

# Using Methods/Theories/Schools in Criticism



# Two Definitions of Method

Method is one of those English words with both a greek and a latin root

- Greek: technique for doing something: “follow these steps”
- Latin: a systematic framework for understanding: “be methodical”



# Methods in narrow sense always present in criticism

- Rules for observation
  - Example: How to establish a reliable text?
- Rules for writing
  - Example: How to support an argument?



# Method in another sense may be present in varying degrees

- As a philosophy of criticism
  - Brockriede “Rhetorical Criticism as Argument”
  - Rosenfield “The Experience of Criticism”
  - Klumpp & Hollihan “Rhetorical Criticism as Moral Action”
- As a structuring framework
  - Using a theory as a method
  - Most frequently disciplines the way we think about a rhetorical act



# Using Theory as *Method*

- Theory as Criteria
  - Formal Criticism: The theory specifies *what a good speech is*
  - Forbes Hill on Richard Nixon
- Theory as Structural Frame
  - To *pose critical questions* (usually descriptive/interpretative)
  - Birdsell, “Ronald Reagan on Lebanon and Grenada ...”
  - Then, a strategy for reporting insight



# Using Theory as *Method*

- Theory as Hypothesis
  - Way of explaining relationships
  - Not so much organizational as *to fix insight*
  - Klumpp and Hollihan (Butz) on competition among explanations
- Theory as Perspective
  - Overall frame for understanding: *assumptions*
    - Neo-Aristotelian: Speakers address audiences
    - Burkean: Symbols mediate encounters with experience
  - May not appear in essay, but shapes the understanding



# Using Theory in *Writing*

- Become a . . .ian
  - You use a method as a hallmark of your criticism
  - Fisher and narrative
  - A thorough use of vocabulary, relationships, and key moves typical of the theory
  - Theory becomes a method



# Using Theory in *Writing*

- Become a . . .ian
- Organizational Device
  - A way of organizing the major questions driving your study and arraying them
  - Logical power comes from relationships of the theory
  - Birdsell





# Using Theory in *Writing*

- Become a . . .ian
- Organizational Device
- Setting a background for the rhetorical action
  - The theory provides a structural scheme against which the rhetoric plays
  - Bormann, Fantasy Theme, and the Puritans
  - Note the theory is set forth first and the analysis follows, slavishly dependent on the theory



# Using Theory in *Writing*

- Become a . . .ian
- Organizational Device
- Setting a background for the rhetorical action
- Analogical (Metaphorical) strategy
  - You use the image of the theory to manifest the relationships of the rhetoric
  - Need not carry all the assumptions of a full theory with you
  - Takes theory less seriously than other strategies
  - Scott & Klumpp: rhetoric as advisory



# Using Theory in *Writing*

- Become a . . .ian
- Organizational Device
- Setting a background
- Analogical (Metaphorical) strategy
- Detheorizing Theory through Criticism
  - Theory provides the understanding, not the vocabulary or expression
  - The object is to convert theoretical understandings into common explanations, w/o jargon, w/o special definitions of terms
  - The rhetorical act provides an illustration without the baggage of theory



# Why a Critic NEEDS Theory

- Dialectic between Critic and Artifact
  - Rosenfield *luminosity*
  - A critic kneads the artifact
- Theory creates sensitivities
  - Burkean recalcitrance
  - Matching explanation with insight
  - Systematic frameworks for understanding (vocabulary, relationships)
- The richer your sensitivities the better critic you can be



# How can you develop your sensitivities?

- Catalog those methods!
- Multiply those theories!
- Read, read, read criticism
- Black, “A critic is someone who does criticism.”



# Using Criticism to do Theory

- Some argue: purpose of crit - test theory
  - Hart (But see Darsey and Hart's reply)
  - “Theory” in mechanistic sense (social science)
- If so
  1. Identify and explicate the theory
  2. Apply the theory to the object of crit
  3. Significant claim: refute the theory
- Problems
  - Single instance c/n generalize



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