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Writing Portfolio

Delavan Smith

A Brief Reflection

My very brief writing career can be roughly summed up in two phases. The first phase began when I was 10. My mother died and the family pastor told me and my siblings to write her a farewell letter the night before the funeral; he said it would make us feel better if we tried to say goodbye. I don't remember what I wrote, or even how long it was but I do remember a feeling of surrender when I finished the letter. Although I didn't immediately recognize this as an effect of the writing, I did start to keep a journal about a year or so later and somewhere along the line I observed that I was more relaxed after writing, and more focused. I also continued to write my mother letters. All of my letters and journals were similar in that I tried to write down everything I was thinking. I didn't give summaries, and I didn't simply scratch down answers that I called my own, I asked myself questions that I knew I had to deal with. Through writing I responded to those questions as fully as I could, and from writing I learned to channel my thoughts onto paper, quickly enough to find out where I was going, and slowly enough to keep from losing my train of thought. I also learned that stress reduction is usually only a few paragraphs away.

The second phase began when my brother took his first philosophy course at college when I was a freshman in high school. One of our first discussions was about determinism and the nature of free will. He argued that free will was impossible and I argued the opposite. At some point during the conversation, I felt like I had to write down what I was thinking and I did. We continued our conversations for the next couple of years, and I kept up my journal entries. I

found myself one day in the philosophy section of the library and I checked out Mind, a Brief Introduction by John Searle. Although it probably wasn't the best first introduction to philosophy that was available it was nonetheless fascinating. I kept reading, and responding through writing. Somewhere in my junior year it dawned on me that philosophy entailed a level of thought that I been trying to achieve in my journal entries. I realized I was always trying to answer the big questions about life and that was why I was so easily attracted Searle's work. I discovered that my thoughts were philosophical in nature, and after realizing this, I had a much greater awareness of who I was as a writer. Looking back I realized I was using writing to try to find out who I was. Through writing I realized that I didn't need to have an answer, I just needed to know that I was looking.

I have given this brief reflection of my experience as a writer because although I do feel more developed in the way of fine tuning, I can't say much of my growth as a writer in the course, apart from that I have become more aware of considering the audience, more appreciative of the help an outline can provide, and more skilled at forming the structure of a critical evaluation. For the first paper, the expectation was to analyze the rhetorical devices employed by the author such as persuasive appeals, logical structure, etc. For the second paper we were expected to analyze the credibility of the author according to specific criteria we had chosen. The third paper was intended to be a research paper with four credible sources and a clearly defined position about either global trade, global outsourcing, global energy, or a global crisis such as the food or water shortage. Looking back on the course, I can say that I have had a positive experience, I am thankful for the assistance and insight provided to me along the way by my professor, Dr. Paulette Swartzfager, and I look forward to continuing the journey.

Rhetorical Analysis of “The Human Right to Water

“Papa, there may be another place” Kutar said to his father. They had traveled several miles by now, having set out well before sunrise in a desperate search for water to bring back to their village. His father shook his head, and remained silent; he did not look at his son. As Kutar became aware that his father was crying, he turned away with the feeling of betrayal that presents itself when one first learns that there is evil in the world, and asked, “Why is there never any water?” In “The Human Right to Water,” Peter Gleick demonstrates that water, a commodity essential for survival, is a right as inalienable as the right to life. He makes his case by presenting well documented factual and testimonial evidence in a logical, cohesive structure that allows the audience to travel smoothly from one idea to the next. He also shows that the problem he discusses extends far beyond scenarios similar to the opening anecdote by appealing to a sense of justice within his audience.

With factual evidence, Gleick advances an important point that supports his central claim: that there are nearly four billion people suffering hardships either through lack of safe drinking water or health risks caused by poor sanitation systems. This is important because the number alone supports the idea that half of the world’s population faces some form of distress from death to a myriad of illnesses because of water. Another compelling fact Gleick presents is that on an average year, there are approximately half a million deaths because of the problems that the majority of the world is facing. These facts demand attention by virtue of the number of zeros that compose them, but the underlying importance of these two facts, and the reason Gleick uses them, is that they force the audience to recognize the immediacy of the water problem. This

is a hurdle the developed world must negotiate if further steps to mitigate this crisis are to be taken, as Gleick ultimately shows.

To argue that water is a human right, Gleick turns to specific legislation established by international bodies concerned with preserving human rights, and he holds that the human right to water was implicitly understood by the authors of such legislation. Testimonial evidence that Gleick cites is Article 26 of The International Covenant for Civil and Political Rights. This article states that, “Every human being has the inherent right to life.” The reason, Gleick explains, that confirms implicit awareness is the fact that life cannot be sustained without water. In further testimony, Gleick relies on an understanding reached by the U.N. in the 1977, Mar del Plata Conference: “all peoples have a right to have access to drinking water...of a quantity equal to their basic needs.” This more explicit recognition addresses the concern of the misinterpretation of previous, more general U.N. declarations, so it clearly strengthens Gleick’s main argument. The importance in referring to such declarations is that Gleick, instead of arguing solely on the basis of a moral conviction, uses already established international agreements to substantiate his point. In other words, his argument is an idea already supported by international understanding.

Perhaps the most effective device that Gleick employs throughout his report is the logical organization that structures his ideas. First off, all of the main ideas are numbered so they’re easy to find, and second, they’re logically sequential. He starts off by arguing that humans do have a right to water in one clearly indicated part, and in the next two numbered ideas, he argues the implicit and explicit support of his claim. Next, he discusses what the implications of acknowledging such a right would entail, so he doesn’t leave the reader thinking, “Okay, but how...what next?” He discusses that nearly \$100 billion dollars could possibly be saved by

undertaking the construction of sanitation systems to doing nothing. Next, he discusses what the consequences of failure to meet this basic need might be and he concludes admitting that the recognition of water as a human right may likely not suffice for dramatic changes to occur. He closes with the idea that this effort is not just a moral exertion, but the duty of government. Here enters philosophy.

The common denominator in the fractions of Gleick's argument is his appeal to the audience's sense of morality. Metaphorically speaking, he tries to compel the international community into seeing that it is their responsibility to ensure that Kutar and his father aren't the only hope for the rest of the village. This idea comes up throughout his article and its significance lies in the personal connection it establishes with the audience. When he asks what the value of acknowledging the human right to water would be he provides five specific answers; three are intended to show that governments' shoulders should bear the burden. When Gleick defines the term "right" in the sense of that which governments have a "duty to protect and promote..." (Gleick, 3), that's his argument's metaphorical insurance policy every time he uses the words "human", "right", and "water" in the same sentence. By drawing attention to the severity of the global water crisis, he shows that something has to be done. But by speaking to the best within his audience, by appealing to their sense of right and wrong, he more effectively shows that that something is the ball of responsibility in the international court.

Immediately preceding the introduction, Gleick offers a quote by Charles Darwin that to paraphrase, is that if human distress is caused by institutions and not nature, then the institutions have failed. This may be what motivated Gleick to make his case, but is just a small factor that contributes to the impact of the techniques Gleick used to accomplish his purpose. The clarity of the report, accompanied by sufficient and reliable research are the two main components that

complemented each other to make the author's argument very effective, not just to a human rights organization but to the reason of humanity.

Rhetorical Analysis of "From Food Rebellions to Food Sovereignty"

It's dark out. CNN is replaying some news breaking story I saw during my lunch hour. I've had two servings of pasta with alfredo sauce and sausage, a generous side of curly fries, and a small plate of assorted fruits that I know didn't come from any farm too far from the equator. I take my plates to the return line and scrape the remnants of my dinner in the trash. I notice the height of the post-rush pile, and I realize I almost have to balance my food on it to get it to stay. I'm not surprised by anything I see. A different heap will be there tomorrow night. I'm not weighed down by the knowledge that somewhere else in the world people are starving. In "Food First", Eric Holt-Giminez and Loren Peabody expose the glaring food crisis, its origin and nature, and they urge the steps developed societies must take to reverse or at least halt the damage it construes in an authoritative, highly organized report that elicits the audience's response by way of the factual evidence it provides, the historical context which brings all readers to accurate awareness, and the solutions proposed to stop what can summarily be described as rapacious policies. Despite a questionable weakness apparent in the authors' bias, the overall argument is consistent with the context in which the argument is made, which is what raises the question as to whether or not the authors' bias is a significant weakness.

The authors' bias is evidenced by the rather pointed terminology that composes the title and various subheadings. For example, the title, "From Food Rebellions to Food Sovereignty: An Urgent Call to Fix a Broken Food System" gives the reader the impression that the authors believe

the seriousness of the discussion is tantamount to that of war. It as if the authors believe the global shift to food sovereignty is a war that needs to be won by those who are currently on the losing end. The first subheading, “Hunger in a World of Plenty” is seemingly designed to provoke the audience's moral outrage by appealing to their sense of justice. Another subheading, “Free Trade: The nail in the coffin of food security” clearly shapes the authors outright contempt for the actions taken by the World Trade Organization. Similarly, the next heading “Agrofuels: A poor idea, badly implemented at the worst possible time” further crystallizes how the authors feel about the subject they're reporting on. The authors argument comes under scrutiny by the critic who observes that such sharp diction indicates an obvious bias which may have motivated hasty generalizations made in the report, creating weaknesses that can be a nice target for counterarguments. The question as to whether or not the authors bias presents any real weakness will be dealt with later on.

The article begins with the notion that countries like Mexico, Mauritania, Egypt, Morocco, and Haiti are plagued by food riots. The authors claim this is because of a global rise in food prices: over 80% (par. 1) in the last three years along. They report that the food and Agricultural organization has accounted for a 45% (par. 1) increase in food price index in the last nine months. Furthermore, they add that world wheat prices at the time the article was being written, were 130% (par. 1) higher than just a year before. Yet completely opposite the evidence presented they report that the FAO had record grain harvest in 2007-2008 (par. 4). The powerful significance of these unsettling statistics pave the path on which the authors advance their central claim: that food prices are rising despite plentiful surpluses because of an internationally coordinated effort to dominate the food market and corollary industries, an effort made for

decades the wild success of which was just superficially illustrated by the opening anecdote, which is a personal experience of this author.

Combined with factual evidence, the impact of this report lies in how the authors take the audience through the historical context of this worldwide crisis, like detectives at a crime scene recounting the steps of a premeditated murderer. They discuss the rise of the agricultural equivalent of the military-industrial complex that characterized the Cold War. This agri-complex, the authors show began as multinational grain traders, fertilizer companies, seed companies, chemical giants, and supermarket chains undertook development projects such as the Green revolution, which was designed to increase the abundance of food in the world. It did. But the authors claim that it also led to an increase in global hunger. The authors discuss the Structural Adjustment Programs that led to the debt crisis that spread like an infection throughout the global south and allowed for the wide scale “dumping” of northern grain sold far below southern production costs. The authors also discuss initiatives like free trade agreements such as the World Trade Organization's Agreement on Agriculture, and recent initiatives to reduce fossil fuel consumption via agro-fuel production which realistically amounts to self defeat. The importance of discussing the historical context of the agri-industrial projects is inherent in the author's purpose of effectively delivering a message to the audience. The authors want world leaders and people who seek to mitigate global food shortages, and competent citizens in general to understand that the food crisis is not an accident. This report effectively exposes the multinational corporations not when the gun is smoking, but still firing off rounds.

The context in which the authors' argument is made is consistent with the evidence presented, and therefore the authors' bias doesn't present a definitive weakness in their line of reasoning. Take the title, “From Food Rebellions to Food Sovereignty: An Urgent Call to Fix a

Broken Food System” while seemingly a scathing outcry against the crime of forced starvation, in not out of line with subsequent evidence. The authors describe a food riot that occurred in Haiti, an uproar resulting in the removal of the nation's head of state. After a detailed description of how the food crisis occurred over the span of four decades, the authors illustrate that from many countries of the global south food sovereignty, or in other words the ability to produce and distribute one's own food, has been withdrawn. Initiatives like the North American Free Trade Agreement, Central American Free Trade Agreement, agro-fuel production, genetically modified crops, and massive northern grain harvests helped to ensure the displacement of food sovereignty within the global south. That said, the authors strong aversion to the actions taken by northern industrialized societies which characterizes their bias has only the potential setback of providing a weakness in the proposed solutions, not the evidence presented.

The impact of this report is made most definitive, though, through the solutions the authors propose. The idea that the authors' bias doesn't affect negatively impact their argument is supported by the idea that if the authors were just discussing how badly the food crisis is dealt with, and who's to blame, readers might likely be suspicious of a political agenda. But since the proposed measures are consistent with the root cause of the crisis, it seems that the authors care more about changing than charging, although there is significant blame attributed to northern agricultural industries. The authors advise world leaders to return farming to southern farmers, to halt agro-fuel production, to reconstruct food economies worldwide, and to make it a top priority to further agro-ecology. If taken, these measures would lead to more jobs and more food in the global south, the two most prevalent destitutions. Food prices would decline because agricultural resources would be more diversified, and all countries would be more self reliant than they currently are.

I would highly recommend this article to any reader who desires to understand why it is that in some places in the world good food can be thrown away in heaping piles whereas in other countries people are eating biscuits made of mud. This sharp contrast is a strategy the authors use to show northern readers the other side of this very distinct polarity. The factual evidence in both the numbers and this history, I think, effectively appeal to the common reason of both world leaders and every day people in modern industrialized societies who may be unaware as to why the food crisis has developed and how its death toll can be drawn to a more level slope. The strong personal feelings of the authors, while largely indicative of bias, are helpful in that the argument made is made human, it's brought to life. If the authors did not present some semblance of their personal perspective, their audience would not feel compelled to do anything because they wouldn't necessarily have arrived at the idea that what has happened to the world is wrong. They might have read an unsettling statistic, but those are just numbers people can detach themselves from. It's not easy to be detached from something you're constantly being reminded of.

Outsourcing, Handle with Care

The last three decades are a testament to the powerful effect that technology can have upon societies. With the advent of computers, whole new industries have come into existence with an unparalleled speed, giving rise to a diverse field of occupations and corresponding academic disciplines. The manner in which both the public and private sectors of the world operate has fundamentally changed because societies are now literally connected by a highly convenient flow of 1's and 0's that have affected the way we think, live, work, and socialize.

This global technology nexus has enabled the corporate world to answer the collective social demand of bigger, better, faster, and cheaper with a level of efficiency that is impressive even by modest standards. That efficiency owes a debt of gratitude to a common business practice around which heated controversy revolves: outsourcing. The precise definition of this practice varies sharply depending upon who's holding the dictionary. To middle class American workers, who feel driven into a state of obsolescence, outsourcing may be properly defined as "the fight [by corporations] to destroy American jobs" (Hira ix) and business leaders will likely hold outsourcing as the "manager's job to find the most practical, productive, cost-effective source to getting a job done.." (Johnson 4). Put very simply, outsourcing is the movement of some type of service from one country to another with the aim of obtaining some predicted advantage. The middle class contemporaries contend that outsourcing should cease to exist as a business practice because it is detrimental to the economy, and business leaders respond by reminding them of the convenience with which nearly all of their consumer products and services were obtained, saying "Well, if we didn't outsource, you would be even less successful and less happy than you are now, and for the record, you probably still wouldn't have a job because we wouldn't have been able to stay in business."

However, the question of whether or not to outsource cannot be fulfilled by a yes or no alone. As is the case with most human endeavors, there is evidence to indicate that the historical implications of outsourcing as a business practice can be marked by both failure and success. I strongly side with the notion that, "in today's globalized economy, it is impossible not to outsource" (Burkholder x). This is also my rejoinder to the widely held perspective that outsourcing is bad for the economy, and that it should be stopped because it is intended solely to boost the already lavish profit margins of greedy business interests. Assuming that argument is

true, the proponents would still have underestimated the caliber of ammunition required to put even a dent in the outsourcing industry. Reality confirms that outsourcing happens because globalization happens, there is no way to stop it, and therefore we must both plan and act accordingly. However, I also hold that all business leaders share a common social responsibility to those that compose their workforce, their shareholders, and their customers and furthermore that when the time comes to make a decision as crucial as outsourcing, business managers should not take action before conducting highly thorough research investigating the most likely consequences of the proposed operation. This investigation should be undertaken with respect to the effect that outsourcing would have on both the current and future workforce of the business, the shareholders, the and intended customers. In short the old adage: if it's worth doing, then it's worth doing right. Succinctly, this is because there ways in which outsourcing has been done poorly, and mistakes made that could have been avoided given a deeper analysis.

For a brief example, the information technology industry is probably the most widely outsourced industry because ninety percent of all new jobs require some measure of IT competence (Barrar 43). This access to a skilled workforce in addition to improved flexibility, wider access to new technology, personnel cost reductions has prompted the U.S. government to outsource IT services (Burkholder 10). However, there are case studies to show that complications can occur as a direct result of the decision hastily made to outsource information services. In 2003, the IRS contracted with the Computer Science Corporation to manage record-keeping systems, but late delivery of an important component the CSC was using resulted in the cost of nearly \$10 billion on a project that did not make its deadline (Barrar 57). Another study reveals that after the Affiliated Computer Services failed to meet an important deadline in a contract with the state government of Georgia, state authorities were forced to discontinue a

\$300 million dollar project involving medical claims processing (Barrar 57). Barrar and Gervais cite these case studies as examples to illustrate the idea that “organizations may outsource infrastructure and services but should not allow themselves to outsource responsibility and accountability” (Barrar 57). This is perhaps the most important concept for business leaders to keep in mind when considering whether or not to outsource, and it is an idea that underlies every principle which outsourcing experts agree are pillars of good outsourcing strategies.

Two such principles that Michael Corbett of the Outsourcing Institute in New York describes as successful outsourcing strategies are understanding the difference between strategic decision and a tactical decision, and the use of outsourcing as a response to the “make versus buy” problem that business leaders simply have to face (Johnson 16). When business leaders use outsourcing as a strategic tool, they’re making long-term considerations with the intention to “improve company focus, access world-class capabilities, accelerate re-engineering benefits, and share risks” (Johnson 49), whereas tactical decisions are short term cost-reduction techniques to “doing the same things a bit better, a bit faster or a bit cheaper” (Barrar 44). These two different outsourcing philosophies can best explain why Lou Dobbs, when speaking on the behalf of working class Americans, denounces outsourcing as “a major upheaval for the American economy and American people” (Hira x) and why some can justify outsourcing as just a more productive method of taking Albert Einstein’s advice that “Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler” (Burkholder xiii).

The second principle that Michael Corbett describes is that outsourcing should not entail the question of, “America or China?”, but rather “Can we do it ourselves or should we buy it?”. The latter question is more consistent with strategic considerations. Most of the functions a company decides to outsource are non-core operations, and the Outsourcing Institute describes

this as a generally good strategy (Johnson 121). However, outsourced does not always have to be synonymous with offshored. A company can “insource” to another company that it simply more efficient at making a needed product or producing a service. Although it is usually more cost effective to move operations offshore, common sense tells us that it is more consuming of both time and resources. Strategic outsourcing, however, should not too narrowly focused on the “make or buy” decision but should, as Barrar describes, be focused on the ripple effects that occur as a natural consequence.

Strategic outsourcing concerns the company’s ability to create ‘value’ within its own organization – that is, to individuate along the value chain of the product those areas that best represent its customers’ interests and thereby to develop them while strategically emphasizing the company’s core competencies. (Barrar 185)

To attempt to stop the phenomena of outsourcing is equivalent to the attempt to stop globalization. Both endeavors are futile, and are usually clouded by varying forms of a knee-jerk, emotionally charged analysis. Business leaders must use outsourcing as a strategic imperative with the big picture at hand, as opposed to a tactical imperative designed to increase profits in the short term. When an investment is made with too narrow a vision of the goal, —the return on that investment is also narrowed down by the failure to consider the ever present “game-changer” possibilities that can mean the difference between bonuses and bankruptcy. It could also very well mean the loss of unneeded loss of millions or perhaps billions of taxpayer dollars that could have been used for education, public welfare, or the rebuilding of important national infrastructure. Business leaders, while immediately responsible for

completing the task of their business productively, should not do so in a way that marginalizes the company code of ethics that preserves both their integrity and image to their workforce, their shareholders, and their customers. If business is done with shortsighted or less than respectable motives, then business altogether or the invaluable experience of the leaders that compose its workforce will be lost.

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