

Bridging Scholarly Theory and Forensic Practice: Toward a More Pedagogical Model of Rhetorical Criticism

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At some time during a teacher's career he will be asked to explain why he is asking students to perform in a certain way or to carry out a particular task. His answer will determine whether he is an educator or [simply] a trainer, whether he himself is educated, and whether he has considered the reason for his beliefs. The educator knows the "why" of what he does, and to him theory and conceptual knowledge take precedence over conditioned responses. It is not enough for the teacher to say, "It's always been done that way." A student, peer, or even a supervisor will still want to know why. Pedagogy is generated by theory, and theory comes from a philosophy which is grounded in certain values. When one wants to know what influences account for the present state of affairs, he cannot ignore the past. Knowledge of the past helps the teacher formulate both answers and questions for the future, as well as the present. So it is with forensic education.¹

The academic discipline of speech communication and the activity of intercollegiate forensics are natural allies. Speech scholars seek to identify and understand communication principles by studying communication practices, while students of public speaking aim to enhance their personal communication skills by practicing recognized principles. Collectively, these two traditions represent a unique intersection of theory and practice. Indeed, the emergence of speech as an independent curriculum in universities and the growth of competitive

speech and debate are inextricably tied to one another.² Yet despite their related aims and common origins, speech as a discipline and speech as an activity are frequently ignorant of one another, particularly to the detriment of forensics.

Perhaps no better illustration of this pedagogical harm exists than in the platform event of rhetorical criticism (RC).³ In this essay, I contend that competitors in the event of rhetorical criticism, or communication analysis (CA) as it is alternatively called,⁴ are locked into a model that poses serious questions about the educational value of the event. In an effort to narrow the ever widening gap between theory and practice and to heighten the pedagogical value of contest rhetorical criticism, I propose to chart briefly the chief features of the existing RC model, to identify the limitations posed by that model, and to suggest several viable alternatives.

FORENSIC PRACTICE: WHY ALL RHETORICAL CRITICISMS SOUND THE SAME

Charting the chief features of the existing model for rhetorical criticism is a necessarily risky endeavor because it potentially obfuscates the uniqueness of each speech. Nevertheless, certain identifiable traits pervade the event of rhetorical criticism; moreover, judges police and thereby reinforce these traits through their judging practices. To the extent that judges reward speeches with these features and sanction speeches without them, students have a strong disincentive to deviate. Hence, competitively successful RCs possess these traits almost without exception, and in the process establish the standard or model that others must emulate. The existing model of rhetorical criticism entails several key topical and structural features.

Topic Selection

At first glance, it might appear that the topics for RCs are wonderfully heterogeneous. But closer inspection reveals that the topics

of successful speeches are governed by three principles: recency, shock value, and obscurity. Consider a student with a strong personal interest in Malcolm X, who wants to analyze his pivotal 1963 Message to the Grassroots Address. Recognizing that most competitive RCs examine contemporary discourses, a coach might discourage that topic. But the student persists, and one could not think of a good reason why modern discourses are more deserving of critical attention than historical discourses. The coach's concerns were realized throughout the season though, for judges critiqued the topic on the principle of recency, as the following examples from the student's ballots illustrate:

You're in a *big time ditch* trying to pull of [sic] such an old artifact-your [sic] going to have to create *massive* justification, [and] I'm not sure you can. (emphasis original)

Reason for rank: Out-of-date topic.

Malcolm X speech-good for a class, but for this event? Where's the immediacy [sic]? Opponents had more immediate [sic] and accessible artifacts.

First, using speeches by Malcolm X or Martin Luther King, Jr. are usually frowned upon. Second, there are many more *recent* speeches that you could use whose author isn't as problematic to the speech community, (emphasis added)

The four judges quoted here all explicitly or implicitly sanctioned the speech on Malcolm X, based not on the quality or significance of the artifact or the analysis, but on the age of the artifact. Worse still, none of the judges suggested why a recent subject is more worthy of critical attention.

Judges tend to reward speakers who analyze controversial and

obscure artifacts, while penalizing those who examine mainstream or landmark texts. Reinforcing this trend, one judge wrote of the speech on Malcolm X, "Malcolm X is a subject that should *never* be done-he, in general, has been overdone. When you take this to NFA's you'll fall quickly. You have a great presentational style-don't let your *topic* hold you back" (emphasis added). This statement implies that the discourses of Malcolm X have been thoroughly exhausted critically, and that nothing new of value can be said. As a result of judging practices that reward both shock value and obscurity, RCs increasingly examine fringe rhetoric to the exclusion of mainstream discourses. For instance, one rarely judges a rhetorical criticism of presidential rhetoric, despite the fact that the president arguably exercises great influence on public policy; similarly, the scarcity of film and television criticisms is troublesome in light of the overwhelming influence these mediums exercise.

Form and Structure

The formal and structural similarities of competitive RCs are even more deeply ingrained than the topical similarities. In rhetorical criticism, a three-point organizational pattern featuring method, application, and implications has achieved a doxatic status.⁵ The structural similarities of RC extend far beyond the overall organizational pattern to a sub-structural level as well. This can be seen by examining each of these three points in greater depth.

The first main point of competitive RC is usually dedicated to identifying or delineating the primary elements, tenets, or components of a method appropriate to the analysis of a particular type of discourse. The term "method" assumes a very narrow and specific meaning within this model. In forensics, a rhetorical method most often refers to a student's reduction of a practicing critic's rhetorical analysis to a set of key principles. The original analysis should have been published in a communication journal during the past five years, for scholarly work undertaken more than five years ago has apparently been debunked by

the forensic community which critiques methods, like artifacts, using the principle of recency. For a student to be successful in RC, the method must also be justified as appropriate to the discourse being analyzed. Not only is this structural feature policed by most judges, forensic scholarship encourages it. Cataloguing the objectives of contest RC, Dean argues, "The basic question the student should answer [at the outset of the methods section] is: 'Why?' Why is this method of analysis fitting, appropriate, insightful, and/or unique to the given artifact?"⁶ A justification is typically phrased: "To the extent that Some Scholar's essay published in Some Communication Journal addresses Some Rhetoric, it is appropriate to guide our analysis of Some Text."

The second main point of competitive RC is the analysis or application section. There, students take the rhetorical components, principles, features, or tools they identified in the first point and utilize, employ, adopt, or apply them as a framework, guide, or means of explaining, understanding, or interpreting the artifact. Regardless of the precise phraseology selected, students proceed in their speeches to locate the specifics of their method within their artifact. Most often, this identification process follows the same order in which the key tenets of the method were discussed in the first point. The student critic continues: "The first principle of the rhetoric is (insert principle). This trait can be seen in the following statement." The student critic then quotes a passage of text that perfectly illustrates the principle. In short, the method drives the analysis section. Although the RC model is subject to criticism on many levels, it is this aspect to which I object most strenuously, and I will discuss the reasons in section two.

The third and final section of most competitive RC is the implications or effects. For much of the history of the event, the third main point of rhetorical criticisms was dedicated almost entirely to proving that the rhetor was a rhetorical success or failure because she or he had deployed or failed to deploy all of the key principles in the method. Like method justification, efficacy assessments are encouraged by forensic scholarship. Explains Dean, "The critic's [final] responsibility [is] to render a judgment regarding the artifact's ultimate

success or failure."⁷ This task was usually accomplished by quoting experts who either avowed or disavowed the success of the rhetor, by citing statistics that showed how the rhetor met or failed to meet stated goals, or by noting the cultural and social changes that had or had not taken place as a result of the rhetor's discourse. This aspect of RC, however, is perhaps not so stringently policed by judges as it once was, and as a result, the content of the third section has shifted somewhat. Today, it frequently incorporates reflection on, evaluation, or assessment of the rhetorical method. Students spend a minute or two highlighting the limitations of the method, and ways to extend or improve the method. This change in the content of the third point has been embraced by a large number of judges, who, of course, now police it.

SCHOLARLY THEORY: WHY ALL RHETORICAL CRITICISM IS NOT THE SAME

Topic Selection

Although I do not oppose contest rhetorical criticisms that examine contemporary or controversial discourses, I do object to present forensic practices that explore such discourses to the exclusion of more historical and mainstream rhetoric. By encouraging the student critic to write speeches solely about recent artifacts-and ensuring such criticism through ballots-coaches and judges foster the misleading impression that the analysis of historical discourses is less important to our understanding of rhetoric and its function in the world. This impression is dangerous on a number of levels. First, criticisms of historical discourses or public addresses have the potential to yield significant insights about culture, history, and the nature of society. In an essay addressing the key challenges faced by the field of speech communication in its scholarship, Martin Medhurst writes:

[W]e must both promote and study public address as a cultural force that shaped and continues to shape the

American experiment. We must learn to articulate, on a sustained basis, the intellectual and cultural rationale for studying American oratory. . . . Given the great opportunities that are available in rhetorical-cultural studies, it is nothing short of appalling how few scholars . . . have sought to make the link between America's oratorical tradition and its cultural, educational, religious, political, civic, and economic heritage. . . . [We must study] the place of oratory in society [and] oratory as a force that shaped American character, society, and social institutions.⁸

Historical studies and analyses of oratorical masterpieces are important because they contribute to our understanding of the way rhetoric functions in the world. They make seminal contributions to theory. Touchstones demand critical attention, explains Edwin Black in his landmark 1965 book, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*, because they inform our expectations about what "rhetorical discourse is capable of doing."⁹ This statement suggests that practicing critics do not frown upon-as the forensic community does-the analysis of canonical texts. On the contrary, scholarly critics emphatically encourage it. Nor do practicing critics devalue-as the forensic community does-the analysis of texts that have previously received critical attention. If anything, writes David Zarefsky, "[W]e need more comparative studies of the same rhetorical objects, exemplified by the symposium on Lincoln's Second Inaugural in the first issue of *Communication Reports*."¹⁰ Practicing critics recognize that texts can profitably be examined from a variety of perspectives, for each can contribute to rhetorical theory and to our understanding of a particular case. Thus, one wonders why forensic judges should sanction students who would assess rhetorical touchstones, such as the speeches of Malcolm X? or Martin Luther King?

An additional way that the criticism of historical rhetoric can enhance our understanding of communication and history is through

historical revisionism. The dangers of blindly accepting that certain texts, and not others, are in the canon of public address has been carefully documented elsewhere.¹¹ But scholarly critics agree that the canon must constantly be reassessed, for the very notion of a canon functions rhetorically to privilege certain social, political, and economic interests over others. Only by studying the canon's construction can scholars understand the ways that it empowers and disempowers various social groups. Zarefsky stresses the importance of historical revisionism:

[W]e need to deal with all the same problems of canonization which confront our colleagues in literature. On the one hand, we do need to revisit what by common consent are a body of great speeches. Mohrmann is right in noting with surprise that many of these "great speeches" have never been subjected to careful rhetorical study. Presumably, works acquire canonical status for some reason, and renewed attention to the "classic" texts might help us to understand those reasons. At the same time, the standard canon of public address is not neutral. Some groups of speakers are notoriously under-represented, and some topics are treated as taboo.¹²

Elaborating on this point, Medhurst writes, "Historical revisionism is an important trend precisely because it does make our scholarship significant. We are able to teach something to the scholarly world at large and that teaching function, as Edwin Black noted in 1965, is no small part of public address scholarship."¹³ In sum, the study of historical rhetoric is vital to our understanding of society and our place in it, to rhetorical theory, and to the politics of canonization and collective memory.

The bias toward recent texts is not the only factor that contributes to the intellectual stagnancy of RC. By rewarding shocking

and obscure discourses to the exclusion of more mainstream discourses, the forensic community nurtures the dangerous impression that popular rhetoric is less intrinsically important and interesting. At present, students seem compelled to analyze only those discourses that sound outrageous. Thus, most RCs tend to focus on the rhetorical efforts of fringe groups, such as Act-Up, Deaf Culture, and the Branch Davidians. Obviously, such studies are important and have contributed significantly to our understanding of rhetorical resistance and opposition. But alone, such studies treat only small segments of how power operates rhetorically in society. Therefore, coaches and judges should encourage students to explore dominant and popular discourses in addition to subordinate and fringe discourses. Only then will we come to understand how power is constructed and exercised in all parts of society.

Form and Structure

"Method," as practiced by the forensic community, refers to a collection of principles gleaned from a rhetorical critic's recent analysis of a particular discourse. Not only does this definition differ from the way most practicing critics conceptualize method, but it virtually guarantees that student critics will produce so-called "cookie-cutter" criticisms that prevent them from learning about their artifact or how rhetoric functions in society. Method in a scholarly sense is more general than the narrow conception held within forensics; rather, it is an orderly procedure or process of investigation, or as Kathleen German wrote in this journal in 1985, "broad categories or systems of critical thought... developed in response to the questions asked by critics."¹⁴

Modern textbooks on rhetorical criticism survey several methods. These methods are unified, not by a set of narrow rhetorical tenets, but by a general outlook. In *Rhetoric and Popular Culture*, for instance, Brummett identifies five key methods: marxist, feminist and psychoanalytic, dramatistic/narrative, media-centered, and culture-centered.¹⁵ Brock, Scott, and Chesebro's *Methods of Rhetorical*

Criticism is organized around the methods of fantasy-theme, neo-Aristotelianism, dramatistic, narrative, generic, feminist, and deconstructionist.¹⁶ Similarly, Foss's *Rhetorical Criticism* covers cluster, neo-Aristotelianism, fantasy-theme, feminist, generic, ideological, narrative, and pentadic.¹⁷ Finally, Burgchardt's comprehensive *Readings in Rhetorical Criticism* adds social movement, ethical, metaphoric, and close-textual to those previously listed.¹⁸ All of these methods exist, not as a narrow set of controlling terms, but as a general perspective on discourse. Genre criticism generally examines the shared expectations created by classes of texts; feminist criticism generally determines how texts foster gender inequalities; narrative criticism generally treats the suasive power of stories, and so forth.

This scholarly view of method has two important consequences. First, each method can produce an infinitude of distinct, yet valuable analyses. A feminist criticism of a text, for instance, might look at repressed desire, or phallic representations, or sexist language, for there is no single, prescribed way to do feminist criticism. Second, any number of methods could be brought to bear on a single text, each yielding its own valuable insights. A speech by Malcolm X, for instance, could be analyzed from a dramatistic perspective, or ideological perspective, or metaphoric perspective. Because any text can profitably be analyzed from countless different perspectives, method justification as practiced by the forensic community is problematic. Current practice perpetuates the mistaken assumption that one method is inherently better than others for reading a text. One method is not *more* appropriate than others, it is *as* appropriate. Students should select the method they do because they are interested in the types of questions-dramatistic, ideological, metaphoric-it asks, not because of some fabricated link between text and method. If student critics feel compelled to offer a justification, they should identify the initial questions they were interested in, and explain how their method aids them in answering those questions.

The important point here is that what passes as method in forensics is simply one critic's analysis of a particular instance of

discourse. Although scholarly critics use methods, such as the ideological perspective, their analyses are themselves not methods. In *Rhetorical Criticism*, Foss published three examples by different authors of ideological criticism. Although the essays are united by their interest in the ideological character of texts, i.e., they share the same method, each analysis and essay is distinctly different. Each author identifies certain principles at work in the examined discourse, but those principles are *not* a method. They are the scholar's critical observations, and when a student uses those observations as a method, the student critic is, in effect, pirating someone else's critical observations concerning a specific rhetorical artifact and forcing those observations to account for another instance of discourse.

Aside from the questionable way the forensic community defines method, its definition leads to unimaginative and unenlightening criticism. To understand why, we must turn our attention to the second main point of competitive RC and the early development of the field of speech criticism. After students successfully reduce a critic's analysis to a set of key principles in the first main point, they then apply those principles to examine their own artifact. In short, they engage in method driven criticism-where "method" retains the narrow meaning discussed earlier. Fifty years ago, scholarly critics were locked into a strikingly similar model. Many critics of that period practiced a brand of neo-Aristotelian criticism in which, as Dilip Gaonkar notes, "method mastered the object [or text]."¹⁹ The danger of this approach was not with neo-Aristotelianism, but with how it was practiced. Recalls Zarefsky,

Critics presumed a method-neo-Aristotelianism, not as Aristotle himself probably would have done it but as a set of categories automatically applied to any speaker or speech. The resulting studies were not theoretically interesting and often had as their primary finding that the neo-Aristotelian categories could be made to fit virtually anything.²⁰

Within this framework, critics simply followed "a set of procedural injunctions on how to conduct oratorical criticism."²¹ The pitfalls of this approach have long been widely recognized by speech scholars, for as Benson explains, "When criticism was so stringently subordinated to theory [i.e., method-driven], the theory itself was incapable of being tested or refined by the criticism: it could only be confirmed to nobody's surprise or enlightenment."²²

Given these limitations, it is hardly surprising that the field would begin to explore alternative ways of doing criticism. In the 1960s, communication scholars began—due in part to Black's scathing attack of neo-Aristotelianism in 1965—to develop new methods of criticism. Almost over night, the field witnessed a proliferation of new methods from Fisher's narrative analysis to Bormann's fantasy-theme approach. Methodological pluralism failed to address the underlying problem, however, and criticism continued to be method-centered. Instead of producing cookie-cutter criticisms using one method, such as neo-Aristotelianism, critics generated cookie-cutter criticisms using many methods. Recognizing that cookie-cutter criticism persisted despite the introduction of new methods, the field came to understand that the *real* problem had to do with the narrow conception of method.²³ Zarefsky describes the transition from method-driven criticism to a more object oriented approach that took place in the years following this recognition:

Throughout the academy, and particularly in the human sciences, the late 1960s and 1970s were marked by a self-reflexiveness about method and assumptions which called into question traditional models and paradigms As scholars realized that rigidity as to . . . perspective, and method of study were constricting inquiry and producing studies that largely replicated the assumptions, they began to probe in new directions The resulting studies, now accumulating over a decade or more, make more substantial theoretical

contributions, exhibit a richer array of approaches, demonstrate more methodological sophistication and awareness of assumptions, and-at least in my opinion-are more interesting.²⁴

Tragically, what Gaonkar has termed, "the arrival of the object," the turn from method to artifact that freed the field of speech communication from reductionists criticism, has not yet been embraced by the forensic community.

Competitive RC is still caught in the 1960s model of methodological pluralism. Although student criticisms are characterized by a wide variety of theories, the overall approach to RC continues to entail a narrow and reductionistic conception of method and to be animated by method. In forcing a narrow set of principles gleaned from a specific rhetorical analysis to account for the rhetoric they are analyzing, student critics tend to fall into one of two traps. On the one hand, many students mangle a critic's controlling principles until they fit the discourse they are analyzing. Some students, on the other hand, disfigure a discourse until it fits the controlling principles found in a published rhetorical analysis. Hence, students shred their artifact by ignoring language that does not fit the method and by quoting textual fragments out of context to create a perfect correspondence between text and method. Competitive rhetorical criticisms tend to lack any real explanatory power because they force the practice to fit the theory, or the theory to fit the practice.

The third main point of most competitive RCs examine social and methodological implications of the analysis. The discussion of these implications tends to focus on rhetorical effectiveness. Although nothing is inherently wrong with such an approach, some potential dangers are present. First, discussions of effects can frequently oversimplify complex cause-effect relationships that may obscure the many rhetorical forces at work in a given situation. Second, the focus on effects frequently prevents students from asking more important and interesting questions. Increasingly, scholarly critics ask, "How does rhetoric work

in a particular instance?" as opposed to "Was rhetoric successful in a particular instance?" In fact, in some instances the question of effect is almost nonsensical. In *Rhetorical Criticism*, Black questions whether it would be possible for a critic to judge the effectiveness of John Jay Chapman's 1912 Coatesville Address to an audience of three persons; nevertheless, Black contends it is still profitable to engage that text, and he conducts a virtuoso reading that eloquently illustrates the value of criticism that is unconcerned with effect.²⁵

The second traditional component of the implications section or the assessment of the method suffers from its own set of problems. Because the current RC model features a narrowly defined view of method, subsequent critiques of the method are wholly predictable. Students generally begin by pointing out some limitation of the method—some way in which it fails to account fully for their artifact. Since the method was originally written as an analysis of some other specific instance of discourse, it should come as no surprise that it cannot account for the student's artifact! In short, students use the method to explain rhetorical tactics and strategies that it was never designed to explain. Another common practice involves students' proposals to extend the method in their third main point. These so-called methodological extensions are a product of the necessary lack of fit between the method and the artifact. What students, coaches, and judges fail to understand is that the essays written by practicing critics and published in communication journals are not methods, they are individual rhetorical criticisms. Instead of appropriating someone else's analysis and calling it a method, students should produce their own readings of texts much the same way practicing critics do when they write an essay.

FROM METHOD TO TEXT

If the event of rhetorical criticism is to heighten its pedagogical value, then the forensic community should consider several viable alternatives to the current *modus operandi*. Criticism is a practice

heavily influenced by the inventional process, and coaches should encourage students to see their selection of topics as an important part of criticism itself.²⁶ The artifacts students choose, as well as the way they define those artifacts, should inform the approach students take, and the types of questions they ask their analyses to address. Students should be encouraged to select topics that interest them; potential topics should include historical artifacts as well as contemporary artifacts, mainstream artifacts as well as marginal and/or obscure artifacts. Students might, for instance, explore the discourse of former presidents, early civil rights rhetoric, or the discourse of the women's movement in the nineteenth century. They might examine popular television series, musical artists, and cultural practices such as tattooing and quilting. These topics are as important as recent and marginal texts, for they can teach students about history, culture, and how communication functions in society and how it changes over time. For this solution to be successfully implemented, however, judges must stop penalizing students who examine historical and popular texts.

In writing their speeches, students should not limit themselves to a single structural model, and under no circumstances should they continue to use the present model that currently dominates the event of rhetorical criticism. Students should abandon the outdated, narrow, and misleading definition of method currently popular in the forensic community, and allow their artifacts, rather than their methods, to animate or drive their analyses. Black issues the same imperative to practicing critics when he writes, "[S]ometimes-maybe even all the time-a subject deserves to supersede a method, and to receive its own forms of disclosure."²⁷ Echoing this sentiment, Benson contends, "At its best, criticism is driven by a fascination with the particular [artifact or text], though it struggles to articulate the particularity of a given case in terms of larger concerns-interpretive, historical, technical, theoretical, and philosophical."²⁸ Commenting on the benefits of object-centered criticism, Leff explains, "Theory is something that arises from an understanding of the particular, and abstract principles become important only as they are instantiated and individuated within the

texture of actual discourse."²⁹

Although Black, Benson, and Leff might broadly be characterized as close-textual critics, the turn from method to text is not limited to the close-textual approach. In 1990, the *Western Journal of Speech Communication* published a special issue on the current state of rhetorical criticism. The journal's editors invited two of the field's leading critics to share their views on criticism, and then commissioned Dilip Gaonkar to comment of both perspectives. Michael Leff and Michael McGee were selected because they represent two popular, though different, ways of conducting criticism at the present time: close-textual and ideological. But as Gaonkar explains, the perspectives articulated by Leff and McGee share a fascination with the text:

The essays by Michael Leff and Michael McGee in this volume, ostensibly as illustrations of two competing approaches to rhetorical criticism, display greater anxiety about the critical object than about critical method. This is somewhat perplexing, because the names of Leff and McGee are associated with two different ways of conducting practical criticism: textual and ideological. In this special issue devoted to the interplay of those two methods, we find their chief proponents less concerned with rearticulating their methodological commitments and strategies than with totalizing the critical object... I regard this unexpected anxiety about the object as significant and deserving of analysis. It could hardly be a simple coincidence that two of our leading critics, known for their grasp of disciplinary concerns, should both elect on this occasion to problematize the character of the critical object.³⁰

Gaonkar subsequently examines how both critics have made the object, rather than the method, the key feature in their criticism. Where the two

differ then is in how they conceptualize texts; Leff approaches the text as an artistic whole or unified field of action, while McGee approaches the text as fragmentary and as a constitutive process. Both perspectives, however, suggest the dangers of method-driven criticism.

CONCLUSION

How, then, should students approach criticism, and how should they structure their critical analyses? As there is no single correct answer to this question, students would be wise to follow the lead of practicing critics. After settling on a text or artifact, students need to give some thought to how they conceptualize their text. Is it discrete-clearly bounded in time and space-or diffuse-intricately tied to a host of other texts? Is it reactive, does the text respond to a particular context, or proactive, does the text create its own context? Should one read the text in its original context or a new one? These questions represent choices that critics make, and they guide the critical process. If a critic conceptualizes the text as especially reactive, it would be hard to say anything meaningful about the text without a sustained discussion of context. In this case, students might provide a contextual or historical overview, conduct a close reading of the text, and suggest some textual and historical insights. Zarefsky identifies the approach's value:

Now, not all history is critical; not all criticism is historical. Granted. But any instance of public address consists of a text... and hence is susceptible to critical examination. And any instance of public address occurs in some context and hence is susceptible to historical study. The emphasis between text and context will vary from one study to the next, but I find it hard to imagine a decent study of public address which does not partake of both.³¹

But this is not, and should not be, the only way of doing criticism.

Ideological critics, such as McGee, tend to be interested in questions of power. Therefore, their analyses frequently focus on the ways that texts work to empower or disempower various individuals or groups in society. Adopting this approach, students might analyze the preferred meanings of the text around an issue such as gender, race, or sexuality, discuss the implications of that analysis for relationships of power, and judge the text democratic or undemocratic, oppressive or resistive, or some combination of these extremes.

A third approach students might take is to identify several salient rhetorical principles at work in the text, discuss what those principles are working to do, and assess the appropriateness of those principles for the rhetorical end. With regard to this third structural model, students should identify the salient rhetorical principles in the text by analyzing the text itself. They should not appropriate the principles identified by a practicing critic and published in an essay and then simply look for those same principles in their own text, for such an approach to criticism has questionable educational value and reflects a model that scholarly critics abandoned in favor of more productive approaches forty years ago. Nor should students limit themselves to the three alternative structural models just outlined. These models simply represent a few of the ways of doing criticism that shift the focus from method to text.

The forensic community may resist the suggestions offered here because judges are content or more comfortable with the current model, or students fear that they will be penalized in competition, or coaches simply believe that students are incapable of conducting their own criticism. A judge's apathy is a poor justification for maintaining the forensic status quo. Student competitors should be rewarded for doing scholarly rhetorical criticism rather than conventional forensic practice. Indeed when taught how to do rhetorical criticism, students can produce their own readings of texts-readings that are far more insightful than method-driven, cookie-cutter criticisms. Unfortunately, the longer the forensic community clings to the current way of doing RC, the wider the gap between scholarly theory and forensic practice will grow.

ENDNOTES

1. Don F. Faules, "The Development of Forensic Activities," *Directing Forensics: Debate and Contest Speaking*, ed. Don F. Faules and Richard D. Rieke (Scranton, PA: International Textbook Company, 1968) 1. To avoid interrupting the continuity of this quotation, I have chosen not to mark the sexist language with [sic].
2. See Karl R. Wallace, ed., *History of Speech Education in America: Background Studies* (New York: Apple-Century-Crofts, 1954); Herman Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication: The Emergence of a Discipline, 1914-1945* (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1994); Faules 1-32.
3. Contest rhetorical criticism's disconnected evolution is especially unfortunate given the event's unique relationship to the discipline. In a special issue of this journal over a decade ago, guest editor William Benoit observed that while all individual events have ties to the discipline of communication, rhetorical criticism "serves to tie competitive forensics into the discipline in ways possible for no other event." William Benoit, ed., *National Forensic Journal* 3:2 (1985): preface.
4. Some coaches and judges maintain a distinction between rhetorical criticism and communication analysis by arguing that "communication" is a broader term than "rhetoric" and allows for the analysis of a wider range of artifacts. In 1970, The Wingspread Conference on Rhetoric concluded that "Rhetorical Studies are properly concerned with the process by which symbols and systems of symbols have influence upon beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions, and they embrace all forms of human communication, not exclusively public address nor communication within any one class or cultural group"-see Douglas Ehninger et. al., "Report of the Committee on the Scope of Rhetoric and the Place of Rhetorical Studies in Higher Education," *The Prospect of Rhetoric*, eds. Lloyd Bitzer and Edwin Black (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971) 208. Practicing critics have, since Wingspread, generally viewed any form of suatory discourse (i.e., film, television, music, photographs, public address, pamphlets, cultural practices, etc.) as rhetorical.

5. The organizational structure of contest RC has achieved the status of doxa, or the undisputed and undiscussed, for it "goes without saying because it comes without saying." See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977) 167-9.
6. Kevin W. Dean, "Coaching Contest Rhetorical Criticism," *National Forensic Journal* 3:2 (1985): 123-4.
7. Dean 117.
8. Martin J. Medhurst, "Public Address and Significant Scholarship: Four Challenges to the Rhetorical Renaissance," *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, eds. Michael Leff and Fred J. Kauffeld (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1989) 38.
9. Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study of Method* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965) 67.
10. David Zarefky, "The State of the Art in Public Address Scholarship," *Texts in Context: Critical Dialogues on Significant Episodes in American Political Rhetoric*, eds. Michael Leff and Fred J. Kauffeld (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1989) 26.
11. See John Schilb, "Future Historiographies of Rhetoric and the Present Age of Anxiety," *Writing Histories of Rhetoric*, ed. Victor J. Vitanza (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1994) 131. See also Karen A. Foss and Sonja K. Foss, *Women Speak: The Eloquence of Women's Lives* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 1991).
12. Zarefsky 25.
13. Medhurst 35.
14. Kathleen M. German, "Finding a Methodology for Rhetorical Criticism," *National Forensic Journal* 3:2 (1985): 91.

15. Barry Brummett, *Rhetoric in Popular Culture* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1994).
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