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ENGL 360: The Rhetoric of Fashion

Section 010

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Fashion Oral Presentation (FOP)

**Your task is to prepare and deliver a five (5) minute presentation on a high fashion designer or fashion house. Your presentation must include a blend of spoken lecture and visual aid through images projected on the computer screen or through print handouts. Your presentation should discuss the national history of the brand and its unique selling proposition/point (USP). Depending on your chosen brand you may want to discuss how the company shows commitment to issues such as diversity and inclusion, labor rights, animal rights, and environmental sustainability. Discussing specific items that the brand is known for (like MaxMara’s Teddy Bear coat) is another possibility.**

USP

The unique selling proposition/point is what makes a brand worthwhile to consider for buyers and customers. Buyers are employees of department stores or discount stores or online boutiques who acquire wholesale garments from fashion companies with the aim of selling these garments at the retail level to customers. In fashion, acquiring an item in bulk means paying less per item at the wholesale level, so buyers purchase huge quantities of items from the brand with the expectation of selling each item at an inflated cost (relative to what the buyers paid for the item from the fashion company) to individual retail customers. Customers for fashion brands today, obviously, generally do not have to rely on the middleman of retail in order to buy fashion items since they can directly buy from the fashion brand (such as when a customer visits a Zara store or buys an item from Zara’s website).

But no matter what type of customer a fashion company addresses, whether retail or wholesale, the USP is a means of differentiating one brand from another. USPs draw on topoi or common topics to sell their products to their customers.

One example of a topos is the niche market item. A brand can describe how they offer a product that their competitors do not offer, such as the Gents brand of baseball caps. Otherwise, USPs can highlight the prestige associated with their national origin (Gucci stands for Italian craftmanship and attention to stylistic detail). Sometimes the USP has to do with design elements. For example, the German designer Jil Sander is known for her futuristic designs that have a minimalist edge and tend to be in primary colors (Eileen Fisher is an American designer who has a similar aesthetic albeit at lower prices). Some brands have a distinctive look that factors into their USP, such as Missoni with their zigzag knitwear motif. Other fashion companies draw on history and national identity to differentiate themselves in the global fashion marketplace, like Versace’s highlighting of Greek culture (maximal not minimalistic) through their use of the mythological figure of Medusa as their logo, and the frequency of the Greek key design in their clothes. In the case of Versace, the link with Greek identity is not accidental: the late Gianni Versace was from Reggio Calabria, in Southern Italy, which was established as a city by the ancient Greeks over two thousand years ago. The USP can also be related to the topos of price, as is often the case for fast fashion brands like H&M that promise cutting edge trendy clothes that are affordable for almost all customers. Stella McCartney is an example of a designer whose USP focuses on activism, specifically efforts to prevent animal cruelty as well as preserve the environment through sustainable design and business practices.

Criteria for choosing a brand

You should choose a high fashion brand, one that participates in fashion trade shows and events in the major fashion centers of Paris, Milan, New York, and London. The brand may sell only clothing and accessories, or they can sell non fashion related items (like cologne or sheets and towels). However, the brand should be a fashion company first and foremost.

You should choose a different brand than the one you chose for your FBRA. Unlike for the FBRA, purchasing items of clothing is not required for the FOP. To reduce redundancy, all students must choose their own brands for the FOP. You will make your choices on a first come first served basis through posting on a Moodle discussion forum for the FOP.

A simple test for determining whether a brand fits this assignment is to search for images of the brand’s recent fashion shows. If you can find images of runway models representing the brand, then that brand will work for this assignment. If you cannot find such images, then you will have to choose another brand. In general, you should try to describe the current state of the brand (current trends or designs as opposed to historical ones). Leafing through fashion magazines such as *Vogue* or *Harper’s Bazaar* may help you to find a suitable brand for the FOP.

Presentation delivery method

Given that some students are not attending class in person out for health reasons, there are two options for the FOP. Students can either present in class in person or present in class through Zoom on the same dates. Students that select the Zoom option must be able to share their screen while presenting. Whether presenting in person or through Zoom the requirements for the FOP are the same in that you must speak and use visual aids (a PowerPoint presentation with no audio is not acceptable). While presenting I will verbally tell each student when they have exceeded four (4) minutes so they do not run past the allotted time for the FOP.

Due dates

There will be a submission space for the FOP for you to upload your visual materials. FOP grades and comments will be posted in that space. There is no first draft for this assignment, but students are encouraged to practice their presentations verbally so that they have enough material to talk about for at least five (5) minutes.

Brand selection: 16 March 2021 (post your brand choice in the FOP discussion forum).

Final draft: 23, 25, 30 March 2021 (students should be ready to present on 23 March, though some will have to wait until 25 or 30 March 2021).