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RHETORICAL AND TEXTUAL APPROACHES TO COMMUNICATION

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The modern world is steeped in communication. In an average day, thousands of different messages are communicated via intrapersonal, interpersonal, public, and mediated channels. In fact, the world is so steeped in communication that much of the information that a person uses to become a member of their community is a result of communication (Mead, 1934). Scholars argue that humans come to understand the world and their communities as a result of communication. It comes as no surprise, then, that individual behavior can be shaped in important ways as a result of communication. Indeed, the way humans experience the world is filtered through communication so much so that rhetoric affects what we perceive, what we know to be true, how we understand our experiences, and how we conduct ourselves (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 2002).

Rhetorical scholars engage in research that involves the close study of rhetorical texts or artifacts. This process is called rhetorical criticism, and it is the foundation of rhetorical and textual approaches to communication. Rhetorical critics analyze texts to learn more about how the process of communication works. Critics are interested in why some messages are compelling, but others fall flat, or why some movies, books, or television shows resonate with audiences, while others never seem to catch on. Rhetorical scholars, also called rhetorical critics, engage in systematic and sustained examination of texts. This sets them apart from popular critics who review books or movies and make determinations about whether or not they liked it but who do not seek to understand how the text is working from a communication perspective.

In this chapter, the meaning of rhetoric is explored along with its characteristics. This is followed by an examination of rhetorical criticism, and finally the value of rhetorical and textual approaches to communication is discussed.

Rhetoric

The term *rhetoric* is often used in contemporary society to refer to meaningless talk or empty words. Politicians accuse their opponents of using rhetoric to persuade their audience. This implies that rhetoric is merely linguistic and has no force to shape social change. This perspective on rhetoric assumes that actions are more important than words and that actions can be understood apart from language.

This understanding of rhetoric is shortsighted and misinterprets the meaning of the term. Rhetoric has been an important part of civic life since the 5th century BCE (Foss et al., 2002) and has long been considered one of the most important liberal arts. Plato, the ancient Greek philosopher, believed that the art of persuading audiences should be reserved for the intellectual elite since this ability was too powerful for ordinary people. Aristotle, on the other hand, saw rhetoric as an important part of a democracy. His book *Rhetoric* reads like a public speaking handbook instructing students on the best way to persuade audiences in myriad ways. Aristotle's definition of rhetoric, the ability to discern all the available means of persuasion in any given situation, is illuminating because it is focused on the critical skill of seeing the ways to persuade as opposed to actually making the most persuasive argument. Quintilian, an ancient Roman philosopher, defined rhetoric as the good man speaking well. This definition suggests that speaking skills are directly tied to particular individuals. Additionally, Quintilian believed that for persons to be "good," it was necessary that they have a well-rounded education as well as good intentions for their audience.

While most of the definitions of rhetoric are from ancient times, contemporary rhetorical theorists continue to study this form of communication. Kenneth Burke, one of the most prolific theorists of the 20th century, understood rhetoric as a process of creating identification with an audience. As speakers share their perspectives, audiences identify points of commonality that bring the two closer to agreement. An interesting aspect of Burke's definition is that he is not concerned with persuasion, or the ability of a speaker to change the mind of the audience. Instead, he focuses on the nature of communication as a vehicle for helping humans understand one another.

While there are a wide range of definitions for rhetoric, contemporary scholars tend to share the idea that rhetoric has some basic characteristics. Some scholars argue that for communication to be considered rhetoric, it must be intended to reach a particular outcome, while others have a wider

definition that includes all kinds of communication, be it expressive or persuasive. Regardless of these differences, scholars agree that a great deal of communication is rhetorical in nature. The basic characteristics that tend to be shared across definitions are that rhetoric is the intentional or strategic use of symbols by humans in order to communicate. There are also a number of key terms that stem from the word rhetoric. *Rhetor* is the word used to refer to the creator of the rhetoric, while a *rhetorician* is a person who studies rhetoric, and *rhetorical criticism* is the process of making evaluations of rhetoric based on a systematic analysis of a rhetorical artifact.

The study of rhetoric is a study of human communication. Many scholars argue that one of the things that make humans unique is their ability to communicate. Although animals communicate, that communication falls outside the purview of rhetorical critics. Critics are interested in human-constructed intentional messages communicated through symbols.

Rhetoric is symbolic, meaning that symbols are the vehicle that humans use to communicate. Perhaps the most important symbol system that humans use is language, but there are many other forms of symbolic behavior that are also used to communicate, including nonverbal behavior, art, music, clothing, and architecture. A symbol is something that represents something else by virtue of a relationship or association (Foss, 2004). Symbols are human constructions and have arbitrary meanings. The relationship between a symbol and what it describes are not based on some inherent quality. The relationship itself is arbitrary, and the relationship between a word and what it represents is something that individuals come to understand by means of communication. Another aspect of symbol use is that symbols are ambiguous. Because there is not an intrinsic relationship between the symbol and what it describes, there is often the need for the audiences of the message to interpret what the symbols mean. Language is not inherently clear and concise. This ambiguity allows for both the rhetor and the audience to participate in the creation of meaning. This is interesting to critics because no matter how clear a rhetor attempts to be, there is always the chance that an audience will interpret the message differently. While the intention of the rhetor is important, it is more important to the critic how the message itself can be read as a text. So, for example, a person may say something offensive without meaning to offend. The intent to offend is not as important as the fact that offense took place. It is not enough to say that the offensive language was unintentional, because the meaning of language is not the possession of the rhetor. Instead, the meaning of symbols is a product of both the rhetor and the audience.

Rhetoric is communication that is intentional. Thus, rhetoric is always a deliberate attempt to communicate. It is important to recognize that it is the attempt to communicate that is central to this idea, not whether or not that attempt was successful. A text can be considered rhetorical even if no one pays attention to it, and it can be considered rhetorical even if the audience interprets the rhetoric

differently than the rhetor intended. The intention of the rhetor is relatively unimportant. Rhetoric is strategic because it is both intentionally created and deployed with intent. Rhetoric is usually aimed at a particular goal of persuading an audience or sharing something significant with an audience. Rhetoric does not just happen; it is the result of a deliberate process. Although the process is deliberate, it may not involve much thought. For example, someone may offer an opinion that has not been considered thoroughly, but it was still offered purposefully.

For critics, the strategic nature of rhetoric is intriguing because it reveals important information about how rhetors have chosen to construct messages. A critic may explore why one person may prefer confrontation and another uses a passive-aggressive communication style. A critic may choose to understand why individuals choose certain modes of communication. Many people may not think of these sorts of decisions as deliberate. They are just being themselves, and this is how they communicate. However, just because something has become a habit does not mean that it is not also a choice. Habits are the result of deliberate behavior and can be changed with other kinds of deliberate behaviors.

Individuals usually communicate with an end in mind. The goal may be to change someone's mind, it may be to have an audience buy a particular product, or the rhetor may just want to get feelings about an issue out in the open for others to hear. Regardless of the goal, it is clear that rhetoric is designed with a particular goal in mind. For example, a person may talk to himself or herself in order to help him or her remember to do something or maybe to help figure out the parts of a problem. A person may communicate with someone else to share information or gain a new perspective. Even casual conversations have a goal and are, thus, often rhetorical.

Rhetorical Criticism

The process of carefully examining a text to discover how it works communicatively is called rhetorical criticism. Although a piece of criticism is centered on a particular rhetorical artifact, the goal of criticism more generally is to generate knowledge about how rhetoric works in order to persuade or to create some sort of identification with its audience. Thus, the careful examination of a text is used to generate more general knowledge of communication inductively.

Rhetorical Artifacts

Critics choose particular instances of rhetoric as the focus for their study. The rhetorical act itself is fleeting and can never be re-created in its entirety. Consequently, critics study rhetorical artifacts instead of the rhetorical acts themselves. An artifact is the tangible evidence of rhetoric. For example, when the

president gives a speech, it is a rhetorical act. The artifact of that act would be a transcript and/or a recording of the speech. So while the speech itself has ended, the artifact is a tangible text that can be scrutinized over and over again. Rhetorical artifacts can take many forms, including written texts, books, video, paintings, recorded music, and films.

There are countless rhetorical artifacts available in our culture, so critics must choose their objects of study wisely. Critics usually look for some artifact that evokes a strong response. A book that has become a worldwide best seller and inspires millions of people might be an interesting object of study to discover what is so compelling about that text. Or a critic may choose to look at an artifact that has incited anger or disagreement. Critics might choose artifacts that were particularly effective or notably ineffective. There are myriad choices, but in general, critics are looking for something that is notable, important, influential, or unusual. Critics are also interested in satisfying their own curiosity, so they tend to select artifacts that are particularly interesting to them.

All rhetorical artifacts are a product of the particular time and place in which they were created. Rhetoric is often a response to some sort of problem that the rhetor seeks to redress with words. The term *exigencies* refers to the prevailing cultural conditions and constraints on the particular rhetorical act. Critics must examine the exigencies that surround and constrain a rhetorical act to understand the choices the rhetor made. Bitzer (1968) describes the rhetorical situation as the sum of the exigencies surrounding any rhetorical act and urges critics to carefully consider the ways in which a particular situation demands a rhetorical response.

Rhetorical criticism seeks to understand the way rhetoric works, how messages are created, and why they have the impact that they do. Critics seek to reveal what the average person may not have noticed. A critic peels back the layers of a rhetorical artifact to discover and expose information about the rhetor, the intended audience, the rhetorical situation, the cultural assumptions of the rhetor and the audience, and how the rhetoric functions as a whole. Rhetorical critics formulate research questions concerned with how rhetoric works, why it works the way it does, and what kinds of rhetorical elements allow it to work in that way. Critics accomplish this by looking closely at rhetorical artifacts and researching the rhetorical situation that surrounds the artifact. Critics do not usually engage in interviewing or other forms of qualitative data collection. Instead, rhetoric critics focus their study on a particular text and seek to reveal what it can tell us about the communication.

Method

In rhetorical criticism, the method of inquiry is tied to a particular critical perspective. Critics make arguments about rhetoric based on the particular rhetorical perspective that is being employed. Instead of

an established set of procedures that are used in some other forms of communication research, rhetorical criticism is a product of the application of a particular critical perspective to an artifact. There are countless critical perspectives that a critic can use, and increasingly, critics must develop a unique critical perspective to understand the artifact being studied.

A critical perspective acts as a lens. The critic looks at the artifact through the lens of the perspective. A perspective is informed by theory, and this in turn helps the critic develop a critical vocabulary. This critical vocabulary will help the critic discuss the artifact with a greater degree of precision. For example, if a critic was using a critical perspective that is based on the importance of metaphor, the critic would first research theories of metaphor to better understand what a metaphor is and how to identify its parts and effects within a text. Research into metaphor would reveal that metaphors have constituent parts called the vehicle and the tenor (Foss, 2004). So this critical vocabulary can now be used to better describe the metaphors in a particular text.

A critical perspective will allow the critic to better see some parts of the artifact but will obscure others. If critics are looking for metaphors, for example, they may not notice gender-exclusive language or narrative elements. Different critical perspectives direct the critic's attention in different ways. Thus, the critic should endeavor to choose a critical perspective that will highlight what the critic finds most intriguing about the artifact. In contemporary criticism, critics often combine two or three critical perspectives to articulate their arguments more fully. It may not be enough to isolate and describe the metaphors in an artifact, so a critic may also add the critical perspective of ideology to discuss the ways the metaphors perpetuate a hegemonic ideological structure that supports, rather than challenges, the current societal power structure.

The choice of a critical perspective, much like the choice of an artifact, is an individual decision. Consequently, rhetorical criticism tends to be highly personal. Furthermore, two different critics could examine the same artifact from two different perspectives and make entirely different determinations about it. Different critical perspectives will yield different conclusions, but their evaluations can be equally valid. This means that there is little agreement about what kinds of criticism are best or which critical perspectives are the most illuminating. Rhetorical criticism should be supported by good arguments and based in the artifact being studied, but what makes one critical perspective better than the other is often a case of personal preference. Ultimately, rhetorical criticism should reveal new information about the rhetoric and contribute new understandings of rhetoric to the field of communication.

Examples of Critical Perspectives

There are some critical perspectives that have become common among critics. These critical perspectives provide a systematic approach to analyzing a rhetorical artifact in order to answer specific questions generated by that perspective. An artifact's form, pattern, assumptions, language uses, or structures may also direct a critic to a particular established critical perspective. Ideological criticism, feminist criticism, and narrative criticism are some examples of established critical perspectives. These traditional critical perspectives will be discussed to demonstrate the assumptions about the world and the qualities of a particular artifact that can be discerned with different perspectives. Established critical perspectives are a good place to begin to peel back the layers of an artifact.

Narrative Criticism

Narrative criticism begins with the assumption that humans are storytellers. Narratives are meant to give order to human experiences in order to establish common ways of living and common ways of explaining how to make choices and take action in society. Likewise, humans rely on narratives to explain the choices and actions of others (MacIntyre, 1981). Critics can better understand motive if they can describe all the factors that led to a particular choice. There is a logic to storytelling, and critics seek to unpack and illuminate this logic.

Narration is a type of human interaction and the product of that interaction, the narrative, is something that is interactively created, understood, and shared with others. Narration is part of being human because it has become an ingrained method of reasoning on the personal and social levels. This perspective assumes that stories are used to explain and rationalize events, cultures, conduct, or character (Fisher, 1984). Indeed, humans rationalize their conduct through narratives. The narrative critical perspective recognizes a rhetor as a storyteller and, therefore, recognizes each rhetor's tendency to deliver a message through the use of a personal narrative or through aligning the message with a larger, widely accepted social narrative. These larger, widely accepted narratives are often called master narratives. The function of the narrative critical perspective is to understand the purpose of a rhetorical act. A narrative provides the structure for understanding the creation, adaptation, and reception of rhetoric. By understanding rhetoric as telling a story or aligning with a previously told story, a critic can begin to work inductively to understand how the larger narrative explains the logic behind the decisions made prior to, during, and following a rhetorical act.

Although narratives may not argue explicitly, narratives are intended to be persuasive. When a rhetor chooses to embed the message in a narrative, that message becomes persuasive because of the very nature of stories and of human's natural fondness for them. Narratives have the ability to disarm audiences because of the desire to hear an entertaining story. Narratives have the ability to awaken

memories, experiences, and feelings in an audience that can become powerful motivators. And narratives tempt their audience with a sense of closure in two ways: First, audiences will want to stick around to hear the end of the story (the actual message), and second, audiences are prepared to receive a story's lesson that explains how a certain behavior will lead to a certain outcome. Each of these characteristics of narrative identifies the way rhetors structure their messages in persuasive ways.

The presence of a narrative in a rhetorical artifact assumes that each part of a message is functioning within a larger persuasive construct. In recognizing its presence, a critic can begin to evaluate the overall "lesson of the story" in order to understand the persuasive power behind a message. Critics can evaluate a message based on *narrative probability* and *narrative fidelity* (Fisher, 1984). Narrative probability refers to evaluating the actual qualities of the story being told in terms of a coherent story line, suspense, concern for the protagonist, a climax, a dramatic twist, vivid detail, and closure. Narrative fidelity refers to how well that story reflects the reality of a situation. In other words, narrative fidelity measures the reliability and truthfulness. A critic can measure the fidelity of a narrative by determining what information was available to the rhetor and how well the narrative represents that knowledge (Hart & Daughton, 2005).

Critics can also evaluate a particular message based on the narrative's origin and the narrative's intent. If a narrative is derived from a master narrative, a well-established overarching story that is recognized and respected across a culture, then that narrative taps into certain established set of rules. These established standards of conduct may persuade audience members to abide by a rhetor's message due to inherent loyalties to the overall master narrative. A critic can evaluate this rhetorical strategy in terms of narrative fidelity. Critics can also seek to uncover and evaluate a rhetor's intentions by observing what a given narrative is intended to reveal and what a given narrative is intended to conceal. These decisions reiterate traditional rhetorical decisions involved with the delivery of facts, definitions, and ideas. A narrative provides a vehicle to translate the parts of a message into a meaningful experience, and a narrative critic asks questions about that process of translation and the implications of simple stories.

Ideological Criticism

Ideological criticism is an umbrella term for any criticism that is primarily motivated by ethical or political concerns. As such, an ideology is a pattern of beliefs used to interpret some aspect of a society in order to evaluate that issue or topic and encourage a particular attitude or action toward it (Foss, 2004). The primary goal of the ideological critic becomes discovering and analyzing the dominant ideology or ideologies embedded in an artifact and those ideologies either negated or underrepresented.

Understanding ideologies helps illuminate the motivations of the rhetor and the strategies used to persuade the audience. Ideological criticism not only acts as a lens to focus on the specific rhetorical strategies used by rhetors to persuade their audiences but also specifies the social or political goals of the rhetor. Ideological critics are concerned with exposing the power dimensions of rhetorical artifacts to expose and evaluate the purpose of rhetoric.

The purpose of ideological criticism is unique in that an ideological critic works to develop a standard to judge a particular rhetorical act or artifact (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Although other critical perspectives draw conclusions about the implications of their findings, often ideological critics make these judgments more explicitly. For example, Marxist criticism also seeks to undermine certain taken-for-granted power structures in society. However, Marxist criticism extends beyond an evaluation of linguistic strategies by situating and illuminating how a particular strategy relates to a larger context. Specifically, Marxist critics seek to undermine exploitive economic systems. Although economic exploitation may seem like a narrow goal, this specific standard of evaluation inspires critics to question how rhetorical acts and artifacts relate to societal structures that continually exploit the powerless members of society. Marxist criticism becomes activism because it identifies the specific strategies used to perpetually rationalize the exploitation and then publicly criticizes these structures. Marxists view ideological criticism as a socially responsible activity whereby ideological evaluations need to extend beyond the artifact itself and draw conclusions about the political and social goals of larger systems of exploitation by exposing their spokespeople. To a Marxist, rhetors represent the ideologies of larger organizations, and these connections need to be exposed in order to hold these organizations accountable to higher moral standards.

Like Marxist criticism, postcolonialist critics believe in exposing systems of oppression; however, a postcolonialist critic also aims to resist these systems of oppression by actively privileging the voices of the oppressed. The term *postcolonialist* is derived from the term *colonialism*, which emphasizes a historical tendency for those in power to conquer and control another person's land (Sim, 1999). Here, a postcolonialist likens this definition to the contemporary conquest and control of a person's rights, ideas, freedoms, choices, and voices through the use of rhetorical acts and artifacts. Postcolonialist critics seek to expose the remnants of a seemingly dated method of control. This exposure seeks to evaluate the assumptions of rhetorical acts and artifacts against the assumptions of postcolonialist critics, which seek to respect *alterity* (the quality of the "other") through recovering the voices and perspectives of the *subaltern* (those people who are oppressed due to gender, race, class, religion, or culture). Postcolonialist critics specify the strategies used in rhetorical acts and artifacts that naturalize, or make things seem normal, to expose how these strategies become embedded in larger ideologies and are then taken for

granted. This taken-for-granted approach toward a rhetor's assumptions perpetuates systems of oppression. It becomes the work of the ideological critic to identify and evaluate these assumptions in order to expose their arbitrary relationship.

Feminist Criticism

Feminist criticism can be considered a form of ideological criticism in that many feminist critics also engage in rhetorical criticism to illuminate power inequities in everyday life (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Specifically, feminist critics focus on gender as a source of inequity and ask how rhetoric defines and promotes gendered behavior. Feminist critics focus on gender to evaluate larger structures that promote power at the expense of oppression and equality.

The terms power, oppression, and equality are central to understanding the motivation behind the critical feminist perspective. Feminism is a theory that advocates equal space for all voices in a society; thus, feminists strive to acknowledge the voices of the voiceless that have traditionally been silenced due to socially constructed power structures. Not all feminists are women, and not all women are feminists; instead, these key terms articulate the interests of a particular type of critic. Critics who consider the feminist perspective are usually asking questions about how a particular rhetorical act or artifact relates to the concepts of equality, oppression, and power.

Feminist critics assume that certain power structures perpetuate the marginalization of certain members in society. Ultimately, the function of these structures has been linked to the promotion of patriarchy—the rule of men in society—and a masculine view of the world (Hart & Daughton, 2005). Patriarchy is inherently oppressive because it ignores the unique experiences of people who lie outside the white, privileged male demographic. Feminists explore how factors such as gender, race, discourse, power, and organizing intersect to produce relations of dominance and resistance that work to perpetuate hierarchies of oppression (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). Feminist interpretations of hegemony emphasize the plurality of positions, identities, and interests and promote communication as a way to create, sustain, and challenge current social order (Clair, 1998).

Feminist critics expose the political nature of texts to actively engage in the political process. The feminist critical perspective identifies strategies that are implicit in rhetorical artifacts to actively challenge current social and political order. This political activism can be achieved through different methods of critique (Hart & Daughton, 2005). For example, policy critique seeks to illuminate how public policy has traditionally reflected a masculine worldview. This is achieved through the systematic observation and analysis of language and images used to define and promote certain public policy agendas within a given text. Similarly, performative critique assumes that gender is a socially

constructed concept. This critique looks at how gender is enacted in a given text and then draws conclusions about how this enactment is related to things such as race and class. This approach assumes that rhetorical performances, occurring on stage or in everyday interactions, determine and inform the gender of a person (Hart & Daughton, 2005). This perspective is empowering because it uses rhetorical criticism to demonstrate the ways in which gender is socially constructed in order to counter historically patriarchal conceptions of what make a woman a woman or a man a man. Within the feminist critical perspective, there is an array of ways to approach rhetoric. However, most feminist approaches seek to promote the central feminist values of respect, equality, self-determination, and interconnection (Foss, & Griffin, 1999).

The trend in rhetorical criticism now is to develop individual methods that are suited to a particular artifact rather than applying one of the methods that have become standard in communication studies. This approach illuminates the understanding that a critic can only understand the significance of an artifact through personal interpretation and that meaning is derived from understanding the independent and unique ways texts stand in relation to one another.

The Critical Essay

Sharing rhetorical criticism via the critical essay is essential because it shows others how rhetoric is being deployed and how it functions in certain circumstances. Showing, not telling, is an important part of what rhetorical critics accomplish. While analyzing a text and uncovering strategies, a critic inevitably reaches a “eureka” moment—a moment where the function of the artifact in a larger context becomes clear. The final step in the process of conducting rhetorical criticism is to share that “eureka” experience about communication with others.

A critical essay should include a description and context of the rhetoric/artifact, an explanation of the critical perspective that was applied to that artifact, an analysis of that artifact, and the conclusions and evaluations about rhetoric based on the analysis. Remember, although criticism focuses on a particular artifact, the goal of rhetorical criticism is to understand better how rhetoric works. Rhetorical criticism is an ongoing process, not a product. In other words, the exploration of an individual artifact functions as a case study. Its purpose is to reveal how a particular artifact means something in a larger context and how this new perspective can contribute to, extend, or modify current rhetorical theory.

The first step in sharing rhetorical criticism with others is to orient the reader and generate interest. This orientation is accomplished by providing a brief overview or summary of the actual artifact and a brief description of the context in which the artifact occurs. The critic then needs to provide the reader

with enough information about a particular artifact to help a reader understand its historical, cultural, or social context, as well as its significance. Finally, the critic must explain why this critical perspective matters on a larger scale by illuminating what past studies have discovered and how this particular essay will change, improve, or modify our current understanding of the world.

The second step in sharing rhetorical criticism is an explanation of the critical method(s) used to analyze an artifact. A rhetorical essay needs to be self-sufficient. In other words, readers should not have to go elsewhere to understand the key concepts that are needed to understand the following analysis; however, they are not reading the essay to learn everything there is to know about the critical method that was used. Instead, readers need to understand just enough information about the critical method in order to follow connections made throughout the essay.

The third step in sharing rhetorical criticism is the analysis of the artifact itself. This is where critics get to tell the audience what was observed and then provide proof of their arguments by supporting each claim with direct evidence from the text. So instead of simply stating that a particular rhetor uses a particular kind of language, a critic must demonstrate this claim using direct quotes from the artifact in question. The primary standard of judging the validity of a given rhetorical essay is how well the arguments are justified with examples from the text. Because rhetorical critics examine artifacts through critical perspectives that are highly individual, there is no sense that the research is “right” or “wrong.” Instead, good criticism is interesting and well argued, while inferior research is not supported with evidence from the text. Due to the personal nature of rhetorical criticism, it is important for rhetorical critics to showcase their own ideas and theoretical conclusions because their interpretation of the text is unique. In the analysis, other theories or concepts can be included to support or extend the critic’s unique perspective, but the purpose of reading a rhetorical essay is to gain a new understanding of communication processes.

The final step in sharing rhetorical criticism is a clarification of the conclusions drawn from the analysis and the evaluation of these conclusions on a larger scale. Conclusions help juxtapose important findings that were previously explained in the analysis portion but were so compelling that they deserve another mention. An evaluation of these findings can be either implicit or explicit but must accomplish the goal of explaining the implications of this particular case study in terms of a larger scale. This is the portion of the essay dedicated to articulating how this particular case study contributes to current rhetorical theory.

Value of Rhetorical Criticism

Early rhetorical scholarship tended to be prescriptive. The authors were intent on providing tools for creating persuasion communication and using rhetoric most effectively. Conversely, contemporary rhetorical scholars tend to focus on analyzing rhetoric. This shift has much to do with understanding that words and symbols construct the social world and act as a filter for how an individual understands reality. While rhetoric has been seen historically as a skill to be mastered, contemporary rhetorical scholarship understands the personal nature of creating, receiving, and sharing messages with others and seeks to explore these unique sources of meaning. Rhetorical criticism assumes that the variation in perspectives reveals certain qualities about how the world operates on a larger scale and how people interact with each other in that world. This pursuit becomes significant because rhetorical criticism aims to produce better communicators and a more informed critical audience.

Rhetorical criticism is also valuable because it encourages people to be more thoughtful rhetors. Rhetorical criticism demonstrates ways to better communicate on a personal, professional, and political level by revealing how symbols are effectively used in the construction of meaning. Rhetorical criticism equips people with an understanding of successful and unsuccessful strategies for constructing messages and then encourages them to implement these strategies in their own lives. As a proactive tool for understanding how people communicate needs and motivations, rhetorical criticism enables the audience to hone their own communication skills.

Rhetorical criticism is also valuable because it encourages people to be more critical consumers of rhetoric. Rhetorical criticism creates a more sophisticated understanding of messages, which helps the audience to become more critical of the rhetoric they encounter. The level of sophistication in published rhetorical criticism encourages audiences to recognize the persuasive strategies used to shape their behaviors and then encourages the audience to uncover the implicit strategies that may also be framing their options. Rhetorical criticism encourages society to always question simplicity by articulating how and why the world is not simple. A demonstration of how messages are more complex than what is initially perceived encourages audience members to question the intentions of every message. This critical posture enables audiences to attain a level of sophistication that can help them become more critically aware of the messages they encounter.

Rhetorical critics work to reveal information about how meaning is created to make visible information that was previously unnoticed. Along with encouraging people to become their own critical consumers, rhetorical critics demonstrate how this is done and the benefits of engaging in this type of questioning. Rhetorical criticism often exposes insidious structures in society that have worked to maintain the status quo or normalize certain practices or attitudes. By revealing these strategies, rhetorical criticism reveals the manufactured nature of these power structures or practices, and in doing

so, it may expose their weakness. By providing information about how oppressive structures function, rhetorical critics may delineate ways to transcend entrenched structures, and in doing so, it may empower people to explore different options.

Rhetorical criticism promotes activism and is a valuable tool for improving our current situation. Some rhetorical critical perspectives develop standards by which certain rhetorical goals can be evaluated. Rhetorical criticism, then, can explicitly suggest ways in which current structures oppress or fail members of society. These evaluations often raise awareness about a particular situation and in doing so motivate people to change that reality. Similar to activism, rhetorical criticism offers insights into emotion and then identifies sites of possible improvement.

Rhetorical criticism is valuable because it illustrates the interconnectedness of our experience. Rhetorical criticism demonstrates the intertextuality of our existence by connecting disparate texts and juxtaposing them to reveal a new perspective. Likewise, rhetorical criticism demonstrates the interconnectedness of people by drawing conclusions and evaluations across time, borders, cultures, and societies. This perspective promotes tolerance of alternative methods of constructing meaning in order to encourage individuals to seek to understand why someone behaves in a certain way. This level of tolerance prevents immediate negative reactions to unfamiliar situations or ideas. Broad-minded citizens listen to and incorporate different perspectives to more fully understand and appreciate their shared experience with others. Rhetorical criticism teaches people how to listen to and look for different perspectives in order to ensure that this level of tolerance and appreciation is met.

Finally, rhetorical criticism is a valuable method for appreciating an art. Humans are users of symbols, and this quality sets us apart from all other creatures. Rhetorical criticism becomes a valuable way to pay homage to this ability and to also highlight the responsibility assumed with this status. The more rhetoric is understood as an art, the more its role in everyday life can be appreciated and the more it will be respected as a powerful facet in the rhetorical construction of reality.

Conclusion

Rhetoric is one of the oldest and most revered areas of communication. Its roots can be traced back to ancient Greece, but it remains an important contemporary area of study. Communication scholars look critically at rhetorical texts to discover how rhetoric functions. This process, known as rhetorical criticism, is continually adding new information about the process of persuasion and identification to the discipline of communication. This chapter discussed the definition of rhetoric and the process of rhetorical criticism, provided examples of established rhetorical methods, and explained the importance

of conducting criticism. As contemporary society continues to grow and evolve, new forms of rhetoric are constantly being generated. So while scholars in the early 20th century tended to focus on speeches, contemporary scholars may study emerging genres of artifacts such as Web sites or text messages. Rhetorical criticism will remain a vibrant method of inquiry because it is so closely tied to the artifacts that are produced by a culture. Indeed, critics are especially valuable in contemporary times because they have the ability to reveal the inner workings of the communicative messages that saturate our society.

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