Rhetorics and Technologies

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Introduction

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The essays in this volume invite readers to consider the ways in which rhetorics and technologies relate to each other—and to numerous other aspects, both material and symbolic, of writing and communication situations. Key arguments have been organized and developed for people interested in a sustained treatment of these constantly shifting relationships, which have significant implications for both scholars and teachers in rhetorical studies.

Rhetorical activities have always taken place in technological contexts of one sort or another, whether a scriptorium, a traditional classroom, a state-of-the-art cybertorium, or other work space, private as well as public. Today those contexts have become ever more visible because they have multiplied in number and influence, ever more involved because they increasingly encompass literate activity, and ever more contested because they embody values and aspirations. For these reasons, technological contexts have moved toward the center of disciplinary conversations and encouraged people to think expansively and sometimes untraditionally about their practices and perspectives. Indeed, rhetoric scholarship on writing and communication technologies—print, digital, or otherwise—offers a range of perspectives that spans numerous sites of professional interest.

This diversity is a function of the seemingly inexorable move toward specialization that can now be found across the disciplines. In rhetorical studies, this move has resulted in collectives of researchers who have dedicated themselves to a rather different world of discovery, one that is relatively fast-paced, inevitably pragmatic, and thoroughly multimodal. An example here is computers and composition, a species of rhetoric that is particularly interested in the pedagogical dimensions of writing technologies. Another is technical communication, which focuses, in part, on the applications of communication technologies in nonacademic settings. It makes a certain sense, of course, to invest in the development

of deep expertise and encourage inquiry that is sensitive and responsive to specific clusters of complex problems. But specialization can become an issue if it permits a discipline to compartmentalize concerns that permeate knowledge boundaries.

In both theoretical and practical terms, technology does not really function as a separate category or subcategory of consequence. It tends to infuse each and every area of the discipline, even under fairly narrow circumstances. In fact, it is difficult to imagine a rhetorical activity untouched by ongoing developments in writing and communication technologies. Their increasingly widespread integration into all facets of culture has encouraged scholars and teachers to reinterpret (yet again) the traditional canons of rhetoric. Invention strategies, for instance, now address powerful search capabilities and the ways in which database structures shape access to an intellectual landscape. Rhetorical education on arrangement no longer assumes a linear organizational pattern—or a patient reader, for that matter. More than occasionally, writers and communicators today anticipate reader control with modular hypertexts that can support multiple interpretive pathways and that can invite textual transformations and revisions.

Concerns about style (written and spoken) have evolved in several different directions, especially since the convergence of Internet and broadcast technologies, which initiated an increase in the number and character of forums—official and unofficial, popular and scholarly—for discursive interactions. Yet even a simple medium like electronic mail or instant messaging can confound understandings of style. Although exchanges in these environments are, at least for the moment, primarily written, such exchanges mix markers of oral and literate performance in ways that either fascinate or distress those who study the evolving nature of language use. Some researchers emphasize the opportunity to witness emergent communication practices; others worry that the vernacular complexion of those practices contributes to the decline of literacy.

The canon of memory has also been reinterpreted to accommodate current literacy concerns. In oral traditions, this canon concentrated to a great extent on strategies for recall and recognition, strategies that undoubtedly became less and less important to the literate activities of print cultures. These days, however, memory has been resuscitated by the brain-as-computer metaphor, which informs the assumptions of innumerable investigations of information processing, including projects working to understand the nature of writing and reading in a liminal moment marking the shift from analog to digital systems. In addition, by constantly mapping movement in and across networks, the Internet itself has become a robust storehouse for both individual and collective memory. The issues here have profound social dimensions and reach beyond functional worries over user disorientation and information overload, over recall and recognition in large-scale information spaces. Who controls the memory storehouses constructed by users as they navigate the Internet? Who has access to the

data? To what purposes is it put? These are just a few of the questions that readily come to mind.

Updated notions of delivery involve a comparable trajectory of functional and social development. Since at least the 1980s, computer programs have enabled people to assume increasing control over the structural and presentational aspects of texts. If ancient rhetoricians focused on areas such as gesture, tone, and expression for oral occasions, modern rhetoricians attend to numerous design elements and complex relationships between word and image, moving as well as still, and between word or image (or both) and sound. Although the printing press ushered in a shift from script to print, making information available to a much larger segment of the population, it did not immediately encourage writers and communicators to become designers of their texts. Nor did it immediately redistribute control over the production and circulation of texts: the printing press enabled one-to-many communication, but early communicators were typically from elite classes, and their messages were typically associated with official institutions like churches and governments. In contrast, people nowadays have unprecedented access to powerful systems for publishing and information distribution. This access has encouraged computer users to become producers/designers of both print-destined and online texts. Readers, too, have experienced an expanded role, for the ways in which they configure their personal computing devices affect the look and feel of online texts. More than ever before, perhaps, issues of delivery intertwine writers, readers, technologies, and cultures in new and intimate ways.

In spatial terms, the previous discussion stresses memory and delivery over invention, arrangement, and style, not because they are more vital or important, but because contemporary literacy contexts have brought added significance and new meaning to the final two canons of rhetoric, which historically have been somewhat neglected. This situation is emblematic of the recursive relationship between rhetorics and technologies. Various rhetorical frameworks have been mobilized to help explain design and use contexts for writing and communication technologies. Those contexts, in turn, can influence how people think about the nature and role of rhetorical theory and practice. Early discussions of distance education, for example, advised teachers to transfer to the screen their pedagogical approaches from the brick-and-mortar classroom. Teachers new to computer-based environments were especially encouraged to foreground rhetorical learning objectives and desired outcomes. Although learning objectives can transcend media boundaries, such advice assumed that computers were more or less neutral, that technologies and their contexts would not shape or challenge how teachers thought about domain content or about the art and craft of teaching itself. This assumption was useful to new teachers, but a non-dialogic perspective failed to emphasize the interanimations of rhetorics and technologies.

The assumptions informing this volume exhibit greater social sensitivity. First, technological contexts encompass more than just physical devices like books and computers. They also include systems, techniques, and methods for rationalizing work and society. After all, language itself is something of a technology. Second, technological contexts are, in a very real sense, overdetermined: multiple forces and factors shape the directions and priorities of technological projects. In other words, there is no one-to-one correspondence between technology and change, innovation, or social transformation. Third, and perhaps ironically, technological contexts entail human as well as technical problems, problems of subjectivity, identity, agency, materiality, methodology, pedagogy, representation, and more. As these assumptions suggest, technological contexts are decidedly rhetorical in character.

This reality provides the conceptual backdrop for a series of questions motivating the essays in this volume: What might history contribute to a rhetorical understanding of technological contexts writ broadly? How does rhetoric, as it has been traditionally mapped out, both illuminate and fail to illuminate the design and use of literacy technologies? How do issues of technology intersect with issues of identity, subjectivity, and agency? With race, class, gender, and ability? With other contemporary theory issues and categories? What do productive technologies look like in terms of their design? What specific contributions can rhetoricians hope to make to technological design practices? How are people currently working with technologies of production and reception? What, then, does it now mean to read and write? Teach and learn? Communicate and collaborate with others? What types of challenges accompany the task of integrating technologies into institutions? What are the ethical and professional questions raised by technology and its current contexts? How should rhetorical studies think about such matters? What might be especially productive methods for studying and evaluating technology in context? On the whole, such questions suggest a rich landscape for exploration and analysis.

This landscape is mapped into three sections by the volume: "Redrawing Borders and Boundaries," "Constructing Discourses and Communities," and "Understanding Writing and Communication Practices." The unfolding logic of these sections draws on and interrogates familiar categories and explanations, creating productive tensions that provoke critical reflection on the impact and state of rhetorical studies. Furthermore, the macrostructure captures the diversity of argumentative and research work in the discipline. This diversity is important, intentional, and an artifact of authors who recognize the rhetorical vectors of research practices. Grounded theory, discourse and artifact analysis, participant observation, case study, historical reasoning, and interdisciplinary inquiry—the authors employ these and other approaches to comment differently on the evolution and complexity of the rhetoric-technology nexus. Although the authors mobilize a variety of methods and arguments, each attempts to engage a

significant problem context in both useful and complicated ways. The volume integrates practice and theory at fundamental levels—approaches, assumptions, questions—to ensure relevance for scholars and teachers in rhetoric.

The problem contexts scaffold issues in several discernible patterns of coherence. The primary pattern suggests a model for rhetorical education, one that begins with new approaches to writing and communication and ends with challenges to enacting productive change. In between, the essays disclose an array of literacy complexities that can have an effect on both individuals and the discipline. This arrangement is useful because it highlights both the ubiquity and entanglements of technology in a contemporary society. Students new to rhetorical studies, especially at the graduate level, often start with the ancients and with approaches to discourse that have been studied (and modified) for centuries. Technology, in a standard pedagogical approach, is either ignored or treated as an add-on to rhetorical thinking and conceptualization. Those who ignore technology hide beyond the insights of the past to reject new configurations of rhetoric. Those who picture technology as an add-on underestimate the extent to which dialectic tensions occupy the literate spaces and activities of a digital age. Authors in this volume introduce a genre of scholarship that blends rhetorical criticism and technology studies, bridging the past and future without self-consciousness. The essays serve as exemplars of this new genre and bring consistent attention to issues and relationships that can no longer be avoided or left implicit in conceptualizations of rhetoric that guide education and work.

In addition, the section and essay titles themselves signal keywords in modern rhetorical studies. In the language of new media and Internet-based communication, these keywords constitute a "tag cloud" of associations (without the user-generated weightings one finds on the Internet), reflecting lines of articulated discussion in the volume. These lines are conversation starters for readers. There are also thematic connections established through the repetition of certain critical practices, which are distinctive features of the essay genre in this volume. Authors do not see technology users as detached from operations that generate and legitimate knowledge. All of the essays consider human effects and interventions in technological contexts. They also assume a postcritical intellectual stance, meaning that technology is understood to be either an intrinsic or inescapable aspect of culture, an aspect that should be dealt with directly, seriously, and productively. Such realism is an essential component of any agenda claiming to address matters of significance to rhetorical studies.

Part 1, "Redrawing Borders and Boundaries," offers new ways to think about contexts and traditions for writing and communication that have become foundational (and indispensable) to disciplinary development. Authors in this section interrogate technologized aspects of discourse production, reception, and dissemination, focusing on what it means to participate in a rhetorical milieu that integrates writers and writing systems (somewhat) seamlessly and dialectically

and that involves both conventional and emergent communication practices. In the opening essay, "Being Linked to the Matrix: Biology, Technology, and Writing," Marilyn M. Cooper reimagines the basic structures of the rhetorical situation, offering a view that embraces dynamic interaction, negotiation, and coordination as major elements. Her approach, which draws on phenomenology and complexity theory, departs from referential perspectives on language development and use—perspectives that tend to stress rationality and the intellectual autonomy of writers and communicators. It also deviates from social perspectives that either diminish the role of embodiment in cognition and communication or fail to account for interactions that motivate people to engage in discursive practices. The approach offered by Cooper understands writing as an ongoing process of responding to others, to texts, to contexts: a many-sided, contingent process that is not so much a function of intended plans or actions but of coordinating and mobilizing resources in settings of relevance to writers and communicators. The meanings and uses of technology, in this articulation of the contours of rhetoric, emerge from human interactions and are part of the cognitive ecologies elaborated by humans in acts of literacy.

The discourse process described by Cooper is not exclusive to invention and production activities, however. Nor is it always initiated and advanced by human agents. People can now be written by the very technologies that they employ, particularly in their roles as readers and consumers of online information. This recursive event happens, unwittingly or otherwise, in even mundane use situations. "Among Texts," by Johndan Johnson-Eilola, considers the human-machine feedback circuits that have been promoted by the development of networked spaces for literacy and education. According to Johnson-Eilola, texts have become an active component of database systems, both personal and large-scale, functioning as nodes on digital networks that not only provide information to readers but also generate information about readers. No longer physically discrete artifacts, texts today can record literacy habits, activities, and experiences. They can even communicate with one another and respond to readers. Johnson-Eilola discusses these expanded capabilities and speculates on a future in which metadata about texts is central to the rhetorical situation.

Redrawing disciplinary landscapes to accommodate other boundaries and practices is an indeterminate enterprise—an unending series of negotiations, really, amid forces (and cycles) of reform and stasis. As Johnson-Eilola demonstrates in his social history of texts, any number of meanings can be attached to a literacy device or activity. In response to the confines of received traditions and the domesticated meanings they can encourage, scholars and teachers have begun to generate alternative perspectives on textual production and use. Not surprisingly, these other views have emerged from a confluence of historical and societal factors. In "Serial Composition," Geoffrey Sirc articulates a vision for rhetorical studies that promises to evolve the field in a productive direction. The

factors discussed by Sirc—the rise of minimalism in the art world, the publication of the first major study of composition instruction in the modern era, and the development of the compact audiocassette—all have roots in the same historical moment, 1963, a moment that anticipates contemporary literacy issues and provides antecedents for disciplinary approaches organized around serial versus combinatory logics. The combinatory logic of rhetoric expresses itself most directly (but perhaps too complicatedly) in the thesis-driven essay, which is a hallmark of rhetorical education. Although Sirc does not dismiss the usefulness of instruction that focuses on persuasion, coherence, and deductive organizational patterns, such priorities can lack explanatory power in literacy contexts that mix and remix genres, integrate multiple media, and provide access to and control over an expanded set of literacy resources. The approach Sirc offers is inspired by composition practices that permit organizational structures to surface from material and practical engagements with texts and their contexts. The serial form of his approach, which is instantiated on the Internet by the grammar of MP3 Weblogs, values juxtapositions and associations rather than causal relationships and intricate discursive arrangements. This essay, in the end, stands as a model for rhetorical development that is sensitive to the realities of digital media and to the social-historical forces that can maintain status quo ideas in the profession.

Part 2, "Constructing Discourses and Communities," examines the signifying practices of people writing about, deploying, and structuring rhetorical activity in technological contexts. The discourses of these varied audiences—scholars, users, and designers—contribute considerably to the problems and prospects for online communication and for communication about online environments. In "Appeals to the Body in Eco-Rhetoric and Techno-Rhetoric," M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues that the professional discourse on techno-rhetoric can be too inattentive to the material dimensions of computer-based work. More specifically, he worries about the impulses of scholars and researchers whose formulations of cyberspace neglect the body and its needs or diminish connections between bodies and other physical and social contexts. Using the discourse of eco-rhetoric as a contrast point, Killingsworth identifies instructive moments in the scholarly literature in which people fail to account for the body as an integral part of the brain-computer interface. He then points to practical and theoretical consequences of this neglect for literacy and learning and for academic programs in writing and communication.

If scholarly discourses on technology can fail to account adequately for the materiality of the body, they can also neglect its perceptual and sensual operations. Such neglectful treatment, especially in the context of new media and digital communication, has implications for rhetorical studies that are not to be minimized or dismissed. In "Unfitting Beauties of Transducing Bodies," Anne Frances Wysocki argues that the field should begin to cultivate conceptions of

aesthetics and perception that recognize the unique characteristics of new media projects. The characteristics in which Wysocki is interested engage bodily senses in novel or unexpected ways. But they do more than just that. In addition to mediating interpretive processes, the senses, in an age of interactive digital technologies, can also function as a literal component of new media projects, helping to constitute the experiences of users and the expressions of artifacts and interfaces. This expansive design practice, however, has not always been accompanied by conceptual adjustments to aesthetic or perceptive theories, adjustments that are warranted by the interactive possibilities of online texts. As Wysocki notes, discussions of new media projects tend to count on origin stories for the appearance of aesthetics as a named field. On one hand, these stories help to legitimate such projects by evoking traditional criteria and definitions. On the other hand, they assume that sense experience is a private, natural phenomenon rather than a complex social process inflected by cultural forces. This belief system can lead people to underestimate the extent to which the sensuous histories of users influence their perceptions of new media projects. It can also discourage ethical deliberations over the imprint of cultural forces on sensuous histories.

Scholarly discourses, then, are a potent delivery system for representations of technology that inform the work of the profession. But it is also instructive to pay attention to the discourse practices of users, because concrete rhetorical gestures situate technology in time and space and reflect motivations, needs, and values that can shape the nature of digital environments. "The Rhetorics of Online Autism Advocacy: A Case for Rhetorical Listening" analyzes discourses about autism and autistics in Internet forums that function as alternatives to mass media outlets and their sources of information. Authors Paul Heilker and Jason King evaluate characterizations of autism in the mainstream media, noting, above all, that autistic communities rarely (if ever) have opportunities to speak for themselves, that others—celebrities, parents, journalists—regulate dominant discourses about autism in the public sphere, discourses that promote a disease model of disability and account for only a portion of the issues with which autistics are concerned. In response to this situation, higher-functioning, verbal autistics have begun to use the Internet to advance their own voices and agendas. Heilker and King discuss technical affordances and social dynamics in such efforts and encourage a rhetoric of reconciliation that might enable productive online dialogue between those with conflicting views of autism.

The discourses of users and scholars inevitably come into contact with the discourses of designers, who condition and configure how people think about both technology and their tasks. Although designer discourses can be overridden and rewritten, they define terms of engagement and help to structure the spaces in which literate activity is crafted and enacted. For these reasons, designers of online spaces should be rhetorically sensitive as well as technically astute.

In "Narrating the Future: Scenarios and the Cult of Specification," John M. Carroll explains and illustrates an approach to design that is conscious of the provisional character of communication. His philosophy recognizes the problem-solution cycle permeating technological contexts: new technologies both solve and create human problems, and therefore necessitate more design work and invention. This cycle is generative, endless, and essentially a function of how people interpret design representations. To promote a rhetorical perspective, Carroll asks designers to confront the problem-solution cycle with heuristic scenarios that can help them imagine and anticipate the complexities of user settings. These scenarios emphasize shifting circumstances, foreground contextual details, and stimulate design deliberations. Scenarios, for Carroll, stand out against formal specifications, which are top-down, machine-oriented descriptions of artifacts in development. Although specifications provide useful information, scenarios address the concerns of rhetoric, in part by creating meaningful dialogue between user and designer discourses and accounting for contingencies in communication events.

Part 3, "Understanding Writing and Communication Practices," maps transformations in thinking about invention, production, literacy, and power that have been forged at the intersections of rhetorics and technologies. Authors in this section discuss projects and endeavors that illuminate the ways in which discourse activities can evolve to reflect emerging socio-political realities, technologies, and educational issues. "Technology, Genre, and Gender: The Case of Power Structure Research," by Susan Wells, discusses ways in which subaltern groups leveraged the capabilities of emergent print technologies in order to critique the assumptions and directions of received institutions. Wells conducts visual-rhetorical analyses of underground publications from various social movements, showing how new techniques for graphic design created a vernacular style that helped cultures of resistance achieve political and social aims. The success of these publication efforts relied on the participatory practices of design amateurs who reinvented the genres of conventional journalism and invented genres that mediated between academic and movement audiences. These design amateurs, in addition, saw themselves as issue advocates rather than objective reporters. Their transparent stances contributed to an ethos that was constituted, at least in part, through publications that relied less on the authority of position and status and more on the authority of engagement and direct experience. Wells, however, does not limit her focus to history. At the end of the essay, she relates past contexts to the present in a manner that helps rhetoricians think (once again) about the nature of new media.

As Wells shows, settings for literacy can supply opportunities for cultural intervention. Such interventions, especially in the context of Internet-based communication, often involve alternative views of interaction and exchange. To begin his essay, "Rhetoric in (as) a Digital Economy," James E. Porter urges

scholars and researchers to be alert to the economics of rhetoric in social networking environments, an economics that occupies two related dimensions: non-monetary value that (nevertheless) encourages active, ambitious participation on the Internet; and reproduction and distribution mechanisms for multi-modal texts that are inexpensive or even free. These two dimensions, according to Porter, have the potential to recast the roles of audiences and writers, particularly in situations involving complex social problems or idiosyncratic end-user problems. In such situations, the wisdom of the crowd often proves to be more valuable than the wisdom of expert writers. Consequently writers and communicators must learn to support audiences who are beginning to blur the lines between content consumers and content producers. As Porter demonstrates, building and managing support systems for user-generated content requires social and political understandings of networked-based writing and reading and a revived—and revised—notion of the canon of delivery.

New media users also collaborate on other sorts of intellectual problems, including attempting to understand and take part in large-scale narrative experiences that encompass multiple media and span various time-space frames. In "Literate Acts in Convergence Culture: *Lost* as Transmedia Narrative," Debra Journet investigates the logistical and interpretive challenges presented by media spaces that combine and remix conventions from video games and television shows, creating new modes of engagement in which audiences have a direct say in the unfolding directions of both major and minor plot stories. Her analysis of collective intelligence in one participatory culture reveals an impressive level of audience engagement with imaginative texts that any rhetoric scholar or teacher would welcome and appreciate. Although this engagement consists of recognizable literacy practices—for example, identifying intertextual references and debating authorial intentions—it also includes new literate challenges associated with retrieving and sharing online information, navigating and integrating multiple media, making meaning in distributed collaborative spaces, and recognizing how media and mode shape narrative structures. As these (and other) challenges suggest, texts in a convergence culture are meant to be operated and not just read, serving as interactive prompts that urge people to participate in the construction and reconstruction of richly resourced narrative experiences.

Technological contexts raise important, difficult, and complex questions that encompass the five canons of rhetoric and numerous other concepts and concerns. In response to the wide scope and considerable reach of these multilayered questions, authors in this volume work both with and against the grain of disciplinary thought to illuminate the existent and emergent intersections of rhetorics and technologies. They also employ a panoply of approaches and arguments that attempt to refashion disciplinary thought that is not receptive to the literacy practices of today or to the projected realities of tomorrow. In addition,

each essay models productive habits of mind for technological contexts, situating technologies in space, time, and culture and acknowledging the ways in which technologies, like rhetorics themselves, serve as interfaces for human relations and endeavors. Such habits of mind engender meaningful conversations about technology and clarify the stakes of technological projects not only for rhetorical studies but also for society at large. This volume begins to show that the stakes for everyone are very high and very real indeed.