

A Case for Rhetorical Method: Criticism, Theory, and the Exchange of Jean Baudrillard

This dissertation uses the case of Jean Baudrillard to argue that successful critics must consider *rhetorical method* as it relates to theory. Throughout this dissertation, I follow Edwin Black in using the term rhetorical method to describe the procedures a rhetor uses to guide composition. The project's two main goals are, first, to demonstrate how rhetorical method can serve as a foundation for worthwhile criticism, and, second, to outline a Baudrillardian rhetoric. In order to meet these goals, I perform close readings of Baudrillard's oeuvre alongside a wide range of sources, including critical writings, classical works, analogic photographs, contemporary texts, and recent obituaries.

Chapter One introduces my project and the concept of rhetorical method through an anecdote, which compares the later paintings of Andy Warhol to the writings of Jean Baudrillard. Next, I define rhetorical method and distinguish it from the concepts of critical method and rhetorical object. Then, I reveal the importance of rhetorical method in criticism by reviewing three cross-disciplinary interpretations of Baudrillardian rhetoric. I analyze each interpretation according to its argumentative strength, its treatment of rhetorical method, and its engagement with Baudrillard's reputation as a cross-disciplinary, postmodern rhetor. I argue that rhetorical method asks critics to reconsider the foundations of their interpretive claims. To conclude, I analyze one of Baudrillard's own essays that treats Warhol, assessing the degree to which Baudrillard critically engages with Warhol's rhetorical method.

Chapter Two demonstrates that understanding rhetorical method opens up new understandings of rhetors and their rhetoric, by critically engaging Jean Baudrillard's dominant rhetorical method: *exchange*. Baudrillardian exchange radically revises the conventional rhetorical paradigm (to the exclusion of audience) and relies upon the perpetual movement between two agonistic theories of language: (1) the materialist theory—appearance, production, meaning-making; (2) the anti-materialist theory—disappearance, seduction, meaning-challenging. Baudrillard metaphorically describes exchange as a two-sided game and often embraces the anti-materialist theory of language in his writing and photography in order to challenge the materialist theory of language. After providing examples from his aphoristic writing and his analogic photography, I show how Baudrillard mobilizes disappearance as a move in service of his rhetorical method by analyzing one of his last works: *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?* I argue that, in this text, Baudrillard's rhetorical move of disappearance shifts in accordance with the posthumanist turn in thought, but his rhetorical method of exchange remains consistent with his earlier works.

Chapter Three deploys exchange as a critical method by generalizing and extending this rhetorical method as an interpretive framework that can be applied to texts other than Baudrillard's own. Specifically, I show how Isocrates's *Antidosis* is successful in its creation of an ambivalent rhetorical space—a space that upends convention, dissolves logics, and ruptures values—and how James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* is unsuccessful. In sum, my analysis of these two texts, one classical and one controversial, considers the ability of each text and its surrounding paratexts to challenge the meaning-making system and break with convention. My analysis further positions Baudrillardian rhetoric as a sophisticated rhetoric that offers recourse to rhetors, such as Isocrates or Frey, who momentarily occupy the weaker side of the argument. Yet beyond forwarding a strong counterargument, the attention that

Baudrillardian exchange pays to value systems proves a framework that is particularly amenable to questions of the public good.

Chapter Four offers a metacritical commentary on the use of Baudrillardian rhetoric as a critical method as well as on the construction of Baudrillard as a rhetorical theorist. Focusing on the relationship between method and theory in rhetorical criticism, I argue that rhetorical criticism is a productive enterprise and that existing explanations of this enterprise are insufficient because they abandon method. To better explain the method and theory dynamic that produces rhetorical criticism, I turn to Baudrillard's work on the model and the series in *The System of Objects*. After demonstrating method's affinity with the model and theory's affinity with the series, I argue that the distinction between the model and the series is a rhetorical distinction. With that distinction in mind, I offer a metacritical commentary about the ways in which rhetorical scholars have treated Baudrillard's writing and constructed him as a rhetorical theorist. To conclude my discussion, I turn to Baudrillard's own critical commentary about his rhetoric as it relates to his notion of the simulacrum. Analyzing his discussion of "the rhetoric of simulation" in *The Perfect Crime*, I argue that Baudrillard was indeed a rhetorical theorist in the most robust sense, since he engages with both theory and method.

Chapter Five argues that critics should consider rhetorical method to be as important to rhetoric as ethos. To support this argument, I examine two instances of criticism which involved unflattering obituaries and their responses: Jonathan Kandell's 2004 obituary of Jacques Derrida and Carlin Romano's 2007 obituary of Jean Baudrillard. I, first, analyze these obituaries in accordance with a conventional understanding of rhetoric as representation and, second, in accordance with each theorist's rhetorical method. While conventional responses to these obituaries could repudiate them for their negative tones and nasty messages, I contend that both theorists actually sanction these admittedly distasteful texts. In other words, the unconventional approaches of both rhetorical theorists to writing—namely, the Derridian *différance* and the Baudrillardian fatal strategies—seem to endorse the respective obituaries. I argue that these obituaries further suggest two new models of obituary writing, both of which are grounded in revised understandings of poststructuralist epideictic rhetoric: (1) a Derridian model that exposes the inadequacy of the contextual component of epideictic rhetoric; and, (2) A Baudrillardian model that revises the relationship between epideictic rhetoric and the value contemporary society places upon vitality.

In my **Conclusion**, I propose a methodological definition of rhetoric: *Rhetoric is the meeting of two methods*. As I argue, this definition of rhetoric is not only grounded in the history of rhetorical studies but it also possesses much potential in contemporary times. As contemporary rhetorical studies emerges as an interdisciplinary endeavor, this methodological definition of rhetoric will allow rhetoricians to explain what rhetorical studies actually studies and how those studies are conducted. It will allow rhetorical critics to bracket the questions that forestall the study of rhetoric and explore a variety of methodological interstices. This definition can further imbue rhetorical studies with a research status tied to method that it has so desperately sought throughout the twentieth century.

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