

RHETORICAL CRITICISM ESSAY (20%)

Important Dates:

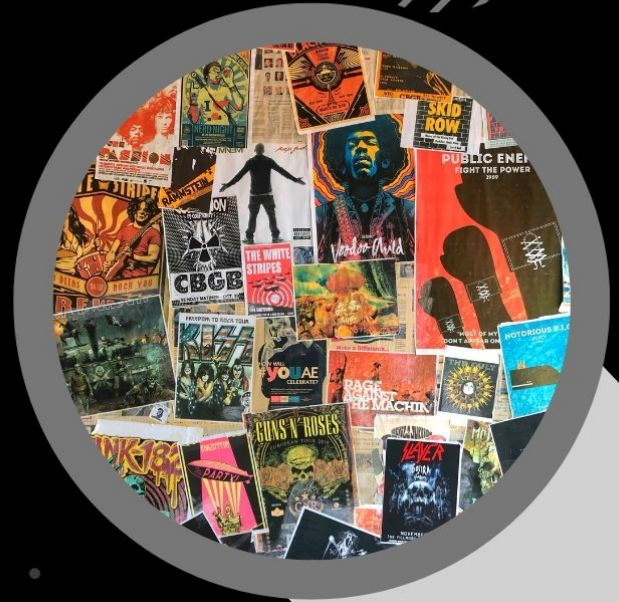
Week 5: Submit Artifact Proposal Paragraph to eClass by 11:59pm on Wednesday October 5th

Week 6: Read Selected Foss Chapter and Complete Initial Analysis

Week 7: Submit Research Question for Tutorial Peer Review on Thursday October 20th

Week 8: Submit Final Essay Sunday October 30th by 11:59pm

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Background: We began our work in this course by learning about marginalized and dominant histories of rhetoric. Now, we will turn to the practice of Rhetorical Criticism. According to Foss (2018), rhetorical criticism is, “a qualitative research method that is designed for the systematic investigation and explanation of symbolic acts and artifacts for the purpose of understanding rhetorical processes” (pg. 6). In this assignment, you are invited to produce an essay of rhetorical criticism on an artifact of your choice.

Assignment Details: You will use your notes from weekly course lectures/tutorials, course readings, and any additional resources provided to produce an original rhetorical criticism essay. Your essay should be between 1,000 – 1,500 words. The chapters that you read from *Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice* by Sonja K. Foss will be especially critical to your process for completing this essay. Chapter 2 provides a guide for selecting an artifact and writing the essay. Chapters 3 – 11 provide directions for how to complete your analysis based on your chosen critical approach. **You will only read one of these chapters in detail.** Finally, **this assignment does not require a literature review.** However, you want to be sure to cite any necessary quotes or artifacts using MLA format.

Assignment Submission Details and Format: Your final essay should be uploaded to eClass by 11:59 pm on October 30th, 2022. Your essay should be well-polished and generally free of spelling, grammatical, and stylistic errors. You should use MLA format for your assignment. This means that your essay should have a proper MLA heading, a title, and a works cited page. Your essay should also be double-spaced with a 12-point font and 1-inch margins.

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Here's how we will complete this assignment:

- 1. Select an Artifact:** After the week 4 lecture and tutorial, you should have enough information to select an artifact. For this assignment, you should choose a contemporary artifact that was produced within the last 3 – 4 years. Remember, your artifact can be a song, poem, hashtag, work of art, commercial, award show speech, or any other “instance of symbol use that is of interest to you and seems capable of generating insights about rhetorical processes” (Foss, p. 9). In very rare cases, you may need to select a series of artifacts. For example, you may want to produce a rhetorical criticism essay on 3 outfits worn at the Met Gala. Or perhaps, you'd like to analyze a series of award show acceptance speeches by Dan Levy or Viola Davis. If this is the case, then you'll want to provide justification for working with more than one artifact. This essay has a maximum word count, which provides more than enough room to complete a robust analysis of one artifact. So, please only select more than one artifact if necessary (like if the items are in a series or if you are thinking beyond the course). **After you select your artifact, you'll need to submit an artifact proposal to eClass by the end of the day on Wednesday October 5th. This should be a one-paragraph proposal that briefly describes your artifact and explains why you are requesting to work with this artifact for your assignment.**
- 2. Week 6:** During reading week, we will not meet for lectures or tutorials. In relation to this assignment, a great use of time for this week would be to read the chapter associated with your selected critical approach and conduct your initial analysis. You'll read **one** of the following six chapters:
 - Chapter 3 – Neo Aristotelian Criticism
 - Chapter 5 – Fantasy-Theme Criticism
 - Chapter 6 – Feminist Criticism
 - Chapter 8 – Ideological Criticism
 - Chapter 9 – Metaphoric Criticism
 - Chapter 10 – Narrative Criticism**These critical approaches will be introduced in the week 5 lecture.** You will use the brief introductions and the additional links provided to decide which approach will be best for your chosen artifact. There is no specific due date for this portion of the assignment, but you should have read your chapter and completed your analysis before we meet for tutorial in week 7.
- 3. Week 7:** During tutorials, we will peer-review and workshop your research questions/thesis statements. To arrive at your research question, you will need to have completed your analysis. You should submit your research questions before tutorial by a submission method preferred by your tutorial instructor.
- 4. Week 8:** Finish writing and submit your essay by the due date.

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Additional Writing Resources: In addition to office hours, The Writing Centre is available for all your writing needs! You can make an appointment at the Writing Centre at any stage in your process. I'd recommend a visit to The Writing Centre at least once during this process (especially if you think this essay could be a portfolio piece).

Notes on Assessment: In Chapter 2, Foss provides a heuristic that will be used to assess your work for this assignment. This assignment will follow Foss's heuristic as well as some additional elements specific to PRWR 2007. As always, assessment will be based on whether these areas are substantially developed, somewhat developed, or scant. Here's a brief overview of each area:

1. **Justification:** This area of assessment will focus on your claims, evidence, and reasoning. In other words, your argument should be fully supported by each of these three elements. It is good practice to use these terms in your essay if you need to see where you are clearly making these moves, or if you'd like the reader to see where you are clearly making these moves. For example, you might signpost with a sentence like, "We see evidence of ___(claim)___ through___."
2. **Reasonable Inference:** You must show how you arrived at your claim from the data within your artifact. The beauty in an essay of rhetorical criticism is that the reader doesn't have to agree with your claims, but they should be able to see how you reasonable arrived at your claims based on how you connect them to your artifact.
3. **Coherence:** Foss states that, "You must order, arrange, and present your findings so that they form a unified whole, created through clear and logical links among ideas and structure" (p. 26). In other words, you want to make sure the order of your essay makes sense. Again, it's always good to sign post for the reader to make your arrangement clearer ("First, we see....").
4. **Format and Style:** You must adhere to the requirements for format and style as mentioned on page 1. You'll want to be sure to do the following
 - **State and Justify Your Critical Approach/Method:** This may seem obvious, but it is an easy one to forget. Dedicate one paragraph to describing your critical approach and providing a short justification for why you selected this approach.
 - **State Your Research Question/Thesis Statement**

**Foss offers instructions for how to apply your analysis in activism (p. 22-24), While this is not required for this essay, I suggest that you give it a try. We do not cover activism in depth in this course, but any effort to apply your analysis in activism will be noted and assessed accordingly.

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Thinking Beyond the Course:

As the Course Director, I am committed to ensuring that your assignments find life beyond the course. For that reason, I'd like to encourage you to select an artifact that will serve that purpose. This may mean that you'd like to seek special permission to work outside of the boundaries of the assignment requirement. For example, perhaps an artifact that is relevant for an industry you'd like to work in was produced 5 years ago (beyond the 3–4-year requirement). If you find yourself in this situation or one similar, then please reach out to your tutorial instructor to discuss options for doing the work that best suits your goals. You should not work outside of the boundaries of the assignment requirements without permission.

Pawmi: An Exploration of Rhetoric in Pokemon Relevance

In the broad world of online entertainment, staying relevant for long periods of time can be difficult to accomplish. The compound challenge of keeping up with advancing technologies and rapidly changing attitudes has, in newer IP's (intellectual properties), frequently led to explosions of popularity before falling off, almost into obscurity. Having said this, Pokemon—among other IP's—have managed to remain relevant for decades. As one of the highest grossing franchises in the world, the Pokemon company has been creating video games, anime, and trading cards, for over 26 years, amounting to over 1000 Pokemon designs across 9 generations. It comes into question, then, what rhetorical strategies does the company use within these designs to stay relevant to modern audiences? The Pokemon named “Pawmi” demonstrates the qualities of the “generational mascot” genre, which expresses the ways in which the design philosophy of the Pokemon company has changed to stay relevant in today's markets.

To explore the rhetorical strategies used by the Pokemon company, a newly released generation 9 Pokemon, Pawmi (fig. 1), will undergo a generic participation analysis. This form of criticism involves deductively comparing a specific artifact with those in a similar genre to determine if the original artifact belongs in that genre. Foss argues that artifacts within a rhetorical genre must share situational requirements (the circumstances surrounding the artifacts), substantive and stylistic characteristics (the rhetorical choices made to satisfy the circumstances), and an organizing principle (an overarching term to describe the genre). By comparing Pawmi to earlier Pokemon designs of a similar genre, the similarities and differences between rhetorical approaches by the company can be seen throughout the years.



Figure 1, Pawmi (Generation 9)

The genre with which Pawmi is most comparable has the term “generational mascot” as the organizing principle. The generational mascots are more commonly known throughout the Pokemon community as the “electric mouse Pokemon” or the “Pikachu clones,” and they consist of 9 designs: Pikachu (Fig. 2), Pichu (Fig. 3), Plusle (Fig. 4), Minun (Fig. 5), Pachirisu (Fig. 6), Emolga (Fig. 7), Dedenne (Fig. 8), Togedemaru (Fig. 9), and Morpeko (Fig. 10). In addition to being visually similar in many ways, members of this genre especially come together around their situational requirements. As the mascot of the IP, Pikachu is the most well-known and popular Pokemon design to exist. Knowing this, the company attempts generationally to reproduce similar successes by creating similar designs as ‘mascots’ for each game generation (hence the title “generational mascot”). These designs are often revealed well before the games themselves to be used in promotional material and in every case, they also can be used as playable team members within the games. Therefore, the function of “generational mascots” is to influence people to buy their respective games while also representing the feeling of these games as a whole. Pawmi, fits these situational requirements identically; it is a design that attempts to reproduce the popularity of the original Pikachu, it was revealed months before *Pokemon Scarlet and Violet* (which would be Pawmi’s debut game) for use in promotional material, and it can be used as a playable team member within these games. With situational requirements alone, it seems obvious that Pawmi fits as a generational mascot, however, the substantive and situational characteristics do not align as perfectly with the original mascots.



Figure 7, Emolga (Generation 5).



Figure 3, Pichu (Generation 2).



Figure 4, Plusle (Generation 3).



Figure 5, Minun (Generation 3).



Figure 6, Pachirisu (Generation 4).

In order to satisfy the needs of being promotional material to influence consumers to buy these games, the generational mascots share a set of substantive and stylistic characteristics that appeal to young audiences and sell the fantasy of Pokemon as a game. These designs attempt to frame their games as enjoyable, fun, and energetic. This is done in official artwork through excited, smiling faces, and frequent use of the colour yellow. The colour yellow also relates to the fact that they are “electric type,” a reference to the electric excitement and energy on which Pokemon games brand themselves. These designs all have fairly rounded designs, with beady eyes, circular cheeks, and small arms and legs, which was done to make them appear cute to audiences. Finally, to be recognizable and iconic, each generational mascot has an identical sounding name in every language, which is not actually common among other Pokemon.



Figure 8, Dedenne (Generation 6).



Figure 9, Togedemaru (Generation 7).



Figure 10 Morpeko (Generation 8).

Pawmi does satisfy some of these characteristics but finds other ways to satisfy its promotional needs. Pawmi’s shape design is very round, with beady eyes and circular cheeks in order to appear cute. However, it actually has large and prominent arms and legs, with small hands and feet. This makes Pawmi seem physically stronger than other mascots, and it appeals to strength as well as cuteness. Pawmi is also frowning in its official artwork, which never occurs in other mascots. Similar to Pawmi’s physicality, this frown appeals to both strength and cuteness. It can also be argued that Pawmi being portrayed with a frown makes it more relatable to audiences than the other mascots. The relentless positivity expressed by every other mascot can seem overbearing or disconnected from the experiences of the audience's own lives, thus Pawmi has a more relatable appeal. This is also shown in Pawmi’s colouring; although yellow is still present, Pawmi is dominated by orange. This is not necessarily new in the genre—Pachirisu (Fig. 6),

Dedenne (Fig. 8), and Togedemaru (Fig. 9) mostly consist of colours other than yellow—however, Pawmi and Dedenne are the only designs wherein yellow accents do not make up the focal points of the designs. The focus on orange as opposed to yellow still provides positive connotations, but with a much more muted energy. It should be noted however, that Pawmi’s use of yellow is still rhetorical. The placement of the yellow colour on Pawmi’s paws and face mimics the places where fur is not found on animals, which frames the orange parts of Pawmi as having fur. This further makes Pawmi appeal cute without taking away from the physical strength the company portrays Pawmi as having. The name “Pawmi” is similar, but not identical in every language; “Pamo,” “Pohm,” and “Bùbō” appear in different languages, making the name “Pawmi” not universal. This may lean into the idea of cultural rhetorics—the idea that different sounds may be rhetorical in different ways depending on culture. The final substantive characteristic about Pawmi that is worth noting is its reliance on internet culture to be popular. The very name “Pawmi” relates to an internet technique that is used to make things seem cuter—ending its name with an “i” instead of the usual “y.” Its roundness, more so than the others in the genre, appeals to the internet idea of being “friend shaped,” a comment usually referencing something that appears harmless due to its shape. These references make Pawmi more appealing to younger audiences, who would actively be participating in internet culture. The combined appeals of Pawmi appearing less energetic, more physically powerful, cute through different techniques, and reference to internet culture makes Pawmi slightly different from the other generational mascots.

Although there is clear evidence that Pawmi does not fit with the other mascots, Pawmi should actually belong in this classification. Foss states directly that “(g)enres can be unstable over time as they develop due to changes in media technology structures, market transformations, or even () intentions and concerns...” (Foss) and over time, it is seen that the generational mascots do the same. Many of the differences in rhetorical practices that were

listed, are appearing more often in Pokemon’s design philosophy. As previously mentioned, the use of the colour yellow has been decreasing over time, with the representatives of generations 4, 6, 7, and 8, all prominently featuring other colours to represent their games. The reliance on meme culture within Pawmi is also prevalent in Morpeko (Fig. 10), which occasionally turns into Morpeko “Hangry Mode” (Fig. 11) with the term “hangry” being an internet term referring to the feeling of anger as caused by hunger. This idea of being “hangry” also goes against the overbearing optimism that older mascots are portrayed as having. As time progresses, the Pokemon company has been straying further from the rhetorical appeals found in the original Pikachu in order to be more effective towards newer technology structures and modern audiences.



Figure 11, Morpeko Hangry Mode.

Pawmi, in spite of the ways in which it diverges from the “generational mascots”, does belong in the genre. Its situational requirements are identical, and its substantive and stylistic characteristics are somewhat different, but remain consistent with the ways that the Pokemon company has changed their design philosophy over time. For video games to remain relevant within the fast, complex industry that is digital entertainment, companies must be willing to break the rhetorical genres they have already established, to let their brand grow.

Works Cited

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