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INTRODUCTION

Scott Sundvall and Joseph Weakland

“What will have been . . . hysterics of rhetorics? What will have they looked, sounded, read like?”

—Victor Vitanza (1997)

WHAT WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT TECHNOLOGY AND SPECULATION, RHETORIC AND WRITING

One of the greatest challenges facing the discipline of rhetoric and writing studies (RWS) is its inability to theorize and deploy emerging technologies before they have already transformed the material conditions of rhetoric and writing. In other words, RWS often engages technological shifts reactively, after such technologies have already changed the production and reception of rhetoric and writing (common examples being the internet writ large, social-media platforms, programming, memes, texting, video sharing, Photoshop, augmented reality, big data, 3D printing, and virtual-reality mediums). Even when RWS has, in fact, approached an emerging technology speculatively and proactively, it has often done so without careful scrutiny of the robust dimensions of such a technological shift. For example, in the 1990s, RWS (as well as a host of other disciplines) often prophesized in near-utopic terms the positive potential of the internet. Such a rose-tinted-glasses model of speculation willfully turned a blind eye to the forthcoming dangers and pitfalls of rhetoric and writing within and through the internet, many of which we are now reactively scrambling to remediate: proliferation of fake news, dissemination of false information, ease of propagation of dangerous political ideologies, cyberbullying, and so on.

We cannot—or, at least, we should not—divorce rhetoric and writing from the question of ethics, and the maintenance of such a marriage is just as difficult and necessary when considering speculative approaches to rhetoric and writing relative to emerging technologies. As Zygmunt Bauman and David Lyon (2012) note, “a knife can be used to cut bread

and slice throats” (45); nuclear technology can provide energy to a metropolis or it can decimate a population. In terms of rhetoric and writing, John Muckelbauer (2009) thus asks us to consider “*not what the proposition is [but] what the proposition does*” (18). Concerning the intersections of emerging technology, rhetoric and writing, and speculative models of thought, we take this a step further: not what it is, nor what it does, but what it can do and will do—what it *will have been*. To this end, this volume of essays allows rhetoric and writing scholars to explore modes of critical speculation into the transformative impact of emerging technologies, particularly as a means to speculate on future shifts in the intellectual, pedagogical, and institutional frameworks of the field. In doing so, the project repositions rhetoric and writing scholars as proprietors of our technological future to come, rather than as secondary receivers, critics, and adjusters of our technological present.

The exigency of this book begins with, and departs from, a couple of related presuppositions. First, we cannot delink rhetoric and writing from technology (or *technicity*, in the broader, ontological sense of the concept). Scholars from numerous fields have impressed this point almost redundantly, from André Leroi-Gourhan (1993) to Martin Heidegger (2008), to Jacques Derrida (1998), and to Bernard Stiegler (1998, 2008) (with various interlocutors in between): rhetoric, as extension of meaning-formation, is afforded by the inauguration and *accident* of technicity—an accident whose “origin” has no *actual* “origin” other than the metaphysical rabbit hole of the “Word.” The formation of meaning—which gathers self-reflexive being, punctuated temporality (history), and space—is *technically prosthetically* marked by both the word (writing) and subsequent arrangements of care, concern, ethics, and the *suasive* force therein (rhetoric).¹ Likewise, writing, as a practical inscription tool for the relay and retention of such meaning-potential, is nothing short of a technological apparatus. Language and technology are mutually inseparable terms, ontologically and metaphysically; rhetoric and writing studies only typify this ontological and metaphysical orientation. As such, we are always already within the program of technics when discussing rhetoric and writing.

Second, while rhetoric and writing are nonetheless always already technological, not all things technological are, in and of themselves, rhetorical or meaningful. The proper *noun* of a technological object only becomes potentially rhetorical through its *verb*, its use: not what the proposition *is*, as Muckelbauer notes, but what it *does*. To borrow from Heidegger’s (2008) classic example, the *hammer* references the nail through its purposive, intentional *hammering*. Within the world of

meaning, such a reference unfolds a signification. Thus, rhetoric and writing constitute technologies, and technological objects can be used rhetorically and semiotically, but only through their appropriation and deployment as such.

Yet, even technologies otherwise external and separate from rhetoric and writing in the proper sense remediate and inform the forward march of rhetoric and writing modalities. We have already seen what the digital institution has done in terms of reorganizing everyday—as well as intellectual—rhetoric and writing, in terms of content, delivery, style, memory, and so on. What might nanotechnologies eventually provide, or the particle accelerator, or advanced virtual-reality mediums, or 3D printers?

The conceptual aim of this book poses the following problematic: that the future ever arrives too soon. That is, in terms of general cognition, we cannot keep pace with the rapid technological development to which we are witness, instead experiencing *disorientation* by way of recursive redoubling of speed, as Stiegler (1998, 2008) would argue: rapid technological development that itself nonetheless informs our contemporary moment and sense of history. Rhetoric and writing must not only respond to such a technological problematic, but it also must work *with* such a technological problematic.

Despite the redoubling of speed (and history) by way of technology, we still yet approach and appropriate emergent technologies *reactively* rather than *proactively*. *We do not anticipate*, though we must. *We must* because grappling with emergent technologies—and the ontological and metaphysical shifts they usher forth with them—in a *reactive* manner leaves us forever behind the technological eight ball. Plato feared writing and literacy because of its ostensible erosion of the metaphysical principles of orality (presence, memory, immediacy), yet a paranoia of the inevitable development of literacy failed to take into account the robust potential of literacy writ large. We, too, have feared the erosion of literacy by way of technological advancement (“digital literacy” as preferred over “electracy”). We can simply call this nostalgia, or, more politely, we might gesture to how the values of rhetoric and writing have failed to move in commensurate step with technological advancement, for better or worse. This anthology of essays proposes such an exigency: a proactive approach to emergent technologies in an anticipatory manner.

The *must* refrain here again constitutes an ethical imperative: if we consider rhetoric as the instruction of *suasive* force that logically arrives at the production and fostering of well-being, then we must

proactively and speculatively approach emerging technologies which otherwise advance at a rate faster than we can re-cognize them. We can never know the future; epistemology has no framework for that. Thus, we must proactively and speculatively *invent* our own future, which has long been the design of rhetoric in the first place. If *dis-orientation* orients our future, then we must nonetheless invent a *suitable* disorientation—theoretically, pedagogically, and institutionally. To answer Vitanza’s (1997) future-perfect-tense question in the epigraph—what will the (hysterics) of rhetorics have been?—we are left with only our own appropriations, as well as the lack thereof.

This book uses the method of speculative modeling, as provided by science fiction literature and other practical disciplines (e.g., engineering, architecture, physics, geological sciences), to afford a strategy for such anticipatory, futural thinking for RWS, especially with regard to emergent technologies. Speculative thinking (i.e., experimental projections of what *could be*) perhaps alone provides a method for what too soon *is*—a method for the exigence of our aim: thinking proactively, futurally about, and in anticipation of, how rhetoric and writing might appropriate emergent technologies before they have *already after-the-fact arrived*. In other words, if technological advancement exceeds our ability to cognitively keep apace, if it disorients us in the middle term of *oriented present*, then a proactive speculation, *which attempts to itself invent the future*, provides a critical approach that evades the reduction of reactive inquiry.

We thus propose the speculative model as a practical and philosophical method for rhetoric and writing’s disciplinary engagement with emergent technologies—and in a proactive manner. Using the speculative model, this collection takes up the question posed by Adam Banks in his 2015 CCCC Chair’s Address: “what happens when laptop and desktop computers go the way of the typewriter?” This collection explores speculative strategies for “anticipatory engagement” (Milburn 2008) with emerging technologies that can help us imagine the scene that Banks solicits. As Elizabeth Losh argues (and as echoed by Alexander Reid’s chapter 3, this volume), “even if the pace of technological change has made it difficult for the field of rhetoric to link theories of the rhetorical situation to increasingly ubiquitous and pervasive forms of computing, rhetoric can do more than simply find purchase in discussions of hardware and software, particularly if rhetorical theorists are willing to shift attention when it comes to how they sense information from their objects of study” (2016). Because we cannot separate rhetoric and writing from technology, nor technology from the future

(or history itself), the redoubling of speed as provided by contemporary technological development demands a speculative model and method, one of anticipation and projection. *Our cutting edge is too often the dull blade of an antique knife.*

METHODS (FOR SPECULATIVE METHODS)

Methodologically, then, this collection employs the model of speculative thought as primarily appropriated from science- and speculative-fiction (together, sf). Karl Mannheim (1955) notes, following Fredric Jameson, sf considers the “historical present” insofar as it places one foot in the actual present (*what is*) and another foot in the conditions of possibility and potential (*what could be*). Or, as sf writer J. G. Ballard (1971) puts it: “what writers of modern science fiction invent today, you and I will do tomorrow.” Consider, for example, Marge Piercy’s (1997) feminist sf novel, *Woman on the Edge of Time*, which uses the conventions of the sf genre to undertake a project thematically similar to ours. The novel’s narrator, Consuela Ramos, lives in 1970s New York but possesses the ability to communicate with people living in the eco-utopian community of Mattapoisett in the year 2137. In one passage, she observes the activity of children in one of Mattapoisett’s schools:

Everywhere children went about their play and their business with adults, with older and younger children, with dogs, with rabbits, children with what Luciente told her were powerful microscopes, spectroscopes, molecular scanners, gene readers, computer terminals, light pencils, lightweight sound and light holi cameras and transmitters that created an image so real she could not believe till she passed her hand through that the elephant in the center of the room was only a three-dimensional image. (175)

In the alternative future Piercy imagines, students have access to (and can play with) a variety of scientific instruments whose capacities exceed today’s state-of-the-art technologies. These technologies represent modalities of reading, writing, imaging, and the (re)composing of the material world—from the molecular/genetic level upward. Science as we might understand it is no longer the purview of specialized disciplines, institutions, or people. Instead, everyone, including children, can participate in exploring nature and attributing meaning and value to it through technoscientific development. The present volume draws on the same mode of speculative inquiry, equally specific to technological advancement, and redeploys it to challenge rhetoric and writing’s *presentist* orientation towards technological *futures*.

We do not need to think too hard to conjure up a litany of other examples of sf writing and film that have accurately speculated on the future, or our current present or past. *Rhetorical Speculations* thus uses speculative thought as a methodology for Futures Studies in a manner already appropriated and used by thinkers and pioneers in other fields: sf prototyping (Johnson 2011), speculative design (Dunne and Raby 2013), and architecture fiction (Gadanhó 2009) harness sf's capacity to extrapolate nascent, unevenly distributed technological developments into the future. There is no reason for rhetoric and writing, as a discipline, not to follow suit. As the human "sensorial envelope" continues to expand as a result of technological augmentation, new material channels will become available for the saturation of space through posthuman rhetoric and writing (Lally 2013; Dobrin 2011). These new material and energetic channels include different wavelengths of light, different spatial registers of vision, sonic frequencies and haptic vibrations, increased sensitivity to smell, and so on. The technological developments of the present and impending future directly implicate rhetoric and writing studies: we do not *have* to be *proactive*, but being strictly *reactive* seems only convenient at best, impractical and fruitless at worst.

Sidney I. Dobrin's *Postcomposition* (2011), with its critique of the spatial politics and epistemological confines of writing studies, opens the door to speculative inquiry into alternative human-technological futures. *Rhetorical Speculations* is an effort to chart intellectual futures for the discipline that moves beyond the *post* of *postcomposition*; it is an attempt to "imagine what comes next and an attempt to catch a glimpse of the monster" (3). Much as computer science, design, and architecture already mobilize speculative thought to explore alternative human-technological futures within their respective disciplines, our collection seeks the same in the service of RWS. That is, this book aims to understand the futural evolution of the technological basis of rhetoric and writing, and in a way that such allows us to observe more clearly the cultural, economic, and institutional boundaries that circumscribe the discipline's intellectual orientation toward technology.

This collection does not use the blunt edge of antique knives to dissect already existing techno-rhetorical practices; instead, it seeks to *discover* and *invent* the future itself—with technological machines that necessarily exceed our nostalgic coveting of literate antiquities, dull blades or otherwise. By speculating on the futural dimension of RWS, as guided and informed by rapid technological innovation, this collection suggests that discovery and invention arise jointly, simultaneously, as inextricably

co-born. Science has long understood this: experiments as projections that succeed or fail. Albert Einstein, for example, both discovered and invented relativity. Geometry was likewise both discovered and invented, and Derrida's (1989) treatment of Edmund Husserl's *Origin of Geometry* indicates the same pattern: following not the tracing of truth as a priori granted, but rather guided by the mapping of an intuitive and phenomenological *truth-sense*. Both were speculative projections, germs of thought regarding what is and what could be. As John Muckelbauer (2009) argues: "invention cannot be adequately described by recourse to either subjective or objective poles—it is neither simply a subjective *creation* nor an objective *discovery*" (13). The chapters in this collection offer only speculative experiments with emergent technology: some will fail, some will not. All chapters, however, provide an experimental *model* for exploring the technological future of RWS. That is, this collection seeks to use the speculative model to *invent* the future of RWS and its relationship with technology, rather than merely *receive* it.

THE OTHERS: A REVIEW

Several scholars have already framed the present state of RWS as a means to speculate on its potential future. Notably, and as already mentioned, Dobrin's *Postcomposition* (2011) calls for a shift from the teaching (and management) of student-subject writers to a (re)focus on writing itself. His edited collection, *Writing Posthumanism, Posthuman Writing* (2015), continues this project of thinking rhetoric and writing beyond the rhetor/writing subject and the privileging of human exceptionalism, and instead considers the rhetorical function and mediation of objects, animals, and technology. The recent and extensive flow of scholarship on new materialism (Gries 2015; Boyle and Barnett 2016), ecological rhetoric (Rickert 2013; Dobrin and Morey 2014), object-oriented rhetoric (Rivers and Brown 2014; Duffy 2014; Gunn 2014), object-oriented language (Galloway 2015), and rhetorical code studies (Beck 2016; Monea 2016; Brock 2016) continues the speculative task of positioning rhetoric and writing as modalities beyond the human subject. This edited collection garners many of these scholarly voices so as to broadly conceptualize what rhetoric and writing *could be*—intellectually, institutionally, pedagogically—and what form such a speculative proposition might assume.

Other scholars have considered how the digital turn and ubiquitous computing (ubicomputing) have fundamentally reconfigured the conception, institution, and practice of literacy. Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes's *On Multimodality* (2014) and Stuart Selber's *Multiliteracies for a*

Digital Age (2004) present theoretical and practical models for a “digital literacy.” David M. Sheridan and James A. Inman’s *Multiliteracy Centers* (2010) appropriates the logic of “digital literacy” and applies it to writing centers in particular. Similarly, Sean Morey’s (2015) work theorizes the affective dimension of rhetorical delivery (*hypokrisis*) as inflected by digital technologies, while John Tinnell’s (2014) research suggests how such digital technologies provide an augmented reality that can reform our sense of rhetoric and writing in the otherwise strictly alphabetic and literate sense. Tinnell’s work largely draws from Ulmer’s work on electracry, from which we also derive concepts such as Sarah Arroyo’s (2013) update of Ulmer’s *videocy*, all of which challenge the concept of literacy—digital or otherwise—as the end-limit apparatus with which we still perform rhetoric and writing, particularly with the advent of the digital institution. These electrated approaches, of course, are cross-mediated by other, related-yet-different approaches: Kristie S. Fleckenstein’s (2003) *Embodied Literacies*, Kristin L. Arola and Anne Frances Wysocki’s (2012) *Composing(media) = Composing(embodiment)*, Adam Banks’s (2011) *Digital Griots*, Amy D. Proppen’s (2012) *Locating Visual-Material Rhetorics*, and Jason Farman’s (2012) *Mobile Interface Theory*.

The burgeoning subfield of the convergence of RWS and emergent technology exhausts the ability to name all relevant texts. This book, however, attempts to extend this mode of inquiry, with specific attention to *speculative* models of thought. The chapters in this edited collection do not seek to critically examine what rhetoric and writing *is* relative to current or even emerging technologies, or even what rhetoric and writing is projected *to be* relative to current or even emerging technologies, with the current diagnosis of rhetoric and writing as the primary point of departure. Rather, this edited collection seeks to radically speculate on what RWS *could be* in tandem with emerging technologies—to speculate on how RWS might grow and develop *with* emerging technologies, rather than project how RWS might reactively change according *to* them.

DI/VISIONS

This book is divided into six couplet sections—two chapters for each section. The logic behind such a move is twofold: to keep the sections as precise in thematic focus as possible, and to put the chapters in each section into direct conversation. This book thus intends not only to engage a topic or theme but also, by way of that topic or theme, to engage itself. *Our disciplinary future is self-reflexive.*

Bodies

The body is a site and cite, a text: we rhetorically engineer and write the body. The rhetorical constitution and marking of a body engenders embodiment, which in itself necessitates *difference*. As such, embodiment demands questions of affect, ethics, care, and concern. Nonetheless, we rhetorically construct and use our bodies as technical objects—as *desiring-machines*, to borrow from Deleuze and Guattari (1983)—to employ embodied techniques as vehicles for expression of self and content of identity. The figuration of a body is thus always virtual, *becoming*; the body is categorically speculative, recursively in remediation.

Drawing from Octavia Butler’s (1995) “Bloodchild” and the New Jedi Order novel series, Kristie S. Fleckenstein and Anna M. Worm (chapter 1) argue for the preservation of difference *and* unity with regard to the rhetorical manufacturing of bodies and identities: “a double perspective, a parallax vision that is both osmotic and othered,” providing “the necessity of seeing from two seemingly oppositional positions,” enabling “a double vision [that] produces fewer illusions.” Such a speculative rethinking of the *topoi* of bodies provides a futural rhetoric that considers emergent technologies as capable of delivering a certain iteration of Jean-François Lyotard’s (1989) concept of the *differend*.² Sean Morey broadens the rhetorical mark of a body beyond the human, “attending to speculative bodies of animals.” Using Leonard Nimoy’s (1986) *Star Trek IV* as context, Sean Morey (chapter 2) suggests that “together [to] create new worlds . . . to be poetic together,” we should consider the rhetorical poetics of nonhuman bodies (i.e., *zoopoetics*). Using the method of speculative thought to renegotiate the otherwise boundaries of the body, both chapters attend to how emerging technologies can refashion our rhetorical, ethical, and affective conception of embodiment.

Minds

In a strict materialist sense, we cannot separate body and mind; they mutually constitute the individuation of singular embodiment. Yet the mind still has a certain primacy as the “factory” of the body at large, which is why so much intellectual discourse is still so specifically focused on the mind. Indeed, our ability to speculate, to anticipate, *to have a future* in the first instance, can be directly linked to the mind. As with the body, however, the brain is a malleable organ, with cognition constantly being reorganized, redistributed, and repatterned. Rhetoric and writing initially extend from, and are delivered by, the mind, and such orient our sense of being; yet, as noted above, the redoubling of technological speed has

arguably brought about a “disorientation.” As such, a speculative and anticipatory reflection on the convergence of rhetoric and writing, and the emerging technologies that compound such disorientation, provides a pathway for reorienting our future by way of our present disorientation.

Alexander Reid’s chapter 3 considers “brain-to-brain communication” abstractly and in relation to “cognitive-media technologies.” Reid argues that deliberative rhetorics, particularly within our contemporary media ecology, are “bidirectional” and distributed: “knowledge and perception are *in* the world rather than *about* the world.” Thus, while emerging neural technologies might enable us to “expand our sense of the world beyond human evolved limits,” Reid warns that “the challenge . . . is how to proceed with this understanding.” In chapter 4, Kyle Jensen agrees that “digital technologies will distribute human consciousness in the near future,” yet he suggests we look to the past (first) as a roadmap for navigating the future of rhetoric and writing. Jensen takes up Fredric Myers’s experiments on abductive speculation and automatic writing in the nineteenth century to approach our digital future. Jensen argues that “next stages of human evolution,” at least with regard to rhetoric and writing, indicate that, “because self-enunciation in gesture-haptic media exceeds the act of self-enunciation in alphabetic writing, we now find ourselves in the dusk of writing.” This “hybrid of human and machine that is plastic instead of parasitic,” Jensen contends, “is both hopeful and haunting.” Whether by speculative assessment of emerging technologies, or speculative recovery of past methodologies, these chapters provide a futural blueprint for rhetoric, writing, and the mind.

Popular Culture

The rhetorical construction and writing of bodies and the psychology of desire (which informs such construction) constitutes the *socius*, which, we could argue, has no rhetorical delivery system more pervasive and ubiquitous than popular culture. Popular culture is not just *produced* by mass media; popular culture *is* mass media. Following Marshall McLuhan’s (McLuhan and Fiore 2001) famous claim that the medium is the message, we now live in an ecology of media where popular culture is rhetoric and rhetoric is popular culture—and both *are* mass media. The recurring trope in David Cronenberg’s (1983) *Videodrome—television is reality, and reality is television*—could not have been more on the mark: the host of the *Celebrity Apprentice* is now the president of the United States. The medium is not only the message but the *massage*—it works us over. Yet as both *Videodrome* and, later, Cronenberg’s (1999) *Existenz*

(focused on online gaming as opposed to television) illustrate, we nonetheless have rhetorical agency and exigency. If the medium is the message, and the rhetorical product of such is popular culture, then we can always reappropriate the medium (and, thus, the message, the rhetoric). Doing so, however, requires critical speculation.

Kristine Blair (chapter 5) contends that the once-utopic visions of the internet were “neoliberalist delusions” and that cyberculture instead reinforces and augments a popular culture that “promote[s] a performance of gender that remains heteronormative and hypersexualized and reduces women and others to a series of parts.” Blair thus calls for new media remix compositions that critically and rhetorically engage hegemonic constructions of the body and self that focus on “souls” rather than “bodies,” in turn affording a critical and rhetorical “performance of gender literacy.” Jeff Rice (chapter 6) argues that ideological critique only “reconfirms ideology” and, rhetorically, gets us nowhere. Following his work on “affective interface,” Rice proposes a “narrative interface” methodology for understanding cultural artifacts instead of ideological critique. Using “speculation [that] offers the acknowledgment of effects, the ways texts (or actors) affect one another,” Rice focuses on the rhetorical use of food in hip hop lyrics. Particularly because “food is an unexpected hip hop narrative,” Rice claims that “critique is just a report,” but that a “narrative interface” methodology attempts to “*do something, to reveal, and to make possible*” (emphasis added). Blair and Rice both indicate that neither popular culture nor new media technologies are to blame for any rhetorical failure; rather, RWS methodologically needs to reappropriate popular culture and new media technologies. We cannot change the medium, but by way of a speculative approach to, and reappropriation of, such a medium, we can reconfigure the message, the rhetoric.

Games and Gaming

Games are often used as methods for speculative modeling. The “Kobayashi Maru” training exercise in *Star Trek*, for example, presents cadets with a no-win situation to test character, so as to provide a speculative model of how they would react in a real-life situation. John Badham’s (1983) *WarGames* further illustrates the potential for games as speculative models, wherein we realize the blurry line that otherwise distinguishes the virtuality of games and the actuality of “real life.” We enjoy “virtual” games, and we intuitively know how to play such “virtual” games, because these “virtual” games are modeled after the inherent

gaming dimension of actual, “real life.” Rhetoric, classically defined by Aristotle as the available means of persuasion, is thus a game—to successfully or unsuccessfully persuade. As first indicated by *WarGames*, modern technology continues to expand and redefine the relationship between rhetoric and writing, on one hand, and gaming on the other. Insofar as games provide speculative models for “real life,” rhetoric and writing can benefit from a speculation regarding games and gaming.

Geoffrey V. Carter (chapter 7) and Steve Holmes (chapter 8) both highlight games and gaming’s rhetorical (and ontological, phenomenological) foundation. Building off his own experiences as a teenage hacker, Carter approaches the future of rhetoric by way of a reflection of the past. Hacker culture, Carter suggests, gestures to the essential role technologies (technical objects) play in the formation of rhetoric: by way of electricity, contemporary rhetoric is a messy place and technological space, affective, a game, wherein style and aesthetics are as important—or will be as important, or *will have been* as important—as content. What Carter develops conceptually, Holmes refines methodologically: the object-oriented canon of style (OOS). According to Holmes, virtual-reality (VR) “gamework” ruptures and reorients our relations to and with objects in the world, and such carries sweeping consequences for the future of rhetoric. Thus, as “instrumental or representational aims” obstruct or obfuscate a proper “wakefulness” or “attunement,” Holmes turns to object-oriented ontology (OOO) as a philosophy that can provide what Kenneth Burke terms *perspective by incongruity* (Burke 1984). Following OOO’s flat ontology, wherein all things equally exist, but not all things exist equally (Bogost 2012), Holmes exchanges the human-centered rhetoric of ethics (right/wrong) for the affective, aesthetic rhetoric of style (OOS), providing review of several VR games that typify such an approach. Carter and Holmes both speculate on the rhetorical potential of games, old and emerging, *as* speculative mediums: how we game is how we live, how we write ourselves, rhetorically or otherwise.

Technics, Technicity, and Technical Writing

As rhetoric and writing are always already afforded by technicity in the first instance, and as external technologies rapidly (at redoubled speed) continue to remediate and refigure the function and delivery of rhetoric and writing, the relationship between contemporary and emergent technology and rhetoric and writing needs to be reexamined. Digital-computational engines can sort “big data” according to pseudo-autonomous algorithms, for example; embodied augmentations can

remodel our understanding of gesture, speech, and language. These technological developments implicate rhetoric and writing in terms of mere communication: who or what is communicating what, how so, and how can we better clarify such communication?

Alexander Monea's chapter 9 treats Aristotle's *topoi* as a "cultural database"—a stock or storage of ideas waiting to be recycled, a "management system." Monea thus applies such a concept of *topoi* to advanced computer algorithms, extending the concept of technical writing in general to autonomous machines. Monea defends the mathematical foundation of Aristotle's rhetoric, particularly relevant to rhetorical code/programming/data studies. That is, the very branch of rhetoric that classically invented *topoi* has always also been invested in mathematics, algorithms, and computing anyway, so why not use such now? Halcyon Lawrence (chapter 10) analyzes the role and future potential of speech-recognition technology in the field of technical communication. Lawrence identifies the two-fold problematic of speech-recognition technology relative to technical communication studies: first, speech-recognition technology itself often fails because technical communication experts are not involved in the development of such technology; second, the field of technical communication suffers from the lack of inclusion of speech-recognition technology. Lawrence therefore argues for "functional, administrative, aesthetic, and cognitive principles" that can be applied to the auditory dimension of speech-recognition technology if technical communication, as a field, is to productively and proactively appropriate such a technology. While Monea focuses on the technical development of rhetoric via computational machines, and Lawrence provides suggestions for the advancement of technical writing, both use a speculative model to project an advancement of RWS.

Electracy

We conclude with a section on electracy because we consider electracy to be the apparatus of the future that has nonetheless already since arrived (quite some time ago, even). Similar in magnitude to the apparatus shift from orality to literacy, electracy contends that the "digital turn" now ushers forth a new dimension of rhetoric and writing—yet this new dimension constitutes an entirely new apparatus that calls for a rethinking of method, logic, ontology, and metaphysics beyond mere literate or oral rhetoric and writing, as indicated by Gregory Ulmer's electracy chart (table I.1). The table offers only a working hypothesis, though; electracy remains an emergent concept far from completion and in need

of further invention. While electracy does not negate literacy—just as literacy did not negate orality—electracy provides a more robust model and approach than the seemingly stagnant suggestion of “digital literacy” (tantamount to framing literacy as “written orality”). In short, as Ulmer has noted, *alphabetic print is to literacy what new media is to electracy* (Ulmer 2017). Electracy, as an apparatus or social machine, is partly technological, partly institutional, and partly ideological. Thus, as an apparatus shift, the technological, institutional, and ideological dimensions of rhetoric and writing also shift; as such, an emergent metaphysics—gathered speculatively, creatively, experimentally—must supplement the remediation of rhetoric and writing by way of emerging technologies.

Ulmer’s consultation (*konsult*; chapter 11) on the production and enactment of justice, as viewed from the global perspective, provides an electrate rhetorical method. Implicitly following Stanley Cavell’s “ordinary language” program (as demonstrated in Frank Capra’s *It Happened One Night* [1934]), Ulmer proposes a dialogic approach to competing notions of justice. Such dialogue and conversation may not deliver absolute resolve (à la Lyotard’s *differend*), but such a process will nonetheless engender an education by way of rhetorical exchange that will augment “capabilities” (à la Spinoza’s *capacities*). Ulmer’s electrate, dialogic approach thus moves beyond binary ethics (of literacy)—Jihad vs. McWorld, for example, wherein such oppositional rhetoric negatively defines each term—and instead indicates a third, conjunctive option by way of educational, mutually empowering rhetorical exchange: Jihad and McWorld are *both* unjust and diminish capability. We might discover this through dialogic process, returning us to a focus on the common good that is now bound more by mutually shared desire-aesthetics than entrenched ethical adoptions. Likewise, Sarah Arroyo and Bahareh Alaei (chapter 12) also consider global justice in the context of electracy. By further developing Arroyo’s remediation of Ulmer’s concept of “videocy”—a video-specific approach to electracy in general—Arroyo and Alaei advocate for shared, collective, and participatory video production as electrate rhetorical strategy. Thus, Arroyo and Alaei apply their concept to ISIS. Instead of producing typical propaganda videos that focus on the ethical and moral bankruptcy of ISIS, Arroyo and Alaei draw from D. Diane Davis’s (2000) work on the promise of humor and laughter as rhetorical strategies and Ulmer’s (2004) work on pleasure/pain and the brevity of the joke as key rhetorical signals in electracy to suggest a different, more electrate-appropriate and more productive, effective approach: what better way to defeat the allure of ISIS than to laugh at ISIS, with the participatory culture of rhetorical video exchange?

Table 0.1. Gregory Ulmer's "Electracy Chart," available on his Learning Screen blog.

Apparatus	Orality	Literacy	Electracy
Practice	Religion	Science	Entertainment
Procedure	Ritual	Method	Style
Institution	Church	School	Internet
State of Mind	Faith	Knowledge	Fantasy
Behavior	Worship	Experiment	Play
Philosophy	Mythology	Epistemology	Aesthetics
Ground	God	Reason	Body
Ontology	Totem	Category	Chora
Mode	Narrative	Argument	Figure
Axis	Right/Wrong	True/False	Joy/Sadness

Fittingly, Ulmer, and Arroyo and Alaei thus conclude the book not only with a focus on electracy but, in doing so, a rethinking of rhetorical ethics that moves from the right/wrong binary of literate rhetoric to the robustness of affect (see the "Axis" row in table I.1). The cultivation of well-being, as explored in both Ulmer's and Arroyo and Alaei's chapters, speculatively return RWS to the field of desire-aesthetics of Vitanza's (1997) Third Sophistic.³ As delivered by electracy, we have recently been witness to the obfuscation of the true/false binary (fake news, alternative facts, post-truth era), and such an obfuscation remediates our rhetorical conception and practice of subject-ethics. To this end, electracy calls for the (re)invention of a proper metaphysics conducive to emerging technologies in general and, with such in mind, the production of a novel approach to being-with-others in particular. Ulmer, and Arroyo and Alaei provide speculative models against which we can experiment and test such a call.

CONCLUDING FIGURATIONS

While many do not read edited collections front-to-back in linear fashion, the sections in this book are organized so as to provide a thematic narrative, an unfolding of concepts, where one section suggests the next. With this method in mind, we move from bodies, to minds, to (popular) culture, to games and gaming, to technics and technical writing, to electracy. This collection thus gains cohesive traction as it moves forward, collecting both heterogeneous elements and a somewhat

homogenous sense of the future of RWS. In other words, while the conclusions drawn from the contributors are diverse—even at times mutually divergent—several shared concepts emerge:

RWS no longer privileges or prioritizes the human. By way of new materialism, object-oriented thought, and critical animal studies, this collection at times insists that the future of RWS hinges upon our ability to dethrone anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism and acknowledge that communication and rhetorical actors extend beyond the human mark.

Literacy is an increasingly insufficient model for the rhetoric and writing emerging within the digital institution (and the technologies to come). This includes “digital literacy”: for the same reasons that we do not qualify “literacy” as “written orality,” we must not qualify digital rhetoric and writing as “digital literacy.” Some contributors use the term *electracy*; others do not. In any event, there is a consensus of recognition that new media technologies are changing rhetoric and writing to such a radical extent that we need entirely new methods, if not an entirely new metaphysics.

Creativity and invention will play a central role in the future of rhetoric and writing. In the midst of a “postcritical” turn, analysis and critique not only fall short but at times reproduce that which is being analyzed or critiqued. *Heuretics* (the logic of invention) must supplant *hermeneutics* (the craft of interpretation): ours is now a technological culture of making and sharing.

We must return to popular culture—games and gaming, celebrity logic, pop music, fast food, commercials and “click bait,” garbage television, and formulaic blockbusters. Most rhetoric and writing is now produced, distributed, and received via popular culture, with social media operating as the central delivery system. It seems antithetical for rhetoric to stand against popularity—persuasion is, after all, the goal, and who doesn’t want to be popular? Rather, RWS need to appropriate the logics of popular culture (i.e., everyday commodification) and apply them in such a way that we again focus on the common good and well-being.

The future is not guaranteed, and there is no guarantee on what the future might be or look like. Many scholars, notably Timothy Morton (2013), have argued that we have already marked the end of the world—determined by the advent of soot and nuclear technology—to be inevitably delivered on a later date. We present a similar yet different diagnosis: the end of the future arrives not with the technologies that we produce that take no heed of the future, but rather, and more fundamentally, with an *approach* that takes no heed of the future in the first place. We need not only cease taking the future for granted; we must *proactively (re)invent the future*, appropriating and employing emergent

technologies in the service of the future we desire to inhabit. To draw from Muckelbauer (2009), this collection concerns not only the theoretical compass of the future of rhetorical invention, nor exclusively with the invention of rhetoric and writing's future, but with the complexity of (futural) invention itself. Indeed, speculative fiction has long provided a model for such an endeavor. This collection asks the discipline of RWS to take up such a model and an endeavor—a discipline that, since its inauguration, has honed in on one primary question: *what do we do next and how do we make it happen?*

NOTES

1. For more information on this, consult Bernard Stiegler's *Technics and Time, volumes I and II* (1998, 2008). The use of the qualifying term *word* can also mean "utterance" or "enunciation," which is to say, following Jacques Derrida (1989), that "writing" precedes actual literate print. The *suasive* primacy of care, concern, and ethics relative to rhetoric has been undertaken extensively by D. Diane Davis (2000, 2010), which we link back to Stiegler and Martin Heidegger (2008).
2. Lyotard's *differend* approaches otherwise irreconcilable conflicts between two or more parties as nonetheless capable of facilitating an "agree to disagree" that, in turn, broadens perspective and mutual understanding.
3. Conducive to the task of electracy, the Third Sophistic marks an achronological rhetorical tradition that exchanges the biunivocal, logocentric consideration of "either/or" propositions for the excess and multiplicity of the desire-aesthetics of propositions that arrive with "and."

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