

Calling All Rebels!
Taco Bell Fights Fast Food Breakfast Fascism:
A Rhetorical Analysis of the “Routine Republic” Commercial
Using Narrative Criticism and Intertextuality

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By

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INTRODUCTION

Is Taco Bell fundamentally any different than McDonald's? If so, are Taco Bell customers smarter, cooler, and more heroic than McDonald's customers? Does Taco Bell understand the human experience? The ostentatious three-minute Taco Bell "Routine Republic" commercial appears to answer a brash "yes" to these questions, and to tell viewers just how Taco Bell exemplifies all that is cool by antagonizing the McDonald's cultural tradition. The ad debuted on YouTube on March 23, 2015. *AdWeek* writer Gabriel Beltone, in her "Ad of the Week" article, labeled the short film an "epic narrative ad," impelling me to unveil the story it conveys. "Routine Republic," while fulfilling its capitalist function as a promotional piece to sell product and reap enormous profit for its sponsor corporation, forms a fictive cover story that coopts a deeply embedded, universal lived-out narrative: the grand theme of successful rebellion against a persecutor, with youth leading the way. The commercial was written, produced, and introduced to the Internet audience with an unambiguous intention of championing Taco Bell over McDonald's—while casting the Golden Arches as outdated, sinister, and oppressive—in the fight to win more fast food breakfast consumers. The cover story depicts Taco Bell as a New World of human self-determination, with the freshness of youth and the celebration of elite difference—that is, heroic individualism—in being a sort of fast food cognoscenti. To contrast that image of "goodness," the story portrays McDonald's as an Old World of cold-hearted constriction, with the staleness of archaism and the desolation of sameness exemplified as unconscious conformity.

And so the significance of "Routine Republic" is the stark contrast between Taco Bell and McDonald's: a juxtaposition wherein narrative forms the meta-text, which serves as a framework filled out with fragments from familiar texts that, taken together, construct the whole, epic, rhetorical artifact. As a film, "Routine Republic" compresses into the "specific story moves" (Cannell) of the Three-Act Structure a common, and currently trendy, narrative of rebellion against an oppressor, while exploiting the "sameness – difference" trope to justify the acts of the rebels. The commercial is made even more accessible for viewers by filling it with

dozens of fragments grabbed from other time-honored and popular cultural themes, films, music, images, and so on. To examine the cinematic complexity of this artifact, I will introduce the organizational framework known as the Three-Act Structure by previewing the commercial, and then I discuss elements that explicate the four components of narrative (movement, temporal order, causal relationships, and unified subject). These will consist of action, color and lighting, audio, and stage and props as they operate within the two methods employed in examining this artifact. The first method, narrative criticism, will open the door to viewing, in depth, the principal theme of rebellion. Second, an investigation using intertextuality as a magnifying instrument will reveal for readers the most important elements of the commercial that provide multiple layers of depth, distinction, and resonance in this highly crafted Three-Act narrative of oppression and human insurrection. I argue that Taco Bell's advertising agency, Deutsch LA, deftly combined the rebellion-against-oppressor storyline with well-chosen cultural fragments in "Routine Republic" because this fusion makes the commercial irresistibly rich and palatable, much like the fast food that the ad promotes. That such an ad exists in our cultural milieu also demands that I discuss the rhetorical situation surrounding, and incubating, "Routine Republic." These points of analysis will help to prove my claims.

My overarching assertion is that "Routine Republic" overshoots its persuasive intent to turn fast food consumers away from McDonald's and toward Taco Bell—despite both the top-notch production value and the exceedingly accessible entertainment quality built into the ad. I reason mainly that, while the commercial displays ample narrative probability with its use of a familiar, coherent tale of rebellion against oppressor, the story is a gross misappropriation of that theme. At the same time, "Routine Republic" fails to achieve narrative fidelity, a sense of loyalty to "the rebellion story" as a shared understanding: *it works too hard to "ring true."* Discussion will lead to underscoring a problematic movement in marketing convenience food and most other consumer goods, begging critical review. Analysis and interpretation will give way to a full appraisal of "Routine Republic" as a rhetorical artifact in order to assist readers in understanding why this advertisement *really* matters in their lives. This is a tall order for a fast food commercial

(no pun intended), but I believe that readers who join me in uncovering details of this unique artifact will learn new concepts in rhetorical criticism, connect to “Routine Republic” in a fresh way, find the opportunity to gain new skills in detecting persuasive attempts, and ultimately enjoy the process along the way. First, I want to explain some details surrounding “Routine Republic,” set up the implications of its Three-Act Structure, and provide a sort of “academic trailer” for the commercial in order to highlight some of its attractions as a rhetorical artifact.

As typical artifacts go in the consumer advertising realm, “Routine Republic” is a vast rhetorical playground. It is *six times longer* than the average televised commercial of thirty seconds (and twelve times longer than a 15-second ad, but who’s counting?). Yet in just three minutes, the commercial encapsulates the mind-boggling narrative details of a 90-minute Hollywood feature film. This alone gave me impetus to explore what might be “inside” such an ad for fast food breakfast.

“Routine Republic” was produced like a miniature version of an entertainment industry feature film, by a professional team of Hollywood screenwriters, directors, crewmembers, staff, and actors, all under the direction of Taco Bell’s advertising agency, Deutsch LA, and on location in Europe (Belton). This is modern filmmaking at its finest. There should be no doubt that this commercial adheres strictly to the Three-Act Structure. Why? Not only is the Three-Act Structure simple, it is the time-honored entertainment industry standard for organizing *all modern stories*: books, screenplays, and movies. Everything we read and view created by Hollywood has passed the Three-Act Structure test. Also, the Three-Act Structure *works* – it is an effective, efficient organizing tool because viewers understand it. And finally, *all compositions* organized in the Three-Act Structure contain three distinct “acts” or segments of flowing action: “Routine Republic” is one such composition. In general, applying this universal arrangement looks like this:

- Act I introduces the protagonist, the narrative set-up, and the main problem;
- Act II centers around the narrative complication;
- Act III offers the resolution.

In the Three-Act Structure, set-up takes up a big chunk of the show-and-tell part of narrative, and having a somewhat lengthy complication is necessary to build drama. But screen time for the resolution or *denouement* (French: un-knotting), not so much. Simply, once we know how the protagonist deals with the complication, we only need to slap a bow on the narrative's ending; any further information will diminish the dramatic effect. According to acclaimed screenwriter Stephen J. Cannell, "The Three-Act structure is critical to good dramatic writing, and each act has specific story moves. Every great movie, book, or play that has stood the test of time has a solid Three-Act structure." In this sense, "Routine Republic," a Hollywood style short-film-as-commercial, works structurally because it follows great narrative works of the past in employing the Three-Act arrangement.

In order to understand how I will use the Three-Act Structure as fundamental to some of the most widely established rhetorical concepts about narrative, and as a set-up for exploring the four categories of textually rich components of the commercial, I offer the following précis of "Routine Republic":

ACT I:

A tiny, dreary apartment sets the stage. Through a window we view the outside world as an endless, unappealing metropolis. The window allows rainy-day light to shine on a small 1980s-style analog television. Sparking up all on its own, the TV transmits an advertisement filled with simple graphics and sounds that instantly familiarize us with the scenario that is the Routine Republic. Antithetical to democratic ideals of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, the Routine Republic is a darkly formal establishment, deceptively predictable in its scripted message, and lacking in meaningfulness for its denizens. Our young male protagonist is introduced; we follow him out of the apartment into an industrial courtyard, where he joins dozens and dozens of depressed-looking people waiting in long, never-ending lines for a single allotted breakfast sandwich. When the camera pulls back, the scene is immediately complicated with a multitude of

uniformed guards on high alert. They ride on horseback, rove about on foot, and position themselves watchfully in high places around the complex. We see the Routine Republic overlord himself in a drably ostentatious room filled with large surveillance screens depicting scenes around the complex. Our young heroine is presented, and she unites with the hero.

ACT II:

Suddenly, the hero and heroine “defect” from their adjacent food lines. The lithe couple outruns a bevy of clumsy sentinels-in-pursuit, successfully breaking free of the compound walls. Meanwhile, the minions left behind rise up in non-violent turmoil against the Routine Republic, which has been rendered useless against captives because of the shrewd and effective determination of the daring rebels.

ACT III:

The heroic duo survives their arduous defection and arrives, unharmed and completely refreshed, at their destination. This scenario is entirely different from the Routine Republic, it is Taco Bell: a desirable and welcoming place that represents the opposite of their former state of ostensible captivity.

This is just a teaser for “Routine Republic.” I will go in depth throughout this paper to analyze and interpret not just the fictive rebellion “cover story,” which cleverly mimics the “narrative” in narrative criticism, but the textual fragments that build in suggestive cultural meanings designed to create a deep, enduring connection for viewers in this persuasive commitment.

METHODOLOGICAL DISCUSSION

As a matter of definition, a narrative involves the everyday and yet profoundly important reporting of the events of our lives: “[R]ecounting and accounting for are stories we tell ourselves and each other to establish a meaningful life-world” (Fisher, *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism* 295). The “Routine Republic” rebellion-against-oppressor storyline follows a universal format that can be found in narratives which are for humans “part of our being, and...meaningful for everyone, across culture, time, and place” (Fisher, *Readings* 289). The rebellion narrative is,

as I have already established, consistent with the Three-Act Structure. It involves 1) a main character who is most often a seemingly unremarkable person, 2) an exigency in which the character is compelled to engage, and 3) a resolution of that exigency despite often perilous constraints dictated by the narrative. Furthermore, a character who overcomes the problem then transcends being “normal” and achieves hero status; this is the case for our “Routine Republic” defector and his female cohort. In addition utilizing Fisher’s narrative criticism perspective to reveal the “Routine Republic” commercial’s rhetorical use of the rebellion storyline, I will show how this method explicates the Three-Act Structure and illuminate important particulars of the storyline through the lens of intertextuality.

Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism is the brainchild of rhetorician Walter R. Fisher, who developed this theory on his concept of the narrative paradigm, a foundation for interpreting and evaluating rhetorical messages (Fisher, *Communication Monographs* 56). The preeminent Fisher wrote of narrative: “I refer to a theory of symbolic actions—words and/or deeds—that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictive worlds” (Fisher, *Readings* 291). His statements lend credibility to my selection of narrative criticism as the entrée to delving into “Routine Republic” because this paper will demonstrate how this fictive world cover story, while appealing in visuals and sound, violates the meaningfulness of authentic lived-out human experience explained in Fisher’s narrative paradigm.

Fisher contrasted his assumptions in the narrative paradigm with the rational paradigm, which focuses on human logic-based reasoning and the scientific method. He posited that humans are not as rational as we would believe ourselves to be, and that our stories are not always just stories—they go beyond mere amusement, even as they are often entertaining—and become a quasi-logic that we use to influence and persuade each other: our stories contain rhetorical ideology. Specifically, he wrote that they are “rhetorical fictions, constructions of fact and faith having persuasive force, rather than fantasies” (Fisher, *Communication Monographs* 7);

this idea becomes a key point later in my analysis and evaluation of “Routine Republic.” Using these enlightening concepts as a basis for understanding, Fisher sought to formalize into a canonical method the critique of rhetorical artifacts that contain narratives. For Fisher’s purpose, “paradigm” is defined as “a representation designed to formalize the structure of a component of experience and to direct understanding and inquiry into the nature and functions of that experience—in this instance, the experience of human communication” (Fisher, *Readings* 291). The term “paradigm” as he used it serves to metaphysically convey narratives as messages of ethics, “whether social, political, legal or otherwise” (Fisher, *Readings* 292). He explained that “the narrative paradigm *does not deny reason and rationality*; it reconstitutes them, making them amenable to all forms of human communication” (Fisher, *Readings* 291 [emphasis added]). Here, Fisher means that the narrative paradigm reconstructs human reason and rationality as operating through narrative as an everyday communicative, potentially rhetorical device. Narratives, then, can be understood as formally unlearned, part of our sub-conscious knowledge of culture and our relationships.

Imperative in the process of doing narrative criticism is deciding whether or not the story is “good,” and whether that goodness is based on narrative rationality. Fisher elucidated:

[Narrative rationality] is determined by the nature of persons as narrative beings—their inherent awareness of *narrative probability*, what constitutes a coherent story, and their constant habit of testing *narrative fidelity*, whether the stories they experience ring true with the stories they know to be true in their lives” (*Readings* 297).

I will test “Routine Republic” against these conditions. Further, Fisher cited two additional narrative paradigm features which he deemed fundamental, and which apply well to a narrative critique of “Routine Republic.” First, the narrative paradigm resolves dualisms such as “fact-value, intellect-imagination, reason-emotion, and so on”; and second, “narratives are moral constructs” (Fisher, *Readings* 299). Such dichotomies are really the stuff of narratives: they are present in our human understanding of stories, simple and complicated, and especially those that

can be condensed into the Three-Act Structure. The dichotomies reaffirm human principles over the eons of evolution. Phrases like “resolving,” “moral constructs,” and “being convinced” fall directly from the overarching idea that narrative criticism purports: our stories contain a rationality of the collective human psyche that defies logic and scientific method while simultaneously embracing them, creating a transcendent, epic endorsement of ethical principles. These generally unconscious narrative understandings are often bound by culture, time, space, biology, and a combination of exigencies and constraints. And because of the incalculable archetypal influence of human narratives, it seems all the more important to discover how individuals and groups, especially those already in positions of power, may use narrative to consciously—sometimes unwittingly—persuade people to do things against their own best interests. This paper, through narrative criticism, aims to reveal “Routine Republic” as one of these: “packaged persuasion” narratives created for the corporate profits of Taco Bell and with no other moral objective.

To reiterate, narrative criticism is not only a sufficient method for unpacking “Routine Republic,” it also is designed, as per Fisher’s explication, to examine narratives in rhetorical artifacts. This commercial is a proper subject because (1) it follows a familiar, timeless story of rebellion-against-oppressor, and (2) such common narratives can become powerful rhetorical devices, especially when interwoven with multiple other textual fragments that captivate viewers in profound but subtle ways. As far as rhetorical power, commercials like “Routine Republic” can influence viewers, perhaps even more so because ads themselves are often viewed reflexively, as mere entertainment: this leaves spectators vulnerable, at least potentially, to unconscious psychological manipulation by the ad’s creators and sponsors. In particular, “Routine Republic” achieves narrative probability of such high quality, proportion, and intensity that viewers may get swept up in the cultural current of the narrative and neglect to evaluate violations of narrative fidelity that are insensitive at best, morally reprehensible at worst. I believe that examining the age-old and seemingly immutable story of rebellion as recounted in “Routine Republic” will shed new light on the beauty of Fisher’s narrative paradigm. This

investigation will ideally instruct readers on how to resist hasty, hedonistic compliance to messages in rhetorical artifacts like advertisements, thus offering people an opportunity to gain more control over their day-to-day decisions. Additionally, what deepens the experience of viewing “Routine Republic” is the carefully selected, well-crafted intertextuality, featuring visual and audio cues from throughout culture—called *textual fragments*—that help the commercial seem coherent, plausible, and relatable. In a fascinating twist, the ad’s intertextuality highlights the supplanting of Fisher’s view of a meaningful life-world as implicitly understood through storytelling for one fashioned from our fragment-filled culture.

Intertextuality

“Routine Republic” undergirds its rhetorical message of Taco Bell’s contraposition against McDonald’s with the grand theme of rebellion-against-oppressor as the narrative’s main thread, and offers a variety of textual fragments that demonstrate intertextuality while strengthening both the production value of the film and the potential impact of the story. Textual fragments are details that ultimately inform the complex interaction between “production of the text” and “interpretation of the text” (Jasinski 322-323). More importantly, perhaps, says Jasinski, “A text or an utterance always exists and, hence, must be studied and/or understood in relation to *other* texts and utterances” (322). Essentially, we can never read or produce a text without interweaving selected other texts into it, thereby producing another text altogether. Again, texts, and textual fragments, refer to any production: certainly words and symbols, but also song hooks and lines in popular movies, works of art, cultural experiences, colloquialisms, and now, internet memes and GIFs. Further, the subjective selection of textual fragments in any given production can contribute to rhetorical artifacts: “[H]istorically rhetors have been interpreters of texts to their own strategic ends. In my view, rhetors have often construed the meaning of previous texts to their own advantage by constructing public discourse that draws upon those texts” (Watson, qtd. in Jasinski 325). In “Routine Republic,” we will see that the advertising firm tasked with producing the commercial unambiguously employs numerous visual and audio fragments.

In working with the idea of intertextuality, McGee differs from Watson in that he believes “‘texts’ have disappeared altogether, leaving us with nothing but *discursive fragments of context*. By this I would mean that changing cultural conditions have made it virtually impossible to construct a whole and harmonious text” (McGee 287). He explains cultural fragmentation as such: “Rhetors make discourses from scraps and pieces of evidence. . . . [The] apparently finished discourse is fashioned from what we can call ‘fragments’ [of a culture]” (McGee 279). McGee says that with the cultural change in the early 20th century from homogenous to heterogeneous, “The unity and structural integrity we used to put in our texts as they faithfully represented nature is now presumed to be *in us ourselves*” (McGee 287 [emphasis added]). Whether Watson or McGee are correct—and I see their positions as necessarily two sides of the same valid coin—cultural fragmentation vis-à-vis intertextuality is evident in “Routine Republic.” As mentioned already, the significance of “Routine Republic” is that Taco Bell has unmistakably positioned itself as the rebellious provocateur against McDonald’s mechanistic tyranny in the world of hand-held breakfast fast food. The respective opposing themes of difference and sameness—individualism and conformity, and other dualisms as highlighted by Fisher—will be teased out from both the rebellion narrative and additional familiar texts in exploring the intricacies of Taco Bell and Deutsch LA’s marketing masterwork as representative of the cultural fragmentation that McGee illuminates. To better understand this artifact, I want to look deeper at its position within the cultural environment and give it some context, since its rhetorical situation is foundational to analysis and interpretation of the commercial.

RHETORICAL SITUATION

As a practice, scrutinizing all fast food commercials is important because they are rhetorical artifacts *designed* for persuasive potential, and knowing how they work empowers scholars and viewers alike. In particular, “Routine Republic” quite boldly presents a multilayered, persuasive strategy that epitomizes this particular aspect of the rhetorical situation: an emerging trend in advertising that caters to a demanding online audience. As mentioned in the introduction, “Routine Republic” aired for one week on YouTube before being released for

network television viewing. Already inured to commercials everywhere, all the time, “Routine Republic” viewers were offered this exciting mini-drama to break up the dreariness of everyday real life (and advance a tasty reward for viewers who, literally, bought into the drama). Advertisers as professionals know that their Internet audience, if not sated with endless entertainment, will click a single button and find different, more engaging content—possibly an ad by a market rival—that hooks the viewers. This fact alone urges corporations like Taco Bell to allocate vast sums of money for sophisticated productions such as “Routine Republic,” making clear that consumers’ dollars are worth that cost, because corporations do absolutely nothing without considering the bottom line. In 2012, “McDonald’s remained number one [in the fast food market] with \$35.6 billion in sales, almost one-quarter of all sales by the top-50 restaurants and almost three times the sales of Subway, its closest competitor”; Taco Bell ranked sixth with just shy of \$7.5 billion in sales, although this was an increase of 10% since 2009 (“Overview of Fast Food Market” 13). Most recently, second-quarter reports from Taco Bell Division’s parent company, Yum! Brands, show that the fast food restaurant’s sales increased 9%, the division opened 58 new restaurants, and operating profit increased 29% (Schmitt 6). According to Yum! Brands CEO Greg Creed, “Taco Bell is firing on all cylinders driven by industry-leading innovation and a solid breakfast platform” (Schmitt 2). The producers of “Routine Republic” unquestionably attempted to reinforce that platform by touting the Taco Bell Breakfast Biscuit during the quarter prior to Creed’s confident statement.

And thus, in addition to marketing trends, timing is a thought-provoking issue within the rhetorical situation. “Routine Republic” was released on YouTube during the typical US college “spring break” period (mid-March into mid-April), a ritualistic social occasion of “freedom” from the supposed monotony of academic rigors that often equates to excessive eating, drinking, public nudity, and other self-indulgent party atmosphere behaviors. Each year, “spring break attracts over 1.5 million students who collectively spend more than a billion dollars” (Roblyer). This indicates an attitude of autonomy among young people that harmonizes brilliantly with the rebellious independence depicted in “Routine Republic”—this will be made clear during the

artifact description section. I think it is important to augment the college spring break timing aspect of the rhetorical situation with YouTube's 2015 Demographics Report, which reveals that a full 78% of its US audience are males. Of those males, 41% represent the largest age group, 18-24 years old: that is, college age ("Demographics Report"). Also significant is that "Taco Bell replaced Starbucks as the most viewed [YouTube] channel in 2013, with just under 14 million views. Starbucks ranked second in popularity with over eight million views, and McDonald's ranked third at just under eight million" ("Overview" 60). By garnering roughly 6 million more views than both Starbucks and McDonald's in a single year, Taco Bell knows what the online audience want to see. Miranda Brookins, a marketing professional from Demand Media, says videos like "Routine Republic" that air on YouTube "are designed to encourage viewers to pass the video along to friends, family, and colleagues who may find it entertaining. [Such videos are] usually laced with an element of humor or surprise." To make these productions even more viable, fast food advertisers attract viewers with music (Brookins). In the case of "Routine Republic," spectators may have recognized dark humor in the surprising twist that transforms McDonald's into fast food fascists, while getting hooked into the energizing rebel cry of a time-honored, quintessential American punk song. The ad likely went viral due to its amped-up entertainment value. Clearly, the fast food market is extremely competitive, creating an environment in which companies like Taco Bell will go to tremendous marketing effort to try to increase their customer base and thus their bottom line. "Routine Republic" is a shining example of that "ante up, all in, cash out" corporate mentality and might with which average viewers cannot compete. Only those media literate individuals willing to *use* their evaluative skills have a likelihood of not just questioning what they view, but changing their buying habits and, therefore, *changing the market itself*.

The first step toward empowering viewers to achieve such influence is to develop skills in evaluating persuasive attempts by corporations like Taco Bell. It is my aim to guide readers through this process by closely scrutinizing "Routine Republic" for its narrative probability and narrative fidelity, and for the cultural fragments that help to "hook" ad viewers. I want to state

unequivocally that Taco Bell Breakfast Biscuits—however tasty, convenient, and nifty in their hexagonal uniqueness—lack the nutrients required for optimal human health. This, too, is part of the rhetorical situation: our nation is finding out that a diet of fast food wreaks havoc on health, leading to diabetes, heart disease, and obesity. By discovering the ways in which corporations seek to persuade viewers into purchasing unnecessary and frequently harmful products, readers of this paper have the opportunity to make better, more life-affirming decisions when it comes to consumption in a capitalist economy that, by its nature, places profit over people.

At this point in the paper, I am certain that readers who have not seen “Routine Republic” are curious as to its content. Interested readers may still find the video online on Vimeo. However, since it originally aired in the third week of March 2015, “Routine Republic” has been taken offline by YouTube.¹

ARTIFACT DESCRIPTION

Film components in four categories of “Routine Republic” present opportunities to survey both the meta-narrative of rebellion-against-oppressor and the multitude of interwoven textual fragments. These four elements are: 1) action, 2) color and lighting, 3) audio, and 4) stage and props. An investigation of each of these will highlight the complexity of “Routine Republic” within the overarching Three-Act Structure.

Action

This component matches the narrative elements of movement, including the basis for temporal order, causal relationships, and unified subject because, when dealing with visual productions, action portrayed within the three acts does the bulk of the storytelling work. In Act I, viewers meet the soon-to-be hero, who appears as an everyday young man. We see his deliberateness as he opens the drapes, reflects in a mirror, then trudges out of his apartment and down a metal stairway. The protagonist steps into the Routine Republic, a bleak outdoor industrial complex, where he joins scores of people standing silently in long lines. An exaggeratedly cheerful female voice fills the sonic void, hyping “sameness” and “routine” and

¹Artwork posters originally viewable on Gabriel Beltone’s *AdWeek* online article, mentioned in my introduction, are also no longer available for viewing.

disparaging “different” as “bad.” When the camera pulls back, viewers see that the lumbering people are waiting for an allotment of a single unwrapped, round sandwich. In the complex, movement is slow, suggesting somnambulism: the shuffling of the zombie-like food captives as they move toward the breakfast windows, the unhurried outdoor regime guards, and the distracted security staff. Even the Stalinist Ronald McDonald leader eats his breakfast sandwich in a belabored manner. All action herein points out that the McDonald’s Old World is antiquated, monotonous, and wearisome. The Old World also appears tyrannical, having presumably turned the denizens of the Routine Republic into cataleptic prisoners. This sets up the narrative of oppression: people controlled by a powerful, menacing system characterized by slow, mechanized, dehumanized motion.

In direct comparison, Act II is characterized by fast-paced action. It begins when the young male protagonist turns and runs from the line alongside his young female partner-in-defection, inciting the guards to hot pursuit: this is the spark of rebellion. We see additional fragments typical of action films, such as running at breakneck speeds, guards on horses, and agitated minions. Since fast-paced visual action is associated with physiological change and mental or emotional excitement, it is safe to expect that viewers will experience vicariously the mediated rendering of the act of rebellion. This experiential element helps make a good narrative so compelling.

After the gripping peak in fast-paced activity, Act III returns to fictional life at a normal, relaxed tempo that also represents the transformative aspect of the story: the Routine Republic becomes a horrific phenomenon of the past as the defectors enter the Taco Bell New World, a cool place, indeed. Also, in understanding narratives and the Three-Act Structure in specific, it is no surprise that Act III times out at under 30 seconds. The resolution to conflict in a shared story should be succinct, giving the majority of screen time (or storyteller time) to the build-up for purposes of increasing tension. In other words, a good story first establishes important details and then spends the bulk of its time working the conflict to maximize suspense. The resolution is certainly expected, but a *quick* conclusion is most effective in leaving viewers with the

physiological “rush” of the narrative’s action combined with its brief “feel-good” ending. This is just the sort of “all is well that ends well” conclusion that prevails in typical action-adventure films: the final action shot cuts to a scene showing the hero at home with family and friends, relaxing at a backyard barbecue, for example. “Routine Republic” achieves this effect by showing an abrupt end to the protagonists’ strife as they wondrously appear in Taco Bell. This is a place of comfort and ease, a safe haven filled with happy people, and the narrative tells viewers that the *heroes belong here*. Further—and key to the brilliance of narrative as executed within the Three-Act Structure—the built-in brevity and coolness on display in Act III *contrasts and thus highlights* the rhetorical significance of the protracted, emotionally hot rebellion act by allocating to Act II virtually all of the film’s high-energy action, drama, and driving music.

Color and Lighting

Scenes in Acts I and II are treated in post-production process to be color de-saturated, an effective tool in building narrative complexity, and in the case of “Routine Republic,” in setting up the juxtaposition between Taco Bell and McDonald’s. Images in this murky lighting conjure familiar graphic fragments of European concentration camps and Cold War Russian desperation creating a grungy, sinister, Old World look. The McDonald’s-esque graphics in the film appear simplified and muted in color, with distinctly threatening overtones. The long-established, cheerful Ronald McDonald clown face is depicted as one-dimensional and cartoonish, with circles indicating rosy cheeks, for example. And instead of the vivid white, yellow-gold, and bright crimson hues traditionally associated with the restaurant, referential images are shown in ashen white, dull yellow, and muddy red to suffice as the allusion. Given these substitutions, Ronald’s cheeks could hardly be called “rosy.” Additionally, all characters are dressed in shades of sickly, greenish grey. Beyond the walls of the Routine Republic, a seemingly never-ending metropolis and its concrete-and-opaque-glass construction look ominous under dark, rainy, smog-filled skies. These faded and excessively darkened or de-saturated colors depict the lifelessness of McDonald’s Old World, and hint at a “shady” character.

Near the end of Act II, as the heroes run furiously from the compound, a few brief

glimpses of sunlight (presumably at daybreak) show above distant concrete edifices. This subtle, but powerful, effect symbolically upsets the equipoise of the dark past and compels spectators to invest more emotional commitment in the heroes' efforts because triumph seems imminent. Seeing the sun, then, shifts the narrative balance toward the future and full daylight. The contrast within the color and lighting component is that all Taco Bell imagery comes in brilliant living color, which denotes the beginning of Act III—and the beginning of a new life. Viewers are treated to sunny, blue skies over a vast green field carpeting a distant mountain: atop is the shimmering Taco Bell castle. These lively and vividly lit images invoke a long-standing pop culture fragment: the Emerald City in *The Wizard of Oz*, reminiscent of the epic Bible theme of the Promised Land.

Consistent throughout the film, use of color and lighting shows McDonald's as a dreary and chilling prison of fear and isolation, whereas Taco Bell is portrayed as an optimistic, welcoming community of safety and security. Such visual metaphorical techniques instantaneously enhance the rebellion storyline by reactivating our cross-cultural agreement as viewers of in-color films, television shows, other graphical representations, and even written stories descriptions—that is, dark signifies “bad,” while light signifies “good.” Visually, these metaphors work because they have worked in past discourses that we recognize, imparting intertextuality with the broad brush of historical understanding. Therefore, color and lighting in “Routine Republic” enhance the significant juxtaposition of light and dark so that viewers automatically apply the symbolism of the familiar rebellion-against-oppressor narrative. The film's stark portrayals of McDonald's as “dark” and Taco Bell as “light” are the main requirement for the furtherance of the film's rhetorical significance.

Sound

Acts I and II feature a menacingly pleasant female voiceover, much like the proper voice of Effie Trinket in the film *The Hunger Games*. Her voice extols Routine Republic virtues of “same breakfast, same routine, same smile,” and repeats the phrase “circle good, hexagon bad” to distinguish McDonald's circular breakfast sandwich from Taco Bell's six-sided breakfast

wrap. In these first two acts, this voice remains the sole vocal utterance, constantly reprising the Routine Republic mantras. The voice is unattached to human form, making it especially eerie, while feeding into the high-contrast characterization of McDonald's Old World as a fascist, propagandizing netherworld. In the background, a low drone-tone can be heard that is reminiscent of an outdated Industrial Age factory. Many of the accentual noises herein are similar to the one in which several actors descend a staircase, their heavy boots thudding on the steel steps to create empty, resounding, mechanized clatter, further depicting McDonald's as "out of step" as well as oppressive. A key moment occurs when the hero and heroine make eye contact as they stand in their breakfast queues: a low bass note thumps to a steady beat, building in volume and frequency for ten seconds until drums enter the sonic space and accompany the bass for another ten seconds. This quiet-to-loud dynamic swell, or *crescendo*, may not even be perceptible to viewers, but its function is nevertheless significant as a musical device designed to build excitement and anticipation.

At the precise moment of the start of Act II, as signaled by the breakaway, the Ramones song "Blitzkrieg Bop" begins to play, developing seamlessly from the bass-and-drums rhythm. That the ad's producers chose "Blitzkrieg Bop" is indicative of both the depth of intertextuality and the power of cultural fragments in the commercial. A young, industry-sponsored music composer could have penned a new song that likely would have saved Taco Bell a great deal of money in song royalties and other statutory recording industry payouts. But "Blitzkrieg Bop" has serious cultural clout because the Ramones characterized the late-70s punk music scene, and the band remains iconic of youth bucking the status quo. Billboard authorizes that "the Ramones crystallized the ideals of the [punk] genre," celebrating "not just the punk aesthetic, but the music itself" (Erlewine). The early 1970s punk movement, "fuelled [sic] by a generation of disaffected young people who wanted the world to wake up" (McLaren), is used by Taco Bell to hype its fictional image as personified in the narrative's rebel couple. In the ad, "Blitzkrieg Bop" stops temporarily when the defectors stand on top of a tall inner compound wall, preparing to jump: we hear a cinematic wind sound, reminding us of the epic-ness of "Routine Republic" that

we have come to understand and expect from sophisticated film and television productions. After they land and run toward the outermost wall, “Blitzkrieg Bop” returns. Then, at the crossroads between Acts II and III, the Taco Bell “bell” begins to peal just as the defectors get their first glimpse of the Promised Land that is, for the ad’s purpose, Taco Bell.

From a musical perspective, two interesting realities intersect here. First, the Taco Bell “bell” tone is an “E” below middle “C” but it contains harmonics or overtones that are audible but almost impossible to recreate or notate. This tone was trademarked by Taco Bell (Trademarks). Second, “Blitzkrieg Bop” was written and performed in the key of “A” although the chords are executed in what is called “power chord” form, meaning that the notes played include only the root (“A”) and its perfect fifth (“E”). The connection between these two perfectly intersecting musical inclusions is that the Taco Bell “bell” tolls on the first beat of the song and at every key beat thereafter until the commercial ends. Given the power of music alone as a tool of emotional provocation, I find persuasive, Pavlovian implications for viewers embedded in this brilliant combination of two popular musical themes. For example, the Taco Bell “bell” sound frequently coincides with the downbeat of “Blitzkrieg Bop.” I argue that this connects the signature Taco Bell tone, already an auidial “call” to visit the restaurant, with the driving rhythmic force of defiant punk rock music and its physiological provocation. By assembling the two powerful features in a single sonic moment, the producers have created a compelling new association for viewers: a heuristic is formed, aligning Taco Bell with both the *visual notion* and the *physical arousal* of rebellion/freedom. The dynamic music repeats for a few seconds at the tail end of Act III, recharging viewers with a fleeting but vigorous reminder of perceived rebellion. Overall and without doubt, audio selections as textual fragments in “Routine Republic” both guide and augment the grand narrative of rebellion-against-oppressor.

Stage and Props

This component enhances movement and temporal order, while also functioning to unify the subject. The McDonald’s Old World is sparsely appointed, featuring props of the past that exemplify further textual fragments, helping to build upon the rebellion narrative and fully flesh

out the rhetorical artifact. Act I opens with a 1980s-style analog television set that *turn itself on*, suggesting more than anachronism: the Old World is retrogressive, and worse, it not only controls machines, it *controls people* by holding them captive from a life worth living. The main setting in the miserable, meaningless life offered by McDonald's Old World is a concrete compound in a state of disrepair, covered in large propaganda posters touting the benefits of living in the Routine Republic, and rimmed with razor wire—all easily accessible images of abject bleakness that are embedded deep in the cultural psyche. In the center of the compound stands a massive metallic monument to the film's version of the Napoleonic tyrant-founder, who is depicted holding a circular breakfast sandwich. Not only disturbing at the outset, the tower is a keen reminder of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's shrine that was toppled in April 2003 (Olbermann), and represents a foreshadowing of the fall of the McDonald's antediluvian old guard. In addition, McDonald's props appear throughout Acts I and II. A PlayLand slide and ball pit are both shown, but as oversized, dirty, and dilapidated. A windup toy hamburger (as if it is the "free toy" found inside a "Happy Meal") turns from a mindless distraction in the hands of a regime guard into numerous cartoonish landmines "exploding" in the field as our hero and heroine run toward their freedom in the Promised Land. Prior to that moment of liberation, the defectors approach the compound's final wall, which is lined with more large propaganda posters. On one poster, we see a hand-drawn hexagon (*a la* the six-sided Taco Bell Crunch Wrap) that serves in the ad as the symbol for freedom.² The hero-couple tears away the poster to reveal yet another pop culture textual fragment: a chiseled escape hole such as the one featured in the classic film *Shawshank Redemption*, suggesting a grueling process of patience, hope, and hard work driving the desire to flee the Routine Republic.

In Act III, the Taco Bell New World Promised Land, where the defectors arrive, is completely antithetical to McDonald's Old World: it shows clean and stately, like a highly groomed college campus. The only prop necessary is the hexagonal breakfast crunch wrap that New World residents toss to the newly-freed rebels, making it clear that there will be no more

² The first "freedom" cue in the film appears as a pictogram of a small hexagon, the second as the hand-written word "defect," used as an intransitive verb.

waiting in lines: Taco Bell food is so convenient, customers only have to catch it as it flies in their direction. Even the *idea* of fast food is a cultural fragment that “Routine Republic” pushes to new levels of unexpected (and unrealistic) speediness.

The clever selection and arrangement of stage and props combined with action, color and lighting, and sound choices demonstrate significant intertexted cultural fragments that create depth and richness in “Routine Republic.” No doubt, the ad’s producers chose these fragments due to the powerful associations they evoke on their own, thus facilitating the composition of a highly concentrated, three-minute version of the rebellion-against-oppressor theme that most films take at least ninety minutes to accomplish! However, it is important to note that this fascinating narrative and its intense, multilayered intertextuality do not stand on their own: the story, along with the cherry-picked cultural fragments, are, as both Fisher and McGee suggest, already *in us*. What the ad’s producers have done is to activate in viewers, through particular fragments, a multitude of culturally relevant, meaningful reasons to align with Taco Bell over McDonald’s: and in the case of “Routine Republic,” as we have seen, Deutsch LA has “stacked the deck” in favor of its client. We can look to popular films and other narrative concepts and texts for verification, and for further analysis and interpretation of “Routine Republic.”

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The meta-narrative of rebellion-against-oppressor originates largely from and resonates with cultural fragments of other fictive stories such as the iconic George Orwell’s *1984* and Aldous Huxley’s *Brave New World*: the archetypal dystopia. This manufactured, dismal future came on visual display in films like *Blade Runner*, and is seen in recent films such as *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*. In television commercials, Apple’s “1984” revolutionized that ominous vision; “Routine Republic” modernizes it yet again. Author Sean M. Chandler offers two cliché trends in Hollywood films that offer insight into the timeliness—as well as *timelessness*—and strength of the ad’s underlying narrative. In the first motif, “Marxism,” we see “the poor and oppressed overcoming some totalitarian regime, hence waging a revolution that will basically return the world to the fantastic utopia we all know and love today,” and in the

second motif, “Oppressive Military Regime,” we see “military or thought police that basically controls a system founded on holding the little guy down” (Chandler).

These motifs are evident and well-blended in “Routine Republic.” As in the “Marxism” motif, the film portrays the breakfast captives as the underclass oppressed by McDonald’s as the “dominant industrial class,” and being freed by representatives of the “honorable values” of the lower class—in this case, the heroes who “share a faith in proletariat justice” by displaying necessary *courage* to rebel against the bourgeoisie (Badaloni). That the Routine Republic looks and sounds like an oppressive regime out of historical records is important in priming spectators psychologically: the ad’s producers knew exactly how to play up the Marxist theme for maximum engagement in the narrative. Hand in hand with the “Marxism” motif, an “Oppressive Military Regime” is made evident in the commercial using visual aids, such as the numerous guards “protecting” the people inside the compound walls, the overlord tucked away in a surveillance tower, and the abundance of well-placed pieces of “propaganda.” Further, guards are shown wiping out all publicly visible graffiti that alludes to potential defection. Audially, the female voice that constantly speaks, and only of the virtues of Routine Republic, adds a cultish creepiness to the oppressive, militaristic scenario.

These deep-seated philosophical motifs help glue together “Routine Republic” as a garish pastiche, further guiding Deutsch LA’s interpretation of the narrative and textual fragments by overplaying the dichotomy of New World - Old World and its associated dualities of individualism - conformity, freedom - oppression, and youth - age. Culturally in the US, these dyads have been normalized, and we understand implicitly in today’s post-modern, highly developed, fast-paced, technology dependent life that being “hip and cool” is better than being old-fashioned and stodgy. We know that *distinguishing* oneself, even superficially, is better than *imitating* others. We have accepted the notion that a “free” society like ours is better than a “socialist” society like France. And we “just know” that being young or even appearing youthful is better than being or looking old. In “Routine Republic,” Taco Bell and Deutsch LA have meticulously capitalized on these cultural understandings in publicizing their message. But are

those social assumptions “true” in a way that reflects Fisher’s notion of narrative rationality and, in particular, the grand rebellion-against-oppressor theme? The answer is “no,” and it is important to understand *why* within the context of “Routine Republic.” The communal agreements mentioned above further develop the ad’s narrative notion of escaping oppression and returning to the Promised Land, a “fantastic utopia” that does not exist within the very real hegemonic framework of our current profit-driven society. I contend that Fisher would not agree with such polarized, popular culture notions that bypass the meaningful work of storytelling. And yet the vast majority of US citizens believe in an improbable fairytale that we can reach the fantastic Promised Land by way of the attainment of wealth, beauty, and power as illustrated in coopted narratives we see and hear everywhere in our society. At issue is the intention of these narratives that we should all *buy our way into* that fantasy.

Consequently, the most significant message that readers might benefit from is that “Routine Republic” coopts the rebellion-against-oppressor narrative simply because Taco Bell *can*: it has the economic capacity combined with the cultural clout to appropriate any narrative that serves the corporation’s interests. As I see it, Taco Bell turned the goodness of that theme into an entertaining but improper cover story, *making it antithetical* to the inherent intention of the narrative that we all understand implicitly, which is to inspire oppressed peoples to rise up against, for example, a truly despotic ruler, an abusive spouse, or a hostile work environment. With Taco Bell’s cultural authority in mind, it is not difficult to imagine that McDonald’s could have hired Deutsch LA to create a commercial *with the same narrative*, but portraying Taco Bell as the oppressor (and perhaps featuring in the captivity courtyard a statue of its retired-but-still-lovable Chihuahua mascot chomping on a six-sided Crunch Wrap). Judged from this perspective, Taco Bell’s intention to represent itself as somehow dissimilar to McDonald’s falls flat. And yet, this is not a judgment that many viewers will likely make because the rhetorical situation includes a largely uncritical public that accepts this kind of advertising and turns to fast food out of perceived convenience and tastiness. The US public lacks the same narrative rationality that Fisher understood and believed to be unlearned and *already in us* because, in the post-modern

world, we (generally speaking) no longer view narratives with the same cultural agreements as to what makes life meaningful. His notion of the meaningful life-world does not account for the turn in US culture from praising collective homogeneity to glorification of individualism and heterogeneity.

This cultural shift has changed our intuitive understanding of narratives as well as how the post-modern world developed from that swing (and in a relatively short period of time compared to the previous 2,000 years). First, Taco Bell is but one of hundreds of corporations in dozens of industries—food, automobiles, insurance, clothing and accessories, pharmaceuticals, and more—that coopt narratives for profit-making purposes. One need only look at other commercials to see age-old storylines like “boy meets girl, boy loses girl, boy gets girl [in this ad, because boy buys fancy car].”

Second, our rapidly intensifying consumption of technology has altered *what* is produced and consumed. This includes a shift from small-farm grown food that was minimally processed (without preservatives, added color, and flavor enhancements, for example) to the big-agriculture, highly processed products now offered in grocery stores and restaurants, especially fast food establishments like Taco Bell. In the same consumptive fashion, technology has changed how and what we communicate. To illustrate, internet and television ads are pervasive throughout culture, in our homes, offices, schools, vehicles, and literally *in our hands* on smart devices. Not only omnipresent, hand-held technology renders communication personal and therefore individual, further explicating—and complicating—the cultural progression from Fisher’s meaningful life honoring collective potency to our current celebration of individuation. Like food, commercials, and technology itself, we produce and consume every bit and piece of life so quickly that fragmentation, in retrospect, seems inevitable: things, events, and even thoughts must be broken down into smaller bits (or bytes, perhaps) in order to be consumed constantly in such quantity and with such voracity.

Third, our society generally lacks proper education in dealing with the myriad ramifications of this consumption. Fisher could not have predicted such a quandary without

theorizing narrative rationality into some futuristic, cultural “nth degree.” And we have yet to either stem the tide of technology production and consumption (as if anyone really wants to *or can* do so), or come up with a plan to make sense of it all so that future generations are prepared for the unknowable cultural crisis that seems imminent.

Finally, our public institutions are under ever-increasing pressure to behave like corporations: put financial interests first, public image next, and community interests last—if at all. This is to cast aside the values underlying Fisher’s narrative rationality that augmented faith in people to rebel against authoritarian rulers and oppressive structures that stand in the way of the kind of individual thought and action leading to a culture’s profoundly satisfying progress, strength, and freedom. But whereas Fisher may have been thinking “Newton, da Vinci, and Wagner,” Taco Bell and Deutsch LA were thinking “Dollars, Tax Havens, and Fortune 100 Status.” All of these radical changes in how we understand narratives and meaningful lives have come about because of how narratives are used and misused by corporations and powerful individuals. And it adds up to unimaginable cultural and psychological fragmentation in the human experience for a populace left extremely vulnerable to the immense power of rhetorical messages, none of which Fisher likely could envision.

Complicating the cultural conundrum is that viewers themselves can become complicit by way of *self*-persuasion:

The only way to ‘say it all’ in our fractured culture is to provide readers/audiences with dense, truncated fragments which cue *them* to produce a finished discourse in their minds. In short, *text construction is now something done more by the consumers than by the producers of discourse* (McGee 288 [emphasis inherent]).

Here, McGee is getting at what I argue: that advertising agencies have known about cultural disintegration for decades. Our culture is now so extremely rich with shared-narrative fragments, and viewers so quick to consume them, that just about any well-crafted persuasive message will readily form new heuristics because spectators are inured over time to connecting the dots

between fragments as those fragments come into being. How would marketing experts know this? I believe that they helped usher in the era of cultural fragmentation with abbreviated ideas in short commercials. These notions hold especially true when the message is remarkably entertaining, and “Routine Republic” is certainly both well-crafted and compelling. I am not claiming that all entertaining narrative productions are necessarily bad; they become problematic when those narratives are utilized to deny or confuse the needs of the community but satisfy those dictated by the corporation. In my estimation, Taco Bell and Deutsch LA together created in “Routine Republic” a brilliant flop that tragically dictates the political and moral landscape, one in which our own citizens suffer in an astonishing rate of financial, educational, and inspirational poverty that ultimately disenfranchises them from the meaningful life-world as recognized and praised by Fisher.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Such real world constraints and exigencies as can be ascribed to our heterogeneous, fragmented culture underscore that despite the fundamental “goodness” of the grand rebellion-against-oppressor theme, the producers of “Routine Republic” appropriated the narrative with such arrogance as to absurdly assert that people would have *no choice* but to eat McDonald’s breakfast sandwiches until...escape to Taco Bell! The ad discounts the numerous other restaurant options as well as the time-honored tradition of preparing one’s own nutritious meals, and makes farcical the significance of choosing Taco Bell’s breakfast wrap over McDonald’s breakfast sandwich. By oversimplifying the real world with such silly dualities—but while making them *appear* significant—the ad reduces opportunities for viewers to create the kind of genuine meaningfulness that Fisher understood. More importantly, “Routine Republic” lacks narrative fidelity in that it does not “ring true” to other stories we know to be true. However much McDonald’s is a savvy, post-modern company trying to persuade people to buy its food products based on entertainment, convenience, and chemically enhanced tastiness rather than on healthful nutritional value, the corporation is not an oppressive, anachronistic regime of fascist, brainwashing overlords as portrayed in the fictive cover story.

Of no small significance is that Taco Bell is part of an industry whose corporate playing field remains competitive in its broad conformism, featuring “a consistent, simple look, feel, and even music in each location [where] consumers enjoy a recognizable, familiar experience no matter where they are” (Sena). Taco Bell differs from McDonald’s in one main way: Mexican versus American food being the obvious and important distinction. For Taco Bell to pit McDonald’s as an evil, anachronistic overlord is to say the same for its own franchise, especially in light of “Routine Republic” as an over-the-top rhetorical artifact that attempts to mitigate the fundamental corporate likeness of the two companies.

Far more troubling is that “Routine Republic” mocks the plight of millions of people, now and through the ages, who have suffered under *actual* oppressive conditions such as slavery and other forms of tyranny, poverty, terrorism, and sexual violence: this makes the commercial and its co-creators utterly abhorrent. Especially unnerving is that Deutsch LA and Taco Bell decided to shoot the commercial in Budapest, Hungary (Belton), which conveys an undeniable dearth of cultural and historical sensitivity given the brutal WWII German Occupation that began there in March, 1944 (“Holocaust Encyclopedia: Budapest”). Clearly, the horrors of lived out human oppression are as far from the fictive Routine Republic as can be, but Deutsch LA and Taco Bell saw no malice in making light of actual human captivity in a comic commercial for cheap, mass-produced breakfast food.

So while Taco Bell will continue to pitch its trivial, and repulsively trivializing, “Routine Republic” cover story all it wants (or can afford), what does matter is that Taco Bell, in a cunning, cut-throat turnabout, deftly renders *McDonald’s* as the ruthless profiteer at the expense of human meaningfulness. I asked at the beginning of this paper, are these two franchises *inherently different*, judged in the view of Fisher’s narrative rationality? In order to answer that question, we can look at how the producers depicted the ad’s main duality: “difference”—or rather, human individualism—is a calculated conceptual fragment in “Routine Republic,” wherein “sameness”—that is, cultural homogeneity—is equated with loss of personal identity and freedom. This is the opposite of Fisher’s view of the meaningful life. And so we can only

answer no, the two fast food chains are not fundamentally different. This is made even more clear when analyzing food quality and nutritional value, target audiences and marketing tactics, fast food competitiveness, or issues of corporate morality—because *all* fast food corporations seek profit first, and they are ever seeking more. Corporations lack souls, and so they lack moral and ethical scrutiny of their products, their processes, and their promotional techniques: “Routine Republic” is a prime example. Such ethical dereliction at the hands of the Taco Bell and Deutsch LA team reflects a growing capitalist-culture trend that violates the fundamental needs of a community by way of Fisher’s meaningful life-world—*almost because corporations are designed to do so*.

“Routine Republic” is superficially entertaining as a short film with high production value that faithfully follows the Three-Act Structure through a familiar human narrative of rebellion-against-oppressor. However, I see the ad failing to achieve the full “goodness” of Fisher’s reasonable standards because the film lacks narrative fidelity. Textually rich as a cover story, “Routine Republic” works extremely hard—again, because it *must*, in order to fulfill the corporate mission and compete in the fast food breakfast market. The ad draws from established and trending texts to create a veritable Frankenstein of cultural fragments, forcing a false dichotomy between Taco Bell and McDonald’s by amplifying the following themes of polarization: difference - sameness; individualism - conformity; freedom - oppression; youth - age; and New World - Old World;. These equate to Fisher’s “dualisms of modernism” that the narrative paradigm as a whole is supposed to resolve, and yet this self-indulgent, coopted storyline does not make the mark (*Readings* 299).

Despite its high narrative probability, “Routine Republic” fails because it supplants true narrative rationality—and therefore, human meaningfulness—with an insolent Hollywood usurpation of the real-world, lived-out profoundness of fighting legitimate forces of oppression. On the other hand, *because of* the high narrative probability in “Routine Republic,” viewers likely become so deeply engrossed in the intricate, entertaining cover story with its myriad cultural fragments—and identifying with the “smart,” “cool” heroes—that they are rendered

unable to recognize its gross violations of narrative fidelity. It follows then, to answer my third introductory question, that Taco Bell, by way of Deutsch LA's creative genius, *well understands* the human experience—enough to literally grasp and capitalize on the innate persuasive power of the rebellion-against-oppressor narrative. The team was brilliant enough to use their combined cultural clout to warp the narrative in their favor, banking on the ad's extraordinary length, intensity, and complexity to overwhelm the average, uncritical internet spectator. But under the scrutiny of narrative criticism, the juxtaposition between Taco Bell and McDonald's is nothing but subterfuge. Taco Bell is revealed as a *typical fast food company ultimately celebrating the sameness and conformity it attempts to deride* in its disturbingly amusing and morally bankrupt "Routine Republic" commercial. Sadly, the American public is the loser at the end of this story. Whether consciously or not, we continue to sacrifice our profound life-meaning for expedient fantasy stories of the sort invalidated by Fisher's narrative paradigm: "packaged persuasion" produced for corporate profit that contains no ethical aspiration for the society it tries to persuade. It is my sincere hope that readers of this dissertation seize future opportunities to critically analyze and evaluate such superficial narratives, acting as genuine rebels against this formidable cultural conundrum.

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