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WRD 103---131

Informal Writing Assignment: Genre Challenge 1
Winemaker's Notes

What's the Assignment?: In her book, *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Jody Shipka generates several questions to help student analyze social texts. As a multi-part informal writing assignment called "Genre Challenges," we will use Shipka's questions to analyze several social texts including winemaker's notes (bottle labels), GroupOn advertisements, academic essay titles, donation solicitation materials used by the homeless (cardboard boxes), and obituaries. After reviewing several examples of the genre and considering the attached questions, you will produce your own version of the text. Be careful to include the essential features that you identify in response to question 3 (attached), but take creative liberties where allowable. When you run into limitations in producing your text, take note of these and include them in a brief section titled "process notes" beneath your work posted on D2L. This is an informal writing assignment that will not be graded. It is designed to help us explore the form & function of various social texts and investigate genre as a mode of social action.

Who am I?: For each of your genre challenges, you may respond to the assignment in one of two ways (every student must complete both options at least once by the end of the quarter):

Option 1: The Ventriloquist:

The ventriloquist projects her voice through another form so convincingly that listeners nearly believe someone else is speaking (a dummy!). Students choosing this option for their genre challenge will try to produce a version of this social text that could sit among the standard examples without producing any suspicion.

Certainly, we do not think of "good writing" as a copy or duplicated formula—a speaking dummy—but in this case your ventriloquy will demonstrate your familiarity with the form. You will not just reproduce a social text, you will rely on your understanding of the relationship between its form and function to create your own remixed version.

Option 2: The Disruptor:

In order to disrupt a space, any space, you must know the expectations, boundaries, and conventions of that space. Let's think of social texts as sites of communication within spaces that also have expectations, boundaries, and conventions. Using Shipka's questions to guide you, determine the purpose or function of the text (to sell wine?) and how the language interacts with that purpose by both including and occluding certain information. To be disruptive in this case means to maintain enough of the form so that the text still functions within its social space, but to use language to reveal what the text typically means to conceal. Ultimately, your disruptive remix should demonstrate a more sophisticated understanding of the text's intention and operation.

How do I Submit?: To turn in your work, **do the following two things:**

1. Post your genre challenge to the D2L discussion board by 11:59 pm Monday night. Indicate in your response which option (Ventriloquist or Disruptor) you've chosen.

2. Bring to class with you a material copy of your response to the assignment in whatever form you believe most appropriate for the genre.

What's Today's Social Text?: For our first genre challenge, we will treat the descriptive labels that often appear on wine bottles as social texts, analyze their generic form, and use our understanding of this text's purpose, function, and *meaning*, to produce our own remixed versions of this social text.

Today in class, we will examine a few wine bottles as social texts using Shipka's questions to guide our discussion. As you will no doubt notice, holding the artifact has a different impact than simply reading the alphabetic text. Since you cannot take these home (sorry), I've copied below just the text from the labels for your review.

Winemakers' notes on red varietals:

Quintessential Anderson Valley aromas of savory herbs, pinesap and wild berries soar from the glass. On the palate, a plush, dense mouthfeel supports lush flavors of raspberry and blackberry, as well as hints of licorice and red apple skin. Oak-derived notes of clove, brown sugar and vanilla pave the way to a supple finish hinting at sweet leather and loamy earth.

The 2012 Gisele is ruby red and purple. It has an aroma of vanilla, cherry, cedar and blood orange. The palate is mouth-filling and round with juicy black raspberries. This Pinot has lingering rich fruit and spice on the finish. Enjoy this wine now or age for 5 to 7 years. Pairs well with roasted rosemary chicken and raisins.

The 2012 Santa Maria Valley Pinot Noir displays aromas of dark berry and cherry accented by hints of floral and mineral. The flavor profile has a core of dark berry and dark cherry with hints of earth and brown spices, backed by a smooth, silky and long finish. The wine is styled to highlight the vivid aromas and flavors of the cool-climate fruit, enhanced by careful winemaking.

The Tahuan Malbec opens to not quite a full purple color. On the nose the wine offers lots of toasty aromas, but then, after only a few minutes, the aromas of fresh and juicy red fruits -such as strawberry and cherry- take center stage. There are also intriguing hints of wild flowers and violets. It is a very well balanced wine in the mouth, delivering sweet, yet firm tannins, and with a soft and pleasant taste where all kinds of fruits freely express themselves.

Source: wine.com

Questions to Consider for Genre Challenges

On page 154 of her book *Toward a Composition Made Whole*, Jody Shipka presents a series of questions that we will consider during our discussions of social texts. Below, I have written a list of questions inspired by Shipka's "Reading Social Texts: Some Frequently Asked Questions" in her book's appendix. You should refer to these questions in writing your response to each genre challenge. **Please keep track of this list throughout the quarter. Subsequent genre challenges will always refer to this list but will never include it.**

1. What is the text?
2. How would you classify and/or describe it?
3. What are the common features across different versions of the text that help you place them in a common category/genre?
4. What are the essential features of the text—without which you could not place it in the common category?
5. What variations do you notice across the different versions or examples of these generic texts?
(For your genre challenge, consider: What liberties can you take in your reproduction of the genre without sacrificing membership to the group?)
6. What material components does the text deploy? For example, are fancy fonts used, are the words printed, stamped, embossed?
7. What is the text made out of?
8. How does the material impact its use? Could it be made out of other materials and have the same impact?
9. Does the text have visuals?
10. Where would you find examples of this genre? In grocery stores, online, in magazines, in museums, and how does the space in which it is encountered impact its use?
11. What "work" does the text do? What need does it fulfill and how is it meant to be used? Could it be used differently? Consider design.
12. Who, specifically, might have access to the text? What does one have to have or do to come into contact with the text? What assumptions are apparent about its audience?
13. Is the text necessary? If it is not necessary, how does it make space for itself and manufacture its own usefulness?
14. Is the text cited with having an author? Why or why not? Who produces this text and how does that change its use?
15. What response does the text generate from users?
16. What value, if any, is assigned to the text by its culture; is it considered significant or insignificant?
17. What does the existence of this text say about the values of the culture that produces it? What are the conditions (economic, historical, cultural, technological) that make this text possible?
18. Is the text expressly associated with the US? With this moment in history? Would people living in other places and other times have had use for this text?

Work Cited

Shipka, Jody. *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2011. Print.

Genre Challenge One: Wine Bottle Labels

Two Student Samples:

Option One: The Ventriloquist

This 2011 Ephemeral Pinot Grigio opens with a bouquet of juicy green apple skin, pear, cinnamon, and mouth-watering hints of ambrosia. The bouquet dissolves to a luscious mouthfeel, ripe with tart apple and floral tastes. It finishes with silky, fruity notes mingling with the pleasant taste of cedar and cloves. Pairs well with fresh-caught peachen in a honey-balsamic glaze.



Option Two: The Disruptor

From ripe, earthy blackberries to notes of citrus and ivy, the 2014 Regrette Rien opens briskly. Aged in wooden barrels to an oaky finish that dissolves guilty nights this pinot noir pairs perfectly with overindulgence in red meats justified by complex preparation. Enjoy now or reconsider while it ages.

