

Student name

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“☺ ☺”

In his book, What Video Games Have to Teach Us about Literacy and Learning, James Paul Gee discusses semiotic domains which are “any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities to communicate distinctive types of meanings” (18). Within semiotic domains, media of different types take on unique meanings, represent various ideas, or can be analyzed in alternative ways when the media are presented in certain manners (Gee 17). Now, what exactly does that mean? Giving the definition in other terms would be equally confusing, but an example of the concept should give the term solidity. Author Robynn Clairday published a text called Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer: A Blog in which she presents the story of a sixteen year-old girl, Genesis Bell, in the style of an online blog with message board commentary; therefore, the material is read and analyzed as a blog from an internet source. The quirk of this story is that Confessions is actually a published, printed and bound text. The blog and the book present two differing semiotic domains through which all the material can be read in two separate ways and possibly evoke two separate analytical responses because of their presentational differences. How exactly does Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer function in its blog format and how might switching to a more traditional book-style format alter that functionality? The comparative differences are many and include the language used, visual differences, and grouping differences.

The internet jargon under which the vast majority of the text was written is representational of a language in which the teenage audience of Clairday is fluent in, or at least fairly literate in. Internet jargon, also known as internet lingo, is becoming an increasingly popular speech method among teens and young adults because of the increasing popularity of online communication methods. These mass communication methods include the celebrated instant messenger, chat room, and, of course, the internet blog. Writing her book using this familiar terminology aided the text's readability and increased the comfort level of the readers, who were most likely individuals who are familiar with the blog-style format. Removing this extremely effective format in lieu of a more formal set-up similar to one an individual would encounter in the typical book might result in a decreased reading speed, but it would also alter the simplistic, familiar, and easily digested style which was designed for her target audience.

With the blog as the chosen semiotic domain for Confessions, Clairday gives the audience a less difficult task seeing from the central character's point of view in the text through the in-depth inner monologue and through the dramatic emphasis which is more freely used within the text (by means of formatting). Words become more like signs and symbols when they are presented in bold print, have added letters, and/or are typed using all capital letters to aid with textual dramatization. Actual symbols are freely used as well within the blog. These tools help confirm the writer's emotional standpoint and emotional connection to the material being presented, making it easier for the reader to connect. An example of this point is shown in a comment left on the message board attached to the blog proclaiming "Nick Pilates is sooooo hot, guys☺ ☺" (Clairday 22). By the use of the four additional letters tacked to the end of the word "so" and the two smiley faces ending the sentence, the readers are lead to the safe assumption that Nick Pilates is indeed an attractive character and that people are really happy about that fact! Trying to translate the same points to the audience using a book format would not only remove

the vernacular speech which accurately captures the teenage response to the situation, but could possibly require an unnecessary amount of words to capture the same intensity.

Along the same lines as jargon and dramatic emphasis through formatting, the style through which the blog is presented directly addresses the reader; blogs incorporate their audience through its conversational style rather than overlooking and failing to acknowledge external feedback. This point is one where several books, even those which are very well written, fall short. Many traditional books which are delivered from a first-person perspective are written to concentrate solely on the speaker's thoughts and never incorporate outside influence. Genesis incorporates her audience into her blog by responding to the comments left on her message board throughout the blog's entirety. An example of this integration is apparent after she posts a blog, receives negative comments from her readers, and then responds by stating, "The rumors you've heard are all wrong. You'll get the real deal here," (15). This integration and responsiveness would not have occurred in a commonplace book for its lack of audience interaction; therefore, the semiotic domain of the blog once again differs from that of the book.

Digressing back to Gee's actual definition of a semiotic domain ("any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities to communicate distinctive types of meanings"), one can apply his definition to the visual style in which Clairday wrote her Confessions text (Gee 18). In a book, set stopping and starting points are present which indicate to the reader that a pause can be taken to meditate on the newly acquired material and/or indicate to the reader that he or she can stop reading to pick up at a later time or date. These breaks usually come in the form of chapters or subsections to an overall chapter in a formal work. Blogs have no such stylistic pauses; hence these media are usually read in their entirety in a lesser amount of time. The common language

used in the blogs (which was discussed above) also aids with the fast pace at which blogs are usually read.

Thus far, the nature of a blog has shown itself to be rather effective in delivering a message in its own unique way through the language used, through the blog's dramatic textual variations, and through the visual style blogs are presented under, but this form of print media can be analyzed in more ways than just through the actual words themselves. The format as an entity can also have an effect on the way the medium reads to the audience – an effect what is not always beneficial. In Confessions of a Boyfriend Stealer, the blog format was anticlimactic because of its faulty resolve. In a “book” or in almost any formal literary work, a standardized format exists. This arrangement has three or four general steps (some of which are interchangeable): (exposition,) rising action of the conflict, climax, and resolution. Clairday's blog, although engaging from the first page because of the above named tactics in the blog's semiotic domain, lacked a clear presence of a resolution. The exposition which opened the blog is in the form of an “All About Me!” survey on Genesis; this survey gives a setting and set the tone (and also includes foreshadowing). The blog also continues to include a climax that is present at the end of the work. Between those two points lay the build-up of the action – yet no true resolution was apparent throughout the process. Blogs do not have to follow any particular format so no concrete layout is expected of the typical blog post, yet this particular blog was in print and delivered physically as “a book”, leading readers to falsely assume that the formal rules would be followed. In this case, the semiotic domain of the blog was ineffective.

The semiotic domains within a book and within a blog both rely heavily on textual information and appeal to their audiences in specific manners. This particular work, being a printed and published form of the blog crossed into a different medium than a blog would usually venture, opening up a great deal of options and opportunities to those who normally would not

relate to a book or to book-readers who are not keen on internet blogging. Both the blog and the book's semiotic domains are made more readily available for criticism in a form such as the Confessions blog, but the personal differences and uniqueness that each form brought to this inventive medium is intriguing. The differences between the reader responses an individual may receive from reading this blog as a book and vice versa are profound, further confirming the fact that the blog and the book are to equally popular, but very different media with two very different semiotic domains present in each. The text may not have been as successful in either of its purest forms, but with together, the often contrasting yet complementary semiotic domains of the Clairday text brought Genesis's Confessions to life. ☺

## Works Cited

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