Writing & Digital Media

Unit #3: Multimodal Rhetorical Analysis

(Worth 20% of your grade; due on April 22)

Overview

We live in a world of messages, appeals, arguments, claims, agendas, pleading, persuading, and other communicative efforts. Rhetorical analysis is a central method for understanding this world of messages and for sharpening your evaluative and critical abilities. Simply stated, rhetorical analysis is the process of closely examining an artifact (the remnant of some communicative event) to determine the choices made in composing the message and then to evaluate those choices.

To strengthen your work on the Online Advocacy Project, this assignment asks you to conduct an individual analysis of an existing online advocacy project. You will share your analysis with the other members of the class, and all of us will work together to create a set of "best practices" for developing and promoting advocacy projects on the web.

Selecting a Topic

The following topics, taken from our reading assignments, are all "pre-approved":

- Rolling Jubilee
- FixMyStreet
- SOPA Strike
- Internet Defense League

- Save Stadium Woods

- #EatDownTipUp

- Rootstrikers

- Charity: Water

- Free Rice

- It Gets Better

- Caring Across Generations

- Kiva

- Zidisha

- Open States

- Demand Action to End Gun Violence

- Upworthy

If you would like to analyze an advocacy project that is not on this list, that's fine, too. As long as you can demonstrate that the organization you have in mind is actively using the internet to accomplish its goals, you will have my blessing. On Wednesday, April 3, you should come to class with a list of four sites (in ranked order) that you would be willing to analyze for this project. I will compile everyone's choices and announce the final assignments later that day.

Conducting Your Analysis

Once you have selected an advocacy project to analyze, you should immerse yourself in the organization's various content streams. Read as much of the group's website as possible, watch any related videos (either on the site itself, or on a third-party site like YouTube), and follow the organization on Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook, Google+, and other social media sites. As you take in all of these streams, capture anything that seems like it might be useful later on — e.g., take screenshots of pages you might be able to analyze, download videos, save HTML pages to your computer. To keep these materials organized, carefully label everything you collect by including the URL and time/date of collection.

As you observe the organization in action, you will begin to notice specific patterns and strategies used by the group to persuade readers/watchers/visitors. Your analysis of these persuasive strategies will form the foundation of your paper. We will discuss specific strategies for conducting rhetorical analysis in class, but the following

questions might help you get started with your analysis:

- What is the background and context of the advocacy project? How did it get started?

- Who runs the organization? Does the organization have any ties to political or business interests?

- What is the organization's motivation? What does this project hope to accomplish?

- How does the organization attempt to persuade its audience? Does the project rely most heavily on logos, pathos, or ethos? Why do you think this is so?

- What types of tropes (similes, metaphors, irony, etc.) does the organization use? How are these devices typically used?

- How does the organization make use of non-textual media (images, video, etc.) to advance its cause?

- What role does social media play in this organization's efforts? How successfully has the organization connected with potential supporters using Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Google+, etc.?

Your finished paper should be roughly 1,200 words long (shorter than 1,000 is a problem; longer than 1,500 is a problem), and it should contain at least three screenshots, appropriately captioned and annotated. Your paper should include a traditional "Works Cited" page, but perhaps more importantly in this venue, it should include hyperlinks to outside sources.

Submitting Your Analysis

This assignment is due before you come to class on Monday, April 22. To submit your analysis, place your finished document inside your Google Drive folder that is shared with me (e.g., "John Doe – 3844 Shared"). Any additional materials related to your analysis should be clearly labeled and also placed in that folder (or a subfolder).

Evaluation Criteria

I will evaluate your paper using the following criteria:

- Does the paper analyze, not just summarize, the organization you have chosen?

Does the analysis address both textual and non-textual elements?

- Does the paper make clear, substantive, focused claims about how the organization uses rhetorical strategies to persuade audience members to think, feel, believe and/or do something?

- Does the paper support its claims with well-chosen examples and reasons?

- Is the paper organized logically and coherently?

- Does the essay include at least three images related to the project you are analyzing? Do the images feature helpful annotations and descriptive captions? Do the images strengthen the written analysis?

- Does the paper answer the "so what?" question? (In other words, what difference does it make now that you've conducted your analysis?)

- Does the essay adhere to the conventions of standard written English (grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc.)?