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Reflective Portfolio Letter

Throughout the course of the semester, my understanding of the components to successful academic writing has vastly expanded. Through the investigation of hoax's and humbugs, core aspects of compositional writing and critical thinking developed. My portfolio contains a rhetorical analysis of a primary source hoax, an original podcast, a paper analyzing a primary source hoax through secondary source research and various blog posts relating to a variety of class discussions and assigned readings. Each assignment helped me further my skills in rhetorical awareness and composition, the process of writing and revision, critical thinking and close reading, and understanding and expressing the nuances of fact and fiction in relation to hoaxes.

My understanding of rhetorical devices such as genre, audience, purpose and organization was strengthened greatly by the breadth and frequency in assignments. By the end of the semester I felt as though I had a mastery of literary skills such as quote integration, topic sentences, and meaningful analysis.

The first paper I wrote for this class focused on the importance of the rhetoric triangle with the use of ethos, pathos, logos, or authority/ credibility, logic, audience. Learning to identify these essential devices was essential to the success of the first paper. Analyzing different genres such as 17th century scientific articles, film photographs, documentary film, and nonfiction works helped me fully understand how to apply such devices to nearly any genre. Practicing these devices in a blog post (see example A), solidified how to systematically dissect the tactics of an artifact, such as writing from hoax news websites such as *The Onion*.

Example A

"The overall tone of this article is authoritative. There are quotes from highly intelligent personnel like "Stanford University computer scientist David Alperin" and "leading scientists and engineers" to enforce the idea of robots as slave masters. This ethos or authority on the subject creates a more convincing and believable argument. Because it is coming from people who are specialists in the area of intelligence and members of the "Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence," the reader is more likely to hold the article credible. When explaining the mechanisms of the machine, the rhetoric is broad and mostly focuses on the empty guarantee that these machines are capable of compassion."

Audience is important when constructing any type of writing. Knowing information about the reader or viewer is essential when analyzing an artifact and when constructing an argument. This is exemplified by the podcast I created that was meant to take on the tone of National Public Radio's Morning Edition. Before I began to write a script or prospectus, I thoroughly researched NPR's audience base (see example B).

Example B

"The audience for this podcast is first off going to be anyone who works or gets up early enough to listen to NPR's Morning Edition. Because this airs from 5 am- 9am Monday through Friday, it is going to attract people who are driving to work because most commonly that's where people listen to live radio in this day in age. Moreover, according to research, NPR draws an educated audience where 54 percent have a college degree and 21 percent have some schooling. The irony of this is that these people are probably the very group that this drug pokes fun at the most. It is the educated, college students, and working people that would probably do anything to be better at their jobs/ school. So a drug like PMAX that maximizes things like efficiency, intelligence, and focus is something that would catch this audience's attention. Because a plurality have a college degree and the nature of NPR is informative that means this hoax has to be semi accurate and informational."

With each assignment the idea of writing as a process was enforced. Brainstorming in the form of informal writing as blogposts was important in the development of ideas. After developing a couple of prospective topics was writing a prospectus. Writing a prospectus was helpful in getting ideas down on a page through a stream of consciousness format. As the semester progressed the ability to produce a detailed outline became vital. In my research paper about *The Blair Witch Project*, I wrote numerous outlines. These outlines contained a detailed roadmap to the construction of the argument including a working thesis, topic sentences, quotations and analysis. I found it especially helpful after my rough draft was written to not only have my peers review what I have produced but also to read their work. The way my peers set up their arguments and decided to approach the paper gave me insight into techniques I would have never considered using. Though peer review is ostensibly altruistic I think that it had an equally mutualistic effect. The process of writing as a process can be seen in the examples below from artifacts from my paper entitled “*The Blair Witch Project: Fact or Fiction*”

Prospectus

“For my final paper I want to explore *The Blair Witch Project* with the focus around genre. The most captivating part of the film is the way it is captured: through the seemingly unfiltered lens of the characters reality. As I furthered my research I found that many people believed the film to be a work of factual uncut reality...? I plan to argue that there are many factors that created such a successful capture of “reality.” The overarching argument is encompasses genre: documentary style of film. But more than just the device it was captured through are things such as reality vs. perception, technology during the cusp of the 21st century, the concept of an off screen presence/ setting, the informal nature of dialog and lack of finesse when shooting. All of these sub topics could also be under the umbrella of the nuances of fact versus fiction and what makes something true. Going off of that idea, the film as a mock- documentary or “mockumentary,” would fit well to prove the point that fact and fiction are not polar notions.”



Annotated Bibliography

Must, Jelle. “New Directions in Hybrid Popular Television: a Reassessment of Television Mock-Documentary.” *Media, Culture & Society* 31.2 (2009): 232-243. *ProQuest*. Web. 4 November 2015.

The secondary source that I find most compelling is entitled “New Directions in Hybrid Popular Television: A Reassessment of Television Mock-Documentary.” The article I found discusses the recent trend of the mock-documentary or “mockumentary.” It delves into the ideologies and concepts of how audience is influenced by this new genre.... The author, Jelle Mast explores the psychological theories of mockumentaries where the line is blurred between perception and non-fiction



Outline

Body Paragraph 2- Time period + rise of documentary + handycam

Topic sentence: The genre of horror film is continually shifting to accommodate the context of its time period

- “Major aesthetic changes to the genre did not occur until 1978, but these changes had mostly to do with sophisticated technology, not artistic concerns *per se*”(King 189)
- “With American horror increasingly unable to take itself seriously, new life had to be infused into the genre. Since ‘more’ had become the operative concept (more gore, more violence), perhaps ‘less’ might be a good place to start” (King 190)
- idea that growing tech= overhaul of traditional horror methods. Things become more realistic + special effects= now horror is kind of satirical, cant take it seriously

Critical thinking and close reading became easier and more natural as the semester progressed. Aspects such as integrating quotes into an argument were emphasized. I noticed that as I kept writing, my arguments became more and more complex. My thesis in the first paper was logical and well thought out. However, comparing it to the thesis from my most recent paper makes it seem rigid and uncreative. This course helped me develop my intellect when pondering and analyzing literature. I also noticed that my choice in quoted material became more complex, where quotes were used to really push my argument further or challenge my argument.

With the idea of hoaxes and humbugs as the overarching theme I noticed how my perception of what those two words meant changed. Rather than looking at texts for concrete evidence that it is fake or true per se, I learned to embrace the nuances and gray area of the blurred line between what we consider fact and what we consider fiction. I think that idea goes hand in hand with critical thinking and close reading. The evolution of my thoughts on literature versus hoax have changed entirely. Rather than looking at the concept from a binary or polar standpoint, I now see how it could not be further away from a dichotomy.

News: The Cost of a Great Story

In her 1980 *Washington Post* front page article entitled “Jimmy’s World: 8-year-old Heroin Addict Lives for a Fix,” Reporter Janet Cooke presents a compelling story of a boy who is raised in a drug-centric community in Southeast Washington, D.C. Janet Cooke started at the *Washington Post* in 1979 as a young ambitious writer. Within a short two years of starting at the post, she received a Pulitzer Prize for her article “Jimmy’s Word.” However, it was soon discovered that her fact-based story was built upon nothing but an eloquently written façade. Through the use of vivid narrative, emotional content, and credible professional commentary, Cooke crafts a compelling exposé that ostensibly sheds light on the horrific effects of perpetual drug use on younger and younger generations of children. Using these rhetoric tactics, she successfully captures the attention of *The Washington Post’s* widespread and diverse audience. However, her motive is not the public good, but rather recognition and self-promotion for her eye-catching story, ultimately at the cost of her integrity and credibility as journalist.

The notion of an 8-year-old-heroin addict is eye catching but also troubling for many readers. Newspaper articles with alarming or provocative claims in the title are more likely to grab the audience’s attention to read the-article. Daily newspapers attract a large, broad, dedicated audience. *The Washington Post* is recognized as a credible daily newspaper with particular popularity in the Washington DC, Virginia, and Maryland area. Many working class Americans, especially before the invention of the Internet, would start their day by reading their local newspaper. More specifically, the audience is largely white, therefor only able to relate to the story off of what they hear impoverished DC is like. When these factors are combined, and a story appears on the front page of a highly respected newspaper like the *Washington Post*, readership and credibility is almost certain. Such great exposure guarantees that “Jimmy’s

World: 8-year-old Heroin Addict Lives for a Fix,” will gain the audience’s sympathy and attention. Jimmy comes to symbolize what is deeply wrong within our drug-infested cities and he becomes the epitome of lost innocence. The use of graphic imagery also plays a role in captivating the audience. The audience is told that Jimmy is so young that an adult must inject the drug for him, portrayed by “plunging a needle into his bony arm, sending the fourth grader into a hypnotic nod” (Cooke). This extraordinary, deeply disturbing and visceral image is emotionally gripping and unimaginable, and therefore, something not easily dismissed or forgotten.

Cooke instills sympathy, using lavish descriptions and detailed narrative, to convey the impression of a first hand account. She begins with a description of the main subject named Jimmy. She describes him as a “precious little boy with baby-hair, velvety brown eyes and needle marks freckling the baby-smooth skin of his thin brown arms” (Cooke). She pulls the reader in by creating a visually rich setting, allowing the reader to imagine the scene she so vividly paints. In doing so, she not only convinces the audience of the veracity of her account but she constructs a powerful emotional connection to Jimmy. Her description of Jimmy creates a disturbing contrast between the innocent beauty and pristine appearance of a young boy, and the scarring, destructive, unfathomable track marks on the arms of a child. She further paints the picture by describing him “nestled in a large, beige, reclining chair in the living room of comfortably furnished home of South Washington” (Cooke). By sharing with the audience such detailed observations, it encourages the reader to imagine the scene from Jimmy’s point of view--a small child dwarfed in a large, comfortable chair, like any living room anywhere. Cooke portrays Jimmy in such a way that the audience is swayed to sympathize with him. Described with a “cherubic expression on his small round face”(Cooke), Jimmy is portrayed as an innocent

child with a far from childish addiction. Indeed, Cooke gestures back to his age many times throughout the article. By reminding the audience of Jimmy's strikingly young age, it ensures that the emotional pull stays intact throughout the article. The reader is emotionally drawn in time and time again by the dissonance she creates between his age and his addiction.

Cooke's use of detailed rhetoric is also evident in her depiction of the individual characters that populate Jimmy's world, imbuing them with distinct voices and viewpoints that reinforce and add credibility to the story. His mother, Andrea, claims that, "I don't really like to see him fire up... But, you know, I think he would have got into it one day, anyway. Everybody does. When you live in the ghetto." His mother's seemingly dispassionate attitude makes Jimmy's addiction appear "normal" within the social context of the environment in which he lives, not out of the ordinary. By quoting her, Cooke makes a convincing case employing first-hand dialogue. Finally, by setting the stage in an area already quite well known in the public awareness for its endemic drug problems, Cooke capitalizes on preconceived notions and stereotypes as a further way to add credence to her story. Indeed, she has the reader believe that a heroin addicted child is really only different because of his age.

In an effort to demonstrate credibility, Cooke quotes a host of outside specialists and includes hard facts and statistics. Bringing in experts on the topic of drug use helps solidify and reinforce the veracity of her argument. She adds commentary from DEA special agent, David G. Canaday, claiming that "while judiciously avoiding the use of the term epidemic, Canaday does say that the city's heroin problem is "sizable"(Cooke). Having a DEA agent comment on the severity of the drug problem in Washington, D.C. does help establish credibility. However, though these facts are contextually relevant, they are not specific enough to directly verify the existence of Jimmy or any particular facts tied to his story. Cooke also turns to social workers to

back up her claims about Jimmy's family structure. According to social workers in the Southeast Washington area "many young black children become involved with drugs because there is no male authority figure present in the home." Not only does this not align with the "facts" of Cooke's portrayal of Jimmy's family, it once again relies on stereotype and overly broad interpretations of causation of a very complicated social-cultural issue. Yet readers are seduced by these simplified notions, probably not even noticing the contradiction within the storyline because of the effectiveness of Cooke's emotionally charged portrayal.

Though Janet Cooke created a captivating piece of literature, she displayed it as a work of non-fiction. In the case of Cooke, in which she fabricated most all of the article and presented it as an "objective" news story, the line between fact and fiction is blurred and challenged. Within a democracy, the news is a critical anchor in the balance of power with the government. We look to our nation's established news outlets as a credible way to keep up with current events from around the globe. For the most part, news is supposed to be unbiased and objective. But when did the world of news become more about entertainment than about the actual events? We live in a society where "news" is evaluated for the number of viewers or being the first to report on a celebrity breakup. It is no wonder journalist's feel the need to fabricate elaborate stories for their own self-promotion. Though Cooke's article was published decades ago, one can argue that the pressure to skew the truth for recognition within the sea of media onslaught is even greater than in Cooke's time. Indeed, Janet Cooke received much scrutiny for her deception but who is to say that news today isn't equally as duplicitous.

Revision Report: Paper 1

The major changes I made to my rhetorical analysis include structural rearrangement, topic sentence adjustment, and rhetorical adjustments. As I read over my original paper, I noticed that my paragraphs topic sentences weren't directly indicative of what I talked about inside of that paragraph. However, rather than merely adjusting topic sentences I thought my paper would be more cohesive if I rearranged points within my paragraphs. Originally, my paragraphs were not logically organized. My thesis is clear stating that Cooke uses "vivid narrative, emotional content, and credible professional commentary." Though I set out to prove these three tactics, I did not do it in the most logical way. This made my paper weak and confusing. An important revision was reorganizing sentences and points so that each paragraph had a clear-set theme. Rather than discussing emotional aspects of Cooke's argument in numerous paragraphs, I moved things around so that these points were grouped together (Example A & B).

An important part of reproaching this essay was starting from scratch with a series of new outlines and ideas. Coming back to this paper after not reading it for two months allowed me to view it from a new lens. After re reading it I marked out where I think needed work or revisiting. It was clear that the structure could be more logical and organized, something I did not see when writing this paper in September. I created three outlines of possible structures for my paper. When I compared them to my outlines from September I was surprised to see how different my thought process was.

On a larger scale, I rearranged the overall structure of my argument to adequately

I moved the paragraph about audience and genre to the beginning so it follows my introductory paragraph. Following the idea of broad to narrow then narrow to broad, I arranged my paragraphs to mirror this. I also decided to separate one of my paragraphs into two after realizing that the content was too broad and varied to fit in one paragraph. I think by doing this it helps clear up confusion about the main point I am trying to make inside of each paragraph.

Rhetorically, the area that needed further investigation was the analysis of audience. I more thoroughly researched the audience of daily newspaper, more specifically the audience of *The Washington Post*. In my introductory paragraph I added the ways in which audience plays a role in how and why Janet Cooke was able to convince so many people of the veracity of her article (Example C). More specifically I mentioned audience in my thesis to show my understanding standing of the influence of audience in a broad overarching sense. In multiple areas I added the influence of audience. I also thought it was necessary to specifically identify who the audience is. Rather than deeming the readers as just people who read the daily newspaper, I was able to find out that *The Washington Post* has a primarily white audience base of working class men and women in the Maryland, Virginia, and D.C. area. Deepening my understanding in audience helped me realize how vital a component it is to an overall successful rhetorical analysis.

The content in my first paper remained the same for the most part throughout my revisions. I had previously revised my first draft many times in terms of content and analysis so that aspect of my paper did not need much work. There were a couple sentences that needed revisions in terms of word choice. Beyond minute details such as those, I would like to think that the content of my paper is strong and makes for a compelling argument.

Example A World: 8-year-old Heroin Addict Lives for a Fix,” will gain the audience’s sympathy and attention. ~~Cooke portrays Jimmy in such a way that the audience is swayed to sympathize with him. Described with a “cherubic expression on his small round face”(Cooke), Jimmy is portrayed as an innocent child with a far from childish addiction. Indeed, Cooke gestures back to his age many times throughout the article. By reminding the audience of Jimmy’s strikingly young age, it ensures that the emotional pull stays intact throughout the article. The reader is emotionally drawn in time and time again by the dissonance she creates between his age and his addiction.~~ Jimmy comes to symbolize what is deeply wrong within our drug-infested cities and he becomes the epitome of lost innocence. The use of graphic imagery also plays a role in captivating the audience. The audience is told that Jimmy is so young that an adult must inject

Example B comfortably furnished home of South Washington” (Cooke). By sharing with the audience such |detailed observations, it encourages the reader to imagine the scene from Jimmy’s point of view- a small child dwarfed in a large, comfortable chair, like any living room anywhere. ~~Cooke portrays Jimmy in such a way that the audience is swayed to sympathize with him. Described with a “cherubic expression on his small round face”(Cooke), Jimmy is portrayed as an innocent child with a far from childish addiction. Indeed, Cooke gestures back to his age many times throughout the article. By reminding the audience of Jimmy’s strikingly young age, it ensures that the emotional pull stays intact throughout the article. The reader is emotionally drawn in time and time again by the dissonance she creates between his age and his addiction.~~

Example C ~~they hear impoverished DC is like.~~ Through the use of vivid narrative, ~~emotional emotion evoking~~ content, and credible professional commentary, Cooke crafts a compelling exposé that ostensibly sheds light on the horrific effects of perpetual drug use on younger and younger generations of children. ~~Using these rhetoric tactics, she successfully captures the attention of The Washington Post’s widespread and diverse audience.~~ However, her motive is not the public good, but rather recognition and self-promotion for her eye-catching story, ultimately at the cost of her integrity and credibility as journalist.

The Blair Witch Project: Fact or Fiction

As the world entered the new millennium, it witnessed a time of sustained technological advancement as devices continued to shrink in size, decrease in cost, and increase in capability. As such, technologies previously restricted to the very wealthy or professional use entered into the everyday marketplace. As readily available gadgets increased, so did widespread use of the web, again becoming part of people's daily life. These two factors played a critical role in the creation and phenomenon of *The Blair Witch Project*. Utilizing the new technologies of the time, *The Blair Witch Project* created a new genre of film that had yet to be seen by Hollywood. The film exploits preconceived notions audiences hold about documentary filmmaking where the camera lens captures the unfiltered reality through the eyes of the characters. Using conventions of low budget documentary film and applying them to the unconventional genre of horror, *The Blair Witch Project* effectively blurs the line between fact and fiction, leaving the audience perplexed and muddled by the film's striking veracity despite the preposterous content. Ultimately, the real paradox behind the horror of *The Blair Witch Project* lays in what the audience doesn't see or what isn't visually captured.

The background of *The Blair Witch Project* is vital in understanding its significance in film culture. During the winter of 1999, the "documentary" entitled *The Blair Witch Project*, premiered at Sundance Film Festival. In fact, it was the first horror film to ever be premiered at Sundance. Its unique take on the horror genre not only took the media by storm, but also influenced many films for many years following its creation. After shocking its audience and receiving critical acclaim, the film was released to general audiences a few months later. It is often considered the first film to have been marketed on the Internet (Aufderheide 3). Shot for

\$40,000, this low budget film was a “slap in the face to big budget producers, and a fodder for critics” (Mcdowell 1). The plot revolves around the journey of three young filmmakers who set out to debunk the myth of the Blair Witch. Heather Donahue, Michael Williams, and Josh Leonard embark on a journey through the woods in rural Maryland. The character Heather shoots the majority of the footage with most of the film is shot on a Hi-8. However, snippets appear from a 16-millimeter film camera that adds an interesting contrast to the color footage. Unlike the impression the film creates, “these were not first-time filmmakers, by and large, but experienced producers who wanted to use camcorder technology for self expression” (Aufderheide 3). As the story goes, the tapes were found a year later by walkers exploring the woods.

The Blair Witch Project represents a shift in horror filmmaking capturing the cultural and technological changes of the time. According to Geoff King, “for what seemed the first time in years, a commercially viable horror film took a ‘less is more’, psychological (as opposed to visceral) approach to horror, and audiences worldwide were fascinated and outraged in equal measure” (King 187). The genre of horror is continually shifting to accommodate the cultural context of the time period. For decades leading up to the turn of the 21st century, horror films shared many of the same conventions. King refers to this popular prototype as classical horror. This genre centers on dramatic chiaroscuro lighting that is reminiscent of rich colors of oil paints on canvas with bright highlights and dark shadows. Also, part of this prototype includes beautifully shot scenes and a formulaic pattern of suspension and predictability. However, as technology advanced in cinema, films in general became more realistic and audiences were captivated by special effects. Horror struggled to find its niche. The classical approach of horror seemed no longer adequate in the context of modern technology. With the horror genre “unable

to take itself seriously, new life had to be infused into the genre. Since ‘more’ had become the operative concept (more gore, more violence), perhaps ‘less’ might be a good place to start” (King 190). Like many cultural phenomena, *The Blair Witch Project* captured the cultural Zeitgeist and changed the rules of filmmaking.

The line between of fact and fiction, reality versus fantasy, is so skillfully nuanced in *The Blair Witch Project* that many people were unsure of the film’s authenticity. The film creates the ultimate grey area and within that ambiguity exists the conflict in the mind of the audience. The conflict originates in the preconceptions of reality and perception being polar. According to Margrit Schreir, “Literary theory has often been concerned with defining ‘fiction’ in sharp opposition to ‘fact,’ thus presupposing that the two are conceptually distinct” (301). The film overtly melds fact and fiction through genre but it also does so minutely. The camera not only shades the audience from the truth but it also acts as a barrier from reality for the characters. Lost in the woods with fleeting hope, Josh picks up Heather’s camera and exclaims, “I see why you like this camera so much... it’s not quite reality.” Josh deliberately verbalizes how reality cannot be captured through a lens. It is paradoxical, or maybe ironic, because that is the exact issue the audience has trouble grasping whether it’s reality or not. Moreover, Josh utters “No but its totally like filtered reality man. It's like you can pretend everything is not quite the way it is.” It’s as if Josh is letting the viewer in on the ruse: “filtered reality” may be a working definition of this film. Like all reality with our psychological defenses, you can pretend “everything is not quite the way it is.” The filmmakers manipulate us to believe we are seeing what they want us to see, despite our deep reservations. Most importantly, they exploit us to fill in the missing pieces—the parts that are *not* there-- with our own deepest fears to make the film resonate as real. Perhaps that is the key to understand how so many educated, informed people fell for *The Blair Witch*

Project.

The Blair Witch Project utilizes the conventions of amateur documentary film to innovatively capture a minimalist horror narrative. The melding of these two genres is known as mock documentary, or “mockumentary” (Schreier 309). According to Jelle Mast, mockumentaries “[walk] a delicate line between fictional and factual conventions... lumped together under the tentative ‘docufiction’ designation.” Rather than conventional documentaries that are created from an existing reality, mockumentaries are constructed from a made up experience for the purpose of spectator entertainment. *The Blair Witch Project* used this genre so convincingly that, according to a study done by Margrit Schreier, “40 percent [of viewers] were at least temporarily uncertain as to the product type” (306). This statistic sheds light on how plausible is to induce a sense of reality through this genre. Arguably, the goal of this genre “asserts that the events and people actually exist as such in the world as portrayed” (Mast 234). In other words, the spectator’s preconceived notions of genre-conventions are exploited for the purpose of entertainment. Mast contends, “Mock-documentary, through its use of the style and techniques that are conventionally attributed to non-fiction discourse (e.g. voice-over commentary, interview segments, hand-held camera)...” implies a constructed reality. In some ways, factual documentaries filter the truth in the same way. Though the genre of mockumentary is a deliberate trickery of its audience, who is to say that documentary too falls somewhere on the same spectrum.

Though *The Blair Witch Project* was not the first mock-documentary film, the directors’ deliberate and innovative behind-the-scenes tactics made the film the most popular in its genre. Moreover, though there are many approaches to fusing horror and documentary into a seamless experience, *The Blair Witch Project* takes a very specific approach. In an interview with the

director of the film, Eduardo Sanchez reveals the approach he used to make the film as believable as possible. Not surprisingly, Sanchez utilized many techniques that are generally associated with documentary filmmaking. The actors were kept in the dark on most aspects of the film until the production began and throughout the filming. This meant that the entirety of the dialog was unscripted in order to evoke natural conversation. They had little contact with the crew and were merely instructed where to be at what time. Having the actors know as little as possible ensured their reactions and instincts were authentic and spontaneous as possible. Sanchez offers insight into the atypical audition process where hundreds of actors were simply asked, "Why they should be let off parole" (McDowell 4). This rather peculiar audition tactic helped reveal the few who had the aptitude for ad-lib. His creative yet simple ploy was essential to the success of the film's portrayal of unfiltered reality. It is behind the scenes strategies such as these that make the film such a successful mock-documentary. Rather than sustaining the polarity between authenticity and imitation, the directors clearly aim to disregard this convention. The characters themselves embody the complexity of the hazy line between what is real versus what is not. Attributes from both genres are reworked and rethought in an innovative, seamless manner.

The first person point of view ostensibly allows the audience to see through the unfiltered eyes of the characters' reality. The camera functions to document the characters journey in the discovery of the Blair Witch. The craftsmanship of the footage seems amateur in skill and unplanned in content, inducing an ambiance of young, carefree and unprofessional film students. The film opens with a shot of Heather in her apartment talking directly to the camera, explaining the about the journey they are about to take. Rather than being perfectly outfitted and groomed, she is wearing sweatpants with no makeup and messy hair. This gives the aesthetic of a

spontaneous home movie rather than a scripted Hollywood film. Indeed it is the “jerky camera movement and unscripted, awkwardly repetitive dialogue”(King 197), which produces such an authentic effect. Though the characters lack eloquence in their dialog, something that might detract from another documentary, in this instance it suits the film and further reinforces the spontaneity and veracity of a first-hand account. Before the camera introduces the audience to the two other faces, Heather shows off “some essential reading. How To Stay Alive in the Woods, cause you never know what's going to happen.” This claim indicates that, even early on in the narrative, this deliberate foreshadowing might be reminiscent of a duplicitous lens. From this claim it is evident that reality might not be the only force at play.

In the making of the film, the use of found footage documentary allows for gaps in the narrative and the integration of ambiguous snippets of film. The sense of an off screen presence or setting is equally as significant where the negated visual field is not obvious but rather implied. During the third night the three characters are woken up by an eerie baby cry. For many moments the screen is black but the audience can hear the terrified dialog between the characters. Taking away the audience’s vision heightens the dramatic effect as the unknown arguably evokes more terror. In the film, tension rises when a tent violently shakes, causing the characters to flee in horror. Heather turns her head looking back at the tent and screams “Oh my god what the F*** is that! What the F*** is that!” multiple times. The shaky camera work of the scene is shot as if someone is actually quaking in fear holding onto the camera. The scene is then obscured by the night so the audience is forced to make interpretations based solely on the characters reactions. Heather’s sheer terror indicates that she sees something abjectly terrifying. The lack of reference puts the spectator in an interesting place where they must use their imagination, their own projection of terror. This type of approach displays a “keen understanding

of off screen space...[T]he implication that there is something just off the camera moving too quickly for the camera operator to catch is very strong” (McDowell 4). This technique not only builds tension, but it also demands that the audience become the actors themselves; filling in the visual blank with their own worst demons. Because the camera takes on a subjective role, the audience is situated “not in in the monster’s position, but in that of the victim’s, thereby increasing the audience identification and anxiety” (McDowell 5). The off screen space becomes a “representation of a monster or monstrous human or monstrous psychological force”(King 196). The audience takes on the role of victim themselves, kept in the dark just as much as the characters.

There is something about the veracity of the lens, especially in the pre-digital era, which the filmmakers exploited. The camera has long functioned to capture snippets of reality for documentation, evidence, and entertainment purposes. However, the exploration of deception through the “objective” lens is nothing new. Even in the early twentieth century photographers took an interest in ectoplasm and teleplasm photography, claiming that the ghost like figures in the background were “material byproducts of spirit activity”(Schoonover 31). Shown by the jerky, not fully developed capture of reality, *The Blair Witch Project* “accentuate[s] the camera’s ability to record what is otherwise too fleeting for eyesight to register fully” (Schoonover 31). We tend to trust what we see through a lens as “real.” In the case of *The Blair Witch Project*, the camera serves multiple functions “as ‘medium’ in both senses of the word, not only rendering the image of a person posing for a portrait but also materializing the impression of a ghost hovering above” (Schoonover 32). In this subliminal way, the process and content become one. The camera itself pulls us in, manipulating our unconscious fears in the worst-case scenario.

The Blair Witch Project was successful in its pursuit of a new and captivating genre.

However, contextually speaking, one could argue that time period played a key role in its ability to obfuscate fact and fiction. With the sophistication we have today and plethora of technology at our fingertips, it is hard to believe that popular culture would view the film as anything beside fictional entertainment. With the ubiquity of reality TV and explosion of social media platforms, we have developed an insatiable appetite, almost a voyeuristic need to witness the intimate details of the lives of others. With this has come the deterioration between public and private life. For the viewers in 1999, watching a film that gave a peek into the private life of other people through a subjective camera was a new idea and novel experience. Arguably, portable technology such as the camcorder and, more recently, the smart phone, are responsible for the obscurity and breach between the lens of private life and that of public. The implications of this social and cultural shift have yet to be fully understood. In retrospect, *The Blair Witch Project* now appears rudimentary and easily understood as a hoax. As technology continues to advance, the stakes do as well, positing so many questions about the line between fact and fiction, truth and lies, and the meaning of reality.

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Revision Report: Paper 2

Writing a research paper with many secondary sources was not an easy task. Organization was difficult for me throughout the process. Though I found a plethora of great secondary sources, it was challenging to deem what points would fit best where. Originally my paper's structure wasn't logical. Rather than going from broad to narrow and then narrow to broad, I jumped back and forth in a confusing way. After giving the order of the paragraphs much thought I deemed it best to talk about the abstract ideas such as fact versus fiction towards the begging of the paper and then delve into the technical.

Film as a genre also posed challenging. Though *The Blair Witch Project* had many great quotes, much of what was most significant isn't a quote per se. It was hard to describe a scene as primary evidence without over summarizing. Because the film was unscripted and mostly all ad lib, I was unable to find a transcript online. This meant that I had to watch and rewatch scenes from the movie many times. In a way this was a type of close reading and forced me to analyze aspects beyond that of the lines of the characters.

Structurally I rearranged my body paragraphs so they fit together more cohesively. Because the length of the paper was longer than we have done in the past, it made it hard to organize my thoughts. Deeming what should come first was challenging because everything seemed to work in multiple variations in order. I made many outline with different orders for the paragraphs but was not sure how to decide which made the most sense.

Using rhetorical devices in the genre of film was interesting for many reasons. Things such as credibility, authority, and emotion are depicted in film through not only words but also facial expressions, body language, setting, music, directing choices and timing. These aspects are not part of reading from a text and make the analysis that much more dynamic. It challenged me to read more closely and read in between the lines.

Some parts of my paper were a little too wordy with jargon. For example when describing old horror movies I mentioned "dramatic chiaroscuro lighting." After reading this I realized that my audience probably doesn't know what chiaroscuro means since it is a renaissance Italian art term. To clear it up I changed the sentence to describe how it reflects the art practice of creating rich colors with oil paints. It embodies the bright white highlights and the deep dark shadows that make for a very dramatic setting. In the way that artists use this on a canvas, directors use this on the screen. It conveys a sense of mystery and eeriness.

Revision Report: Podcast

There are many aspects of my podcast that could use revision in areas such as rhetoric technique but also technical aspects. If I had the opportunity to make the podcast longer than 5 minutes I would first add in another character or voice. Though three characters were enough to keep an interesting dialog going, I think adding another voice or two could create a more dynamic podcast. A forth voice would give me the prospect to add a viewpoint from a skeptic or possibly add another P-MAX user. If I were to add a skeptic voice some options of characters would be a competing doctor or scientist in the same field of study, a children's neuropsychologist, or the director of neuroscience at the National Institute of Health's Dr. Neil Buckholtz. For the most part, Renee Montagne does the questioning as well as the interviewing of Dr. Drum. In a way she is taking on two roles, which could have been avoided if I had introduced another character. If I were to have a cynic voice, I would want it to target the idea of the ethics behind a "smart drug." The ethics behind a nearly unrestricted cognitive enhancer is relevant. With the current advancement of drugs such as Adderall, Ritalin etc the invention of a drug like PMAX is not a matter of if it is a matter of when. I think describing the background to cognitive enhancers would premise the discussion of ethical concerns nicely.

If I were to have the director of neuroscience at NIH come on the show, I think it would make the most sense to introduce him right after Dr. Drum is introduced. This way there is the prospect for an open dialog and back and forth stichomythia effect. This Ancient Greek rhetoric technique, seen in plays, allows for an organized and rhythmic way of debating with each character alternating single lines in a quick and witty manner (See Example A). Having a skeptic on the show makes it more realistic since in science things are not always black and white. Often, drugs have side effects and put up for question before they are available to the public.

If NPR would have done a series on PMAX I think it would be interesting to show a variety of snapshots into live footage from the study. Henry, being a 3 year old boy, shows just one the many types of people that PMAX benefits. Perhaps, showing footage of a kind of person who is more closely allied with NPR's audience base would be interesting. This person would most likely be a working American man or woman who simply wants to get ahead in their career and be more efficient. Since the effects of a cognitive enhancement drug are going to look extremely different on a toddler, having an adult might give a clearer insight into who the drug mainly targets. Another interview option could be a college student who is double majoring and need the extra boost to stay on top of his studies. Psycho stimulant medication is very prevalent on college campuses all over the United States, so having a first hand account of a college student on PMAX could shed light into the differences in respect to drugs like Adderall.

On a technical scale, the major change I would make is a better microphone and a bigger variety of audio from the characters. A problem I faced was when interviewing Henry, I used an audio recording software on an iphone that had a much crisper sound than the rest of the audio that was recorded using the built in MacBook microphone. Recording the entirety of the podcast on the same type of microphone was something I overlooked and now realize is essential. There were parts with Henry where I had to break down the audio in single word segments due to slight changes in script direction. This could have been avoided if I had a more concrete script from the beginning or a more copious selection of audio to choose from. Though it may not be very obvious, small aspects like choppy transitions and change in audio quality can distract from the content of a podcast.

Example A

Renee: This morning we are honored to be the first to sit down with the inventor of the recently FDA approved “Smart Drug” Dr. Drum who’s trials were just published in the New England Journal of Medicine and the director of neuroscience at the National Institute of Health Dr. Buckholtz

Dr. Drum: Hello Renee and thank you for having me on The Morning Edition

Dr. Buckholtz: Good morning Renee, Dr. Drumm...

Renee: Dr. Drumm Could you tell us more about this new drug? Just yesterday Johnson and Johnson’s PMAX concluded it’s FDA approval is that correct?

Dr. Drum: Exactly right. For the first time, a drug will be available that maximizes a persons neural abilities. Panatomoxitine Methylphenidate Amphetamine or PMAX works by stimulating specific neurotransmitters in the prefrontal cortex resulting in the temporary surge of dopamine and noradrenaline levels. Through a number of studies with ages from 3 years to 65 years, it has been shown to improve efficiency and cognitive speed up to 8 times the human average for that age.

Dr. Buckholtz: What you are doing is ethically immoral!

Dr. Drum: excuse me? On what grounds?

Dr. Buckholtz: Artificial neuro enhancement is a slippery slope, giving everyone access will result in a nation wide addiction and economic downturn.

Dr. Drum: Access to PMAX is the future of humanity, humans should all have access to unleashing the full potential of their mind.

Dr. Buckholtz: Might I interject the fact that artificially stimulating the prefrontal cortex through neuro-enhancement mechanisms has been proven to increase onset Parkinson’s, symptoms of Schizophrenia and Alzheimer’s.

Blog Post: Best

“Scientists Confident Artificially Intelligent Machines Can Be Programmed To Be Lenient Slave Masters”

The Onion is known for reporting modern ideas and events through satire and hoaxes. “Scientists Confident Artificially Intelligent Machines Can Be Programmed To Be Lenient Slave Masters,” is a great example of how rhetoric is used to create a persuasive argument. This is done using the “rhetorical triangle” which encompasses ideas of ethos, pathos, logos, and context. The overall tone of this article is authoritative. There are quotes from highly intelligent personnel like “Stanford University computer scientist David Alperin” and “leading scientists and engineers” to enforce the idea of robots as slave masters. This ethos or authority on the subject creates a more convincing and believable argument. Because it is coming from people who are specialists in the area of intelligence and members of the “Association for the Advancement of Artificial Intelligence,” the reader is more likely to hold the article credible. When explaining the mechanisms of the machine, the rhetoric is broad and mostly focuses on the empty guarantee that these machines are capable of compassion. Further, the article uses logos or reason by explaining the benefits of artificial intelligence. The idea of humans as slaves to artificial intelligence is supported with many logical claims, such as the “incalculable application in the fields of medicine, finance, transportation, and so many others,” said MIT computer engineering professor Daphne Quintero.” Though the article seeks out to support this idea, it balances with counter arguments in a rational way. Triggering emotion, or ethos, the article aims to reassure its audience. One scientist shows compassion acknowledging that “It’s understandable to be nervous about such a formidable technology.” By showing understanding of both sides, it helps the audience see it from a more open view. The audience is assured that these machines will show a “certain amount of mercy,” in a way a human does. By emphasizing the ability for a machine to show mercy or compassion, the audience is more likely to resist since emotions are something that they can relate to. To conclude, the context of this article, being a popular subject for debate in technology today, makes the argument that much more persuasive.

Audience Description for Podcast

Audience: The audience for this podcast is first off going to be anyone who works or gets up early enough to listen to NPR’s Morning Edition. Because this airs from 5 am- 9am Monday through Friday, it is going to attract people who are driving to work because most commonly that’s where people listen to live radio in this day in age. Moreover, according to research, NPR draws an educated audience where 54 percent have a college degree and 21 percent have some schooling. The irony of this is that these people are probably the very group that this drug pokes fun at the most. It is the educated, college students, and working people that would probably do anything to be better at their jobs/ school. So a drug like PMAX that maximizes things like efficiency, intelligence, and focus is something that would catch this audience’s attention. Because a plurality have a college degree and the nature of NPR is informative that means this hoax has to be semi accurate and informational. But I also want to some how make it satirical in slight ways like by interviewing a 3 year old.

Close Reading: The Blair Witch Project

“It’s not the same on film is it? I mean, you know it’s real, but it’s like looking through the lens gives you some sort of protection from what’s on the other side.”

This stream of consciousness starts with a rhetorical and vague question. The use of the word “It” to start and end the question is vague and mysterious. “It” is something that is broad and general where the viewer doesn’t really know if it is a pronoun or noun. The medium is film brought up which is an important component throughout the story. The question he poses is rhetoric as he quickly follows it up with a statement. The sentence starts with “I mean” giving a sense that he is trying to answer the question he posed. The next part is interesting in how he is literally trying to convince himself out of accepting reality. He goes on to say “you know it’s real, but...”. Following the statement with the word “but” shows hesitation and an internalized doubt. He goes on to say “looking through the lens gives you some sort of protection from what’s on the other side.” This is interesting in how the writer chose pronouns because even though he is saying “you” he is talking about his own fears of reality. This line is encompassing of a major theme in Blair Witch Projects, which is the separation between the first hand account of the characters with the audience by the separation of a camera lens. The camera acts as something that skews and distorts reality, which ironically is touched on in the quote above. It is almost like the director is leaving breadcrumbs through nuanced dialog to indicate that the Blair Witch Projects are a hoax and not reality.

Supernatural Hoax in Photography

To create this I used Adobe Photoshop. This idea of having a demonic child behind the curtain sprung from an irrational fear that someone is going to pop up behind me when I look at a mirror. The child in the back is actually an old baby photo that I put a radial blur on and changed the opacity, saturation, brightness etc to create a half translucent demon. The hardest part was probably deciding what to put behind the curtain.



Blog post weakest

Barnum's Joice Heth

For a hoax to be persuasive or successful the source must have an authority on the topic or Ethos. Alike, the audience is more apt to believe something that is highly detailed and supported by secondary sources. For example in Barnum's "The Life of Joice Heth" he uses elaborate detail to imply the legitimacy of the case he presents. He explains her diet down to the way she prefers her eggs and tells the audience her average. These random details are important in establishing a convincing hoax. However, Barnum does not solely rely on his own accounts as evidence. He presents the reader with multiple secondary sources from not only other established newspapers and published but from the subject herself. Since the article is presented in a published medium, it legitimizes Barnum's accounts. The nature of newspaper is to present current events with an unbiased stance. He is seemingly impartial, with an informative tone making it a convincing article. An unsuccessful hoax is one with too much embellishment. Barnum presents this woman as the oldest woman alive as well as George Washington's nurse, a coupling that is pushing the boundaries of what is believable and what is not.

BLOG POSTS REFLECTION:

My strongest blog posts are all detailed and organized. My logic is clear and my understanding of rhetorical devices is also clear. I think my close reading of the quoted material is well analyzed and detailed. With my post about robots, I think I did a good job pointing out what the tactics the author was using to create a comedic but authoritative piece of literature. My Photoshopped picture with the demon in the back targets a common fear of what is behind the curtain. I think why my Joice Heth post is weak had to do with my lack of understanding with the material. I could improve this by being more specific and less general especially with audience. Rather than saying newspaper is made for people who want to keep up with current events, I could have researched the topic more specifically to figure out the audience