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ENGL 360: The Rhetoric of Fashion

Secs. 010, 011

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Garment Narrative Essay (GNE)

**In an essay of 5 pages, describe a garment or class of garments that you wear and why you do so. Your essay should discuss what the item means to you and what message you believe you are relaying in wearing it. That is, your essay should discuss the rhetorical potential of the garment. You should also discuss what things you look for when purchasing the garment. Your essay should have a creative title that previews what the reader can expect in reading your essay. You must visually document the garment by including photos either of the garment by itself or of you wearing the garment or both.**

Specific focus

Choose a garment or a class of garments rather than garments from more than one category of clothing. For example, choose belts rather than accessories, flannel shirts rather than shirts, jeans rather than pants or bottoms. It is important to specify what types of clothing your essay is about because different garments broadcast different signals rhetorically due to the symbolic meaning of clothes in our society, as well as due to the sensual properties of texture and color. You may discuss other garments but only in relation to the garments that are the subject of your essay. For example, you could focus on t-shirts but also briefly discuss what outfits you have that feature t-shirts as well as other garments, and how t-shirts fit into your personal style. Garments are generally contingent or dependent on context in meaning since we rarely wear just one garment when we are dressed.

Fashion inspiration

If you wear the garment due to being inspired by someone who wears it then discuss who that person is and why they persuaded you to adopt that garment in into your style. Your fashion inspiration for wearing the garment may come from someone famous or from social media or even from someone close to you like friends or family members. Visual documentation of the source of fashion inspiration is recommended, if applicable.

Stereotypes and identity

Think about how your identity is partially constructed by the item you choose to write about. Since clothes can be representative of subcultures consider also whether your chosen garment is stereotypical or indicative of a subculture to which you may or may not belong. Access to buying items of clothing depends primarily on money whereas access to subcultures depends on effort, relationships with others, and interests or values. For example, anyone with a certain amount of money can purchase Vans shoes but not all those who purchase them will do so with the intention of skateboarding in them. Indeed, some Vans wearers may not even be aware of the association between that brand and skateboarding, since the act of buying Vans does not require the connection between Vans and skateboarding. Does your garment belong to a subculture and are you part of that subculture or are you opposed to the subculture but wear the garment anyway?

Consumer preferences

In an essay as focused as this it is important to be meticulous in terms of describing your preferences for the garment. As fashion consumers, we are generally allowed many choices in terms of which brands we patronize and even which garments we choose from within the same brand. Consider things like cut, materials, color, and price. When you buy the garment what do you pay attention to? What sort of compromises do you make when shopping for the garment if you cannot find the perfect version of it?

Culture, Nationality, and Ethnicity

Another way to approach this essay is to discuss whether the garment represents something meaningful for your culture, nationality, or ethnicity (or perhaps more than one of these). Do you wear the garment to show your ties to a larger community that you are linked to through ancestry or birth? Note that this question is by no means necessary to answer in composing this essay because many items of clothing circulate globally without being tied to a specific culture, nationality, or ethnicity. Another angle to consider from this perspective is whether there should be limits on precisely who should be allowed to wear this type of garment, a discourse that has been described as cultural appropriation. An example of this happened in 2007 when the American retailer Urban Outfitters began selling the keffiyeh, an iconic head or neck scarf associated with the Palestinian people. A backlash from American consumers led to Urban Outfitters removing the item from their stores.

Company ethos

Assuming that your analysis is not about a handmade garment (which is allowed for this assignment), consider the values of the brand which produces the garment. Do you care about the company’s values? Do the company’s values help influence you to buy from them or is it the aesthetics of the garment that is most persuasive? Does the country of manufacture matter to you when you buy the garment? What about the country of the company which designs the brand? (Germany for Adidas, the United States for Nike, Lacoste for France). These questions will be more important for the following assignment, the Fashion Brand Rhetorical Analysis (FBRA).

History

Your essay should consider your history in wearing the garment. When did you start wearing it and why? Think also about memories you have of when you were wearing the garment and how those memories are still important for you (a dress and prom, a necktie and a job interview). Can you still recall such memories without resorting to thinking about the garment?

Format and length

The essay should be at least 5 full pages double-spaced in 12 pt. typeface. The required images should be inserted into the document at the end of your essay, so that the entire file should be longer than 5 full pages. Please use MLA formatting or a similar scholarly style if you would prefer that instead. While quotations or paraphrases are not necessary for this assignment, if included, they should be cited according to MLA or some other scholarly style format.

Due dates

Rough draft: 16 September 2021

Rough draft feedback: 21 September 2021

Final draft: 30 September 2021

Upload your rough draft and your peer feedback on the Moodle discussion boards. Your final draft should be submitted to the assigned space for assignment submissions on the course Moodle page.