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### Picture V. Word: A Rhetorical Analysis

Clearly, an argument can be made both through words and pictures. Success or lack thereof rests on the quality of the argument; whether or not the rhetorician employed a thorough strategy of employing the basics i.e. ethos, pathos and logos. Other facets of argumentation certainly exist and will be discussed, but enough with the introduction: the cliché goes a picture is worth a thousand words, this analysis will discover whether or not that is the case.

Because the written story preceded the comic, I will begin there. To build credibility – credibility of the author being paramount in the success of any argument – I chose appropriate language and tone. The mood was set with the opening, which appeals to both logos in that common sense tells one yes, moving does suck and pathos is equally triggered because anyone that has moved will have an emotional response. The set up is effective, immediately the reader is into the story and the end is foreshadowed.

In terms of effectiveness, the comic's title page works as a set up. However, the four images are definitely shy of four thousand words. Essentially the comic's title page is a mimic of the opening line of the written piece. A problem with pacing immediately presents itself, but I will address that later. Throughout the comic though, the tone is consistent, the images appropriate and credibility is established.

In regards to amplification through simplification or as McCloud puts it, “not so much eliminating details”, but rather “focusing on specific details”, I tried to make

the truck look like any other moving truck (McCloud 201). It should be a universal stand-in for moving truck, eliciting the same sort of dread or anxiety most people feel when having to move. That is the feeling I wanted to build on. It may be worth a thousand words or more (especially if one has moved recently or often).

Before this analysis goes any further I'd like to define rhetoric. Foss, Foss and Trapp define rhetoric as "the human use of symbols to communicate" (Foss, Foss & Trapp 1). Interestingly, Lanham defines rhetoric "as the synonym for deception", which combined with the previous definition to arrive at rhetoric meaning not only a means of communication or a shaping of our world, but more so as a means to create a world (Lanham 138).

Both the text (my blog) and the comic communicate effectively. There, of course, is a deceptive quality in that both "stories" were told after some time had passed from the original action. Non-fiction is necessarily a recreation of past events . . . so, maybe the words spoken weren't exactly what was said, but the feeling and gist are accurate. That being said, because I lacked a picture of my brother-in-law, I substituted a friend for him and no one would know except I just spilled the beans. Though both the verbal and visual arguments communicate effectively, the visuals lacked an emotional punch. Choosing the disembodied heads was a missed opportunity for amplification through simplification, which would have distanced the visual from the verbal.

Certainly a natural separation between the two forms was developed. The visual nature of the comic has a more fun feel (no floating heads in the blog) and is arguably more engaging than the verbal. That being said both make adequate use of

pathos; the audience should feel annoyed when the U-haul (verbal) and i-Haul (visual) employees are encountered. Frustration and perhaps sympathy or empathy, as experienced by the audience, are important to the mutual success of those scenes. Also both employ humor and though by their basic nature the two stories are different, they end up being rather similar in regards to pathos. Both are a heightened telling of a story, not bound by realism.

Whether or not either telling of the story is entirely factual is not important; however, what is important is that both are a created world. The crux of the success of the comic in its hope to vanquish the text resides in its visual presence. Hill writes that presence “refers to the extent to which an object or concept is foremost in the consciousness of the audience member” (Hill 28). The visual presence of the comic is undeniable and though amplification through simplification is a hallmark of the comic I opted to include pictures of the real people who took part (for the most part). An especially effective bit of visual argument is on the fourth page of the comic. By combining an image of my frustrated face with a bright red background, the anger is strongly evident. That image’s strength is derived from its universality, a combination of visual presence and amplification through simplification. This image seems so simple, yet effective; and in hindsight I wish I had employed more images in this vein, thusly arriving at a more successful visual argument.

When considering universality, the verbal argument omits names. Is this the verbal equivalent of amplification through simplification? Does it have the same power? Most likely not, but the choice certainly has an effect. The reader can, if he or she chooses, insert whomever they wish. Also, physical descriptions are left out.

The descriptive focus of the writing was condition of the roads and our struggles with them. This choice further de-emphasized the people creating an ease of substitution for the reader. However, one could argue that actually seeing the people will have more impact. For instance, simply saying 'suckers' doesn't have as much impact as saying 'suckers' with images of those supposedly being duped.

Essentially the use of images of real people with minimal manipulation or "comic-ification" is a double-edged sword. Along the same lines, omitting names or physical descriptions can be detrimental to a verbal argument; these opposing strategies faults could be described as too personal versus too vague. With that in mind then, which impacts the audience more thoroughly: an image based argument that perhaps is too personal or a verbal argument that might be leaning towards the vague?

To begin to answer that question and to begin to arrive at the decision of which argument is triumphant, I must first reconcile myself with what Birdsell and Groarke called the "prevalent prejudice" against visual images (Birdsell & Groarke 1). Of course visual argumentation can be vague, but as I have laid out above, so can the verbal variety. When considering which is more successful a proper distance is required. This required separation is more easily accomplished in theory than in practice and also considering that the conclusion I drew from reading Birdsell and Groarke was that an argumentation employing both visual and verbal rhetoric was the most effective and impactful. With that said, the obvious choice would be to say that the comic was most successful having employed both a visual and verbal threadwork rhetoric. However, this conclusion discounts the world created by the

verbal argument of the blog. And in consideration of the cliché that I began the essay, the images did not carry as many words as they could have. I will not argue that a visual argument cannot carry its weight, rather I, as the author of the visual argument did not adequately add the weight; they were beasts without much burden.

Ultimately, my verbal argument carries the day. Without the addition of text the comic or visual argument is lost or at best confused. The pacing of the comic, as well, when compared to the blog was confused, rushed, not as fluid. Additionally, though minor, the verbal argument was able to make use of logos in describing the depth of the snow and the grade of the hill, a strategy that was missing from the comic. Again, as previously mentioned, the fault lays with the author not the visual rhetoric. Each had its moment of delight (the comic with its lock and ha-has, the blog with its vivid description of my wife as Godzilla), but with my criteria set pretty high – that a picture is worth a thousand words – I think my prejudice influenced the outcome as much as my roughly wrought comic. Perhaps as my next trick I shall perform a rhetorical analysis of myself.

## Works Cited

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