

The Expiration of Exigence: How Postmodern Frameworks Dissolve and What Rhetoric Can Do About It

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Abstract

Lloyd Bitzer's 1968 article, "The Rhetorical Situation," reframed scholarship on communication. Prior to this, rhetorical studies primarily looked to content and style of discourse in order to provide an analysis of meaning and value; however, scholars became frustrated with the limited access that this type of framework afforded. The 1960s marked a dramatic shift in dominant rhetorical thinking from modern thought toward a realm of new ideological approaches, including postmodern thought. Environment became a major focus of postmodern communication studies, claiming that the situation, more than the content itself, determines the message. Rhetorical frameworks continue to rely on a modern or postmodern consciousness, despite the emergence of yet another societal shift into an evolved postmodernism, a reaction to the biases inherent in this relativism. Specifically, the evolution of the postmodern mind into an apathetic consciousness leads to an expiration of exigency as Bitzer defined it 50 years ago. This paper argues that current scholarship lacks a complete awareness of these new assumptions and understandings, specifically relating to cultural apathy. This paper will recount the historical context that leads into this modern framework, illustrate the situation, and argue the potential solutions. Ultimately, this paper reveals that much exigency inhabits a devalued position in the now-evolved postmodern mind, and rhetorical theory must renovate its understanding on discourse accordingly through three steps: acknowledgment, updated definitions, and thoughtful discourse.

1 Introduction

It is vital that communication theory adjusts for a shifting societal consciousness; operating within anachronistic frameworks renders such work nearly useless in pragmatic application. Aspects of scholarship appear attached to models like Lloyd Bitzer's "Rhetorical Situation," functioning from an outdated understanding of exigency as inherently meaningful. Meanwhile, Western society is inundated with a surplus of exigence so that these occurrences lose their value and Bitzer's model becomes obsolescent. This paper will argue that a rise in Western societal apathy, an indication of an evolved postmodernism, limits our engagement with contemporary issues, thus blinding us to exigences that arise. I begin by defining key terms as they apply to this paper, and then I move onto the problem that faces current scholarship. The third section discusses the historical shift from Western modernism toward postmodernism in the late-mid twentieth century, and the communication scholarship alterations that became necessary under this cultural evolution. The next section focuses on how Bitzer defined "exigence" as he wrote into this new postmodern theory, and why his definition is no longer viable. Then, I offer some reasoning for the state of cultural apathy, and finally move into examples of such lethargy, revealing the expiration of exigency.

2 Method

In order to lay a common groundwork for the analyses within this paper, I wish to define key terms. These definitions are not necessarily essential for the claims I make and should not deter the reader that does not agree, but they allow for a common perspective on which I may build my analysis. I work from Bitzer's somewhat discursive definition of rhetoric:

rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action (4).

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From an augmented postmodern perspective, I acknowledge that rhetoric functions in more material ways than Bitzer defines it. However, for the purposes of this paper, viewing rhetoric as primarily discursive, revealing itself through artifacts such as words and images, simplifies the reading. Bitzer's definition of exigence, "imperfection marked by urgency," also serves as the basis for the following discussion (6). Under Bitzer's reading, "exigence" occurs anytime that something is not perfect and is bound by some time constraint: climate change, for example. "Relativism" can be defined as the lack of framework or structure within the rhetorical search for truth, and an emphasis on situational characteristics. Finally, I use terms such as "truth" and "objective truth" in order to present the majority-held beliefs, notably during the modern period and before, that constituted a general framework. The search for truth is a search for an authoritarian structure that functions beyond oneself.

3 The Problem

The current scholarship on rhetorical relativism deserves observation because many of its methods are outdated. When rhetorical scholars study discourse, their evaluative claims are steeped in an objective framework purposing to further a body of scholarship. However, certain rhetorical scholarship lacks understanding that facets of society have lost the contextual framework that rhetorical criticism continues to perpetrate. Scholars such as Anderson, Ehrenhaus, and Garrison represent such textual scholarship that fails to understand or reflect a shift in contemporary consciousness. This category of scholarship cultivates insightful readings within text, but in disregarding the contemporary audience's consciousness, blindly assumes that the exigency¹ it responds to is relevant because of a reliance on past theoretical understandings. However, when the Western world began to deviate from a modernist focus² on technique within classical structure,³ Lloyd Bitzer responded, offering "The Rhetorical Situation"⁴ to replace neo-Aristotelian criticism and usher in a postmodern era of rhetoric. In the media studies and philosophy communities, Marshall McLuhan and Martin Heidegger, respectively, influentially illustrated the meaning of the new era for their realms of scholarship. Therefore, rhetorical scholarship should be prepared to make changes once again. Over 50 years later, we still find ourselves in what seems to be an offspring of the postmodern mind; and yet, I argue that we should not assume this mind is unchanged from the time of Bitzer's writing. I assert that the main alteration that the world appears to understand, leaving current textual rhetorical scholarship behind, is the culture of apathy, a result of rhetorical relativism in situational rhetoric.

In order to better understand the rhetorical dilemma, I will provide a historical instance of exigency and its application within the context of current communication scholarship. In his 1972 article, "Rhetorical Exigence," Arthur Miller employs a useful analogy for the way that current rhetorical scholarship ineffectively interacts with culture through anachronistic frameworks. The account details two competing groups: The Chartists and the Anti-Corn Law League. The Chartists, due to an exigence of starvation, pushed for a charter that would alter the political machinery of England and enhance Britain's economic reality. Meanwhile, the Anti-Corn Law League worked to repeal high tariffs on foreign grain so that a higher percentage of the British population could afford food. Thus, two reactions to the same perceived exigence. The defining conclusion of this analogy comes from Ebenezer Elliot, the Corn Law Rhymer, who says: "I am for your charter, but I am not for being starved to death first" (Miller 117). This analogy sheds light on the problem within rhetorical scholarship: a charter toward starving peasants is like old frameworks for the modern mind. When rhetorical critics make claims steeped in an outdated framework and an expired awareness of the modern mind, they offer a charter to starving peasants. This is not to say that they are ignorant to the starvation of the masses, but instead that they lack contemporary resources to adapt to the exigence or assume that old frameworks will somehow evolve alongside.

¹I.e. a problem.

²An understanding of the world through a hierarchical lens and traditional, institutional values. Notably, modernism assumes a universal audience and rejects subjectivity and relativism.

³Aristotelian and Neo-Aristotelian criticism: methods of judging rhetorical works for specific elements of style, and forgoing evaluations of content.

⁴Briefly: a paper intended to define the spaces where individuals create rhetorical discourse and to assert the situation-based nature of rhetoric.

Textual analyses operating from outdated frameworks, such as the ones mentioned above, tend to assume the relevance of their exigency, relying on Bitzer's notion that rhetoric comes into existence as an answer to a question or a solution to a problem (5) and failing to realize that the starving peasants of our contemporary consciousness perceive such exigency as unhelpful charters. The importance of rhetoric here is that if rhetorical theorists, critics, and scholars intend to offer real contribution for the contemporary mind, they must begin by recognizing that the people are hungry for bread, a step that would recognize the substance of rhetorical complaints before blindly mapping charters, or frameworks, onto them.

Naturally, this analogy faces some limitations that I will clarify. First, one may be led to think that because hunger acted as a constraint within Miller's tale, that the apathy resulting from late postmodernism⁵ also does not change any situation, but merely constrains the group affected: this is not the case. The evolution of postmodernism results in a new sort of mind, just like a new consciousness accompanied the shift from modern to postmodern, Marxist, and poststructuralist thought. Hunger acts as a constraint because, for the most part, it does not permanently alter reality. Cultures can establish systemic starvation, but we fight these systems through existing means. The evolution of group consciousness acts quite differently, however. We have no existing means through which we may "solve" this condition; in fact, there is nothing to be solved. The solution lies in perceiving the new reality and accommodating for it in helpful ways. This paper argues that information and non-rhetorical exigence has overwhelmed Western society so that true rhetorical exigence loses its significance and distinction. In order to recognize the situation in which we find ourselves, this paper will look to the beginnings of postmodernism. Only then will we begin to grasp the realities of rhetorical relativism and the extent to which current scholarship is lacking.

4 The Postmodern Move

Modern consciousness functions from the understanding of traditional hierarchies, a universal audience, and rhetorical focus on style. Neo-Aristotelian criticism was the reigning technique of analyzing discourse during modernism,⁶ employed within criticism to judge the style of a work based on classical technique (Hill, 1972; Leff, Mohrmann, 1974; Stob, 2012). In the *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, David Kaufer illustrates the social implications inherent within classical critique. He writes that classical societies function under social transparency, namely that "the interpretation of a situation ascribed to it by participants is accessible by observers" (Kaufer 173). Neo-Aristotelianism finds its basis in social transparency, assuming that rhetoric directs itself toward a universal audience and that any observer may readily use Aristotelian style to make a judgement critique on the discourse. This technique becomes problematic, however, when critics require the ability to move beyond style and assert moral judgements on discourse's content. Edwin Black makes this comment in his article "The Second Persona," writing, "there is something acutely unsatisfying about criticism that stops short of appraisal" (109). Although Black was discussing this in the context of Marxist thought, his quote nonetheless extends to my argument in revealing the unsatisfactory extent of modern criticism that pushed rhetorical studies further.

However, when Western culture shifted away from modernism, discourse abandoned social transparency in favor of social opacity. Kaufer writes:

under extreme assumptions of [social] opacity, all social meanings can be regarded as idiosyncratic (each individual perceiver defines "unique" situations whose meanings are inaccessible to others) and the dominant function of language is simply the expression of an isolated ego (175).

While Kaufer primarily links social opacity⁷ to the romantic period, it clearly functions within the postmodern period as well. Unlike social transparency, meaning in discourse (under social opacity) comes from specific, unique environmental structures. Thus, significance within any given

⁵A response to modernism: the abolition of general, objective truths and the instillation of subjectivity and relativism. In rhetoric, there is no longer a universal audience.

⁶Circa mid-twentieth century.

⁷The opposite of social transparency: i.e the discourse is not open to a universal audience and is highly dependent on an individual reading of a text. This is the loss of communal truth in discourse to some extent.

text is not oriented toward a universal audience, but rewards those who understand the relative context. Similarly, in his essay on Alfred Korzybski,⁸ Neil Postman describes the non-Aristotelian perspective that Korzybski vies for, writing that it “requires that we learn and internalize the most up-to-date assumptions and understandings about the structure of the world” (143). When rhetorical criticism moved away from Aristotelian structure, it became required that scholarship learn the contemporary consciousnesses as they evolved. I argue that current scholarship lacks a complete awareness of these new assumptions and understandings, specifically relating to cultural apathy.

While there exists very little scholarship on Bitzer’s postmodern contribution, highlighting McLuhan and Heidegger’s postmodern biases reveals that such analysis applies to Bitzer’s scholarship as well. Grant Havers argues that all of McLuhan’s writings indicate a postmodern bias, contributing to previous scholarship on the subject. In *Media, Culture, and Society*, Havers identifies a central element of postmodernism, “the ideas of truth and reality are essentially myths” (518). The mythification of universal truth is the expiration of Classical and Modern assumptions, giving rise to the postmodernist perspectives of relativism and subjectivity. Naturally, myths continue to survive within postmodern assumptions, but only because, according to Havers, they are self-aware (519). They are the tall tales we tell our children, while reminding them such stories are false. Thus, the postmodern mind destroys all recognizable hierarchy in fear of objective truth and in favor of relativism. McLuhan breaks modern assumptions of universal myth in asserting the relativity of truth according to environment. Bitzer makes a similar postmodern argument when he calls rhetoric “situational.”

In a similar time period, Heidegger’s works reiterate the same emphasis on environment, indicating a progression toward postmodernism. In *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Heidegger specifically engages with the concept of art and its relation to environment. He asserts that it is essential for a work to be in relation to an environment; environment establishes and creates significance for the work, and the work simultaneously creates and augments meaning within its world (Heidegger 40-41). Discourse functions in much the same way: being influenced by its situation (exigence, audience, constraints), and thus influencing its situation further (through rhetoric). The postmodern mind, as articulated by McLuhan, Bitzer, and Heidegger, creates new language for this once invisible and insignificant environment. Michael Heim compares the contributions of McLuhan and Heidegger, claiming:

what synchronized their visions is the crucial role technology plays in defining reality, in operating as an invisible backdrop within which the content or entities of the world appear (313).

Naturally, this conception bleeds outside of the realm of “technology.” Rhetoric itself can be considered a form of technology, in that it augments mere speaking into an art of greater persuasion through tools. Heim illuminates the significant contribution that these three scholars make to theory: environment, and situation by extension, substantially acts within art, technology, and rhetoric, although often invisible. This is the common example of a fish, blind to the water he swims in: the environments that surround, influence, and sustain our discourse become imperceptible. Bitzer similarly understood the invisibility of situation, specifically in forming rhetorical discourse, and his understanding of exigence was the initiation of a new era of theory. I will look to his definitions now in order to highlight the reality of current exigency.

5 Early Postmodern Exigence

Bitzer’s “Rhetorical Situation” reveals why early postmodern models are no longer sufficient. The model relies on three central aspects of rhetorical discourse: exigence, audience, and constraints. Exigence acts as the defining feature in discourse - an “imperfection marked by urgency” (Bitzer 6). An exigence is anything that calls the rhetor into discourse. However, there exist many exigencies where discourse does not follow and thus many more exigences occur than rhetorical discourses. It is impossible for society to address every exigency rhetorically, therefore many go unaddressed. Bitzer divides exigence into rhetorical and non-rhetorical categories: those that cannot be altered

⁸The founder of general semantics, according to Postman at least.

with rhetoric, such as the weather, remain non-rhetorical and therefore, impertinent to rhetorical situations. Audience consists of “only those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change” (8). Rhetorical discourse, unlike other forms of articulation such as poetry, for example, requires an audience that can alter reality in order to exist. Finally, Bitzer’s model maintains that every rhetorical situation consists of constraints “made up of persons, events, objects, and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence” (8).

It is important to note Bitzer’s popularity within the realm of rhetorical studies. Scholars have used rhetorical situations to examine Biblical texts and ancient documents (McAuley, 2015; Pogoloff, 1992); they have analyzed current socio-political realms of discourse (Edbauer, 2005; Swift, 2007); and they have studied historical political events (Garret and Xiao, 1993; Norton, 1971; Johnson 2012). His article has also become the subject of perpetual criticism and revision. Critics have argued that the model functions too deterministically, not allowing the rhetor freedom in crafting a response (Cosigny, 1974; Miller, 1972; Vatz, 1973, 2009), and have demanded a furthering of rhetorical situations that more explicitly account for environments, relationships, and changing identities as opposed to discrete entities (Biesecker, 1989; Edbauer, 2005; Gorrell, 1997; Grant-Davie, 1997; Kaufer, 2003; Smith Lybarger, 1996). While their additions offer insight into a potentially more realistic understanding of the complications within postmodern human interaction, the problems these critics continually face is that models will never perfectly serve reality; this is inherent within the definition of a model. Bitzer’s model illustrates exigence, audience, and constraints as three fragments making up rhetorical discourse, not because of his ignorance toward the true nature of human interaction, but because he effectively elevates the situation above all else: a response to the early Postmodernism.

It is exigence that appears most affected by a change in modern consciousness. Miller understood this vaguely when he retold the story of the Chartists and Anti-Corn Law League: perceptions of exigence can vary according to constraints and affect rhetoric similarly to actual exigency. Misperceptions of exigence undoubtedly have drastic effects on communities, as Garret and Xiao show, yet this is not the essence of the problem. The stumbling block that faces contemporary rhetorical theory, which I will detail in the following section, is that exigence is dead, it has expired. I briefly note, here, that non-rhetorical exigency, according to Bitzer’s conception, does not directly apply to the realm of rhetorical studies, nor my analysis. In fact, non-rhetorical exigency has flooded the Western psyche so that valuable, rhetorical exigence is confused and lost. Bitzer was correct in saying that exigence forms discourse. However, he did not realize the effect that the later postmodern mind would have in dispelling rhetorical exigence from rhetoric, in the same way that critics using neo-Aristotelian analysis did not realize it is much more profitable for the postmodern mind to make moral judgments and address relative truth. When exigence dies, it does not cease to exist, but is merely confused for and replaced by non-rhetorical exigency in an overload of information. Thus, it no longer matters.

6 The Expiration of Exigence

In ridding ourselves of the modern hierarchy and universal guiding myth structures, we inherit apathy, spoiling the early postmodern conception of exigence. What was once an “imperfection marked by urgency”, under assumptions of apathy becomes merely an imperfection. The remainder of this paper will reveal the extent of this new era and the ways in which it appears as a result of the postmodern consciousness. It is a reaction that Heidegger entitled “boredom,” Postman referred to as “information overload,” and Crawford called “flattened culture.” It permeates our perceptions and alters our discourse. Technologies including media and rhetoric are ideal lenses through which we may make clear this changing era, since technologies are merely extensions and indicators of ourselves.

First, we must address the biases that the postmodern mind fosters. In an attempt to rid itself of rational values and institutions, as well as explicit forms of hierarchy, Western society began to turn toward subjective meanings and relativism brought about by complexities in situation. In *The World Beyond your Head*, Crawford asserts that the rise of the postmodern period is accompanied

by the rise of the sovereign individual: an individual who must take it upon oneself to rise to the top. He writes, "if there are no external constraints, what you make of yourself depends on your gumption and mental capacities" and later "in a culture of performance, the individual reads the status and value of her soul in her worldly accomplishments" (Crawford 162). Thus, the downfall of universal audiences and hierarchical structures leads to a performance culture where one's structure now comes from within, documented and legitimized through performance.

As the postmodern mind has evolved, however, this dependence on one's own performance, relying on the approval of peers in order to establish a hierarchy, leads to the creation of the flattened culture. Crawford presents the flattened culture as a reaction to the stresses of the performance culture: too much individual control leads to others' disapproval of one's dictatorship, while too much focus on others' opinions leaves one without control. Crawford quotes Kierkegaard in saying that, in this society, "our judgements [become] so objective, so all-inclusive, that it is a matter of complete indifference who expresses them" (190). Because of a desire to maintain one's position within postmodernism's invisible hierarchy, one must seem inoffensive, and thus our minds turn toward apathy. He gives the example of Muzak, a brand of background music that plays in gyms and department stores, so utterly void of musical content, and therefore inoffensive to anyone's taste.

Neil Postman reacts to a similar understanding of cultural apathy revealing itself through a reaction to postmodernism. He argues that modernist structures held information in place, and decided what was necessary to know, and what was important. A school curriculum will always favor some information over other forms, and modernist structures essentially controlled society's "curriculum." When these institutions fell, under postmodern assumptions, suddenly we were left without information control. Postman writes: "when there is too much information to sustain any theory, information becomes essentially meaningless" (77 emphasis theirs). If value acts as a function of scarcity, then ridding ourselves of the control of information creates an apathy toward exigence. Heidegger labels this apathy "boredom", defining it as an individual seeing the world, but not feeling compelled to participate within it. If the social consciousness is defined by apathy, then Bitzer's notion of exigence becomes obsolete. Under assumptions of boredom, individuals see the imperfection marked by urgency, but feel no compulsion toward rhetoric; in essence, most exigences become non-rhetorical.

7 The Revelation of Cultural Apathy

Cultural apathy limits our engagement with contemporary issues; therefore, we do not recognize exigences when they arise. Postman argues that one should always question what problem a particular technology is attempting to solve. It seems, under the current assumptions of this paper, that there are many technologies which offer solutions to nonexistent problems, and answers to nonexistent questions. In "The Rhetorical Situation," Bitzer writes that:

rhetorical discourse comes into existence as a response to a situation, in the same sense that an answer comes into existence in response to a question, or a solution in response to a problem (5).

Of course, there exist rhetorical situations where a real exigence must be solved: situations where a real problem or question arises. For example, as I write this paper the world faces a global pandemic: the virus COVID-19 creates many exigences, including how we may stop the spread and deaths of the virus, how we may flatten the statistical curve. Business owners, governors, and presidents constantly send out updates and warnings. I do not wish to argue that the world is void of important exigences. Instead, I hope to show that, because of information overload and a flattened culture, there exist many more forms of non-rhetorical discourse: many that we confuse for the real thing. As a result, we may even begin to ignore true and valuable exigences. Let us turn now to a couple of illustrations in order to demonstrate how non-rhetorical discourse floods our psyche. The success of both memes and the recent television show "Tiger King" offer considerations of the current mass-consciousness and reveal apathy toward rhetorical exigence within popular culture.

The exaltation of the meme in Western digital society illuminates a randomization of fact, truth,

opinion, and exigence. The meme essentially combines an image, usually an icon of popular culture, with short, unrelated text. It responds to no rhetorical exigence in that there exists no problem that the meme attempts to solve, or even can solve. There are countless numbers of memes, many with the same image but completely different texts underneath. Take, for example, the image of "Success Kid," one of the top internet memes. In a 2015 article CNN refers to "Success Kid" as "likely the internet's most famous baby" (Payne). The image depicts a young boy clenching sand in his fist and staring forward with a determined facial expression. The image, like most memes, does not reflect someone famous or known; it is completely randomized and maintains no prior social significance. A selection of captions for this particular meme include: "went to Burger King, got a crown," "ate spaghetti while wearing a white shirt, didn't get sauce on it," and "put 5 dollars in pocket, pull out 10." The meme exalts a reality without formula, it randomizes pieces of information, reacting to the fact that we have too much of it. It is flat, primarily inoffensive, mildly funny, and maintains the apathy of the individual because of the ease of production and consumption.

Although one might object to the prior example, saying that perhaps memes do not hope to be rhetorical even if they may inadvertently function rhetorically, I merely intended to illustrate the new consciousness reflected by our prominent media and discourse. While memes may not reflect a wide body of rhetorical scholarship, many scholars accept that television shows respond to exigency and function rhetorically. Many critics have analyzed TV shows and films for rhetorical messages (Ehrenhaus, 2001; Mittel, 2001; Cisneros, 2008; Coon, 2011; Dubrofsky, 2013; Fritz, 2015). The Netflix TV show "Tiger King" (2020) parades itself with the style, voice, and tropes of the documentary genre, yet fails to outline a definable exigence it responds to. Of all major television genres, the documentary should be most concerned with rhetorically solving a perceived exigence because it acts as an inflated model of reality. And yet, paradigmatic of exigence's expiration, "Tiger King" suggests many potential exigences throughout the seven-episode series, offering no real rhetorical response or solution.

The show primarily follows Joe Exotic, the owner of a Tiger zoo, "G.W. Zoo," in Oklahoma. However, the footage from his zoo is intercut with footage from Doc Antle's "Wildlife Safari" in South Carolina, and Carole Baskin's "Big Cat Rescue" in Florida. Although the show sometimes presents itself as finding the truth of tiger extortion, it often exacerbates unwarranted, likely false exigences, similar to a reality show. For example, in episode three, "The Secret," the show reveals that Carole Baskin's husband suspiciously disappeared years earlier after a major fight with Carole. Exotic spends nearly his entire life and fortune attempting to prove that Baskin fed her late husband to the tigers and this ends up costing him his zoo and leading to his imprisonment. The show works hard, rhetorically, to allude to the fact that Baskin did kill her husband. However, most of their information comes from Exotic because the authorities presented in the show do not see a clear cause for suspicion; there is no legitimate exigence. Instead of responding to actual questions and real problems, "Tiger King" creates questions and establishes problems in order to produce entertainment. The show cannot change any exigence because it does not take itself seriously, it is, in effect, non-rhetorical. The creation of exigences, problems and questions for television reveals that true exigence has expired. Society now produces an abundance of information which fosters apathy and a general confusion and boredom with what really matters.

8 Conclusion

Thus far I have concluded that much exigency inhabits a devalued position in the evolved Post-modern mind; we are no longer able to recognize meaningful exigence because it has become conflated. Rhetorical relativism, responding to Modern frameworks through situational rhetoric, fosters an apathy that now permeates society. Therefore, the frameworks of rhetorical criticism we have become accustomed to are no longer legitimate. To acknowledge once more the analogy of the Corn-Law Rhymer, we must forgo our charter, our frameworks, in order to understand the true situation of the starving individual, the one that cannot perceive exigency because of the contemporary condition. Rhetorical critics continue to use obsolescent frameworks in textual analyses that are not helpful in diagnosing the truth of modern society. We should not do away with these frameworks all together because they offer great insight into technique; however, we

should not rely on them beyond the extent of technique. For example, you would not hire an art historian to teach you how to paint a portrait. The art historian has great insight into techniques inherent within any given work, but they cannot, for the most part, step into the painting process with you. In the same way, these frameworks are not able to reveal the modern consciousness of our culture.

Rhetorical theorists and critics are in a wonderfully unique position: they can both analyze past discourse and create oratory. They are, in a sense, both the art historian and the artist. It is important that we do not lose the historian side of rhetoric. And yet, it is vital that we remain relevant to society as it exists in the now. I will offer a few suggestions on how we can accomplish this, although I provide these as first steps in a process that welcomes and anticipates further research. First, rhetorical studies must acknowledge the existing condition. It makes no sense to give up the charter if we do not see the truth of starvation. It is also nonsensical to abandon the frameworks if we cannot recognize the condition. Scholars must see the truth of how Postmodern thinking produces lacking exigence. Although it might be a cause for concern, it should not produce in us the same apathy we encounter. Instead, it should encourage us to seek even further into the exigence of the situation. Second, rhetorical studies need a theorized and defined definition of rhetoric. As culture responds to information overload, many “texts” contain non rhetorical exigences, according to Bitzer’s definition. Is a text rhetorical only when it can be changed by discourse? If that is the case, we will see the body of modern rhetoric quickly decline. Scholars must ask and re-ask what serves as rhetoric and why, not abandoning all historic truths of rhetoric, but understanding new applications for changing consciousnesses.

Finally, in the creation of discourse, we must be thoughtful in approaching rhetorical exigence through fitting responses. A plethora of news coverage pursues entertainment as its end, approaching often serious exigency with unfitting, entertaining responses. If we inhabit a culture that magnifies non-rhetorical exigency, which prevalence of popular culture has exemplified, then as rhetors we must recognize and respond to true exigency in fitting ways. Bitzer asserts that we fully understand, to whatever extent possible, exigence, audience, and constraints within the situation in order to create the most meaningful discourse. Letting non- rhetorical exigency rule popular views of rhetoric is conceding to the enemy of apathy. Our discourse must elevate true rhetorical situations beyond mediocrity, and our criticism and theory must account for the new Postmodernism we encounter. Ultimately, we should seek to avoid a total expiration of exigency through elevating legitimate exigences within a reframed hierarchy. When genuine exigency becomes the most valuable source of rhetorical discourse, its expiration will begin to disappear.

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