Figure 1: Starting Screen

This (Figure 1.) is what greets a player once they start "We Become What We Behold," (WBWWB) a point and click game by Nicky Case. It is also a reflection on how what we see and are exposed to shapes how we act, shapes our Ethos. This concept goes back centuries, all the way to -and perhaps even past- Aristotle, since in his book *Rhetoric* he says "things that are true and things that are just have a natural tendency to prevail over their opposites" (Bizzell and Herzberg, 180) But, what if the Ethos -the distinguishing character or guiding beliefs of a person or group (Merriam-Webster)- was shaped by something not so beautiful? Wasn't shaped ethically? "We Become What We Behold" is an example of the warping that can arise when rhetoric is used without thought about encouraging proper Ethos.

The gameplay of WBWWB is centered around the player taking snapshots of the world (Figures 2. & 3.), which then get put upon the

Figure 2. Game tutorial.

screen that is the center point of the world. The little shapes that populate the world then watch the screen and react to it, which forwards the game (Figure
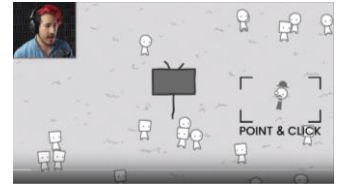

Figure 3. Result of pointing and clicking.

4.). But the game only lets certain stories and events to go "viral." If the player takes a snapshot

Figure 4. Little shapes watch the screen like we do the news and are affected by it.

of something they deem boring, the picture is given a black bar, as opposed to the "interesting" red, and no shapes are affected by it (Figures 5. & 6). As the player

Figure 5. "Uninteresting" snapshot.
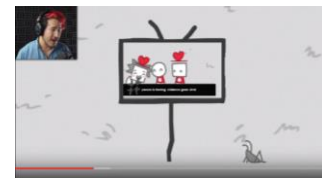
Figure 6. Effect on shapes of an uninteresting snapshot.

continues through the game they come across an angry square, who goes about the screen yelling at the other shapes. Taking a snapshot of him mid-scream towards another shape (Figure 7.) starts a

Figure 7. Result of taking a picture of the "crazy square"

Figure 8. "Crazed square attacks" and the terrified circle.

Figure 9. "Circle fears squares" and disgruntled square.

Figure 10. "Square snobs circle" and angry circle.

downward spiral. Once that picture hits the screen, under the caption "crazed square attacks," a circle now becomes terrified of every square it comes across (Figure 8.). Take a picture of the circle's terror, "circle fears squares," (Figure 9.) a square is disgruntled and goes on to rebuff a circle. Click. "Squares snub circles," (Figure 10.) a circle now turns red with rage and begins yelling at any square it crosses.
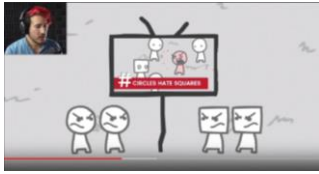
Figure 11. "Circles hate squares" and several angry shapes

Figure 12. Screen after a mix of "circles hate squares" and "squares hate circles."

Figure 13. Evolution from "X hate Y"

Figure 14. Evolution from "almost everyone hates everyone"

"Circles hate squares," and now both squares and circles are flushed with anger (Figure 11.) and go around yelling. Soon, the screen is filled with angry shapes (Figure 12.), and soon the caption turns to "almost everyone hates everyone" (Figure 13.), and then to "everyone hates everyone" (Figure 14.). The game continues on from here, but it focuses on the shapes murdering each other and existential questions along the vein of "How much of our opinions are determined by the media we consume?" As such, it will not be expounded upon, as the concern of this paper is with the rhetoric of the screen, caption-writer and the chaos caused by them slowly before the hysteria, and it really is a conclusion one should experience for themselves.

Aristotle says there are three responsibilities a rhetor -a person who practices rhetoric, the art of speaking or writing effectively (Merriam-Webster)- bears; firstly, they must choose virtuously to avoid incurring reason-destroying passions (fear, anger, rashness) in their audiences; secondly, they have a responsibility to act as wisely and effectively as possible to achieve good ends (Rowland-Womack, 21); and thirdly "the rhetor must adapt to the audience . . . including placing them in the proper frame of mind" (Rowland-Womack, 21) Whatever entity is in control of WBWWB follows neither of these responsibilities.

As stated before, Aristotle's first responsibility of a rhetor is that they "must choose virtuously in order to avoid creating reason-destroying passions …. nor arouse harmful emotions" (Rowland-Womack, 21) The captions given for the snapshots of WBWWB only encourage harmful emotions and knee-jerk reactions: fear, snobbery, hate, anger, rage and murder. As Aristotle, Rowland and Womack may be quoted: "anger is not excited by what is just" (17), "Cowardice and rashness are two extreme and unethical reactions to fear" (17), "Excessive emotional reactions produce 'a similar reaction to men asleep, mad or drunk'" (18). Each headline the game gives to a player's pictures only fuels the chaos amongst the shapes. Whoever writes the headlines in this world is doing so to get seen, to get noticed and perhaps even famous; they are not thinking, perhaps they are even unaware of the madness they cause with their rhetoric. In light of Aristotle and his view on a rhetor's purpose in Ethos, they are acting unethically. Much like the world today, where "big thing" people like actors, politicians, social media personalities, singers, performers and more have huge followings of people with some fans who are fanatic enough about the person or group to take their word as gospel, "big thing" people are in a place where they can reach hundreds, thousands or more and must be careful about what they say. A word of anger or even just annoyance towards a group from a "big thing" can send hundreds off in a tirade against them, all because of a single person's opinion.

The second of Aristotle's responsibilities is this: the rhetor "has a responsibility to act as wisely and as effectively as possible in order to achieve good ends" (Rowland-Womack, 21). I dare say mass murder and terror WBWWB ends on, with shapes killing each other left, right and center is not a good end. As Rowland and Womack relate, there are many things a good

rhetor needs to do to achieve the second responsibility, but two of them relate most clearly to WBWWB's mysterious Captioner. The first of these things is: "present only those arguments which will be intelligible to the audience" (Rowland-Womack, 21), and the Captioner both succeeds and fails at this. The conflicts they relay are simple: there is a notable physical difference between the shapes, and certain members of the two groups are reacting to the other in not the best of ways. It's prejudice, "an irrational attitude of hostility directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics" (Merriam-Webster). One shape was being angry, which led to a second being scared, which brought upon the snobbery of another, which led to anger that snowballed into mass murder. The Captioner fails being intelligible in that they don't give the background, the reasons why what they see is happening. The shapes then only get a sliver of the story, and what they get pushes them down the spiral of excessive emotional responses: exactly like social media today, where the smallest of statements or thoughts from a "big thing" person can drive hundreds or more into action, for better or for worse. But as I've been saying, there's two groups of shapes in WBWWB, clearly separated by head shape. The trail leading to the chaos the game ends with could have been walked within a group that showed very few or no differences between individuals, but the events were propelled forwards by the fact that the population is physically divided in two by the shape of their head, by shapism. In our world, we call it racism. There will always be problems in our world, but many of them are incentivized and worsened by our physical differences, a clear way to say: "us and them."

The third point is: "the rhetor must adapt to the audience . . . including placing them in the proper frame of mind" (Rowland-Womack, 21). Now, if the Captioner's goal is to incite fear

and panic, the shapes were in the right frame of mind all along. The best frame of mind, though, is most likely calm and educated. In the best case the Captioner's intent is to inform the shapes and being calm and collected is a good state to be in to be willing to listen to every side of a problem. It is not a guarantee, but if the shapes could know more than just the latest snapshot, a "latest stories" in which snapshots two or three back could be seen, then they could rationalize why the first circle was wary of squares. They would be educated in the context of the matter, and while the anger may still be there, there should be less of a knee-jerk reaction, or hopefully the action coming from it is turned towards the ignorance, not the shape. In a bad case, the Captioner is looking for some quick and easy interest, attention they seek to gather with the bold, confusing and -for lack of a better phrase- scary captions. But, worst case the Captioner's intent is to incite paranoia, rage and terror, which is what they end up doing in WBWWB. The evidence points to the Captioner wanting this, since as they can be quoted: "Who tunes in to watch 'people get along?'" (WBWWB), "Peace is boring. Violence goes viral." (WBWWB) A similar mentality seems to have a powerful foothold in our world; just look at the news today. Acts of harm and fear make headlines every day, while good and uplifting things are left often without a broadcast. The shooting in Texas will be front and center news for the week, with endless repetition of the footage and speculation on the why, but the responses of the community, the coming together of the affected and the hope, help and well wishes from the rest of the country will have maybe one segment a day. "Nobodies," people who aren't the news or a "big thing," will share and tell the goodness, but its "not important enough" to become big news.

"We Become What We Behold" is a game that is social commentary at many levels. This paper focused on how the Captioner was an unethical rhetor who chose to incur fear, anger and rashness (reason-destroying passions) in the shapes; acted to achieve bad ends for the shapes; and did not place their audience in the right frame of mind.

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