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*This is another essay for my Text and Discourse Analysis class; this time using metaphor criticism to analyze a real world article. I chose to write about Steve Jobs’s commencement speech at Stanford University, and how by using clichéd metaphors he was able to connect his very unique life to a crowd of college graduates and their families. This is another example of me analyzing an everyday artifact through a rhetorical lens.*

Cliché Metaphors for Connection

**Introduction**

On June 12, 2005, Steve Jobs, CEO of Apple Computer and Pixar Animation Studios, delivered a commencement speech at Stanford University to the graduating class. Ironically, Jobs dropped out of college, but still had valuable messages to offer the students. In his address he tells three stories, which he enhances with the use of figurative language. A commencement speech is the opportunity to provide a lasting take-home message for students as they finish their education and begin a new chapter of their lives. Jobs utilizes metaphors to add meaning and images to his stories, thereby both creating a connection with his audience and driving home his purpose of the speech: trust your instincts, never give up, live life to the fullest, and push yourself. However, sometimes metaphors are used so often that they become commonplace and cliché. Jobs uses quite a few of these well-known metaphors so as to relate his unusual life to that of many.

Today this speech is seen as one of Jobs most influential, and most notably people remember the quote “Stay hungry. Stay foolish,” which he took from the back of a *Whole Earth Catalog* magazine (Whole Earth Catalog). This essay will look at how the cliché metaphors used to describe one person’s life can be understood and applied to the lives of others, despite having little to no similarities to that person. By doing this Jobs bridges his experiences to that of the audience, despite being an extraordinary individual.

**Presentation of Artifact**

Jobs begins his speech by admitting that this was the closest he’s ever been to a college graduation. He then outlines three stories from his past, beginning with an anecdote of his brief college career. He claims that before he was even born he was set to go to college, as his biological mother would only allow him to be adopted by college graduates. He then admits to dropping out after only six months, while still attending classes of his choosing as an unregistered student. He later used what he learned in a calligraphy class towards designing fonts for the Mac, and then summarizes that one cannot “connect the dots,” when “looking forward…only [when]…looking backward.”

He sets up his second story by expressing that it is “about love and loss.” Here he illustrates the anguish he felt when being fired from his own company, and having to try to find himself and start anew. He uses a lot of metaphors to explain the feelings he had and actions he took, such as “sometimes life hits you in the head…don’t lose faith,” and “I had been rejected, but I was still in love,” (in reference to his work.) He finishes this story with the the idea that sometimes when one door closes, another opens, sometimes to better things.

His third and final story is about death, in which he talks about some clichés like “liv[ing] each day as if it were your last,” but makes it personal by weaving in the narrative of his battle with pancreatic cancer. Towards the end of this he gets philosophical, again utilizing quite a few metaphors, like “follow your heart,” “death is…life’s change agent,” “don’t waste [your time] living someone else’s life.” He concludes with the now memorable quote, “Stay hungry. Stay foolish,” (Whole Earth Catalog).

**Method of Criticism**

Metaphor criticism is a type of rhetorical criticism where a critic analyzes the usage of metaphors in a piece of rhetoric. Metaphors are defined as “nonliteral comparisons in which a word or phrase from one domain of experience is applied to another domain” (Foss 267). They can also be explained in terms of “tenor” and “vehicle.” The tenor serves as “the topic or subject that is being explained,” and the vehicle as “the mechanism or lens through which the topic is viewed” (Richards qtd in Foss 267). Tenor is also sometimes called the “target domain” and vehicle is sometimes referred to as the “source domain.” A critic goes about writing a metaphor criticism paper by first selecting an artifact which they see fit to analyze. They then analyze the paper and formulate a research question about the purpose of the use of metaphor in the rhetoric they have selected. Finally, they write the essay, in which they explain the metaphors, the analysis of them, and the greater purpose of their findings.

**Analysis of Artifact**

Jobs begins his first story stating that it is “about connecting the dots.” This in itself is a metaphor. It takes the idea of a connect-the-dots game which starts with many random points, that when completed ends up resembling a picture. This is a metaphor for how while Jobs was struggling through his first year of college and the following few years, he felt lost and didn’t see himself going anywhere. He said that he “couldn’t see the value in it,” referring to both the high cost of tuition and his time spent wasted feeling unsure. When he reflected back on this period of his life, he could now see how what he learned was “priceless” as it helped him create the fonts for the Mac. Priceless because he could not put a value on what he had learned, and because of how vital the knowledge was towards creating style for the personal computer. He uses the terms “looking forwards,” and “looking backwards,” to describe how one cannot see the full picture that the dots create when looking forward, but rather only how everything worked together in retrospect. He also throws throws in a few cliché metaphors like “trust…your gut,” but personalizes them by adding to trust in “destiny, life, karma, whatever.” By doing this Jobs can get away with certain clichés without sounding boring, but still have it relate to people. Additionally, by making the overused metaphors personal he makes them sound fresh and it ties them into his life stories more.

In his second story Jobs shares from when he got fired from his own company, Apple. He uses phrases with the idea of a downward motion such as “we had a falling out,” “I had dropped the baton as it was being passed to me,” “something slowly began to dawn on me,” “the heaviness of being successful.” These all create the image of a dragging, weightiness that he felt from this roadblock he encountered after he was fired. He then explains how he made the best of a bad situation by embracing this new-found freedom admitting that “it was awful-tasting medicine, but I guess the patient needed it.” He adds that “sometimes life hits you in the head with a brick [so] don’t lose faith.” He tends to end each story with cliché metaphors to summarize his message, which lends to making it understandable and interpretable by many.

Jobs’ third story begins with another cliché: to “live each day as if it were your last;” however, like in the first story, Jobs adds his own twist by supplementing this with a personal recounting of his battle with cancer. Most of his audience had probably not suffered severe illness or near-death experiences, so Jobs paints the feelings he had with metaphors. With cancer, Jobs was left to believe that he was to die in a few months, and spent that time thinking about how he was going to finish what he needed to do and tie everything up. He uses metaphors like “make sure everything [was] buttoned up,” “get my affairs in order,” “say your goodbyes.” He said that “all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure — these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important.” He confronts and contemplates death as, again, a chance to start anew, and uses this as a way to encourage students to “follow [their] heart,” which is arguably one of the most cliché metaphors of encouragement. While some of these phrases may lead to some rolling their eyes out of their obviousness and staleness, in the context of the speech and the occasion, they created a simple, comprehensible message. In addition to this there is the fact that the speaker was seen as one of the most acclaimed, intelligent, and influential figures in the world at the time, allowing him to get away with otherwise cliché and unexciting metaphors.

He concludes with referencing *The Whole Earth Catalog*, which he calls “one of the bibles of [his] generation,” and “Google in paperback form,” to emphasize its significance. He tells of how this remarkable magazine published its last issue with the phrase “Stay hungry. Stay foolish,” left as a final message for its readers on the back cover. He hopes that his audience takes this away as the final message of his speech also, to stay hungry for knowledge, and hungry to chase their dreams. As well as to stay foolish in doing things others think cannot be done, and ready to step outside their comfort zone.

**Conclusion**

Steve Jobs related personal anecdotes to generic, cliché metaphors which he used to enhance his storytelling and also to extend his own experiences to that of his audience. By doing this, he can speak to the students and elicit an understanding and relatability from them, despite being from vastly different lives. This helps drive home a powerful message that will stay with the graduates, and make them feel connected to Jobs. While Jobs could have created his own novel metaphors, this may not create the universal comprehension of his speech like using well-known metaphors would. This method of metaphor usage can be applied to anything from intimate conversations to large campaigns. Overall, this method is useful as it helps people connect, who may otherwise not be able to relate to one another without this bridge of understanding.

**Sources**

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