

The FORENSIC of Pi Kappa Delta

OCTOBER 1978



The FORENSIC of Pi Kappa Delta

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The President's Message . . .

Tom Harte



LOOKING AHEAD TO ST. LOUIS

In just a few months a unique forensic event will take place. In St. Louis the week of April 8-12, 1979, Pi Kappa Delta will hold its Thirty-First Biennial Convention and Tournament. Now is the time for every chapter to make plans to attend and to be well represented.

A Pi Kap National is unlike any other forensic event you have ever been to. There you will find more than just another tournament, more even than just another "national" tournament. In addition to the customary rounds of competition, an atmosphere of friendliness and good will pervades the convention. Contestants visit with one another between rounds, teams sincerely shake hands at the conclusion of a debate, judges take an active interest in the events they hear, people renew old friendships and make new ones. The schedule, though demanding, is sensible. It permits ample competition in debate

and a variety of individual events, leaves time for a little sightseeing, and also allows for the transacting of the important business of the organization — a process in which every student can participate. It is, after all, at the national convention that the significant policies and procedures of Pi Kappa Delta are established and its chief officers elected. Sometimes the debates which take place on the floor of the convention are a good deal more lively and impassioned than those which take place during regular rounds.

So a Pi Kappa Delta National Convention and Tournament is indeed special. And the one next April in St. Louis promises to be superlative. For example, several contest innovations are planned. Students will be able to enter more individual events than last time, a prose interpretation event and an off-topic debate

(Continued on page 15)

RHETORICAL CRITICISM:

THE QUINTESSENTIAL HUMAN ACT

Richard B. Gregg

Kenneth Burke, one of our outstanding contemporary rhetorical analysts, has declared that all of us are critics. In a sense, of course, he is correct. We cannot help but spend a portion of our time every day interacting with discrimination to a multiplicity of phenomena in our environment. We arrive at judgments, formulate values, and rank preferences in ways that few other forms of life appear capable of performing. Notice that these are activities which involve the reaching of conclusions in light of conscious reasoning. It is this characteristic which differentiates critical activity from subjective and affective response. To say simply that something is good or bad, beautiful or ugly, desirable or undesirable is to describe ourselves more than the phenomenon evoking our response. But if we provide reasons for our response, based upon an evaluation of some kind of data or evidence, we are engaged in critical activity. My purpose in this brief paper is to outline the major dimensions of the activity we call rhetorical criticism, to discuss the kind of judgment rendered by a rhetorical critic, and to indicate why a rhetorical critic is an educator in the best sense of that term.

A logical starting point would seem to be an answer to the question, "What does a rhetorical critic look at for the purpose of making a judgment?" But there is a hidden trap in the question, for one can easily take it to imply that there are certain kinds of objects or phenomena or events that properly lend themselves to the analysis of rhetorical criticism, and other kinds of objects, phenomena, and events that do not. Thus, some scholars have argued in the past that formally prepared public speeches were the proper materials for critical study, whereas informal conversation was not. Some have declared poetry to be solely within the province of the literary critic and hence

outside the purview of the critic of rhetoric. Some years ago, a majority of critics examined only spoken messages to the exclusion of written messages. And until recent years, to think of music or filmic messages or art as rhetoric was clearly an unacceptable idiosyncratic view.

As rhetorical criticism became more sophisticated, these distinctions and dichotomies began to break down. It seems obvious now that all talk, whether it is prepared in advance for delivery in the form of a speech or occurs spontaneously during the interaction of several people, has the potential to persuade. The mere fact that language is put in the form of poetry does not necessarily diminish its capacity to persuade; in some situations its suasive potential is even enhanced. The published newspaper editorial is no less an argument than that presented by an attorney in court. Furthermore, the Charles Manson murders attest to the persuasive power of music; the movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* had a profound persuasive affect on the American viewing audience just prior to World War II; and Joan Mondale's public discussion of the political dimensions of art demonstrates the suasive potential of that medium. In other words, what we have come to recognize in recent years is that such phenomena as language, music, art, architecture, dance, etc. are all symbol systems, invented and constructed by humans to serve various functions and accomplish numerous purposes. We further recognize that these symbolic manifestations, or systems, are made possible by a fundamental capacity for symbolic production which is inherent in human

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intellectual capacity. Finally, we are realizing that all symbols have the potential to function rhetorically; that is, we may be persuaded attitudinally and behaviorally by any symbolic manifestation.

One consequence of the perspective I have just outlined is that we now have a clearer picture of what a rhetorical critic examines and thus a more accurate description of the task of the critic. A rhetorical critic may examine, analyze, and judge the suasive function and potential of any symbolic interaction whatsoever. This is to say that a rhetorical critic is not to be identified by the kinds of messages examined or by the analytical methods employed; rather, as The Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism reported at the National Development Project on Rhetoric in 1970:

Rhetorical criticism is to be identified by the kinds of questions posed by the critic. This position involves a shift in traditional emphases from identifying rhetorical criticism by material studied to identifying it by the nature of the critic's inquiry. Implicit in this shift of emphasis is an expansion of traditional concepts of rhetorical subjects. We shall no longer assume that the subject of rhetorical criticism is only discourse or that any critic studying discourse is *ipso facto* a rhetorical critic. The critic becomes rhetorical to the extent that he studies his subject in terms of its suasive potential or persuasive effect. So identified, rhetorical criticism may be applied to any human act, process, product, or artifact which, in the critic's view, may formulate, sustain, or modify attention, perceptions, attitudes, or behavior.¹

While the phenomena available for study by the rhetorical critic have been considerably extended, it is unreasonable to expect any one critic to become an expert in the analysis of all possible symbolic interactions. There is simply too much expertise demanded by such a task. And there is still good reason to consider the formally prepared public speech the paradigm of rhetorical situations, because it is a message consciously prepared for presentation with a view toward evoking certain kinds of responses in light of particular problems and situations. Furthermore, the message is couched in oral language, which is probably the most versatile human symbolic code. Thus, for the rest of my discussion I shall be assuming a

public speaking situation when I refer to a rhetorical situation. But my concern for the suasive potential of such a message is the same as if I were writing of the rhetoric of art or literature or music.

The act of rhetorical criticism may lead to several different kinds of outcomes. The critic may suggest practical guidelines for achieving communication success with audiences or in light of certain kinds of situations as a result of studying successful and unsuccessful rhetorical interactions. By carefully examining all of the major factors interacting in a rhetorical situation, the critic may arrive at new understandings regarding historical events.² The critic's work may augment our theoretical understanding of rhetorical communication, either by employing some concepts or implications from already developed theory to see whether practical analytical results can be obtained,³ or by arriving at new conceptualizations which have the potential to lead to new theory.⁴

But each of these contributions is derivative from the more fundamental goal of all criticism. As Edwin Black states it, "Criticism is a discipline that, through the investigation and appraisal of the activities and products of men, seeks as its end the understanding of man himself."⁵ From the rhetorical critic's perspective, of course, his generic contribution has to do with providing new insights into human rhetorical behavior. Such insights are concerned with the ways humans create rhetorical symbols in light of circumstances and, in turn, respond to them, the ways rhetorical symbols relate to and shape human thought and behavior, and the functions rhetorical symbols play in the cultural life of a society.

Obviously, though the perspective taken by the rhetorical critic does not include all of human behavior, the critic must be willing to use any knowledge at hand to understand the complexities of rhetorical transactions; history, literature, psychology, sociology, philosophy, political science, anthropology, and other fields of study all have the potential to contribute to a critic's understanding. Obviously too, the critic's work involves not just achieving new understandings for himself but presenting those understandings so that others may learn from

his work. Thus, the critic's objective is preeminently an educational one, *i.e.*, to teach those who read criticism about the nature of human rhetorical behavior. Once again, Edwin Black says it very well:

The critic proceeds in part by translating the object of his criticism into the terms of his audience and in part by educating his audience to the terms of the object. This dual task is not an ancillary function of criticism; it is an essential part of criticism.

However esoterically a critic may write . . . he is always an interpreter, and he means to affect the way in which his auditor will apprehend the object of his criticism.⁶

The rhetorical critic, then, examines and analyzes rhetorical transactions for the purpose of formulating judgments concerning how humans function and respond in such contexts. Once the critical research is completed, the critic faces the task of presenting his judgments to others so that they might better understand rhetorical transactions from what the critic has learned. Our question now becomes, "In what form does the critic make his judgments public?"

There is general agreement with Wayne Brockriede's statement that useful criticism must function as argument. By argument, Brockriede means "the act of evaluating or analyzing experience. A person can function as critic either by passing judgment on the experience or by analyzing it for the sake of a better understanding of that experience or of some more general concept or theory about such experiences."⁷ Whether the critic chooses to pass judgment on a rhetorical event or help achieve a better understanding of it, he must present his conclusions in a reasoned manner, supported by data, so that his audience can understand *why* the critical conclusions were formulated. As another critic puts it, "Obviously, we expect a critical verdict to be in some way conditional upon the reasons offered in its support."⁸

The idea that the critic should present his findings in argumentative form is, itself, entirely reasonable because any act of criticism is an act of interpretation and judgment, and to be acceptable the critic must provide the basis for his interpretations and judgments. To say that criticism is argument does not mean that a critic

must present his findings in the strict form of a legal brief; in fact, the best criticism will not follow such a conventional and often arid format. In written form, a critical essay should appear as a well-written literary essay; in oral form, a critical presentation should take on the characteristics of interesting and imaginative public presentation rather than the kind of mechanistic presentations debaters and some extemporaneous speakers are inclined to deliver.

But no matter what style the presentation takes, to function as argument the critic must include consideration and discussion of the following concerns:

1. What is the rhetorical situation being examined; what makes it a significant situation, or an interesting one, worthy of consideration?
2. What is the purpose of the critic's examination? Does the situation possess unique features; is it an event of significance for some reason; does it promise to reveal interesting insights into human and/or social or cultural life?
3. What kind of critical orientation will be taken? Will the critic examine only the immediate situation or place the event in a broader historical context? Will the critic examine all aspects of the rhetoric or only certain features, such as particular kinds of persuasive strategies or uses of metaphorical appeal? Why?
4. What are the important definitions an audience needs to know in order to better understand the analysis? For example, what does the critic mean by "enthymematic arguments," or "strategies of identification" or "metaphorical appeals"?
5. What kinds of examples, discovered in the rhetorical situation, typically illustrate what the critic found?
6. What kinds of patterns or categories do the data exhibit?
7. What do the patterns and categories mean? What reasons does the critic have for his interpretation of the meaning?
8. What major conclusions about the rhetorical situation can be drawn based on a careful examination of the data in

light of clearly articulated norms for judgment?

9. What do those major conclusions reveal or “teach us” about human rhetorical behavior?

If the critic answers these questions in regard to the rhetoric he is examining, he will have presented his critical judgments in acceptable argumentative and pedagogical form, and his audience will understand clearly what he has found and why.

There is one caveat we must enter regarding the idea that criticism should function as argument. It is not very helpful to view criticism as we do debate, where there are often clear-cut winners and losers. Criticism does not tend to be true or false, or right or wrong in that sense. It is entirely possible for several rhetorical critics to examine the same event, take different analytical orientations to it, and thus arrive at several differing sets of conclusions about the same event. In a case like this, each critical interpretation may be equally valuable, and we may have a much better understanding of the event as a result of the several critiques. Let me illustrate the point.

On the evening of November 3, 1969, President Richard Nixon broadcast an address to the American people that became known as the Vietnam Moratorium Address. The appellation was appropriate, because the speech was planned by the Nixon Administration in response to a national demonstration called by various peace groups to protest the continuing war in Vietnam. The first moratorium was held on October 15, with a second planned for November 15. Nixon’s address, in which he defends the Administration’s policy, thus falls neatly between the two moratorium demonstrations. Four rhetorical critics studied this event thoroughly. Though their judgments differ according to the perspective they took, each of the four illuminates the speech in a useful way.

Robert Newman examines Nixon’s speech from the standpoint of the major policy positions articulated in it, the rhetorical strategies Nixon used while discussing those positions, the language employed by Nixon, and the responses

from differing audiences the speech was likely to evoke. Newman’s conclusions reveal the kind of critical norms he employs. He finds Nixon’s language to be tough and uncompromising; it was the kind of language that painted those favoring withdrawal from Vietnam as extremists and traitors. The argumentative strategies Nixon used were consistent with the language, leading Newman to conclude that Nixon’s rhetoric was the rhetoric of confrontation.⁹ Newman judges Nixon’s speech to be a mistake, given the anxious temper of the time, and further concludes that Nixon foreclosed meaningful policy discussion just when such a discussion was called for:

It was not just the speech that was a political tragedy; the speech merely made visible tragic policy decisions — to maintain the goals and propaganda of the cold war, to seek confrontation with those who want change, to go with a power base confined to white, non-urban, uptight voters. Given such decisions, the shoddy rhetoric, the tough talk, the false dilemmas are inevitable.¹⁰

Karlyn M. Campbell’s rhetorical analysis parallels Newman’s findings to a large extent, though Campbell finds her norms for judgment from within Nixon’s speech itself rather than from external factors. Campbell notes that early in the President’s speech, Nixon told his audience that it must judge the policy he was defending on the basis of truth, credibility, unity, and ethical responsibility. She then applies those very standards suggested by Nixon to the speech itself and concludes that it was so full of contradiction, misrepresentation, and outright distortion that Nixon’s arguments must be rejected on the President’s own criteria. Campbell’s most serious judgment is that Nixon perpetuated a false mythology about America.¹¹

Forbes Hill undertakes a criticism of the same Nixon speech but makes clear that his judgments will be less sweeping in scope than those of Newman and Campbell. Hill employs what he calls a strict Neo-Aristotelian approach which calls for a very specific set of judgments to determine “whether the speaker makes the best choices from the inventory [of rhetorical choices possible] to get a favorable decision from a specified group

of auditors in a specific situation."¹² Hill determines that Nixon was not trying to address all possible audiences but that he was primarily trying to persuade those Americans not ideologically committed to opposing or supporting the war at any cost. Given this target audience, Nixon had to choose those argumentative strategies which would best achieve audience identification with the position he was advocating. With these criteria in mind, Hill reaches the following general conclusion:

[The message] operates from the most universally accepted premises of value and prediction; it buries deep in its texture most promises not likely to be immediately accepted The goals — life, political freedom, peace, and self-confidence — are those shared by nearly all Americans, and connections of policies to them are tactfully handled for the target group In choice and arrangement of the means of persuasion for this situation this message is by and large a considerable success.¹³

Hermann Stelzner adopts a radically different focus for his analysis of the Nixon speech. He observes that in the address Nixon referred to his "quest for peace," calling to mind the archetypal form of "the Quest story" which appears in literature and which is one of the "oldest, hardest and most popular" literary forms. The Quest story, while describing a search for something, presents and orders events to offer an "objective experience of the social, political, or moral life. However, to become viable it must interact with the subjective experience of . . . listeners."¹⁴ Stelzner argues that we get useful insights into Nixon's speech by examining it in light of the Quest form. His analysis reveals that in many ways the address followed the structure of the Quest story but that it had serious shortcomings, because at certain strategic points it did not easily allow Nixon's audience to identify its subjective experiences with the objective reality developed in the speech:

Evaluated in literary terms Nixon's political narrative is obviously not a good Quest story. It is not altogether convincing. There are too many loose ends and too many unanswered questions. It is peopled by flat characters and its language is dull and unimaginative.¹⁵

Clearly, it will not do to evaluate these four critical essays in terms of whether one set of conclusions is better than another; the critical judgments differ because each of these rhetorical critics has chosen to examine the Nixon speech from a different perspective. And each set of judgments must be accepted as valid if the critic has argued for his or her set of conclusions from a thorough, well-illustrated, and carefully articulated examination of the data found in the rhetorical situation, coupled with a reasonable comparison of the data with explicitly stated norms for judging. If one studies the four critiques referred to above, one must conclude that each offers a useful perspective from which to understand Nixon's address, that they are complementary in that they add up to a synthetic position of general agreement, and that by reading all four of them one gets a richer understanding of the rhetorical situation than is possible from reading any one of them alone.

We can now appreciate another reason for describing rhetorical criticism as a pedagogical enterprise. A rhetorical critic is not out to win anything. The critic's primary task is to argue his case in such a way that his audience can better understand rhetorical events. And just as several teachers may offer various productive perspectives for understanding the same subject (sociologists and psychologists will examine human interaction from different viewpoints, for example), so several rhetorical critics may offer varying judgments about a rhetorical transaction.

The key to the evaluation of rhetorical criticism has to do with whether a critic argues his case well. And the criteria for the evaluation of criticism parallel the concerns a critic must have which were stated above:

1. Has the critic clearly identified the rhetorical event to be examined? Has he indicated why the event is worth examination?
2. Has the critic clearly stated the purpose of his or her investigation? What will be asked about the rhetorical situation that might lead to interesting answers?
3. What kind of orientation does the critic

- propose to take toward the rhetorical situation?
4. Has the critic clearly defined the important terms and concepts we need to know in order to understand the analysis?
 5. Has the critic provided us illustrations of what typifies the rhetorical situation in light of the analytical questions being asked?
 6. Has the critic identified and explained the patterns and categories of data which may be found in the rhetorical situation?
 7. Has the critic interpreted the meaning of the patterns and categories and also provided reasons for those interpretations?
 8. Has the critic articulated the norms to be used for arriving at major conclusions about the rhetorical situation?
 9. Has the critic articulated the major conclusions and discussed what those conclusions reveal about human communication behavior?

If we can give an affirmative answer to all of these questions, we have good reason to conclude that the critic has accomplished a reasonable job. Then we are faced with judgments about critical faculties which are the most difficult to explain but which may make all the difference. Rhetorical criticism is an art, not a science. This means that ultimately the critic must call upon his sensitivity and his imagination, his knowledge about human affairs generally, and his ability to present his thinking to others in order to carry his task to completion. Somehow these characteristics of the individual critic must be brought to bear in the task of analysis and presentation of results if the critic is to achieve more than just a mechanical job. There are no clearly established guidelines for evaluating these characteristics. But most of us can recognize when a critic has so employed his own artistic qualities that the answers he provides are enlivened with his own sense of insight and purpose and when he can so extend that insight and purpose that we may all learn from it. Thus, rhetorical criticism which engages in the analysis of what is most characteristic of human behavior is itself a quintessential human act.

¹Thomas O. Sloan, et. al., "Report of The Committee on the Advancement and Refinement of Rhetorical Criticism," in Lloyd F. Bitzer and Edwin Black, eds., *The Prospect of Rhetoric* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), p. 220.

²See for example, Richard B. Gregg, "A Rhetorical Re-Examination of Arthur Vandenberg's 'Dramatic Conversion,' January 10, 1945," *QJS*, 61 (April 1975), 154-68.

³See Roderick P. Hart, "Absolution and Situation: Prolegomena to a Rhetorical Biography of Richard M. Nixon," *CM*, 43 (August 1976), 204-28.

⁴See John Waite Bowers, "The Pre-Scientific Function of Rhetorical Criticism" in Thomas R. Nilsen, ed., *Essays On Rhetorical Criticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), pp. 126-45.

⁵Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1965), p. 9.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁷Wayne Brockriede, "Rhetorical Criticism As Argument," *QJS*, 60 (April 1974), 165.

⁸Lawrence W. Rosenfield, "The Anatomy of Critical Discourse," *SM*, 35 (March 1968), 55.

⁹Robert P. Newman, "Under the Veneer: Nixon's Vietnam Speech of November 3, 1969," *QJS*, 56 (April 1970), 172.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹¹Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "An Exercise in the Rhetoric of Mythical America" in her *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric* (Belmont, Calif.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), pp. 56-57.

¹²Forbes Hill, "Conventional Wisdom — Traditional Form — The President's Message of November 3, 1969," *QJS*, 58 (December 1972), 374.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 384.

¹⁴Hermann G. Stelzner, "The Quest Story and Nixon's November 3, 1969 Address," *QJS*, 57 (April 1971), 163.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 172.

The Cover: Backgrounded by the Chase-Park Plaza, the National Council poses in Forest Park, the site of the 1904 World's Fair. Back row, left to right: Larry Norton, historian; Joe Low, local convention officer; Roger Hufford, Council member; Ted Karl, secretary-treasurer. Seated, left to right: Darrell Moore, student member; Jack Starr, vice-president; Carolyn Keefe, *Forensic* editor. Front row, left to right: Evan Ulrey, past president; Phyllis Bosley, Council member; Roselyn Freedman, Council member; Jill Leuhrman, student member; Tom Harte, president. Photo by Barry Mandel of The Mandel Studio, St. Louis.



The Secretary's Page . . .

Theodore O. H. Karl

Memberships Down — Hopes Up

By the time you read your *Forensic*, the National Council will have met in St. Louis during the second week of August. On other pages of this issue, many of the decisions regarding the National Convention next April will be discussed. I, for one, am looking forward with much excitement to the St. Louis Convention. The facilities are the best we have had since we moved the convention from the campus to a hotel location. The City of St. Louis is rich in American heritage, with many places, both old and new, to see on the day assigned for that purpose. To make the convention a smooth-running affair, the Council has attempted to make many decisions in the interest of all. Not the least of these arrangements has to do with the host province and their representatives. From the standpoint of this office, never has greater cooperation been offered. Our tasks will be easier to accomplish with the assistance of the Province of the Missouri.

On another page of this issue, the annual audited report of this office will appear, giving the financial status of the

organization as of July 31, 1978. At first glance it appears that we are healthy, but please understand that the one item listed under RECEIPTS as interest is received only once in four years. It is the interest earned from our four-year Certificate of Deposit, which we hold in reserve. The checking account balance would, in other years, be about one-half of the figure listed. Aside from this one item, the fact remains that the only real source of income is membership.

During the month of September we send out the Fall Report and the invoice for the annual chapter dues. Most of the chapters accepted the responsibility of payment of these dues as the 1977 National Convention in Seattle instituted, effective August 1, 1977. If your chapter did not respond to the invoice last year, you will find the amount added to your 1978-79 invoice.

As you can well understand, memberships do not arrive in great numbers during the first three months of the school year, and yet it is during that time that

(Continued on page 30)



**In the summer
of '78 the**

PKD National Council met

and made decisions in the

Chase-Park Plaza of St. Louis.

For some of the outcomes,

see the next two pages.

