

Essay 1 Assignment Sheet: Rhetorical Analysis

Analysis (Gr. *analysis*: dissolving): A separating or breaking up of any whole into its parts so as to find out their nature, proportion, function, relationship, purpose, etc.

Globalization & Localization: “Thinking globally” can be overwhelmingly complex and abstract. Instead of thinking the global, we’ll begin by experiencing the local, exploring, in turn, how the local and the global intersect in various ways.

Texts, Rhetoric, & Rhetorical Analysis: We have discussed in class how texts are not only written documents but may include things like people, objects, images, and places. Thus, it is possible to “read” (i.e., analyze) the rhetoric of any given situation.

The Assignment: Choose any one of the following commercial spaces and write an essay in which you describe and analyze the rhetoric of that space:

- A local shopping mall
- A local fast-food restaurant
- A local grocery store
- A local coffee shop
- A commercial space at UA (Mall, Student Union, etc.)
- A commercially-zoned street (i.e., Fourth Avenue, University Boulevard, etc.)
- A store (clothing, footwear, gifts, music, etc.)
- A comparison/contrast of two type-similar commercial spaces from the above list

In addition to the above choices, I am open to suggestions, so long as they involve commercial spaces. If you’d like to propose an alternative space for analysis, please let me know by the end of class on Tuesday, January 28.

You may also use quotes from Barber and/or Iyer to introduce an idea, lend support to your argument, etc. Such quotations are fine, so long as your main focus is on the commercial space you are analyzing.

“What am I supposed to analyze?” If rhetoric is the art and science of using language to persuade someone to do something or think something, then your objective is to analyze how and what the text of a commercial space is asking you to do or think. Here’s an example for Barber’s analysis of malls in *Jihad vs. McWorld*:

The boundaries that separate the mall from the world are intended to remove every boundary between what goes on inside the mall and in the world: very few exits, no clocks. As fast food energizes consumers to shop (“dining” takes time away from shopping) and movie multiplexes provide entertainment incentives to consumption, so the architecture of mall space—the placement of stairways, the grouping of shops by income level, the theming of stores. (130-131)

Note how Barber 1) makes several points, 2) gives examples, and 3) argues a link between his examples (mall architecture) and their effect (more consumption). Another way of putting it: rhetorical analysis is the study of the relationships between how and why things are structured as they are.

Things to Think About—Commercial Spaces: You won’t be able to address all of the following, but here are some questions to prompt your analysis: Obviously, commercial spaces want you to buy their products, but how do they go about doing this? Ads, yes, but what else? What are you buying/buying into? How do commercial spaces see you? How do commercial spaces portray you-the-consumer? What appeals are being made to community? region? nation? world? What values do they appeal to? What beliefs? desires? fears? Why do people come to this space? What needs or desires draw them into this space? What sort of people come to this space? How do they behave within this space? How do socializing and consumption interact? How is this space designed to encourage certain behavior (social interaction, consumption, etc.) and/or discourage other sorts of behavior? How does

socializing/consumption change an individual's identity within this space? How does this space "perceive" or "define" the person? How does the person, in turn, resist or embrace such perceptions and definitions?

We have looked at two portrayals of globalization: Part 1 of Benhamin R. Barber's *Jihad vs. McWorld: Terrorism's Challenge to Democracy* and Pico Iyer's "Bali: On Prospero's Isle/The Philippines: Born in the USA." Both seem to be critical of the commercial aspects of globalization, but they go about their criticism in very different ways. Consider the rhetorical approaches of Barber (logos-driven theory) and Iyer (pathos-driven narrative). Feel free to imitate these rhetorical styles.

Suggestions: Choose a space from the above list that interests you. Try to make a few trips to that space; sit for a while; take notes; observe how people interact with the space around them. Choose a commercial space that you feel you can analyze in depth within a relatively short essay. Make sure to introduce the larger context of the social consumer space that you are analyzing. Think about the rhetorical strategies Iyer and Barber use to introduce, describe, and analyze particular commercial spaces.

Although description is important, make sure to move beyond description in order to analyze the space. Make sure to state a clear thesis somewhere near the beginning of your essay. Your thesis should argue a particular interpretation of the commercial space you choose. Consider writing the thesis *after* writing your essay.

Citations: If you choose to cite from Barber or Iyer, make sure to use proper MLA formatting and include a "Work Cited" page. For proper citation methods, see readings from *Rules for Writers*.

Your Rhetorical Situation (Audience): Write for an educated adult who has not been to the particular commercial space that you are describing and analyzing.

First Draft: No length requirement. Multiple copies due, beginning of class, Thursday, 6 February. Type, double-space, staple; name, class, section, and date on top of first page.

Final Draft: 3+ pages. Due, with complete portfolio, beginning of class, Tuesday, 25 February. Make sure to follow proper MLA formatting (see *Rules for Writers*). Type, double-space. Number your pages. "Work Cited" page does not count as a page. Late and/or incomplete portfolios will be marked down one full grade per day late (see syllabus).

Please talk to me if you have any comments or questions. Good luck!

The following essay by Sarah McDonald was written for Dan Featherston's 104H class. It persuasively examines the marketing techniques of the popular clothing store Urban Outfitters. She presents interesting examples that the reader might be surprised to learn and effectively supports her interpretation with engaging analysis and connection.

SARAH MCDONALD

Hola Urban Outfitters, Sianara Marketing Sincerity

Individuality is a hard commodity to come by on a college campus where you are surrounded by 40,000 of your peers. For many, the quest for individuality manifests itself in fashion choice. Such was the case for me, as I nervously surveyed my outfit options for the first day of school. I wanted to come across as a beautiful, mature college girl who understood the “ins and outs” of campus life—but where could I acquire such a look? I soon found out I had nothing to fear; after all, just a block down from campus, Urban Outfitters was here. Urban Outfitters is the perfect solution for an identity-seeking college student like me; it offers two stories of “coolness”: an amalgam of clothing, jewelry, belts, shoes, dorm accessories, and the all important book, *A Guide to Drinking Games*—what more could the American college student ask for? Urban Outfitters is, of course, only for those students who wish to discard the All-American image those mall stores like Gap offer and take on a more liberated, more global style. This is, at least, the trendy personality that Urban Outfitters attempts to convey through its merchandise and structure. However, the intrinsically paradoxical nature of Urban Outfitters' constructed commercial persona destroys the sincerity and credibility of their marketing strategy.

In order to promote its worldly image, Urban Outfitters has chosen to distance itself from the ultimate American shopping icon—the mall. Urban Outfitters presents itself as far too trendy to buy into the consumerist ideology promoted by shopping malls; it understands that its patrons are far too sophisticated for the bland conformity the mall offers. Besides, the shopping mall connotes the soft suburban lifestyle it has come to dominate, while Urban Outfitters symbolizes the edgier bohemian existence for which it was named. Those who wish to escape conventional fashion for a more individualized metropolitan look need only venture to their local college campus. For within the vicinity of every institution of higher education, you will surely find an Urban Outfitters, ready to supply clothing to the newly enlightened generation. Therein lays the irony of a clothing store which markets individuality and snubs its mall-situated counterparts, yet places identical Urban Outfitters on the corners of every college town.

As you walk into Urban Outfitters, you are immediately confronted by mass groupings of clothing and accessories. Nothing is displayed in the mundane rack manner; you must instead navigate its maze of strategically-placed counters in order to search through its piles of brightly colored goods, much as you would browse some foreign marketplace. However, unlike the marketplace it attempts to mimic, there is no triumph in discovering some exotic hand-woven gem; the “unique” ensembles Urban Outfitters offer are available in blue or green, small, medium, large, or extra large (to satisfy the needs of its diverse customer base). The “exotic” merchandise that Urban Outfitters offers, such as the *Hola Madrid!* shirts which are popular on campus, provide a source of individuality for college students through their implications of world travel. After all, by purchasing one of these souvenirs, you're not simply buying a *Hola Madrid!* shirt, you're buying into an experience. Why visit Spain if you can procure the evidence of your travel one block away from campus? It's the best European vacation twenty dollars can buy (seasoned travelers can also purchase *Bonjour Paris!* and *Sianara Tokyo!* shirts for an additional forty dollars). Consumers may be surprised to learn that their *Hola Madrid!* shirts were not imported from Spain, but from Sri Lanka. These foreign imports were not the work of local craftsmen, but the mass-produced result of factory labor.

As you continue to browse through the store, you will notice the cracked concrete floor, exposed piping, and ceiling beams which seem to belong more in a downtown industrial center than a clothing store. These atypical flaws appear to be the result of a manager who is 'too hip' to care about something as superficial as interior design. Upon closer inspection, you discover that the beams of this “rustic” warehouse have been recently varnished and the pipes gleam with an unnatural newness. These are the carefully planned creation of a corporate enterprise who wishes to convey nonchalance to its customers. The superficiality of the architecture (ironically, superficiality is exactly what it is trying to mock) is evidence of Urban Outfitters' strategy to market a carefree lifestyle to the college student.

Urban Outfitters not only utilizes its worldly image to market its goods, but also employs more conventional means such as the large SALE sign emblazoned across its doors. American society has fostered us to be ever-vigilant for the elusive sale sign; the promise of which lures in the unsuspecting bargain hunter who will accumulate an armful of full-price clothing before they find one shirt marked down by 5%. Urban Outfitters' clothing prices tend to be inflated for the type of merchandise they are trying to sell. The clothing style is portrayed as vintage or street market, yet the store prices conflict with those that we would expect to pay for the authentic goods which are the Urban Outfitters' prototype. Urban Outfitters makes certain that we pay the price for the "trendiness" they have skillfully incorporated into each item. Customers may feel justified in the fact that they paid top dollar for their individuality, not allowing conformity to creep into their closets simply because of their shrunken bank accounts.

But who am I to criticize? I have fallen prey to the marketing wizardry of Urban Outfitters myself; even when I walked in the store with a critical attitude, I walked out with a purchase. I analyzed the Urban Outfitters image and sales technique and recognized it for what it was—a construction meant to encourage consumption and generate sales. Urban Outfitters is a corporation which has to compete with other national clothing stores who are working equally hard to increase their sales. Urban Outfitters' very purpose undermines its attempt at individuality because it is merely one commercial fish in the global market sea. Did my knowledge and recognition of Urban Outfitters' strategy and purpose curb my desire to purchase the cute shirt in the corner? No. Is my own inability to resist marketing strategy a microcosm of the inability of people worldwide to escape the black hole of consumerism? Has advertising so pervaded our culture and infiltrated our thought that even skepticism cannot save us? I would love to continue pondering the answers to these disturbing questions, but I hear that Urban Outfitters is having a sale...

Comments from the Writer

In order to begin this rhetorical analysis of a commercial space, I chose a spot with which I was familiar and which I felt had strong symbolic meaning for my generation and for commercial culture as a whole. After deciding on a store, I brought a notebook to the location and walked around the store taking notes on the building, the merchandise, the other consumers, and the way that it all made me feel. I tried to analyze all of these elements as if I had never been to the store before and take down my first impressions. I then attempted to relate my feelings from this specific location into a broader social context. After creating a first draft, I went to the Writing Center to get my paper peer-reviewed and plan out how I could integrate my professor's suggestions into my paper. The consultants at the Writing Center were very helpful and suggested useful strategies for reorganizing and focusing my paper. This paper helped me to become more aware of the text of my surroundings and the cultural messages which are woven into our everyday lives.