that the purpose of crafting that message is not to impose forceful rules for the audience to follow; the goal is for the audience to be so moved by the message that they are persuaded to effect change because of it. It is a difference in philosophy with persuasion as the deciding factor. Put another way, if a designer's plan to use only industry-set standards for decorating a space fails and directly causes the house to remain on the market, then in order to regain prospective buyers' attention, the seller has to resort to other persuasive methods such as drastically reducing the asking price. So, it would have been a better plan had the designer thought of how to design the house in terms of rhetorical strategy from the onset.

Hypothetically, even if every house for sale in a buyer's market was designed with the concept of neutrality at the helm of the designer's decision-making process, all the houses will not sell. Such is the business concept known as supply and demand. But, a designer who researches deeper into discovering factors such as who these potential homeowners are, where they live, and what they believe, the designer can adjust the message with color to target a specific audience within the masses of potential buyers and stand a better chance on selling a house. Potentially, the more familiar a designer is with her audience, the more risk she can take in color design. The kitchen shown in Picture 17 is a prime example of an exigence in which the rhetor must be well acquainted with her audience.

From the perspective of a seller, the kitchen in Picture 17 has several noteworthy amenities. It has updated appliances, a flat screen high-definition television, new cabinets, marble countertops, and a dining set that matches the décor – all of which are highly desirable, trendy luxuries by 2009 design standards. Undeniably though, the red walls in the kitchen are the focal point and despite the nice details, this house has had a difficult time selling. In terms of contrast, the room juxtaposes two strong colors against each other, which creates a very specific feel in this room. Even though the area is clear of clutter and well utilizes the red "white space" in the room, the red and black combination in this space is inescapable. In terms of the concept of neutrality, it could be difficult for some designers conditioned by foundational rules to see how two highly communicative color semiotics apply; however, they do, but audience analysis is key.

Picture 17: Kitchen in southeastern Richmond home

According to truths commonly held in the interior design industry, using red is a major "no-no" in real estate because, like black, it is too impressionable. In this situation, a foundationalist designer could claim that the use of both black and red in this room are greater obstacles to overcome than is the exigence to sell the house. As a matter of fact, such a person could argue that using these colors will prevent the house from selling, and a designer's refusal to use industry standards about real estate and color selection is inconsiderate, unprofessional, and will only exacerbate the problem for the sellers. However, the anti-foundationalist rhetor sees this room as an exigence that simply needs a more specific audience. In spite of what color theory and industry standards mandate, this red and black kitchen exemplifies my argument for the concept of neutrality. The overriding principles governing this argument, though, are contingent upon specific audience analysis and usability.

Logically speaking, it does not make very much sense to ignore what people expect to find in a home; after all, a house on the market is there to attract non-residents and to get them to envision

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themselves in the space – not to serve as a personal showcase of the current owner's style. Therefore, this explanation offers a possible reason for why this house has not sold: this property is located in a rural area near the outskirts of Richmond where the typical house is considered traditional. Therefore, any house that is not similar to it in that area is seen as uncharacteristic of that particular locale.

Although a person's locality does not determine his design preference, in some cases, it does. Compared to other houses in the area, this house employs the industrial style design throughout it – which makes it drastically different from the others in the area. In social construction theorist Thomas Kuhn's[10] terms, this house, with its red kitchen and industrial design, is an example of divergent thinking[11] that is outside this particular neighborhood's paradigm of what is universally recognized as normal. Therefore, in this neighborhood, this house is not socially accepted; but perhaps if this same kitchen was in a property in downtown Richmond where the population is much more diverse and a variety of color use is socially accepted, the chances of this house selling increases. This scenario shows just how important audience analysis is to color assignment in a house on the market.

Analyzing the concept of neutrality as it pertains to Bitzer's exigence can also be explored by using Kostelnick and Roberts' rhetorical situation. Specifically, the values of neutrality are those that intend to address the exigence of a situation affecting the audience, enable the action taken to address the exigence to achieve its purpose, and to be appropriate for the context in which the audience uses it. The Victorian period's use of deeply saturated colors, for instance, served the purpose of concealing the dirty conditions of homes. Therefore, the context in which these heavily saturated colors were used was to hide filth in a culture in which sanitation possibly was either not highly valued or was a luxury that only the wealthy could afford. Likewise, the psychedelic use of colors during the 70s potentially served the purpose of allowing people to stay in a hazy feeling condition for the purpose of avoiding the harsh realities of the Vietnam War. As seen from these examples, Kostelnick and Roberts' rhetorical situation provides purpose to why the concept of neutrality fits within Bitzer's model and identifies its usefulness in real estate.

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[10] Thomas S. Kuhn, <u>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</u>

[11] A radical way of thinking that supports rejecting communal norms and venturing in new directions.

The Designer as Rhetor

The nature of communication depends on Aristotle's combinations of reader, writer, and text. This model is of particular interest to designers because it and the rhetorical appeals are ways of determining how the audience is impacted by the message, or in this case, design. Moreover, designers do not just shape what others see, but the message itself is shaped by the exigence as well as the designer's own values about what the audience should see. Hence, it can be understood why color selection is one of subjectivity.

Color choice in real estate design is also an ethical, logical, and emotional decision that the designing rhetor has to consider and make. This matter of ethics can extend beyond the various meanings and interpretations of color and delve more into what the buyer actually expects from the home. Most real estate television shows contend that the seller only has ten seconds to impress a prospective buyer about the house. A ten-second window to convince a potential buyer is an exigence in itself and is not a very generous allotment of time for sellers to persuade prospects about the benefits of their homes. Hence, the knee-jerk reaction that most people untrained in design would take is using colors in their homes that they themselves find 'pretty' or 'attractive'. Although it may not appear to be a major problem, it is one that calls ethics, logic, and abuse of pathetic appeal into question. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the ethical, logical, and pathetic factors behind how designers use color and consider how the audience will react within that time frame.

In a seller's market, which is categorized by a shortage of homes on the market, the owners of the home stand a good chance of selling their home with very little effort and may even make a profit off of the home should a bidding war ensue. Thus, the urgency in this case is on the buyer to meet the seller's financial requirement. However, between 2007 and 2009, the market has had a surplus of homes with not many buyers. Thus, the exigence has since shifted and has become extremely important for buyers to adapt their homes to what prospective buyers would want. Oftentimes, as evident from the number of home selling shows on television, many people either do not take the proper steps to prepare to sell the home or do not know what to do. It is for this reason why the interior designer comes in and serves as the professional communicator to address yet another exigence of helping unprepared buyers stand out in a market heavily saturated with other sellers.

The process of selling a home is unmistakably an exigence for selling home owners and particularly for those who have to pay two mortgages due to their moving to a new house before the last house sold. Hence, sellers in this particular situation are usually highly motivated to sell and will consider the available means necessary to them to accomplish this goal. In some cases, like the experience I had while taking pictures, many home owners within the same area hosted open house events during the same time as their neighbors. To some, this occurrence could be described as merely coincidental. Yet, in such a competitive market, it is more than likely that the sellers strategized about keeping prospective buyers out of their competitors' homes. Although this technique is not very courteous to the prospective buyers, it is a plan that can potentially work for sellers who are faced with the urgent need to sell. Likewise, designers are sometime faced with similar decisions about whose interests to serve: the sellers', the buyer's, or their own.

Considering that designers have approximately ten seconds to make an impression on a prospective buyer, perhaps using red on the front of a house is not necessarily a bad thing if it is used with the audience in mind. However, if the designer uses this particular choice of colors with the understanding that the color red is hard to ignore, then the designer possibly is just using color as a means to an end. The house in Picture 18 shows a house near downtown Richmond. The distinguishing features about this house are its clean lines, white façade, and red door. Previous discussion on color theory suggest that industry standards do not promote using red in real estate design because it is a color that is highly impressionable. On the other hand, many real estate designers who subscribe to foundationalist rules find ways around this rule and paint some outside features red anyway. This decision to defy convention and use red on the exterior of a house is both highly persuasive and logical as well as ethically questionable. The design rhetor who decided on the colors for this particular house seemingly had several goals in mind.

First, she implemented the figure-ground contrast method. In looking at this picture, the contrast of the two colors appear to trick the eye into either seeing the red door pushing forward or the white siding drawing the eye inward. Skeptics against this method claim that it is not ethically responsible to use strong colors such as red to catch the attention of that potential homebuyer with the understanding that red has a dominant physical effect on the human eye. Moreover, they argue that the emotional and psychological effects that follow the initial physical reaction could have a negative impact on the visitor and deter them

from proceeding through the house.

To combat this argument, secondly, the designer seemed to consider the social and physical effect that white has against red and tried using as much of it as possible without completely washing out the house. In making this decision, the designer utilizes the Quiller's theory about how white reflects light and black absorbs it. Again, some people would argue that the design rhetor's choice to manipulate this procedure is just a method of tricking the buyer. Yet, in cases such as this one, it is difficult to tell where the lines of conventional neutral and rhetorical neutral definitions meet. This disagreement brings up the final point of dissention about how this exigence was addressed: the ten-second rule.

Picture 18: House with red, white, and green contrasting colors
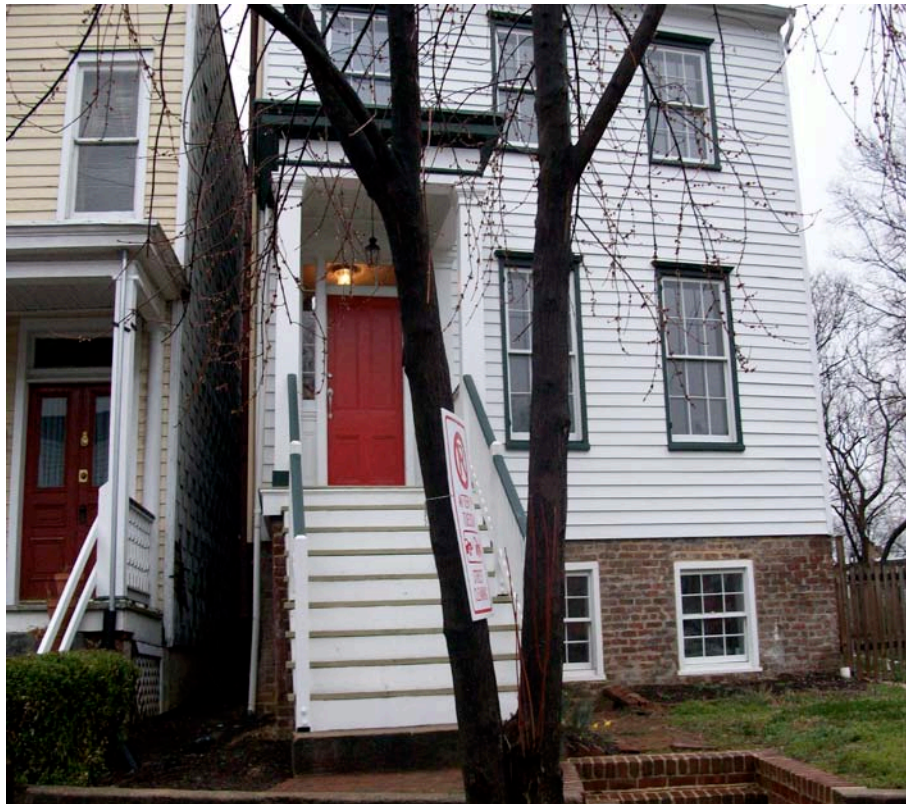
Although the rhetor has to consider the fact that possibly using these particular colors would not be seen as very ethical by some designers, the designer has to keep the secondary audience's, the sellers, goals in mind as well. Specifically, in a buyer's market, some designers could possibly see reserving the use of these colors as a last ditch effort to get a property sold, hence, with the understanding of these two colors serving as a conventional truth. Yet, considering the fact that the designer has such a small time to catch a buyers' attention and to even get them to stop to look at one particular house among many, perhaps painting the door is more so seen as a way to address an exigence in a responsible manner.

Whether or not the use of these colors are handled in an ethical manner is ultimately a decision to be made by the viewer. Yet, it is important to explore this situation because it still calls into question that which is neutral. As evident in this example, just because all colors can function in a way that could make them serve as neutral, this neutrality depends on the situation in which they are used, how, and with what other colors. Just because a designer's choice to use certain colors in a house may not be seen as appropriate, perhaps it should be taken into consideration that they have also explored other options. The house in Picture 19, for instance, is being sold by the owner. It is possible that to some people looking for a house, this one may jump out at them if the house in an area that minimally uses vibrant colors in this manner; yet, for other people, they would probably just ignore it.

Compared to Picture 18, Picture 19 is fairly similar in design method. Both use an accent color to draw the audience's attention and both are white. However, according to color theory, the human eye would be more attracted to Picture 18 because it appears more prominently to the human eye than does the purple. Moreover, the bright white siding in Picture 18 seems to provide more of a contrast against the red than would using off-white. Though it seems the question is whether or not to use the 'conventional trick' of pairing red and white together, it is still a rhetorical matter of how to address the exigence. To say that a designer uses the colors in Picture 18 to trick the buyer is one argument, but the designer then is responsible for making the inside of the house just as appealing. So, depending on the context in which colors are used, and the means and motivation for which the rhetor employs them, they can serve as indicators as to whether the designer acted in good character.

Picture 19: House with teal, purple, and off-white contrasts

Preparing a house for the real estate market requires ample time and consideration of how to address the exigence of color choice. Since neutral colors are persuasive calls for imagination and action, and designers are in the business of presenting the potential buyers' dream homes in the best way possible, color can be a strong influencing factor on how well a home shows, how long it will be on the market, and the level of worth a potential buyer will ascribe to the property. Since sellers often cannot distinguish between living in a home and selling their house, it is the designer's job to help them make the distinction visually. The colors used in the interior of a home, for example, can often be equated to the personality of the individuals currently residing in that home. Therefore, it is important that the designer sees neutralizing the space not as eliminating the character from a room, but realizing that in a buyer's market, the urgency is to sell, and selling is in some cases dependent on color.

If designers ignore the rhetorical influence of the concept of neutrality and how all colors can function in some way as "neutral", then they fail to address the problem of persuasively designing a house to sell altogether and compromise the sale of the property. Design is not a 'one size fits all' process. It requires the rhetor to effectively balance audience analysis, theoretical knowledge, and judicious decision-making. With regards to color selection, the concept of neutrality neither values the safety of using conventional neutrals nor the recklessness of personal preference. Its focus is on finding the available means of all colors to address the exigence in a rhetorical situation. A safe exigence is not an exigence at all and an exigence that focuses on personal fulfillment does not have an audience. Hence, using colors simply because they are seen as conventional safety nets or overly personalized audience shockers do not effectively address the exigence of the rhetorical situation, and if they do get an audience response, it will not necessarily be favorable. Designers who still decide to take the "safe" route of abiding by foundational industry rules risk being paid safe wages from skeptical homeowners who question their usefulness. Over time, if the design does not aid in the selling of the house and the seller has to agree to a lesser asking price that is "safe" to the buyer, then the designer will possibly lose a customer in that home seller. Moreover, it is safe to say that she may be out of a job.

People's experience of, response to, and preference for or against certain colors are not constant. The complexity of one audience having so many terministic screens is that it is incredibly challenging to determine what message to communicate to such a vast group. The best way to approach this situation is not to carelessly throw a neutral color on the wall and expect it to work.

Neutral colors are rhetorical and effective in real estate design because they provide balance and are timeless. To better address the exigence of design urgency, color should be thoughtfully implemented in conjunction with other design components. It should appeal to people in all three dimensions of human existence and used in such a way that persuades, inspires, and stimulates the audience to act. The job of the interior designer as a professional communicator is not just to change what people believe, but also to make them do something. Therefore, it is important that the designer is able to develop a communicative color message that accomplishes just that. Neutral colors can do many things with regards to addressing an exigency; however, it is important that they are used to attract people's attention in a positive way that

guides their thoughts towards making informed decisions about purchasing a house.

In this chapter, I have argued that a good designer should consider how the exigence affects the audience; think about the various social, cultural, and historical dynamics of color; and address the exigence of how color affects the buyers' experiences as interactive elements of the decision-making process rather than separate entities. Chapter six will address the concept of neutrality as a socially-constructed response to the constraints affecting the urgency of this rhetorical situation.

6. Situational Limitations

Color selection in real estate design marketing is not only persuasive because of what is shown, but also because of what is not. Communication theorists Ben F. Barton and Marthalee S. Barton's text, *Ideology of a Map*, describes how maps are socially constructed and how the ideologies employed affect what actually appears on the map. These exclusive and inclusive measures that Barton and Barton delineate are similar in purpose to what Bitzer identifies as constraints.

According to Bitzer, constraints are "persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation [that] …have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence" (Bitzer 8). Constraints may exist on behalf of the audience, the writer, the exigence itself, or various outside aspects. These limitations are like the ideology of maps in that they have the power to determine how the exigence is handled and how discourse is structured. Echoing Aristotle's artistic and inartistic proofs concept, Bitzer divides the types of constraints into two distinct forms:

1. Artistic: "those originated or managed by the rhetor and his method" (8)
2. Inartistic: those inherent in the situation, "which may be operative" (8)

Constraints are comprised of a number of sources such as beliefs, interests, motives, attitudes, traditions, culture, or anything else that could limit, or affect discourse. Bitzer states that, "…when the orator enters the situation, his discourse not only harnesses constraints given by situation but provides additional important constraints - for example his personal character, his logical proofs, and his style" (8). In other words, even while the speaker constructs his own argument based off of constraints he imposes, he is also affected by his own credibility as a speaker.

The speaker must consider the possible constraints of a rhetorical situation in order that the message can be adapted to those constraints; in turn, the audience will be moved to take action towards addressing the exigence. If the situation is one in which the rhetor does not have to consider the constraints, then the situation is not rhetorical, and the audience will neither be persuaded nor moved to take action. A

rhetorical situation exists because of an exigence that needs a response and a subsequent action from the audience to address the exigence. The audience may not respond appropriately or at all if the various constraints that dictate their perception of the world are not taken into account. Likewise, if the designer does not consider the constraints affecting the audience's perception of color, then the exigence of the situation will not get the desired response: the house will not sell.

In addressing these limitations, it is important that designers see the concept of neutrality not as an end and of itself, but as a choice of acting responsibly and ethically so that the message communicated in these colors reach the broadest audience capacity possible in a useful and harmless manner. Color itself is a major constraint of selling a home because it is difficult to communicate a solitary, persuasive message when using a semiotic that has multiple interpretations. Since color carries so many meanings and affects people from various backgrounds differently, it is important to identify some of the constraints that affect the exigence of this situation.

Constraining Convention

In *Introduction to Visual Rhetoric*, Kostelnick and Roberts identify another type of constraint: conventions. They define conventions as "the customary forms and configurations that members of an audience expect" (33). Almost like a "foundational" social terministic screen of sort, they are meant to help readers understand information. A professional communicator, and designer alike, should effectively assess conventions, determine how they could alter the discourse, and choose, if necessary, how to appropriately apply them to particular rhetorical situations. Kostelnick and Roberts produce three guidelines to help with using them:

- Identify relevant conventions for any design problem that needs solving
- Realize that some conventions are more rigid than others
- Equate conventions with readers because they give conventions significance and meaning (Kostelnick 40).

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In essence, conventions as defined by Kostelnick and Roberts are like neutrality in that the result from using either concept appears objective. Yet, both are social constructions of ways in which, over the course of time, discourse communities have come to a consensus on a particular subject matter for the purpose of communicative clarity. Bitzer describes constraints as certain limitations that are important shaping forces of an overall argument. Conventions are constraints because they are stringent rules that control how messages are formed. Moreover, conventions are constraints for designers who do not think about color design beyond using them. When it comes to real estate, in particular, conventional rules state that neutral colors are specific colors. This type of closed-minded thinking is what makes some designers appear useless. Therefore, designers should be aware of conventions as possible constraining factors as they decide how to employ color in various situations.

Although not directly tied to conventions, traditions regarding real estate open houses can be constraining factors that affect how persuasive the color choices should be. As previously stated, many home owners schedule their viewing times during the same time as their neighbors. In this sense, it again falls on the designer to use color in such a way that appears more attractive and inviting to prospective buyers. Otherwise, factors such as house location and open house times will be a factor that limits foot traffic in a home.

In essence, when it comes to how designers choose to either ignore or strategically, not blindly, implement some design conventions, they must have their audience best interests in mind. To put it another way, the exigence of selling a house is an urgent matter in itself. A designer or home owner who chooses to further complicate the issue by adding too much of their own style or carelessly selecting color combinations from a design book to fix the problem may find that the house does not sell. Moreover, it is seems obvious as to why a person would not want to complicate the matter further: it creates another constraining factor yet again. In the real estate market, especially in a buyers' market, designers and homeowners cannot afford to be stubborn and ignore the persuasive, rhetorical value of considering this way of seeing neutral design. Although buyers will come in with their own set of reason for or not liking a house, the prepared, responsible designers will have already considered the constraints thoroughly and decided on a color scheme that is both acceptable and persuasive for the audience. Greg Myers writes in

"Texts as Knowledge Claims: The Social Construction of Two Biology Articles" about how if newly presented information does not fit within the accepted paradigm of a community, the knowledge will not be accepted within the community. Specifically, he talks about high level claims and low level claims:

- High level claim: involves contradiction established knowledge; gets rejected (602)
- Low level claim: contradicts nothing; seen as trivial (602)

Real estate designers looking to make a name for themselves by using "out of the box" color designs will in essence be making high level claims with color. Not only is this act boastful and inconsiderate of the home owners' need to sell, but potential buyers will be turned off from the property as well. Likewise, a designer who makes low level claims by only using safe conventional methods does not really accomplish anything out of the ordinary that an unskilled home owner could not do themselves. Therefore, designers should realize that conventions are constraining factors that buyers, sellers, and designers have and create. The designer is still responsible, however, for thinking of color design that will take these constraints into consideration.

Social Constraints

Another constraint that has a bearing on color selection and the sale of a house is the socioeconomic context in which it functions. One constraint that affects how buyers respond to a house is how well it presents itself. Specifically, buyers try to determine whether or not the house appears to need extensive repairs to make it functional and livable. In Picture 20, the yellow house is the one for sale. Although the paint job on the house appears to be in better condition than the other, it appears as equally old and poorly maintained as the green one. For starters the brickwork on the green house appears to have been redone while the yellow house has not. Moreover, the yellow awning appears to have been recently painted; yet, the faded neighbor's cover is significantly dating the yellow house as well. Also, the paint job on the yellow house looks washed out in comparison to the bright yellow awning.

Picture 20: Neighboring house has an impact on yellow house on market

At the time of this writing when market is full of houses, it is increasingly important for sellers to present their homes as one that is a good value. Given the poor condition that the Amercian and global economies are currently in, buyers expect more from their houses than just aesthetic appeal: They are looking for a return on their investments, not financial burdens that require constant spending to salvage and retain its value. Neutrality addresses this constraint by presenting a house as one that works with whatever concern a potential buyer may have. A house designed with the goal of addressing a particular audience will present this property as one that is a prospective fixer or a nice investment home for buyers such as new families, a modern space for newlyweds, or a propertier looking for an appreciating property that will not require updating. Granted, effective colors design will not fix damage to a property, but it could possibly present the house as more of an opportunity rather than a liability.

Neutral colors also address the listed market price constraints and concerns associated with purchasing a home. In some cases, the all-inclusive message that neutral colors communicate are attractive to buyers, and in the event that more than one potential buyer is interested, the seller can benefit monetarily from a "bidding war" for the house. Ironically, bidding wars sometimes are simply based on the irresistible bargain cost of a house, but oftentimes, it is because the buyers have made an emotional connection with the house and are committed to having it in spite of the costs. Designers who utilize the pathetic appeal to the audience will understand how it functions within the concept of neutrality for houses on the market: they appear unbiased, but their assumed objectivity makes the audience comfortable, begin to see themselves in the house, and move toward buying the house regardless of the charge. Unless the seller is fortunate enough to get more than one buyer who likes his individual color preferences, a house that carelessly uses convention bold or blandly expressive colors are less likely to participate in such a financial competition for ownership.

Economic social status is another facet that plays a role in the effectiveness of color choice in a marketed house. For instance, during the post-Depression era, many people bought houses regardless of the colors used in them. In fact, many buyers during that time were less concerned with how the existing colors in a house would match their belongs as they were with simply having somewhere to live. Moreover, the need for the newly purchased home to mesh with the buyers' individual style, home furnishings, and color preference often took a back seat to low income families' concerns for survival and having a roof over their heads. People who lived in these conditions moved into a house and generally stayed there for the duration of their lives. Consequently, many people who lived during this time are now the older or elderly members of society. Many of these people are self-proclaimed as those who "know the value of a dollar", are thrifty shoppers, and avoid spending money "unnecessarily". The room from the house on the market shown in Picture 21 belongs to an elderly couple who are moving into an assisted living retirement community.

The constraints that are associated with the presentation of this room are evident. In one case, the elderly couple's experience during the Depression has limited their decision to make aesthetic changes to this space. Perhaps the owners have decided that anyone who wants their house badly enough will make changes to it as they please. The elderly couple is seemingly also constrained by their habit of saving

money. Unfortunately for them, ignoring the urgency of this outdated space may cost them the sale of their home. Prospective buyers who entered this charming, ranch style brick exteriored home came into the space with the expectations of seeing a house that offers opportunity. However, the constraints of the loud colors and the owners' negligence to use neutral colors or hire a designer have communicated to prospective buyers that this house is a financial sinkhole that will require much updating and prolong a possible move-in date. Unless the sellers encounter a buyer who is interested in a renovation project, the expressive, personalized colors in this space will present the house as an outdated financial burden, which will be a constraint for many prospective buyers and serve as a constraining factor preventing the sale.

Designers should see the concept of neutrality in home real estate design home as a matter of financial responsibility. Sellers who hope to at least break-even in the current buyer's market need to take a proactive approach to selling their homes. Being stubborn and keeping colors that appeal to their own tastes only negatively affects the sellers in the long run. A house on the market with colors once popular years ago will cause potential buyers to hesistate on making an offer because they can tell the seller has not made improvements to the space. Consumers today are looking for value in their purchases, and since buying a house is a major investment, they expect the sellers to take appropriate measures in ensuring their content.

Picture 21: Multi-colored room decorated by the seller

The hallway shown in Picture 22 is an example of how sellers can be constraining factors themselves. In the event that sellers ignore the socioeconomic constraints of the real estate market, three possibilities can happen:

1. The house does not sell.
2. The house is bought by a motivated buyer who wants to remodel.
3. The house sells, but for a much lower asking price than the seller listed.

Picture 22: Tropical wallpaper in hallway near foyer

Although the sellers of this house made an effort to use neutral colors in the upstairs portion of their house, they refused to change the 1970s tropical-inspired wallpaper in their downstairs hallway. Perhaps updating the upstairs area with neutral colors and earthy materials like hardwood floors put a financial strain on the buyers. However, their decision not to invest in a can of white primer paint will also constrain prospective buyers from possibly making an offer on this property. In showing the house, the sellers, who did not hire a designer or real estate agent, presented the personalized hallway mural as one that is calming and reminiscent of the beach. However, although many people enjoy visiting the beach, not everyone wants an orange and black reminder of it in their home. This wall could be a major constraint for a prospective buyer who had a bad memory of something that happened in coastal area. The sellers went off of the lazy assumption that people agreed with their preference, forcing their beliefs on other people. Another example of too much personality in the color selection and design of a house on the market is in Picture 23, which happens to also belong to the elderly couple mentioned previously.

Picture 23: Hallway with wallpaper
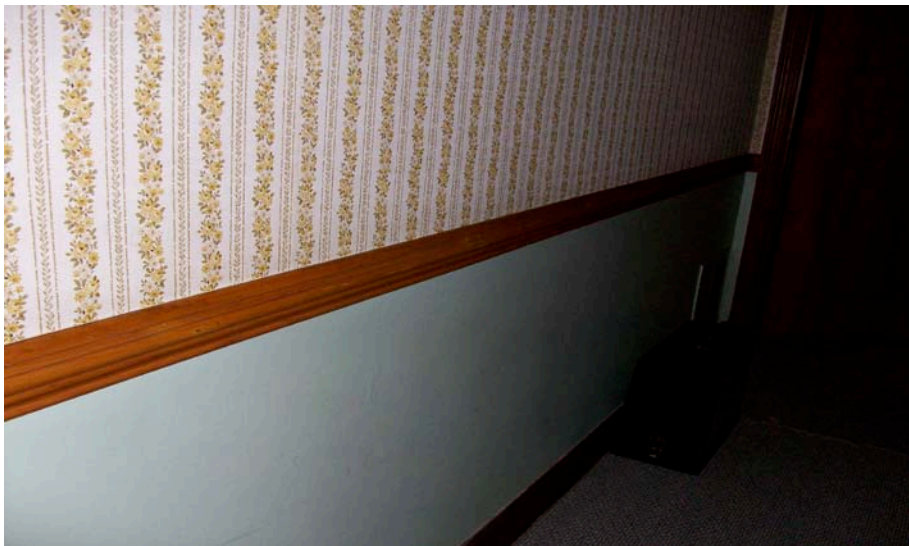
When a house is on the market for sale, it is not the buyers' responsibility to look beyond the seller's style and see what they want. The exigence of the real estate process is to get the audience (the buyers) to address the exigence of needing to sell the house, and be persuaded through action by purchasing it. Without utilizing neutrality for its persuasive, unifying, rhetorical value, the exigence of that situation will not be addressed. Moreover, the community of prospective buyers will not accept the house. Refusal to work within the societal constraints will only prolong the possible sale of the property.

The designer is also constrained by how she envisions the space. Designers inherently communicate their own personal style in selecting a color for a house on the market. Their experience and success as a student studying the subject will also transfer in decisions the designer makes. However, it is their job as professional communicators to work responsibly, courteously, and ethically and do what is best for the involved audiences: buyers and sellers.

Buyers will only feel good about a house if the space conforms to their expectations. Therefore, designers are charged with the responsibility of addressing the exigence by selecting colors that encourage potential homebuyers to browse the property without feeling hurried while also directing them to make an offer on the house. If the designer does not appreciate the rhetorical value of color, then certainly the audience will not respond accordingly. The designer should consider the various constraints placed on color and make an informed decision about when it is appropriate to use certain ones.

Designers are also constrained by how much they can and should spend on materials. For instance, a designer should consider whether or not to buy an expensive can of paint for a trendy shade temporarily labeled neutral or select a moderately priced color that fits within conventional guidelines. Just because the designer buys the paint and the house sells, it does not guarantee that the owner will get the asking price for the house. Nor is it fair that the seller is tricked into buying an expensive product simply out of the designer's interest in experimenting with a new color fad. Moreover, the question of ethics again appears if the homeowner only purchases a can of inexpensive paint for the designer and increases the asking price of the house significantly on the basis of selling the modernity of the paint. Therefore, the designer has to be economical with how money is spent and ethical in her decision-making process.

Cultural Constraints

Cultural influence greatly affects how potential buyers understand color meaning. Since all buyers do not belong to the same culture, finding and using colors that communicate the same message to an audience with different color perceptions is a difficult task. On one hand, the designer could personalize the space according to one particular culture's standards; yet, doing such puts a limitation on the connection potential buyers from other cultural groups will have with the space. Ethically speaking, if the colors employed in the new design are offensive to the broader audience, the designer has then lost potential customers to the design and has poorly addressed the exigence.

The other option the designer has is to use colors that still have meaning, but have been agreed upon socially as colors that are non-offensive and do not have prominent associative meanings. To some, these colors, socially deemed as neutral, may be seen as plain and unimaginative; the designer may even feel the need to add more individuality in the space to appease his own design preferences. However, resisting the urge to add personality, or bold colors, gives the impression of objectivity while simultaneously presenting the house as one of limitless opportunity.

It makes sense, then, how cultural influence assigns color meaning and promotes its understanding; likewise, it also constrains how people react to an exigence. Some cultural and societal factors that influence how an audience perceives color are education, nationality, religion, government, ethnicity, and values. Culture has such an impact on an audience's perception because it shapes people's identities, determines how they understand their own livelihoods, and serves as a model to compare and contrast other cultures outside of their own. Moreover, culture is innately a social entity.

Culture is so important in understanding color semiotics because it has a direct bearing on the physical functions of the eye: the individual's eyes see colors, but the brain, which is manipulated by culture, interprets color meaning. This concept helps to explain how and why color values and meanings are bound with culture: culture is a controlling mechanism that shapes how people view the world. Although humans are reflective, thoughtful and decisive, they function within a culture as individuals of social environments.

On an individual level, culture also influences how people look at color based on associations,

previous experiences, and prejudices, which are also socially shaped. For instance, in American society, the color pink has numerous interpretations. Depending on the context in which it is used, a pink document can be a good or a bad thing. In one case, receiving a pink piece of paper can indicate to a person that the information on the paper is about women's health issues or Valentine's Day; in another situation, it can also indicate that the recipient has been fired from her job. Pink can also relate to health conditions such as pink eye or pink-colored medicine to treat bodily ailments.

Cultural influence can also affect how an audience reacts to a property. For instance, a person who has a strong affinity for her Native American upbringing in the southwestern region of the United States might make a connection with mud red and orange tones used in a design. For someone else, however, the colors may not be considered as special.

The way the color in a space makes the prospective buyer feel can constrain whether or not the potential buyer sees the usefulness of the space. In Picture 24, for example, the seller decorated the entire house in shades of blue. Although color theory has established blue as a recessive color that does not impede on the human eye, potential buyers could see this space as overwhelming and may not look at it further. Again, although any color can be employed in design in some form or fashion that appears neutral, as the saying goes, "too much of a good thing" is not necessarily a good thing. Some buyers may see this room as exactly that.

Colors can express the character, identity, personal characteristics, and values of a seller. Color can also enforce cultural stereotypes and emotional connotations. Therefore, it is important to see why using colors socially agreed upon as "objective" is important in addressing the various cultural and social norms that function as constraints in this situation. Robert Ladau describes it best in his explanation of how color functions:

Once a color is combined with its metaphor, it then becomes possible to add emotion. Colors can become positive or negative, take on gender, or become something with personality. Emotional manipulation through the use of color is constant. We do not live in a neutral world, and therefore our color responses are seldom neutral either (Ladau 87).

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Picture 24: Blue bathroom seller decorated

Although too much color can be information overload for a prospective buyer, too little color reads as uninspiring and sterile. Where some people confuse the concept of neutrality is in their description of it. For some people, neutral colors are those that have no meaning other than plain or boring. On the contrary, neutral colors communicate warmth, possibilities, modernity, tradition, comfort, calmness, and high quality because they are social constructions that can have more meanings than what industry enforces. Although some buyers visit a house on the market and envision painting over colors the designer chose for showing the house, during the "courtship" phase of the house hunting process, the buyer probably felt an emotional connection with the persuasive "neutrals". These colors give buyers a "good feeling" because they highlight the features of the house while also appearing objective so that the buyers can imagine using their own personalized colors to make the house "special". This same positive experience

can also occur with non-traditional colors. It is the designer's job as rhetor to make this decision, and if done well, it will inspire a buyer to commit to the property.

A person's mental state or association with colors strongly affects the emotional response of the message. Contrary to color theory, "neutral" colors are communicative and highly subjective. They affect people and their emotional world, even when they are unaware of it happening. It is for that reason why the use of color in real estate design is so important. Color automatically draws attention to itself because it is a visual element. When used appropriately, it can effectively communicate a message; if used callously, it can be a distraction.

In this chapter, I have argued that the decision to use "neutral" colors in real estate marketing should be an ethical choice of deciding how to address constraints. This chapter analyzed possible constraints of this rhetorical situation through historical, social, and cultural lenses in an effort to expose other constraints such as buyers, socioeconomic conditions, sellers, and designers. In the final chapter, I will reveal the concept of neutrality as visual rhetoric that utilizes Aristotle's rhetorical appeals: ethos, pathos, and logos.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has argued that the concept of color neutrality, especially with regards to how it is used in residential real estate design, is one that is created socially within discourse communities. In collectively deciding on what neutrality is, the discourse communities had to determine what it is not by attempting to disassociate certain cultural, social, and historical interpretations from them. Although the definition and notion of the word itself is representative of many concepts that go against anti-foundational constructionism, identifying it as a social construct enables professional communicators and designers alike to see the rhetorical value of this concept, assess ways in which it can be implemented in design, and progressively work towards identifying it a highly persuasive element of visual communication.

As shown throughout the numerous examples in this thesis, the definition of neutral, literally speaking, generally concerns colors that are unbiased, meaningless, or plain. Perhaps the reason why these colors are considered meaningless is because they are not on the color wheel. Their absence from not being included on other social constructions, such as the color wheel, does not warrant labeling these colors as meaningless or boring: the color wheel itself is a type of terministic screen. Rather, the concept of neutrality, or "design diplomacy" is one steeped in rhetorical influence.

This thesis has included the use of "neutral" colors in residential real estate design as a form of visual communication. In addition, it has even classified the use of this concept of neutrality as one that sought to provide designers and other professional communicators with a different perspective on the concept of color neutrality.

Neutrality is a design fundamental that many in interior design and the professional communication rely on quite often; furthermore, these colors are accepted and used frequently without any serious questioning of its imposed, assumed objective authority. This thesis does not deny that the idea of neutrality exists, but that is exists as a rhetorical, socially constructed facet of design communication. "Neutral" colors are just as communicative as those more widely accepted for their expressive semiotic qualities. Therefore, because the concept of neutrality was built based on various societal contexts, it can neither be completely neutral nor null of meaning. Therefore, this thesis seeks to alter the reality of how the

notion of neutrality is used and understood. It redefines this concept by identifying six qualities contending that it:

- is socially-constructed

- is rhetorical

- has communicative meaning

- sells houses

- involves ethics

- entails and requires responsibility

These six qualities renounce the objectivity associated with the concept of neutrality and provide reasoning for making a case for it as an anti-foundational social construct. It also presents "neutral" colors as highly rhetorical semiotics that communicate various messages to various people in various situations. Specifically, color choice in home real estate design is contingent upon the interrelation between the audience and the space itself. In this interaction, perception and experience facilitate the communication between the color choice and audience. Hence, deeming a color neutral in the sense of its design choice as one of mere triteness or routine is incorrect. "Neutrally" distinguished colors are useful, rhetorical social constructions.

The purpose of color communication in real estate design is to persuade the audience to do something. Furthermore, it is the professional communicator's job of guiding the audience towards understanding the message so that the audience will make an informed decision for itself and take some action as a result of the message. The mere fact that designers choose to use "neutral" colors in this particular situation indicates in itself that they have rhetorical value. Moreover, designers say and do two different things when they reference neutral colors: they say that neutral colors are only good for making a house unbiased and reducing the personality of the previous or current owners. However, they consider using neutral colors in residential real estate marketing because it is an essential part of the selling pitch.

Moreover, they use these colors to answer this exigence because neutral colors have been socially accepted as those that can communicate warmth, tradition, comfort, calmness, and quality. Hence, the social construction of color neutrality has seemingly created an objective way of decorating a house on the real estate market, but it is a highly communicative way of influencing an audience of potential buyers to purchase houses.

In the real estate market, the interior designer has to creatively and cautiously use color in a way that appeals to the prospective buyers' terministic screens, other professionals in the field, and the current property owners. This awareness is increased in a buyer's market, where the risk of not selling the house is too high for the designer to intentionally ignore the exigence and constraints of the situation; likewise, home sellers, particularly those who do not want to de-personalize their homes, have to make decisions about how badly they want to sell the house. For some people, this decision involves hiring a designer and for others, it entails whether or not the individuality of the house is scaled down.

The goal of persuasive communication is to persuade the audience so much that it is inspired to move to action. To accomplish this action, the rhetor typically informs the audience about occurrence and belief from the past (forensic rhetoric), the present (epideictic), or the future (deliberative). In establishing the type of rhetoric, the speaker formulates how he wants the audience to react. In a way, rhetoric molds how a society is formed, and as Bitzer says, inspires the people under its influence to become mediators of change. The decision to use neutral colors and which colors in home real estate design is a rhetorical situation that needs a change made to the exigence as a result of it. Thus, the designer could be seen as a rhetor who shapes reality in using rhetoric so that the audience's perception of reality will change.

Using neutral colors like beige in real estate design simply because it is just done that way degrades them into mere marketing tools. Rather, they make an argument that connects other elements of a space in order that the space promotes the attributes of the featured house. Hence, this interplay between elements uses Aristole's rhetorical triangle: writer (designer), reader (prospective buyers), and text (color communication).

The basis for this argument that enables the various elements to work together is the uses of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals. Using color in marketing strategy is inextricably bound to ethos, pathos, and

logos because they directly affect how the audience will identify with the design, and consequently, the house. Moreover, using colors, particularly neutrals, is a rhetorical undertaking despite the general perception of neutrality as a 'one size fits all' deal.

Rhetoric can be used for both harmful and beneficial purposes. Likewise, color is an extremely communicative semiotic that exists in real estate design. Accepting neutrality as a form of rhetoric is not an easy concept to grasp. Yet, when dealing with the influence of designers and the effects of design on an audience consisting of consumers, the connection is made a little clearer. Color design involves more than just practical and aesthetic functions; psychological, cultural, historical, and social influences also play major roles as well. Therefore, it is necessary to explore the ethical, logical, and emotional appeal of color because if ignored, then the intended audience may overlook or misinterpret a message.

Neutrality and the Appeal to Character

One of Aristotle's three rhetorical appeals, ethos, is the appeal to character. It is similar in concept to the term ethics, which is concerned with determining right from wrong. This appeal to character can be that of the speaker's character or whatever the topic of interest happens to be. In this particular context, the colors chosen in various design elements of a house on the real estate market are reflections of the designer's or homeowner's character. Not only does the ethos in this situation reflect their character, but it also hides some parts and enforces others about the speaker's character. As a matter of fact, if a designer does her job effectively, the design of the room will assume its own collective authority in the space. Many designers give neutral colors this authority without second-guessing their decisions. This authority entails a certain level of power and control exerted over the impressionable audience; so much, in fact, that the audience may be so moved by the message that they inquire on buying the house.

Ethos is ultimately related to how trusting an audience is of the speaker. If the audience believes the speaker is an expert who will not harm them, then they assign authority to the speaker and or message. Moreover, it entails how color communication must also consider the appropriateness of a message, how that authority is used, and how it translates and communicates with the audience. In one sense, the authority produced from ethos is like that of Thralls and Blyler's concept of ideology, which concerns knowledge

building by using authority to silence some voices while privileging others. Burke's terministic screens concept is also evident in that the authority expressed in a design is the result of what was allowed through the terministic screen. Put another way, if the designer's communicative message in real marketing is not clear, the audience will not understand and will not be affected by the "authority" because their terministic screens limit what they discern about the message. Also, a speaker or designer is able to select which persona the visual message will assume while either eliminating the speaker altogether or presenting the message as one that is not realistic. This "faceless" communicator notion erases the human agent out of the rhetorical situation, which is an unethical decision in itself. This question of ethos brings the neutrality debate full circle.

Neutrality and the Appeal to Logical Reasoning

Aristotle's logos is the appeal to logical reason. With regards to interior design, the use of neutral colors is not an easy decision to make; it is just as important to make sure that the use of these colors work in particular design situations just as it is for others. However, many people misuse the need to use neutral colors ethically and logically for that which is simply expedient. Reasoning in design is the way the designer manipulates materials and processes to solve practical problems. The problems, in turn, are solved because the audience was moved to action. Neutral colors are persuasive problem solvers in that they address the audience's needs and provide options for them visually.

Good color design requires sensitive insight, sound knowledge of color's meaning and effect, professional competence in the use of color in approach, awareness, and creative courage. It also requires a distinct sense of elegance, culture, design, and material. These are all essential factors in the communication between human beings and a house on the real estate market.

Neutrality and the Appeal to Feelings

Pathos is the third part of Aristotle's appeals to rhetoric. In real estate design, this appeal is arguably the most important because people assign meaning and worth to colors. Hence, when emotion becomes a factor in determining how to select colors for a home, it is not an end in itself, but a mode of

persuasive communication. The problem for design is to put an audience of users into a frame of mind so that when they use a product, they are persuaded that is it is emotionally desirable and valuable in their lives. Design provides an organization of the way we feel in a direct encounter with out environment.

Pathos is so important in real estate design because it enables the prospective buyer to make a connection with the property. If a buyer feels good about the space, they will more than likely begin to see themselves using it. For this reason, professional communicators, whether interior designers or technical writers, must recognize that how they perceive something is not necessarily the same way the audience will perceive it. They must consider how the audience would utilize the space in order to make a connection with them. Also, professional communicators should hold themselves responsible for researching a variety of ways in order to reach the majority of their audiences.

After analyzing the home real estate industry with regards to the rhetorical situation and how each version of it is influenced by the appeals to rhetoric, this thesis offers two useful guidelines for designers to consider when selecting color for a house:

1. Neutrality is a socially-constructed response to the exigence of unethical, irresponsible design practice.
2. However, be wary of blindly using colors deemed neutral: the concept of neutrality is socially accepted, not necessarily the colors labeled neutral themselves.

In essence, this thesis was a call for designers to be more vigilant and ethical in their design practices. As evident in the historical information included in the literature review chapter, various color trends have defined periods throughout time; however, not all audiences subscribe to trends, and as seen in the timeline, trends become outdated. This scenario causes a problem because many designers assume that if a design is popular during a particular timeframe, then it is within good reason to utilize that tool to their advantage when marketing a house. However, trends and poor design decisions in real estate can be compared to the "usefulness" of adhering strictly to color rules: the work is not uniquely catered to the rhetorical situation and the designer's job can be easily outsourced.

Blindly following rules to get a fast end result can be detrimental on several levels. First, if all a person needs to do to sell her property is to use a single color deemed neutral throughout her house, then what value is there in hiring an interior designer? Like Lee Clark Johns describes in her The File Cabinet Has a Sex Life, the role of the professional communicator becomes obsolete because the "answer" is in the file cabinet, or in this case, the easy answer of just using a labeled neutral color; therefore, the designer is not needed. Secondly, an untrained homeowner who decides to coat his house in beige, for instance, may neither take into consideration how neutral colors function within a space nor care to realize that not all people like beige. Although beige is an example of what the design industry now socially accepts as neutral, interior designers have the skill, educational background, and design finesse to know how to manipulate the color to present the space in the best available way possible. Lastly, the use of what is perceived as a neutral color like beige in a space can backfire: some audiences may see the space as boring and completely misinterpret a message or overlook the potential in a home. Moreover, the homeowners may put up some resistance to changing the personality of their homes. In any of these possible occurrences, the designer should be able to assume the role of the professional communicator to respond to the various exigences that arise from the need to sell a home while also addressing the corresponding constraints.

Good design will not leave the audience second-guessing about anything. Home real estate design is not just about aesthetics, but also providing clear communication so that the audience will be moved to action. Color does more than just decorate and beautify. It serves to define and articulate, thus contributing clarity and order in design. It is also an element that can have great impact on our emotions and dictate the mood of a place. Thus color is also an important instrument for enrichment. It can be used in ways that make individuals and groups identify with it, making it invaluable to achieve or reinforce particular expressions. A good interior designer is a social constructionist and a good rhetorician.

The design community should reconsider the rhetorical value of neutral colors, breaking free of the constraints that have kept them locked to defining neutrality. Color scholars should continue to explore the specificities of how the concept of neutrality functions in residential design marketing. A possible direction for future research is in possibly conducting a field study analyzing prospective buyers' reactions

to various colors in homes on the market. Another route for additional research is in conducting a survey on what people think about neutral colors. This study can ultimately be used to determine the effectiveness of them in real estate design. This study did not attempt to articulate a cause and effect result about neutrality; rather it focused on identifying the relationship between particular neutrality and social construction. Also, it contends that the decision to choose colors for a home on the market is a rhetorical situation. In addition to factoring in audience analysis and the means of persuasion, a professional communicator should be able to identify the rhetorical situation. For instance, instead of using the terms reader, writer, and text, this thesis can supplant the terms with buyers, designer, and color. This similar structure better shows the relationship between the three elements.

Color use in real estate design is neither a means to an end nor a simple choice of "real estate beige". Professional communicators, whether home stagers or technical writers, must recognize the difference between author-based design and user-based design. This distinction is important because a design with only the author's, or designer, interests in mind does not have an audience in which to communicate. Interior designers must understand the implications of their choices and research a variety of ways in order to reach the majority of an audience. Using old ideas because they once worked will not suffice for every situation. This practice of expediency is both dangerous and unethical.

APPENDIX

Color Meanings From Thesis and Other Associations

Blue	stable, welcome, cold, sadness, masculinity, professional, water
Red	stop, warm, love, anger, blood, Christmas, Valentine's Day, fire
Yellow	caution, happiness, sunny, illness, joy
Black	death, pride, mourning, modern, sleek, cold, evil, mystery
Green	go, natural, environment, recycling, St. Patrick's Day, envy, money
Purple	royal, fruit, cold, death, numbness, Easter
Orange	loud, Halloween, fruit, caution, Clemson University
Pink	femininity, medicine, employment termination, Valentine's Day
Gray/silver	professional, cold, new, modern
White	purity, cleanliness, plain, mourning
Brown	nature, dirt, bland, environment

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