The purpose of this thesis is to analyze political cartoons found on Daryl Cagle’s (2005) website. By using the work of Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, & Airne (2001) a Fantasy Theme Analysis is performed. This analysis argues that the cartoonists create a vision that is critical of President Bush and that they form an argument in an attempt to sway public opinion. Furthermore, this analysis suggests implications for the use of Fantasy Theme Analysis and the study of visual rhetoric as a field of study.
President George W. Bush:

A Portrayal of the Iraq War Through Cartoons

A Thesis

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Chapter 1: Situation

The kind of humor I like is the thing that makes me laugh for five seconds and think for ten minutes.

--William Davis

Humor is the only test of gravity, and gravity of humor; for a subject which will not bear raillery is suspicious, and a jest which will not bear serious examination is false wit.

--Aristotle

Introduction

The war in Iraq began with military operations on March 19, 2003 and still continues today, over two years later. Since the war began, there has been controversy, both at home and abroad, regarding the United States’ involvement in Iraq. Of course, with this controversy there has been much criticism. The U.S. as a nation, Congress, and of course, President Bush, has all fallen under scrutiny for the actions that the U.S. military has taken.

The media has reacted in many different ways to the war in Iraq. Movies such as Micheal Moore’s Fahrenheit 9/11 have used the war in Iraq to attack President Bush. Accusations regarding the link between corporations and the White House became prevalent in the newspapers. Blogs have blatantly criticized the war in Iraq and the President’s actions. The media has commented on the war through several mediums throughout the war.

In this thesis, I will discuss the media’s production of political cartoons that address President Bush, his actions, and the war in Iraq. This will be done by examining political cartoons that have been collected and posted on Daryl Cagle’s (2005) professional cartoonists index. The collection of cartoons will occur by following the timeline:

War in Iraq Timeline 1/02-6/04

January 29, 2002
• Iran, North Korea, and Iraq are labeled the “Axis of Evil”

January 28, 2003
• President Bush announced that he would attack Iraq, even without a UN mandate

March 17, 2003
• President Bush gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq

April 2nd, 2003
• Jessica Lynch was rescued

April 9, 2003
• Baghdad came under U.S. control

May 1, 2003
• President Bush declared an end to major combat operations on an aircraft
September 7, 2003
• President Bush announced that an additional $87 billion is necessary to finance the war in Iraq
December 13, 2003
• Saddam Hussein was captured
January 28, 2004
• David Kay announced that more than likely no weapons of mass destruction would be found
April 30, 2004
• The Abu Ghraib prison scandal was revealed
June 16, 2004
• The 9/11 commission concluded that there was no credible link between Iraq and the Al Qaeda attacks of September 11, 2001
June 28, 2004
• The United States transfers power back to Iraq.

The timeline identifies the major events of the war during the specified time period. The timeline reflects a significant portion, but not all, of the timeline of the war in Iraq. The events in the timeline were selected for three reasons. First, for practical reasons, including every event as a point of analysis for war related political cartoons would result in an overwhelming number of cartoons and is beyond the scope of this project. The second reason is that the timeline provided highlights the major events in the war in Iraq, thus providing an adequate portrayal of the rhetorical situation. Finally, the events portray a timeline that includes the initial conflict, the rise to combat, and the decrease in U.S. control and operation within Iraq. This provides a reasonable amount of material to give us insight into the rhetorical situation.

This thesis will be divided into five chapters. The first chapter will recount the events highlighted in the timeline in detail. The second chapter will review the history of political cartoons, including those related to war, in American culture. The third chapter will outline the methodology and its theoretical backing, as well as define the parameters for how the cartoons will be selected for analysis. The fourth chapter will apply the methodology outlined in chapter three and apply it to the cartoons selected. The final chapter will draw out implications regarding the analysis of the selected war political cartoons and the theory and methodology outlined in chapter three.

Critical Problems
Political cartoons present an interesting rhetorical device. On face, they may seem as though they are simplistic in nature. The reader views the cartoon, perhaps laughs, and then moves on to the next part of the newspaper. Yet the rhetorical message that the cartoon contains may have a deeper impact on the reader, even if it is not recognized immediately. The complexity of the rhetorical cartoon, along with its construction, provides us ground for a rhetorical examination. Thus, this project will
focus on the following critical questions: What does Fantasy Theme Analysis tell us about the selected war political cartoons and the rhetorical purposes of the cartoonists? What insight does Fantasy Theme Analysis offer us into how war political cartoons and the cartoonists operate in attempting to influence others? What does this study reveal about Fantasy Theme Analysis? Before attempting to answer these questions though, it is important to first examine the timeline of events that highlight the war in Iraq.

Major Events

The timeline outlined is based on information from Brunner (2005), who created a chronology of the major events that have occurred during the war in Iraq. On January 29, 2002, President Bush singled out three nations: Iran, North Korea, and most significantly, Iraq, and labeled them as the “Axis of Evil.” This of course was not the first sign of aggression shared between the United States and Iraq. Operation Desert Storm, the no-fly zone that was instituted in the northern territory in 1991, and a no-fly zone, which was instituted in 1992 in the southern region, preceded President Bush’s remarks. However, this now infamous phrase seems to mark the beginning of increased U.S. aggression towards Iraq and, more specifically, Saddam Hussein.

Nearly one year later, President Bush intensified the level of aggression that was shown towards Iraq. On January 28, 2003, President Bush announced that he would attack Iraq even without a United Nations mandate. This followed President Bush urging the UN to act in Iraq. Resolution 1441 was passed in the hopes that Iraq would comply with stronger regulations regarding weapons inspections. However, Iraq claimed in December that they had no weapons that were banned under the resolution. In January, inspectors discovered that Iraq indeed had materials that were banned and thus they had violated the resolution by not declaring these materials. While they did not find chemical or nuclear weapons, they did discover that missiles Iraq possessed had the capability to travel further than what they were permitted. Faced with this, President Bush strongly urged the UN to act. He made it unambiguous that the if the UN failed to act upon Iraq’s failure to comply with the resolution that the United States would take action to insure compliance. President Bush believed that the way to do this was through military action.

On March 17, 2003, President Bush gave Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq, or military action would be taken. Upon his failure to leave, the war in Iraq officially began on March 19. Within two days, propaganda regarding the war began to appear in the media and the first catch phrase appeared. The phrase “shock and awe,” was introduced and was used to capture the public’s attention.

On April 2nd, 2003, Jessica Lynch was rescued from Iraqi detention. As a female soldier, this captured America’s attention. The media covered the story heavily and it was in the headlines for weeks. This story seemed to bring a sense of realism to the American public. Before this incident, the appearance of the war was that the U.S. military was nearly invincible. The story of Jessica Lynch seemed to bring a sense of realism to the American public that they probably were not expecting. This event was significant because it appeared to show how the military was failing in the war in Iraq.

April 9, 2003 was significant as this was the day that Baghdad fell into U.S. military control. In the media, a visual element to the event was shown, as there was a statue of Saddam Hussein located in Baghdad that was toppled when the city came into U.S. control.
Within a month President Bush declared an end to the major combat operations. This seemed to signal to the American public that we would soon dramatically cut the number of U.S. forces within Iraq. During Operation Desert Storm, once major military operations ended it was not long before the troops that were sent there were returned home. However, as we have seen, even with an end to the major combat operations in the current war, U.S. military forces have not been able to leave Iraq.

On September 7, 2003, President Bush announced that an additional $87 billion dollars would be necessary to continue the war in Iraq. This became an issue in the 2004 election, as there were multiple versions of a bill to provide this funding to the military. The request by President Bush became an issue that was prominent in the media for quite some time.

December 13, 2003 was a victorious day for President Bush and the U.S. military as Saddam Hussein was captured. This was celebrated as a victory as he had been hiding for months. His capture helped to solidify the position that the U.S. military was succeeding in Iraq.

On January 28, 2004, a blow came to the appearance of success when David Kay informed the Senate that no weapons of mass destruction had been found in Iraq and that more than likely none would be found. President Bush and Colin Powell led not only U.S. citizens but also the rest of the world to believe that we were invading Iraq on the major premise that they had weapons of mass destruction and thus posed a threat to the region and to others. Of course, President Bush did not order the invasion based only on this reasoning, but it appeared to be the major premise and at the minimum was covered most by the news media as the major premise for entering Iraq. When Kay’s statement was made, it greatly hurt the United States’ credibility. This was significant because the credibility of President Bush and the U.S. as a whole, from a global perspective, was not high at this point. This announcement then gave more credibility to those that argued that the U.S. entered Iraq based on illegitimate arguments.

March 8, 2004, was a significant date for Iraq as the Iraqi governing council signed an interim constitution. This was a positive sign to both Iraqi citizens and U.S. citizens as it was a positive step towards allowing Iraq to govern itself.

The Abu Ghraib prison scandal appeared in world headlines April 30, 2004. The media reported several incidents where prisoners had been abused. Pictures were distributed showing a female soldier leading a prisoner on a leash, a dead Iraqi detainee, and of male prisoners who were posed in lewd acts. This scandal provided fuel for the fire that other nations had started. Many believed that the U.S. was imposing its will upon Iraq and that it was not the humane actor that it claimed to be. This seemed to provide the evidence that others needed to try and derail the U.S. military’s actions. Additionally, President Bush lost credibility throughout the world. These scandals called for someone to be responsible, and critics of the war held him as responsible as he is the commander in chief of the military.

On June 16, 2004, the 9/11 commission concluded that there was no credible link that Iraq and Al Queda cooperated in attacking the United States on September 11, 2001. Both President Bush and some citizens of the American public believed that Iraq had some sort of connection to the terrorist attacks that occurred on this day. However, the commission was unable to verify a link between the two, thus greatly damaging the credibility of President Bush’s claim.
June 28, 2004 was the day that Iraq was given control. While the U.S. still occupies the nation in an attempt to maintain a civil society, Iraq now has the opportunity to start running the nation as they see fit. This culminated on January 30, 2005, when Iraq was able to hold free elections.

The U.S. military remains in Iraq for an unspecified amount of time. Essentially, the U.S. military will leave when President Bush, or whoever is president at the time, feels as though Iraq is stable enough to proceed without the U.S. military’s presence and the Iraqi government agrees with the decision.

These events have led to the media finding ways to analyze certain situations and to characterize those that are involved. From articles in magazines, in newspapers, to stories on the news, to books being written, various outlets have been used to analyze the war and those involved in it. One particular media outlet that has been used are political cartoons. These cartoons are what this thesis will focus on.

Overview of Thesis

The following four chapters explain the relationship between the war political cartoons selected, Fantasy Theme Analysis, and the implications this has in terms of rhetoric. Chapter two looks at the previous literature that focuses on political cartoons. It is important to understand the history of political cartoons to be able to understand their rhetorical significance and the themes that seem to have developed in this form of communication. Additionally, it gives us insight into political cartoons that have focused on the president and past studies of political cartoons as a whole. This information helps to build a solid understanding to critically examine the war political cartoons selected for this analysis.

Chapter three explores the theoretical framework for the methodology. By looking at Symbolic Convergence Theory, it gives us a backdrop to understand the methodology of Fantasy Theme Analysis. Thus, chapter three first focuses on explaining both of these concepts. The components that are critical to Fantasy Theme Analysis are the three levels of symbolic convergence and the five key elements of a rhetorical vision. Additional elements outlined in Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001) are also identified so that they can be incorporated into the analysis. The arguments against Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis are addressed as well as the defense of the theory and its methodology. Then the criteria for determining how cartoons are selected are outlined. Finally, an outline is given detailing how the methodology will be applied and which components will be used.

Chapter four applies the methodology outlined in chapter three to the selected cartoons. By examining these rhetorical devices through the lens provided, insight is gained into the rhetorical themes that emerge. Each component of Fantasy Theme Analysis will be carefully applied to the cartoons to gain insight into their rhetorical significance.

Chapter five draws critical conclusions based on the rhetorical themes that emerge from the analysis of the cartoons. Implications from this study are applied to Fantasy Theme Analysis as well as political cartoons as a whole. Finally, suggestions for possible future research are made.

Chapter 2: History of American Political Cartoons

Visual Element
Political cartoons have failed to attract the amount of scholarly inquiry that they deserve. Scholars that wish to pursue more conventional interests, such as theoretical development or analyzing speeches that are given in a political forum, often overlook them. As a result, hundreds of cartoons that are produced on a daily basis throughout the world go without scholarly comment or in-depth analysis of the various levels of meaning that comprise their framework (McKenna, 2001). This study will help to shed light into some of these cartoons that have been overlooked. To better understand these cartoons, we must first understand the background behind political cartoons and their significance. Upon understanding this, we can then examine a theory and its methodology, Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis, to understand how it can and has been applied to political cartoons in the past, making it an appropriate tool for analysis. Next, an application of this theory and methodology can be applied to the selected cartoons to discover the fantasy themes that have developed. Finally, some critical conclusions can be drawn regarding both the themes that developed and implications for future studies. Specifically, an examination of the cartoonists’ perspective will be conducted by looking at the cartoons they produced and the messages that these cartoons contained. By evaluating the messages portrayed in the cartoons, we can draw conclusions regarding the cartoonists’ attempts to change the public’s perception of particular issues through the use of political cartoons.

Political cartoons are unique in how they communicate to an audience because of the visual elements that they use. These visual cues have been found to be significant in past research. Visual aspects often can transmit meaning more directly than verbal symbols (Morrison, 1969). This is because the visual aspect allows audience members from different backgrounds, cultures, and ethnicities to draw upon what they know and they are able to apply it to what they can see in the cartoon. Even if a person does not understand the language used in the cartoon, a person may still be able to understand a cartoon. If you lack the ability to read, you may be able to discern meaning from the cartoon. This is because there is not a “correct” interpretation of a cartoon; essentially, the meaning lies in the eyes of the beholder. Of course, this does not mean that there is not an interpretation that can be easily seen or an interpretation that is commonly perceived by viewers. In general, cartoonists tend to incorporate visual elements that most people can comprehend and/or derive meaning from.

Cartoons find a way to capture an audience’s attention when other attempts may fail. The political cartoon functions as a powerful tool of nonverbal communication in thousands of editorial and op-ed pages. For those across the world reading newspapers and magazines that barely manage to scan the headlines and opening paragraphs, the political cartoon provides a means of understanding a significant event or person in a brief moment (McKenna, 2001). By incorporating the visual aspect, individuals are less likely to become bogged down in the content of a message and instead can quickly derive meaning about a certain event or person by evaluating the cartoon. “One well-drawn, easily understood, imaginatively conceived cartoon is equal in influence to sixty column inches by the opinion-writing staff—even on the opinion writer’s rare day of inspired work” (Landon, 1971, p. 2-3).

In order to understand why political cartoons are significant and a valuable rhetorical communication tool, it is critical that we examine the history of the political cartoon, particularly its use in the United States’ history. Their use throughout history
shows that the media feels as though it is a useful tool for accomplishing goals that they have. Additionally, the themes that are developed in cartoons throughout much of history can be found in the cartoons of today. Thus, this lends credibility to some of the themes that have been developed as the analysis and logic that the cartoonists have used is recurring in similar situations. By looking at the development of the political cartoon and some parallels to today’s time period, we can gain an understanding of the political cartoon’s historical significance, justifying the examination of their role in portraying the war in Iraq.

Inception of American Political Cartoons

Political cartoons started to become prominent in the early 19th century. At first, there were not many cartoons as technology made this feat somewhat difficult. In fact, by following a timeline of technology during the 19th century, the progression of the increased publication of political cartoons can be understood.

During the nineteenth century, the history of American political cartoons can be divided into roughly four separate periods. During the first period, woodcuts and copper engraving were used. In the second period, where cartooning became much more abundant, commercial lithography was used. In the third era, weekly publications were ushered in, allowing political cartoons to become even more common. In the final era, the daily newspaper was introduced, allowing the political cartoons to be distributed more than ever (Nevins and Weitenkampf, 1944).

In the early nineteenth century, many political cartoons seemed to focus on the hatred towards the French government. There was a panic in 1837 regarding the succession of the presidency after President Jackson. Several cartoons continued to focus on this issue years after it occurred. Slavery became a larger issue in the 1850s and early 1860s as it became a large political issue. The Civil War became the prominent theme in the rest of the 1800s as it became a key issue in American history (Nevins and Weitenkampf, 1944). It appears that every major historical event in the nineteenth century was captured in political cartoons.

Transcendence of Time

Political cartoons seem to have themes that can transcend time. Cartoons from the Civil War actually resemble situations that have occurred in modern times. One cartoon depicts Abraham Lincoln out on the battlefield attempting to gain the soldiers’ affection. President Lincoln, it appeared, would be in danger of losing the next election. Thus, he was out on the field in an attempt to increase his support, which he hoped would turn the tide and allow him to win (Nevins and Weitenkampf, 1944). This resembles a situation that President Bush put himself in when he boarded the aircraft carrier in a now infamous appearance. While he was not necessarily trying to gain the votes of the soldiers or overtly attempting to gain the votes of the public, the appearance on the aircraft carrier seemed to be an appeal to the American public that he was standing with our troops. The situations, although not exactly the same, clearly have a resemblance to one another.

Another situation drawn from the civil war resembles the 2004 election. A cartoon from 1868 depicted the two presidential candidates, Ulysses S. Grant and Horatio Seymour. Seymour was known for his words; he had addressed a large crowd and was able to bring serenity to the situation. Grant on the other hand had become famous for crushing the southern rebellion and restoring the Union. Thus, the cartoon depicts Grant
as a strong man, standing over the crushed rebellion while Seymour is shown speaking to an angry crowd, telling them that he relies upon them to uphold the peace of the city (Nevins and Weitenkampf, 1944). This cartoon is similar to the 2004 election in that the figures seem to fit President Bush and John Kerry. President Bush was seen as a person of action. He trumpeted the fact that he lived up to his word, that he was a man of action. On the other hand, John Kerry attempted to persuade voters by using his words to offer hope. President Bush then attacked John Kerry for only being a person of words. His Senate record was attacked, as he was not extremely productive in terms of sponsoring legislation. Thus, the battle of a person of action versus a person of words that was depicted in 1868 resurfaced in 2004, illustrating another example of how themes from political cartoons seem to transcend time.

Another situation can be found in Bill Mauldin’s book, in which he has compiled cartoons dealing with soldiers from World War II. These themes can easily be applied to today’s soldiers in Iraq. For example, one caption under a cartoon reads, “You have completed your fiftieth combat patrol. Congratulations. We’ll put you on mortars awhile” (Mauldin, 1991, p. 99). This seems to resemble the situation in Iraq. It is common knowledge that troops have been forced to extend their tour of duty. President Bush has called for the troops to remain past their previously set deadline because there is a shortage of troops available. Another caption reads, “Don’t look at me, lady. I didn’t do it” (Mauldin, 1991, p. 71). The cartoon depicts the outside of a home that had been severely damaged during the war by bombs. Of course, Iraq has faced similar devastation. Even though our technology has advanced greatly since World War II, there still were some civilian casualties as a result of the bombing campaign in Iraq. In addition to these casualties, damage was caused to cities and homes. Thus, soldiers find themselves in a similar position today as did those in World War II where the citizens whose homes were damaged want to know who is responsible and who will do something to fix the damage that was caused.

The Cold War, while it did not involve actual direct military combat between the U.S. and the U.S.S.R., was still a significant event in terms of the exercise of military strength and in turn, the depictions of the situation according to political cartoonists. While the comparison between the Cold War and the war in Iraq may seem far-fetched, in reality the themes found among political cartoons of the era seem capable of being applied to today’s world.

One political cartoon depicts a group of starving individuals, huddled together, with a hand holding a basket of food. On the basket it states, “From the land of freedom” (Mieder, 1997, p. 111). The caption underneath the cartoon reads, “Whose bread I eat, his song I sing” (Mieder, 1997, p. 111). The implication of the cartoon seems to be that whatever government provides food for the people will be seen as the legitimate government of the people. This cartoon seems to address some of the concerns that many have had that the United States will impose its will upon the Iraqi people. It is well known that many of the Iraqi citizens live in poverty or near the poverty line. Thus, while the U.S. military has been in Iraq, it has also been able to help provide food aid to some of Iraq’s citizens. However, others are concerned that the U.S. will try to control the Iraqi government’s formation and that essentially it will become a puppet of the U.S. Thus, the resemblance between the cartoon of the Cold War era is applicable to today’s situation with the war in Iraq.
A Soviet cartoon directed at the U.S. surprisingly fits very well into today’s situation. The cartoon shows one large fish swallowing up several other smaller fish. While the cartoon is in Russian, translated the bigger fish represents the military while the smaller fish represent healthcare, funding for education, social security, and other interests (Mieder 1997). This resembles today’s situation where the U.S. faces a ballooning deficit and programs facing the threat of funding being reduced. As previously mentioned, President Bush required an additional $87 billion to fund the war in Iraq, and as a result several programs are facing reduced budgets. Thus, it appears as though the situation depicted during the Cold War is applicable to the budget situation today.

Cartoons from a more modern era, but in different situations, can still be applied to the war in Iraq. The situation in the Balkans was the subject of political cartoons. One cartoon depicts a scene where errant bombs have struck a school, a playground, and a senior citizens’ center. Above the attacked areas it is written, “Oops!”, “Sorry!”, and “NATO will investigate your claim that you are not a legitimate target…have a nice day…” (Turner, 2000, p. 14). A similar situation has occurred in Iraq, as there have been civilian targets that have been hit by bombs intended for military targets. War political cartoons often look at the difference between military and civilian damages that occur during a war.

Another cartoon is relevant today and has been a hot topic in politics. The cartoon is separated into a question and answer section where the questions asks, “What is the difference between a Stealth Bomber and NATO’s long term policy in the Balkans?” and the answer to the question is, “In some circumstances it is possible to see where a Stealth Bomber is going…” (Turner, 2000, p. 15). The overarching theme presented in this cartoon, which can be applied to the war in Iraq, is that our policy is fairly ambiguous. The idea that we have entered a situation without a specific plan of action is prevalent in both situations.

President Political Cartoons

Political cartoons do not just focus on the broader issues of politics though. Indeed, many of them focus directly on the President. Throughout history, many presidents have been seen in political cartoons. In 1929, Herbert Hoover took over as President of the United States of America. He was faced with a great challenge just seven months into his presidency as the Great Depression hit America. One political cartoon focused on him, questioning his leadership ability. It showed the many possible faces of Herbert Hoover, ranging from him being a great thinker to a great doer, from a commoner to an aristocrat (Bredhoff, 1992, p. 50). President Truman was shown in one cartoon as trying on shoes that appeared too big, but then it shows him wearing these shoes to leap over a wall of political hurdles (Bredhoff, 1992, p. 54). Lyndon B. Johnson’s legacy was included into political cartoons, as one shows him lifting up his shirt to reveal a scar that is in the shape of Vietnam (Bredhoff, 1992, p. 61). President Ford was poked at for his unfortunate physical missteps as a political cartoon points to different areas of his body that were injured through accidents while the caption above the cartoon reads, “Gentlemen, we’re supposed to be protecting our chief” (Bredhoff, 1992, p. 64). Even Ronald Reagan was made fun of for his age. One political cartoon asks questions to which his responses indicate that he has not heard the question clearly,
such as, “Sir…do you think you’re too old to run?” to which he replies, “Sure my old movies were fun…” (Bredhoff, 1992, p. 68).

Political cartoons about the president extend beyond modern times though. Even our founding fathers and early presidents found themselves depicted in political cartoons. George Washington was shown defending justice while the Federalist eagle attacked the approaching cannibals (Blaisdell, Jr., Selz, and Seminar, 1976). When America attempted to stay out of a war between France and England, President Jefferson signed the Embargo Acts to prevent the U.S. from trading with either nation. From this, a political cartoon was born criticizing his decision as not being neutral but instead as giving in to French demands (Blaisdell, Jr., Selz, and Seminar, 1976).

Political cartoons criticizing the President and their actions have been in print since the United States’ first president came into power. It is very difficult to find cartoons that support the President directly. As humor is a core component of the political cartoon, it seems almost impossible for a cartoonist to be in direct support of the President and be able to depict this in a cartoon. It is exponentially easier to criticize a person and incorporate humor than it is to show support for a person while trying to include the core concept of humor. What few cartoons do support the President usually do so indirectly. For example, Daryl Cagle’s website (2003) displays a cartoon poking fun at Senator Robert Byrd as he is portrayed criticizing President Bush for spending the taxpayers money on an aircraft carrier landing, yet a sign posting all of the public funding he has used to help his home state is posted in the background. While this cartoon is not direct support of President Bush, it does seem to indicate a defense in part of President Bush. While this is an example of a cartoon that seems to defend the President, the majority of cartoons that reference the President are attacking in nature. Undoubtedly, political cartoons will continue to exist, criticizing the president and their actions. Those that are in power are historically the recipients of criticism. The media, citizens, even one’s own party often is critical of a person that is in power. No president has, or will have, a 100% approval rating. Thus, political cartoons are an extension of a form of criticism that a person in power receives.

President Bush has faced a very turbulent time while in office. He has addressed the issue of terrorism, which reached a new level of significance during his presidency. He changed the education system throughout the nation. His tax reform has been a significant change in our system. All of these topics have been depicted in some manner in political cartoons and have served as a basis for criticism.

Previous studies

In the past, political cartoons have been studied to determine the rhetorical functions that they serve. In a study of the Iwo Jima flag-raising image, it was concluded that the situations that use the image are not recurrent in its exact form; instead the contexts varied greatly, from military to political to other arenas (Edwards and Winkler, 1997). From this, they recognized that they “Would readily concede that, in many cases, visual images bear an iconic relationship to the ideas they represent. If either the elite or the non-elite are influenced by the image exclusively, or the purposes of the image are clearly defined and unequivocal, or the image lacks the elasticity to accommodate meanings beyond its contextual specifics, the image fails to meet the requirements of the ideograph. Only in its appropriation does the influence of the image transcend the domain of the political elite to affect both the nation’s leadership and its
citizenry” (Edwards and Winkler, 1997, p. 305). Political cartoons have the power to appeal to both those criticized by the cartoons and those that the cartoonists wish to influence. This in turn can impact how both of these categories of individuals act. They further explain its rhetorical power by stating, “Editorial cartoons present politicized context that, through satire, irony, and parody, motivate differing senses of community” (Edwards and Winkler, 1997, p. 305). They continue by claiming, “Not only does the parodied context of a representative form identify the specific circumstances which inspire the ideology’s application, it also draws attention to key elements of the ideology at issue. Cartoonists direct the audience’s attention by the addition, omission, substitution, and/or distortion of visual elements” (Edwards and Winkler, 1997, p. 305).

Additionally, other authors have looked at different political cartoons to find rhetorical meaning. Becker (1996) analyzed Soviet cartoons and found that the party had a strong influence over them. This exemplifies the argument that cartoons are a device used in an attempt to influence the public. The Soviet government would not have influenced their production unless they reasonably believed that these cartoons could have some effect on the population. Morris (1992) examined political cartoons and found that they made social commentary on the political and legislative processes. Carl (1970) recognized that readers might not interpret the same political cartoon the way the artist intended it to be viewed and that no two people will see the same political cartoon exactly the same way.

Most significantly, the 2001 article by Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne, the article that this thesis is based on, gives us a great amount of insight into the rhetorical value of political cartoons. They provide evidence that the rhetorical visions from political cartoons that dealt with the Lewinsky-Clinton-Starr affair are very negative in nature, and that only a few cartoons presented positive characteristics of the individuals involved. They concluded that political cartoons in general tend to be negative and that the Lewinsky-Clinton-Starr affair helped to solidify this conclusion (Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne, 2001). This is a significant facet to consider, as it may be a component of the explanation for why the public’s view of politicians is negative in nature. As cartoons are seen to have an influence over the public, to some degree, and the cartoons portray politicians a majority of the time in a negative light, there is clearly a correlation between the cartoons and the public’s overall negative perception of politicians. This correlation does not necessarily imply causation. In order to positively determine causation, a study that is outside the scope of this research could be conducted. However, further examination of the motives behind the cartoonists can give us some insight into the possible effects political cartoons may have on individuals.

They also showed that political cartoons could provide important messages in public affairs. Important questions were raised in these cartoons, encouraging people to think about the issues that were addressed. While political cartoons include elements of fantasy, they manage to blend in real world issues that create a contribution to the political realm (Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne, 2001).

Finally, cartoons are inherently ambiguous which allows for many different interpretations. This is an important rhetorical device because readers with different backgrounds, political affiliations, attitudes, and beliefs can still appreciate the same political cartoons, just for different reasons (Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne, 2001).
Political cartoons are important rhetorical devices that allow us to have insight into public affairs. Their visual element allows them to have a unique impact on an audience. So far, only one major study has focused on their ability to track a rhetorical vision of a major political event. It is important to explore this type of analysis further for several reasons. First, an examination of another rhetorical event using the guidelines outlined by Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001) could provide validity to the method that they have outlined. Second, this type of analysis allows further exploration into the visual element and how the visual element may operate as a persuasive tool within political cartoons. Third, the motives of the cartoonists can be uncovered, as examined by the themes that emerge in the cartoons. By conducting a second study that follows the methods outlined in the Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001) article, it can serve as validation for the exploration of the persuasive effects of political cartoons through this method.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Overview of SCT and FTA

The theory that will be used as the basis to explore war political cartoons of President Bush and the war in Iraq is Ernest Bormann’s (1972) Symbolic Convergence Theory and his Fantasy Theme Analysis will act as the method to analyze these cartoons. Fantasy Theme Analysis has been described by Bormann (1973) as a tool for examining rhetorical discourse by looking at the message rather than other variables.

Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis have been selected because they are a great fit for analyzing political cartoons. “But if asked what can SCT and Fantasy Theme Analysis do that is different we reply that Fantasy Theme Analysis points the scholar to imaginative language, that SCT stresses not a unique reading of myth, metaphor, narrative, or story but provides a clear technical vocabulary for the general analysis of imaginative language. In addition SCT encompasses all the features of discourse and provides a way to make a coherent analysis of a community’s public consciousness” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 276). Political cartoons by nature are full of imaginative language. Language here is intended to include both the written form and the images that form a political cartoon. The visual element is just as important as the written, and with political cartoons, the visual element usually composes the rhetorical message. The visual element is usually more prevalent, as the nature of a cartoon is to focus on the nonverbal rather than the words that may be included. Thus, we can see that SCT and Fantasy Theme Analysis provide a method that best fits this situation. With this in mind, it is appropriate for us to look at SCT and FTA in depth.

Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis

Bormann (1985a, p. 128) explains the basic premise of SCT when he writes, “The symbolic convergence theory of communication is a general theory within the broad framework that accounts for human communication in terms of homo narrans. The theory explains the appearance of a group consciousness, with its implied shared emotions, motives, and meanings, not in terms of individual daydreams and scripts but rather in terms of socially shared narrations or fantasies.” Essentially, the theory works to explain how groups start to become cohesive. They do this by sharing fantasies, or stories from their personal lives and thus they may form a bond because of these shared fantasies. This does not always occur, but SCT works to help explain what happens during this process. Political cartoons’ meanings can be revealed through SCT. Emotions, motives, and meanings can be integrated into political cartoons. Thus, this analysis works to reveal the messages that the cartoonists have embedded within their cartoons which may then lead to the sharing of fantasies among readers.

The discovery of SCT started with the work of Robert Bales. Bormann (1972, p. 396) writes, “Bales provided the key part to the puzzle when he discovered the dynamic process of group fantasizing. Group fantasizing correlates with individual fantasizing and extrapolates to speaker-audience fantasizing and to the dream merchants of the mass media.” Bales started his work with small groups and what he found laid the framework for Bormann. Bale explained how these fantasies helped to create social reality for groups and his method gave the critic a tool for gaining insight into the group’s intricacies such as their culture, motivation, and cohesion (Bormann 1972).
It is easiest to comprehend SCT by thinking of it as a web of interaction where information flows in many directions, rather than in just two steps as is the traditional flow model of communication (Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet, 1944, Lenart, 1994, Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne, 2001). Information spreads through the members involved as if the members were the outside points of a spider web. Thus, as the information flows between those individuals, it creates a construction of reality that all of the members can share, also known as a rhetorical vision.

Bormann, Knutson, and Musolf (1997) explain how the process works in creating a rhetorical vision. They explain that SCT claims that when a source produces a dramatic message or messages, the audience may become involved. The audience finds some part of the message and they attach themselves to it, focusing on it until they participate in the actions and images caused by the message or messages. “The key message is that of dramatization. Dramatizing comments are rich in imaginative language and consist of the following: puns, word play, double entendres, figures of speech, analogies, anecdotes, allegories, parables, fables, jokes, gags, jests, quips, stories, tales, yarns, legends, and narratives” (1997, p.254-255). Bormann explains what happened when Bales observed members in an experiment. He claims that the conversation picked up speed, that members would grow excited, laugh, interrupt each other, and that they would laugh, all signs of a group that are participating in the drama. Additionally, a meeting that was quiet and dense became animated and lively, showing that the chaining process was in action. All of these processes and actions are similar to the process that occurs as individuals become friendly with one another. Thus, as this process occurs, there is a likelihood that the group’s cohesiveness will increase as well.

However, in order for the method to be used in many more contexts, it has to be applied outside of small group situations. Bormann (1972) believed that it could be applied to different scenarios, such as a public speech. This can cause what is called a fantasy chain. Dramatizations start in the group and move out from there. Members that are involved in the group spread these dramatizations through different avenues. They may interact with their friends and families and spread the message through them. They may interact with the media and the message could then be disseminated. Regardless of how it happens, the message can be sent out through avenues to a larger public. Then this public can be compelled to action as a sense of community is fostered. A social-reality composed of heroes, villains, emotions, and attitudes can be created (Bormann, 1972). This does not mean that all attempts are successful, as shown by research that has proven that people may ignore or completely reject a message (Bormann, Knutson, and Musolf, 1997).

According to Bormann (1972), this chaining results in symbolic convergence. “Central to the theory is the distinction between a message that contains a dramatization and the shared group fantasy that only comes about as a result of audience members actively appropriating, modifying, and sharing the drama publicly. Dramatizations that are shared result in the symbolic convergence process and create common ground that serves to unite the participants” (Bormann, Knutson, and Musolf, 1997). What this means is that through messages and symbols, a sharing occurs which eventually can lead to shared perceptions, known as symbolic convergence.

Bormann’s original work in 1972 suggested that there were only two levels to symbolic convergence, but he later added a third level. The three levels that he identified
are fantasy themes, fantasy types, and rhetorical visions (Bormann, 1982a). “A fantasy theme is the content of the dramatizing message that sparks the fantasy chain. Although the content of the message is the same as that of the theme, the difference is that the theme has become part of the group consciousness through the dynamic communication process of chaining and sharing...Because fantasy themes are always slanted, ordered, and interpretative, they provide a rhetorical means for two groups of people to account for and explain an experience or an event in different ways” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 281). Thus, a fantasy theme is simply the material, action, experience, or other event that the members then interpret. Often this theme is recognizable to the group but it may not be to outside members (Cragan and Shields, 1995). Another way of explaining it is that groups may develop their own slang for certain events. Things may become an “inside joke” that only they understand. Fantasy themes are a way for a group to recognize an event while excluding those outside of the group.

The next level is a fantasy type. “The fantasy type is a general scenario that covers several of the more concrete fantasy themes. The symbolic cue phenomenon makes possible the development of fantasy types. When members of a group share similar scenarios or outlines of the plot of the fantasies, including particulars of the scenes, characters, and situations, they may generalize a fantasy type” (Cragan and Shields, 1995, p. 281).

The final level is called a rhetorical vision. “A rhetorical vision is a unified putting-together of the various themes and types that gives the participants a broader view of things. When people come to share a group of fantasy themes and types they may integrate them into a coherent rhetorical vision of some aspect of their social reality. Usually a rhetorical vision is indexed by a key word, a slogan, or a label” (Cragan and Shields, 1995, p. 281).

There are five key elements of a rhetorical vision as outlined by Cragan and Shields (1995). The dramatis personae are the characters shown in the messages that inspire the rhetorical vision. A plot line is simply what actions occur within the rhetorical vision. The scene, as would be expected, is the time and place where the plot line takes place. A sanctioning agent is the person who legitimizes the vision, and finally there is a master analogue, of which there are three. The righteous analogue is the correct, moral, right; the social applies to the relationships that are formed between people and groups; and the pragmatic analogue is expediency, efficiency, and/or practicality.

Now that we have a clear understanding of Symbolic Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis, we can look to the validity of the two. There have been many attacks against SCT and FTA. In order to use these tools to analyze the rhetorical artifacts, a defense of SCT and FTA is warranted. **Defense of SCT and FTA**

Symbolic Convergence Theory and fantasy theme analysis have come under scrutiny by critics that believe it is a theory and method that has many faults. “First, fantasy theme method is not a logically consistent extension of the theoretical bases from which writers contend it derives, and second, published critiques tend toward circularity in applying the dramatism that is the hallmark of the approach” (Mohrmann, 1982a, p.110). He continues in a separate article later that year by saying, “Having registered those observations, I must state unequivocally that I remain unimpressed by the sweep of fantasy theme analysis. Having respect for individuals and for individual contributions, I
am perplexed by the program at large and the rejoinder to my essay does not allay my disquietude. I cannot hope to understand either fantasy theme analysis or the symbolic convergence theory of communication until both are explicated with rigor and precision, a task yet to be accomplished for most who are outside the pale, and the rejoinder does not advance the cause” (Mohrmann, 1982b, p.307). However, SCT and fantasy theme analysis did not go undefended.

“Much of Mohrmann’s attack on fantasy theme analysis is aimed at a research model that only slightly resembles it and thus misses the mark” (Bormann, 1982, p.288). Throughout the article he articulates arguments very specific to Mohrmann’s comments. In summary, he states, “Mohrmann has confused me both in the Minneapolis seminar and in his recent essay by being unwilling to accept our carefully gathered data about audience effects as evidence that fantasies have been shared and are now a part of a community’s consciousness” (Bormann, 1982, p. 305). He goes on to indict Mohrmann by explaining that he interpreted his Q-sort techniques as being used to explain the rhetoric they were examining when instead they used the Q-sort techniques to collect data about the audiences’ responses (Bormann, 1982). Bormann uses this as just one example of how Mohrmann’s criticism is misguided and how the SCT and fantasy theme analysis is a viable method for performing rhetorical criticisms.

Bormann further defended SCT and fantasy theme analysis in his 1985 article. He refers to a variety of articles that have used SCT and fantasy theme analysis successfully. Bormann refers the use of SCT and fantasy theme analysis, “To conduct market and public opinion polls (Cragan and Shields 1981), analyze audiences for public speeches, and intervene to improve organizational and small group communication (Bales 1970, Bormann 1975, Bormann, Pratt, and Putnam, 1978). It has been used to analyze popular culture (Kidd, 1975, Koester, 1982) and political campaigns (Bantz, 1975, Bormann, 1973, Bormann., Koester, and Bennett, 1978, Bormann, Kroll, Waters, and McFarland, 1984, Cragan and Shields, 1977, Rarick, Duncan, Lee, and Porter, 1977, and Solomon, 1980) and as the basis for historical and critical studies of mass persuasion and mass media communication (Bantz, 1975, Bormann, 1982b, Bormann, 1985b, Henderson, 1975, Nimmo and Combs, 1982, and Shrag, Hudson, and Bernabo, 1981).

Bormann, Cragan, and Shields also defended SCT and fantasy theme analysis in a 1994 article. These authors defend against four major arguments that they feel critics have brought against SCT and fantasy theme analysis. The first argument that they identified was that SCT’s proponents have not clarified the basic presuppositions that undergrid the theory. “The symbolic convergence research program is based on a much different set of central presuppositions than guided earlier critics and that seemingly is implied by some subsequent critics” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 263). Thus, the authors spelled out the presuppositions that had been previously laid out. Presupposition one was that, “A grounded approach to theory building can result in a good general theory of communication. They assumed that concepts should emerge from the studies rather than being derived from studying previous writings, such as those of Bales or Freud, and drawing out their implications to develop an untested set of hypotheses to serve as the basis for study. In other words, the scholars did not posit fantasy types, inside-cues, rhetorical visions and sagas, and then go out looking for them” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p.263). The second presupposition was that, “An empirically based study of the sharing of imagination can provide a viable account of the
rhetorical relationship between the rational and the irrational” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 264). They go on to explain how this has occurred and summarize by saying, “The prior sharing of requisite fantasies is a necessary and sufficient cause for the creation of a special theory with an ideal model that provides the rules, warrants, and grounds for argument. Therefore the general SCT can account not only for the irrational and nonrational aspects of rhetoric but it explains the origin and practice of the rational elements as well” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 268). Presupposition three is that, “The audience should again be an important part of the rhetorical paradigm” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 268). This is fairly straightforward and was agreed upon by both Bormann and Mohrmann at the seminar that was held in Minneapolis (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994). Presupposition four was that, “It is possible and important to be able to make generalizations based on the results of previous studies. The importance of generalization is a key feature of the SCT” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 269). They go on to explain that this allows the discoveries of several studies to be synthesized together. Thus, all four presuppositions were clarified.

The second argument that they looked at is that SCT is Freudian-based and thus is only applicable to small groups (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994). The basic argument is that because Bales, the person who laid out the basis for SCT, was a Freudian follower, the rhetorical work that followed should be Freudian as well. However, critics argue that a Freudian would not generalize fantasy sharing beyond a small group setting (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994). They go on to make several responses to this argument. One answer is that, “Freudian terms do not appear in SCT studies (with one inadvertent exception, manifest content, that has subsequently been dropped)” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p.269-270). They also state, “Numerous studies support the generalizability of the communication process of sharing group fantasies. In live group interaction, fantasy themes may be identified by: their stylistic qualities (interruption, excitement, all talking at once); their substantive qualities (specific thematic content); their dramatic meta-structural qualities (character, plot line, scenic and sanctioning agent description in the case of dramatic action, narrative, story); their imaginative qualities (figurative, literal, metaphorical, ironic in the case of double entendre, personification, metaphor, simile, analogies). With print material and audiovisual artifacts of speeches, narratives, stories, and other message forms of mass communication, stylistic qualities analogous to the chaining process in small group communication may be thought of as variations on a changing theme” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 271).

Researchers have used SCT to help explain communication phenomena in many different contexts. Overall, there is a strong amount of evidence supporting the extension of SCT from small group communication contexts to different communication contexts (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994).

The third argument they addressed is that SCT’s insights are dependent on the researcher instead of on the theory (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994). They respond by saying, “It does make sense to judge that some scholars using SCT produce better studies than others. But, it does not make sense to argue that they could have studied the same material using a different scholarly perspective (one without basic assumptions and technical terms of SCT) and produced the same findings only more elegantly expressed because they were unburdened by the theory” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p.
The argument they present makes sense; they explain how different results occur while at the same time explaining the value of the theory. They conclude that, “Whenever communities of people come to share a common rhetorical vision, SCT provides a way to study and understand the consciousness creating communication that brought the vision into being and created the consciousness, the consciousness raising communication that drew new converts to the consciousness, and the consciousness sustaining communication that aimed to keep the true believers committed to the vision” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 277). SCT is a valuable tool that provides unique insight into rhetorical situations.

The final argument that they address is that, “SCT is a relabelling of old concepts with trivial jargon that lacks precision and clarity” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 277). This is a common problem that emerging theories face. Again though the authors provide valid responses. They state, “As the research program continued, scholars using the SCT found the distinctions among levels of language, concreteness, and scope important. As a result they drew distinctions and added to the precision of their technical terms” (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994, p. 279). This distinctness proves that it is not simply a relabelling of an old concept but that SCT has been found to be a distinct theory. Additionally, they go on to provide a very specific glossary for the technical terms of SCT. They also provide specific definitions for the concepts that are incorporated into SCT, leaving no doubt to critics as to what the terms mean (Bormann, Cragan, and Shields, 1994).

Even though SCT has been criticized, it has been well defended. The arguments that have come against it have actually served to make SCT and fantasy theme analysis even stronger, as arguments defending it have made the theory even clearer. Now that SCT and fantasy theme analysis have been proven to be a reliable method, we can understand why they are appropriate choices for application to war political cartoons that focus on President Bush and the war in Iraq.

Appropriateness of Method

The framework of SCT and Fantasy Theme Analysis can be applied to the situation with President Bush and the war in Iraq. Imagine that a person has embraced a fantasy theme that, “All politicians are liars.” This theme would shape how the person looks at politics and politicians, including the President of the United States.

There were multiple reasons given for us entering into Iraq by the President and his staff. However, the media tended to focus on the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. We have not found weapons of mass destruction yet in Iraq, and it does not seem promising that we will. As it was pointed out during the 2004 election, the argument can be made that President Bush misled, or even lied, to the American public. It definitely is not easy to believe that the President deliberately lied to the public. However, if a person were already inclined to believe that all politicians lie, it would be much easier to believe that President Bush was lying about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq.

If claims were made to the contrary, that it was not President Bush’s fault, or that he never lied to the American public, a person that shared the fantasy that “All politicians are liars,” would more than likely reject these claims. These claims would be inconsistent with the person’s rhetorical vision, and thus they would feel compelled to reject them. Suppose information arose that showed that
Indeed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction recently. Even this information may be ignored if it does not fit into the rhetorical vision.

On the other hand, information or claims that are in support of a person’s rhetorical vision are likely to be accepted. For example, if a news reporter claims that President Bush is a liar and should be impeached, a person is more than likely going to accept that message. If a book is written against President Bush, detailing how he has misled and lied to the American people, a person who believes that all politicians are liars is likely to believe the content of the book.

As explained previously, if a person embraces a fantasy theme such as, “All politicians are liars,” not only are they likely to accept messages that fit within their rhetorical vision, but also they are also likely to pass along their rhetorical vision when they speak on the same topic with other people. Thus, it is possible for the fantasy theme to chain out amongst a particular group.

As would be expected, if a person subscribes to a fantasy theme that is the opposite, such as “All politicians have our best interest at heart,” if the same information was presented to a person with a much different rhetorical vision, how they would process the information would probably be much different. Instead of rejecting information that made President Bush to be a victim or that he was basing his decision on what intelligence he had, it would be accepted.

Besides laying out the basic principles of the theory, Bormann also gave advice to the critic on how to use SCT and Fantasy Theme Analysis. “The critic begins by collecting evidence related to the manifest content of the communication, using video or audio tapes, manuscripts, recollections of the participants, or his (sic) own direct observations. He (sic) discovers and describes the narrative and dramatic materials that have chained out for those who participate in the rhetorical vision. When a critic has gathered a number of dramatic incidents he can look for patterns of characterizations...of dramatic situations and actions...and of setting...The critic must then creatively reconstruct the rhetorical vision from the representative fantasy chains much as a scholar would delineate a school of drama on the basis of a number of different plays...Once the critic has constructed the manifest content of the rhetorical vision he (sic) can ask more specific questions relating to elements of the dramas. Who are the dramatis personae?...Where are the dramas set?...What are the typical scenarios?...What meanings are inherent in the dramas?...How does the fantasy theme work to attract the unconverted?” (Bormann 1972, p. 401-402).

Selection of the Artifacts

The war political cartoons were selected from Daryl Cagle’s professional cartoonists index. They were selected by using key terms and specific dates applicable to each event, as outlined in the timeline on page 2, through the search engine of the website. They key terms and dates used are outlined in Appendix 1. The first ten applicable cartoons, in chronological order, were selected for analysis. If at least ten cartoons did not apply to the event associated with the search, however many cartoons were available were selected. In determining what cartoons would be chosen, relevance to the event guided the decisions made. Political affiliation, comments, bias, and other factors such as this were not considered in selecting the war political cartoons. Overall, 76 cartoons were selected for analysis, representing the 12 major events outlined in the timeline.
Application of the Methodology

As in Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001), Bormann’s guidelines will be used to examine the characters, scenarios, and scenes in the political cartoons that fit the rhetorical texts selected. Bormann, Koester, and Bennett (1978) applied this scheme to analyze political cartoons from the 1978 presidential race. Benoit et. al. then used their analysis as an informal guide for their study. I will follow Benoit et. al.’s method and employ it for my analysis. Specifically, I will look for the rhetorical vision of the cartoonists. While Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001) looked at the rhetorical visions of Starr and Clinton briefly, it is unnecessary and beyond the scope of this study to look into President Bush’s rhetorical visions. Dramatis personae, storylines, scenarios, and the master analogues will be examined. It is not necessary to analyze all five components of the rhetorical vision to create a holistic view of the rhetorical messages that are being conveyed. However, based on the work by Benoit, Klyukovski, McHale, and Airne (2001), it is necessary to also examine how motives, values, and metaphors work to create the rhetorical vision. Now that we have a complete review of SCT and Fantasy Theme Analysis, we can turn to the rhetorical analysis.
Chapter 4: Application

Cartoonists’ Rhetorical Vision

The focus of this study is on the cartoonists’ rhetorical vision. The complex drama that unfolds is attached in Appendix 2. The highest form of abstraction shows that the cartoonists asserted that “Our political leaders are involved in a corrupt farcical drama.” The two highlights of this vision are that “President Bush is a war hungry president that led us into a war without justification and has used it to benefit himself and his allies” and “Foreign leaders/organizations refuse to cooperate.”

The political cartoonists often used several different methods within their cartoons to portray their message. References to historical, cultural, and current events were often tied in to the cartoons, drawing on readers’ previous knowledge to create their message. Overall, the cartoons were quite negative in their critique of the major characters. President Bush was portrayed as a war hungry president that jumped to conclusions and rushed the U.S. into war without a clear exit strategy. Foreign leaders and organizations, specifically, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and the United Nations, were portrayed as believing that it was positive to have anti-U.S. sentiments. As Benoit et. al. (2001) also found, “The negative implications of satire were a key feature of the fantasy theme reflected in political cartoons” (p.384).

Both fantasy types were expanded upon by using several inside jokes and references to cultural and current events. More specific fantasy themes were developed by the cartoonists using the aforementioned devices. To provide more insight into these fantasy themes, the key elements, as guided by Fantasy Theme Analysis and described by Benoit et. al (2001), will be elaborated upon in detail. Specifically, the key dramatis personae, story-lines, motives, values scenarios, the master analogue, and the use of metaphor will be examined to help provide a deeper understanding of the fantasy themes that developed throughout the war political cartoons.

Dramatis Personae

The characters are portrayed only as villains in the rhetorical vision. The lack of a hero or heroes is not uncommon, as has been mentioned. The primary villains are President Bush, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and the United Nations. There are minor villains found throughout the cartoons as well. Tony Blair, Osama Bin Laden, Dick Cheney, the CIA, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Saddam Hussein, and Ted Kennedy. These villains play a very minor role though and often are portrayed with President Bush when they do appear.

Story-lines

The themes that developed provided a large variety of scenarios in which President Bush was attacked. President Bush was often portrayed as a child in the political cartoons. For example, he was shown riding a tricycle in a cartoon where the front, lone wheel, or “big wheel,” was labeled “Support.” Additionally, President Bush was portrayed as a child in numerous cartoons displaying a Christmas theme, following the capture of Saddam Hussein, which occurred December 13, 2003.

He was also depicted as a cowboy. This should not be a surprise as this theme has emerged in popular literature before. Often President Bush was shown with some symbol of the cowboy way, most often the cowboy hat. However, other items such as a handgun, handkerchief, and belt buckle were used to help create the cowboy theme.
Another story-line that developed was that President Bush was using the war in Iraq for his presidential campaign. One cartoon that serves as a great representative depicts President Bush flying in a fighter jet over a donkey wearing a “Dems” button. The cartoon stems from the declaration he made that major combat operations were over aboard the USS Abraham Lincoln. The claim that this is being used for the campaign is made obvious through the writing on the side of the fighter jet, which states “Campaign 04.”

The reconstruction of Iraq emerged as a story-line. Within this storyline, President Bush was portrayed as someone that has lost control of the situation. The cartoon on page 41 (Figure 1) is one example of this theme. President Bush is shown flying a fighter jet, which is a reference to the situation previously discussed regarding the USS Abraham Lincoln. He writes the word “war” with his jet exhaust, and seems to have done so with ease. The words “W, Top Gun” are displayed on the jet, supporting the idea that the cartoonist wanted the writing of the word war to appear to have been easy. Next to this picture is President Bush, attempting to fly with a machine that resembles one that was built when humans first attempted to construct an airplane. His arms are shown flailing frantically and the caption above him reads “Nation-building.” The argument constructed here is that President Bush led us into war and won the war with ease, but that attempting to reconstruct Iraq is a much more difficult task and that he is struggling in this endeavor.

Another story-line is that he has misplaced priorities. One cartoon illustrates this by showing oil pouring out of his head. The message that he has oil on the brain intends to show that he is focusing on the wrong issues at particular points during the war.
One story-line that may resonate easily with individuals is that the justification for the war was weak. Numerous cartoons held content at included this message. There was even an evolution in the cartoons that created even more depth to the story-line, as some cartoons focused on the reasons provided for the war as we first entered the war while other cartoons focused on a later time period, such as after Kay’s report indicating that it would be unlikely for weapons of mass destruction to be found. The cartoon shown on page 41 (Figure 2) illustrates the theme that is being presented. President Bush’s war rationale is falling apart, as his reasons (WMD, 9/11 connection, imminent threat, and Al-Qaeda link) are seen falling off the vehicle and are rolling away from him. This cartoon depicts a time after Kay’s report and is a solid representative of cartoons from this story-line, as many of them depicted Bush’s rationale falling apart.

The need for additional funds also was a story-line in the cartoonists’ rhetorical vision. President Bush was shown in some interesting positions based on the need for the significant amount of money requested for the war in Iraq. In one cartoon, he is shown in the jaws of a crocodile or alligator, labeled Iraq. He is holding up the jaws while stating, “I’m going to need another $87 billion…” Another cartoon, shown on page 43 (Figure 3) depicts President Bush stretching Uncle Sam for more money. The wording in the bubbles verify this as it shows President Bush saying, “Just 87 more billion is all I need for now…Just stretch that deficit…We’re in this for the long haul.” The cartoon shows Uncle Sam on a torture rack, one that would have been used in more primitive times to stretch victims. Above President Bush it reads, “Why they call it I-Rack,” making an intentional play on words regarding the country. Here the theme is very clear that
President Bush is stretching the government for funding for the war in Iraq, even though it is causing great pain to Uncle Sam, a symbol for the American government.
The ties between President Bush and Halliburton are expressed as a story-line as well. In the process of reconstruction, companies need to be hired to perform the various jobs. The theme prevalent in these cartoons is that President Bush is using the war reconstruction effort to help his friends. One cartoon identifies President Bush as having a verbal slip when he claims the $87 billion is for Halliburton, but then corrects himself and says Iraq. The theme present is that the public is concerned that wars, like the war in Iraq, are utilized by those in power, such as President Bush, to profit corporations that have connections to those in power.

The Abu Ghraib prison scandal also found its way into the rhetorical vision of the cartoonists. The cartoon on page 43 (Figure 4) illustrates one example of how this storyline was developed. Here the pot representing the Abu Ghraib prison is overflowing, a symbol that it is beyond President Bush’s control, as he attempts to stir and focus on the Iraq pot. The storyline depicts President Bush as being in a situation that he cannot control, as well as accepting the abuse that is occurring.

The final storyline of the rhetorical vision of President Bush depicts the victory over Saddam Hussein. In some situations, President Bush is seen as the dominating force over Saddam. For example, one cartoon simply shows a game of tic-tac-toe, using President Bush’s head and Saddam’s head in place of X’s and O’s, with President Bush forming three in a row to win the game. In other situations, Saddam’s capture is portrayed as a gift for President Bush. Numerous cartoons depict President Bush as receiving Saddam as a Christmas present.

The story-lines of Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and the United Nations can also be explored. The story-line for the United Nations is that they were unwilling to accept proof of an imminent threat and instead wanted to wait until after an incident had occurred. One cartoon that depicts this shows a gun pointed at a person, and the United Nations walks away, asking for a call when the gun is smoking. The depiction of the UN being unwilling to act until after the fact is very clear in the cartoons, which likely resonated with the public as they perceive the UN to be ineffective because they only act after an atrocity has occurred.

Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schroeder are often depicted together in cartoons. The story-line is that they are allied with Saddam and are ignoring the truth. A cartoon involving Chirac, Schroeder, and Saddam Hussein show Chirac and Schroeder talking to Saddam Hussein. They claim that they tried to tell President Bush that he was not an imminent threat and that they must treat Saddam with patience and kindness. Meanwhile, he is stirring a barrel of anthrax and is encouraging them to take a taste of it. This cartoon clearly portrays Chirac and Schroeder as friends of Saddam Hussein and their anti-U.S. sentiments.

Motives

President Bush is depicted initially as a cowboy with the backing of a strong military. As the war progresses though, the portrayal of his motives change. At the end of major combat operations, his motives are portrayed as using this to support his presidential campaign. During the reconstruction of Iraq, he is portrayed as being selfish in terms of giving the spoils of war to the United States and to his friends. As time progresses, his motives for entering the war are questioned and he is portrayed as someone that misleads the public.
Jacques Chirac’s, Gerhard Schroeder’s, and the United Nations’ motives are portrayed in a consistent manner. They are portrayed as being very hesitant to act and they have what is best in mind for them and their respective nations.

**Values**

President Bush is perceived as arrogant at times. For example, the illustrations of him as a cowboy show him as a person that overestimates his abilities. Additionally, he is portrayed as deceitful. Cartoons that dealt with the issue of the rationale provided for entering the war illustrated this value clearly. Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and the UN are shown as being greedy and looking out for their own self-interests.

**Scenarios**

President Bush is often depicted manipulative, deceitful, and unintelligent. President Bush is shown with Dick Cheney as the “war lemon” drives away. Their conversation has President Bush saying that if he returns, he never said linkage, he instead just implied it. Another cartoon portrays a tank driving through the desert with a missile, presumably a weapon of mass destruction, is projecting through the ground. However, the missile is actually the nose of Pinnochio, who is buried underground. The implication here is that the concept of WMDs being present in Iraq was a deceitful claim by President Bush.

The United Nations, Jacques Chirac, and Gerhard Schroeder are portrayed as ignorant and selfish. An example, previously referenced, shows Jacques Chirac and Gerhard Schroeder speaking to Saddam and explaining that they had attempted to convince President Bush that he was not an imminent threat. Meanwhile, Saddam is shown stirring anthrax in a barrel and asks the two of them to take a taste. France and Germany were known as two of the largest opponents to the war. Many claimed that this position was taken because of their economic ties to Iraq. Thus, there was an implied incentive to act against the war movement because it would help both nations’ economies.

**Master Analogue**

The righteous master analogue is at work in this rhetorical vision. As Benoit et. al. (2001) point out, the righteous master analogue stresses morals (or immorality) and proper (or improper) conduct by all the dramatis personae.

There were several cartoons that highlighted the righteous master analogue at work in reference to President Bush. One cartoon depicts soldiers reading a statement from President Bush, Donald Rumsfeld, and Tony Blair in a prison to a group of prisoners. They state that the three of them say they are sorry for the abuse. Then, they speak to the other two soldiers and say that they can now carry on. The prisoners are naked with cloth bags over their heads. Dogs are viciously barking at the prisoners, and one of the soldiers is taking pictures of the prisoners. The concept of immorality is portrayed here as the superficial sense of sorrow or wrongness in the abuse. It is clearly insincere.

Another example that illustrates the righteous master analogue at work shows President Bush among Janet Jackson, Donald Rumsfeld, and Dick Cheney holding wringers. Each of them then has a relevant issue written on the wringer. Above them it states, “People with sensitive areas caught in wringers.” The comparison between Janet Jackson, who is in this cartoon because of her exposure during the Superbowl’s halftime show, and President Bush who is in the cartoon because of missing weapons of mass
destruction, highlights the improper conduct of President Bush. What has been portrayed as the major reason for entering the war in Iraq, the weapons of mass destruction, has been seen as deception, particularly in political cartoons.

One final example that shows the master analogue at work displays pairs of pants belonging to President Bush, Powell, Cheney, Woolsey, and Rice. The pants are hanging on a telephone line and they are lit on fire. The cartoon makes a reference to credible evidence regarding ties to Al Qaeda or the 9/11 attacks. Here there is a clear reference to an old schoolyard rhyme, “Liar, liar, pants on fire.” The implication was that President Bush and others lied to the American public regarding the justification for the war in Iraq.

Metaphor

The use of metaphor, although not originally part of Fantasy Theme Analysis, was found to be prevalent in these cartoons. President Bush was portrayed as a child in many cartoons. While most of the cartoons did not indicate that he was a child through any specific use of words, the depictions of his stature, facial characteristics, and the situation clearly indicated the metaphor. There were a few cartoons that did indicate that he was a child through the use of words. For example, many of the Christmas-related cartoons used words that would be typical of a child during the Christmas period. One cartoon has him exclaiming, “Santa!” Another cartoon has President Bush claiming that his favorite present is Saddam. These are all statements that would be typical of a child during the Christmas period.

Another metaphor is the cowboy metaphor that has become associated with President Bush. He is shown in one cartoon carrying a pistol and wearing a cowboy hat along with a flannel shirt, which fits into the stereotype of what a cowboy may look like. One cartoon even goes so far as to provide both an American and a French definition of cowboy, with President Bush saying that he thinks they were cussing at him.

The use of fairy tales was a very prevalent theme throughout the selected cartoons. The fairy tale of the little red hen was depicted, where other nations did not wish to plant the seed, or help in the war effort in Iraq, but then wished to reap the reward by participating in the reconstruction efforts. Cinderella is also portrayed in one of the cartoons. President Bush, an unlikely Cinderella, is found to be sitting in a pumpkin carriage carried by two mice. It claims that at the stroke of June 20th, the pumpkin would turn into a golden carriage, making a reference to the date in transition of power from the U.S. to Iraq. In the background a clock is pictured gonging, symbolizing midnight. Another example of the use of metaphor shows Pinnochio’s nose as a weapon of mass destruction protruding through the earth. One final example of the use of fairy tales involves a reference to the Tooth Fairy. It depicts President Bush telling a story of how the Keebler elves bought weapons of mass destruction from the Tooth Fairy, an obvious reference to the absence of a discovery of WMDs in Iraq.

The use of mechanistic metaphors were common throughout the cartoons. President Bush was shown in a jet in multiple cartoons and for a variety of purposes. One cartoon shows him using the jet to strengthen his campaign for the election. Another cartoons shows President Bush flying the plane with ease, writing the words “Nation building.” Another metaphor shows the “Saddam-terrorists link” bridge being disconnected, while dead U.S. soldiers fall through the gap.

Holiday icons also become prominent in the use of metaphor. Numerous cartoons pictured President Bush during Christmas and with Santa Claus. One cartoon shows
President Bush thanking Santa for his life-size Saddam action figure. Another cartoon shows President Bush pointing a gun at Santa, with the statement, “Um, sir, I think you have the wrong bearded guy” being made by an advisor. Another example of the holiday metaphor has a cartoon featuring Saddam Hussein as a stuffed Turkey.

There were several other themes found in the metaphors of the selected cartoons. The use of animals, food, death, magic, historical figures, Uncle Sam, and video games also appeared. It is evident that metaphors were used lavishly in the rhetorical vision and that they are important rhetorical devices.

We have examined the rhetorical vision articulated by the cartoonists and seen that, “Our political leaders are involved in a corrupt farcical drama.” The dramatis personae highlighted the primary villains as President Bush, Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and the United Nations. There were several story-lines that were revealed within the cartoons. The motives for President Bush and Jacques Chirac, Gerhard Schroeder, and the United Nations were identified as well. The values as well as the scenarios for the characters involved were also identified. Finally, the use of metaphors within the war cartoons were examined. After applying the selected criteria to the selected cartoons, we must now look at the implications that these results have warranted.


Chapter 5: Implications

Insight into the Artifacts

This analysis has helped to provide great insight into the discourse surrounding the war in Iraq and the connection to President Bush. It has provided analysis regarding the attacks that have occurred against President Bush. To understand how this analysis has shed light on the subject, the first two questions identified in the critical problems section will be addressed, followed by an examination of the social impact that these political cartoons may have outside of an attempt at persuasion.

The first question identified in the critical problems section asks us, “What does Fantasy Theme Analysis tell us about the selected war political cartoons and the rhetorical purposes of the cartoonists?” The answer to this question is two-fold. First, the cartoons portrayed were extremely negative in nature. Second, the rhetorical purpose of the cartoonists was to attack President Bush and to sway public opinion.

The cartoons selected were overwhelmingly negative in nature. Out of the 76 cartoons that were chosen for analysis, only 5 of them were overtly positive in nature. The cartoons strongly criticized President Bush on a variety of issues. From the portrayal of him as a child to his overzealousness, shown as a cowboy, to the depiction of him as a liar, the cartoons depicted President Bush in a negative light. As Benoit et. al. (2001) notes, political cartoons generally tend to be critical in nature. They focus on the mishaps, mistakes, and errors in judgment of those in power. This selection of cartoons verifies these claims whole-heartedly. The evidence supports the notion that those in power tend to draw critique and the use of satire. The role of the cartoonist then, as a political satirist, is to raise questions about those that possess the most power.

The cartoons revealed that the cartoonists’ rhetorical purpose was to attack President Bush and attempt to influence public opinion. One strategy that the cartoonists used was to exaggerate features within the cartoons. For example, while President Bush did appear on the aircraft carrier to announce the end of major combat operations and he did arrive by traveling in a jet, the cartoons relevant to this issue all depicted President Bush as the solo pilot, which of course was not the case in reality. Additionally, the cartoons portrayed him as an overzealous pilot. In one cartoon, he flies the jet through a large picture of Saddam Hussein.

In another cartoon, two figures, domestic policy and foreign policy, are shown standing outside President Bush’s door. President Bush welcomes in foreign policy and shuts the door on domestic policy. In reality though, President Bush did not close the door on domestic policy during the war in Iraq, even if the focus may not have been on domestic policy. For example, a host of policies dealing with national security, the suggestion of oil development in the Alaskan National Wildlife Refuge, and the issue of gay marriage have all been addressed by President Bush during this time frame.

A final example of the exaggeration of features can be found in a cartoon that pictures President Bush behind a machine gun shooting down the enemy. Next to him stands Condoleeza Rice with a sheet of paper that details President Bush’s doctrine. His doctrine reads shoot first, verify evidence later. President Bush has made numerous statements indicating that he truly believed that the intelligence he received showed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

What this analysis tells us is that the cartoonists were overwhelmingly critical of President Bush and his actions regarding the war in Iraq. While there was an opportunity
to support him, very few cartoons took this path. The rhetorical vision that they created was extremely critical and negative of President Bush. The cartoons then were an outlet for this criticism. The exaggerations of certain features and events served to magnify the impact of the criticisms. Thus, the cartoons were an outlet for these individuals, giving us insight into the rhetorical vision that they created. It becomes apparent that the rhetorical purpose of the cartoonists was to attempt to influence public opinion. Specifically, the cartoonists wanted the public to perceive the President in a negative light. However, in order to understand the impact of this rhetorical vision, the second critical problem must be addressed.

The second question asks, “What insight does Fantasy Theme Analysis offer us into how war political cartoons and political cartoonists operate in attempting to influence others?” The answer consists of four components. First, political cartoons are capable of impacting one’s attitude. Second, the cartoons’ negative characterizations play a powerful role. Third, the master analogue is an attempt at persuasion. Finally, the visual element plays a unique role in changing the construction of the rhetorical message.

Political cartoons have been shown to possibly have an impact on readers. Brinkman (1968) was able to show that cartoons can have an affect on people’s attitudes. Wheeler and Reed (1975) indicated that cartoons may signal a change in public opinion. Some conclusions can be drawn regarding the likelihood that these messages did indeed have an impact on the audience. A poll conducted jointly by ABC News and the Washington Post, released on June 22, 2004, indicated that 52% of Americans believed that the war in Iraq was not worth fighting. This poll was taken after President Bush started to receive a large amount of criticism for grievances such as a weakened justification for the war and the Abu Ghraib scandal. Additionally, at the time this research was written, President Bush’s popularity was at the lowest level ever, providing further support that the political war cartoons had an influence over the public. More than likely, the themes that developed were accepted as truths by the public. The conception that President Bush is a cowboy does not require a large leap of faith, as he is from Texas, owns a ranch, and has been portrayed as a cowboy in the media before. When the cartoons portrayed President Bush as helping out his friends at Halliburton, it likely resonated as being true with the public. The conception that those in government help their friends when they can is a common belief among many people. Even though the cartoons would not be the only factor that changed public opinion, they likely did have an effect. It is a source of media that many see weekly, if not daily. Overall, it is very likely that the messages portrayed in the cartoons had an impact on the readers.

To further support this notion, the negative criticisms towards President Bush played a powerful role. Society seems to find it easy to point at politicians. Jokes that politicians are corrupt and immoral are as old as politics itself. Thus, the myth that all politicians are corrupt is not hard for many people to accept. If a person already believes that politicians are corrupt, political cartoons that reinforce this idea would not be readily dismissed. Because political cartoons are, for the most part, extremely negative, it seems to be a reflection of societal attitudes towards politicians as well as an attempt to continue to shape attitudes towards politicians.

One way in which the cartoonists’ rhetorical vision attempts to shape the readers’ attitudes is through the master analogue. Weaver (1970) argues that language teaches us a lesson. Thus, the righteous analogue, which is at work in the cartoonists’ rhetorical
vision in this study, conveys a message of what politicians are doing wrong. The rhetorical vision explains that these political actors, and more specifically, President Bush, are taking actions that are inappropriate for a person in politics. Thus the implication is that we, as readers, need to voice our displeasure with the current course of actions. The lesson being taught by the rhetorical vision then is two-fold. For President Bush, the political cartoonists are informing him that his actions, such as those surrounding the Abu Ghraib prison scandal and his justifications for the war which later fell apart, are not becoming of the President and that he needs to take corrective action. The second part of the lesson then is for the reader, indicating that they should take the appropriate measures to condemn the actors portrayed in the cartoons to prevent further inappropriate behavior. This is clearly a persuasive message, on two levels, by the political cartoonists.

Finally, the impact of the visual element and how it can be used in persuasion must be addressed. What we can gain through this analysis is the realization that political cartoons offer a unique perspective in creating a rhetorical vision. While humor can portray some of the effects that are illustrated in political cartoons, the visual element uniquely changes the construction of the rhetorical message. The use of drawings allows an elaboration of the message of the cartoons. It would be very difficult to convey the message that President Bush is child-like without including the visual element. While it could be described, the effect more than likely would be decreased. Additionally, the visual element may be the cue that catches the reader’s attention. These political cartoons were found in newspapers from across the country and the globe. An average person is more likely to be drawn to a humorous visual message than they are to examine the same content in an article. Furthermore, the visual element itself can be humorous. Seeing Saddam dressed as Santa is dramatically more humorous than someone describing Saddam as Santa Claus.

By applying Fantasy Theme Analysis to these political cartoons, it has been revealed that the visual element plays a unique role in allowing a rhetorical vision to develop. While it is not a necessary component, it does change the composition of the rhetorical vision that is created. The visual element functions uniquely through the use of metaphor. Metaphors expressed through the use of cartoons convey meaning that cannot be explained through the use of words. A political war cartoon portrays President Bush as a cowboy extremely effectively. It can include a cowboy hat, a belt buckle, a gun on his side, a flannel shirt, and chaps. All of these clearly convey the message that President Bush is seen as a cowboy. A drawing creates a message that is interpreted at once, whereas a description takes multiple steps, is not as effective, and essentially has less of an impact than a cartoon would.

Metaphors function as a strong argument. Rather than make an outright argument, metaphors function in this case by allowing the viewer to make their own conclusions. This makes the argument more powerful because the viewer is constructing the argument themselves with the help of the visual element as a guide. A political war cartoon does not specifically tell us that President Bush is a cowboy, but the implication is clear through the drawing. As a viewer, we are then constructing an argument that President Bush is a cowboy when we see the political cartoon.

Why is this significant? Current research has not explored how the use of cartoons as metaphors function as an argument. The selected cartoons demonstrate the
ability of cartoonists to structure an argument in a unique fashion. Thus, a significant
discovery has been made in regard to these cartoons as this research has shed light into
the rhetorical power of political war cartoons.

The social impact of these cartoons needs to be addressed as well. As previous
studies have indicated, such as Bormann, Koester, and Bennett (1978) and Benoit et. al.
(2001), political cartoons can be important vessels for creating discourse about issues
pertinent to the population. While these cartoons ridicule the events and the characters
involved, they do raise awareness about significant issues. The Abu Ghraib prison
scandal, President Bush’s honesty regarding the justification for war, and the use of the
$87 billion dollars requested for the war in Iraq all are important issues that were
addressed. These political cartoons serve as a starting point to urge readers to think about
and discuss critical events that occur in our society. Even though they have a humorous
slant, the messages embedded in these cartoons serve an important function by
contributing to the public dialog.

Implications for Fantasy Theme Analysis

This study has offered several insights into Fantasy Theme Analysis and, as a
result, Symbolic Convergence Theory. Additionally, it has provided insight into the
rhetorical field as a whole. Thus, this section will first examine the impact that this study
can have on FTA and SCT directly, but then examine the impact of this study on the
examination of rhetoric overall.

First, this study has shown how multiple rhetors with separate discourse can come
together to form one coherent rhetorical vision. This supports Benoit et. al.’s (2001)
analysis and conclusions regarding the implications for individuals coming together to
develop a rhetorical vision, giving credibility to their claim.

Second, based on both Benoit et. al’s (2001) study and this study, it seems
appropriate that the further investigation regarding the use of metaphors within Symbolic
Convergence Theory, and subsequently Fantasy Theme Analysis, is warranted. Benoit
et. al. (2001) claim that metaphors are not typically components of SCT. It seems
appropriate that metaphors are closely examined when political cartoons are the focus of
a study using SCT and FTA. Perhaps there are other situations, such as the examination
of advertisements or brochures, where the use of metaphor needs to be included to fully
utilize SCT and FTA when analyzing a rhetorical artifact or artifacts. Generally, it would
seem appropriate that metaphors be examined whenever there is a visual element present.
Researchers intending to utilize SCT and FTA should at the minimum consider the
examination of metaphors when performing their analysis.

These conclusions serve two purposes. First, it helps to explain how Symbolic
Convergence Theory and Fantasy Theme Analysis was effective in providing sufficient
insight into the rhetorical meanings and implications embedded within the selected
cartoons. Second, it highlights how SCT and FTA might be modified when used by
future researchers. Upon examining the direct implications of this study on SCT and
FTA, it is important to see the implications of this study on rhetoric overall.

As was mentioned earlier in this study, rhetoricians tend to focus on the verbal
aspects of rhetoric. This study has helped to give insight into how the nonverbal, or
visual element, can be as significant or even more significant than the verbal aspect
within certain contexts. The nature of political cartoons helps to expose this side of
communication and the impact that the visual element can have on a message.
Hopefully, scholars will at least consider the impact that the visual element may have on a rhetorical artifact before they begin their analysis.

Conclusion

This study has looked at President Bush, his actions, and the war in Iraq as portrayed in a selection of political cartoons from Daryl Cagle’s professional cartoonists index. By looking at Symbolic Convergence Theory and the method of analysis that has sprung from it, Fantasy Theme Analysis, an examination of the selected political cartoons was performed. Conclusions regarding not only the cartoons, but also their implications regarding the cartoonists’ intent and the implications they have for Fantasy Theme Analysis have been discovered. Finally, the significance of this study, from both a social and rhetorical studies perspective, have been discussed. It has become clear through this analysis that political cartoons and their examination are warranted and that they make a significant contribution to the overall study of rhetoric.
References


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Appendix 1
“President Bush is a war hungry president that led us into a war without justification and has used it to benefit himself and his allies.”

His offenss
Bush makes rash decisions
Bush holds a grudge
Bush overestimates abilities
Bush holds misplaced priorities
Bush lies to the public
Bush intentionally misleads
Bush shifts blame to others
Bush doesn’t know how to find the answers
Bush helps his friends
Bush is narrow-minded
Bush is overaggressive
Bush is unintelligent
Bush acts like a child
Bush does not show remorse

Effects on Bush
Bush is greedy
Bush is focused on political agenda
Bush has lost control
Bush’s legacy will be trivial
Bush can not handle pressure
Bush is in a precarious position

Effects on Others
Soldiers are misled
Iraq’s future questionable
US credibility hurt

Responses by Bush
Criticize France for acting as a cowboy
Difference in conceptualization
Lucky
Provide some evidence
Both him and Chirac are culpable
Accomplished some of mission
Military is strong
No other choice
*Bush’s Success*
Saddam’s capture meets Bush’s goal
Saddam toppled

“Foreign leaders/organizations refuse to cooperate”

*Anti-United States Sentiment is Acceptable*
Refuse to accept the obvious
Wish to reap the benefits without putting forth any effort
Oblivious to danger
Artificial friend(s)