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# *Writer's Statement for "You're Filtering Me Out: Reviewing Snapchat Lenses through a Rhetorical Lens"*

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In the latter half of ENC 1101, we began examining writing as a process of conscious, contextual decision-making, that writing is contingent and can't be universalized. Rhetoric is the study of the tensions and causes for human interaction and meaning-making. Our final task was an application of rhetorical criticism through a Neo-Aristotelian framework, to discern the underlying implications and the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of a textual artifact that we were exposed to on a daily basis. The genre constraints were such that we had to anatomize its parts: the rhetor, audience, exigence and constraints (rhetorical situation), the delivery, memory, style, arrangement and invention (five canons), and the use of ethos, pathos and logos (rhetorical appeals); evaluate its effect on audience through a rhetorical perspective, and refine our argument with references and research.

While we were being assigned the rhetorical criticism paper in class, the cogs were already churning in my head. I knew that I'd be dissecting through a feminist lens (obvious, clear choice for me) and earlier that day I had happened upon an article on facial neoteny, or apparent retention of youth, and how it's considered attractive and valued. I mentally surveyed popular culture items that prize youthfulness in women and Snapchat filters quickly came to mind. Even though I never quite used the app and generally abstain from social media (to illustrate my defunct reclusive personality, since installing the app and conducting my exegesis, I've only accumulated a Snapchat score of fewer than 100 points), I was still made aware of the beauty, dog, and puking rainbow filters because of their prominent feature on other sites. I spent a few days uninterruptedly laboring over articles that discussed beauty standards exacerbating body image, female acculturation to male desire, and the entrancing quality of augmented virtual realities in order to frame and enhance my argument.

For my artifact, I chose a technology as opposed to a specific text because Doug Downs had observed in "Rhetoric: Making Sense of Human Interaction and Meaning-Making" that "even machines can be rhetors." Snapchat lenses are inanimate but omnipresent, and definitely impose hegemonic claims on their users. During my investigation, I noted that rhetorical exchange was reliant on and being carried out by audience participants, demanding interaction

much like actual discourse. Thus I posed that “a *compound* rhetorical situation arises” where “the audience is *activated*... and serves as a hybridized rhetor-audience.” Audience actions and identities are mediated differently across a technologic medium than through traditional text or speech. Agency, the execution of rhetoric, is shifted onto the reader which amplifies adherence and accelerates message dissemination. The oppressed are offered irresistible tools for perpetuating their own objectification.

This seemingly innocuous rhetorical device is instantaneous, pervasive, and crowd-sustaining, affecting an entire tech-equipped generation. But I conclude that we remain capable of making sound judgment, of autonomous thought, stressing that “*we* have to be discerning and firmly tether ourselves to what’s real.” The audience is the only conscious, living, and dynamic participant in the rhetorical transaction between phone and user, and therefore, I would argue, possesses the most constructive role. Rhetorically cognizant readers are capable of effecting positive change, of deflecting and counteracting dominant taken-for-granted ideologies, and of producing breathtaking “#nofilter” selfies.