

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

Brian James Gogan

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Bernice L. Hausman  
Paul V. Heilker  
Kelly E. Pender  
Katrina M. Powell

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## ABSTRACT

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 sophistic 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 at certain historical junctures.

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## Chapter 1:

## Introduction and the Case for Rhetorical Method

On September 26, 2009, the Milwaukee Art Museum debuted *Andy Warhol: The Last Decade*. The show was billed as the first exhibition in the United States to survey the work that Warhol “produced during the final years of his life,” years that arguably constituted “the most productive period of his career” (“Andy Warhol”). It included enormous works, some of which were fifteen-feet tall and others of which were thirty-five long. Following its stint in Milwaukee, the show traveled east to the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, the Brooklyn Museum, and the Baltimore Museum of Art. It was received well.<sup>1</sup> Mary Louise Schumacher, art and architecture critic for the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, deemed the show to be “a sophisticated one.” *New York Times* reviewer Roberta Smith complimented the show for its attempt “to come to terms with the full range of Warhol’s best late work.” According to *New Yorker* critic Peter Schjeldahl, the pieces included in the exhibition “stand up to the strongest art made by anyone else, anywhere, at the time.”

I attended *Andy Warhol: The Last Decade* before its closing in Milwaukee, and I too enjoyed the range and integrity of the pieces that it included. Its sophistication also impressed me. I was particularly struck with the way this show—a survey of the most productive period for the most product-driven twentieth-century artist—emphasized Warhol’s process in order to offer a new assessment of the artist and his art. This emphasis was not lost on critics who, like Smith, noticed the way in which the show “retraces the evolution of the paintings on view and the increasingly close collaborative

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<sup>1</sup> Roberta Smith was largely critical of the staging of the exhibit at the Brooklyn Museum. She had more concerns with exhibition’s layout at the Brooklyn Museum than with the actual pieces included in the exhibition.

methods of Warhol and his studio assistants.” Among the pieces which captured my attention and the attention of many art critics was a set of twelve small rectangular canvases, each displaying distorted radial shapes in patina greens and turquoise blues that dissolved into lustrous golds and bright coppers. The twelve canvases were assembled into a roughly four-foot by four-foot square with impressive effect. Critics call the piece “ravishing,” “striking,” and “visually arresting” (Smith; McCabe; Schumacher). One critic went so far as to note its “Apollonian beauty” (McCabe). I, too, was captivated by the piece. Critics frequently compare the puddling effect of this piece to the drip effect in Jackson Pollack’s work (Smith). Yet, the critical understanding of this piece changes when the method which Warhol used to compose it is considered. These twelve canvases, Warhol’s *Oxidation Painting (in 12 parts)*, are also referred to as one of Warhol’s “Piss Paintings,” having been composed with a “brush-free method” that consisted of individuals “urinating on canvas treated with metallic copper paint” (Smith). A consideration of Warhol’s “brush-free method” opens this piece up to a myriad of interpretations, with critics speculating that Warhol was responding to Pollack, parodying Pollack, or experimenting with his methods, so as challenge his associations with a mechanistic silk-screening method (McCabe; Schumacher; McCabe).

The exhibition is, in the end, notable, not as much for the way in which it presented an artist’s methods (arguably, this emphasis is commonplace in art exhibitions) as it is for the way in which it targeted method so as to question critical interpretation. The show seemed to recognize that interpretations of Warhol, whether favorable or unfavorable, often rely upon an understanding of his method as resembling an assembly line: Warhol, the Pop Artist, cranked out silkscreened paintings like a machine. By

focusing on Warhol's later methods, brush-free or otherwise, the show suggested a way in which Warhol might be understood differently. In other words, the exhibition called for a renewed critical attention to the methods the artist used to guide his composition, and it is the same call that I will be issuing throughout this project.

In this project, I argue for renewed critical attention to what I refer to as rhetorical method, or the procedures a rhetor uses to guide composition. Rhetorical method is a concept that emphasizes the importance of composition processes (broadly defined to include writing, speaking, and painting, among many others), as well as composition products. This concept, as I will elaborate it, ought to be an important one in rhetorical studies—a broadly conceived rhetorical studies that encompasses all individuals for whom rhetoric is an area of scholarly interest, including those individuals who would identify more closely with rhetoric and writing and those individuals who would identify more closely with rhetoric and speech—for it invites a reassessment of how rhetorical criticism works.

### Criticism, Method, Object, and Rhetorical Method

From its beginnings, rhetorical criticism has, as Sonja Foss observes, concerned itself with method (“Constituted” 36). Method can be understood as a process, as Jim Kuypers illustrates when he defines method as “a particular manner or process for accomplishing a task” (14). Some rhetorical critics, including Kuypers, conceive of method broadly and consider criticism to be a method. Kuypers lists criticism as an example of a humanistic method, which he contrasts with more rigid and highly replicable scientific methods (14). Similarly, Lester Thonssen and A. Craig Baird offer a

general definition of rhetorical criticism as “a process or method.” (*Speech* 16). However, other rhetorical critics, such as Marie Hochmuth Nichols, Barnet Baskerville, and Dilip Gaonkar, conceive of method in more specific terms and align method with a particular perspective. For these scholars, criticism encompasses many different methods, and these critical methods have, as Baskerville notes, proliferated (“Rhetorical” 116). Different counts put the number of critical methods in rhetorical criticism well above fifty.<sup>2</sup> Listed among these critical methods are the Neo-Aristotelian method, the Burkeian method, and the Marxist method.

Despite the many different types, critical methods all seem to carry out the same function in rhetorical criticism: Critical methods are processes applied to a rhetorical object. A critic uses method to get at a text, to interrogate a phenomenon, to evaluate a movement. Method can, in other words, be understood as the counterpart to the rhetorical object. As Dilip Gaonkar explains in his influential “Object and Method in Rhetorical Criticism: From Wichelns to Leff and McGee,” the dialectical relationship between critical method and rhetorical object has fluctuated within twentieth-century rhetorical criticism. Gaonkar traces many articulations of the method-object relationship, presenting a history of twentieth-century rhetorical criticism as associated with rhetoric and speech. According to Gaonkar, Herbert Wichelns’s “The Literary Criticism of Oratory” describes a relationship between method and object, in which the rhetorical object is privileged, the nature of rhetoric is prefigured, and the critic is, therefore, committed to a particular approach or method.<sup>3</sup> In sum, Wichelns favors the object at the expense of method. Gaonkar contends that Wichelns’s elevation of the object over method led to two types of

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<sup>2</sup> See Jasinski’s reference to the Malton Index (“The Status” 253).

<sup>3</sup> Gaonkar admits that this reading is unorthodox, although he makes a strong case for it.

responses. Whereas the first type of response followed Wichelns in privileging the object over method, the second type of response defended the autonomy of method over that of the object.<sup>4</sup>

Chief among the second type of responses—those that favored method over object—was Edwin Black’s *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*. In Gaonkar’s history, Black’s text is described as the text that “free[d] the critic from the domination of the object,” as well as the text that most fully articulates the response: “the object can no longer master the method” (“Object” 303). By embracing method, Black’s text ushered in a plurality of critical methods. As Gaonkar notes, a plurality of critical methods was deemed to be the only way rhetorical critics, in aggregate, could accomplish “the task of mastering and making intelligible the bewildering variety of objects that constitute rhetoric” (303). Beyond merely reversing the dialectic, Black’s text “snapped” the connection between method and object (303). Black’s text moved to make method autonomous and, in Gaonkar’s opinion, it succeeded (303). Black’s text was so influential that James Jasinski, in “The Status of Theory and Method in Rhetorical Criticism,” discusses it as establishing “method-based analytic criticism” as “the norm” for rhetorical criticism (“The Status” 251). By the accounts of both Gaonkar and Jasinski, Black’s text issued an understanding of critical method that aligns with the longstanding notion that a method is “a procedure for attaining an object,” where “attaining” refers to possessing, grasping, or analyzing an object (“Method”). For Black, the ideal rhetorical critic accounts for how a rhetorical object works, and the critic, through method, “means

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<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Gaonkar suggests that critical method predetermines the rhetorical object—that, once a critic selects a method, the critic selects the way in which the rhetorical object is understood. Scholarship in rhetorical studies has, of course, flipped this centuries-old relationship between method and object, and argued that the object masters the method. See McGee as well as Barnett et al.

to affect the way in which his [*sic*] auditor will apprehend the object of his [*sic*] criticism” (*Rhetorical Criticism* 18; 6).

Although Black primarily discusses the word *method* as process for accessing, analyzing, or disclosing a rhetorical object, he also appears to deploy the word *method* in a second sense. Rather than asserting method’s autonomy from the rhetorical object, this second sense of the word *method* suggests that there is a kind of method that might contribute to, or be coextensive with, the object. As Jasinski acknowledges, Black’s foreword to the 1978 edition of *Rhetorical Criticism* suggests that critical methods lack objectivity, for they admit the personality of the critic into the act of criticism (“The Status” 266). In that same foreword, Black outlines a continuum of methods: objective methods, such as those a geometrician would use to calculate circumference from diameter; pseudo-objective methods, such as those a surgeon would mobilize to perform an appendectomy; and, wholly contingent methods, such as those used by a musician to compose a sonata (*Rhetorical Criticism* x). After outlining the three methods, Black compares a rhetorical critic’s use of method to the musician’s use of method, contending that “criticism, on the whole, is near the indeterminate, contingent, personal, end of the methodological scale” (xi). It is through this comparison, however, that Black reveals the way in which the musician uses method in a different sense than the geometrician, the surgeon, or even the critic.

All four methods, critical method included, clearly constitute processes or procedures. A difference emerges, however, when the ability of each of these procedures to be applied to an object is considered. As Black details, the geometrician applies a method to a problem, the surgeon applies a method to a body, and the critic applies a

method to rhetoric. Yet, the musician does not apply method to an object. Rather, the musician employs method like a muse to create a composition. In describing the wholly contingent methods of the musician, Black writes that “there are methods that require personal choices at every step, methods that are pervaded by contingencies” (*Rhetorical Criticism* x). The composition of a sonata serves as his example, and he references “the procedures that figured into the composition” of that sonata (xi). Here, Black invokes a more arcane sense of the word *method*, in which method may be considered “a mode of procedure in any activity” or “a set of [...] procedures proper to a particular, practical art” (“Method”). Black’s example of the musician implies that there are methods that contribute to the constitution of the object. Nonetheless, Black remains careful not to subsume method under the object. He has not, in other words, acceded to the position of those who privilege object over method. Instead, by suggesting that method serves a heuristic role in generating the object, he suggests an alternate kind of method, what I refer to as rhetorical method.

Rhetorical method, as I define it, refers to the procedures a rhetor uses to guide composition. In its most orderly manifestations, rhetorical method equates to a rigid marshaling of moves that approaches arrangement; it approximates the definition of method most often associated with rhetoric: “The effective marshaling of thoughts and arguments for exposition or literary composition” (“Method”). In its most fluid manifestations, rhetorical method equates to a relaxed heuristic that approaches invention. Regardless of how it manifests itself, though, rhetorical method poses problems for critics, in that the procedures followed by a rhetor cannot be entirely revealed by the critic—after all, they may not even be known to the composer. Black

acknowledges this critical problem in his discussion of the sonata composer. According to Black, “[o]ne may be able to say subsequent to an act of composition, ‘This is a sonata that has been composed,’ but one may be unable to describe any of the procedures that figured in the composition” (*Rhetorical Criticism* xi). The way in which Black resorts to the third-person “one” and the hypothetical “may” can be read as not only diffidence and equivocation, but as an admission that his example treads upon unfamiliar critical, and methodological, ground. Put more straightforwardly, Black tells readers that a critic can claim with relative certainty that a given product was produced by a process; however, the critic’s description of the process is a far less certain critical enterprise. Black recognizes that rhetorical method confounds the critical enterprise, in that it resists, at least to a degree, the critical ability to analyze the processes which contribute to the rhetorical object. The acknowledgment that a given rhetorical method resists a given critical method’s attempt to describe process, in turn, reveals the flaws inherent to critical method: Criticism cannot capture the capacity of rhetoric to slip, shift, drift, rupture, and resist as it attempts to produce meaning.<sup>5</sup>

Black, for his part, too easily abandons a discussion of rhetorical method and an investigation of how it can contribute to rhetorical criticism. If the scholars in rhetorical studies who follow Black’s lead (by privileging method over object) ignore rhetorical method, then they will foreclose certain interpretations. As Black outlined it, ideal criticism apprehends the rhetorical object and “demands nothing but full disclosure” (*Rhetorical Criticism* 18). However, if critics disregard rhetorical method, they will abandon Black’s ideal and they will also be preempted into conceiving of rhetoric solely

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<sup>5</sup> This is a different limit than the one suggested by Black himself (ie. that criticism invites personality and it cannot be considered objective).

as a product. As such, critics will ascribe to a position wherein texts function as interpretive touchstones, and this is the position to which Gaonkar assigns critics like Michael Leff. By privileging the text as a product, critics risk overlooking the processes with which a given text has been, is, or will be involved. Rhetorical method asks these product-focused critics to consider the process that leads to the product.

However, rhetorical method is also an important consideration for those scholars who favor object over method, those scholars who do not follow Black's lead. These critics, who have followed Wichelns by focusing on the rhetorical object, have, according to Gaonkar's history, viewed the rhetorical object as involving multiple processes. Here, Gaonkar offers Michael Calvin McGee as an example of a critic who links the object of criticism to the material and social processes with which rhetoric is inextricable.

McGee's work proposes to collapse texts into contexts, so as to acknowledge that all rhetorical objects are fragments, the whole of which will be impossible for the critic to grasp, possess, or attain ("Object" 287). Indeed, processes factor heavily into McGee's work and his understanding of rhetoric. As Gaonkar observes, McGee views rhetoric as "a material social process that constitutes (or generates) a wide range of objects" (291). While McGee does acknowledge process, the social and material bent of McGee's notion of process functions like a critical method. Gaonkar also notes that McGee's understanding of rhetoric predisposes him to a method, which interprets a diffuse object through material and social approaches.

The difference between McGee's understanding of process and the inventive understanding of process captured by the concept of rhetorical method is illustrated by a sampling of McGee's claims. For instance, McGee asserts that "rhetors *make* discourses

from scraps and pieces of evidence” (“Text” 279). Here, his admission that “rhetors *make* discourses” seems to correspond with the notion of rhetorical method. However, his addendum that discourses are made “from scraps and pieces of evidence” focuses critical attention upon the materiality of rhetoric. All processes are, in other words, not equal in McGee’s process-focused approach. Moreover, McGee’s orientation towards social process leads to assertions, such as “Writing makes no sense unless there are readers” (281). Here, McGee aligns “sense” with interpretive processes and forecloses the possibility of an inventive process guided by sense, logic, or procedure. The concept of rhetorical method challenges the limited notions of process under which McGee’s criticism functions and, instead, opens critics up to interpretations based upon the wide range of processes that a rhetor uses to guide composition.

When rhetorical critics—regardless of whether their criticism prefers method or object—consider rhetorical method, they embrace the potentialities of interpretation. The concept of rhetorical method counters critical method, and attests to the importance of process for the rhetor, as well as for the critic. Indeed, paying attention to the procedures a rhetor uses to guide a composition provides new perspective on individuals whose methods have been overlooked or flatly categorized as unwavering, unimpressive, or unintelligible; that is, rhetors such as Jean Baudrillard.

### Rhetorical Method, Reputation, and Interpretation

The case of Jean Baudrillard illustrates the importance of rhetorical method to rhetorical criticism. In the following pages, I review three treatments of Baudrillard, arguing that the pieces of criticism that engage more fully with Baudrillard’s rhetorical

method offer stronger arguments, that the pieces that interrogate the processes behind a composition forward more comprehensive and more convincing claims. At stake in my discussion of these three pieces of criticism is the degree to which critics of Baudrillard forward well-supported interpretations of Baudrillard's rhetoric. As my review will show, critical engagement with rhetorical method is all the more important given the critical propensity to base interpretive claims upon a prepackaged understanding of a rhetor's reputation.

Rhetorical method can provide a new perspective on rhetors whose compositional methods have been overshadowed by their reputation. Critical interpretations of Baudrillard often base claims upon a prepackaged understanding of Baudrillard as a cross-disciplinary postmodern rhetor. This reputation overshadows the interpretations of his rhetoric and conditions the critical interpretations of him: his reputation precedes him and forecloses interpretation. In other words, Baudrillard's reputation functions as a major premise under which criticism follows deductively.

Fundamentally, Baudrillard possesses a reputation as a rhetor with an extensive rhetorical prowess. Before his death on March 6, 2007, he had written over forty-five books, given countless interviews, released at least two photography exhibits, and assembled a cult following rivaling that of any one of his contemporaries. Ryan Bishop claims that Jean Baudrillard was "[e]ver the protean rhetorician," and this claim seems merited, regardless of whether rhetoric is defined as a product or whether rhetoric is defined as a process (5). When rhetoric is considered to be a textual product qua Leff, Baudrillard is seen as the individual who produces the books, speeches, and photographs that are received by audiences. Indeed, this understanding of rhetoric is captured in

Richard J. Lane's observation that Baudrillard was "a writer and speaker whose texts [were] performances, attracting huge readerships or audiences" (1). When rhetoric is considered to be a process that involves many interconnecting dynamics qua McGee, Baudrillard is seen as a fragmentary part of these intersections. This understanding of rhetoric appears in William Bogard's description of Baudrillard as an individual who "cannot stand outside his own milieu," but "instead, he traces the ways objects and events pass through that milieu" (315).

In addition to his reputation as a rhetor, Baudrillard also maintains a reputation as an individual whose work epitomizes postmodernism. The name *Baudrillard* and the label *postmodernist* are, according to Gary Genosko, synonymous (*McLuhan* 88). When Baudrillard is not viewed as a synonym to postmodernism, he is considered sovereign to it. In 1989, *Marxism Today* ordained Baudrillard "the high priest of postmodernism" (qtd. in Merrin 54). As Stephen Best and Douglas Kellner explain, "Baudrillard eventually identified with the postmodern turn and was crowned as high priest of the new epoch" (111). The understanding of Baudrillard as a postmodernist runs rampant throughout much of the literature that introduces scholars to his thought. For instance, anthologies frequently pair selections from Baudrillard with selections from Jean-Francois Lyotard or Frederic Jameson, two other thinkers who are also commonly labeled postmodernists. These pairings further appear in many scholarly articles. It is not uncommon, for instance, to read an article, chapter, or book that treats Baudrillard and then proceeds to Lyotard or Jameson.

Baudrillard's reputation as a synonym for postmodernism or as sovereign to it conditions the way in which his rhetoric is interpreted. Critics often invoke the

commonplace definition of postmodernism as a condition or a period that elevates *style* over *substance*, *form* over *content* when they address Baudrillardian rhetoric. By prescribing the relationships among the four terms of *form*, *content*, *style*, and *substance*, the commonplace definition of postmodernism compels criticism of Baudrillard to work within and around the *style-over-substance* and the *form-over-content* binaries. This preconceived understanding of the nature of his rhetoric forecloses interpretative possibilities. Criticism of Baudrillard often deprecates the terms that are deprecating in the postmodern binaries, *substance* and *content*. Quite frequently, *substance* and *content* fall out of scholarly discussion regarding rhetoric unless they are invoked with reference to their relationships with the other two terms, *style* and *form*. Sometimes, the two separate binaries—*style-substance* and *form-content*—are collapsed into one monolithic binary, in which *substance* and *content* are merged as synonyms, and subsumed under *style/form*. This monolithic binary forecloses interpretation even more, as any difference between *style* and *form* or *substance* and *content* are effaced.

Finally, Baudrillard is widely regarded as maintaining a cross-disciplinary appeal. Baudrillard himself asserts that his “work has a transversality, a cross-disciplinarity” (Hunter 287). He explains that his work required him to move across disciplines and that “it forced a cross-disciplinarity on [him]” (*Passwords* 4). Baudrillard further categorizes his work as “reducible to no particular discipline” (*Passwords* 4). Kellner and Coulter are two Baudrillardian scholars who corroborate Baudrillard’s assessment of his own work. For example, Kellner refers to Baudrillard as a “transdisciplinary theorist” whose work influences “a diverse numbers of disciplines” (*Jean* 53). Kellner also claims that “Baudrillard’s work cuts across the disciplines and promotes cross-disciplinary thought”

and that Baudrillard “challenges standard wisdom and puts into question received dogma and methods” (“Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007)” 25). As Gerry Coulter comments, “Baudrillard’s work is theory, theory that challenges theory and while doing so passes through many disciplines” (“Reversibility”). Indeed, individuals who draw upon Baudrillard hail from departments of sociology, history, art, architecture, French, English, communication studies, gender studies, film studies, new media studies, cultural studies, writing studies, and rhetorical studies, among others.

When cross-disciplinary interpretations of Baudrillard are compared, interpretations of Baudrillard appear to be remarkably consistent in their invocation of the four terms of *form*, *content*, *style*, and *substance*. This consistency indicates that cross-disciplinary critics are largely favoring the Baudrillardian rhetorical object (presupposed to be a postmodern rhetorical object on account of Baudrillard’s reputation) over their own disciplinary methods.<sup>6</sup> Here, the idea is that different disciplines employ different methods and ostensibly these different methods would lead to different findings that are articulated differently. However, these methodological distinctions in approach, findings, and language are largely absent in the criticism of Baudrillard, indicating a general lack of attentiveness to method among interpretations of Baudrillard.

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<sup>6</sup> Most fundamentally, an academic discipline can be defined in terms of what it studies or how it studies it. In other words, the defining characteristics of a discipline could be described as either object or method. In the criticism of Baudrillard, the rhetorical object proves uniform. For instance, take Baudrillard’s *Simulacra and Simulations*. *Simulacra and Simulations* constitutes a rhetorical object that has been studied in many disciplines. Regardless of the discipline, the text *Simulacra and Simulations* does not change. The Baudrillardian object thus seems to travel across disciplines, in the same way that one film might be studied by individuals in history and in gender studies. Since the object of their criticism remains the same, the different disciplines that interpret Baudrillard would seem to only distinguish themselves on account of their different disciplinary methods. For instance, a history scholar might interpret *Simulacra and Simulations* in terms of its portrayal of the Vietnam War, while a gender studies scholar might interpret *Simulacra and Simulations* in terms of its construction of gender.

Significantly, Baudrillard's reputation as a cross-disciplinary, postmodern rhetor is as an interpretation in and of itself. But, as I will show, it often functions as the premise upon which various claims about Baudrillardian rhetoric are articulated. The argumentative chain seems to take Baudrillard's reputation as a given and the interpretation follows. Here, a consideration of rhetorical method would shift the focus of interpretation from the critic's reception of a rhetor's prepackaged reputation to the critic's construction of a rhetor's reputation through an investigation of that rhetor's rhetorical method. In other words, the critic avoids asking the question: How is this rhetor's reputation received? Instead, the critic asks the question: How does an investigation of the processes that a rhetor uses to guide a composition help construct that rhetor's reputation?

#### Bryan S. Turner's "Cruising America"

In his 1993 "Cruising America," sociologist Bryan S. Turner offers an interpretation of the rhetoric manifested in Baudrillard's *America* and, to a lesser degree, *Cool Memories*. This essay is important for the way in which other Baudrillard scholars have referenced it. In particular, Richard J. Lane draws upon Turner's essay as a basis for his claims about Baudrillard's writing strategies. Lane suggests that "many of the reactions to Baudrillard have been to do with his style of writing" and Lane impugns Baudrillard as "partly to blame for this travesty, because he has situated himself as an intellectual precisely at the level of style or fashion as a way of writing at the limits of the hyperreal" (127). Lane reads Turner's essay as an analysis of Baudrillard's style and regards Turner's interpretation "as a guide to virtually all of [Baudrillard's later] texts"

(Lane 129). In other words, Lane considers Turner's interpretation to be a rhetorical map for Baudrillardian critics.

The map that Turner provides critics, if Lane's claim is to be accepted, comprises a nearly circular argument that only gestures towards rhetorical method briefly. Turner contends that two of Baudrillard's texts, *America* and *Cool Memories*, capture "the postmodern mood" by encouraging readers to "cruise" through texts and practice a superficial form of interpretation (106). However, the superficial postmodern interpretive strategies that his argument explicitly endorses are not the same ones that he uses in his criticism. Turner's interpretation digs below the surface of a text to the point where it acknowledges rhetorical method. Although Turner stops short of engaging with the procedures that Baudrillard used to guide his composition of *America* and *Cool Memories*, Turner's brief gesture towards rhetorical method reveals an argumentative inconsistency between his argument and his own interpretative strategies.

Turner claims that Baudrillard's *America* should be received "within a particular tradition of European critical analysis of America" and that Baudrillard's text should be "admired and praised" for the way that it captures the postmodern experience (152; 159; 154). Turner positions Baudrillard's text in what he refers to as a "transatlantic critical tradition," in which Europeans assess the state of America (151). Yet, he carefully notes that Baudrillard's *America*—which "has been either dismissed or received with a deal of criticism"—is, along with *Cool Memories*, also a part of the short form tradition that Turner connects to La Rochefoucauld's *Maximes et Memoires* (151). Linking Baudrillard's texts to these two traditions, Turner suggests that the texts, which are situated at the crossroads of the transatlantic critique and the maxim, constitute rhetoric

that might be volatile to critics, namely academic scholars. Indeed, he notes that the texts are “offensive to academics, especially serious academics” (152). Regardless of their poor reception, Turner interprets these two texts as quite amenable to scholarly study.

In his interpretation, Turner argues that Baudrillard’s texts participate in a “postmodern cruising through America,” and this argument is assured its support by a critical move that places Baudrillard, rhetoric, and the Baudrillardian rhetorical object within a postmodern paradigm. The contention becomes nearly circular with Turner arguing that texts (composed by rhetor whose name is synonymous with postmodernism) are postmodern. Moreover, he follows the binary relationship associated with a presupposed understanding of the postmodern, articulating his findings with the terms *style*, *form*, and *content*. To justify his interpretation of the two texts as exhibiting a postmodern cruising, Turner suggests thinking about Baudrillard’s *America* and *Cool Memories* “from the point of view of their style” (152). When he examines the works in terms of their style, he discovers four “ingredients” in Baudrillard’s writing (155). According to Turner, style constitutes the most prominent of all the ingredients in Baudrillard’s writing. He surmises that, in Baudrillard’s writing, “style, or form, is everything; content and matter are diversions” (155). This claim operates under the monolithic postmodern binary, in which style and form are synonymous and elevated above content/substance. Some pages later, Turner invokes this binary definition again as he discusses the maxim. He observes that “form subordinates content” (156). Indeed, style and form *are* really everything in Turner’s interpretation, for the other three ingredients in Baudrillard’s writing—repetition, hyperbole, and nonlinear sequence—could all be rhetorically categorized as components of style or form.

But even in this piece of criticism, which uses a conflated style/form to argue that Baudrillardian rhetoric “expresses the postmodern mood,” Turner invokes the concept of rhetorical method, or the processes a rhetor uses to guide composition (106). As Turner develops his analysis of Baudrillard’s texts, his interpretation begins to confront Baudrillard’s rhetorical method by suggesting that *America* follows the method of the Situationists, a group that influenced Baudrillard. Turner further explains that *America* “appears to avoid any simplistic critique of American values” and, indeed, that “conventional methods of enquiry are fatuous” given Baudrillard’s assessment of society and his comments about critique in his previous work (152). Thus, Turner traces a lineage of Baudrillard’s earlier work and influences, in order to vaguely suggest that the unconventional methods of the Situationists guided Baudrillard’s composition of *America* (152). Admittedly, the importance of rhetorical method seems slight in this passage. However, its importance to Turner’s interpretation increases further along into his essay. For instance, when he contrasts the two texts, Turner refers to *Cool Memories* as “a clever, but disconnected, set of notes” and he compares it to *America*, which “appears to have more organization and is self-consciously designed as a text with an audience in mind” (152). Here, Turner’s reference to Baudrillard’s design of *America* again gestures towards the processes that “self-consciously” guided Baudrillard during the composition of *America*. Later in the article, Turner admires the “carefully constructed form” of the maxim (156). Rhetorical method appears most strongly in this piece when Turner discusses the four ingredients in Baudrillard’s writing. First, Turner notes that, “[w]hen art historians want to indicate a certain self-conscious artistry, they talk about the ‘painterly’ qualities of a creative artist” (155). Then, Turner asserts that “Baudrillard is

extraordinarily “writerly” (155). Thus, Turner acknowledges the “self-conscious artistry” in Baudrillard’s *America* and *Cool Memories*. He implies that “reflexivity and writerly qualities” exude from the texts. This claim most convincingly extends back beyond the rhetorical products and into Baudrillard’s processes of composition (155). Here, the way in which Turner’s criticism flirts with the concept of rhetorical method is unmistakable.

Unfortunately, Turner refrains from engaging with rhetorical method more fully. Turner’s interpretation reaches an impasse; he seems reluctant to engage with the concept of rhetorical method behind the texts and he stops short of allowing his references to Baudrillard’s self-conscious method, careful construction, and mindful design of texts to actually impact his interpretation of Baudrillardian rhetoric. However, the underlying presence of rhetorical method in Turner’s criticism reveals a larger inconsistency in Turner’s argument. Turner’s treatment of *America* and *Cool Memories* analyzes the characteristics of cruising that each text exhibits. Cruising, as Turner defines it, is “a trivial exercise”; it “does not intend to interpret;” it “is pointless, aimless, and unproductive” (152; 153; 153). Turner argues that readers “can cruise through” these two texts, “sampling the style” (155). But, as much as Turner encourages critics to cruise through and sample the style of Baudrillard’s texts, Turner cannot avoid providing an interpretation of these texts. In other words, Turner’s criticism does much more than sample style. His interpretation reveals cruising to be impossible for the critic as he himself provides an initial foray into an interpretation of Baudrillard’s rhetorical method.

Catherine Constable’s “Postmodernism and Film”

In her 2004 contribution to *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodernism*, film studies scholar Catherine Constable argues that the accounts of postmodernism forwarded by Jean Baudrillard and Frederic Jameson impact film studies and affect film theory and history. Constable's article dedicates its first section to an interpretation of Baudrillard, its second section to an interpretation of Jameson, its third section to a discussion the tensions between modernism and postmodernism in film studies, and its fourth section to an analysis of the 1997 film *Face/Off*. While the central claim in this article—that accounts of postmodernism impacts film studies—is so general that it is unimpressive, each individual section contains much more specific claims supported by insightful interpretation. In its first section, Constable's article invokes Baudrillard's reputation as a postmodern rhetor in order to dismantle the presupposition about postmodern rhetoric. To explode the binary of *style-over-substance*, Constable briefly addresses Baudrillard's rhetorical method, demonstrating the way in which rhetorical method enables stronger argumentative claims than those claims based on presuppositions. Constable, however, abandons the line of argumentation associated with rhetorical method only to collapse back into preconceived notions of Baudrillard and his rhetoric.

Constable's treatment of Baudrillard traces the apocalyptic figurations of reality-as-film that occur throughout Baudrillard's oeuvre. She argues that these postmodern metaphors of circulation incite critical debate. Thus, she offers a meta-critical commentary on Baudrillard, as he is received through apocalyptic postmodern metaphors. Constable notes, for instance, that "Baudrillard's nihilistic presentation of the postmodern continues to provoke considerable critical debate within academia" (46). In her estimation, "it is hard to judge the status of [Baudrillard's] assertions" on account of the

“relish with which Baudrillard presents his apocalypse” (46). Noting the critical tendency to treat Baudrillardian rhetoric as science fiction, she attributes the indeterminate status of Baudrillardian rhetoric to Baudrillard’s style. According to Constable, “[t]he refusal to treat Baudrillard’s work as theoretical is a common critical response and serves to draw attention to particular problems created by his style” (47). Thus, Constable’s review of criticism of Baudrillard focuses on the presupposed nature of postmodern rhetoric as elevating *style* over *substance* and, ultimately, how the postmodern paradigm overshadows Baudrillardian rhetoric.

Constable’s gloss of the criticism of Baudrillard suggests her dissatisfaction with various interpretations of Baudrillardian rhetoric that have been foreclosed by his reputation as a postmodernist. She is quick to acknowledge the problem of Baudrillard’s reputation and the insufficient interpretations produced by it. According to Constable, “reading Baudrillard’s texts as symptomatic of a postmodern valorization of style over substance (however tempting) is ultimately inappropriate because the style *is* the substance” (47, original emphasis). Here, it becomes apparent that Constable only invokes to the postmodern binary of *style-over-substance* in order to dissolve the binary. Her argument champions aesthetic monism, in which no distinction can be made between *style* and *substance*. While this argument is familiar to rhetoricians who study *style*, it is a bold assertion in the context of past treatments of Baudrillardian rhetoric. Constable’s argument works deductively—from the premises that Baudrillard is a postmodern rhetor and postmodern rhetoric elevates *style* over *substance*—only to refute that deduction. Constable argues that critics should abandon the major premises from which they work

deductively and, instead, consider *style* and *substance* to be one entity in Baudrillardian rhetoric.

To support this argument, Constable invokes Baudrillard's rhetorical method as a means by which critics can reassess Baudrillard and consider him a rhetor belonging to a tradition that extends back to Nietzsche. Constable contends that "Baudrillard presents himself as one of Nietzsche's successors" (47). More precisely, she suggests that Baudrillard and Nietzsche share a rhetorical method. As Constable notes, the connection between the two rhetors resides in their "mode of writing philosophy" (47). Here, the phrase "mode of writing" gestures towards the concept of rhetorical method, or the procedures a rhetor uses to guide composition. Constable describes the mode of writing shared by these two rhetors as the adoption of an overt rhetoric that draws attention to the status of their writings (47). There is, in other words, a rhetorical confluence in the way in which each rhetor composes his text. Constable states that Baudrillard and Nietzsche can both "be seen to adopt" their similar modes of writing, and it is in this statement—Constable's interpretation of the rhetors' processes—that the critic acknowledges rhetorical method. Constable argues that Baudrillard's writing functions "to provoke a response, forcing the reader to rise to the challenge that he presents" (47). Accordingly, Constable's interpretation positions Baudrillard as a rhetor whose writing is more purposeful and deliberate in its aim than the stylistic play commonly associated with postmodernists.

Constable's argument briefly invokes rhetorical method to combat Baudrillard's reputation as a postmodern rhetor and the presuppositions which follow from that reputation. Unfortunately, Constable's engagement with rhetorical method is too

transitory to sustain her claims. After arguing against claims that Baudrillardian rhetoric elevates *style* over *substance* in a postmodern fashion, Constable retreats into commentary about Baudrillard's *style* and his position as a postmodernist. She claims that Baudrillard merely adds "to the theoretical debates concerning the postmodern" and constructs himself "as the self-styled bad boy of the postmodern theorists" (47). Evading the possibility that Baudrillard might be known as something other than a postmodernist and that postmodern rhetoric might consist of something other than *style*, Constable appears to fall back into the very interpretations that she argued against. In the end, she seems too complacent with describing Baudrillard as the "self-styled bad boy of postmodern theorists" (47).

William Merrin's *Baudrillard and the Media: A Critical Introduction*

In his 2005 *Baudrillard and the Media: A Critical Introduction*, media and communication studies scholar William Merrin stresses the importance of method in any act of criticism and positions method as a critical tool accomplishing four goals: (1) forwarding the Baudrillardian critical project; (2) emphasizing Baudrillard's sociological lineage; (3) promoting an understanding of Baudrillard within his home discipline; and, (4) applying Baudrillard's work to contemporary media phenomena.

Within the first few pages of his book, Merrin abandons Baudrillard's prepackaged reputation as a postmodernist. In no uncertain terms, Merrin declares his critical "rejection of Baudrillard's positioning as a postmodernist," a repudiation that he explains through a description of his approach to criticism of Baudrillard (7). In other words, he attributes his willingness to reject the postmodern description of Baudrillard to

his own critical approach. Merrin describes his critical approach as an approach that “unfolds,” allowing for deficiencies in Baudrillard’s work while maintaining an openness to its critical value (6). Merrin stakes his critical ground early and associates himself with a group of Baudrillardian critics that includes Mike Gane, William Pawlett, and Paul Hegarty. As Merrin explains, he strives to encounter Baudrillardian rhetoric on a critical ground that is more hospitable than the “merely negative” adversarial approaches practiced by Douglas Kellner and Christopher Norris (6). By rejecting Baudrillard’s postmodern reputation and encountering Baudrillard more hospitably, Merrin fulfills two of the purposes that he outlines for his treatment. First, he forwards the Baudrillardian critical project by offering different interpretations of Baudrillard and Baudrillardian rhetoric. Second, he repositions Baudrillard by emphasizing the criticism that traces his sociological lineage and ignoring the criticism that focuses upon his connections with postmodernism.

This treatment of Baudrillard explicitly considers method by further foregrounding “the question of methodology,” which, according to Merrin, “animates all of [Baudrillard’s] work” (9). Merrin contrasts Baudrillard’s method with empirical methods. In Baudrillard’s “anti-empiricist methodology,” Merrin locates an important similarity between Baudrillard and Marshall McLuhan (61). He even claims that the “question of method [...] is central to understanding Baudrillard’s work, its critical status and its aims” (43). In Merrin’s work, there is a strong move to apply Baudrillard’s method to other disciplinary objects. Merrin wants his treatment of Baudrillard “to demonstrate the value of this [Baudrillardian] media theory for media and communication studies” (150). He claims that Baudrillard’s most important contributions

to media studies are methodological; that Baudrillard's methodology contributes to "a critical model whose relevance and ease of application to a variety of contemporary media phenomena are easy to recognize" (157). Here, the word *method* is used with respect to a critical method—one that can be applied to analyze a rhetorical object or phenomenon. Thus, Merrin's turn toward method enables him to work towards the additional, self-stated goals of promoting an understanding of Baudrillard within his home discipline and applying Baudrillard's work to contemporary media phenomena.

While some of his references to Baudrillard's method clearly align with critical method, other invocations of the word *method* seem to suggest that Merrin is also concerned with rhetorical method, or the processes a composer uses to guide a composition. For example, Merrin refers to Baudrillard's theoretical methodology and notes that, for Baudrillard, "[t]heory is a process of invention" (158). Here, Merrin suggests that Baudrillard draws upon theory as a rhetorical method, or a procedure for inventing arguments, texts, events, and phenomena. This reference is Merrin's closest attempt at engaging with rhetorical method through the term *method*. Most often, he distinguishes Baudrillard's method from Baudrillard's writing, listing writing and methodology as two distinct entities. Subsequently, Merrin implies that writing and method are not connected; that the method (or methodology) to which he refers is not rhetorical method (55, 150). Nonetheless, Merrin's discussion of the similarities between McLuhan and Baudrillard manages to confront the concept of rhetorical method. Appearing reluctant to engage with rhetorical method, Merrin's interpretation relies upon the terms *style*, *form*, and *content*. Merrin claims that the two theorists "share a similar writing style, both employing the form of their writing as part of their philosophy" (60).

Although the relationship between *style* and *form* remain ambiguous in this claim, his elaboration of the claim reveals that he conceives of *style* and *form* as independent critical terms. For Merrin, style refers to ornamentation and form approximates genre. For example, when he explains McLuhan's style, he offers a list of ornamental figures and strategies including metaphors and puns (60). Likewise, he notes that Baudrillard has been recognized for employing "a specific writing style" (61). Additionally, when Merrin explains Baudrillard's *form*, he catalogs a list of genres including reviews, essays, poetry, aphorisms, interviews, and lectures (61). According to Merrin, McLuhan also mobilized form to reach his reader (61). In this interpretation of McLuhan and Baudrillard, *style* and *form* are allowed to stand alone as independent critical terms, further suggesting that Merrin's interpretation does not presuppose the nature of rhetoric.

In his comparison of McLuhan and Baudrillard, rhetorical method—although it proceeds unnamed—emerges as one of the Merrin's central concerns. Merrin asserts that, for both Baudrillard and McLuhan, "critical content and form are inseparable as part of a coherent and unified, career-long strategy of writing and thinking" (61). In this assertion, Merrin makes two moves. First, he champions the view of aesthetic monism, in which *form* and *content* cannot be separated. In doing so, he resolutely rejects the presupposed understanding of rhetoric as operating in accordance with the binary that pits *form* against *content*. Second, he associates the rhetoric of both Baudrillard and McLuhan with a longstanding method, or what he describes as "a coherent and unified, career-long strategy" (61). In other words, Merrin argues that Baudrillard and McLuhan are similar in that they both maintain a longstanding rhetorical method. According to Merrin, the

rhetorical methods of each theorist span their respective careers and impact their writing as well as their thought.

Ultimately, Merrin's interpretation forwards a strong argument that meets his goals because it explicitly focuses on Baudrillard's method. Although it does not name Baudrillard's rhetorical method as such and, indeed, often considers writing and methodology wholly separate entities, Merrin acknowledges the role rhetorical method plays in interpretation. Merrin's criticism recognizes the importance of the strategies deployed by a rhetor during composition, even if it does not provide those strategies the most comprehensive treatment.

#### Rhetorical Method and Critical Reconsideration

My analysis of these three pieces of cross-disciplinary criticism of Baudrillard demonstrates the way in which rhetorical method appears essential to the interpretive strength of each critical argument. Each of these three pieces confront situations in which Baudrillard's reputation as a cross-disciplinary, postmodern rhetor precedes him and conditions particular interpretations of his rhetoric and they do so in very different ways. Turner's article seems comfortable issuing an almost circular argument that contradicts his own approach to criticism. Constable's argument attempts to dissolve the presuppositions about the nature of rhetoric that are attached to Baudrillard's reputation as a postmodern rhetor, only to revert back to those same arguments. Merrin's book breaks away from a preconditioned interpretation by concentrating on method. However, in all of these pieces of criticism, rhetorical method emerges as an extremely important concept. In each of these pieces of criticism, rhetorical method provides key

argumentative evidence upon which major interpretive claims are built and, in each of these treatments, the soundness of the argument seems to be associated with the degree to which each critic engages with rhetorical method. For Turner, glancing references to Baudrillard's self-conscious writings appear inconsistent with his endorsement of interpretive cruising. For Constable, vague references to Baudrillard's mode of writing, his adoption of particular writing practices, and his purpose in writing are not strong enough to prevent an argumentative return to preconditioned or foreclosed interpretations. For Merrin, a deliberate focus on method and a particular attention to Baudrillard's coherent writing strategies facilitate an interpretation that meets his critical goals and avoids interpretive foreclosure.

My analysis of these three interpretations reveals that addressing rhetorical method is fundamentally important to critical work on Baudrillard and that addressing method has the potential to challenge preconceived notions of a rhetor's ethos. My reading of these three interpretations suggests the value of rhetorical method as a critical concept. Moreover, my reading intimates that a more substantive and more sustained critical engagement with rhetorical method would substantially shift rhetorical criticism by asking two questions: (1) How does rhetorical method work to construct a rhetor's reputation? (2) More generally, how have we formulated our critical judgments?

These two questions constitute questions that are widely applicable to all types of criticism and all types of compositions. As I have demonstrated, considering rhetorical method asks critics to reconsider the foundations for their interpretive claims. To emphasize this point, I return to my opening discussion of the exhibition *Andy Warhol: The Last Decade* and Warhol's "Piss Paintings." I began this chapter by suggesting that

interpreting the rhetorical method an artist, in this case Warhol, uses to compose a particular piece of art alters the critical understanding of both the art and the artist. I then carried this suggestion through to the case of Jean Baudrillard for the remainder of the chapter. In both of these cases, my claim has remained the same: When critics interpret the rhetorical methods a rhetor uses during composition, new understandings of the rhetor and the rhetoric are made possible.

As individuals who are familiar with Baudrillard's writing will have recognized, my pairing of Warhol and Baudrillard was quite deliberate, for Warhol and his art—what could, by some definitions, easily be called his rhetoric—receives much criticism in the writings of Jean Baudrillard. Indeed, Baudrillard interprets Warholian rhetoric in no less than fifteen of his publications. Baudrillard's interpretations of Warhol and his rhetoric are at the same time critical and complimentary. Baudrillard acknowledges a sort of shrewdness in Warhol's work, but he also regards Warhol's method of composing art with disdain. Above all else, Baudrillard's criticism of Warhol is derived from his understanding of Warhol's rhetorical method.

In the essay "Machinic Snobbery," Baudrillard contends that "[m]odern art had gone a very long way in the deconstruction of its object, but it is Warhol who has gone furthest in the annihilation of the artist and the creative act" (79). Baudrillard argues that Warhol has become his rhetorical method in the most rigid sense of the concept, in which method becomes so orderly that it is mechanical. This understanding of rhetorical method is clearly an extreme understanding of the concept that sits in contradistinction to an understanding of rhetorical method as fluid and organic. For Baudrillard, the mechanical

method defines Warhol. According to Baudrillard, Warhol has morphed into his machine-like rhetorical method. “Warhol *is* a machine,” proclaims Baudrillard (78).

In the end, Baudrillard’s definition of Warhol as a machine relies upon his interpretation of Warhol’s rhetorical method. Baudrillard interprets one of the infamous Pop Artist’s rhetorical method as follows: “Warhol starts out from any old image, eliminates the imaginary dimension and makes it pure visual product” (“Machinic” 78). For Baudrillard, Warhol’s method makes him emblematic of unchecked production and a proliferation of copied products. As Baudrillard sees it, this production and proliferation voids Warhol’s status as an artist and, instead, positions him as a machine. On the one hand, Baudrillard seems enamored with Warhol’s ability to mechanistically produce silkscreens so prolifically. In Baudrillard’s estimation, the sheer scope of this process retains the potential to radically confront disciplinary standards and boundaries. Baudrillard writes that the “point of his work is a challenge to the very notion of art and aesthetics” (81). On the other hand, Baudrillard appears disgusted by Warhol’s method. His essay is partly an “interminable polemic” that addresses Warhol’s “complicity with the media or the capitalist system” (83).

Baudrillard, for his part, plays his competing interpretations of Warhol—Warhol as a challenge to convention and Warhol as complicit with convention—against one another. Nonetheless, Baudrillard’s interpretive play is predicated upon his understanding of Warhol the machine-like rhetor, who works in a small factory studio churning out piece after piece, silk screen after silk screen, through a process that resembles an assembly line. In spite of his ambivalent interpretation of Warhol and Warholian rhetoric, the fact that Baudrillard exhibits a keen concern about the processes which guide

compositions might, at least for some readers, be a startling revelation in and of itself. By reading Baudrillard's criticism of Warhol and recognizing the attention that Baudrillard pays to rhetorical method, an individual might arrive at a new perspective regarding Baudrillard, his reputation, and his rhetoric.

The same interpretive ambivalence that occurs in Baudrillard's essay seemed to also occur at the Warhol exhibition that I attended in 2009 and described in this chapter's opening. I was at the time and I continue to be particularly impressed with the way in which this exhibition opened up a space for new understandings of Warhol. It showed that Warhol's mechanistic method was one method among many. Indeed, investigating rhetorical method opens up new interpretive possibilities and new perspectives. In turn, these possibilities and perspectives require the critic to more carefully construct interpretive arguments. Thus, rhetorical method affords the critic more interpretive options, while simultaneously requiring more rigorous interpretive supports and more sound argumentative foundations. After having attended the exhibit and considering the way in which interpretations of rhetorical method allow critics to forward alternate interpretations of a rhetor and his or her rhetoric, I cannot help but wonder as to whether Jean Baudrillard was ever aware of Warhol's later works and the methods—including the brush-free method—that forged those works. One can only speculate as to how an understanding of Warhol's different rhetorical methods might have compelled Baudrillard to offer wildly different kinds of interpretations of Warhol.

## Chapter 2:

## Rhetorical Method and Rhetorical Questions

In the previous chapter, I called upon critics to deliberately engage with the concept of rhetorical method and demonstrated the way in which rhetorical method manifests itself in cross-disciplinary pieces of criticism. As I defined it, the concept of rhetorical method encompasses the wide variety of compositional procedures and processes that may guide a rhetor. Rhetorical methods may be unidentifiable to the rhetor who tacitly deploys these procedures during composition, may serve as inventive heuristics that a rhetor loosely references during composition, or may operate as a set of moves arranged quite rigidly by a rhetor during composition. While my survey of the cross-disciplinary criticism of Baudrillardian rhetoric implied that Baudrillard drew upon processes which guided his compositions, I stopped short of articulating any of Baudrillard's rhetorical methods.

This chapter demonstrates the way in which an understanding of rhetorical method opens up new understandings of rhetors and their rhetoric, by critically engaging Jean Baudrillard's dominant rhetorical method: *exchange*. I draw upon the concept of rhetorical method to argue that Baudrillard was a highly methodical rhetor, a rhetor whose method was more rigid than fluid. As I demonstrate, Baudrillard's dominant rhetorical method—a method derived from his reconfiguration of the rhetorical paradigm and his understanding of language—guides his writing and his photography. To support my argument, I leverage Baudrillard's metaphorical and processual descriptions of exchange against one of his last writings: the 2007 book *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared? (Why)*. According to Toby Lichtig of the *Times Literary Supplement*,

*Why*'s "effect is one of obscurity in all its senses." However, my analysis of *Why* argues the contrary—that *Why* actually make sense in all of its obscurity. As I show, an analysis of *Why* that considers rhetorical method reveals that Baudrillard remained remarkably consistent in his method, even when the phenomena to which he responded shifted. When critics consider *Why* in terms of Baudrillard's rhetorical method, they come to view the text as a highly methodological attempt to rhetorically initiate exchange in the face of the posthumanist turn in thought. Such an analysis positions Baudrillard as a serious theorist who deliberately challenges the fundamental premises of communication, rather than an obscure stylist who is difficult to read.<sup>7</sup>

### Rewriting Rhetorical Paradigms

Rhetorical methods are often dependent upon a rhetor's configuration of rhetoric, and Baudrillard's dominant rhetorical method is built upon a radical rhetorical paradigm that ignores reception. Under the conventional rhetorical paradigm, a rhetor and an audience negotiate the meaning of a message through the production and reception of text. Convention holds that a rhetor produces rhetoric and an audience receives that rhetoric. Meaning is made, negotiated, and perhaps changed during the transit of the text. To be sure, there are dozens of variants to this conventional sender-receiver rhetorical paradigm. Some variants explicitly reject the idea of the rhetor's agency, while others complicate the notion of audience. A third group of variants interrogate the status of the text. However, even these variations insist that meaning is made through complex activities and intricate negotiations that occur external to the text.

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<sup>7</sup> Reconsidering Baudrillard's positioning as a theorist might, in turn, compel the reconsideration of other thinkers. As Mike Gane suggests, "Perhaps Baudrillard will force people to reread a number of writers—McLuhan, Nietzsche—who are often thought to be unreadable" (*Baudrillard: Critical 3*).

In this externally focused rhetorical paradigm, criticism and interpretation occur in conjunction with the reception of a text. In the case of a written text, readers constitute the receivers, the interpreters, and the critics. Since the textually mediated writer-reader relationship comprises the fundamental hermeneutical relationship under the conventional rhetorical paradigm, it is perhaps unsurprising that much of the scholarship discussing Baudrillard's writing focuses on Baudrillard's readers, namely the way in which they receive his writing.<sup>8</sup> In other words, reader reception of Baudrillardian writing assumes a prominent role under the conventional rhetorical paradigm. Readers receive Baudrillard's writing tepidly, often with a penchant for scathing reviews, and scholars have primarily addressed these inflammatory receptions and unfavorable portrayals by attempting to reform the practice of reading Baudrillard. Arthur Kroker, for instance, describes a method of panic reading and Mike Gane details a reader-response trajectory that moves from naiveté to criticism to balance. Both of these approaches offer successful and satisfactory methods for rectifying highly unsavory, or simply confused, receptions of Baudrillard and his writing by focusing on the act of reading. This focus on reading adheres to the conventional rhetorical paradigm, yet it simultaneously obscures the fact that Baudrillard works under a different rhetorical paradigm.<sup>9</sup> In fact, in *Why*, Baudrillard suggests that the rhetorical assumption that lumps humans together as “unwitting

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<sup>8</sup> This focus on the relationship between readers and writers is understandable for two reasons. First, this writer-reader relationship is integral to the dominant, materialist theory of language, where the writer-reader relationship approximates the producer-consumer relationship in a content-dependent knowledge economy. Second, the hermeneutical paradigms which accompanied readers' receptions of some of Baudrillard's most (in)famous writings often privileged reality, as was the case with new historicism, or the reader, as was the case with reader-response theory. Thus, the dominant critical milieu when Baudrillard was writing seemed to endorse the materialist theory of language, as well as the relationship between writer and reader.

<sup>9</sup> In *Baudrillard and the Media*, Merrin explains Baudrillard's writing in terms of a “spiralling of semiotic and symbolic forces” (101). Obviously, Merrin's invocation of the figure of the spiral adds a complexity to rhetoric that is not conventionally attributed to the rhetorical triangle.

transmitters and receivers” is “aberrant” and hegemonic (44). Baudrillard, for his part, considers the conventional rhetorical paradigm to be so deeply flawed that he abandons it.

In a departure from the conventional rhetorical paradigm, Baudrillard considers meaning to be made—and challenged—in accordance with a significantly revised rhetorical paradigm. For Baudrillard, meaning is made and challenged within a text, so that readers are consequently excised from the rhetorical paradigm. As such, reader-focused approaches to explaining Baudrillard’s writing run contrary to Baudrillard’s own approach. Indeed, he repeatedly repudiates interpretation and criticism. According to Baudrillard, interpreters of texts handle signs that are in a sort of “fallen” state (*Perfect*73). Making it clear that he does not participate in the derivative act of interpretation, he unequivocally declares: “I don’t interpret anything” (*Art* 34).<sup>10</sup> Also, criticism constitutes an enterprise that is “unhappy by nature” (*Perfect* 104). Baudrillard’s dismissals of interpretation and criticism are indicative of the way in which he appears to completely ignore his readers, often to the peril of his reputation. His readers might be confused, frustrated or infuriated with his writing, but Baudrillard enjoys writing, stating that “writing has always given me pleasure” (*Baudrillard Live* 179). His comments from this same 1991 interview evidence his view that writing does not need readers for external validation. In that interview, he disregards his readers and unabashedly declares: “I just write for myself” (*Baudrillard Live* 182).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The distinction between analysis and interpretation has been expounded elsewhere. See Kuypers, Jasinski, and Black’s *Rhetorical Criticism*.

<sup>11</sup> To reframe the distinction: Baudrillard finds pleasure in writing. In a 1991 interview, Baudrillard states that “writing has always given me pleasure” (*Baudrillard Live* 179). The problem, however, is that reading Baudrillard’s writing seldom gives readers pleasure. Rather, Baudrillard’s writing often confuses, frustrates, or infuriates readers—so much so that these negative receptions taint Baudrillard’s reputation.

As a writer who writes for himself, Baudrillard has been recognized by Bryan S. Turner as being “extraordinarily writerly” (155). If scholars agree with Turner’s assessment that Baudrillard is a writerly writer who remains unconcerned with readers, then scholars need to engage Baudrillard’s writing not as writing meant to be read, but instead as writing meant to be written: Baudrillard’s writing needs to be engaged as acts of writing compositionally guided by inventive and organizational processes.<sup>12</sup>

### Agonistic Theories of Language

Rhetorical methods are often built upon a rhetor’s theory of language, and Baudrillard’s dominant rhetorical method relies upon an exchange between language theories. By extracting the receiver from the conventional rhetorical paradigm, Baudrillard locates the act of writing in between two theories of language. Both theories define language in terms of its relationship to meaning and value, not to the receiver. Subsequently, both theories render the receiver as inconsequential to the operation of language. Together, these theories hold that language, words, and signs make and challenge meaning irrespective of a receiver. The first theory attempts to mobilize language in a way that generates meaning and creates value. Baudrillard refers to this first theory as the materialist theory of language: *Language uses words as “things” to produce meaning, meaning is consumed, and valued is established.* The second theory attempts to void any value attributed to language, and Baudrillard calls this theory the

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<sup>12</sup> Baudrillard’s rejection of the conventional, externally oriented view of rhetoric and his preference for a radical, internally oriented view of rhetoric leaves him susceptible to the charge that his rhetoric is more akin to a poetics. The relationship between rhetoric and poetics is beyond the scope of this chapter, but notable discussions of this relationship can be found in Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* and Gaonkar’s “The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science.”

anti-materialist theory of language: *Words are not things, and language and materiality attempt to eradicate one another.*<sup>13</sup>

The difference between the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language might otherwise be understood in terms of representation. The materialist theory of language forwards a strong conception of representation through a sign system, in which a signifier (some “thing”) represents and refers to a signified (some “matter”). The anti-materialist theory of language not only works against representation and reference, but also works against presentation (existence). More than simply questioning a representational relationship, the anti-materialist theory of language conceives of language as antagonizing the presence of matter. The correspondence, which is characteristic of representation and reference, is replaced with defiance.

Whether it is an act of writing or an act of photography, Baudrillard situates rhetoric at the juncture of the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language. Rather than transmitting a message between a sender and a receiver as the conventional rhetorical paradigm would have it, rhetoric, in this sense, enables movement between both theories and facilitates an antagonistic exchange between the making of meaning and the challenging of meaning. Of course, in any act of rhetoric—an act of writing or an act of photography—there are material and immaterial aspects, yet rhetoric distinguishes itself from the theories of language which are being exchanged. For instance, take the rhetorical activity of writing. Baudrillard acknowledges that there is a material aspect to the act of writing: pen ink or pencil lead marking paper.<sup>14</sup> He also

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed description of these two theories, see *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (233-8). See also *The Ecstasy of Communication*.

<sup>14</sup> Baudrillard calls this the “formal materiality of expression” (*Perfect* 104). By drawing attention to it, Baudrillard draws attention to the physical relationship that a writer enters into. In *Paroxysm*, Baudrillard

recognizes that the act of writing always grapples with an “allusive force” of indeterminacy, a “juggling with meaning” that occurs during an expression (*Perfect* 104). However, these interpretations of certain components of the act correspond to the particular theories of language, but do not describe the rhetorical activity. Thus, the act of writing is not predisposed to either theory of language and is distinctive for its activity—its rhetorical activity.

Baudrillard envisions any act of writing as establishing a relationship between the two competing language theories, one materialist and one anti-materialist. By outlining this particular role for writing, he also fundamentally explains his dominant rhetorical method, and that method is *exchange*. Baudrillard’s writing aims to develop an ambivalent rhetorical space in which both theories of language can engage in an exchange relationship. His purpose—the initiation of exchange—guides his compositions on a fundamental level. Significantly, though, exchange is not teleological, as it is a movement that has no end or no ultimate goal. Rather, exchange is methodological, as it is an unfolding and ongoing process that has no end. Exchange is Baudrillard’s most dominant rhetorical method, for Baudrillardian rhetoric strives to initiate and sustain exchange, to maintain the agonistic relationship between the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language.

To better explain Baudrillard’s rhetorical method of exchange and the way in which an act of writing engages the materialist and anti-materialist theories of language

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elaborates upon these relationships. Baudrillard seems to approve of writing relationships that involve a pen and paper, or even a typewriter, yet Baudrillard does not condone the relationship (or lack of one) established between a writer and a computer (*Paroxysm* 31-2). See also *Cool Memories II*, in which Baudrillard states: “Word-processing as the artificial paradise of writing” (12).

in exchange, I turn to a metaphor that he himself relies upon in his own discussions of exchange. This metaphor compares exchange to a two-sided game.

### The Two-Side Game of Exchange

Baudrillard's rhetorical method can be understood through the metaphor of a two-sided game between what he calls appearance and disappearance. Appearance and disappearance describe the two theories of language that Baudrillard outlines as the materialist, or representational, theory and the anti-materialist, or exterminatory, theory. The materialist theory creates appearances, while the anti-materialist theory creates disappearances. Metaphorically, rhetoric facilitates a back-and-forth competition—or exchange—between the two sides engaged in the game. Baudrillard draws upon the two-sided game metaphor when he implores writers “to play the whole game,” or to play in both appearances and disappearances (*Baudrillard Live* 181). He declares: “You’ve got to be able to make them appear as well as disappear; to play the whole game. Writing is nothing but that” (*Baudrillard Live* 181).

Baudrillard remains adamant in his view that writing involves both appearance and disappearance, so much so that he admits that his own writing attempts “to make things appear or disappear” (*Baudrillard Live* 182). On the side of appearance, Baudrillard partakes in writing as the practice is conventionally understood by assuming a place as a knowing subject who creates meaning.<sup>15</sup> In many instances, it is the meaning that he makes as a writer that elicits highly unfavorable receptions from readers. Readers are familiar with writing as appearance and implicitly understand this side of the game as

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<sup>15</sup> As Gerry Coulter notes in *The Baudrillard Dictionary*, when Baudrillard's “writing produced ‘meaning’ it was to ‘play meaning against the system itself’” (“Writing” 240).

an act of meaning making; they, therefore, expect Baudrillard to play the game of writing by the rules of representation. As Baudrillard notes, “[e]veryone prefers to lend credence to reality, to sincerity, to the honesty of writing” (*Fragments: Cool Memories* 7). Readers expect that his writing will be a straightforward, mostly effortless read (*Cool Memories II* 17-8). They look for the content, the meaning. Problems arise when the meaning of Baudrillard’s writing is so outrageous that readers simply cannot get past it—the meaning sticks with them; it remains with them; the meaning becomes the remainder of Baudrillard’s writing. Baudrillard is aware of this risk, but he seems to consider this risk inherent to this side of the writing game.

Appearance is the conventional side of the writing game and can become so conventional that it is boringly commonplace—so much so that Baudrillard refers to it as banal. Appearance’s conventionality contributes to what Baudrillard calls an “impatience with writing” and allows him to suggest that appearance participates in the accelerated production processes which permeate society (*Cool Memories II* 17-8). A connection exists for Baudrillard between conventionality and efficiency. He intimates that appearance has seized upon overwrought conventionality and has cultivated an expedient shorthand that works to anticipate; its purpose is not to merely make meaning, but rather to make meaning appear self-evident.<sup>16</sup> The shorthand of appearance leaves no time for the writer to explain, convince, or predict, for time displaces the writer as a knowing subject, dates writing, and renders thought insufficient. Appearance aims only for the rapid production of meaning, a “precession of thought which has no other aim [*fin*] than to precipitate events [*precipiter les choses*]” (*Cool Memories II* 17-8). Excessively

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<sup>16</sup> Since the purpose of appearance, as Baudrillard explains, “is never proof,” the shorthand of appearance is not a logical shorthand (*Cool Memories II* 17-8); it is neither the shorthand that appears in an Aristotelian enthymeme, nor the shorthand that undergirds a Toulmin warrant.

conventional and rapidly profuse, appearance attempts to precede events, and writing that works predominantly in appearance is both banal and uneventful.

On the other side of the writing game, disappearance, Baudrillard writes in order to obliterate meaning and remove himself from the position of the subject (*Art* 33). Most readers do not typically understand writing as working against meaning and, consequently, this side of the writing game proceeds undetected. Baudrillard even admits that, although readers “thoroughly understand the rules of production,” readers do not understand “the rules of this particular game” (*Baudrillard Live* 180). Rather than flaunting the subject, writing as disappearance requires the isolation of the object (*Art* 34). Instead of representing reality, writing as disappearance both *provokes* and *challenges* reality (*Baudrillard Live* 205). Most readers, if for no other reason than habit, interpret disappearance as appearance. Confusion ensues when Baudrillard’s readers do not detect this side of the game and mistakenly consider provocation to be gross misrepresentation. However, if readers do not preoccupy themselves with meaning and if the writer executes disappearance successfully, no meaning will remain. As Baudrillard says of disappearance, “it leaves no traces (when it is done successfully)” (*Fragments: Cool* 59).

Whereas appearance is characterized by hasty shorthand that unites the banal and the uneventful to make meaning, disappearance is characterized by radical invention that mounts an extreme challenge to meaning. According to Baudrillard, the role of writing that predominantly deals in disappearance is to go to extremes (*Baudrillard Live* 180). Disappearance abandons the concept of the knowing subject and instead embraces the radicality of the object (*Baudrillard Live* 182). Most simply, disappearance defies

convention in order to challenge meaning making. As Baudrillard explains, this side of the act of writing is “another game, in the sense that it’s the invention of another, antagonistic, world” (*Paroxysm* 31-2). Disappearance, according to Baudrillard, constitutes an event, because it breaks with and radically offends convention. This side of the writing game, says Baudrillard, “has a more offensive action” and it “constitutes an event in a world where there are no longer any events because everything’s already in the programme” (*Paroxysm* 31-2).

Although Baudrillard often discusses his dominant rhetorical method through metaphors, including the metaphor of the two-sided game, he also discusses exchange more directly. In the next section, I examine one of these more direct discussions. In particular, I turn to Nicholas Zurbrugg’s 1993 interview of Baudrillard. The Zurbrugg interview is significant both for the scope and the depth with which Baudrillard discusses his rhetorical method.

#### Exchange as a Method, Disappearance as a Move

Rhetorical method is a concept that is not constrained to compositions of a particular type, such as written compositions. Rather, rhetorical method is a concept that describes processes that can stretch across many different kinds of compositions, including written, spoken, photographic, and even multimodal compositions. Baudrillard’s 1993 remarks to Zurbrugg clarify the ability of one rhetorical method to guide many different kinds of compositions. In this interview, Zurbrugg questions Baudrillard about the relationship between his writing and his photography and Baudrillard indicates that exchange applies to written compositions as well as

photographic compositions. The interview moves from a discussion of Baudrillard's initial interest in photography to a consideration of Baudrillard's rhetorical method. Ultimately, the discussion reveals the dominant procedure that guides Baudrillard's written and photographic compositions—the rhetorical method of exchange.

As Baudrillard's remarks in the Zurbrugg interview indicate, rhetorical methods are not necessarily realized by the rhetors who deploy them. Baudrillard's experiences as a writer and a photographer illustrate my claim that rhetorical methods may proceed tacitly, explicitly, or somewhere in between. For example, Baudrillard explains that he “came to photography as a kind of diversion or hobby” (*Art* 32). Initially, he considered his writing and his photography to be unrelated. Photography “offered an alternative to writing” and, in his opinion, it “had no connection with writing” (32). However, he eventually came to “realize that there was a relation between the activity of theoretical writing, and the activity of photography” (34). Although he previously viewed the two acts of composition as unrelated, he later recognized that “in fact it's the same thing—it's the same process”—that writing and photography were guided by the same overarching “mental process”—that a single rhetorical method guided both kinds of compositions (34).

As he explains it, the process that guides his writing and his photography is exchange. In his compositions, Baudrillard aims to create a rhetorical space that facilitates perpetual exchange between appearance and disappearance, subjectivity and objectivity. His rhetoric works to create movement by engaging both sides in the game. According to Baudrillard, in both kinds of compositions he attempts “to make the object appear or disappear as a concept, and to make the concept appear or disappear as a

subject” (*Art* 33). His compositions attempt to facilitate an exchange relationship between the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language, and he acknowledges that this method is more difficult in written composition when compared to photographic composition. According to Baudrillard, written compositions force a writer into “a subjectivity” as “a producer of meaning” (33). Thus, Baudrillard must challenge subjectivity and meaning-making more forcefully in written discourse. However, exchange comes more easily in the photographic act that, by way of its media, seems to lend itself to the capturing of the object. Baudrillard contends that with “photography it is considerably easier to make the object appear, and to disappear as a subject” (33). With either photography or writing, Baudrillard’s rhetorical method is a process by which he works to initiate and sustain exchange between the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language, the subject and the object, appearance and disappearance.

Baudrillard’s rhetorical method of exchange should not, however, be considered inconsistent with his rhetorical products. As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, critics often receive Baudrillardian rhetoric as overwhelmingly dealing in disappearance or producing obscure rhetoric that means nothing. Here, Mike Gane’s description of Baudrillard’s writing as “follow[ing] lines of argument without concession to their limit” is emblematic of the consensus among scholars that Baudrillardian rhetoric challenges meaning and convention (*Baudrillard: Critical* 3). While I agree that much of Baudrillardian rhetoric deals in disappearance, I caution that this propensity to deal in disappearance must be considered in terms of Baudrillard’s rhetorical method. Baudrillard suggests that the two-sided game of exchange is monopolized by appearance,

meaning-making, and representation. Therefore, much of his rhetoric champions disappearance so as to strongly challenge appearance and reinstate exchange between the pair. Disappearance is thus a move in service of Baudrillard's rhetorical method; it is a sub-process of the larger process. When Baudrillard champions disappearance, he can be viewed as employing a move that resembles the classic sophistic move of making "the weaker seem the better cause" or "the weaker cause appear the stronger" (Aristotle §1402a; Isocrates §15). The way in which his rhetoric deals in disappearance—the way in which it offends convention, questions assumptions, exceeds logical limits, and ruptures value systems—is a radical challenge to meaning that aims to initiate and sustain exchange by bolstering disappearance's rhetorical role.

In the Zurbrugg interview, Baudrillard outlines disappearance as involving three steps: objectification, isolation, and analysis (*Art* 34). The first step in the move known as disappearance is objectification. Baudrillard's notion of objectification should not be conflated with an objective or neutral approach. Rather, it should be understood as an embrace of the object over the subject, and the dissociation of the subject with knowledge. In this first step, the rhetor abandons the subject for the object. The rhetor tries "to remove [him or her]self from the position of the subject," and Baudrillard suggests that this removal entails an admission by the rhetor that she or he will "no longer be the subject of knowledge" (33). Often, this first step requires the invention of a scenario that removes the rhetor as a knowing subject. In the dialogue between Baudrillard and Zurbrugg, Baudrillard agrees with Zurbrugg's description of this step as an "objective meditation" (34). The second step in disappearance is isolation. In this step, the rhetor creates what Baudrillard refers to as an "empty space" (34). Baudrillard's

discussion of this empty space suggests that this is the step in disappearance where the rhetor severs ties to materiality, context, reality, and reference. This empty space suspends the object wholly in illusion and it comprises a crucial component in disappearance for Baudrillard. He describes the similarities behind his photography and his writing as “isolating something in a kind of empty space” (34). The third step in disappearance is analysis. Baudrillard likens the analysis that occurs in this final step to “irradiation” and he remains adamant in his view that analysis is not interpretation, noting: “I don’t interpret anything” (34). His comparison of analysis to irradiation emphasizes two points. First, when Baudrillard’s rhetoric favors disappearance, he is sanitizing the isolated object of the values, status, and materialist logic which infest it, just as food is irradiated to rid it of harmful bacteria. Second, he is emphasizing the radical nature of disappearance by suggesting that disappearance will let the object go to its extreme. For Baudrillard, taking an object to its extreme risks the destruction of that object, just as irradiation has been used to exterminate objects—objectified humans included.

The three steps of disappearance—objectification, isolation, and analysis—assume importance in Baudrillard’s later work. As Baudrillard observed the increasing and unchecked modes of production in society, he mobilized a more radical kind of disappearance more frequently in his writing, equating disappearance with the aphoristic short form. Scholars such as Francois L’Yvonnet have observed that Baudrillard’s writing “evolved towards aphorism” (*Fragments: Conversations* 21), and indeed Baudrillard’s later texts, including *America*, the *Cool Memories* series, *Impossible Exchange*, and *Screened Out* constitute aphoristic texts that seem to closely adhere to the

three steps of disappearance so as to work against the production and accumulation of knowledge. These texts assemble disjointed paragraphs and gather arrays of sentences. For instance, a single entry in *Cool Memories I* reads: “Reversibility, like that of day and night, of all the concepts at the equatorial heart of the system: this paradoxical, derisory, indefensible and therefore impregnable position is the bitter privilege of phantom rhetorics” (*Cool Memories I* 102). Entries like this one challenge the knowing subject’s ability to connect this language to a meaning making system and interpret it. In this entry, Baudrillard has objectified language and isolated it. He refrains from building a totalized body of ideas (*Fragments: Conversations* 23). Rather, his writing scatters the subject’s grasp on knowledge and allows the entry to sit in isolation. It is bordered only by the white space of the page and it seems disconnected from the entries before and after it. This isolated entry eschews interpretation, but invites analysis. It is a fragment that can only be broken down further.

Writing in the genre of the aphorism is one rhetorical move through which Baudrillard mobilizes disappearance in order to play the game of exchange. A notable difference exists between Baudrillard’s aphoristic writing like *Cool Memories* and his theoretical writings like *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Baudrillard observes that “[i]n the aphorism, the fragment, there is the desire to slim things down as much as possible [to the point where] you no longer grasp the same things; objects are transformed when you see them in detail, in a kind of elliptical void” (*Fragments: Conversations* 22). For Baudrillard, the aphorism comprises “a sacrilege against the canonical form of the well-argued essay” and constitutes “a violence done to discourse, but not to language” (23). Fittingly, an aphorism in the very beginning of *Cool Memories I* declares: “The real joy

of writing lies in the opportunity of being able to sacrifice a whole chapter for a single sentence, a complete sentence for a single word, to sacrifice everything for an artificial effect or an acceleration into the void” (*Cool Memories I* 29).

Baudrillard often compares his aphoristic texts to photographs, thereby implying that these texts and his photographs are guided by similar compositional processes. According to Baudrillard, “[t]here’s the same work on detail and on the fragmentary in writing aphoristically or doing photography” (*Fragments: Conversations* 22). Just as Baudrillard draws upon the genre of the aphorism to execute the move of disappearance, he also draws upon photography—the technology of the camera, lens, and film—to execute the move of disappearance. Baudrillard contends that photography “is the art of eradicating everything that interposes itself between one and the world—the absence of the world presented in each detail, reinforced by each detail” (*Art* 29). Photography, he says, constitutes a process “by which one simultaneously expropriates and eradicates oneself” (31). According to Baudrillard, during the photographic process, photography makes the world become an object by way of the photographic image. The photographic image stands apart from other images because it is analogical, not virtual, real, numerical, or digital. Baudrillard explains that, as an analog, the photograph depends upon its relationship with its negative (*Art* 31).

Baudrillard offers many examples of the photographic image that sustains disappearance, as he was an avid amateur photographer. For example, consider Baudrillard’s photograph “St. Clement.” This photograph not only appears as a color plate in *Art and Artefact*, but it also serves as the cover art for the Verso edition of *Paroxysm*. It focuses acutely on the details of the objects captured by the image: water

and rust, a car and a few bubbles. Framed and cropped by the camera, this photograph isolates the object in a way that cannot be interpreted, in a way that resists the viewer's attempt to make knowledge. "St. Clement" proves a photograph that resists interpretation and the production of meaning—it "restores the object to the immobility and the silence of the image" (*Art* 31). In "St. Clement" as in *Cool Memories I*, Baudrillard mobilizes disappearance in order to play the game of exchange. In each kind of composition, he follows a uniform sub-process of objectification, isolation, and analysis. His compositions constitute responses to the proliferation of meaning making texts. Thus, photographic texts, like their aphoristic counterparts, are to be understood as uniformly embodying disappearance in order to facilitate exchange. Texts, such as "St. Clement," undeniably align with the object, the anti-materialist theory of language, and disappearance in order to play the two-sided game of exchange.

While it might be tempting and perhaps critically popular to view Baudrillard's sophistic move and the propensity of his later work to deal in disappearance as a rhetorical method in and of itself, Baudrillard's final works undeniably position disappearance as a move in service of exchange. Notably, the steps of disappearance—objectification, isolation, and analysis—executed by Baudrillard's aphoristic texts and his photographs do not carry through to Baudrillard's more recent texts, *Why* among them. Most conspicuously, *Why* abandons the aphorism as well as the photographic image. The text of *Why* is presented as a short argument and it combines Baudrillard's writing with digital images composed by Alain Willaume, resulting in what Toby Lichtig of the *Times Literary Supplement* describes as "a handsomely produced post-structuralist booklet." More subtly, however, *Why* reveals that Baudrillard remains consistent in his rhetorical

method, even as the moves he executes in order to facilitate exchange subtly shift. As I argue in the following section, Baudrillard's rhetorical move of disappearance shifts in accordance with the posthumanist turn in thought, but his rhetorical method of exchange remains the same.

#### Exchange in *Why Hasn't Everything Already Disappeared?*

A rhetorical method is not the same thing as a rhetorical move, and Baudrillard's *Why* makes this distinction clear. Guided by the rhetorical method of exchange, this text revises the three-step rhetorical move known as disappearance so as to respond to the posthumanist turn in thought. Much more than a mere recapitulation of Baudrillard's well-worn arguments and far from a dejected admission of his own theoretical defeat, this text marks the triumph of Baudrillard's rhetorical method.

Written in January of 2007 just a few months before Baudrillard's death, *Why* comprises a text that, as its title suggests, is focused on disappearance. However, there is little agreement among its reviewers as to how Baudrillard is working with disappearance in this text. As I previously noted, Lichtig opines that the book's "effect is one of obscurity in all its senses." Noting that Baudrillard juggles binaries with his "characteristic élan," Lichtig implies that Baudrillard fails to offer anything new in *Why*. What Lichtig perceives as a rehashing of old material does not, however, diminish the book's provocativeness. Lichtig writes: "If this essay reads like a potted summary of Baudrillard's late oeuvre (and influences) then this does not detract from its ability to stimulate the mind." For Lichtig, Baudrillard treats disappearance as he does in his previous work—as one half of a binary to be juggled.

The sentiment that Baudrillard invokes disappearance in a characteristic manner also pervades John Armitage's review of *Why* for the *Times Higher Education*. Armitage, a Baudrillardian scholar, asserts that *Why* should be received "not as a farewell essay, but as a practically spiritual text on the appearance, disappearance and reappearance of everyday objects." In large part, Armitage's review surveys the vast range of topics upon which Baudrillard comments in *Why*—technology, globalization, art, photography, and terrorism—and, thus, suggests that the text should be appreciated on account of Baudrillard's topical musings. Armitage's review positions Baudrillard as the characteristic champion of disappearance and looks favorably upon Baudrillard's text. As it concludes, Armitage claims that "if we seek to read [Baudrillard's] work accurately, we have to do so in view of its disappearance."

In a third review of *Why*, Baudrillardian scholar Gerry Coulter contends that the way in which Baudrillard addresses disappearance actually is quite uncharacteristic of Baudrillard's other writings. Coulter's review focuses on the ubiquity of disappearance in *Why*, specifically Baudrillard's description of the technologically-driven disappearance of the subject. According to Coulter, the central argument in *Why* is that digitalized networks are reducing diversity among subjects, reducing subjects down to a code, and expelling humanity. Noting that "[d]isappearance is everywhere today but without a telos," Coulter's reading of *Why* is both ominous and pessimistic ("Last"). It is also forlorn; where Coulter would usually locate exchange, or what he prefers to call reversibility, in Baudrillard's writing, he finds none in *Why* ("Jean"). Ultimately, Coulter argues that in *Why* Baudrillard abandons his trademark allegiance to exchange. Coulter writes that "in this book Baudrillard, unlike the Baudrillard we have known in all of his

other books, has [...] lost faith in reversibility” (“Last”). Coulter suggests that Baudrillard’s treatment of disappearance in *Why* is consistent with his previous work, while his treatment of exchange is inconsistent.

By my own reading, Coulter’s findings seem transposed, in that Baudrillard’s deployment of exchange remains consistent with his previous work, while his treatment of disappearance subtly shifts from his previous treatments. In contradistinction to Lichtig, Armitage, and Coulter, I find Baudrillard’s discussion of disappearance in *Why* substantially different than any of his prior treatments of it.

### Dual Disappearances

It seems obvious, perhaps indisputably so, that Baudrillard focuses upon disappearance in *Why*. Baudrillard, for his part, describes the central question in his text as “a question of disappearance” (*Why* 9). However, Baudrillard’s brief, seventy-four-word introduction to *Why* illustrates that he is particularly concerned with the posthuman condition, or the disappearance of the human. In his introductory line, Baudrillard commands: “Let us speak, then, of the world from which human beings have disappeared” (9). By summoning his audience to discourse, Baudrillard focuses on the rhetorical activity of theorizing the posthuman condition. The speakings, and writings, and general discourses of posthumanism are the targets of this text. The problem, as Baudrillard explains it, is that the human species has “invented a specific mode of disappearance that has nothing to do with Nature’s law” (10). Here, invention can with good reason be understood in the technological sense, as it is in the reviews of Coulter and Armitage. However, I argue that this use of invention can also be understood in the

rhetorical sense, as in the invention of a posthumanist discourse that makes the human disappear. By ostensibly making the human subject disappear, the discourses of posthumanism pose a significant problem to Baudrillard's rhetorical method of exchange, in that they threaten to erase one side of the exchange game—the side of appearance.

In *Why*, Baudrillard distinguishes between two kinds of disappearance. The first kind of disappearance is the disappearance of the subject orchestrated by the discourses of posthumanism. This kind of disappearance is more accurately categorized as appearance, for it is a calculated disappearance of the subject in order to make more meaning; there is no challenge in this kind of disappearance. This first kind of disappearance is what Baudrillard refers to as the “great disappearance” (*Why* 28). According to Baudrillard, the “great disappearance” is the end “of a linear trajectory, from origin to end, from cause to effect, from birth to death, from appearance to disappearance” (20). Baudrillard argues that this first kind of disappearance is the inevitable outcome of appearance, that this kind of disappearance “is precisely the product of an internal logic, of a built-in obsolescence, of the human race's fulfillment of its most grandiose project, the Promethean project of mastering the universe, of acquiring exhaustive knowledge” (16). His use of the term *disappearance* to refer to the product of appearance is highly uncharacteristic of Baudrillardian rhetoric, and it constitutes a move that departs from his previous work.

The second kind of disappearance is the kind of disappearance found throughout Baudrillard's writings. This second kind of disappearance is what he refers to as the “art of disappearance,” or “disappearance as form” (*Why* 10; 31). The art of disappearance challenges meaning and reality. It seeks to dissolve values, ideologies, and goals (21).

The art of disappearance comprises one side of the two-sided game that is exchange. As he explains, this second kind of disappearance is inextricably linked to “concepts and language” (11). For Baudrillard, once a concept or a thing is named or represented, it begins to disappear. He suggests that from the very moment that representation, or appearance, works to make meaning, disappearance begins challenging meaning. Playing upon this point about representation, Baudrillard contends that “the real world begins, paradoxically, to disappear at the very same time it begins to exist” (11). He further mentions that the human search for knowledge, a search that assigns value and distributes meaning is simultaneously “a process of dissolution” (11). He also states: “It is when a thing is beginning to disappear that the concept appears” (12). This second kind of disappearance, the art of disappearance, is a kind of disappearance that corresponds to the “analytical grid” outlined by Baudrillard as involving objectification, isolation, analysis (31; *Art* 34).

Throughout *Why*, Baudrillard distinguishes between these kinds of disappearances through the understated yet detectable strategies of modification and contrast. Most commonly, he modifies the word *disappearance* so as to rename it as either the first kind or the second kind. He modifies his references to the first kind of disappearance with the words *negative* (as in the negative drive which seeks to exceed the negative), *mode* and *product* (as in “It is here that we see that the mode of disappearance of the human [...] is precisely the product of an internal logic”), and *great* (as in “the great disappearance”) (*Why* 16; 16; 28). He modifies his references to the second kind of disappearance with the words *positive* (as in “positive disappearances”), *form* (“disappearance as a form”), and *art* (as in “an art of disappearance”) (28; 31; 17). These modifications become

particularly evident in passages where Baudrillard combines them with contrast. For instance, take the passage “One might argue, *alternatively*, that there have been some positive disappearances” (28; emphasis added). This line occurs after Baudrillard describes the “great disappearance.” He uses the word *alternatively* to signal a contrast between the two kinds of disappearance; the great disappearance and the art of disappearance, the first of which is negative and the second of which is positive. In other instances, he deploys the word *but* in the same way:

All this remains confined still within an evolutionary perspective that sees everything in terms of a linear trajectory, from origin to end, from cause to effect, from birth to death, from appearance to disappearance.

*But* disappearance may be conceived of differently: as a singular event and the object of a specific desire, the desire to no longer be there, which is not negative at all. (20-1; emphasis added)

Here, the word *but* functions as the contrastive pivot that allows Baudrillard to transition from the first, negative, and productive kind of disappearance to the second, positive, and artistic kind of disappearance.<sup>17</sup>

Admittedly, Baudrillard’s use of modification and contrast in *Why* are so understated that they can be easily missed. However, his somewhat ambiguous shuttling between these two kinds of disappearance only serves to emphasize the significant problem that posthumanist discourse poses to Baudrillard’s rhetorical method. Just as Baudrillard seems to collapse the distinction between these two kinds of disappearance,

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<sup>17</sup> For more on the use of opposition in dense theoretical writing, see Cathy Birkenstein’s “Reconsiderations: We Got the Wrong Gal: Rethinking the ‘Bad’ Academic Writing of Judith Butler” in *College English*. Birkenstein’s analysis of Judith Butler’s writing references John Schilb’s discussion of the word *but* as a word that helps the critic establish exigency (282).

so too does the discourse of posthumanism seem to collapse the two sides of exchange. Posthumanism moves beyond the meaning-making human subject and, as such, erodes the fundamental premise upon which the side of appearance is built. Baudrillard insightfully observes that the very project of posthumanism could be considered to be a project of disappearance and, indeed, posthumanism mobilizes disappearance as a rhetorical move in order to extinguish exchange. The discourses of posthumanism abandon the subject and, instead, embrace the object. Thus, they engage in objectification (the first step in the art of disappearance previously outlined by Baudrillard), but they do not perform any isolation or analysis. Stopping short of mobilizing a positive disappearance by executing its final two steps, the knowledge-seekers who once embraced the human subject have become knowledge-seekers who masquerade as the object. As Baudrillard surmises, “[o]ur greatest adversaries now threaten us with their disappearance” (*Why* 28). Baudrillard’s ambiguous shuttling between the two kinds of disappearance can be understood as an illustration of the significant obstacle that posthumanism poses to his rhetorical method. For Baudrillard, discourses of posthumanism attempt to erase the subject and embrace the object; they tilt the rhetorical playing field so far towards disappearance that exchange would be extinguished.

However, he argues that even when the playing field seems to tilt toward disappearance exchange persists. For Baudrillard, no amount of terminological masquerading will change rhetoric’s position at the juncture of the two theories of language, the one materialist and the other anti-materialist. Even in posthumanism, both appearance and disappearance persist, and so too does rhetoric. In *Why*, Baudrillard revises the rhetorical move of disappearance by altering its first step of objectification. In

order to work through the posthumanist obstacle, he seems content to forego objectification—an “objective meditation”—and trade objectification with obfuscation. As the discourse of posthumanism illustrates, the art of disappearance requires more than simply abandoning the subject for the object. Baudrillard suggests that the subject-object binary within which exchange thrives might actually need to be complicated. In *Why*, he complicates that relationship before he proceeds to isolate exchange. According to Baudrillard, posthumanism’s disappearing subject “gives way to a diffuse, floating, insubstantial subjectivity, an ectoplasm that envelops everything and transforms everything into an immense sounding board for a disembodied, empty consciousness—all things radiating out from a subjectivity without object” (*Why* 27). Here, Baudrillard contends that, even when the subject disappears, subjectivity remains. Moreover, by complicating the relationship, he isolates exchange. The diffuse subjectivity that remains after the subject has disappeared assaults the object even more insidiously; the exchange between the subject and the object, appearance and disappearance, the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language continues—and so does Baudrillard’s rhetorical method.

#### Ambivalence, Rhetoric, and Exchange

It is my contention that *Why* constitutes a text in which Baudrillard theorizes his rhetorical method. In response to the posthuman condition, he shifts away from his sophistic tendencies as the champion of disappearance and, in this text, positions himself as the protector of exchange. He mobilizes exchange and places *Why* largely in the ambivalent rhetorical space created by it. Baudrillard accomplishes this feat partly

through the dual and often ambiguous use of the word *disappear*, and partly through his deployment of the rhetorical question. As Genosko notes, the ambivalence of Baudrillard's texts have always been one of their distinguishing marks: "It is not merely that one might respond ambivalently to them, but that they are themselves full of ambivalence" (*McLuhan* 79). *Why*, however, strikes me as significantly more ambivalent than Baudrillard's previous work.

Central to my reading of *Why* as a text more squarely positioned inside of Baudrillard's rhetorical method is the "stress" that he places upon "the total ambiguity of our relation to the real and its disappearance" (*Why* 32). Baudrillard makes his point about ambiguity in his conclusion, which comes at his text's midpoint. In this conclusion, he asks: "According to the official version, we worship the real and the reality principle, but—and this is the source of all the current suspense—is it, in fact, the real that we worship, or its disappearance?" (32). This question is a provocative question and one that Baudrillard will ask again at the end of his text; neither time will it be answered. In this instance, Baudrillard resigns himself to ambiguity and declares that a "contradictory two-fold postulate cannot, in any way, be resolved" (32). As if the placement of his conclusion in the middle of his text was not emphatic enough, Baudrillard's refusal to offer any resolution resolutely signals the text's ambivalent position.

The second time that Baudrillard poses this question occurs at the end of a long extended example. This example constitutes the example most conducive to pessimistic readings of *Why* and, in it, Baudrillard examines photography with regard to the rise of digital imaging in the posthuman condition. After noting that the place of photography comprises "one tiny example of what is happening on a massive scale in all fields—

particularly in the fields of thought, concept, language and representation,” he traces photography in terms of exchange (*Why* 39). He then forwards a number of assertions and reaches “the limit case,” what he describes as “an unstoppable series of shots” (55). Upon reaching this limit case, Baudrillard appears to succumb to the digital. Indeed, Baudrillard’s assertion that “it is clear that mankind exists only at the cost of its own death” lends credence to Coulter’s perspective that, in *Why*, “Baudrillard’s hope (in reversibility) faded” (62; “Last”). After offering this dire assertion, Baudrillard proceeds to list a set of four “troubling paradoxical questions,” the fourth of which echoes his earlier question. The abbreviated questions, and their corollaries, are:

1. Is everything doomed to disappear—or, more precisely, hasn’t everything already disappeared? [He connects this question with the question: Why is there nothing rather than something?]
2. Why isn’t everything universal?
3. Are we not far less fascinated by the real than by its vanishing, its ineluctable disappearance?
4. How does this irresistible global power succeed in undifferentating the world, in wiping out its extreme singularity? [He follows this question with two others: (1) How can the world be so vulnerable to this liquidation, this dictatorship of integral reality, and how can it be fascinated by it—not exactly fascinated by the real but by the disappearance of reality? (2) What is the source of the fragility of this global power, of its vulnerability to minor events, to events that are insignificant in themselves?] (*Why* 63-4)

Although he poses these questions, he exerts no effort in answering them. They are, for him, the questions of the posthuman condition. He explains that these questions occur “at the outer limits” of the “great disappearance” or “systemic disappearance” (63).

Baudrillard admits that these questions are “insoluble”; that they cannot be answered, only avoided (64).

To avoid these unanswerable questions, Baudrillard turns to what he calls duality, what Coulter refers to as reversibility, and what I have been naming exchange. Exchange, for Baudrillard, maintains the human in the face of the posthuman. Exchange asserts both subject and object, locking both in a two-sided game. Not only does exchange attest to both appearance and disappearance, but it also facilitates the movement between the two. With exchange as their method, the questions do not require final answers or ultimate resolution. Rather, exchange permits these questions—these rhetorical questions—to rest in silence.

In *Why*, Baudrillard exploits an “eternal” correspondence between humanity and the rhetorical question in order to confirm the viability of his rhetorical method. Baudrillard’s description of exchange, what he calls “the inviolable golden rule of duality,” suggests that the ambivalent rhetorical space created by exchange creates an affinity between the rhetorical question and human undertakings, in that both are suspended and thwarted by exchange (*Why* 67).

On the one hand, exchange thwarts human endeavors to mass produce, reproduce, and synthesize. Exchange always holds that some form or some thing will challenge any attempt to synthesize, reconcile, or integrate it into that mass. Baudrillard writes that exchange “eternally thwarts human undertakings (all based on synthesis, integrality and

the deliberate forgetting of all refractory forms, of everything that cannot or will not be integrated or reconciled...)" (*Why* 67). Here, Baudrillard's language is notably more ambiguous than in his previous works. Yet, in contradistinction to Coulter's reading that Baudrillard is conveying his lost hope for exchange, this more muted language should be understood as response to posthumanism. Prior to posthumanist discourse, Baudrillard would have most assuredly described these things as the seductive objects that challenge the subject's productive drive, as the disappearance that challenges the appearance, or as the anti-matter that challenges the matter. But, in this statement, his language departs from his well-worn binaries in accordance with the ambivalence of exchange.

On the other hand, exchange suspends the rhetorical question in silence, thwarting its ability to be answered. Exchange facilitates a circular movement between the making of meaning and the challenging of meaning and it is this movement that suspends the rhetorical question in silence. A question, as Edwin Black explains, "is rhetorical if it is either so profound that answering it is obviously impossible, or so superficial that answering it is impossibly obvious"; however, in either case, the "rhetorical question uses the auditor's silence for its own confirmation" (*Rhetorical Questions* 2). Here, in Black's explanation of a rhetorical question, there is an ambivalence that envelops the question. The silence that confirms a rhetorical question does not confirm whether the question was profound or superficial, whether it challenged meaning or made meaning, whether it ruptured conventional values or banally perpetuated those values. In the ambivalent silence that greets a rhetorical question, exchange assumes prominence as meaning is negotiated in a way that is completely internal to the text. There is no response from the reader, the listener, the viewer, but ambivalence persists.

Returning to the text of *Why*, some kinds of resolution seem possible while other kinds of resolution seem impossible. It can be resolved, in my view, that this is a text that responds to the supposed disappearance heralded by posthumanism. It can further be resolved that the effect of this text is anything but what Lichtig categorized as “one of obscurity in all its senses.” On the contrary, *Why* is an extremely methodical text that makes sense in terms of Baudrillardian exchange. Finally, it can be resolved that this text does not, as Gerry Coulter would have it, profess Baudrillard’s lost hope in exchange. Rather, *Why* is a text that marks the triumph of the rhetorical method of exchange, even when confronted by the posthumanist disappearance of the subject. A thorough consideration of Baudrillard’s rhetorical method shows that Baudrillard is not an obscure stylist or a forlorn theorist. Instead, he was a highly methodological and indefatigably consistent rhetor.

One final example should serve to prove my point. The largest question in the text is found in the book’s title: *Why Hasn’t Everything Already Disappeared?* When considered in terms of Baudrillard’s sophistic tendencies, the title question functions as the contrarian’s pejorative inquiry. Auditors can almost hear the skeptic’s taunt: “Well then, why hasn’t everything already disappeared?” When considered in terms of the posthuman disappearance of the subject, the question functions as exchange’s hope. Since things haven’t already disappeared, one could deduce that the subject remains and rhetorical exchange—however depleted—persists.

Among the many other interpretations of this title question, there is one interpretation that is, in my opinion, still more compelling. Baudrillard ends the book with three sentences:

In the beginning was the word. It was only afterwards that the Silence came. The end itself has disappeared... (*Why* 70)

In these three sentences, he provides readers with a tripartite definition of a rhetorical question: (1) Question; (2) Silence; and (3) Ambivalence. Yet, this definition also explains the position of the title question in relationship to the rest of the text. The title question, or “the word” in the beginning of this text, is met with silence and is thereby confirmed as a rhetorical question. Thus, when the title question is considered to be a rhetorical question, it proves that exchange persists—that rhetoric engages the materialist theory of language and the anti-materialist theory of language in a relationship that internally negotiates meaning. As with any rhetorical question, the title question is a declarative that poses as an interrogative. In this case, the title question is a declaration about the persistence of exchange, but this declaration about rhetoric poses as a question about disappearance. This interpretation is the most compelling. As Black has observed of the rhetorical question, “it may be the most miniature of iterated persuasive patterns” (*Rhetorical Questions* 2).

## Chapter 3:

## Extending Exchange: A Baudrillardian Approach to Rhetorical Criticism

Baudrillard's rhetorical method seizes upon his conception of writing as a two-sided game, with one side working to produce meaning and one side attempting to challenge meaning. As I emphasized in the previous chapter, Baudrillard refers to the former side as "appearance" and the latter side as "disappearance." He further explains how the game of writing ought to be played. Theoretically, movement should occur between the two sides of the game. In other words, the rules of this game would have appearance and disappearance engaged in perpetual exchange of meaning. However in contemporary practice, very little exchange occurs between the two sides of writing. Baudrillard tells us that contemporary writing is a lopsided game in which appearance repeatedly wins out over disappearance.<sup>18</sup> Instead of a circular movement between the making of meaning and the challenging of meaning, the movement of writing is overwhelmingly linear, with the side of appearance driving hard toward singular meaning. In effect, disappearance sits out the game.

To re-engage both sides in the writing game and to reinstate an exchange between appearance and disappearance, Baudrillard often champions disappearance. In doing so, he employs a move that resembles the classic sophistic move of making "the weaker seem the better cause" or "the weaker cause appear the stronger" (Aristotle §1402a; Isocrates §15).<sup>19</sup> His writings radically challenge meaning in order to bolster disappearance's role in writing; they offend convention by questioning tacit assumptions,

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<sup>18</sup>Noting that "Everyone prefers to lend credence to reality to sincerity to the honesty of writing," Baudrillard identifies a propensity in readers to consider writing in terms of the way in which it represents reality (*Fragments: Cool Memories III* 7).

<sup>19</sup> All in-text citations of *Antidosis* have been taken from George Norlin's 1929 translation, unless otherwise noted.

exceeding logical limits, and rupturing value systems. As I argued in the previous chapter, the significant challenge that Baudrillard's writing poses to convention and criticism must be understood as a rhetorical move deployed in the service of his larger rhetorical method. That rhetorical method is, in one word, exchange.<sup>20</sup> Through his rhetoric, he methodically works to exchange one meaning with another meaning.<sup>21</sup> Baudrillard's rhetorical method further manifests itself in genre. My discussion of his oeuvre in chapter two illustrates the way he increasingly favored the aphorism—a genre that enabled him to make chunks of texts literally disappear<sup>22</sup>—as he dealt more and more in disappearance.

Baudrillardian rhetoric aims to initiate exchange. In Baudrillardian terms, exchange is the free circulation of a text without logical or symbolic constraint—without fixed meaning, as it were. Unlike Aristotelian rhetoric, it is not preoccupied with persuasion. Unlike Burkean rhetoric, it is not concerned with identification. Instead, Baudrillardian rhetoric strives to create an ambivalent rhetorical space in which a text sheds its predetermined meaning. Baudrillard refers to this space as “a blind zone, in which everything is called into question again” (*Passwords* 15). The “blind zone” is the rhetorical space in which exchange occurs. Baudrillardian rhetoric emphasizes his understanding of a text's function. He maintains that, no matter how strongly a text works to produce meaning, every text possesses a capacity to challenge meaning. By

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<sup>20</sup> Here, the word “reciprocity” would also suffice and, as Gerry Coulter argues in “Reversibility: Baudrillard's “One Great Thought,” so would the word “reversibility.”

<sup>21</sup> With reference to Baudrillard's *The Evil Demon of Images*, Coulter observes: “When his writing produced ‘meaning’ it was to ‘play that meaning against the system itself’” (*The Baudrillard Dictionary* 240). See also *The Evil Demon of Images*, page 41.

<sup>22</sup> Baudrillard explains that there is a joy to be found in disappearance and the aphorism. He writes: “the real joy of writing lies in the opportunity of being able to sacrifice a whole chapter for a single sentence, a complete sentence for a single word, to sacrifice everything for an artificial effect or an acceleration into the void” (*Cool Memories* 129).

challenging meaning, a text becomes exchangeable. It becomes capable of circulating freely without restrictive value systems or binding logics, and that text facilitates a critical questioning not otherwise possible. Indeed, much of Baudrillard's writing attempts to activate this potential for challenge by rupturing convention.

Rhetoric scholars can deploy Baudrillardian rhetoric as a critical framework through which they can contemplate a text's potential to resist meaning. Critics who adopt a Baudrillardian perspective can consider the degree to which a text—in conjunction with its surrounding paratexts—radically breaks from convention and establishes “a blind zone” (*Passwords* 15).<sup>23</sup> Critics can assess the degree to which a text does *not* participate in established value systems or adhere to dominant logics. They can evaluate the degree to which a text ruptures value and dissolves logics. They can appreciate the ways in which a text avoids capitulating to meaning-making systems and, instead, circulates in ambivalence. Critics recognize that a Baudrillardian approach positions rhetoric as an ambivalent venture.

Rhetorical critics can also deploy Baudrillardian rhetoric to challenge a text's categorical function. Baudrillard suggests that the “deconstruction of value” that facilitates exchange blurs and muddies categorical distinctions and definitions (*Mirror* 43). Thus, Baudrillardian rhetoric challenges the two fundamental rhetorical moves described by Plato in the *Phaedrus*: definition and division (50-6). Baudrillard tells us that, in the “blind zone” of ambivalence, things once confined to their separate definitions are exchanged “in a kind of universal collusiveness of inseparable forms” (*Passwords* 15; 16-7). Here, the word “form” invokes Baudrillard's rhetorical method, as I discussed in

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<sup>23</sup> Gerard Genette explains that a paratext functions as “a discourse that is fundamentally heteronomous, auxiliary, and dedicated to the service of something other than itself” (12).

chapter one. Yet, the examples that he provides to clarify his argument show that he uses the word “form” to refer to categorical definitions. He argues that things defined as categorically different—such as animals, humans, and divinities—can be exchanged (*Passwords* 16). In other words, after they have been propelled into a state of ambivalence, categorical meanings can be circulated, interrogated, and challenged. A Baudrillardian framework offers critics an additional approach to a rhetoric beyond representation, and this approach is especially applicable to texts with ambiguous or competing classifications (not the least of which might be competing genre classifications).

In the following sections, I illustrate the critical value of Baudrillardian rhetoric by applying this approach to two very different texts and their surrounding paratexts. Both phenomena involved a public putting a rhetor on trial for challenging established values. The first text, Isocrates’s *Antidosis*, constitutes a central text in the field of rhetorical studies and is especially noted for the way in which Isocrates endorses the civic value of a rhetorical education. Baudrillard’s poststructuralist rhetoric reveals how this classical text ruptures convention through the deployment of a language of credit. The rhetorical success of this text is further substantiated by a number of paratexts that confirm the way in which *Antidosis* resists classification. More controversial than canonical, James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* fails to rupture the conventional meaning-making system because it trades conventional notions of truth. A Baudrillardian approach to *A Million Little Pieces* and its paratexts demonstrates how its challenge was enfolded back into traditional conceptions of value. Analyzing these two texts in terms of Baudrillardian rhetoric not only suggests the applicability of this framework to a wide

variety of rhetorical phenomena, but it also suggests the need for rhetorical critics to reevaluate their understandings of public good.

A Baudrillardian approach to both of these phenomena is particularly fitting for the way in which the public puts the rhetors—Isocrates and Frey—on trial for disrupting conventional notions of value. In texts like *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Baudrillard grapples with questions of value as they manifest themselves in conjunction with use value, monetary value, sign value, and symbolic exchange value. In the rhetorical phenomena that surround Isocrates’s *Antidosis* and Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces*, similar questions of value and similar manifestations of these questions occur. That is to say that, with respect to these two controversies, value occurs in relation to use, money, and signs, as well as in relation to exchange. In both of these phenomena, the public attempts to judge the value of Isocrates and Frey, as well as the value of their rhetoric, in terms of these nested manifestations of value. A Baudrillardian approach to these tangled rhetorical trials considers the more conventional manifestations of value—use, monetary, and sign—in terms of the larger value systems against which these two rhetors are tried.

#### Exchange in *Antidosis*

Written by an eighty-two year-old Isocrates in 354-3 BCE, *Antidosis* takes its title (which can be translated as “exchange” or “on the exchange”)<sup>24</sup> from a legal procedure that a citizen could enact in the context of a complicated Athenian practice called the liturgy system. As Matthew R. Christ explains, the “well-being of the Athenian state

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<sup>24</sup> Among others, Mirhady and Too, in 2000, translate “antidosis” as “exchange” (201). In 2008, however, Too translates “antidosis” as “on the exchange” (87).

depended largely upon its ability to harness the private resources and energy of the wealthy through a system of ‘liturgies’” (147). The Athenian liturgy system required particular citizens to sponsor public projects and compelled them to, for instance, underwrite a festival, fund a chorus, or subsidize athletic training (Too, *A Commentary* 5). In contemporary terms, the liturgy system could be viewed as a system that imposes a philanthropic tax on the wealthiest class of citizens. The only way a citizen could challenge the liturgy system was through the procedure that lends its name to Isocrates’s text.

The antidosis procedure challenged the liturgy system by proposing two kinds of exchanges: private exchanges and public exchanges.<sup>25</sup> Typically, it began with a private exchange proposition, in which the citizen originally assigned the liturgy would challenge another citizen to perform the liturgy in his stead.<sup>26</sup> This private exchange proposition suggested that the liturgy duty be exchanged between two citizens. If the citizens did not agree upon an exchange, then a second exchange proposition—predicated upon the assumption that the wealthiest citizen should perform the liturgy—suggested that the two citizens exchange estates. Distinct from these private exchange propositions, public exchanges occurred if the citizens failed to agree upon an exchange or if “difficulties arose during the exchange” (Christ 161). In these public exchanges, both citizens exchanged arguments in front of a jury. In *Antidosis*, Isocrates draws upon his

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<sup>25</sup> While discussing the antidosis procedure, Christ situates “the procedure in both its private and public stages” (165).

<sup>26</sup> Christ details “up to three stages” in the antidosis procedure, while Gabrielsen asserts “that the entire procedure consisted of two main stages that could (but need not) be coextensive: the antidosis-challenge itself, during which the man originally liable and his potential replacement might try to settle in private the issue of which of the two should discharge the service; and a legal hearing” (“Liturgy” 161, *Financing* 91).

experiences with such trials and employs the trial as a fictional frame for his longest extant piece of writing.<sup>27</sup>

Critical consensus maintains that *Antidosis* is a text largely concerned with representation.<sup>28</sup> Critics most often read *Antidosis* as a lengthy attempt by Isocrates to positively portray both himself and his profession in response to slanderers, detractors, and sycophants. Josiah Ober summarizes these representational readings, observing that the “Isocrates of the *Antidosis* radiates confidence in his ability to change the minds of his jurors” and “vindicate him and his profession before the Athenian *dēmos*” (33). Critics who forward these interpretations often reference Isocrates’s assertion that *Antidosis*’s “real purpose” is to rectify the misperceptions of his character that result from his profession as a rhetoric educator (§13). Subsequently, many critics argue that this text functions to convey a particular understanding of Isocrates and rhetorical education.<sup>29</sup> In these arguments, critics conceive of rhetorical success in terms of persuasion or identification. *Antidosis* either succeeds (1) because Isocrates has persuaded his audience to change their perceptions of him, his occupation, and his values, or (2) because he has encouraged them to identify with him, his occupation, and his values. From these perspectives, *Antidosis* is a text that attempts to settle the meaning, decide the appearance, and solidify the values of an individual, like Isocrates, or a profession, like rhetorical instruction.

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<sup>27</sup> Three times during his life, Isocrates was involved in the antidosis procedure, since a liturgy called a trierarchy had been leveled against him. The trierarchy asked Isocrates to finance, in some part, the Athenian navy. For a detailed investigation of trierarchies, see Gabrielsen’s *Financing the Athenian Fleet*.

<sup>28</sup> Norlin explains that Isocrates “conceived of dissipating [...] prejudice against him by publishing” *Antidosis* (181).

<sup>29</sup> For example, in *Speaking for the Polis*, Takis Poulakos contends that Isocrates uses the form of apologia in the *Antidosis* as an alibi for a chance to recount his past accomplishments as an educator without being perceived as engaging in extravagant self-praise (93).

Baudrillardian rhetoric suggests a third way in which *Antidosis* might succeed rhetorically and that way is through the rupture of meaning and the initiation of exchange. Baudrillardian rhetoric strives for neither persuasion, nor identification, nor persuasion through identification. From this perspective, rhetoric should not attempt to persuade audiences to accept a particular meaning, nor should it try to facilitate persuasion through audience identification. Instead, Baudrillardian rhetoric pushes its audience's logics to extremes, ruptures its audience's sense of convention, and enables the "deconstruction of value" (*Mirror* 43). As a rhetorical method, exchange remains unique for the way it endorses instability. Baudrillard's ideal text participates in circulation without a clear meaning, without predetermined values, and without a binding logic. A text that would successfully initiate exchange would rupture the meaning-making system, and I argue that *Antidosis* is such a text. *Antidosis* proves a rhetorically masterful text in the way that it participates in Baudrillardian exchange and resists systematic meaning. *Antidosis* functions as a radical challenge to convention, and this claim is further substantiated by a cluster of critical paratexts that comment on this classical piece. That *Antidosis* remains a prominent classical text in rhetorical studies—despite the uncertainty over its meaning—demonstrates that its rhetorical success lies precisely in its ambivalence; that is, in its participation in an exchange.

#### Enabling Exchange: The Two Halves of *Antidosis*

To understand how *Antidosis* successfully initiates exchange, critics must return to a series of passages which occur just after the text's midpoint. These passages, which encompass sections 172 through 179, mark a division between what can be considered

*Antidosis*'s two halves. Within sections 172 through 179, Isocrates transitions from a specific defense of reputation, which relies upon his personal recollections, to a general defense of rhetorical education, or what he describes as his best attempt "to explain what is the nature of this education, what is its power, what of the other arts it is akin to, what benefit it is to its devotees, and what claims [he] can make for it" (§178). Here, Isocrates signals that his text will begin to address its topic more broadly. In this text's second half, Isocrates outlines his vision of a rhetorical education that retains civic value. However, just before he embarks on the full explanation of his educational program, Isocrates issues a warning that resembles the warning he provides in the opening lines of *Antidosis*.<sup>30</sup> He writes: "But I beg of you, if I appear to carry on the discussion in a manner far removed from that which is customary here, not to be impatient but to bear with me, remembering that when a man is defending himself on a charge unlike any other, he must resort to a kind of pleading which is out of the ordinary" (§179). Once again, he warns his audience that his text might seem a bit inappropriate, for it will break with customary, conventional discourse by discussing the aforementioned topics at length.

This repeated warning functions as *Antidosis*'s second introduction and it permits a consideration of *Antidosis*'s two halves. This reintroduction suggests that, by this point in the text, Isocrates has pried open a rhetorical space in which rhetorical education can undergo a critical questioning not otherwise possible; indeed, that the idea of a rhetorical education is free to circulate without being bound by an isolated logic, tied to a single value, or hindered by one dominant meaning-making system. The liberties that Isocrates

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<sup>30</sup> Too's commentary on section 179 claims that "Isocrates draws attention to the fact that his defence is idiosyncratic and extraordinary, as he did in the first sentence of the oration" (*A Commentary* 182).

takes with his audience—for example, he is bold enough to ask for their patience (§179)—indicate further that the second half of this text functions differently than the first, that the rhetor enjoys a special license in what has become a more ambivalent rhetorical space. The second half of *Antidosis* contemplates rhetorical education so thoroughly because the text has successfully established “a blind zone” in Baudrillardian terms (*Passwords* 15). By line 179, Isocrates succeeds in initiating *exchange*.

In this series of passages, Isocrates conspicuously acknowledges the presence of a meaning-making system. From a Baudrillardian perspective, acknowledging that a sign system produces meaning constitutes a necessary step towards challenging that same system. The presence of a sign system, as Baudrillard reminds us, establishes the value of the sign, and it is this sign value that exchange ruptures (*For a Critique* 150). Identifying a meaning-making or signification system must therefore occur prior to the rupture of that meaning-making system. This acknowledgment occurs in section 172, when Isocrates writes:

For Athens is so large and the multitude of people living here is so great, that the city does not present to the mind an image easily grasped or sharply defined, but, like a turbid flood, whatever it catches up in its course, whether men or things, in each case sweeps them along pell-mell, and in some cases it imbues them with a reputation that is opposite of the true. (§172)<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Too’s recent translation of section 172 reads: “Because of its size and the number of inhabitants, it is not readily understood as a whole or in detail, but like a swollen river, it carries along whoever or whatever it picks up, and it gives to some people a reputation that is completely inappropriate” (*A Commentary* 61). Too’s translation not only supports my interpretation, but its commentary further clarifies the reference to images not “easily grasped or sharply defined” in Norlin’s translation. As Too explains, “the quantity of images and experiences at Athens means that people become confused about some of them and give them false reputation” (*A Commentary* 179).

In this description, meaning-making in Athens is larger than any one person, any one argument, or any one representation. It is a powerful system which Isocrates compares to a flood. This system subsumes diffuse images and, after amassing them, it does with these representations what it will. As Isocrates rightly emphasizes, the system is so powerful that sometimes it “imbues” an individual or a thing “with a reputation that is opposite of the true” (§172). Thus, the system affixes a particular representation—regardless of its truth value or any other criteria by which it may be judged—to an individual or a thing. The system, in other words, pushes towards absolute meaning.

Participating in the production of meaning drives the system, and Isocrates’s words suggest that arguing against particular representations is, in the end, futile. Although these comments position Isocrates’s stated purpose of rectifying misperceptions of him and his profession as disingenuous, a Baudrillardian perspective sees potential in the futility of representation. If critics approach this text from an Aristotelian perspective or a Burkean perspective, then they might speculate about Isocrates’s purpose, intentions, or motivations behind section 172. These critics might dispute Isocrates’s representation of the meaning-making system, his representation of himself, or even his representation of Athens in this passage. However, from a Baudrillardian perspective, the description of the meaning-making system as a flood acknowledges the arbitrariness of meaning and simultaneously recognizes that this arbitrariness might potentially be pushed to extremes and ruptured. The system’s unrelenting, flood-like capacity to sweep away meanings that are “in its course” further suggests that a formidable challenge to the system would be one that would reverse the flood’s course (§172). The challenge to the system is a disturbance to its course, a rupture of the meanings it affixes to individuals and to things.

Before engaging in exchange in its second half, *Antidosis* must, in its first half, rupture the representational arguments forwarded by the meaning-making system. In its first half, the text challenges meaning as it has been established with respect to a teacher's interaction with rhetorical pedagogy as well as a citizen's involvement with the liturgy system. Athenian citizens believed that reputable teachers did not accept fees for rhetorical instruction. Pedagogues who charged students fees were perceived as indifferent to their students' uses of rhetoric. They were stigmatized, labeled sophists, and considered to be sly in their personal use of rhetoric, especially with regard to court oratory. Ultimately, as James Fredal explains, "taking fees meant taking 'advantage'" (155). In addition, the citizenry believed that reputable citizens should fund public projects with their personal wealth. Completed liturgies thus became a sign of civil service. As Paul Millet explains, forensic orators often invoked completed liturgies as a sign of their civil service when they defended themselves against charges of bribery and charges of murder, as well as when they desired honorifics and protections (230-3).

Both the stigma of sophism and the sign of civil service made meaning in similar ways.<sup>32</sup> Both involved an economic exchange in which a relationship corresponds to a monetary amount. These exchanges are partially explained by the growth of the Athenian economic system during Isocrates's lifetime, growth that gradually transformed customary relationships into economic relationships.<sup>33</sup> However, both meanings imposed

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<sup>32</sup> As Baudrillard notes, there are many ways to make meaning. In *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, Baudrillard describes three meaning-making processes: (1) *Utility*, (2) *Equivalence*, and (3) *Difference*. Each of these processes combines a particular logic with a particular value (123).

<sup>33</sup> Seaford argues: "Although the Greek economy was the first in history to be pervaded by coinage (in the advanced city states from the fifth century BC), in the classical period at least to some extent it remained *embedded* (as in other pre-modern societies) in non-economic social relations and practices: the increasing importance of commercial exchange neither produced a system of *economic* institutions nor pervaded and transformed social relations to the extent characteristic of advanced capitalism" ("Introduction" 6). The point remains that this transformation was only partial.

themselves upon individuals, like the flood Isocrates references in section 172. These meanings were, as Isocrates recognizes, “malicious” in their conspiracy (§16). With respect to his pedagogy, Isocrates realizes that, should he defend himself against the stigma of sophism, he will reinforce the stigma by appearing to be a sly rhetor. If he does not defend himself against the charges, then he will be condemned on account of an ineffective argument. As Isocrates acknowledges, the meaning determined by the system will stick to him in either case regardless of the truth. Likewise, the liturgy system forced the Athenian citizen to lose capital in a way that stuck. Either a citizen could forfeit economic capital and accrue symbolic capital by completing the liturgy, or that citizen could keep economic capital and forfeit reputation by invoking the antidosis procedure.

#### Initiating Exchange: The Language of Credit in *Antidosis*

Considering the way in which stubborn, nonnegotiable meanings affixed themselves to individuals makes the rupture of those meanings a formidable rhetorical task. Even Isocrates, the “foremost speech artist” of the time, admits that it “was by no means an easy undertaking” (Too, *A Commentary* 15n35; §11). Thus, when critics approach *Antidosis* through a Baudrillardian framework, they raise the text’s rhetorical stakes.

As an initial and obvious move towards initiating exchange and challenging the meaning-making drive of the Athenian signification system, the text invokes the antidosis procedure as its fictional frame. In ancient Athens, the antidosis procedure was an offensive rhetorical action, or what Millet refers to as a “drastic” process that marked the “peak for potential disruption” of the liturgy system (251). In the end, however, since a

jury determined which citizen would complete the liturgy, the antidosis procedure worked in service of the Athenian meaning-making system and the values that it instantiated. Contrary to its title, the procedure did not initiate exchange, at least not in the Baudrillardian sense. In fact, some scholars doubt that any exchange ever took place during this procedure.<sup>34</sup> From a Baudrillardian critical perspective, the actual antidosis procedure does not propel the system into an ambivalent state. Rather, the antidosis procedure merely traded in values; it did not rupture them.

Within the Baudrillardian frame, critics come to understand that if the text is to move beyond a representational argument then it will need to do much more than simply invoke the antidosis procedure as exchange. In other words, if *Antidosis* is to initiate exchange and challenge the meaning-making system, then it must be a rhetorically masterful text. It is, as Baudrillard reminds us, much easier to make meaning than to challenge the drive to make meaning.<sup>35</sup> In order to challenge the drive to make meaning, *Antidosis* must address the dominant meanings between teacher and pedagogy and those between citizen and liturgy, as the text simultaneously works to offend the value of those meanings.

For a text like *Antidosis* to rupture values, it must rearrange the meanings produced by the meaning-making system. In *Antidosis*, Isocrates begins to initiate exchange by deploying a language of credit that emphasizes the conditional nature of meaning. His language plays upon the word *credit* as it is conceived of in terms of

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<sup>34</sup> Christ recognizes that “many scholars have doubted that the antidosis procedure ever entailed an exchange of property” (161). However, both Christ and Gabrielsen acknowledge that “speakers regularly treat exchange as a real possibility” (Christ 161).

<sup>35</sup> For instance, in *Impossible Exchange*, Baudrillard refers to the “tyranny of meaning” (134).

value—as belief, as sign, and as use.<sup>36</sup> Through this verbal play, Isocrates draws his audience’s attention to the fact that multiple logics surround various meanings of credit. Credit, Isocrates emphasizes, is determined on the condition of use, not by any predetermined meaning. At the beginning of his discourse, Isocrates begs his audience “to neither credit nor to discredit what has been said [against him],” until the audience has heard what he has to say (§17). Here, Isocrates entreats his audience to suspend judgment. His request anticipates the creation of an ambivalent rhetorical space in which values and value judgments are ruptured. Later, he pleads with the jury “not to credit charges which have been made without proof or trial” but rather to judge him on the basis of the arguments presented at his trial (§32). Addressing his audience directly, he tells them: “if you decide the case on this basis, you will have the credit of judging honourably” (§32). Credit, in this passage, develops a meaning that is associated with the way in which an individual arrives at a belief and formulates a judgment. The usage here reveals that the concept of credit does not refer to a static relationship between value and logic. Credit proves to be an extremely pliable concept, and Isocrates seizes upon this pliability. Admonishing his audience for any prejudice directed towards his rhetorical talents, Isocrates uses the word “credit” to emphasize that rhetorical talent should be judged only in accordance with its use. He states:

[I]t would be much more just to give me *credit* for being an honest man than to punish me; for when a man has superior talents whether for speech or for action, one cannot fairly charge it to anything but fortune, but when a man makes good

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<sup>36</sup> Too’s commentary offers some corroboration, noting that Isocrates “makes explicit the idea that [logos] may mean both ‘speech’ and ‘account’ or ‘calculation’” (*A Commentary* 163).

and temperate *use* of the power which nature has given him, as in my case, all the world ought in justice to commend his character. (§36, my emphasis)<sup>37</sup>

Arguing that credit should be allotted and discredit assigned in accordance with a rhetor's use of rhetoric, Isocrates outlines his challenge to the Athenian signification system.

With his challenge to the system outlined, Isocrates makes two broad moves in *Antidosis* that, in Baudrillardian terms, can be interpreted as deploying an exchange logic. Both of these moves reorder the relationships among teachers, pedagogies, citizens, and liturgies. Furthermore, both of these moves suggest that use ought to be the condition that determines rhetoric's meaning. In the first move, he revisits his own writings, calling upon three excerpts to be read aloud by the clerk and interpreting these excerpts for his audience (§57-80). These excerpts demonstrate that he is a teacher of rhetoric who remains a conscientious citizen, as he uses rhetoric to address "questions of public welfare in a spirit worthy both of Athens and of Hellas" (§80).<sup>38</sup> In the second move, Isocrates calls upon nine of his former students as his witnesses, detailing their own uses of rhetoric as a credit to Athens (§93-140).<sup>39</sup> He invites his audience to suspect whatever they would like to about the nature of his relationship to his former students. These two moves allow Isocrates to reshuffle the relationships conventionally associated with meaning, reordering the established meaning with respect to a teacher's interaction with rhetorical pedagogy as well as a citizen's involvement with the liturgy system. Instead of meaning being established between teachers and pedagogy and between citizens and

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<sup>37</sup> Too translates the latter half of section 36 as: "One might plausibly credit good fortune when someone is better at speaking or acting than others, but everyone ought rightly to praise my character for using my natural ability well and with restraint" (*A Commentary* 40).

<sup>38</sup> Indeed, Robert Hariman identifies what he describes as an "Isocratean politics," in which "the Isocratean education would be directed to developing citizens capable of acting together to solve problems in a manner that would allow for mutually sustainable ecological, cultural, and political practices" (228).

<sup>39</sup> As Too observes, "[t]he language which Isocrates employs to describe the teacher-student relationship in the speech is implicitly that of liturgy" (*A Commentary* 6-7).

liturgies, Isocrates positions the teacher as the citizen and pedagogy as liturgy. As such, Isocrates exchanges meanings by logically transposing relationships, and thereby challenging convention.

By unequivocally endorsing rhetoric's use as the criterion upon which it should be judged, *Antidosis* ostensibly undercuts the stigma of the sophist while simultaneously reworking the sign of a good citizen. In the text, Isocrates suggests that his case should be judged on the use and function of rhetoric, not upon a preconceived notion about rhetoric. From a Baudrillardian perspective, Isocrates's argument can be interpreted as a simultaneous endorsement of *utility* (in which value occurs in conjunction with the use of rhetoric) as well as *equivalence* (in which value equals a monetary sum).<sup>40</sup> This simultaneous endorsement undercuts the stigma of sophism, since the Athenian meaning-making system positioned *utility* and *equivalence* as mutually exclusive concepts. The system determined that accepting fees for rhetorical instruction meant that a teacher necessarily disregarded the use to which he and his students put rhetoric. Isocrates challenges this logic by conceding that he accepts fees from his students and also by insisting that he and his students use rhetoric well. He draws a distinction between the sophists, none of whom "has ever been thought worthy to have pupils," and himself, who has had an abundance of students (§41). Isocrates argues that the system is broken, that use and function should impact the assignment of credit when it comes to determining who among teachers is a good citizen. Moreover, Isocrates connects the good use of a rhetorical education to civil service. Just as liturgies economically support the well-being of the *polis*, good rhetorical education also functions to support Athens. Pedagogy as well

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<sup>40</sup> See Baudrillard's "For a General Theory" in *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, pages 123-9.

as liturgy should signify civil service. *Antidosis* thus forwards an exchange logic, in which offering students a good rhetorical education is equivalent to paying civic liturgies to the *polis*.

### Radicalizing Exchange: The Extreme Exchange Logic in *Antidosis*

On account of his strong endorsement of use and function, it seems as if Isocrates's reordering of relationships manages to undercut the stigma of the sophist (by positioning the teacher as the citizen) and garner the sign of civil service (by positioning pedagogy as liturgy). But Isocrates does not simply reorder the relationships among teachers, citizens, pedagogies, and liturgies. In a radical move, Isocrates pushes exchange logic to its extreme. If reordering relationships and introducing exchange logic is a metaphorical rip in the fabric of the system, then pushing that logic to its extreme is the rupture of the system that catapults the system into ambivalence. *Antidosis*'s readers might have expected that, after he introduces the teacher as the citizen (calling upon the clerk to read his writings) and after he introduces pedagogy as liturgy (calling upon his students as witnesses of his service to the *polis*), he would rest comfortably with the evidence he supplies to his jury. In other words, readers might grant that the basis upon which Isocrates would like his jurors to decide his case is sufficiently clear. However, Isocrates extolls his jury to hold him to "a more difficult standard than for other people" (§51). Before the clerk reads his writing, Isocrates issues a proposition that even he admits might "seem over-rash": "I ask you not only to show me no mercy, if the oratory which I cultivate is harmful, but to inflict on me the extreme penalty if it is not superior to any other" (§51). This standard, superiority, is an extreme one. Isocrates suggests that

if the teacher be seen as a citizen, then the teacher must be a superior citizen and that his rhetoric must be of superior quality.

These extreme standards occur a second time, as Isocrates presents his students as his witnesses. Within the larger move of presenting pedagogy as liturgy, Isocrates addresses his audience and asks:

If any of those who have been associated with me have turned out to be good men in their relations to the state, to their friends, and to their own households—I ask you to give them the praise and not to be grateful to me on their account; but if, on the other hand, any of them have turned out to be bad—the kind of men who lay information, hale people into court, and covet the property of others—then to let the penalty be visited on me. What proposition could be less invidious or more fair than one which claims no credit for those who are honourable, but offers to submit to punishment for any who have become depraved? (§99-100)

The most striking aspect of this passage is the way in which Isocrates invokes the language of credit in order to radically challenge the system. In effect, he revokes the system's symbolic credit, for he does not want to be praised on account of his students' stature. Moreover, he invites discredit, asking that his students' worst behavior be attributed to him. These are extreme moves that defy convention and challenge the system's meaning. Isocrates has pushed representation and reputation to its logical limit. He now invites poor repute to be visited on him and commendable character to be stripped away from him.

A third time—in that crucial series of passages spanning sections 172 through 179—Isocrates issues another extreme proposition. This time, he wagers his own death,

stating: “I would rather lay down my life this day [...] after having spoken adequately upon this theme and persuaded you to look upon the study of eloquence in its true light, than to live many times my allotted span and see it to continue to fare among you as it does now” (§177). The extreme challenge of value and logic that he has undertaken during the first half of *Antidosis* leads Isocrates to question the value of his own life. Rhetorical education, Isocrates tells his jury, is so valuable that he would trade his life for it. The text has brought its readers to the point of rupture. While Neo-Aristotelian approaches to *Antidosis* might read this line as an appeal to pathos, in Baudrillardian terms it marks the ultimate challenge to the meaning-making system. According to Baudrillard, western convention holds life to be supremely valuable and it is life and survival that power the meaning-making system (*Symbolic Exchange* 129-30).<sup>41</sup> Thus, by this point, *Antidosis* seems to completely abandon a representational argument and its purpose seems much larger than rectifying perceptions of Isocrates’s reputation; he is willing to die in ill-repute, in order to challenge the meaning affixed to rhetorical education. Through his text—its extreme standards of judgment and its reordered relationships between teachers, citizens, pedagogies, liturgies, *life*, and *death*—Isocrates has placed his audience in what Baudrillard refers to as “a blind zone, in which everything is called into question again” (*Passwords* 15).

### Certifying Exchange: The Genre Classification of *Antidosis*

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<sup>41</sup> Besides *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, see Baudrillard’s *Fatal Strategies*. As Mike Gane succinctly explains, death is a wager that, for Baudrillard, falls into the realm of ambivalent symbolic exchanges. Gane writes: “Symbolic exchange is a broadening out of the terrain of obligatory exchanges of the same kind: from simple exchanges in conversation to sacred sacrifices, and the exchanges between the living and the dead” (*The Baudrillard Dictionary* 211).

A testament to *Antidosis*'s rhetorical success in moving beyond representation, pushing at logics, challenging meaning-making, and initiating exchange can be found in a cluster of recent criticism on this classical text. Baudrillardian rhetoric not only focuses on the radical rupture and circulation of values, but also the rupture and circulation of categorical definitions, such as genre. Although recent scholarship in genre studies endorses operative definitions of genre, or definitions grounded in genre's many complex functions in very specific situations, the notion of genre functions, more generally, as a category.<sup>42</sup> Amy Devitt argues that "[c]lassifications are effects of genre but not the extent of genre" (6). A Baudrillardian rhetoric suggests, however, that genre need not be conceived of in terms of a cause and effect relationship; rather, genre could function as perpetual and ambivalent exchange. By defying generic classification and resisting these effects to this day, *Antidosis* affirms its success in creating an ambivalent rhetorical space.

Criticism of *Antidosis* acknowledges Isocrates's own references to this text's unusual generic status. *Antidosis* is no exception to the claim that "[g]enre is an important issue for reading Isocrates' works" (Too, *Rhetoric* 13). In the text's opening section, Isocrates claims that *Antidosis* "is novel and different in character" (§1). He contends that it is "a discourse so unlike any other" (§1). Later, he asks his audience to "make allowance, as they listen to [*Antidosis*], for the fact that it is a mixed discourse" (§12). As Isocrates's own words indicate, this text deliberately defied the generic categorizations of

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<sup>42</sup> Various studies of genre, including those by Charles Bazerman, JoAnne Yates, Wanda Orlikowski, and Clay Spinuzzi have focused on the activities with which genres are involved. These studies also pay close attention to the relationship between genres and the impact that genres have upon actions. Importantly, though, the criticism of *Antidosis* often identifies a genre classification in order to forward a critical argument. In these critical arguments, genre is not associated with activity. Instead, genre is associated with convention and effect. Thus, the competing classifications are indicative of a text that ruptures convention and perpetuates movement as its effect.

ancient Athens. Critics could take Isocrates at his word and recognize that, with respect to genre, he succeeds in creating an ambivalent rhetorical space. However, since the fourth century BCE, critics have attempted to define this text in terms of its genre. The critical rationale seems to be that, if *Antidosis* can be categorized according to its genre, then critics might be able to better determine its value and more clearly extract meaning from the text. Various scholars have treated *Antidosis* as a dicanic text, a forensic oratory, an imitative apology, an educational piece, a court speech, and even an autobiographical work (Too, *Rhetoric* 14-7).

Yet, the important point about *Antidosis*'s genre is that it defies critical classification, as a fair amount of recent critical pieces seem to note. For instance, David Mirhady and Too echo Isocrates's own observation about genre context, explaining that "*Antidosis* is itself an atypical speech in light of fourth-century speech genres" (*Isocrates I* 203). Terry Papillon observes that in *Antidosis* Isocrates chooses to "include items that fit none of the standard oratorical genres very well" (49). David Depew and Takis Poulakos refer to Isocrates's "genre-bending" as if "genre-bending" were a character trait ("Introduction" 18). And even Robert J. Bonner admits the unique generic position of *Antidosis*: "neither wholly forensic nor wholly epideictic" (195).

From a Baudrillardian perspective, these critical remarks are evidence of successful rhetoric. In *Antidosis*, Isocrates succeeds in creating a rhetorical space that has remained ambivalent for nearly 2,400 years. Too contends that each attempt "to identify and categorise [Isocrates's] texts says something about him" (*Rhetoric* 17). But when critics adopt a Baudrillardian rhetorical perspective, the failed attempts at categorizing *Antidosis*'s genre say more about Isocrates's rhetorical prowess. *Antidosis*'s resistance to

generic classification positions Isocrates as a perennially successful rhetor, in Baudrillardian terms, because it persists to circulate in the “blind zone.” Rather than allowing critics to pinpoint its textual effects and, therefore, categorize its genre, *Antidosis* maintains ambivalence and rhetorically exchanges effects with causes.

#### Trading Truth and Convention in Textual Controversy

In this section, my analysis moves from the classical text *Antidosis* to the contemporary text *A Million Little Pieces*. Beyond illustrating the range of texts to which a Baudrillardian approach might apply, my analysis of *A Million Little Pieces* reveals a text that, along with its paratexts and author, pleads a case using remarkably different strategies than those used in *Antidosis*. Although the juxtaposition here might seem strange because of my selection of texts, I wanted to again emphasize the close relationship of the two rhetorical phenomena that surrounded these texts: Both phenomena involved a public putting a rhetor on trial for challenging established values.

On February 1, 2006, James Frey, author of the book *A Million Little Pieces*, issued a note to his readers. Written in January of 2006, the note responds to allegations that Frey’s memoir—a recollection of Frey’s experiences as an alcoholic, addict, and criminal; a text selected by Oprah Winfrey as her book club’s October 2005 featured text—contains factual inaccuracies. In this note, Frey acknowledges that he “embellished many details about [his] past experiences” (“Note”). But Frey also maintains that his book should be classified as a memoir, since a “memoir allows the writer to work from memory instead of from a strict journalistic or historical standard” (“A Note”). That same day, Frey’s publisher, Doubleday Publishing, reaffirmed its original classification of the

book *A Million Little Pieces* as a work of nonfiction (“Brooklyn”). On February 2, 2006, the Brooklyn Public Library announced its own reclassification of Frey’s book. The library had previously shelved the 2003 text under the Dewey decimal number 362.29, cataloguing the book as a nonfiction piece that addresses issues of drug use and abuse. By early 2006, however, the Brooklyn Public Library had moved the text to its fiction section. As library chief of staff Dionne Mack-Harvin explained, the reclassification was necessary to “assure Brooklyn’s library users that the information they want and need is easily available and accessible within a clear and truthful classification system” (Hogan). Mack-Harvin’s comments further emphasize the relationship between the library and its community, claiming “that the Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) classifies books in its collection in a way that reflects the community’s expectations” (Hogan). There was, at the time, speculation that other libraries would follow the Brooklyn Public Library’s lead.

Frey’s note, Doubleday’s press release, and Mack-Harvin’s comments all address questions surrounding a given text’s genre classification. As auxiliary texts, these paratexts suggest that the genre classification of *A Million Little Pieces* disposes Frey’s book to an extreme questioning indicative of a rhetorical “blind zone.” Indeed, the book itself remains mired in ambiguity. Very little critical consensus exists as to the classification of *A Million Little Pieces*. Writers, publishers, librarians, and readers all dispute the degree to which Frey’s text instantiates or challenges convention. They ask: To what degree do the conventions of a memoir require an author to adhere to truth and fact? Does Frey’s text adhere to the conventions of a memoir? Should writing, regardless of its genre classification, ring true to a reader? Does Frey’s text, regardless of its genre classification, ring true to its readers? As the difference in the scope of these four

questions indicates, the controversy surrounding Frey's text has not been easily settled.<sup>43</sup>

As an unsettling text that disrupts convention, *A Million Little Pieces* appears to exemplify a Baudrillardian rhetoric; it appears to be a text that creates an ambivalent rhetorical space, in which exchange occurs.

However, a careful analysis reveals the opposite to be the case: Frey's text along with all its paratexts—news reports, internet postings, press releases, legal documents, and two nationally televised interviews—wholeheartedly endorse conventional rhetoric, in which a text establishes a meaning-making contract with its reader. In other words, *A Million Little Pieces* is unsuccessful in sustaining Baudrillardian exchange. I argue that, contrary to the fragmentation evoked by its title, the text and its paratexts are remarkably unified in their conventional message. From a Baudrillardian rhetorical perspective, Frey's text and its paratexts use truth to reinforce convention, and therefore squander opportunities to radically challenge the values attached to writing.<sup>44</sup>

## Two Rhetorical Relationships

To understand the way in which *A Million Little Pieces* and its myriad of paratexts capitulate to convention, critics must first distinguish between two relationships through which meaning is made and challenged. The first relationship makes and

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<sup>43</sup> An analysis of this controversy using Hermagoras's stasis theory seems to substantiate this point. The controversy over *A Million Little Pieces* mushroomed so quickly that individuals immediately began arguing at cross-purposes. Some argued at the level of fact (Do truth and fact exist in memoir?), others at the level of definition (Can Frey's text be called a memoir?), still others at the level of judgment (Is it good or bad that Frey embellished details?), and finally some at the level of policy (How should writers and publishers work to avoid similar situations in the future?).

<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that the controversy surrounding *A Million Little Pieces* proves a controversy familiar to scholars in critical autobiography studies. The same discussions that took place in during the Frey controversy also took place in the 1990s, during the *I, Rigoberta Menchú* controversy. For a comprehensive overview of this controversy, see *The Rigoberta Menchú Controversy*, edited by Arturo Arias.

challenges meaning through a process of textually mediated negotiation between a writer of a text and a reader of a text. This first relationship is the most conventional relationship and its basic premise—that the transit of a message occurs external to that message—undergirds the vast majority of rhetorical theories. In this first relationship, the concept of audience (whether a group or an individual, a reader or a listener, an intended audience member or an unintended audience member) assumes a central role in any communicative process. Embedded in this conventional rhetorical relationship are the rhetorical concepts of intention, implication, persona, reputation, and appeal. The second relationship makes and challenges meaning through appearance and disappearance. This second relationship is a Baudrillardian relationship in that it emphasizes the two-sided game that is internal to writing, internal to a given text. In this relationship, the whole slew of message receivers (audiences, readers, and listeners) are rendered insignificant, as are the batch of rhetorical terms that focus on the mediation of meaning between writer and reader through a text. By challenging the basic communicative premise of audience, this second relationship remains highly unconventional.

Distinguishing between the conventional rhetorical relationship and the Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship offers rhetorical critics a way to reconsider *A Million Little Pieces* and its paratexts. That is to say that the controversy involving this text and its auxiliaries is a conflict between the conventional rhetorical relationship and the Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship. The disagreements over genre classification, truth, and art are, on a fundamental level, discussions as whether or not meaning should be made and challenged in a conventional manner—a manner external to a text—or in a radical manner—a manner internal to a text. Both the conventional rhetorical relationship

and the Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship receive sustained treatment in Frey's text. Indeed, *A Million Little Pieces* positions the character James Frey as an audience member who makes meaning and challenges meaning on account of truth, as well as a rhetor who understands that the two-sided game of composing can make and challenge meaning independent of an audience.

*A Million Little Pieces* endorses the conventional rhetorical relationship, in which meaning is made and challenged externally through the involvement of an audience, by having the character James Frey use truth to evaluate a variety of texts that he encounters either as a listener or as a reader. For example, as part of his routine at a residential drug and alcohol treatment facility, Frey attends a daily lecture. One day, a former patient at the facility, who is also a "famous Rock Star," returns to deliver the lecture (159).<sup>45</sup> As Frey listens to the lecture, he begins an internal monologue berating the speaker for glorifying addiction. He refers to the speaker as a "Fraud" and a "Chump," before he criticizes the speaker's attempt at masking the truth that "An Addict is an Addict" (159). Frey explains:

To make of light of [this truth], brag about it, or revel in the mock glory of it is not in any way, shape or form related to its truth, and that is all that matters, the truth. That this man is standing in front of me and everyone else in this room lying to us is heresy. The truth is all that matters. This is fucking heresy. (159)

This passage demonstrates the way in which a listener possesses an ability to make and challenge the meaning of a given text within the conventional rhetorical relationship.

Frey's character rejects the speaker's message because the message does not correspond to the truth as the listener conceives of it. In the conventional rhetorical relationship, the

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<sup>45</sup> All in-text citations of *A Million Little Pieces* have been taken from the 2003 Doubleday edition.

truth of the message is less important than the listener's perception of that truth. Truth is neither resolutely singular, nor necessarily objective. As Frey explains, "[r]idiculous things can be true," and truth often runs deep (223; 368). Thus, the conventional rhetorical relationship privileges the listener's version of the truth as the criterion with which texts can be accepted or rejected.

The conventional rhetorical relationship is repeatedly presented through Frey's character as he is exposed to a variety of other texts. As he listens to another character named Leonard, Frey states that he can believe in Leonard's words because "[t]hey are true" (174). The marshaling of truth to substantiate an audience member's evaluation of a text is also presented in terms of reading written texts. Frey dismisses the Bible, because "[i]t didn't ring true" (198). However, Frey's sense of truth makes the *Tao te Ching* consistently amenable to him. Frey champions the series of eighty-one short poems that comprise the *Tao's* text as "ring[ing] true and that is all that matters the truth" (161). Meditating on the *Tao*, he gushes:

The words are as true now as the first time I read them. They don't tell me what to do or how to live or what not to do or how not to live, they simply tell me to be what I am and who I am and let life exist and exist within life. The words are true.  
(368)

*A Million Little Pieces* thus positions truth as the main criterion through which a text should be judged by a reader. In the conventional rhetorical relationship, a reader makes or challenges a text's meaning according to its resonance with truth. The conventional rhetorical relationship depends, therefore, on readers' external validations of a text's truth.

Frey's text does not only endorse the conventional rhetorical relationship. It also presents the Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship by focusing on the tension internal to composition and independent of audience. The Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship positions appearance and disappearance as the two sides of the composing game, with the former working to produce meaning and the latter attempting to challenge meaning. To emphasize this second relationship, *A Million Little Pieces* positions Frey's character as a self-reflective rhetor, a speaker or a writer who considers the way in which meaning is made and challenged by the very composition of a text. For example, Frey muses over the composition of his own obituary. He considers the way in which "[t]he truth of [his] existence will be removed and replaced with imagined good," as well as how "[t]he reality of how [he] lived will be avoided and changed and phrases will be dropped in like Beloved Son, Loving Brother, Reliable Friend, Hardworking Student" (85). Here, the composition negotiates its own internal truth and its own internal meaning. No audience need externally evaluate this obituary. A radical relationship involving imagination, removal, change, and challenge replaces the conventional relationship between text and reader, and its criterion of truth. The composition that adheres to a Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship escapes meaning and questions binaries like fact and fiction, true and false. In this second rhetorical relationship, imagination allows rhetoric to move beyond strict representation. When Frey's character imagines an obituary, he contemplates and articulates the Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship by considering the capacity of a composition to resist predetermined values and to exceed logical options.

The strongest example of how *A Million Little Pieces* deploys a Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship in order to dissolve established logics and create an ambivalent

rhetorical space occurs in a scene towards the beginning of Frey's book. In this scene, Frey's character attempts to complete the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory psychiatric test. He is instructed to complete the test, taking as much time as he needs to respond to 567 statements with either "true" or "false." Frey reads and responds to a variety of statements, stopping at the statement: "My sins are unpardonable" (40). Frey reads, but does not respond to, this question. This scene demonstrates the way in which imagination can challenge convention. Indeed, Frey imagines a third kind of response, one that escapes the criterion of truth and remains mired in ambiguity. That he refuses to respond or evaluate this small chunk of text substantiates the two-sided game internal to writing. The scene questions the assumption that a text relies upon a reader to make and challenge meaning. In this case, the making of meaning or the challenging of meaning frustrates the reader. The reader is unable to judge the statement, and, consequently, the psychologist, whose job it is to analyze the test results, will also be unable to evaluate this statement. Instead, the statement is internally ambiguous; it sustains an ambivalent exchange which defies any permanent evaluation. In this unconventional rhetorical relationship, the choices of "true" or "false" are ruptured. Any permanent evaluation remains impossible.

#### Truth and Trust, Memoir Writers and Memoir Readers

The distinction between the two kinds of rhetorical relationships—the conventional, externalized relationship that requires an audience and the radical, internalized relationship as posited by Baudrillard—encourages a critical reconsideration of the controversy surrounding *A Million Little Pieces*. Given its treatment of both kinds

of rhetorical relationships, *A Million Little Pieces* possesses a rhetorical malleability that could have been mobilized during the controversy in order to move beyond a conception that memoir is dictated by truthful representation. The various rhetors involved in this controversy could have invoked the Baudrillardian rhetorical relationship in order to imagine unconventional possibilities and more nuanced positions regarding Frey's text. However, Frey's text and its paratexts capitulated to the conventional value system, squandering an opportunity to create an ambivalent rhetorical space in which established values, logics, and conventions are questioned. Put differently, the controversy involving *A Million Little Pieces* proved remarkably unsuccessful from a Baudrillardian perspective. Rather than establishing a "blind zone" within which everything would be interrogated, the controversy sought to deliberately illuminate the fact from the fiction, heralding truth and vilifying lies.

Although questions regarding the factual accuracy of Frey's text had been raised since the text's publication in 2003,<sup>46</sup> the controversy over *A Million Little Pieces* erupted on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2006, when the website *The Smoking Gun* (TSG) published an exposé entitled "A Million Little Lies." TSG's self-stated purpose is not to create controversy over texts. Instead, the website supplies visitors with "exclusive documents—cool, confidential, quirky—that can't be found elsewhere on the Web" ("About The Smoking"). In an attempt to find one of Frey's mug shots from one of the multiple arrests detailed in *A Million Little Pieces*, TSG discovered that many of the incidents recounted by Frey were "wholly fabricated or wildly embellished" ("A Million"). Instead of publishing one of Frey's two mug shots that they *did* find, TSG published the results of a six-week fact-finding mission in which they cross-checked details from *A Million Little*

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<sup>46</sup> See Maslin and Rybak.

*Pieces* with public documents and other interviews. The exposé by *TSG* led to an array of other texts—news reports, internet postings, press releases, legal documents, and two nationally televised interviews of Frey—the majority of which expressed disgust at Frey’s lies.

That the results shocked so many individuals and escalated to such a degree should be understood as a symptom of the conventional rhetorical relationship, in which meaning is negotiated between the writer and the reader through the text. Many of the auxiliary texts created during this controversy refer to this rhetorical relationship in contractual terms. For instance, in her comments on the Frey controversy, Susan Cheever observes:

The basis of most good writing is the connection between the writer and the reader—this begins with the contract with the reader, which is made by the writer in the opening words and paragraphs of each work. The promise the writer makes—implicitly or explicitly—defines what will come afterward. (Johnson)

Cheever’s statement is striking for the way in which the reader-writer contract precedes just about everything else. From the reader’s perspective, Cheever’s comments seem conventional, for a writer’s early stance towards a reader impacts the reader’s reception of the text. When considered from the writer’s perspective, however, the Cheever’s assertion implies that good writers draft a contract with their readers early-on in their text. Cheever’s observations are echoed by Samuel G. Freedman’s description of the writer-reader relationship as a compact. As Freedman explains, “[f]iction and nonfiction make fundamentally different compacts with a reader and are held to fundamentally different standards” (53). Freedman merely suggests what other critics more directly

assert: Memoirists maintain more solemn compacts with their readers. Maureen Corrigan, for one, defines the difference between fiction and nonfiction solely in terms of the “handshake” exchanged between the writer and the reader. Likewise, William Zinsser contends:

As a memoir writer, I have a contract with my readers to arrive at the truth about my life to the best of my ability to recall it. The readers buy into that contract and expect that from me. If the writer begins to invent, the writer loses credibility.  
(Johnson)

For critics and writers like Cheever, Freedman, Corrigan, and Zinsser, no relationship other than the presumed relationship between the reader and the writer would facilitate the writing of a memoir. A strong notion of intent seems coextensive with this position. According to these individuals, the presumed writer-reader relationship binds and constrains the writing of a text, as the expectations of and standards for that text follow from the relationship between writer and reader. In the case of the memoir, the relationship between the writer and the reader is one in which the reader trusts that the writer is representing the truth.

In these paratexts, the Baudrillardian alternative to the reader-writer relationship receives little consideration. Freedman, for instance, snipes that “[w]riters do not write only for themselves” (53). Yet, Freedman’s assertion stands in stark contrast to Baudrillard’s declaration: “I just write for myself” (*Baudrillard Live* 182). In their unfaltering support of the writer-reader agreement, these paratexts do not invite alternative perspectives into the controversy surrounding *A Million Little Pieces*. The Baudrillardian perspective suggests that writing does not follow from the writer-reader

contract. Baudrillardian rhetoric consistently questions cause-and-effect relationships, including the cause-and-effect relationship articulated by critics and writers like Cheever, Freedman, Corrigan, and Zinsser. Baudrillardian rhetoric would challenge the general idea that writing follows a contract, in particular that the solidification of the writer-reader contract functions as a cause that leads to the effect of writing. In the auxiliary texts generated by the controversy over *A Million Little Pieces*, this kind of Baudrillardian rhetoric occurs, ironically, in Frey's note to his readers. Frey concedes: "I didn't initially think of what I was writing as nonfiction or fiction, memoir or autobiography" ("Note"). Thus, it is in Frey's attempt to reestablish a relationship with readers that he acknowledges the possibility that a writer may write without first establishing an agreement with readers. Frey's statement questions the notion that writing necessarily follows from a writer-reader contract. Unfortunately, Frey's note quickly undercuts this suggestion by listing reader-based reasons for his purpose in writing *A Million Little Pieces*.

As many of the paratexts acknowledge, the writer-reader agreement manifests itself in the genre classification of a given text and, as such, the agreement locks the writer, reader, and the text into a proscribed value system. According to these paratexts, the contract is less about what a writer will write and more about how a writer will write; that is to say, the agreement determines the value system under which the writer, reader, and text meet. Behind the conventions of a text reside the values shared by the writer and the reader. Commenting on the Frey controversy, Roy Peter Clark states:

Transparency has become an important virtue in American culture [...] Some readers don't care, of course, when memoirists fudge the facts; but most readers

think that memoir is nonfiction. Just ask around. A contract with the reader requires the author to assure the reader that nothing in the story was made up. So let's have truth in advertising. And let there be a foreword to every book and a long footnote to every story in which the author reveals standards and methods. I distrust authors who don't want to do this. It seems like they are hiding something from the reader. (Johnson)

In Clark's comment, a sense of trust is conventionally established between the memoir writer and the memoir reader on account of truthful and transparent representation. Convention instructs writers and readers of memoir, alike, to value truth and fact. Clark's statement further demonstrates the way in which conventional values steer textual conventions. Clark values truth and transparency so much that he proscribes forwards and footnotes for every memoir.<sup>47</sup> Rick Moody concurs. In Moody's estimation, "calling something a memoir implies certain literary values, and chief among these is the fealty to the truth" (Johnson). The value system described by Clark and Moody, and repeatedly invoked during the Frey controversy, unites memoir writers and memoir readers through a dedication to truth. For both writers and readers, memoir conventionally means truth.

A Baudrillardian rhetoric attempts to challenge conventional meaning, and it is in this sense that the text and its paratexts were most unsuccessful from a Baudrillardian rhetorical perspective. Many of the most notable texts that were exchanged during this controversy did not attempt to disrupt the conventional values and rupture the dominant meaning-making system. Instead, they traded conventional notions of truth. For example, Frey's own defense of his text on the January 11, 2006, *Larry King Live* show invokes

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<sup>47</sup> Indeed, there is evidence that these forwards and footnotes became increasingly common following the Frey controversy.

the very meaning-making system that has fueled the scrutiny of *A Million Little Pieces*. During the interview, Frey argues that his book conveys “the essential truth of [his] life” (Interview by Larry King). He holds that his book—which he defends as a memoir—maintains a degree of factual accuracy, as only the factual accuracy of eighteen pages out of 383 pages have been questioned. Frey’s defense subscribes to the very conventions that bother his writing; yet, from a Baudrillardian rhetorical perspective, Frey could have argued that his memoir was unconventional and that exceeded the conventional binary of either truth or lie, either fact or fiction. According to Baudrillard, writing is an *illusory* art, in which appearance and disappearance are perpetually exchanged. As an alternative to making truth appear, Frey might have argued that his writing worked to challenge appearance and the representation of truth. Frey could have invoked the way in which his character in *A Million Little Pieces* drew upon imagination to challenge meaning as an analogy for his own compositional method. However, he did not.

Unlike the most prominent paratexts involved in this controversy, there were some auxiliary texts which activated a Baudrillardian rhetorical perspective by challenging the meaning-making system that valued truth and fact in conventional memoir. These less notable texts appeared in places that included internet message boards and published letters to editors of various news publications. These postings and letters show that it was the readers of *A Million Little Pieces*, not the writer of *A Million Little Pieces*, who were most disposed to discard the conventional meaning-making system. For instance, one reader wrote: “I loved *Million Little Pieces* [*sic*] and *Leonard*, and must admit I am not bothered about what is true and what is not in the books—they are both fantastic pieces of writing, compelling and entertaining” (Jon). Another reader

questions: “whether wholly true or not, is it not the writer’s art, and in fact job, to transport the reader and give us a fantastic page-turning read?” (Nissa). According to this reader, the answer is: “Yes” (Nissa). A third reader exclaims: “If fibbing made this book more appealing to the masses, and it’s likely to end up in the hands of addicts and their families, I say, ‘Fib on.’” (Martinez).

### Oprah Winfrey’s Conventional Crusade for Truth

The pinnacle of the controversy over *A Million Little Pieces* occurred on January 26, 2006, when Oprah Winfrey interviewed James Frey. The Winfrey interview occurred two weeks after Larry King’s interview with Frey, and it has been described by Stephen King as a “ritual scourging.” If this interview was a scourging, then it was a scourging in the name of convention, for the Winfrey interview marks the triumph of conventional truth over Baudrillardian ambivalence.

In this interview, Winfrey mobilizes conventional rhetoric in order to erode any ground upon which Frey might offer an alternative perspective. Winfrey approaches the interview through the issue of trust. She uses trust to introduce the controversy on an interpersonal level. She begins by explaining the difficulty she has even speaking with Frey. She feels “duped,” and as if Frey “betrayed millions of readers” and “conned” everyone (Interview by Oprah Winfrey). Winfrey is one reader among many who feels as if Frey ignored his agreement with her. Thus, Winfrey occupies a metonymic position throughout the interview. She stands in for other readers, as a part of Frey’s readership that may feel angry and cheated. Since Winfrey ascribes to a highly conventional rhetorical relationship in which an audience’s trust is an essential part of rhetoric, her

demeanor during this interview can also be interpreted as an attempt to reconstruct her own viewer's trust in her and her show. She, of course, was responsible for selecting Frey's book for her book club and recommending it to a nation of viewers. She also came to Frey's defense two weeks earlier during the King interview. Towards the end of that interview, Winfrey called into King's show and supported Frey's text, stating: "although some of the facts have been questioned [...] the underlying message of redemption in James Frey's memoir still resonates with me" (Interview by Larry King). Winfrey would explain her unconventional support of Frey's book two weeks later, referring to her statement as a defense that resulted from clouded judgment. However, feeling as if she had been conned, Winfrey rescinds her support of Frey's text.

Winfrey's once-clouded judgment has become clear: In her interview, truth becomes the criterion for her readerly judgments. Winfrey measures Frey's statements according to their truth. At one point in the interview, she shares her opinion that Frey's novel "presented a false person" (Interview by Oprah Winfrey). Later, when Frey refers to an idea with which he worked in his book, Winfrey interrupts him and exclaims: "That's a lie. It's not an idea, James. That's a lie" (Interview by Oprah Winfrey).

Winfrey's interview is in no uncertain terms a corrective measure by which a reader might vindicate truth. Winfrey embarks on a crusade to restore the solemn pact that the memoir genre establishes between writer and reader. She even inquires as to Frey's desire to alert his readers to the fiction found within this memoir by printing a disclaimer on his book. Although she had expressed her belief that "discussion will be furthered by the so-called controversy" during her call into *Larry King Live*, when conducting her own interview of Frey, Winfrey seemed annoyed by discussion and instead grilled him about

the facts (Interview by Larry King). She asks questions such as: “Why did you lie?” “How much of the book is fabricated?” Winfrey further questions Frey’s motives for lying and his feelings about doing so.

Frey, for his part, seems defenseless during this interview. His answers to Winfrey questions seem subdued. He maintains that he wrote *A Million Little Pieces* “from memory,” but he seems to listen to Winfrey’s points throughout the interview (Interview by Oprah Winfrey). Ultimately, he sheepishly agrees with her assessment of the situation. Frey’s capitulation to the dominant meaning-making system—its valuing of truth and its belief in the writer-reader pact—is best captured in his closing exchange with Winfrey:

Winfrey: I appreciate you being here because I believe the truth can set you free. I realize this has been a difficult time for you... Maybe this is the beginning of another kind of truth for you.

Frey: I think you're absolutely right. I mean, I think this is obvious. This hasn't been a great day for me. It certainly hasn't been a great couple weeks for me. But I think I come out of it better. I mean, I feel like I came here and I have been honest with you. I have, you know, essentially admitted to... to lying. (Interview by Oprah Winfrey)

### A Unified Response to a Fragmented Text

The epigraph to *A Million Little Pieces* forwards a scene that can be interpreted as emphasizing disrepair. The scene captures the feeling of the postmodern era—an era of sustained fragmentation, of a shattering beyond repair. The epigraph reads:

The Young Man came to the Old Man seeking counsel.

I broke something, Old Man.

How badly is it broken?

It's in a million little pieces.

I'm afraid I can't help you.

Why?

There's nothing you can do.

Why?

It can't be fixed.

Why?

It's broken beyond repair. It's in a million little pieces. (Frey, *A Million Epigraph*)

The epigraph's sense of relinquishment retains a hint of nihilism and it seems wryly sarcastic in its tone. In short, the epigraph suggests that Frey's book might be predisposed to a Baudrillardian rhetoric. Indeed, particular scenes in the text seem to endorse Baudrillardian rhetoric, as Frey's character ruptures logic, challenges truth value, and defies convention. Nonetheless, *A Million Little Pieces* and its paratexts remain unsuccessful creating an ambivalent rhetorical space and initiating exchange within that space.

In stark contrast to the fragmentation described in the epigraph of Frey's book, the texts involved in the controversy subscribed to an extremely cohesive meaning-making system that united memoir writer with memoir reader in a pact sealed by truth value. Rather than challenging convention, this controversy ascribed to convention. In the end, it was adjudicated in United States District Court. On May 14, 2007, a consolidated class

action lawsuit was settled, with Doubleday's parent company Random House Publishing and James Frey offering a refund to readers of *A Million Little Pieces* who felt misled by the text. These misled readers needed only to cut off the book's front cover, fill-out a claim form, and place both in the mail, in order to receive their refund (In re).

From a Baudrillardian perspective, it is only fitting that this controversy culminates in an economic exchange that requires readers to literally slice into and sacrifice Frey's writing. Baudrillard would argue that those who willingly participated in the truth monopoly, those who attempted to ferret out the real from the imaginary and the fact from the fiction, had already butchered Frey's writing. The arguments forwarded in search of the truth in Frey's text effectively squelched the exchange between appearance and disappearance that Baudrillard finds so important to writing.

#### Rhetoric and the Public Good

Taken together, the above analyses of *Antidosis* and *A Million Little Pieces* suggest that Baudrillardian rhetoric is a resolutely sophistic rhetoric. By conceiving of rhetorical success in terms of exchange, Baudrillardian rhetoric preserves the potential for the weaker argument to be made the stronger argument. As such, it is a rhetoric that offers recourse to rhetors, such as Isocrates or Frey, who momentarily occupy the weaker side of the argument. When successfully deployed, Baudrillardian rhetoric transforms feeble and defensive posturing into a resolute and offensive stance. Thus, Baudrillardian rhetoric possesses the ability to radically shift arguments and change judgments.

As a sophistic rhetoric, Baudrillardian rhetoric is vulnerable to the charge that it may be deployed unethically and used to replace a bad argument with a good argument.

Behind this charge is a relatively static understanding of values, an understanding of values which foregrounded both *Antidosis* and *A Million Little Pieces*. As my analyses demonstrate, Baudrillardian rhetoric combats static understandings of value; it seeks to rupture established value systems. Accordingly, Baudrillardian rhetoric undercuts the centuries-old attack on sophistic rhetoric.

Beyond warding off conventional arguments against sophistry, Baudrillardian rhetoric asks its auditors—whether members of the public or members of the academy—to radically reconsider the values upon which rhetoric is judged. For members of the general public, this means a reconsideration of what constitutes a public good. For instance, is it good for the public to share an understanding of truth? To recognize education as a public service? To adjudicate rhetoric in the courts? For members of the academy, namely rhetorical critics, this means an expanded definition of rhetorical success and a critical openness to new and different conceptions of rhetoric beyond representation.

## Chapter 4:

## Rhetorical Studies, the Series, the Model, and Baudrillard

As I argued in my previous chapter, rhetorical critics can deploy Baudrillardian rhetoric as a framework through which they can contemplate a text's potential to resist meaning. My analyses of Isocrates's *Antidosis* and James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* adopted a Baudrillardian perspective, in order to evaluate the degree to which each text and its auxiliary texts shattered convention, ruptured established value systems, and dissolved dominant logics. In other words, I generalized a notion of Baudrillardian rhetoric and applied this notion of rhetoric to other texts. In doing so, I aimed to demonstrate an alternative way by which rhetorical studies could conceive of a rhetoric beyond representation.

This chapter steps away from the discrete moves of generalization and application deployed in the previous chapter and, instead, offers a metacritical commentary on those very moves, as well as the moves I executed in chapter one and two. My arguments in the previous three chapters have focused upon the relationship between methods, whether critical or rhetorical, and rhetorical objects. James Jasinski notes that recent trends in rhetorical studies suggest that the relationship between *method* and *theory* deserves more critical attention than the relationship between *method* and *object*. According to Jasinski, method continues to enjoy an unmatched status in rhetorical studies; however, there is evidence suggesting the decline of method and a "shift away from method-based criticism" ("The Status" 254). Here, Jasinski conceives of method-based criticism as criticism that applies a critical method to a rhetorical text—the kind of criticism that I practiced in chapter three. Jasinski finds that the decline in method-based criticism has

been accompanied by the rise in what he refers to as conceptually-oriented criticism (256). For Jasinski and other critics, the difference between method-based criticism and concept-based criticism is located in the relationship between method and theory. In method-based criticism, theory produces criticism, in that theory provides a methodological lens that enables the critical analysis of a rhetorical object. In concept-based criticism, criticism produces theory, in that criticism generates new ideas and concepts that embolden theory. Thus, method and theory share a relationship in the production of the older kind of criticism, while method is extricated from the production of criticism in this more recent kind of rhetorical criticism.

The extrication of method from conceptually oriented criticism pits method and theory in an oppositional relationship. When rhetorical critics embrace a view of method and theory as oppositional critical elements, the result eschews the productive industry that is rhetorical criticism. Jasinski, for his part, articulates the category of conceptually-oriented criticism in an attempt “to disrupt the ‘silence’ with respect to the ‘theoretical productivity’” of rhetorical criticism (266). While his attempt champions *theoretical* productivity, it also extinguishes any *methodological* productivity. Concept-based criticism opposes method to such a degree that it abandons method. But, even conceptually oriented criticism involves method and even conceptually oriented critics adhere to a rhetorical method as they write their criticism. In short, rhetorical criticism *is* a productive industry that necessitates *both* theory and method.

Drawing upon Baudrillard’s discussion of the series and the model, I aim to demonstrate that theory and method maintain a relationship that enables the production of rhetorical criticism; nonetheless, the stakes are quite different in criticism that favors

theory than they are in criticism that favors method. Both theory and method are needed to produce criticism, but, as I will show, the characteristics of their products and by-products are rhetorically distinctive. In this chapter, I argue that existing explanations of the dynamic between method and theory as manifested in rhetorical criticism are insufficient. 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*. Next, 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, proving that Baudrillard was indeed a rhetorical theorist in the most robust sense, since he engages with both theory and method.

#### Rhetorical Criticism as Production and Consumption

Rhetorical criticism is a fundamentally productive endeavor in which critics construct, manufacture, build, and support arguments, analyses, interpretations, and understandings. Not surprisingly, scholars distinguish between method-based criticism and conceptually oriented criticism on the basis of their products, citing critical products and thereby opposing method-based criticism to concept-based criticism. Since critical products (i.e. interpretations or pieces of criticism) are invoked as evidence of the separation of method from theory, my argument—that rhetorical criticism depends upon the relationship between theory and method—begins by reviewing the way in which scholars have differentiated these two kinds of criticism on account of their critical products.

Method-based criticism produces interpretations by creating and replicating methodological approaches in a manner akin to the sciences or social sciences. The association of method-based criticism with more scientific modes of inquiry results, in part, from Edwin Black's comparison of the critic with the scientist in the opening chapter of *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method*. Writing in 1965, Black observes that the achievements of science have made "scientific methodology a model for thought" (2). Science, particularly its focus on method, influences modern critics, making them "especially conscious of their methods" (2). In the characterizations of method-based criticism that connect method with science, method serves only to test theory and add to the model. Method works to build the model. Jasinski, who views method-based criticism as functioning deductively, notes that "the social scientific model of theory creates explanatory models that are tested in order to produce generalizations and predictions" with method driving the production (257). Methods work to organize critical products, binding and disciplining critical products under a coherent set of rules and standards. As Stephanie Houston Grey notes, methods allow members of a particular discipline to assess the work of colleagues. If particular individuals break the rules, reject the standard, or depart from the method, then "their work will be devalued or perhaps even silenced" (Grey 358). In method-based criticism, theory serves criticism by preceding method and method maintains standards of value as it contributes to the model. Thus, critical products are circumscribed by method; they are finished when the method is completed and they are judged in accordance with the method.

In terms of Baudrillardian exchange, a method-based piece of criticism might outline three criteria of exchange, apply these criteria to a text, and test the ability of that

text to in accordance with the enumerated criteria. For example, the criteria of exchange might be: (1) the rupture of values; (2) the questioning of dominant logics; and, (3) the departure from conventions. These three criteria would then be applied to a text like *Antidosis* as a basis for evaluating that text's capacity to initiate and sustain exchange. The resulting assessment would then contribute to this particular pattern of method-based criticism by supporting it or calling for its revision.

Although concept-based criticism differs significantly from method-based criticism, it too comprises a productive endeavor. Conceptually oriented criticism, as Jasinski cautions, "should not be confused with the social scientific model of theory" (256). Whereas Jasinski contends that method-based criticism begins with theory and works deductively, he argues that concept-based criticism begins with criticism and works abductively. For Jasinski, the process of abduction resembles "a back and forth tacking movement between the text and the concept or concepts," in which the critic encounters "a text or a series of texts" (256). Abduction involves the growth or evolution of criticism and it might otherwise be described as "the constant interaction of careful reading and rigorous conceptual reflection" (256). Accordingly to Jasinski, "the concepts(s) remain essentially works in progress," while the critic's "understanding of the concept(s) evolves through the back and forth movement between concept and object" (256). Grey's description of conceptually oriented criticism emphasizes this point as well. For Grey, conceptually oriented criticism never produces a finished product (359). In contradistinction to method-based criticism, concept-based criticism works from the premise that "[n]o theory or model is ever complete" (359). Whereas Black compared the method-based critic to a scientist, Grey describes the conceptually oriented critic as an

entrepreneur ready to seize upon the heuristic value of criticism detached from method (341). Conceptually oriented criticism finds value in the critical act that explores concepts in depth. This more recent kind of criticism elevates the critic and simply allocates value to the generation of theory. Ultimately, conceptually oriented critical products are unfinished; they are useful in so far as they are generative for future studies.

In terms of Baudrillardian exchange, a concept-based piece of criticism might explore a text like *Antidosis* in terms of what it can contribute to an understanding of exchange. Unlike its methodological counterpart, concept-based criticism would not apply any stringently predetermined criteria to a text. Rather, this kind of criticism would begin with the critic's engagement with the text and attempt to thicken the concept of exchange by gleaning insights from *Antidosis*. This kind of criticism embraces interpretation to such a degree that interpretation never ends, nor is the concept ever completely understood. Instead, the concept invites further exploration through future criticism of other texts and events.

Although the differences between these two types of criticism are manifold and the distinctions between their two kinds of critical products significant, both kinds of criticism are similar in that they are productive industries. The language with which scholars use to describe each kind of criticism—*production, work, value, drive, entrepreneur*—positions rhetorical criticism as industry. This view is only further supported by Jasinski's characterization of criticism "as a force for educating its audience and helping those audience members to become better judges and/or consumers of various types of practices" (342). By this reading, criticism is a productive industry aimed at improving consumption.

The way in which critics discuss and describe rhetorical criticism should not, as Grey notes, be ignored. In her discussion of conceptually oriented criticism, Grey contends that rhetorical criticism “derives its meaning both from how it is done and how it is talked about” (343). Thus, to talk about rhetorical criticism in terms of production and consumption says something about “how it is done” and, in the following section, I inquire further into “how it is done.” I ask: If rhetorical criticism is talked about as a productive industry, then what does this reveal about how critics practice rhetorical criticism? Understanding rhetorical criticism as a productive industry suggests that production and consumption are intertwined and form a larger system that involves methods, theories, and objects. Heretofore, descriptions of the system of rhetorical criticism, particularly descriptions of concept-based criticism, unsatisfactorily abandon method. As I intend to show, method remains important to the system, to both method-based criticism and concept based-criticism; that is to say theory and method maintain a relationship in rhetorical criticism, no matter the kind. To support this contention and to offer a more comprehensive description of the system of rhetorical criticism, I turn to Baudrillard’s work with the model and the series.

#### The Ideology of Production and Consumption: The Rhetoric of the Model and the Series

To support my claim that theory and method maintain a relationship in rhetorical criticism, no matter the kind, I turn to Baudrillard’s early work *The System of Objects*. Unlike the majority of Baudrillard’s work, which confronts the production/making of meaning with the seduction/challenging of meaning, *The System of Objects* primarily concentrates upon the way in which everyday objects or products make meaning. *The*

*System of Objects* exhibits the influence of Roland Barthes's work on Baudrillard and reads much like Barthes's *The System of Fashion*.<sup>48</sup> For the purposes of my argument, the most significant aspect of the Barthes's influence on *The System of Objects* is that the text invokes the concepts of rhetoric and ideology in a way that follows Barthes, where rhetoric is the symbolic manifestation of ideology. The book's purpose, as Baudrillard explains it, is to grapple with the way in which products (everyday, practical, or technical objects) speak. He notes that, when compared to a language system, the system of objects is highly unstable and a "description of the system of objects cannot be divorced from a critique of that system's practical ideology" (*System* 8-9). Ideology as manifested in rhetoric is therefore central to Baudrillard's analysis of the system of objects.

For Baudrillard, the ideology of the system of objects and their consumption is composed of the dynamic between the model and the series. For Baudrillard, models are exemplary objects that are meant to be imitated. Baudrillard's understanding of the model invokes the definition of a model "as an object to be copied," as a "thing eminently worthy of imitation" ("Model"). The model may manifest itself as an idealized design, pattern, or description "of a particular system, situation, or process" ("Model"). The

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<sup>48</sup> In an interview with Monique Arnaud and Mike Gane, Baudrillard explains that there are "others who have influenced me" and he proceeds to note that "Roland Barthes is someone to whom I felt very close, such a similarity of position that a number of things he did I might have done myself" (*Baudrillard Live* 204). Baudrillard's debt to Barthes is further evident in his use of the word *rhetoric* in *The System of Objects*, for it resembles similar usages that occur in Barthes's *The Fashion System* and *Elements of Semiology*. When Baudrillard explains "the rhetoric of this object" by way of a twofold connotation that unites product and myth under a rhetoric, Baudrillard seems to be working within a Barthesian understanding of rhetoric, one in which the rhetorical system and connotative system are coextensive. As Barthes repeatedly asserts, rhetoric and connotation occur in the same system<sup>48</sup> (*Fashion* 36-9; *Elements* 92-3). "With the rhetorical system," says Barthes, "we broach the general level of connotation" (*Fashion* 225). The similarities between Baudrillard's use of *rhetoric*, here, and some of Barthes's invocations of *rhetoric* should not be too surprising, for Baudrillard references Barthes in the introduction to *The System of Objects*. As Mike Gane recognizes, "Baudrillard himself made no secret of the fact that Barthes had not only furnished the method but also the problem for [Baudrillard's] first book" (*Baudrillard: Critical* 35). In this instance, then, examining Baudrillard's use of the word *rhetoric* connects Baudrillard's work with Barthes's work and further suggests that both Baudrillard and Barthes are keenly concerned with object-oriented rhetorics.

model might even be “put forward as a basis for theoretical or empirical understanding,” as a high-quality axiom “for calculations [and] predictions” (“Model”). The series, however, involves a sequence of things that may include discourse, writing, or thought (“Series”). The series is “a set of objects of one kind, differing progressively in size or in some other respect, or having a recognized order of enumeration” (“Series”). In a material sense, a series is comprised of “a range or continued spatial succession of similar objects” (“Series”). According to Baudrillard, “the status of the modern object is dominated by the MODEL/SERIES distinction” and this distinction is moreover a rhetorical distinction (*System* 147; emphasis original). Rhetoric assumes a prominent position in the system of objects for it constitutes, in the Barthesian sense, the symbolic manifestation of ideology. Baudrillard discusses the distinction between the model and the series as a rhetorical distinction: “the serial object has its own class-specific script, its own rhetoric—just as the model has its own rhetoric of reticence, veiled functionality, perfection and eclecticism” (160). Thus, the rhetoric of the series and the rhetoric of the model—the “scripts” of each of kind of object—display the dynamic ideology that drives the system of production and consumption.

Throughout his discussion of the system, Baudrillard illustrates the distinctions between the model and the series in terms of their rhetorical differences. For instance, Baudrillard explains that “the *nuance (within a unity)* has come to characterize the model, while *difference (within uniformity)* has come to characterize the series” (*System* 160; emphasis original). He further explains that the “model has a harmony, a unity, a homogeneity, a consistency of space, form, substance, and function; it is, in short, a syntax,” while the series “is merely juxtaposition, haphazard combination, inarticulate

discourse” (159). Thus, the rhetoric of the model appreciates subtleties and provides a sense of coherence. Models maintain a status by transcending the system.<sup>49</sup> On the contrary, the rhetoric of the series manufactures difference and feigns value through combinations. Series are marked by “inessential qualities” and “shoddiness,” and, as Gary Genosko explains, “they are found in cluttered interiors” (Genosko, “Model” 130).

Baudrillard further illustrates the rhetorical distinctions between the model and the series by invoking examples of the model/series distinction. These encompass a wide range of consumer goods, including cars, refrigerators, dresses, and armchairs. For Baudrillard, a model armchair crafted in “steel and leather” and showcased at a particular venue “will crop up in aluminum and leatherette” at the local home furnishing store (*System* 158). Beyond illustrating technical and practical distinctions between the model and the series, this example emphasizes that the distinctions between the model and the series also include class and status distinctions. According to Baudrillard, the model and the series each mean something in so far as they comprise the two components of a dynamic system. One is not inherently better than the other. Rather, they depend upon each other for their meaning—the model as rhetorically distinguished from the series and the series as rhetorically distinguished from the model. Again, Baudrillard cites the example of the armchair to explain the relationship:

Suppose that the uniqueness of the aforementioned armchair lies in its particular combination of tawny leather, black steel, general silhouette and mobilization of space. The corresponding serial object will emerge with plasticized leather, no tawnniness, the metal lighter or galvanized, the overall configuration altered and

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<sup>49</sup> According to Gary Genosko’s reading of Baudrillard’s *The System of Objects*, “[t]he model’s singularity is signified by the user’s strategies of personalisation by means of serialisations in a system-bound, internal transcendence” (Genosko, “Model” 129).

the relationship to space diminished. The object as a whole is thus deconstructed: its substance is assigned to the series of objects in imitation leather, its tawnyness is now a brown common to thousands of other objects, its legs are indistinguishable from those of any tubular chair, and so on. The object is no longer anything more than a conglomeration of details and the crossroads of a variety of series. (*System* 160)

Here, Baudrillard's comments seem to convey an affinity or taste for well-crafted, high-end products. Implicit in this passage is the importance of method and material to craft and art. In much the same way that Baudrillard criticized Warhol's method of mass producing silk-screened pieces that I discussed in chapter one, Baudrillard seems to be elevating the model and critiquing serialization in this passage. While such an interpretation of *The System of Objects* seems warranted if not highly plausible, Baudrillard's purpose in *The System of Objects* is not to evaluate objects as good or bad in accordance with their methods and materials. Rather, he strives to evaluate the system of objects.

The system relies upon the dynamic between the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series, not the elevation of the model over the series. The notion that a model is "deconstructed" into a series should not be interpreted as degeneration, in which a model disintegrates into a series. For Baudrillard, the model should not be conceived as a point that then falls into the series. Rather, the model is, according to Baudrillard, "everywhere discernable in the series" and it should be conceived as an "inaccessible abstraction" (*System* 167). As he explains, "the model is basically an idea" (167). Models achieve "self-transcendence as series" lest they be swiftly replaced by another model

(167). For consumers to have access to the model armchair, the chair must be serialized. Indeed, the purchase of the serialized chair with its plasticized leather functions “as a mark of upward social mobility” (149). As Baudrillard recognizes, the serial chair increases the consumer’s access to the model: “anyone, in principle, via the humblest of objects, may partake of the model” (149).

Besides providing the consumer with access, series offer the consumer choice. Whereas the rhetoric of the model consolidates access and ascribes choice to the producer in a way that connotes aristocracy, the rhetoric of the series relies upon manufactured differences to connote democracy. Baudrillard provides a general outline of the distinction:

In sum, the series offers the immense majority of people a restricted range of choices, while a tiny minority enjoy access to the model and its infinite nuances. For the majority a range which, however extensive it may be, is composed of invariable elements—generally the most obvious ones; for the minority a multitude of random possibilities. For the majority a set of coded values; for the minority endless invention. (*System* 161)

Again, in this passage, Baudrillard works to describe and analyze the dynamic ideology that drives the system of production and consumption. He is not evaluating, at least not overtly so, the rhetorics that manifest that ideology. He neither argues that one rhetoric is better than the other rhetoric, nor does he offer an all-encompassing assessment of the rhetorics. Instead, he focuses on the relationship between the model and the series, illustrating the ways in which there are both good and bad aspects—that is, different stakes—involved in both the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series.

Baudrillard's discussion of the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series attempts to move beyond viewing the two rhetorics as oppositional. He argues that the "[s]eries and model should not be conceived of as two poles of a formal opposition" (*System* 154). In fact for Baudrillard, consumer choice among minute, inessential product features, like color, resoundingly indicates that the model and the series are not categorically opposed to one another. He contends that choice is conditioned by the fact that "[t]here are simply no more absolute models—and no more serial objects devoid of value categorically opposed to them" (153). Choice indicates that a dynamic ideology drives production and consumption. As Baudrillard notes, the ideology is manifested in the reciprocal rhetorics of the model and of the series, in which "the series hews ever more narrowly to the model, while the model is continually being diffused into the series" (150). Here, Baudrillard identifies a dynamic convergence of the model and the series. Whether an analysis begins with the model and diffuses downward or whether it begins with the series and hews upward, the analytic trajectory leads to the same point—but the rhetoric of those analyses maintains a distinction between the model and the series.

#### The Range of Critical Practice in Rhetorical Studies

When scholars conceive of or, as Grey prefers, "talk about" rhetorical criticism as production and consumption, they suggest that the practice or "doing" of rhetorical criticism can be understood metacritically as a perpetual dynamic that manifests itself in the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series. An investigation of how rhetorical criticism is practiced according to methods and theory suggests that method-based

criticism invokes the rhetoric of the model, while concept-based criticism invokes the rhetoric of the series.

Distinctive similarities connect method-based criticism with the rhetoric of the model, so much so that method and model appear to share the same script. First, the practice of method-based criticism is patterned on the idea of the model. As Black notes, method-based criticism takes cues from the scientific model of inquiry, in which methods are used to test a model and then contribute to that model. Second, method-based criticism, as Jasinski claims, progresses deductively from the model to the theory and then to the method, in much the same way that the rhetoric of the model implies that the model is the major object from which the series is deduced. Third, method-based criticism works to forward models. Either a piece of method-based criticism replicates the model or it replaces the model.

Though not synonymous, methods and models remain closely connected, as Frank D'Angelo's 2010 "The Rhetoric of Intertextuality" demonstrates. D'Angelo's essay deploys the rhetoric of the model as it outlines six new methods of rhetorical criticism. The essay, according to D'Angelo, bridges rhetorical criticism as practiced in rhetoric and writing with rhetorical criticism as practiced in rhetoric and speech, promotes "new strategies for producing discourse," and refines the critical understanding of rhetorical theory (32). D'Angelo wants to provide rhetorical critics with "alternative ways of thinking" and these ways of thinking are methods that apply to intertextual rhetorical objects. The specific methods outlined by D'Angelo number five: (1) adaptation, (2) retro, (3) appropriation, (3) parody, (4) pastiche, (5) simulation. Although D'Angelo often refers to these methods as concepts, he uses them as critical methods. His essay is

broken into five sections—one for each method—and in each section he elaborates the critical method and then applies it to an intertextual object. In the section that treats simulation, D’Angelo draws upon the work of Baudrillard to outline simulation as a method. Then, he applies simulation to the reality television show *The Apprentice* and the videogame *Spore* to suggest the way in which simulation opens up new understandings of the ways in which intertexts imitate, mimic, and fake reality. D’Angelo expressly states his intention for this method of criticism to be replicated. In his conclusion, he reiterates his hope that “this excursion into the rhetoric of intertextuality would enable teachers and students, in their roles as rhetorical critics, to understand new strategies for producing discourse and to give them alternative ways of thinking about the rhetorical situation, rhetorical invention, genre, arrangement, and audience” (43). Thus, D’Angelo’s essay deploys the rhetoric of the model in order to emphasize his method. The essay positions Baudrillardian simulation as a model of criticism intended for replication and, in doing so, it reveals the close association between method-based criticism and the rhetoric of the model.

Just as methods and models share close associations, series and theories also share close associations, with conceptually oriented criticism often invoking the rhetoric of the series. First, concept-based criticism affords the rhetorical critic some choice during the critical act and this choice resembles the range of choices that the rhetoric of the series presents a consumer. While I do not want to suggest that the choices of the rhetorical critic are inessential to the critical product in the way that Baudrillard describes the choices associated with the series, the similarity between concept-based criticism and the rhetoric of the series is located in the interest behind these choices. Concept-based

criticism starts “with an interest” that is located with the rhetorical critic, just as the series affords the consumer an opportunity to execute choices in his or her interest—he or she makes choices driven by the self-interest to accrue status, value, or distinction (Jasinski, “The Status” 256; Baudrillard, *System* 154). Second, a confluence exists between conceptually oriented criticism and the rhetoric of the series in that both involve necessarily incomplete or unfinished products. Conceptually oriented criticism is, as both Jasinski and Grey note, a work in progress. The critic investigates a concept, hoping that his or her criticism “can serve as the conceptual ground for further critical inquiry” (Jasinski, “The Status” 256). Thus, conceptually oriented criticism understands critical activity as constantly progressing in terms of a sequence, in which one critical product follows another critical product with each product distinguishing itself from its predecessor. The rhetoric of the series works in much the same way, in that it depends upon a sequencing of products, each with their own variants and distinguishing traits. Both concept-based criticism and the rhetoric of the series depend upon subsequent products for progress. But while a concept or a series progresses, it neither reaches a point of completion nor a point of finality.

Carolyn Miller’s 2003 “Writing in a Culture of Simulation” illustrates the point that no line between one concept and another concept, or one series and another series, can be definitively drawn. As it investigates the relationships between the concepts of simulation, rhetoric, writing, culture, and ethos, Miller’s piece mobilizes the rhetoric of the series in order to answer the question: “What effect does the culture of simulation have on writing, or rhetorical action more generally?” (60). Miller’s article invokes the Baudrillardian concept of simulation, not as an approach to understanding a text as

D'Angelo did, but rather as a concept that invites reflection as it is seen in relation to other concepts. Thus, Miller's essay can be considered a piece of conceptually oriented criticism. Miller's invocation of Baudrillardian simulation invokes the rhetoric of the series, in that it references Baudrillardian *simulation* through the work of Sherry Turkle. Turkle, as Miller explains, "takes the term *simulation* from Jean Baudrillard, who maintains that the proliferation of signs in contemporary society has 'imploded' the distinction between the real and the simulated" (60). Miller's conceptualization of simulation is different from Baudrillard's own. For example, after offering a comparison between Plato and Baudrillard, she concludes that "we will gain more by seeing simulation as a natural human capability than we will by attempting to escape or avoid it" (77). Here, Miller is advancing a new concept of simulation that significantly departs from Baudrillardian simulation. The rhetoric of the series shows how the progression from Baudrillard to Turkle to Miller gives way to variation among a similar group of concepts. Whereas Baudrillard explains simulation as an agent-less process, Miller chooses to think of the concept as "natural human capability" (77). Thus, in this conceptually oriented piece of criticism, Miller invokes the rhetoric of the series, presenting the concept of simulation as a work in progress, a sequenced variety, as it passes through Baudrillard to Turkle and to herself.

It is important to acknowledge that, although I have used D'Angelo's essay to illustrate the close proximity of method-based criticism to the rhetoric of the model and Miller's essay to illustrate the close proximity of conceptually oriented criticism to the rhetoric of the series, I am not suggesting that the two kinds of criticism (method-based and concept-based) are mutually exclusive. On the contrary, method-based criticism and

concept-based criticism are perpetually engaged in a dynamic relationship that heads towards the same point—even in the essays by D’Angelo and Miller. To reiterate my argument: Theory and method maintain a relationship in rhetorical criticism, no matter the kind. Their dynamic relationship, however, relies upon the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series. While these two rhetorics can be used to distinguish method-based criticism from concept-based criticism, these two rhetorics can also be used to illustrate the dynamic relationship between the two kinds of criticism. Here, I note that the five categories of methods upon which D’Angelo concentrates are concepts in and of themselves. D’Angelo acknowledges the dynamic relationship between method-based criticism and conceptually oriented criticism, as he articulates his purpose of “discussing and exemplifying concepts” that relate to intertexts (33). Likewise, Miller breaks from the rhetoric of the series when she begins referencing Baudrillard’s discussion of simulation in *Simulacra and Simulations* instead of Turkle’s discussion of simulation in *Life on the Screen*. In effect, Miller’s referencing of Baudrillard and not Turkle disrupts the serial progression of the concept—from Baudrillard to Turkle to Miller—and positions Baudrillard’s discussion of the concept as the model discussion. For this brief moment in Miller’s piece when the series moves toward the model, the dynamic relationship between theory and method becomes apparent. Both D’Angelo’s essay and Miller’s essay support an understanding of rhetorical criticism as a productive industry that involves a dynamic relationship between method and theory and both draw upon the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series to illustrate this dynamic.

Rhetorical Theorists as Critical By-Products

The way in which the productive dynamic between method and theory develops often results in a wide range of critical products. The stakes attached to these products are extremely high, for when rhetorical criticism manufactures a product, it is often also manufacturing a person—that is to say that the critical product often works to build a rhetorical theorist. Over the past twenty years, rhetorical critics have increasingly drawn upon the work of Jean Baudrillard in its scholarship, effectively positioning Baudrillard as a notable, if not controversial, rhetorical theorist. His *Simulacra and Simulation* has, in fact, been recognized by Michelle Ballif and Diane Davis as one of twenty texts that anyone new to research in the area of rhetoric and poststructuralism “must read” (Ratcliffe, “The Twentieth” 186). Additionally, in the tenth chapter of Sonja K. Foss, Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp’s *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, Baudrillard is profiled as a thinker who has “exerted a profound influence on contemporary rhetorical theory” (Waveland). Although these constructions of Baudrillard as a rhetorical theorist are largely favorable, other constructions are much less so. In what follows, I outline the stakes attached to two critical products by examining the way in which they construct Baudrillard as a rhetorical theorist. By tracing the dynamic between method and theory in these critical products, I aim to show the importance of this dynamic in the construction of Baudrillard as a rhetorical theorist.

The first product is Thomas Rickert’s treatment of Baudrillard in his 2007 book *Acts of Enjoyment: Rhetoric, Žižek, and the Return of the Subject*. This treatment comprises a conceptually oriented piece of criticism in that it largely focuses on the theoretical concept of cynicism and primarily discusses Baudrillard in terms of that concept. In this piece, Rickert explores postmodern cynicism as a limit to writing

teachers' attempts to cultivate a "critical sensibility" in writing students (166). Rickert's treatment of Baudrillard might aptly be described as a piece of comparative metacriticism, for Rickert compares two previous treatments of Baudrillard by two rhetorical scholars, Lester Faigley and Victor Vitanza, in order to forward his claim about cynicism. Mobilizing the rhetoric of the series, Rickert reviews the two earlier treatments paying careful attention to the epistemological backing of each treatment. In Rickert's view, Faigley's treatment of Baudrillard focuses on Baudrillard's challenge to the meaning-making ability of signs, but ignores Baudrillard's dismissal of critique. Moreover, Faigley "retains the modernist hope for overcoming the instability of the sign" through critique (Rickert 169). As Rickert explains, the way in which Faigley's treatment of Baudrillard retains a hope for critique contrasts markedly with the way in which Vitanza's treatment of Baudrillard endorses abandonment. Rickert illuminates the contrast and clarifies that if Faigley searches for a space from which to critique, "Vitanza advocates abandonment—abandonment of those critical enterprises that ultimately depend on interpretive procedures motivated by the desire to control signs" (Rickert 169). According to Rickert, Vitanza finds in Baudrillard an ally who questions the meaning-making nature of signs and the effectiveness of critique. For Rickert, Vitanza's treatment of Baudrillard embraces postmodernity more fully than Faigley's treatment and is, therefore, more amenable to Baudrillardian thought.

Rickert's criticism invokes the rhetoric of the series as it puts these treatments of Baudrillard into succession, moving the past treatments of Baudrillard forward into the present and considering them from a slightly different perspective. Although he remains vigilant in his reassessment of postmodern cynicism with respect to the writing

classroom, Rickert allows for Faigley's representation of Baudrillard's reputation to be carried forward without much scrutiny. Faigley's 1992 book, *Fragments of Rationality: Postmodernity and the Subject of Composition*, casts Baudrillard as a theorist whose rhetorical theories do not jibe with the critique-based, cultural studies, composition pedagogies of the early 1990s. Specifically, Faigley introduces Baudrillard to his readers as easily dismissible "[b]ecause Baudrillard is hostile to French feminism, perpetuates racial stereotypes, valorizes science and machines, sees California as utopia, theorizes politics as a play of signs, and is generally oblivious to human suffering" (Faigley 207). Faigley further compares Baudrillard to writing students, stating: "But in spite of the unrelenting cynicism of his position, I find Baudrillard valuable particularly in one respect: students often sound very much like him" (212). Throughout his treatment, Faigley mentions Baudrillard's "profound cynicism" (216), and it is this final characterization—of Baudrillard as a cynic—that undoubtedly helps Rickert thicken his treatment of the concept of cynicism. Not surprisingly, Rickert does not challenge this characterization. However, Rickert does take issue with Faigley's comparison of Baudrillard to students, questioning: "Who are these students that Faigley aligns with Baudrillard?" (Rickert 166). Although he questions Faigley's description of writing students, Rickert does allow Faigley's other characterizations of Baudrillard to proceed unchallenged. He mobilizes the rhetoric of the series and paraphrases Faigley, noting: "It is important to emphasize that Baudrillard is often seen as easily dismissible, ethically objectionable, and politically irresponsible, someone whose work is a cartoon-like caricature of perspicacious scholarship" (Rickert 166). To the detriment of Baudrillard's reputation, Rickert's deployment of the rhetoric of the series perpetuates an unsavory

depiction of Baudrillard by repeating it with only marginal difference. Here, the stakes are high, with Baudrillard standing to lose credibility. Instead of turning to the rhetoric of the model and locating an exemplary description of Baudrillard's ethos, Rickert reverts to the rhetoric of the series and repeats a damaging fifteen-year-old characterization.

While Rickert's critical product serializes a particularly unsavory construction of a rhetorical theorist, a second critical product challenges similar characterizations by invoking the rhetoric of the model. In her 2001 book, *Seduction, Sophistry, and the Woman with the Rhetorical Figure*, Michelle Ballif deploys Baudrillard's move of seduction (another name for disappearance) in order to initiate exchange and augment his reputation. As its title implies, Ballif's book employs seduction as a move with which to initiate and sustain exchange. Beyond simply drawing upon Baudrillardian seduction as a conceptual support for her own argument, Ballif's argument patterns itself after Baudrillard's own writing. Ballif's deployment of seduction imitates Baudrillard's exemplary sophistic deployment of disappearance, as both work in service of the method of exchange. Through this mimetic gesture, Ballif invokes the rhetoric of the model.

Ballif applies seduction to the reception of three thinkers, all of whom have been considered misogynists, with the goal of rupturing values, questioning assumptions, and dissolving established logics. Using seduction as a move in service of exchange, Ballif challenges the conventional assessments of Gorgias, Nietzsche, and Baudrillard. As she explains, "by using a Baudrillardian strategy of extremes (more Woman than Woman, more sophistic than sophistic)," she aims "to clear a space for the Third Woman, the Third sophistic, for *what will have been* the other Other" (61). Here, Ballif describes the creation of an ambivalent space, one in which rhetorical figures and rhetorical theories

may circulate freely without fixed meaning. As Ballif articulates it, her project is “concerned finally with the seduction of Woman—that is, unthinking her, unrepresenting her” (5). She explicitly indicates that she borrows her method from Baudrillard and she repeats Baudrillard’s radical ethic in her own work (10-11; 12). Her task is one of testing and replicating method with reference to Baudrillard’s model method. She works to seduce or unrepresent the rhetorical figure of “woman” in her analyses of Gorgias, Nietzsche, and Baudrillard. Significantly, Ballif mobilizes the rhetoric of the model to salvage what little is left of these thinkers’ reputations, even moving to recover some of the reputation that has been lost by these thinkers. Additionally, she remains overt about her critical method and clear about her debts to a model method throughout the text.

In her writing, she maintains the distinction between production and seduction, pushing arguments and language to extremes in order to challenge the productive, meaning-making drive of rhetoric. Ballif draws extensively from Baudrillard’s text *Seduction*, in order to articulate the ways in which her arguments exceed conventional binaries and logical limits. Referencing Baudrillard’s notion of seduction as supposing “the minimum reversibility which puts an end to every fixed opposition and, therefore, every conventional semiology,” she argues that rhetoric operates unconventionally (Baudrillard, *Seduction* 103-4; Ballif 149). According to Ballif, “the seductive attraction of signs resist the logical coupling, the shotgun wedding that conventional semiology, rational discourse, and communication imposes” (149). The strategy of seduction and the “radical new relationship to language” that it requires manifests itself in the poetic playfulness of Ballif’s writing (147). Whereas Baudrillard’s own writing moved towards the aphorism and other forms of “theory-fiction” to champion disappearance, Ballif’s

writing champions seduction by employing a sub/versive form of writing rhetorical histories. Here, Ballif follows the historiographies of Vitanza by mobilizing, albeit to a lesser degree, a sub/versive form of writing. This kind of writing is quite similar to Baudrillard's own writing, in that it attempts to strategically exploit areas of ambiguity in language, messes with convention, and works against "[o]rderly' presentation and 'clarity'" (Vitanza, "Notes" 109). This seductiveness occurs in lines such as: "within the realm of production, the aim of the speaking subject is to make language articulate truth, to 'real-ise' being, in all its clarity and simplicity, to indite (and indict) its meaning" (Ballif 148). In this line, Ballif describes the production of rhetoric, but the playfulness of her writing—her use of hyphens and parentheses to invoke double meanings—encapsulates the significant challenge that seduction poses to production.

Seduction provides Ballif with a move through which she can initiate and sustain exchange, through which she can propel characterization of Baudrillard as a misogynist into an ambivalent rhetorical space. Deploying the unconventional semiology of seduction, Ballif reviews readings of Baudrillard that characterize him as a misogynist. She then posits the signifiers "Woman" and "the feminine" as instances of "rhetorical tropings," which occur throughout Baudrillard's work (145). As Ballif explains, "[the feminine'] is not a known term; it is not a gender; it is a challenge, a challenge to the comfortable binaries which sustain truth, a challenge to our social, gender coding" (145).<sup>50</sup> By embracing the challenge in Baudrillard's writing, Ballif works against the notion that one can "know" what the "true" meaning of "the feminine" is, and thus provides Baudrillard with some respite from claims of misogyny.

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<sup>50</sup> This definition is strikingly similar to Luce Irigaray's definition of feminine.

As the examples of Rickert and Ballif illustrate, the stakes involved in the dynamic that drives rhetorical criticism are extremely high. In both of these pieces of criticism, the critical product's tendency to focus more on theory than method, in Rickert's case, or more on method than theory, in Ballif's case, results in the invocation of the rhetoric of the series and the rhetoric of the model respectively. These differing rhetorical invocations afford each critic different sets of critical options and these different affordances result in much different critical work constructing rhetorical theorists. Rickert's invocation of the rhetoric of the series compels him to carry certain unflattering past representations of Baudrillard into the present, as the rhetoric of the series maintains uniformity in spite of differences. Ballif's invocation of the rhetoric of the model enables her to test the Baudrillardian approach of challenging representation against Baudrillard's reputation as a misogynist. For her, the rhetoric of the model allows her to test, nuance, and largely combat the unified charges of misogyny against Gorgias, Nietzsche, and Baudrillard. Taken together, these two pieces demonstrate the way in which the method and theory dynamic drives the critical industry. Not only does the dynamic allow critics to practice criticism in different ways, but the difference in criticism exerts a significant impact on the reputation of particular individuals as they are constructed into rhetorical theorists.

#### Rhetoric, Reality, and Rhetorical Criticism: A Series of Three Model Questions

As the case of Jean Baudrillard illustrates, although rhetorical criticism is an industry that churns out critical products, one of the industry's by-products is the manufacturing of rhetorical theorists. The production of rhetorical theorists as by-

products of the industry that is rhetorical criticism constitutes a problematic occurrence for some individuals in rhetorical studies. In this section, I consider Baudrillard's own comments about his theory of the simulacrum and his notion of simulation in order to assess his position as a rhetorical theorist. My analysis reveals that Baudrillard was indeed a critic of his own rhetoric, in that he often contemplated the products of his work that were generated by the theory and method dynamic.

In "The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science," Dilip Gaonkar criticizes this making of rhetorical theorists by outlining what he refers to as the dialectic of explicit and implicit rhetorical analysis. For Gaonkar, the dialectic leads to the conclusion that "there is no exit from rhetoric" (75). As Gaonkar outlines this problem, a critic can "always redescribe any text, both in terms of what it says and what it does, in terms of unconscious deployment of rhetorical categories" (75). Gaonkar also examines the corollary to this claim; namely, that a critic can always redescribe a theorist in terms of what that theorist says and what that theorist does. Curiously, he associates the hunt for rhetoric in a text with the construction of rhetorical theorists:

[I]t is not uncommon to find that those who are celebrated as masters of "implicit rhetorical analysis" react indifferently, if not with hostility, to such interpretations of their work. To the best of my knowledge, none of these masters (and the list is formidable: Kuhn, Feyerabend, Gadamer, Habermas; Toulmin is the possible exception) so far has either conceded that what they have been doing all along is a form of rhetorical reading, or gone on to incorporate rhetorical vocabulary in their subsequent work. (74)

Here, Gaonkar offers a synopsis of the globalization of rhetoric, what Alan Gross and William Keith gloss as “a circular strategy of recovering rhetoric as a universal phenomenon by prefiguring it as something *suppressed* or hidden” (7; emphasis original). As Gross and Keith summarize it, the globalization of rhetoric that Gaonkar critiques enables the construction of rhetorical theorists: “there are many ‘rhetorical’ theorists (e.g. Thomas Kuhn, Stephen Toulmin) who only use the word occasionally and have no grounding in the ‘tradition’—but we can see their work is *actually* rhetorical anyway, provided we can (re-)describe it properly” (7; emphasis original).

Evidently, one of Gaonkar’s central concerns is the basis upon which individuals are constructed as rhetorical theorists through interpretive work. This concern is an issue in rhetorical criticism that treats Baudrillard. Although Baudrillard employs the word “rhétorique” no fewer than forty times throughout his work, rhetorical critics have been reluctant to engage with these usages. Instead, as my review of the essays by D’Angelo and Miller demonstrates, critics quite often implicitly analyze the rhetoric of Baudrillard’s concept of the simulacrum and his notion of simulation. Gaonkar, himself, appears to participate in the very globalization of rhetoric that he decries at the end of “The Idea of Rhetoric in the Rhetoric of Science.” Gaonkar’s interrogation of rhetorical studies concludes by suggesting that rhetorical studies of science—the test case throughout his essay—overstep the bounds of rhetoric. His piece refers to Baudrillard’s simulacrum in its concluding metaphor: “No one doubts that rhetoric functions as a mixer, sometimes as a sweetener, but,” Gaonkar asks, “can one argue that science is a simulacrum (in Baudrillard’s sense), a rhetorical construction without reference?” (“Idea” 77). Here, Gaonkar uses a metaphor to implicitly interpret the Baudrillardian simulacrum

as rhetorical, in order to suggest a point at which rhetoric references no reality. As the question implies, Gaonkar takes issue with rhetorical criticism that operates at this point; that is to say that Gaonkar is suspicious of studies which argue for rhetoric's primacy as opposed to reality's primacy. At the heart of Gaonkar's claims are three questions of reference: (1) What reference points do critics have for considering the Baudrillardian simulacrum to be rhetorical? (2) What reference points do critics have for constructing Baudrillard as a rhetorical theorist? (3) To what degree does rhetoric reference reality? In the remainder of this section, I draw upon Baudrillard's writing to suggest some answers to these questions.

To answer the first question, rhetorical critics must first understand the concept of the Baudrillardian simulacrum. Such an understanding begins by recognizing that, as the title of Baudrillard's *Simulacra and Simulation* suggests, the terms *simulacra* and *simulation* belong to the same conceptual framework for Baudrillard. Also included in this framework are other terms, among them the term *hyperreal*.<sup>51</sup> Although these terms are closely related, Baudrillard distinguishes between them: *Simulacra* is the plural of the singular *simulacrum*, and Baudrillard's treatment of simulacra suggests that there are kinds of simulacra, each associated with historical eras.<sup>52</sup> Indeed, as William Pawlett notes, the concept of the simulacrum is most often associated with Plato's *Sophist* and "is usually understood as constituting a problem for thought because it raises the issues of

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<sup>51</sup> The hyperreal is emphasized, for instance, in Michael MacDonald's "Encomium of Hegel." MacDonald invokes the hyperreal during a discussion of Plato's *Sophist*. He describes "the sophist haunt[ing] the 'darkling' realm of non-being, the underworld of icons, phantasms, and falsehoods mapped out by the Stranger from Elea in [Plato's] *Sophist*" (31). MacDonald connects these mapped falsehoods with Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal. A footnote makes this connection clear, while simultaneously relegating Baudrillard to marginalia: "This is Jean Baudrillard's description of a 'hyperreal' society" (41, note 19).

<sup>52</sup> For an exceptional discussion of the Baudrillardian simulacrum, see Merrin.

falsity and untruth” (“Simulacra” 196).<sup>53</sup> Baudrillard, for his part, offers a genealogy of simulacra in *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. Yet, Baudrillard’s notion of the *simulacrum* departs from the Platonic understanding of the term and instead follows Nietzsche and Klossowski in arguing that the simulacrum is “that which ‘hides truth’s non-existence’” (Pawlett 196).

Baudrillard traces at least four kinds, or orders, of simulacra throughout his oeuvre. The third-order simulacra—which are also the simulacra of the contemporary era—are germane to the present discussion since they are dependent upon a process of copying called *simulation*.<sup>54</sup> *Simulation* is literally the action behind Baudrillard’s theory. Simulation describes action; it nominalizes the verb *simulate*. As Pawlett explains, the verb *simulate* possess Latin roots and comes from the word *simulare*, which means “to ‘make like’” (“Simulacra” 196). Baudrillard frequently employs the verb *simulate* in his work; however, the nominalization of the verb *simulate* in the term *simulation* emphasizes that there is no agent orchestrating simulation. Thus, *simulation* refers to an active, agent-less process in which things are “made like” (Pawlett, “Simulacra” 196). Baudrillard is more specific about the process—explaining it as a process during which a copy makes like (or copies) another copy. This process of copying continues infinitely, as Baudrillard famously asserts: “Simulation is characterized by a *precession of the model*” (*Simulacra* 16; emphasis original).

Accordingly, I arrive at a response to the question: What reference points do critics have for considering the Baudrillardian simulacrum to be rhetorical? Critics have a good number of reference points for considering the Baudrillardian simulacrum to be

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<sup>53</sup> See John Muckelbauer, who employs Deleuze to read Plato’s *Sophist*.

<sup>54</sup> Baudrillard associates simulation with phases, schemas, and processes. It is important to note that simulation determines only one era of simulacra. Thus, simulation is the more specific term.

rhetorical. First, as an understanding of the simulacrum and the process of simulation reveals, both are characterized by the method/model and theory/series dynamic. By choosing to refer to simulation as a precession of models, Baudrillard combines the imitative capacity of the model with the sequential ordering of the series, locking the two concepts in a perpetual dynamic. He even acknowledges that “[t]here are simply no more absolute models—and no more serial objects devoid of value categorically opposed to them” (153). Thus, the simulacrum is a rhetorical product driven by the dynamic that involves the rhetoric of the model and the rhetoric of the series. Second, the Baudrillardian simulacrum can indeed be interpreted as implying rhetoric. The concepts of the model and the series have been independently invoked with reference to writing, art, thought, and reasoning. Thus, the very concepts that comprise the simulacrum could be interpreted as describing rhetoric. Third, the rhetorical nature of the term is substantiated by the confusion surrounding its meaning. As Plato would have scholars remember, the very definition of the word *simulacrum* requires rhetorical activity.

To answer the second question, rhetorical critics must consider Baudrillard’s uses of the word *rhetoric*. Although there are over forty such instances in Baudrillard’s writing, I will focus upon one instance in which he most directly couples the word *rhetoric* with the simulacrum and the notion of simulation. This instance occurs in *The Perfect Crime*, a text that explores the relationship between reality and illusion. In a chapter titled “Radical Thought,” Baudrillard positions the simulacrum as an empirically falsifiable scientific theory, in the Popperian sense. For Baudrillard, the idea of the simulacrum is a hypothesis—or, as Karl Popper would call it, a conjecture—that has been

forwarded so as to enable refutability, or falsifiability.<sup>55</sup> Baudrillard theorizes the third order simulacrum—that is, the one defined by simulation—as an era beyond representation and reproduction; it is an order without reference to reality. As a scientific theory, the third order simulacrum invites falsification by reality. According to Baudrillard, “you put forth the idea of simulacrum, without really believing in it, even hoping that the real will refute it (the guarantee of scientificity for Popper)” (*Perfect* 102). But, as Baudrillard further notes, no refutation has been offered by reality.

Baudrillard writes:

Alas, only the fanatical supporters of reality react; reality, for its part, does not seem to wish to prove you wrong. Quite to the contrary, every kind of simulacrum parades around in it. And reality, filching the idea, henceforth adorns itself with all the rhetoric of simulation. It is the simulacrum which ensures the continuity of the real today, the simulacrum which now conceals not the truth, but the fact that there isn't any—that is to say the continuity of nothing. (102)

Instead of reality refuting the theory of the simulacrum, Baudrillard contends that reality steals the idea and “adorns itself with all the rhetoric of simulation” (102). Here, Baudrillard couples rhetoric with the concept of simulation in a way that not only suggests that simulation is rhetoric, but in a way that also positions him as a rhetorical critic.

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<sup>55</sup> Popper, in *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* endorses falsifiability over verifiability as the logical criterion for science, stating: “I shall not require of a scientific system that it shall be capable of being singled out, once and for all, in a positive sense; but I shall require that its logical form shall be such that it can be singled out, by means of empirical tests, in a negative sense: *it must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience*” (40-1). Later works by Popper, especially *Conjectures and Refutations*, differentiate between three types of theories: (1) logical and mathematical; (2) empirical and scientific; and, (3) philosophical and metaphysical. Popper claims that the third group of theories are irrefutable, although discussable (197-9). Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum would appear to be vulnerable to accusations that it is not a scientific theory. But, this accusation leads to a circularity, especially if scientific knowledge is deemed to be rhetoric.

This passage resoundingly answers the second question—What reference points do critics have for constructing Baudrillard as a rhetorical theorist?—with many multiple affirmative replies. In this passage, Baudrillard engages in the productive industry driven by the dynamic of method and theory. Thus, he is functioning as a rhetorical critic. He is critiquing rhetoric in which he himself was involved. As he describes it, he began with a scientific model, that of Popperian falsifiability, and tested that model on reality. According to his critical recounting—which invokes a rather strong rhetoric of the model—no refutations were offered. By embracing refutation, Baudrillard invites a challenge; yet, by receiving no refutation, Baudrillard’s method is reinforced. When he assumes the role of a rhetorical critic, it becomes quite clear that he is indeed a rhetorical theorist. He experiments with language to provoke responses.

Of course, Baudrillard’s comments in this chapter work to answer the third and final question that I have posed above: To what degree does rhetoric reference reality? Baudrillard’s description of “the rhetoric of simulation” proposes a theory of rhetoric which resembles that rhetoric forwarded by Alan G. Gross in *The Rhetoric of Science*. Gross conceives of rhetoric as constitutive of science and implies that reality is rhetorical. Gross’s theory of rhetoric in this 1990 text embraces “the possibility that the claims of science are solely the products of persuasion” (3).<sup>56</sup> Thus, reality works persuasively “all the way down” (3). By situating his writing in terms of Popper’s work on falsifiability, Baudrillard argues that reality is rhetoric, to use Gross’s phrase, “all the way down,” at least until this theory of rhetoric is refuted (3). Baudrillard appears to offer a slightly

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<sup>56</sup> Gross’s argument was of course exemplary of the type of rhetoric scholarship to which Gaonkar’s piece reacted. In *Starring the Text* (2006), Gross puts this earlier argument into perspective. Whether this perspective softens Gross’s earlier stance or not, Gross does achieve some distance from this claim by taking a generational approach to the rhetoric of science.

qualified version of Gross's theory in the above passage. Baudrillard aligns the relationship between the rhetoric of simulation and reality with the relationship between the rhetoric of the series and the rhetoric of the model: both relationships depend upon exchange; both relationships should be dynamic.

Returning to Gaonkar's concerns about the globalization of rhetoric, Baudrillard's comments about the rhetoric of simulation approximate Gaonkar's explanation of reality as "a rhetorical construction without reference" ("Idea" 77). Yet, in regards to the impact of this relationship on rhetorical criticism, Gaonkar seems to depart from "Baudrillard's sense" of the rhetoric of simulation ("Idea" 77). Gaonkar views simulation as a limit to, or a boundary of, rhetorical criticism, but this view ignores the way in which Baudrillard qualifies "the rhetoric of simulation" in *The Perfect Crime*. For Baudrillard, rhetoric admits the possibility and even invites the act of refutation: The rhetoric of simulation constitutes reality, until it is falsified. Contra Gaonkar, Baudrillard appears to encourage more rhetoric, more refutations, and more conjectures. Thus, Baudrillard's "rhetoric of simulation" affords rhetorical criticism a larger province. Baudrillard's use of the word *rhetoric*, here, seems to conclude that rhetoric invites rhetoric, that rhetoric challenges rhetoric, that rhetorics—like those of the model and those of the series—are dynamic.

### Dynamism and Rhetoric

Rhetorical criticism is both discussed and practiced as a productive industry and, as such, it needs to be understood as a dynamic relationship between the rhetoric the series and the rhetoric of the model. As Baudrillard explains, it is through this relationship and not an oppositional relationship that we can not only understand the

system of production and consumption, but understand our work as rhetorical critics and as members of society. In both criticism and society there is a consistent productive dynamic. Although productivity might increase or seem to change, Baudrillard reminds us that “[e]verything is in movement, everything shifts before our eyes, everything is continually being transformed—yet nothing really changes” (*System* 167). It is with this perpetual, albeit consistent, movement that I return to Jasinski’s description of conceptually oriented criticism. According to Jasinski, one of the definitive features of conceptually oriented criticism is a process of abduction, “a back and forth tacking movement between the text and the concept” (256). Jasinski is correct to draw the attention of rhetorical critics to the movement of criticism. However, this tacking movement does not strike me as a unique aspect of any one kind of rhetorical criticism; rather, dynamic movement between method and theory is a definitive characteristic of all rhetorical criticism.

## Chapter 5:

Memorializing Method: Reconsidering the Reputations of Jean Baudrillard and Jacques  
Derrida

In the previous chapter, I drew upon Baudrillard's concepts of the model and the series to provide a meta-commentary on the stakes of scholarship in rhetorical studies that treats rhetorical theorists. As I reviewed pieces of scholarship that treat Baudrillard and his concepts, I argued that a renewed attention to rhetorical method in rhetorical criticism calls upon scholars to more critically examine their own rhetorical methods in the writing of their scholarship. Since it focused on the scholarly treatments of Baudrillardian simulation and the simulacrum in rhetorical studies, chapter four confined its argument to a kind of writing that is characteristic of academic discourse.

This chapter attempts to broaden my call for a renewed attention to rhetorical method by focusing on a kind of writing much more familiar to various audiences outside of the academy: the obituary. Obituaries function as a type of argument that proves familiar to multiple audiences, that supports a view of writing and rhetoric as representational, and that constructs an individual's character, what is conventionally assumed to be a rhetor's greatest appeal. This chapter analyzes a pair of obituaries in order to break with critical convention and argue that rhetorical method is as significant as ethos to rhetorical criticism. To support my call for a renewed attention to rhetorical method, I examine two instances of criticism which involved unflattering obituaries and their responses: Carlin Romano's 2007 obituary of Jean Baudrillard and Jonathan

Kandell's 2004 obituary of Jacques Derrida.<sup>57</sup> After I analyze these two obituaries, I turn to the rhetorical methods of Baudrillard and Derrida themselves. While conventional responses to these obituaries could repudiate them for their negative tones and nasty messages, I contend that both theorists might actually have sanctioned these admittedly distasteful texts.

Turning Baudrillard's and Derrida's theories on their own obituaries offers a revealing perspective on these two poststructuralist theorists as rhetoricians, as well as on the potentialities of poststructuralist rhetoric. Both obituaries recapitulate the well-worn arguments that had plagued each theorist's reception in the academy, yet the argumentative *agon* that is commonplace in scholarship remains startlingly out-of-place in these obituaries. By disparaging each thinker, the obituaries argue that poststructuralist rhetorical theorists should not be taken seriously. But as I will demonstrate, each obituary paradoxically carves out a rhetorical space in which poststructuralist rhetoric provides critics with an analytical lens that considers the obituaries to be quite serious.

### Obituaries and Convention

Obituaries are compositions published in any number of media outlets (newspapers, magazines, television, and internet) and defined by the occasion of death. They are often compared to eulogies, regularly interpreted as memorials to the recently deceased, and frequently categorized with other occurrences of ceremonial, or epideictic, rhetoric. As Bridget Fowler observes, obituaries adhere to a highly conventional

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<sup>57</sup> It could be argued that these obituaries constitute what John Schilb labels a *rhetorical refusal*, or "an act of writing or speaking in which the rhetor pointedly refuses to do what the audience considers rhetorically normal" (3). However, such an argument would depend upon establishing a principled, that is to say intentional, stance on the obituary writer's part.

“‘default’ model,” in which the deceased are honored through positive accolades and laudatory praise, or acknowledged through neutral recollections and objective recounting (Fowler 17; 244). Fowler sees the conventional obituary as adhering to the maxim: “Never speak ill of the dead” (123).<sup>58</sup> Yet, Fowler also recognizes that there is an argumentative dimension to obituaries that raises questions “as to whether specific obituaries for individuals are largely subjective, value-laden assessments” (123). Whether audiences deem a given assessment to be largely subjective or largely objective, obituaries offer assessments of lives and, in doing so, argue for a particular interpretation of that life. Thus, the writing of an obituary is an act of criticism.

While obituaries constitute a kind of argument that is familiar to multiple audiences inside and outside of the academy, they also involve a kind of writing that is emblematic of the view that rhetoric and writing work to represent reality. This understanding is espoused by Fowler’s description of the contemporary obituary as a piece of writing that “simultaneously reflects on an individual’s concrete, indeed unpredictable life, while also revalorising a certain view of the past” (11). Janice Hume further notes that obituary writing highlights attributes of deceased individuals, “and should be examined not just as an indifferent chronicle but as a commemoration, a representation of an ideal” (14). As a type of representational writing, obituaries are therefore significant for the way in which they construct the character of deceased individuals.

In Neo-Aristotelian terms, obituaries are significant for the way in which they represent ethos. Many rhetorical critics consider ethos to be the most significant aspect of

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<sup>58</sup> An obituary is, therefore, highly typified rhetorical action. See Carolyn R. Miller’s “Genre as Social Action,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 70 (1984): 151-67.

rhetoric, in that credibility persuades audiences more than any other appeal. Conceptions of ethos focus on what Gerard Hauser refers to as “the perceptions of the rhetor caused by his or her rhetoric,” and these perceptions might be related to a rhetor’s authority, credibility, reputation, or character (159). Hauser contends that ethos proves an interpretation between a rhetor and an audience generated by “choices of inclusion and exclusion” (148). As Hauser further acknowledges, “[h]ow we appear to others depends on the choices we make in presenting our messages and ourselves” (148). However, with regards to obituary writing, a deceased individual’s ethos is often constructed for that individual by an obituary writer. In other words, obituaries confirm that ethos is a social construct involving both representation and interpretation, but they complicate the notion that a rhetor directly influences the way in which he or she is perceived. Obituaries reveal that ethos can also be constructed in a second-hand manner, when one audience passes its perceptions of a rhetor along to a second audience.

As socially constructed arguments that function independently of the individuals that they represent, obituaries can rupture convention. Obituaries can offer distinctly negative representations of the deceased which violate the maxim: “Never speak ill of the dead.” These negative representations can weaken the authority, undermine the credibility, erode the reputation, and disparage the character of the deceased. As Fowler states, “[o]bituaries, on occasion, possess understated or secret subtexts which at the least add ambivalence and may introduce a clash between the right and the right, thus subtly transforming a celebratory recollection into an indictment” (17). This suggestion implies that certain obituaries might be predisposed to rhetorical analyses that employ a

Baudrillardian approach, for certain obituaries create ambivalent rhetorical spaces which attribute an ambiguous legacy to the deceased.

In the following two sections, I examine two obituaries that do *not* predispose themselves to a Baudrillardian rhetorical analysis. Instead, Carlin Romano's 2007 obituary of Jean Baudrillard and Jonathan Kandell's 2004 obituary of Jacques Derrida argue for a resolutely negative interpretation of each respective thinker. The meanings forwarded by Romano and Kandell are quite clear and extremely *unambiguous*. Both Romano and Kandell radically challenge the conventional obituary in order to disparage the reputation and the work of Baudrillard and Derrida, respectively, yet their challenges maintain a conventional understanding of rhetoric and writing as representational and dependent upon a rhetor's character. Romano and Kandell work to make meaning that is unflattering to each respective theorist.

To support my argument that Baudrillard and Derrida are two reputable rhetorical theorists, my analysis of each obituary will refute Romano and Kandell, in two ways. First, I will offer conventional counter-arguments, which consider rhetoric and writing to be representational and position ethos as the most important rhetorical appeal. In this first phase, my counter-arguments will blend my own commentary with the commentary of other scholars to refute the representations in each obituary. Second, I will counter the obituaries written by Romano and Kandell by turning Baudrillard's and Derrida's theories on those very obituaries. In this second phase, my analyses will forward unconventional arguments that consider rhetoric to be beyond representation and position rhetorical method as important to rhetoric as ethos. This second phase of analysis will

argue that both theorists would actually sanction the admittedly distasteful obituaries written by Romano and Kandell.

### I. Romano's Unconventional Obituary of Baudrillard

On March 23, 2007, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*—the “No. 1 source of news, information, and jobs for college and university faculty members and administrators” in the United States—printed an obituary of the seventy-seven year-old Jean Baudrillard (“About”). This particular obituary went to press two weeks after Baudrillard’s death, and a mere two months before *The Chronicle* would be recognized as one of “the 10 most credible news sources” by the Erdos & Morgan survey (“About”). The obituary appeared in the “Critical at Large” section of *The Chronicle*, and was distributed to *The Chronicle*’s 350,000 readers, 70,000 of whom are academics (“About”). The obituary’s title proclaimed that “The Death of Jean Baudrillard Did Happen,” and subsequent printings of the same obituary in different publications announced the “Death of a Clown.”

Since this obituary was published on March 23, 2007 (over two weeks after Baudrillard’s March 7, 2007 death), Romano read, referenced, and assembled these other, earlier obituaries of Baudrillard into a conventional value system that describes obituary writing as polite. Romano suggests that obituary writing values politeness, a value that reinforces the “‘default’ model” of obituary writing. Romano’s obituary notes that newspapers have “provided blunt takes on [Baudrillard]” and that these treatments exhibit a range of politeness. For instance, Romano acknowledges that London’s *The Times* “politely” describes Baudrillard’s writing, while London’s *The Daily Telegraph*

“less politely” treats Baudrillard. Romano’s own obituary breaks with the conventional values of being more or less polite, as it unabashedly and vociferously attacks Baudrillard, his work, and his writing.

In this particular obituary, *Chronicle* writer Carlin Romano forwards a distinctly negative representation of Baudrillard, memorializing Baudrillard by assembling a litany of disparaging remarks issued, at one time or another, against him. Throughout the obituary, Romano positions Baudrillard as a hypocrite who viewed the academy as a business. According to Romano, on the one hand, Baudrillard denounced “modern consumerism,” and, on the other hand, Baudrillard exploited consumerism by accepting “innumerable free trips, honorariums, lecture invitations, visiting appointments and publishing contracts.” Romano attacks Baudrillard’s popularity by characterizing Baudrillard as typifying a “brand” of French academics elevated “to superstardom precisely because they perform the dance of opaqueness best.” For Romano, Baudrillard’s incomprehensibility contributed to his popularity. Romano claims that “intentionally obscure French philosophy is an established performance art; there’s money to be made, appointments to be secured, prestige to be garnered,” and that Baudrillard’s work ascribed to this performative paradigm. Nonetheless, Romano speculates that Baudrillard “may be the screw-up who endangered the brand.” That is to say that Romano suggests that Baudrillard’s work was overly obscure and excessively performative. Here, the similarities between Lester Faigley’s portrayal of Baudrillard in his 1992 *Fragments of Rationality* and Romano’s depiction of Baudrillard some fifteen years later are striking. Faigley also associates Baudrillardian thought with brands, branding, and brand consciousness. In particular, Faigley links Baudrillard and his

writing to college students and their writing on account of a supposed fluency with brand-name consciousness (*Fragments* 212-5). Romano implies that the obscurity and excessiveness of Baudrillard's work might be attributed to branding and marketability—and thus to Baudrillard's desire to make money. Although Romano's comments leave any academic who receives remuneration for publications and lectures vulnerable to the label of "entrepreneur," Romano's assessment of Baudrillard is particularly unforgiving.

Romano's negative assessment of Baudrillard's life stems from an aversion to Baudrillard's writing. Romano reinforces his characterization of Baudrillard as little more than an opportunist by describing his work as "simplistic," "outrageous," "miserable," "false," and containing "blithe idiocies." According to Romano, Baudrillard's writing constitutes a "hodgepodge of undefined abstractions," of which few individuals can comprehend. "His sentences," gripes Romano, "often didn't make sense." For Romano, there is little substance in Baudrillard's writing. Romano likens Baudrillard's writing to hiccups, and doubts that Baudrillard was ever asked to edit or rewrite his prose. Frequently, Romano absolves himself from the personal responsibility for some commentary by quoting critical comments about Baudrillard's writing. Here, Romano might be said to be magnanimous, as he selects one quotation from among Baudrillard's persecutors, Alan D. Sokal and Jean Bricmont, and another quotation from "one of Baudrillard's shepherds," Mark Poster, yet both quotations present Baudrillard's writing unfavorably. Romano, however, hammers home the point: Baudrillard's "published writings were so bad and his publicity-hound manner so obvious that the image of incomprehensibility and clownishness attached itself to the respectful profile drawn by his advocates and they couldn't rub it off."

The argument presented by Romano's obituary departs from the conventional obituary in that it is unambiguously negative. Romano's obituary argues that Baudrillard and his work are of little value, and Romano supports this argument by characterizing Baudrillard as an incomprehensible clown throughout. In Romano's opinion, Baudrillard, his work, and his writing are farces that should not be taken seriously. His conclusion states the argument more emphatically. In his closing, Romano lays Baudrillard to rest by noting: "No fraud survives his enablers." He then brazenly forecasts the future reception of Baudrillard, asserting that "No one will read Baudrillard in 50 years."

Although no one—not even Romano—knows whether or not Baudrillard will be read in fifty years, Romano's argument that Baudrillard and his work are of little value relies upon representations of Baudrillard that can be contested through alternative interpretations. Accordingly, the first phase of my analysis will argue that Baudrillard, his work, and his writing are valuable by disputing Romano's representation of Baudrillard. This phase of my analysis will employ a traditional rhetorical approach, in that it will be premised upon the notion that rhetoric and writing are representational, as well as the understanding that an appeal based upon character is a rhetorician's most significant appeal.

#### *A Conventional Analysis of Romano's Obituary of Baudrillard*

Romano's representation of Baudrillard, his work, and his writings diverge from reality and this divergence calls for repudiation. The repudiation that I will offer in this section is long overdue, since Romano's obituary was met with relatively little response at the time of its publication. Apart from some commentary that accompanied a special

memorial issue of the *International Journal of Baudrillard Studies*, there has been no cogent attempt to rectify Romano's offensive representation.<sup>59</sup> From a conventional rhetorical perspective, Romano's obituary damages Baudrillard's reputation and deprecates his value as a theorist, especially for individuals who have not previously encountered Baudrillardian theory. Supporting Baudrillard necessarily entails a repudiation of Romano's obituary.

Notably, one of the few responses to Romano's obituary of Baudrillard avoids a direct engagement with the representation of Baudrillard forwarded by Romano. Instead, this response—an editorial written by Gerry Coulter close to five months after Baudrillard's death—questions Romano's own credibility as a rhetor. In this response, Coulter mobilizes the strategy that Romano used in the obituary of Baudrillard, and turns that strategy against Romano; he attacks the reliability of Romano's writing by attacking Romano's credibility. For example, Coulter addresses Romano as one of two writers “who lined up to urinate on Baudrillard's grave but only managed to pee on their own shoes” (“Jean”). Coulter suggests that Romano's attempt to disparage Baudrillard backfired and actually damaged Romano's own credibility. In Romano, Coulter finds a writer “into whom Baudrillard's negativity has passed, but not his sense of humor” (“Jean”). Thus, Coulter questions Romano's characterization of Baudrillard by characterizing Romano as a vengeful pessimist. He assails Romano's ethos in order to preserve Baudrillard's ethos, guessing that the negative obituary might have resulted from Romano's disappointment that Baudrillard “may be more widely studied today than

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<sup>59</sup> Silence, of course, is a response in and of itself.

Troyat” (“Jean”).<sup>60</sup> This suggestion implies that Romano’s negative obituary of Baudrillard emanated from a highly morose, potentially jealous, grudge. Indeed, prior to writing Baudrillard’s obituary, Romano published disparaging remarks about Baudrillard.<sup>61</sup> Rather than repudiating the representation of Baudrillard offered by Romano, Coulter chooses to engage Romano’s obituary of Baudrillard by criticizing Romano’s own ethos.

Despite Coulter’s decision to respond to Romano’s obituary by reproaching Romano’s ethos, much ground exists upon which Romano’s obituary can be repudiated for its actual portrayal of Baudrillard. For instance, Romano claims that Baudrillard worked “under the tutelage of Henri Lefebvre, Roland Barthes and Pierre Bourdieu.” While Baudrillard was, in fact, closely associated with Lefebvre and Barthes, especially so between 1966 and 1968, Baudrillard did not work “under the tutelage” of Bourdieu. On the contrary, the two were contemporaries. Indeed, Baudrillard challenged many of Bourdieu’s thoughts, so much so that the pair might best be described as rivals (*Baudrillard Live* 1). More remains at stake here than a factual inaccuracy, as it discloses the degree to which Romano misrepresents Baudrillard. Romano’s inadequate understanding of Baudrillard’s relationship to his contemporaries allows Romano to, first, vaguely lump Baudrillard with “intentionally obscure French philosoph[ers],” and, second, suggest that Baudrillard was the “screw-up who endangered the brand.” When

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<sup>60</sup> A conventional analysis of this obituary recognizes that even in academic circles—circles not only familiar with the *Chronicle*, but circles that are energized by disputes over knowledge—the occasion of death seems to call for a putting aside of disputes. Thus, Baudrillard’s death should not be considered an occasion for Romano to renew a war against the poststructuralist thinker he most despises. Nor should Baudrillard’s death be seen as an occasion to critically compare Baudrillard to Troyat—the same argument holds for Troyat, too. Instead, the occasion of death should commemorate an accomplished life recently passed.

<sup>61</sup> For example, Romano’s particular aversion to Baudrillard is captured in a 2003 article where Romano calls Baudrillard “the Eurotrash patron saint” (“An Oasis”).

flaws in Romano's understanding of Baudrillard are exposed, the conclusions that follow from this portrayal are shown to be erroneous. Contrary to Romano's depiction of Baudrillard as typical of, or an insider to, some academic brand, he was, according to Mike Gane, "an outsider" (1). Gane notes that Baudrillard was increasingly excluded from influential academic sectors, especially after he published his critique of Michel Foucault in 1977 (1). Indeed, Foucault, as editor of *Critique*, was among those individuals who censured Baudrillard. Hardly typical of the brand Romano comments upon—"French" thinkers whom "no one dares" to shut up—Baudrillard seemed to be shut up much more often. Thus, the portrayal of him as an excluded outsider not typical of any brand challenges Romano's depiction of Baudrillard as "the screw-up who endangered the brand." Baudrillard could not hyperbolically embody a brand from which he was excluded and censured.

Romano's obituary can be further repudiated for the way in which it cites other scholars in order to disparage Baudrillard. Often, Romano's claims depend upon evidence he gathers from sources, yet Romano twists source information in order to misrepresent Baudrillard. For example, consider Romano's citation of Mark Poster's 2001 book, *Jean Baudrillard: Selected Writings, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.* To support his claim that Baudrillard's writing is incomprehensible, Romano positions Poster as "one of Baudrillard's shepherds in the U.S." and then references Poster's criticism of Baudrillard's writing. Romano tells obituary readers:

In his writings until the mid 1980s, Poster observes, Baudrillard "fails to define his major terms... his writing style is hyperbolic, often lacking sustained, systematic analysis when it is appropriate; he totalizes his insights, refusing to

qualify or delimit his claims. He writes about particular experiences, television images, as if nothing else in society mattered... He ignores contradictory evidence.”

While Poster undeniably takes issue with aspects of Baudrillard’s writing, Poster’s claim is qualified, in that it only characterizes Baudrillard’s writing *until* the mid 1980s. That is to say that Poster’s remarks apply less to Baudrillard’s later work. Indeed, Baudrillard’s 2000 *Passwords*, actually moves toward defining his major terms by glossing twelve concepts central to his thought. However, Romano fails to make this qualification clear because his reference interrupts the qualifier “In his writings until the mid 1980s” (which is supposed to modify “Baudrillard”) with the attribution “Poster observes.” By separating the qualifier from the claim, Romano suggests that the Poster’s claim can stand alone, unqualified. The qualification risks being lost on the obituary reader, especially those who are exhausted by this long, heavily edited citation. Accordingly, Romano risks misrepresenting Baudrillard’s writing.

Romano’s obituary can most substantively be repudiated for the way in which it imposes a conventional value system upon representations of Baudrillard, its own and others. Because Romano’s obituary was published over two weeks after Baudrillard’s death, Romano read, referenced, and assembled other earlier obituaries of Baudrillard to describe the conventional values of the academy. Romano’s obituary represents Baudrillard as departing from these values. Romano observes that “the words that festooned French and English-language reports—celebrated, provocative, controversial—were not accompanied by convincing, persuasive, groundbreaking or other words a thinker might prefer.” Here, Romano attempts to construct preference by imposing a

value system upon depictions of Baudrillard. According to Romano, other thinkers who are depicted as “convincing,” “persuasive,” and “groundbreaking” ought to be preferred to Baudrillard. Thus, Romano draws upon an understanding of rhetoric as representation in order to portray Baudrillard as “celebrated,” “provocative,” and “controversial,” only to evaluate these same representations using terms, such as “persuasive” and “convincing,” which belong to a highly traditional understanding of rhetoric as persuasion. Put differently, Romano judges the portrayal of a thinker according to that thinker’s persuasiveness and, in doing so, discloses his rhetorical value system. The rebuttal to Romano’s value system is rather straightforward: This might be one particular construction of value rooted in certain understandings of rhetoric, but value and rhetoric can both be constructed and evaluated alternatively. Baudrillard’s rhetorical method offers one such alternative.

*An Alternative Analysis of Romano’s Obituary of Baudrillard*

In this second phase of analysis, I will offer an alternative evaluation of Romano’s obituary by evaluating it in accordance with Baudrillard’s own rhetorical method: exchange. In doing so, I implicitly argue for Baudrillard’s significance to rhetoric by demonstrating how Baudrillard’s unconventional approach to rhetoric actually sanctions Romano’s obituary.

As I have argued in the previous chapters, Baudrillard’s rhetorical method is *exchange*. Through his rhetoric, Baudrillard methodically works to exchange one meaning with another meaning. He challenges the meaning of life by deploying what he calls fatal strategies. Fatal strategies are a specific manifestation of exchange that position

death as disappearance and deploy death in order to challenge life. Baudrillard deploys fatal strategies in order to initiate exchange between life and death. Baudrillard's writing has long argued against modern society's preference for and valuing of life over death. As he sees it, the monopoly that life holds over death in contemporary society corresponds to the value society places on the laboring body, the producer of capital. In such a society, he explains that people "are compelled to fight for a place in the circuit of work and of productivity" (*Mirror* 132). In "Political Economy and Death," his most extensive treatment of life and death, Baudrillard contends that modern society has excluded the dead from exchange: the dead "are thrown out of the group's symbolic circulation" (*Symbolic* 126). Society prohibits the exchange of the dead; the dead are, in other words, rhetorically constrained. According to Baudrillard, the only exchange of the dead that society permits is ritualized mourning, a kind of pseudo-exchange that he detests (134). Mourning merely laments the loss of the vital, productive body. In place of mourning, he suggests a "rewriting" of death, in which life and death are exchanged in a duel. Here, he invokes the word "rewriting" to emphasize the significant reconceptualization that is needed to fully appreciate his rhetorical method. Like the two-sided game, the duel constitutes a central metaphor that he uses to describe exchange. Thus, "rewriting" death involves conceptualizing life and death as a two-sided game and endorsing a circular movement between the two sides. His description of the relationship between life and death is analogous to his explication of writing. On the side of "appearance" is life and on the side of "disappearance" is death. Baudrillard positions the two sides as components of one complete symbolic act. He emphasizes that life (the vital) and death (the fatal) together "constitute one symbolic act (the symbolic act *par*

*excellence*)” (166). In a society that excludes death on account of life and privileges the vital over the fatal, a whole symbolic act can only be realized through Baudrillard’s rhetorical method.

Fatal strategies are moves that a rhetor methodically deploys in order to initiate exchange. By ascribing to a conception of rhetoric that defines rhetorical success in terms of exchange and not representation, fatal strategies suggest a different rhetorical approach to obituary writing which champions disappearance and death. Viewed in terms of Baudrillardian rhetoric, Romano’s obituary can be interpreted as mobilizing fatal strategies. In fact, the fatal strategies in Romano’s obituary are so unconventional that Baudrillard might well have sanctioned this disparaging treatment himself.

An interpretation of Romano’s obituary in accordance with Baudrillard’s notion of fatal strategies sanctions the unflattering forecast forwarded at the conclusion of the obituary. Although Romano’s assertion that “No one will read Baudrillard in 50 years” seems over harshly and extremely nasty to Baudrillard’s supporters, it poses a strong challenge to Baudrillard’s meaning or his critical value. Romano’s obituary might be parsed as follows: Baudrillard appeared as a brand, an effect of a cultural milieu that valued obscure French theorists, and Baudrillard will disappear in the next fifty years. While a conventional analysis might object to such a brazen statement, an unconventional interpretation of this statement might sanction it, for Romano uses his writing to regulate Baudrillard’s disappearance. Romano seems to welcome the eradication of Baudrillard and his thought, preferring that Baudrillard be forgotten and Troyat be remembered. Thus, Romano’s obituary champions disappearance and simultaneously offends convention. The challenge Romano’s obituary presents to Baudrillard’s critical value is

considerable, but, as Baudrillardian exchange holds, it is a necessary challenge. Ironically, Romano writes as a Baudrillardian rhetor in his obituary disparaging Baudrillard.

## II. Kandell's Unconventional Obituary of Derrida

Romano's obituary of Baudrillard is, however, one case among many that call for a renewed attention to rhetorical method among various audiences inside and outside of the academy. To suggest the wider scope of my argument and to further position rhetorical method as important to rhetoric as ethos, I turn now to another unconventional obituary: Jonathan Kandell's 2004 *New York Times* obituary of Jacques Derrida.

On October 10, 2004, the *New York Times* printed an obituary on the occasion of the death of the seventy-four year-old Jacques Derrida. The obituary, entitled "Jacques Derrida, Abstruse Theorist, Dies at 74," rather negatively portrayed Derrida, his work, and his writing.<sup>62</sup> This particular obituary was so unflattering that many of Derrida's supporters—including Judith Butler, Susan C. Jarratt, Steven Mailloux, Joan W. Scott, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Samuel Weber, and Kenneth Reinhard—responded to it by writing open letters of disapproval to the *New York Times*. The *Times* published some of these letters, and all of the letters are currently archived on the website *Remembering Jacques Derrida*,<sup>63</sup> maintained by the University of California at Irvine.

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<sup>62</sup> Upon comparison, the criticism of Derrida forwarded in Kandell's obituary seems much more muted than the criticism of Baudrillard in Romano's obituary. That is to say that a comparison of the two obituaries shows that Romano's obituary of Baudrillard is the most extreme; Baudrillard's ethos is more severely treated. The suggestion is that, when compared to Derrida, Baudrillard is the least authoritative scholar, the least reputable thinker, and the least persuasive rhetor.

<sup>63</sup> Available: [http://www.humanities.uci.edu/remembering\\_jd/index.php](http://www.humanities.uci.edu/remembering_jd/index.php)

In this obituary, Jonathan Kandell assails Derrida's character by representing Derrida as a rebellious, opportunistic, and irresolute thinker. According to Kandell, Derrida "was the personification of a French school of thinking [which many Americans] felt was undermining many of the traditional standards of classical education." Kandell further explains that, as "the personification" of deconstruction, Derrida "was the target of as much anger as admiration." Kandell observes that, while some individuals saw Derrida as undermining tradition, some students considered Derrida and deconstruction "a rite of passage" and a good number of younger professors latched onto him and his thoughts as a "springboard" to earn tenure. Kandell also describes Derrida as "an indifferent student" and an academic entrepreneur who "was paid hefty fees to lecture a few weeks every year." Most noticeable in his attack of Derrida's ethos, however, is Kandell's discussion of Derrida's association with Paul de Man and Martin Heidegger. Kandell spends nearly one fifth of the obituary recounting how "Mr. Derrida's credibility was also damaged by a 1987 scandal involving Paul de Man." Kandell notes that Derrida was Jewish, before he details the ways in which some individuals perceived Derrida—as "irresolute" towards and "condoning" of de Man's anti-Semitism as well as Heidegger's fascist ideas—during this supposed "scandal." Kandell's recapitulation of this scandal seems to position Derrida as a hypocritical figure, void of the moral gumption that allows an individual to maintain firm opinions on particular issues. Kandell's obituary rarely represents Derrida positively. Even Kandell's acknowledgment that Derrida "cut a dashing, handsome figure at the lectern, with his thick thatch of prematurely white hair, tanned complexion, and well-tailored suits," can be considered disparaging as Kandell largely dismisses this handsome figure's intellectual work.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> On account of his appearance, Derrida was often called the "Silver Fox."

These unflattering representations of Derrida's character stem from equally unsavory portrayals of his work and his writing. Kandell's attack on Derrida's ethos is multi-pronged; the obituary questions Derrida's character, as well as his authority as a thinker and a writer. Kandell refers to Derrida as "one of the most celebrated and notoriously difficult philosophers," and by representing Derrida's writing as perplexing, Kandell supports his characterization of Derrida as abstruse. Besides describing Derrida's writing as "turgid and baffling," Kandell contends that Derrida's writing typically possesses "murky explanations." Kandell's obituary emphasizes the features of Derrida's writing that prohibit certain audiences from engaging with it. For example, Kandell claims that Derrida's writing "could be off-putting to the uninitiated." Kandell further notes that Derrida's writing on deconstruction lacked a precise definition, which Kandell attributes to Derrida's unwillingness or inability to offer such a definition. These unsavory descriptions of Derrida's writing continue, as Kandell observes that "a single sentence could run for three pages, and a footnote even longer." In addition to these descriptions, Kandell quotes a 1992 *Economist* editorial which states: "The trouble with reading Mr. Derrida is that there is too much perspiration for too little inspiration." Here, the suggestion is that Derrida's writing is not worth a reader's time, and it is a suggestion that Kandell arranges in order to malign Derrida's writing and his reputation.

Kandell's obituary memorializes Derrida as a thinker whose thoughts declined before his body; his representation of Derrida, his work, and his writing, imply that Derrida's ideas had been buried in the grave of public opinion some fifteen years before his death. For instance, Kandell asserts that "By the late 1980's, Mr. Derrida's intellectual star was on the wane on both sides of the Atlantic." Here, Kandell offers an assessment of

Derrida's legacy in a manner that resembles Romano's assertion that "No one will read Baudrillard in fifty years." Whereas Romano's statement forecasts that Baudrillard will eventually fall out of favor, Kandell suggests that Derrida has already fallen out of favor.

The argument forwarded by Kandell's obituary clearly departs from the conventional obituary by offering an unambiguously negative representation of Derrida. Kandell's obituary argues that Derrida and his work are of little value, and Kandell supports this argument by characterizing Derrida as rebellious, opportunistic, irresolute, and abstruse. Like Romano's argument about Baudrillard's value, Kandell's argument about Derrida's value relies upon depictions of Derrida which can be contested through alternative interpretations. That is to say alternative interpretations can be mobilized to repudiate Kandell's representation of Derrida and undermine his claims about Derrida's value. Such rebuttals adhere to a traditional understanding of rhetoric, in that they are premised upon the notion that rhetoric and writing are representational. They also attempt to resuscitate a thinker's ethos, since, according to this understanding, an appeal based upon character is a rhetorician's most significant appeal. While Romano's obituary of Baudrillard was met with relatively little response, Kandell's obituary of Derrida was quite publicly repudiated by Derrida's supporters who interpreted Derrida much differently than Kandell.<sup>65</sup> As such, the first phase of my analysis will argue for Derrida's value by analyzing the rebuttals offered by Derrida's supporters.

### *A Conventional Analysis of Kandell's Obituary of Derrida*

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<sup>65</sup> Kandell's obituary elicits an emotional response from readers much more than Romano's obituary. Derrida's supporters express dismay, disbelief, surprise, distress, even outrage at the commentary proffered as commemoration in the *Times* (Gelley; Hollier; Engle; Atkinson et al). Admittedly, the difference between the two publications the *Chronicle* and the *Times*, might have contributed to the number and kind of responses that each obituary received.

The responses forwarded by Derrida's supporters resoundingly embody the conventional understanding that rhetoric and writing represent reality. That is to say, Derrida's supporters mobilize convention in order to repudiate Kandell's claims about Derrida. From a conventional rhetorical perspective, Kandell's obituary damages Derrida's reputation and deprecates his value as a theorist. As many of Derrida's supporters recognized, Kandell's representation of Derrida diverges from reality and this divergence calls for repudiation. Supporters counter the obituary's claims both indirectly, by attacking the ethos of the obituary's producers, and directly, by forwarding alternative representations of Derrida.

Derrida's supporters resoundingly invoke conventional rhetoric and obituary writing in order to contest Kandell's claims. For his supporters, Derrida's death called for the "'default' model" obituary; it was an occasion for a neutral, if not positive, memorial that worked to accurately represent Derrida's life and accomplishments. Indeed, many supporters castigate Kandell for defying occasion, straying from convention, and representing reality subjectively. "It is too late for anything but regrets at an occasion missed to rise above the petty controversy to honor the life and achievements of a remarkable man," write the faculty, students, and staff of the University of California at Irvine (Atkinson et al. 17). Similarly, Judith Butler views Kandell's obituary as besieging "the occasion of this accomplished philosopher's death to re-wage a culture war that has surely passed its time." Like the writers from the University of California at Irvine, Butler invokes a conventional understanding of rhetoric and obituary writing by expecting accolades in an obituary, not "vitriolic" commentary (Butler). Supporters also refer to custom and propriety, as they categorize Kandell's obituary as unconventional. For

example, Lars Engle opines, “When a major intellectual dies, it is surely not customary for the *Times* to assign his obituary to a small-minded partisan who will devote himself to denigration rather than explanation.” Moreover, Elizabeth Weed was troubled by Kandell’s obituary, since it was not “a knowledgeable and objective consideration of [Derrida].” Yve-Alain Bois also recognizes that this obituary was untraditional, since Derrida was “supposed to be memorialized.” Joan Scott joins Bois in mentioning the newspaper’s propensity to print distasteful obituaries which deviate from the occasion. Scott comments upon the occasion, convention, and objectivity of the obituary, stating “A slash and burn approach might have been appropriate for Carmine de Sapio (whose obituary [Kandell] also wrote), but not for Jacques Derrida.”

The subjective, inaccurate rhetorical approach that Scott references as “a slash and burn approach” receives similar characterization throughout the responses to Kandell’s obituary. As the faculty, students, and staff of the University of California at Irvine note, the obituary “feels like an insult” and contains “errors, half-truths, and slurs.” Other letter writers refer to Kandell’s writing as “mean-spirited and uninformed,” “ungracious and ill-informed,” “terribly one-sided,” “an anti-intellectual rant,” and “a biased and inaccurate account” (Weber and Reinhard; Engle; Scott; Scott; Scott). These comments all address Kandell’s deviation from conventional rhetoric and writing. Instead of crafting a neutral memorial that worked to accurately represent Derrida’s life and accomplishments, Kandell’s obituary offers a negative interpretation of Derrida’s life. As Scott notes, Kandell’s obituary “is full of innuendo and nasty asides.” Likewise, after expressing dismay over “the crude, even slanderous, tone of the obituary,” Alexander Gelley calls Kandell’s obituary “a slur” and “a gossipy essay.” Spivak calls the treatment

“scurrilous,” and Suzanne Guerlac recognizes the obituary’s “shallowness.” These comments show Derrida’s supporters conceiving of obituary writing in accordance with a conventional rhetorical framework. They also suggest that the alternative interpretations offered by the supporters will likewise adhere to conventional notions of rhetoric as representing reality and obituary writing as positively memorializing an individual’s life.

Derrida’s supporters repudiate his representation in the obituary by attacking the ethos of Jonathan Kandell and the *New York Times*. While this strategy fails to directly engage particular representations of Derrida, it works against the obituary’s argument by casting doubt upon the character and credibility of those who produced it. For instance, Bois categorizes the Kandell obituary as typical of the ill-reputed *Times*. Bois opens his letter with this statement:

Topping the usually Philistine relationship of the *Times* to just about everything academic, and its habit of entrusting the composition of obituaries to overt opponents of the deceased supposed to be memorialized, the article by Jonathan Kandell on Jacques Derrida, who died this past Friday, reaches a peak of populist anti-intellectualism—not to speak of the countless distortions it contains—that I thought only possible in a Murdoch publication.

Bois’s statement links credibility with accuracy, in that it associates a bad reputation with bad reporting. Additionally, Scott questions the degree to which both the newspaper and the reporter should be trusted: “One wonders what has become of your standards of journalism, hiring a free-lance writer of dubious reputation to write an obituary of Jacques Derrida, one of the renowned philosophers of our time.” More to the point, Scott notes that Kandell’s writings (which include a *Times* obituary of Lawrence Tisch) have

been reviewed poorly, before offering the assessment that “Kandell is embarrassingly illiterate in the history of philosophy.” As Scott’s comments show, this response challenges the obituary writer’s representation of the deceased by challenging the obituary writer’s ethos.

More directly, Derrida’s supporters repudiate Kandell’s obituary for the way in which it assembles quotations and other references to disparage Derrida. For instance, while discussing Derrida’s response to the de Man scandal, Kandell quotes a 1992 comment from *The Guardian*’s Peter Lennon: ““Borrowing Derrida's logic one could deconstruct *Mein Kampf* to reveal that [Adolf Hitler] was in conflict with anti-Semitism.”” One of Derrida’s supporters, Denis Hollier, aggressively counters Kandell’s use of this comment. Hollier considers the manner in which Kandell represents Derrida to be “ridiculous.” Hollier states: “Absurdity here is competing with dishonest, since [Kandell] cowardly hides behind a quotation from *The Guardian* in order not to be held personally responsible for his slanderous insinuation.” Viewing Kandell’s use of *The Guardian* quote as a dishonest representation, Hollier argues against Kandell’s portrayal of Derrida as irresolute. Like Hollier, other supporters take issue with the way Kandell assembles references to represent Derrida. Many of these supporters repudiate Kandell on more general terms than Hollier. For example, Elizabeth Weed refers to Kandell’s commentary as “most clichéd,” and Stephen Melville argues that Kandell’s obituary settles “for merely recycling a farrago of misconceptions.” Gelley, for his part, describes Kandell as guilelessly parroting animosity towards Derrida.

Supporters offer their most substantive rebuttal to Kandell's obituary, when they respond to its central claim—that Derrida, his work, and his writing are abstruse.<sup>66</sup> Supporters repudiate this claim by revealing the assumptions that undergird Kandell's evaluation. For example, Weber and Reinhard object to the criteria that Kandell used to evaluate abstruseness. They write, "To characterize Derrida, one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century, as an 'Abstruse Theorist' is to employ criteria which would disqualify Einstein, Wittgenstein, and Heisenberg." For Weber and Reinhard, Kandell's characterization of Derrida as "abstruse" is implausible. Similarly, Bois refers to the obituary's title as indicative of the "hatchet job" written by Kandell. As Bois notes, the obituary "is full of filth," namely commentary in which Kandell offers "caricatural" descriptions and "spouts" derogatory terms.

The strongest repudiation of Kandell's assertion that Derrida was an abstruse theorist comes from Mark C. Taylor. Following the responses to Kandell's obituary of Derrida in the *Times*, Taylor wrote an opinion-editorial. This opinion-editorial served as alternative obituary and was published in the *Times* on October 14, 2004. Taylor's obituary, entitled "What Derrida Really Meant," unambiguously aims to counter Kandell's representation of Derrida. Taylor seems to recognize that Kandell's characterization of Derrida as abstruse depends upon the notion that Derrida's writing is obscure. Accordingly, Taylor addresses this claim in the second paragraph of his

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<sup>66</sup> Derrida's supporters decry many of Kandell's other claims. For example, supporters object to the claim that Derrida "was the personification of a French school of thinking that [many Americans] felt was undermining many of the traditional standards of classical education" (Kandell). As Weber and Reinhard put it, this personification possesses "scarcely concealed xenophobia." Also, supporters repudiate the suggestion that Derrida was opportunistic. Derrida's colleagues at the University of California at Irvine deployed knowledge of Derrida's academic appointment at their institution in order to refute Kandell's implication that Derrida "was an operator who did not give [University of California at Irvine] full bang for our buck."

obituary. Admitting that Derrida's writings "cannot be easily summarized or reduced to one-liners," Taylor argues that Derrida has been misunderstood. Of Derrida, Taylor writes:

The obscurity of his writing, however, does not conceal a code that can be cracked, but reflects the density and complexity characteristic of all great works of philosophy, literature and art. Like good French wine, his works age well. The more one lingers with them, the more they reveal about our world and ourselves. In effect, Taylor is reevaluating abstruseness in this passage. Taylor engages Derrida's writing from a perspective that values density and complexity. In doing so, he turns the very criteria which Kandell used to evaluate Derrida's writing negatively into markers of positive qualities.

Thus, Taylor's alternative obituary argues for a different interpretation of Derrida, albeit within a conventional understanding of rhetoric as representing reality. That is to say that both Taylor and Kandell seem to agree that rhetoric works to represent reality and they both seem to agree that Derrida's writing is difficult. Where they disagree, however, is in their characterization and evaluation of Derrida's writing and Derrida. While Kandell judges both to be abstruse and depicts Derrida and his writing negatively, Taylor judges both to be of high quality and depicts them positively. In both of these arguments, Derrida's ethos—his character, authority, credibility, and reputation—is positioned as the most significant adjudicating factor. If an audience believes that Derrida is credible, reputable, authoritative, and of sound character, it will consider his difficult writing to be of high quality and accept the argument in Taylor's obituary. If an audience doubts that Derrida is credible, reputable, authoritative, and of sound character, it will

consider his difficult writing to be abstruse and accept the argument in Kandell's obituary. However, when rhetoric is understood as beyond representation, then Derrida's rhetorical method becomes as important to rhetoric as ethos, and arguments come to be accepted on different terms.

*An Alternative Analysis of Kandell's Obituary of Derrida*

In this second phase of analysis, I will offer an alternative interpretation of Kandell's obituary by evaluating it in accordance with Derrida's rhetorical method of *espacement*, a method that embraces rhetoric's unbridled citationality and understands writing as marking absence.<sup>67</sup> In doing so, I depart from the arguments offered by Derrida's supporters in their open letters to the *Times*, for these letters endorse the very understanding of rhetoric and writing that Derrida's rhetorical method seems to contest. In an ironically un-Derridian way, the letters attempt to bridle the citationality of Kandell's obituary by appealing to context and focusing on presence. This phase of my analysis, however, deploys Derrida's concept of *différance*, disregards context, and focuses on absence in order to demonstrate the way in which Derrida's unconventional approach to rhetoric actually sanctions Kandell's obituary.

Derrida's notion of *différance* is foundational to his rhetorical method. *Différance*, for Derrida, emerges out of the relationship between writing and context. In "Signature, Event, Context," Derrida attempts to show, first, that the concept of context is inadequate and, second, that writing should not be primarily understood as communication, representation, or expression (1476-7). Instead, Derrida argues that writing should be considered in terms of its unchecked citationality; he wants us to consider writing in

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<sup>67</sup> Derridian *espacement* involves other key concepts, including trace and rupture.

terms of absence, or what he terms *différance*. He contrasts the notion of absence in writing (*différance*) with the notion of presence in writing. Implying that occasion is so wholly contextual and contingent that it cannot be captured, preserved, or reproduced through writing, Derrida claims that writing, which emerges from a particular event (a specific “present”), marks only the absence of that event (a present that has since passed).

When analyzed in terms of Derridian *différance*, Kandell’s obituary treats Derrida in a way that compels readers to acknowledge the absent counterpart to conventional understandings of writing as presence. Kandell’s obituary emphasizes the way in which writing marks absence, namely Derrida’s absence. In Kandell’s obituary, the paradoxical relationship between presence and absence becomes apparent. Conventional approaches to obituaries endorse an objective representation; they favor the presence of the deceased over the absence of the obituary writer. Ostensibly, the open letters to the *Times* adhere to this approach, for they argue that Kandell ought to have kept himself (or his writerly presence) out of (or absent from) the *Times*’ obituary.

The approach suggested by Derrida, however, remains attuned to the absence of the deceased and the life that has since passed. This alternative interpretation seemingly sanctions Kandell’s presence in the obituary, for his grossly subjective assessment of Derrida’s life makes Derrida’s absence all the more profound. Indeed, Derrida’s absence pervades Kandell’s representation of him from the first line of the obituary: “Jacques Derrida, the Algerian-born, French intellectual who became one of the most celebrated and notoriously difficult philosophers of the late 20th century, died Friday at a Paris hospital, the French president’s office announced” (Kandell). Here, Kandell’s

communication of Derrida's passing discloses the contingency of rhetoric. Kandell's presence in the obituary supports the concept of *différance*.

Kandell's (mis)representation of Derrida evidences the rhetorical drift that occurs in conjunction with an absence, when a presence has passed. It corroborates Derrida's approach to representations as marked by absences. Kandell's presence in the obituary makes Derrida's absence more acute, more pointed, and, for Derrida's his personal associates, more painful. For instance, Spivak's letter to the *Times* closes by noting that Kandell's obituary is all the more offensive, since the obituary's "subject is unable to respond." Spivak's comment implies that there is a relationship between the absence of Derrida and the presence of Kandell (and, by proxy, the *New York Times*) in the obituary; that absence marks presence. Alexander Gelley, one of Derrida's colleagues from the University of California at Irvine, substantiates this point in his letter to the *Times*. Gelley laments Derrida's absence by closing his letter with the short line that reads: "He will be missed."

### Obituary Writing

This chapter has argued that critics inside and outside of the academy should consider rhetorical method as important to rhetoric as ethos. To support this contention, I analyzed the obituaries of two poststructuralist theorists, first, in accordance with a traditional understanding of rhetoric and, second, in accordance with each theorist's rhetorical method. My analysis of each obituary demonstrated the significance of the Baudrillardian exchange and Derridian *différance* to rhetorical criticism. Although these

analyses invite comparison, they also predispose themselves to rhetorical criticism.<sup>68</sup> In this section, I outline the criteria that critics can use to evaluate obituaries in accordance with three models of obituary writing: (1) the default model; (2) the Baudrillardian model; and, (3) the Derridian model. Although I will not be developing this connection, these three models roughly approximate the four phases of representation outlined by Baudrillard in “The Precession of Simulacra,” with phases one and two (the good representation and the evil representation) corresponding to the default model, phase three (disimulation) corresponding to the Derridian model, and phase four (simulation) corresponding to the Baudrillardian model.

The “default” model obituary corresponds to conventional understandings of representation, in which a text accurately reflects reality. The default obituary honors the deceased through an objective recollection of their lives. A conventional obituary would therefore be assessed favorably, if it were deemed “true to life.”<sup>69</sup> As the conventional obituary drifts towards a more subjective approach, either positive or negative, the obituary risks being assessed unfavorably, as inaccurate, or not “true to life.”<sup>70</sup> Regardless of whether it is evaluated as favorable or unfavorable, flattering or unflattering, nasty or nice, the conventional obituary is evaluated with respect to a principle of reality. In other words, a real referent can be consulted as a basis for a value

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<sup>68</sup> Romano’s obituary of Baudrillard and Kandell’s obituary of Derrida invite comparison, and such a comparison asks that rhetorical critics question existing valuations of rhetorical theorists and their theories. A conventional comparison of Romano’s obituary of Baudrillard and Kandell’s obituary of Derrida suggests that the incomprehensible clown is less reputable in his work and writing than the abstruse theorist. That is to say that, upon comparison, Baudrillard’s obituary is the more extreme than Derrida’s obituary, and that his ethos is more severely treated than Derrida’s ethos. The implication is that, when compared to Derrida, Baudrillard is the least authoritative scholar, the least reputable thinker, and the least persuasive rhetor; that Derrida, his work, and his writings enjoy a better stature.

<sup>69</sup>Baudrillard identifies this phase as what we would call a good appearance.

<sup>70</sup> In the second phase, the representation masks a reality, or pretends as if reality did not exist. Referencing this phase as an evil appearance, Baudrillard calls this phase “dissimulation.”

judgment. However, critics must recognize that this model's reliance upon the reality of a referent produces an impossible critical task. Whether it is ultimately judged to be good or bad, the default obituary refers to a life that has already passed, yet the life that is the referent no longer exists. In other words, any objective evaluation in which the representation is compared to the referent is impossible. Critics must recognize that no obituaries that adhere to the "default model" can be considered to be good (as in realistic); rather, all obituaries that adhere to this model are bad obituaries, with some being worse than others, since evaluating an objective, realistic representation is an impossible rhetorical feat.

The Baudrillardian model of obituary writing ascribes to Baudrillard's notion of exchange and therefore must be evaluated in accordance with the obituary's ability to initiate movement between appearance and disappearance. Significantly, this model does not maintain a definite distinction between reality and representation. Instead, this obituary's main purpose is to regulate the game of exchange between appearance and disappearance, and avoid a take-over by either side. Since the Baudrillardian obituary strives for a radical rupture of values, no single set of unconditional evaluative criteria exist for this model of obituary writing. Critics who assess a Baudrillardian obituary need to consider the way in which an obituary maintains exchange. Although the criteria for evaluation are contingent upon the ways in which meaning has been made or challenged in the past, three critical judgments are possible. First, an obituary would be judged to deficient in initiating exchange if it plays only one side of the two-sided game, if it overwhelmingly works in appearance or deals in disappearance. For an example of the deficient obituary that works overwhelmingly in appearance, I need only note Romano's

gloss of other obituaries of Baudrillard. In this example, the meaning Romano makes by reproducing other obituaries becomes banal. The corollary to the obituary that overwhelmingly works in appearance is the similarly deficient obituary that deals in disappearance. Such an obituary would mean nothing—it would be completely incomprehensible. Second, an obituary would be judged favorably if it initiated exchange by challenging convention. This favorable Baudrillardian obituary would execute the sophistic move of making the weaker argument seem the greater argument in order to sustain exchange. Here, Baudrillard's deployment of fatal strategies in order to initiate exchange between the vital and the fatal serves as an example. Admittedly, if the fatal was monopolizing the game, one would expect Baudrillard to have deployed moves known as vital strategies so as to initiate exchange. Third, a Baudrillardian obituary would be judged favorably if it wallowed in ambiguity and sustained ambivalence through devices such as rhetorical questions.

The Derridian model of obituary writing corresponds to Derrida's concept of *différance*. It considers writing to be marked by absence, as all representation is insufficient to a degree. Since it acknowledges the insufficiency of representation and focuses on the absence of a real referent, this model of obituary writing is well suited for the representation of a life that has passed. This model maintains the distinction between reality and representation and therefore resides somewhere in between the default model and the Baudrillardian model. Critics who evaluate a Derridian obituary ought to pay particular attention to the degree to which the writing is marked with absence. Under this model, a favorable obituary would be replete with markers that signal to readers that no referent exists. As Kandell's obituary illustrates, these markers might include an intrusive

presence that makes the absence more profound. In other words, the favorable obituary would be overt in its treatment of an absent referent. On the contrary, an unfavorable Derridian obituary would attempt to hide absence through representation and minimize the markers in the text. This kind of unfavorable obituary would recall an individual's life as if the individual would recall it himself, or herself. Critics must recognize that the obituaries which ascribe to this model will always be marked in some way; they will never completely succeed in masking the absent referent with a representation.

Having outlined the alternative models of obituary writing suggested by Baudrillard and Derrida, as well as the evaluative criteria that rhetorical critics can deploy to assess each model, I conclude this chapter by returning to the obituary's frequent categorization as epideictic rhetoric. In the following section, I argue that the specific contributions of Baudrillard and Derrida to epideictic rhetoric call for a significant shift in the way rhetoric scholars conceive of poststructuralist contributions to epideictic rhetoric.

### Poststructuralist Epideictic Rhetoric

In the writings of both Derrida and Baudrillard, rhetorical scholars find a poststructuralist repositioning of epideictic rhetoric that elevates this often-denigrated category of rhetoric by fundamentally reconceiving of this genre. Since Aristotle, epideictic rhetoric has been classified as one of three classical genres of rhetoric. It occupies a place alongside, and by some accounts subordinate to, deliberative rhetoric and forensic rhetoric. Epideictic rhetoric offers praise or blame, and has long been connected to ceremonial occasions, including eulogies. Some rhetoricians argue that,

because of its ceremonial nature, epideictic rhetoric is not as vital to the functioning of society and, thus, not as important as its other two generic counterparts: forensic rhetoric or deliberative rhetoric. Whereas forensic rhetoric enabled the functioning of the Greek courts and deliberative rhetoric facilitated the functioning of the body politic, epideictic rhetoric was denigrated as not vital to the functioning of society. Thus, it has long weathered charges that it is the least significant of the three classical genres of rhetoric.<sup>71</sup>

What significance epideictic rhetoric does retain comes from its association with value systems and timing. As Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard notes, “value rather than reason has long been seen as the special province of epideictic rhetoric,” and epideictic rhetoric is often conceived of as rhetoric that seizes an occasion to develop, defend, or challenge value systems (766).<sup>72</sup> That is to say that contemporary rhetoric scholars now understand the province of epideictic rhetoric as exceeding the praise or blame paradigm. For example, Sheard notes that, besides “discourse that praises and censures,” epideictic rhetoric encompasses discourse that “grapples with the competing values and value systems to which speakers and writers appeal when they wish to laud or criticize a culture’s or community’s ideas or behaviors” (787). In these remarks, Sheard clearly affords epideictic rhetoric a more prolific place in society, yet they maintain a connection between epideictic rhetoric and timing. As Sheard notes, the efficacy of epideictic rhetoric “depends today as much as it did in antiquity on *kairos* or ‘exigency’ in the broadest sense (not just the ‘occasion’ of discourse, but what makes the occasion what it is—the critical convergence of time, place, circumstance, including audience needs,

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<sup>71</sup> Compounding its status as the least practical of the three genres, epideictic rhetoric is often associated with the stigma of sophism, since the sophists often wrote and delivered funeral orations for hire (Sheard 767).

<sup>72</sup> Sheard argues that epideictic rhetoric should be considered a gesture, not a genre.

desires, expectations, attitudes, resources, and so on)” (771). For Sheard, epideictic rhetoric remains a kind of rhetoric that is dependent upon context.

The fundamental understanding of epideictic rhetoric as associated with values and context carries through even the most unorthodox treatments of this kind of rhetoric in rhetoric scholarship. For instance, Bruce McComiskey’s treatment of postmodern epideictic rhetoric—what he refers to as “graffitic immemorial discourse”—emphasizes the subversive capacity of epideictic rhetoric. McComiskey explains that, “like sophistic epideictic rhetoric, postmodern epideictic rhetoric is immemorial because its primary goal is to subvert dominant-class hegemonic discourse” (93). Here, McComiskey connects epideictic rhetoric with non-dominant values, but values nonetheless. McComiskey also notes that postmodern epideictic rhetoric shares further similarities with its sophistic predecessor in that “its signs derive meaning as much from their sociotextual contexts as from their referential content” (93). Here, McComiskey emphasizes epideictic rhetoric’s dependence upon context as much as reference, before explaining that postmodern epideictic rhetoric can subvert hegemonic discourse by either transplanting or collaging signifiers and contexts (94). Although McComiskey argues for a subversive kind of epideictic rhetoric, he defines this rhetoric with reference to its orthodox components: values and context. Thus, McComiskey’s treatment can be seen as a successful attempt to interrogate the conventional components of epideictic rhetoric and stretch them to their limit, that limit being representation’s limit. Even though McComiskey’s discussion of postmodern epideictic rhetoric draws upon Derrida and is prefaced by discussions of Baudrillard, among others, it is ultimately a discussion that

understands rhetoric as representation. McComiskey writes that “graffittic immemorial discourse represents what has been left unrepresented” (93).

Derrida and Baudrillard each suggest an epideictic rhetoric that moves rhetoric beyond representation. Indeed, both thinkers conceive of epideictic rhetoric in ways that abandon conventional understandings of epideictic rhetoric as characterized by context and values. Derrida’s conception of *différance* severs the dependence of written epideictic rhetoric upon context. Context, for Derrida, is an inadequate concept with regards to written discourse of any kind, not just written epideictic rhetoric. As Derrida acknowledges, “a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription” (1481). According to Derrida, the ability of writing to drift and escape precise representation is a capacity which no context can encompass (1481). Derrida suggests that context should not be a defining characteristic of written epideictic rhetoric, even when it is argued, as it is by McComiskey, that the epideictic subverts context. The notion that written epideictic rhetoric can subvert context depends upon a mere perception of that piece of writing’s original context. In other words, arguments that see written epideictic rhetoric as subverting context reproduce the problem of context against which Derrida positions *différance*.

The suggestion that epideictic rhetoric be defined in ways that do not depend upon context is more intriguing than it is instructive, and it is limited. The notion that written discourse can escape context and make meaning in imprecise, decontextualized ways allows for the possibility that discourse can haphazardly develop, defend, or challenge value systems. Subsequently, Derrida’s work implies that rhetoric can

inadvertently become epideictic. His brief analysis of J. L. Austin's discussion of the performative utterance in terms of ritual (1485-6) further suggests that the ritualized rhetoric is not exempt from *différance*. For Derrida, the most highly ceremonial rhetoric is imprecise and it involves both possibility and risk. Although Derrida's remarks in "Signature, Event, Context" might seem limited to written discourse, they are expansive in their reach, for Derrida sees writing as preceding speech.<sup>73</sup> Derrida's point is that no kind of rhetoric should be defined in terms of the inadequate concept of context.

While Derrida, for his part, reveals inadequacy of the contextual component of epideictic rhetoric, Baudrillard, for his part, revises the relationship between epideictic rhetoric and the value contemporary society places upon vitality. Baudrillard's deployment of fatal strategies proves an explicit endorsement of epideictic rhetoric. The society that values vitality, productivity, life, and the laboring body—the society against which Baudrillard rallies—is the same society that denigrates the epideictic as not vital to its functioning and, consequently, inferior to forensic rhetoric or deliberative rhetoric. Baudrillard's writings marshal epideictic rhetoric against this very society—a modern society that values vitality. Baudrillard explains that fatal strategies are inextricably connected to ceremony, stating "ceremony is the equivalent of fatality"; and it is in Baudrillard's description of ceremony that a new challenge for obituary writing is located (203). Indeed, Baudrillard laments the decline of strong, rule-based ceremony into arbitrary conventions. What were once time-honored, ritualized rules have now become purposeless *mores* known as etiquette and politeness. Baudrillard contends that "ceremonies were established in order to regulate appearance and disappearance," but today we are faced with simultaneous, unregulated appearance and disappearance (213).

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<sup>73</sup> See *Of Grammatology*.

Baudrillard theorizes epideictic rhetoric in terms of a ceremony that moves beyond representation. For Baudrillard, contemporary ceremony challenges representation. He describes ceremony as “violence against representation” (208), and argues that ceremony attempts “to maintain the tiny distance that makes the real play with its own reality; that plays with the disappearance of the real while exalting its appearance” (211). Contemporary ceremony further entails art, including the art of rhetoric. “It is in art,” Baudrillard writes, “that something of this ceremonial power has been preserved” (211). He resolutely describes the ceremonial in terms that correspond to what rhetoric scholars recognize as figurative turning, or tropological language.<sup>74</sup> For Baudrillard, the ceremonial constitutes “the art of a certain turning, fatal and enigmatic, that rules over the apparition and the disappearance of things” (201). As Baudrillard sees it, language and writing should be conceived not as a system of values or interpretation, but instead as a system of rules. “Language is immanent, as is rite,” says Baudrillard, and the ceremonial prowess of both “tells us what to do, period” (205). Here, Baudrillard attempts to carve out a ceremonial space for all language. Ceremony enables a duel between appearance and disappearance, where rules set the two orders in opposition. Baudrillard thus conceives of all language as ceremonial rhetoric, which challenges the drive to make meaning. In epideictic rhetoric, Baudrillard locates the capacity to interrogate the value systems of society in a way that moves beyond representation. Ceremonial rhetoric sets up the rules of the game between appearance and disappearance and lets the two sides play.

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<sup>74</sup> This description invokes the figurative turning, or tropological turning, that some rhetorical scholars say characterizes poststructuralist rhetoric.

To understand Baudrillard's conception of epideictic rhetoric is to understand his conception of theory. Baudrillard states that "[t]heory is just like ceremony" (217). He explains that "both are produced to prevent things and concepts from touching indiscriminately, to create discrimination, and remake emptiness, to redistinguish what has been confused" (217). Like ceremony, theory initiates, separates, and arranges:

Struggling against the viviparous obscenity of the confusion of ideas, struggling against the promiscuity of concepts—that is theory (when it is radical), and ceremony too has never done anything else, when it separates the initiated from the uninitiated (for ceremony is always initiatory), when it distinguishes between what connects according to the rule and what doesn't (for ceremony is always organizing), between what is exalted and destroyed according to its very appearance and that which is produced only as meaning. (217)

Thus, it is in their respective struggles against confusion that strong ceremony and radical theory are comparable, if not coextensive. By highlighting the similarities in the purpose of epideictic rhetoric and theory writing, Baudrillard suggests that writing theory is an additional manifestation of ceremonial rhetoric.

## Conclusion:

### Method and Rhetoric: Disciplines and Definitions

Method has posed problems for rhetoric and the relationship between method and rhetoric has been the subject of much debate for millennia, from rhetoric's first appearance to its most recent manifestations. Baudrillard provides scholars in rhetorical studies with perhaps one of the more recent illustrations of the problems method poses for rhetoric. Method must be considered as a process applied to a given rhetorical object as well as a process that composed that object; it must be conceived of as both a critical method as well as a rhetorical method. If critics fail to consider the rhetorical method of controversial rhetors, such as Baudrillard, then they risk dismissing provocative writers and speakers as obscure stylists. With each dismissal of a controversial rhetor, rhetorical studies passes on an opportunity to embolden and explore rhetorical concepts, as well as to develop and test methods.

Method, however, need not pose problems for rhetoric. To conclude this project, I aim to resolve the troubling relationship between rhetoric and method by offering a methodological definition of rhetoric: *Rhetoric is the meeting of two methods*. I aim to illustrate that this definition is grounded in the history of rhetorical studies by providing a very brief glimpse of the relationship between method and rhetoric in classical Greece. Then, I quickly turn to more contemporary discussions of the relationship between method and the disciplinary status of rhetorical studies in the contemporary academy. I argue that a methodological definition of rhetoric will not only allow rhetorical critics to bracket the questions that forestall the study of rhetoric, but will also imbue rhetorical studies with a research status that it has, in some contexts, so desperately sought.

## Method and Rhetoric in Classical and Contemporary Contexts

The history of the relationship between method and rhetorical studies reaches back to the first appearance of the word *rhetoric* in Plato's *Gorgias*. Indeed, the very word *rhetoric* seems to have been birthed in response to questions about rhetoric's relationship to method. The dialogues captured in *Gorgias* suggest that much disagreement existed as to whether rhetoric could be considered a method that pursued knowledge and aligned with virtue, or whether rhetoric was an ambivalent venture that could be applied to unscrupulous ends. For example, take the dialogue between Socrates and Callicles that addresses the genuine and spurious arts. In this dialogue, Socrates bluntly acknowledges "that there is a particular method to be practised in the acquisition of each" (5000d). Thus, method provides the basis for Socrates's evaluation of rhetoric.

In classical times, studies of rhetoric often entailed a critical inspection of method, and this type of concurrent inquiry is perhaps best exemplified by Aristotle's *On Rhetoric*. In *On Rhetoric*, Aristotle responds to Plato's *Gorgias* by forwarding a more nuanced understanding of rhetoric, and, most importantly, expounding rhetoric as a method. That is to say, besides discussing rhetoric's relationship to method, Aristotle presents rhetoric as a method. As George Kennedy acknowledges, Aristotle realizes "that rhetoric, like dialectic, was an art, capable of systematic description, which differed from most other arts and disciplines in teaching a method of persuasion that could be applied to many different subject matters" (14). As Aristotle's *On Rhetoric* emphasizes, the earliest discussions of rhetoric and method focused, at least in part, upon whether or not rhetoric constituted a method and many of these early discussions embraced the

understanding of what I have outlined as a rhetorical method, or the procedures a rhetor uses in composition.

Over time, however, method seemed to be lauded and rhetoric denigrated, so much so that discussions of the two seemed separate and disjointed. This trend continued well into the early part of the twentieth century, when rhetorical studies was slowly resuscitated in the academy. As interest in rhetorical studies grew, so too did the need for legitimacy and status. Rhetoric, once considered in terms of a method itself, began searching for method.

The Greek roots of the word method refer to the “pursuit of knowledge” and, indeed, research in the academy works to generate knowledge (“Method”). But, modern institutional contexts often imply that not all knowledge is generated equally. Arguably, the allocation of institutional resources indicates a disciplinary hierarchy that favors applied research over basic research, and the so-called hard sciences over the so-called soft sciences over the humanities and arts. Within this hierarchy, method seems to maintain the disciplinary hierarchy; the strictest set of research procedures are deemed replicable and imbued with institutional status, while more fluid research processes are considered contingent and more haphazard. Rigorous research methods maintain the association between the word *method* and scientific disciplines, connoting control and order (“Method”). This status is lost on more relaxed methods that consider research a more contingent process.

In the research institution, method accrues status and maintains hierarchies, as some rhetorical scholars have acknowledged. These individuals often cite the lack of a method in rhetorical studies and comment upon the attempts of the field to establish

method. Whether these rhetoric scholars associate with rhetoric and writing or rhetoric and speech, there is, from their perspective, some consensus that rhetoric lacks a method and that rhetoric must steal, borrow, poach, or clip methods from other academic fields. In 1969, Walter Fisher not only acknowledged the dependency of rhetoric and speech on method for its academic identity, but he also suggested that method functioned as “a means of redemption” and as a “way to achieve ‘academic respectability’” (102). James Jasinski’s summary of Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland provides an additional example of how the status of method in rhetorical studies contrasts with the status of method in other disciplines. Noting the “continued significance of method,” Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland state that “[m]ethod has been and continues to be of prime concern to most critics” (39-40; qtd. in Jasinski). Despite the fact that methods in rhetorical studies “do not have the procedural rigor or systematicity that typically characterizes a method,” Nothstine, Blair, and Copeland observe that “many critics treat them as if they were equivalent to the analytic methods and instruments of science [...] as if they provided a direct and universal-access bridge for the critics between ‘data’ and theoretical generalizations” (39-40; qtd. in Jasinski). Deploying rhetoric to make rhetoric’s lack of method more tenable, scholars have actually celebrated the mixed methods in rhetorical studies. Janice Lauer, for instance, contends that, early on, rhetoric and writing “saw the value of building on relevant work in other fields and of using methods of investigation refined elsewhere” (“Composition” 26).

An evenhanded treatment of the contemporary relationship between method and rhetoric is found in the first chapter of Edwin Black’s *Rhetorical Criticism*. Black opens his chapter with the proclamation: “The scientist is one of the cultural heroes of our age”

(1). He will later admit that there are “certain disadvantages” to the ascendancy of the scientist and science, but that the influence of the scientist and science upon society is undeniable (2). According to Black, the triumph of the scientist and science has made “scientific methodology a model for thought” (2). Black writes that “[s]cholars in all branches of learning are called upon for increasing precision of thought, clarity of expression, and refinement of methodology” and he surmises that the rhetorical critic feels this methodological pressure (2). Black discusses the relationship between method and rhetoric in accordance with the disciplinary divide that separates the sciences from the humanities. His first chapter compares the critic to the scientist, revealing the points of tension between these two cultures. Black’s goal, of course, is not to engage in disciplinary warfare, but rather to assess the relationship between method and rhetoric. As I have previously noted in this project, Black finds the relationship wanting.

Yet, the admitted—ashamed, for some, and glorified, for others—modeling of methods from other fields and disciplines leaves the impression that rhetorical studies lacks method and, moreover, that it lacks legitimacy. The classical and contemporary discussions, which I have touched upon only briefly (and *far* too briefly at that), suggest that, between classical times and contemporary times, a wedge has been placed between rhetoric and method. The almost coterminous relationship of rhetoric and method in classical times, when rhetoric was evaluated as a method, has separated to such a degree that, in contemporary times, rhetoric is now seen as lacking a method and looking to other disciplines for one. Though inaccurate, the final impression is that rhetoric is not predisposed to method.

## A Methodological Definition of Rhetoric and Rhetorical Studies

Contrary to the claim that rhetoric is not predisposed to method, or that it lacks method, it is my assertion that rhetoric is defined by method. More precisely, I contend that rhetoric is constituted by method; that rhetoric is not an object, not an event, not a movement, not a network, not an act, not an artifact, and not a constellation. Instead, rhetoric is the meeting of at least two methods. Rhetoric is, in other words, the convergence of two methods, procedures, or processes.

Convention conceives of rhetoric as the meeting of two methods, in which the first method is inventive, heuristic, or rhetorical and the second method is interpretative, hermeneutic, or critical. This understanding of rhetoric can loosely be understood as production and consumption. However, rhetoric can also be defined as the meeting of two critical methods or even as the meeting of two rhetorical methods. Throughout this project, I have engaged with rhetoric as it manifests itself at all three of these methodological interstices. In chapter five, for instance, I considered the discourse that resulted from the production and reception of two obituaries, as might be conventional. But, I also considered rhetoric as it manifested itself in the meeting of two critical methods, in that I considered the differences between Bruce McComiskey's mobilization of a Baudrillardian framework to forward a conception of the postmodern epideictic and my own mobilization of Baudrillardian exchange to suggest a revised epideictic. In that final chapter, I also suggested the way in which rhetoric might be conceived of a meeting of two rhetorical methods. Here, I entertained the possibility that the principle of accurate representation might have guided Carlin Romano's composition of Baudrillard's

obituary, just as the principle of a strong challenge, or fatal strategy, might have provided Romano with his compositional method.

When rhetorical critics define rhetoric as the meeting of at least two methods, they discover new opportunities for interpretation at countless methodological interstices. As a result of the multitude of these interstices, the rhetorical critic that takes a methodological approach to rhetoric must focus on certain questions and issues, while bracketing others. Defining rhetoric as the convergence of two methods will not only allow rhetorical critics to bracket the questions that forestall the study of rhetoric, but it will also imbue rhetorical studies with a research status that it has, at certain times and particular contexts, so desperately sought.

Over a decade into the twenty-first century, rhetorical studies has emerged as an interdisciplinary endeavor that aligns with the interdisciplinary visions of many institutions. Yet, the prowess of rhetorical studies in certain venues has been stymied by the lack of a clear method and the absence of one uniform definition of rhetoric. Those outside the field of rhetoric are sometimes unsure of what rhetorical studies actually studies and how those studies are conducted. The methodological definition of rhetoric that I propose here addresses these two issues and positions rhetorical studies as ripe for interdisciplinary and extra-institutional work. To follow Black, there seems to be no reason why the rhetorician cannot be one of the cultural heroes of our age.

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