THEORIZING DIGITAL RHETORIC

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Grayson, and Benson, many thanks for putting up with the hectic schedule of academia and the endless turnaround of projects. I'm glad that we four find the time to dance and laugh along the way.

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INTRODUCTION
Theorizing Digital Rhetoric
Aaron Hess

In a recent classroom discussion, I told my students about how I can recall a time when the world wasn't networked. A time when our phones didn't accompany us everywhere, when the news was on paper, and when the family set of encyclopedias was considered valuable. Yet, even as I tell that story, I still consider myself somewhat of a digital native. The internet "came out" when I was in high school, and I had the fortune of growing up in the San Francisco Bay Area and living in the Silicon Valley in the late '90s. Technology was all around me in my adolescence as stories of the new superfast 56K modem circulated among my social groups.

Like many around my age, I can specifically recall the first time I went online to "surf the web." My friends and I had picked up one of those ten-hours-free America Online (AOL) discs that seemed to endlessly appear on my doorstep. I had heard about the internet through TV shows and other kids at school, but had not had a chance to try it out. That first night with two of my best friends would be a first step in a strange relationship with technology. As console gamers, we were pretty equipped to handle the digital world, or so we thought. We put in all the requisite credit card information and logged on. Chat rooms, the World Wide Web, and all kinds of "cybersurfing" were just waiting for us across the ether. As we heard what would become that ever familiar sound of a '90s modem connecting to the internet, we waited to see what all the fuss was about.

Not really knowing what to do, we ventured on into this new arena, looking for interesting chat rooms or people. A message popped up from "AOLadmin9617." It said, "Greetings AOL user! Your credit card information is in need of verification. Please provide your number and expiration date or your session will be terminated." As we scrambled to find the credit card and frantically enter in the numbers, it dawned on me that this may not be real. "Wait a second, why would it ask us for the info again? How do we know that this is
a real AOL rep?” I inquired openly. We paused to deliberate and then closed the window.

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This volume explores the intersection between rhetoric and digital technology. Much like my earliest experiences with AOL, the discipline of rhetoric has approached technology and the internet with curiosity, trepidation, and awe. For scholars interested in rhetoric, the growing relationship between discourse and technology is one that is nearly impossible to ignore. As many of the authors in this volume will attest, digital technology impacts nearly every element of contemporary society, from wearable technology that tracks footsteps and heartbeats to the influence of social media upon politics and presidential elections. Similarly, the idea of rhetoric is one that also pervades most every element of our daily interactions, from trying to convince our bosses for a raise to deliberating over the political future of the country. Together, the concept of digital rhetoric is both old and young: old insofar as the study of rhetoric dates back as far as recorded history and young in terms of recent revolutions in technological growth that have occurred or are still occurring. Both theory and method have been significantly challenged by the advent and progression of technology in the past few decades, and I would expect that these challenges will only continue as digital technology continues to grow.

In this opening chapter, I chart some of the recent thinking about digital rhetoric. Although young, the concept has received a considerable amount of attention in the past twenty years. Prominent scholars in the field—many of whom are in this volume—began the conversation about the digital rhetoric in the early 1990s. Looking back, even the most profound theory of the time will undoubtedly look quaint by contemporary standards; much like how this very volume might look dated in few short years. So it goes with technology. Yet, the need remains for scholars of rhetoric to be well-versed in the rapid changes of technology and the myriad ways that users adapt and create within digital contexts. Indeed, the field of rhetoric has frequently recognized the need for integrating media studies theory and technology into its theoretical canon (Benson 1996; Kennedy 1999; McKerrow 2010; Miller 2003; Silvestri 2013; Warnick and Heineman 2012). As many authors in this volume will explain, digital rhetoric is not merely the addition of technology to rhetoric—or vice versa—and “still.” The concept of digital rhetoric requires sustained attention to the ways that rhetoric changes in a technological era and how technology is shaped by human expression both about and through the technology itself. Because of this, each of the authors in this volume takes up key challenges in rhetorical theory brought about by the advances in technology as well as the ways in which rhetorical theory can inform our understanding of how language shapes our understanding of technology.

Digital Rhetoric: A Brief Definitional Chronology

As with many scholarly enterprises, this volume steps into a longer and larger conversation about digital rhetoric. The influence of technology on speech dates back at least to Plato, who questioned the role of writing as a technology in the Phaedrus (Ong 1982). His fears of writing—ironically expressed in the written dialogue—resonate in contemporary circles as well. Those who express concerns about a generation of social media users as unable to take up face-to-face conversations may find comfort in Socrates, who during the dialogue decries the lack of human interaction found in the written word. This point of origin for the conversation about speech and technology sets the stage for millennia, but as communication technology rapidly advanced in the twentieth century, rhetorical scholars reacted with new ideas about the relationship between technology, language, and identity. In this section, I briefly outline some of the major milestones in theorizing digital rhetoric.

Before getting to what is commonly understood as “digital” technology, it is worth noting that many elements of digital rhetoric and digital media studies are indebted to previous work regarding traditional or “old” media, such as Marshall McLuhan’s (1964) discussions of mass media, Stuart Hall’s (2006) offerings in cultural studies, or Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s (1988) thorough investigation into the role of mass media in presidential politicking. Much of the theorizing of digital media studies and digital rhetoric can be traced back into larger discussions of media writ large (Herbig, Herrmann, and Tyma 2015). Yet, simultaneously, digital rhetoric is marked with a departure from the models of centralized “old” media, especially when accented with a tailored, individualized experience and participatory sensibility. For example, Lev Manovich’s highly influential work The Language of New Media explores the cultural logics of new media through both a historical understanding of cinema—as an “old” medium—and by examining new features of digital media at this time. The relationship between traditional media theorizing and digital rhetoric is beyond the scope of this volume, but should be recognized as a fundamental starting point for understanding digital technology. As with many elements of scholarship, the belief that technological novelty can fully surpass theory is a mistaken assumption. Instead, as Manovich (2001:8) encourages us, the history of media can be seen as “a succession of distinct and equally expressive languages, each with its own aesthetic variables, and each closing off some of the possibilities of its predecessor.” As such, in what follows, I trace the development of key elements of digital rhetoric through innovations in technology, not to say that one replaces the previous, but to recognize that coming to a definition or understanding of digital technology is an iterative process dependent on changes in technology, usage, history, and theory.

Since the advent of personal computing, many scholars have questioned the ways in which these new, everyday technologies would change the way we speak and write. Early on, with the growing popularity of bulletin board systems, internet relay chat or other chat rooms, and email, many theorists offered fresh perspectives
on the study of rhetoric (Benson 1996). Over time, the practice and study of digital rhetoric has adapted along with the new technologies, such as Web 2.0, social media practices, and locative media. These technologies often embrace new forms of embodiment, physicality, and mobility, drawing new attention to cyborgian claims (Haraway 1991). As will be discussed below, the nature of “digital” rhetoric is troubled by a false bifurcation between digital and analog, as if the analog body shuts off when it embraces a keyboard and screen. More often, the body and machine work in tandem with physical spaces, much more so than with mere static screens located in particular rooms of the home office. Looking back toward that early theorizing, however, provides a vital starting point for considering the evolution of the term to this contemporaneous moment.

The term “digital rhetoric” can be traced back to Richard Lanham’s (1992) influential essay with the same name. There, Lanham maps out movements in art and aesthetic theory to contend that both the “digital computer” and “electronic text” are works of art motivated by “play and purpose” (ibid.: 241). Writing in the larger context of online literacy, Lanham traces the aesthetic of the computer display as an outgrowth of postmodern trends in visual arts. While an important moment in offering a foundation for connecting digital computation with rhetoric, his early formulation does not fully elaborate on the conditions for speaking and writing within this playful environment. Later, Lanham (1993) furthered his claims about the aesthetic value in computational and hypertext discourse, connecting it to larger concerns in the university system. Others at the time, such as George Landow (1994), Jay David Bolter (2001), and Stuart Moulthrop (1994), explored the potential of hypertext for creating new compositional environments, forms of literacy, and a rhizomatic epistemology. Literacy remained a persistent concern as these new technologies took hold. Kathleen Welch (1999) termed this new intersection of rhetoric, literacy, and technology as “electronic rhetoric,” which was understood as “the new merger of the written and the oral, both now newly empowered and reconstructed by electricity and both dependent on print literacy” (ibid.: 104). Again, the understanding of rhetoric within these newly networked spaces reflected upon previous technologies (print) and how they can be comprehended on the “electric” screen. How students and citizens engaged these technologies required rhetorical theory to be reconsidered with due attention to changes in reading, writing, and speaking.

Thus, scholars quickly recognized that rhetorical theories, classical or modern, “left unmodified, are inadequate” (Welch 1999: 104). Case studies and other observations of the changing dynamics of online communication led to the retheorizing of rhetoric in this regard. For example, Laura Gurak (1997) offered a groundbreaking discussion of online protest during the infancy of internet communication. Here, she recognizes how key functions of rhetoric, in particular ethos and delivery, are altered when analyzed online. Prefacing Welch’s (1999) concerns about rhetorical theory, Gurak’s (1997) systematic analysis of the Lotus and Clipper Chip controversies provides a vital justification for recognizing that rhetorical theory, when considered in digital contexts, requires adaptation in order to consider the ways that online protests and argument are fundamentally altered. Similarly, Barbara Warnick (1998: 73) recognized the need to examine “electronic environments” and reposition theory in relation to changing dynamics of technology and later implored rhetorical scholars to “look under the hood” of digital texts to grasp not only the manifest meanings of digital texts, but also of their latent, fundamental ordering as code (Warnick 2005: 332). Her call signals a key shift in understanding digital rhetoric as scholarship moved into the new millennium.

The early 2000s heralded key moments in digital rhetoric. A number of highly influential works were published that established a strong justification for and robust accounting of digital rhetoric. It is during this time that the most thorough definitional work is offered. Laura Gurak (2001) continued theorizing about literal in Cyberliterate: Navigating the Internet with Awareness, offering four key components—speed, reach, anonymity, and interactivity—that constitute much of online communication. Later, along with Smiljana Antonijevic, she mixes ethos, kairos, community/collaboration, and delivery into her understanding of digital rhetoric (Gurak and Antonijevic 2009). James Zappen (2005) picked up on Gurak and others—including Lev Manovich—by integrating the previous components into a theoretical position that attempts “to explain how traditional rhetorical strategies of persuasion function and how they are being reconfigured in digital spaces” (Zappen 2005: 319). In this way, the persistent definitional focus of digital rhetoric has been about the reconfiguration of rhetorical theory within digitality.

Finally, and most recently, scholars have paid close attention to the ways that networking technologies have created fresh challenges to the theorizing of digital rhetoric. Combined with previous calls for understanding its computational or mathematical underpinnings, these theorists rightfully blend the expression of digital rhetoric on the screen with its massively networked quality. For example, Elizabeth Losh (2009: 47–48) outlines four positions to consider digital rhetoric that move from the everyday experience of technology, public discourse from governmental institutions, to the scholarly understanding of computer-generated media as objects of study, to information sciences that quantify human expression online. This work recognizes that the vastness of networked technologies spans from everyday experience to the top-most elements of government. Damien Paster (2014), offering an alternative to digital rhetoric with “networked rhetorics,” underscores the social and communicative elements of technology. This shift recognizes both the ubiquity of digital technologies and that the forms of expression found within such technologies have become increasingly social in nature. Accenting the ubiquity, Douglas Eyman (2015) has taken up a thorough exploration of digital rhetoric and its various definitions, believing that digital rhetoric is most simply the application of rhetorical theory to digital texts and performances. Each of these definitional moments recognizes that digital rhetoric evolves as technology does and as technological tools become increasingly widespread.
Digital Rhetoric: Our Current Moment

Digital rhetoric will be defined in a number of ways throughout this volume. Much like its root concept of "rhetoric," the definition largely depends on particular theorists and their approach to its study. Yet, I offer the following as a stepping stone to consider: Digital rhetoric is the study of meaning-making, persuasion, or identification as expressed through language, bodies, machines, and texts that are created, circulated, or experienced through or regarding digital technologies. Since antiquity, rhetoric has traditionally been about speech and language as delivered for specific audiences. Adding digital to that concept signals that digital technologies make a difference in the ways that we communicate. This claim is typically not surprising. Most everyone in modern society recognizes the differences between communicating via in-person speech or telephone or email. Digital rhetoric emphasizes this difference and highlights that technologies constrain, structure, and enable speaking in fundamentally new ways.

Digital

Theorizing digital rhetoric requires due attention to the nature of "digital" or "digitality." On face, the notion of digital would signal that there is some sort of digital channel between individuals. Rather than seeing the rhetorical situation as existing between embodied actors in spaces, a "digital" rhetoric would underscore the channel of a rhetorical situation as being non-embodied or mediated (Gurak and Antonijevic 2009). Indeed, much of the earliest theorizing regarding digital rhetoric demarked digital space as a separate destination away from the "real" world. This assumption belies a more complicated understanding of digital rhetoric. "Digital" does not signal the absence or eschewing of "analog." It is easy to think of digital and analog as opposite waves of recording information, of turning speech into "ones and zeros." This binary misunderstanding constructs "digital" as the addition of digital technology and a subtraction of analog, embodied, or "real." For example, a public protest event that includes live bodies yelling at governmental institutions can be recorded via digital photography and circulated across social network sites. To say that one is embodied and one is digital misses the point. The mere presence of the digital technologies at the site of protest alters the performance of argument from those involved (Hess forthcoming). In this way, many rhetorical encounters are affected by the presence and use of digital technology. The ubiquity of digital technology in a smartphone and internet of things world means that nearly all elements of public discourse are affected by digitality. For many, it is likely that digital technology already looks less like a technology and more like a common feature of modern existence, much in the same way that writing does not surface in the public mind as technology.

Rhetoric

As a study of rhetoric, digital rhetoric examines the nature of meaning-making, identification, and persuasion, oftentimes in the context of advocacy, deliberation, argumentation, or aesthetic performance. Rhetoric has been defined in many ways by many individuals, but at its core, it maintains a focus on meaning-making. The aim of rhetorical discourse might be a number of things, depending on the theorist, including the Aristotelian notion of persuading others, identification with audiences (Burke 1969a, 1969b), invitation of audiences (Foss and Griffin 1995), or the promotion of ideology (Black 1978; Wander 1983; McGee 1990; McKerron 1989). Furthermore, the expression of rhetoric can be understood in myriad ways, whether as narrative (Fisher 1984), metaphor (Osborn 1967), expressed from vernacular spaces (Hauser 1999; Ono and Sloep 1995), or iconographic visuals (Hariman and Lucaites 2007), to name a mere handful. The core assumptions of rhetoric as founded in human communication and expression, through body, word, and media, have been maintained throughout time.

Digital rhetoric, however, changes the nature of how rhetoric is expressed. The creation of messages is often structured by the constraints and abilities inherent within digital technologies. Some of these constraints are quite visible, such as the 140 characters that limit a tweet. Others, such as the limits placed within the immersive qualities of a video game, are more difficult to ascertain. Like speech itself, these technologies differ in their creative and adaptive abilities. No two speakers have the same vocal qualities, much like no two technologies have the same constraints or creative possibilities. Importantly, however, digital technology, whether through networked smartphones, computer screens, or wearable technology, has been integrated into the everyday and common experience of communication. Much like how Kenneth Burke positioned literature, these technologies are a part of our daily equipment for living (Burke 1974). In this way, they feature squarely within our fundamental abilities and assumptions regarding communication and rhetoric. Given the ubiquity of these technologies in the creation and circulation of rhetoric, every exchange is affected by them or their absence. Even the choice to not use digital means to communicate has consequences for how rhetors are perceived.

From this definition, there are a number of key themes that surface within the study of digital rhetoric. These themes add nuance to the definition, allowing digital rhetoric to be understood as: computational and algorithmic, ordered yet playful, participatory and reaching, and embodied. These ideas stretch across this volume, highlighting moments when digital rhetoric can be seen in ways that significantly differ from traditional rhetorical theorizing.
Computational and Algorithmic

In response to calls to examine the mathematical and coding structure underneath digital contexts, a variety of scholars in rhetoric and elsewhere combined humanistic and computational understandings of digital technologies toward fruitful and innovative analyses. Questions of algorithms, automation, interfaces, and coding structure inquired not merely into the textual environment of digital rhetoric. Rather, these critics realized that fluid digital texts found in Web 2.0 contexts required a nuanced understanding of how computational systems simultaneously enable and constrain discourse (Pfister 2014). For example, both Eli Pariser (2011) and Siva Vaidhyanathan (2011) have expressed concern about the pervasive media environments created by large web companies, such as Google and Facebook, which operate as both gatekeepers and curators of knowledge, interaction, and experience online. Fundamental to these arguments is an investigation into the power and authority of algorithms in producing the user experience, leading to what Pariser (2011) calls the “filter bubble,” which function, as previous scholars such as Cass Sunstein (2007) have noted, like echo chambers of political belief and opinion. Similarly, danah boyd and Kate Crawford (2012) provide compelling reasons to explore the impact and power of “big data” upon contemporary society. Coupled with algorithms and other automated processes, critics have increasingly expressed concerns about the power of social media, search engines, and other purveyors of knowledge, news stories, and opinion in forming public opinion. As recently as the 2016 election, the use of algorithms and filter bubbles to spread fake news has led to fresh concerns about the power of these systems.

Ordered yet Playful

Looking beyond the computational power undergirding much of digital technology, other theorists have connected rhetoric to more specific contexts of digital life, such as video gaming. A relatively nascent but growing field, ludology and game studies has been an influential force in exploring the power of rhetorical play. From a larger humanistic perspective, scholars have recognized the immersive power of digital games to not merely craft narratives, but also make arguments about political and social issues (Nakamura 2009; Hess 2007; Voorhees 2009). Janet Murray’s early work, *Hamlet on the Holodeck* (1997), offered a thorough examination of the unique characteristics of play and narrative games, such as immersion, agency, and transformation. According to this perspective, experiencing an interactive narrative as a game creates a powerful sense of involvement for the player. In a much more thorough exploration of rhetoric and video games, Ian Bogost’s *Persuasive Games* (2007) and *Unit Operations* (2008) make a compelling case about the specific power of play as a part of the persuasive experience of games. Bogost believes that the rhetorical force of games surfaces in the act of play, whereby meaning is authored through interactive and operational form of the game. In this sense, rhetoric is understood specifically through the computational form authored through the coding of specific units within the game coupled with the interactive experience internalized by the player. Much like previous theorizing, Bogost’s conceptualization contains due attention to both the structural form of the digital technology and the textual/interactive interpretation of it—that is, both what’s on the screen and operating underneath it. Together, the concept of ordered play is helpful for conceptualizing how users take up technology for purposes of parody, remixing, or other forms of formal play.

Participatory and Reaching

Similarly, the computational power and reach of Web 2.0 structures has encouraged scholars to explore the ways in which individuals participate, create, and spread texts across digital spaces. Within this strand of theory is the recognition that digital spaces and the internet have fundamentally altered the nature of production and reception of texts. As Barbara Warnick (1998: 77) put it early on, “Everyone is a rhetor, and everyone an audience.” Consequently, in both rhetorical circles and elsewhere, many scholars offered concepts that collapsed the process of production and reception, or production and usage, of digital artifacts into a singular process. Axel Bruns (2008) called this conception “produsage,” while Henry Jenkins (2006) reflected on the convergence of old and new media within participatory cultures. These concepts home in on a particular shift in theory within digital rhetoric that mirrors Burke’s shifting of rhetoric from persuasion toward practices of discursive identification across massively networked spaces. As Gurak and Antonijevic (2009: 500) argue, “The need to persuade specific audiences becomes far less important than the ability to reach many audiences” (emphasis added). Recognizing the shift toward networked and shared user-generated content, rhetorical scholarship found productive avenues in expanding vernacular rhetorical theory into digital spaces (Ono and Sloop 2002; Howard 2008; Hess 2009), inquiring into the ways that individual users have effectively (or not) taken up Web 2.0 tools.

Embodied

Finally, theorizing about digital technology has now recognized the changing relationship between bodies and devices, especially since the advent of smartphone technologies. As a “destination,” the internet was, for the end of the twentieth century, somewhat of a portal. Computer rooms or home offices contained the access to online spaces not only to the home, but to particular parts of the home, in contrast to the smartphone-connected world in contemporary society in which users can be constantly connected in remarkably remote locations (de Souza e Silva 2006; de Souza e Silva and Frith 2012). The world is at once digital and physical, accessed through both devices and bodies. As Gurak and Antonijevic (2009: 504) put it, “It is everything we consider rhetorical in nature. Text, sounds, visuals, nonverbal cues, material, and virtual spaces—all these have blurred together, and all
are digitized.” Moreover, as wireless and cellular technologies have expanded, the internet became something accessed from anywhere that has a signal and connected to physical spaces. Now, mobile devices can overlay digital content upon physical and material spaces, augmenting them with new meanings (Chess 2014). Thus, digital content surrounds us, follows us into streets and cars, is connected to “things,” and has created a hybrid experience of physical and digital worlds, leading to new theorizing about the ontology of not only the user, but of the “things”—cars, objects, and other machines—that carry live networked connections. Moreover, the body is “digitized” or quantified in new ways as digital technologies actively measure embodied elements, such as footsteps, heart rate, and other physical elements of the self, providing new data points and analyses of the everyday human body in motion.

Part and Chapter Overview

This volume is organized into three major sections, each of which builds upon the larger arguments about the power and potential of digital technology to impact rhetorical theory, and vice versa. To begin, Part I outlines larger philosophical and rhetorical frames to understand digital rhetoric. Although I have offered a large, overarching definition of digital rhetoric above, these chapters refine this work to underscore potential avenues for how the experience of digital rhetoric can be understood. These refinements offer much more nuanced and elaborate conceptions of digital rhetoric. In Chapter 2, David Gunkel examines how digital reason itself—that code of binary ones and zeroes—mirrors structural and poststructural notions of language itself and impacts larger social and political conversations about technology. In the same vein, Damien Smith Pfister (Chapter 3) also attends to social conversations about technology by examining how vernacular discourses in the promotion of products supports a larger system of technoliberalism, the tenets of which surface in social attitudes toward technology. Both Gunkel and Pfister provide compelling takes on how the logics of digital rhetoric and technology extend into larger social conversations.

Moving away from the language about technology and toward the experience of technology, both Jay Brower and James P. Zappen (Chapters 4–5) provide insights into the ontological elements of digital rhetoric. Brower looks to the nature of the user experience through an affective lens, which accesses those intensities and sensations that lie beneath or before language. Zappen looks to how the current push toward the “internet of things” opens new possibilities for understanding the relationship between discourse, materiality, and digitality. From self-driving cars to social robots, the user experience with technology has moved away from desktop screens and portable smartphones into the everyday objects we use. Consequently, Zappen argues, our being in the world is impacted not only by things, but by complex entanglements connected to things and networks that move us in various ways. Finally for Part I, J. Macgregor Wise (Chapter 6) extends this rhetorical vision to examine and critique the “Clickable World” as crafted for the promotion of Google Glass, calling for an interruption of the machinic assemblage that surrounds us.

Part II of the book outlines moments when digital technology intrudes upon rhetorical theory. As mentioned above, rhetorical theory is fundamentally altered when considered through digital contexts. The chapters in this section seek to uncover and expand upon those moments when rhetorical theory benefits from due attention to digital technology. To begin, Amber Davisson and Angela Leone (Chapter 7) look to technological affordances as rhetorical forms, noting those moments when structural or formal constraints within technology enable and constrain expression or community within digital contexts. In Chapter 8, Ashley Hinck examines the concept of fluidity and how it challenges assumptions about identity and community. Drawing from her experience with the Harry Potter Alliance, she articulates the concept of fluidity with group membership, noting how fluid identities and groups can provide a catalyst for political and social action. For Davisson and Leone as well as Hinck, the user experience of digital technology through affordances or fluidity alters the potential and possibility of expression and community.

Moving from the user experience and toward an “underneath the hood” view of technology, authors in Part II also seek to understand how the computational form of digital technology impacts rhetorical theory. Jessica Reyman (Chapter 9) looks to the concept of agency within rhetorical theory and the ways in which it is challenged and altered by larger algorithmic structures found online. As a fundamental part of the web’s infrastructure, algorithms structure and hierarchize content toward rhetorical ends. Similarly, and also attending to the infrastructure of digitality, Candice Lanius and Gaines S. Hubbell (Chapter 10) examine the function of “data.” Connecting data within argumentation theory to the digital deluge of data in daily life, they contend that data acts upon the user in profound ways. Incorporating digital data into rhetorical theory, they offer new conceptions of keines, invention, genre, and enthymeme.

Finally for Part II, two chapters look to the ways that identity and corporeality can be understood through digital technology. First, Brett Lunceford (Chapter 11) traces the longstanding question about the body in politics. By tracing philosophical and political conversations from Descartes to Nancy Fraser, Lunceford recovers a position on the digital body that takes into account the constrictions of online technologies via their severing of the body, and the enhancements potentially afforded to the body through manipulation or spread of bodily images. In parallel fashion, in Chapter 12, Vincent Pham looks to embodied politics through the lens of strategic essentialism. He makes the case that vernacular discourses on the internet can mobilize through the use of identity politics and markers of the racialized body. In both chapters, rhetorics of the body are challenged and reworked through digital technology.

Part III of the book asks about how scholars and students of rhetoric can work to recognize the power of digital technology in our everyday lives, particularly through rhetorical theory and method. Opening this part, Michelle Gibbons and
David Seitz (Chapter 13) offers a methodological in-road through their exploration of Twitter. Bridging ideographic criticism into the discussion of hashtagging, the pair offer a terminological approach to studying rhetoric in social media. Continuing the discussion of hashtags, Jennifer Reinwald in Chapter 14 examines the circulation of #ALSIceBucketChallenge, which surfaced as a successful campaign to promote awareness and raise funds to combat Lou Gehrig’s disease. Framing her analysis with McLuhan’s tetrad, Reinwald provides the means for understanding how hashtags persist and fade within public consciousness. In Chapter 15, Jeremy David Johnson looks to how rhetorical critics can take up the power of algorithms, especially within political circles. Crafting an “algorithmic rhetoric,” Johnson offers critics the tools to examine the ways that rhetorical agency can be enhanced and diminished through the programmatic power of networked systems.

Identity and identification have been persistent concerns within rhetoric, and the final two chapters of Part III take up two key elements of each. First, in Chapter 16, Hillary A. Jones looks to how social media encourages particular practices of identification. Drawing from Kenneth Burke’s notion of consubstantiality and Ian Bogost’s procedural rhetoric, Jones displays how identification is wrapped up into sharing practices, a preference for visuality, and ways of looking. Taking up Charland’s notion of constitutive rhetoric, Shira Chess (Chapter 17) closes this part by examining casual mobile gaming and the ways by which these games craft and constitute the identity of “casual gamer,” especially against larger social conceptions of “hardcore gamer.” Together, these essays provide bold assessments about the rhetorical nature of identity as understood through digital technologies. The volume closes with some final thoughts from Brian L. Ott, who looks toward future theorizing of digital rhetoric. Reflecting on the massive proliferation of technology, Ott looks toward how production, format, and flow will continue to impact digital rhetoric.

Overall, the contributors to this volume provide a thorough sketch of the idea and application of digital rhetoric. Together, we aim to continue the conversation about the power and potential of digital technologies to enrich our understanding of rhetoric. Moreover, this volume signals the many ways that rhetorical theory can illuminate the ways in which digital technology constrains and enables our ability to speak and listen in a massively networked society. As technology continues to engage our everyday existence and alter our political realities, students and scholars of rhetoric alike must persevere in their collective critical impulse to evaluate the social, political, and cultural impact of digital rhetoric.

Note

1 The connection between games and stories is complicated and not all theorists of ludology agree that narrative theory is the best fit for games. For more, see Juul (2001).

References


