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English 250 Assignment 4

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Section FK

Author: Charles Siebert

Rhetorical Analysis of “The Artifice of the Natural”

As we can easily find, Charles Siebert states his opinion in his title “the Artifice of the Natural”. In this section Siebert shows how nature seen through the media (television programs) is different from the real nature. Also he argues that people should perceive less artificial to nature shows and encourages people to return to real nature by quoting famous words from famous people, listing reasons in a logical way and using a cynical writing style, which make his essay convictive and logical.

Siebert is an essayist, journalist and the author of nonfiction books. As written in the preface, this essay originally appeared in Harper’s magazine in February, 1993. Harper’s is a monthly magazine of literature, politics, culture, finance, and the arts. Thus, the intended readers are people who are interested in literature.

One Sunday evening, Siebert was watching a nature show about elephant seals. The show narrated that a seal pup was taken by a storm and after struggling he survived the storm. But the show ~~was~~ added too much dramatic things like background music and operatic narration. Siebert thought that over-using movie techniques to the nature show would get people attached to the minor characters rather than real nature. After watching a show about the rain forest, including describing tadpoles and other kinds of insects, Siebert realized that real nature would never be conveyed by a simple nature show. Nature was a wondrous place! As he lived in a big city, he missed his log cabin in woods and real nature. From his experiences on watching nature shows and his stored knowledge, he states that televised nature was not actual nature. Meanwhile, Siebert persuaded that people should care more about real nature.

One of this essay's rhetorical strengths is that a cartoon is included at the beginning of this essay. It is easy to read and catch the author’s idea about nature programs. In the cartoon, a man is sitting in a soft sofa and watching television. Beside him, there is a huge window with a beautiful landscape. However, the man in the cartoon seems disappointed. “What ever happened to quality programming?!” he says. From his rhetorical question, I can easily feel that he is so disappointed with the program that he was a little angry. Using a cartoon makes his topic more intuitional. From the landscape, television and the man’s word in the cartoon, we can easily find that the topic is about nature programs. What’s more, cartoon will make the essay more interesting, and it will attract more readers. Besides, I think, using a cartoon will show that this essay is for majority of people rather than just professional researchers.

Another writing technique Siebert uses to persuade his audience to adopt his approach to reading is to offer lists of reasons to support his ideas.

The first reason for the author to say the nature on the show is not real is in paragraph 5. He writes “the natural world is for us a place of reticent and reticular wonders that command our coaxing, our active exposure and editing; a world made up of what we half create and what, even when we’re there, we fully expect to see”. To support his reason, he quotes Wordsworth’s sentence “Of eye, and ear, both what they half create, and what perceive.” as an example. To make his reason relevant, firstly, Siebert describes a nature show about many elephant seals crowded in the beach of a small island, and slipping through open sea. To represent this simple picture, the narrator says that the elephant-seals look helpless and primitive, even absurd. Meanwhile, the show is added with a lighthearted Latin music. Obviously, he thinks TV nature shows are extravagant dramatizing, voicing in human terms. By this I mean that humans are controlling what we view from the program.

The second reason, in paragraph 8, was written as “nature shows are much more like cities”. Because the entities which are created by human will increase influence in the way we view nature. That is why Siebert says that “the more facts we compile about the animal’s days, the more human the tales we tell of them.” From TV programs, nature is not as ~~much~~ inscrutable as people think. But nature is a wondrous place which a show cannot convey. Just like the author says “we’ve come so far from actual nature.”

Besides the strategies I mentioned above, I really like Siebert’s language style. He describes every detail in a cynical way, and states that what we see through TV programs is not the real nature. The author always talks about background music about the nature show. Sometimes it is Latin music, and sometimes it is deep, sonorous flute music. Nevertheless, this inopportune music is added to the show according to the editor’s feeling. For instance, two shows are about seals, but they are different because of the editors. Siebert writes, “elephant-seals don’t have a constant inner aria of grounded-seal woes playing in their brain. It is no doubt played in the minds of those who made this film.” Siebert emphasizes that the nature show is over anthropopathic. The most typical cynical sentence is, in paragraph 13, that “Perhaps I should not watch nature shows, lest I become no longer able to suffer the real place.” He emphasizes that the nature shows go so far from actual nature. There is no doubt that Siebert is angry and disappointed with the quality of the program.

Wang Anqi,

You did a very nice job on this textual analysis. You cover many of the author’s strategies, and you have a good control of the language. I can see from your introduction a thesis statement and you follow it throughout your essay.

 In general, your organization could use some better transitions between paragraphs to give readers a flow for the information. Also the order of some sentences within paragraphs could use some work (see comments in margins). Conclusion is missing!

Substantially, be sure to offer clear analysis throughout your points, especially when using quotes. Instead of letting the quotes speak for you, give some more analysis about why the quote shows the author’s strengths. Also when quoting, provide the page numbers and works cited.

Context: 9

Substance: 7

Organization: 5

Style: 8

Delivery: 7

**B-**