



## Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice

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## // four // Digital Rhetoric: Practice

This final chapter focuses on three main areas of digital rhetoric as practice: pedagogy (teaching digital rhetoric), publication both about and instantiating scholarship of digital rhetoric, and examples of digital-rhetoric-in-action in the production of multimodal, new media, and other networked, digital texts.

### Digital Rhetoric and Pedagogy

The power of rhetoric lies not just in its analytic or productive capacities, but in its emphasis on pedagogy. If we can build effective theories about how to use and construct digital media for the accomplishment of persuasive enterprises, we can also teach those theories and the rhetorical practices derived from those theories. Classical rhetoric, the starting point of my project, is deeply concerned with teaching; from Protagoras's insistence that the art of persuasion can be taught to Quintilian's

codification of the pedagogy of classical rhetoric, every explication of rhetorical theory has included a pedagogical foundation. This, too, is why rhetoric is best suited for developing a framework of understanding for digital media. Robert Coover (1999) neatly sums up the importance of rhetoric to digital production and pedagogy:

Rhetoric, in this Age of the New Sophists, is still the route to power, but the hypertextual link and all the visual and aural media are now part of its grammar. Like composers, artists, and filmmakers before them, writers will learn to battle through the new tool-learning tasks, or to collaborate with other artists, designers, filmmakers, composers, and the tools themselves will become easier to learn and use and will interact more smoothly with other tools. (n.p.)

One of the first projects that I worked on as a graduate student at Michigan State University was an article on teaching digital rhetoric that was produced by a collective that we alternately called DigiRhet.org or DigiRhet.net (I favored the latter, but in our first publication, the attribution is listed as the .org variant). The idea for the formation of the group (and much of the content of our first publication) came from the first Digital Rhetoric graduate course at MSU, taught by Dànienne DeVoss. We published “Teaching Digital Rhetoric: Community, Critical Engagement, and Application” in the spring 2006 issue of *Pedagogy* (the collective subsequently published “Old+Old+Old=New: A Copyright Manifesto for the Digital World” in the summer 2008 “Manifesto” issue of *Kairos*, but I was not one of the authors on that project). As the title indicates, our approach to teaching digital rhetoric focused on three key elements that we felt were foundational—understanding and developing a sense of community (as it is engaged both online and in the classroom itself), a focus on critical engagement with the technologies of production and delivery, and a method

for developing facility with the applications that support the production of digital texts.

Our approach specifically addresses rhetoric as both analytic and heuristic for production; we argued that “digital rhetoricians must explore both theory *and* technology; critical engagement alone is just as insufficient as a curricular approach as would be practical application without the provision of tools for understanding how technologies work within social and cultural contexts” (249).

While I believe that the DigiRhet framework has value, it is not the only approach to teaching digital rhetoric—other approaches range from teaching multimodal composition and web design from a digital rhetoric perspective to focusing on the theories and methods that constitute the field (aligned with the theories and methods I have described in previous chapters). I have chosen three courses that take different approaches to teaching digital rhetoric to show how these differences might play out depending on whether the focus is on the theories that undergird digital rhetoric or engaging in the development of digital texts using digital rhetoric as a methodology. The courses I have chosen are Sarah Arroyo’s graduate Seminar on Digital Rhetoric, taught in spring 2009 at California State University, Long Beach; Byron Hawk’s undergraduate Advanced Writing—Digital Rhetoric course taught in fall 2010 at the University of South Carolina; and my own undergraduate course on Web Authoring and Design, taught in spring 2011 at George Mason University. These are of course not the only approaches to teaching digital rhetoric, and many other examples are available.

## **Sarah Arroyo: Seminar on Digital Rhetoric**

Arroyo’s course syllabus begins with an overview and brief definition of

digital rhetoric that is aligned with the definition I finally arrive at in [chapter 1 \[http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/13030181.0001.001/--digital-rhetoric-theory-method-practice?g=dculture;trgt=div1\\_ch1;view=fulltext;xc=1\]](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/13030181.0001.001/--digital-rhetoric-theory-method-practice?g=dculture;trgt=div1_ch1;view=fulltext;xc=1):

Digital rhetoric has irreversibly infiltrated our lives, and so it deserves intense scholarly attention beyond simply acknowledging that more people write and communicate with computers. Digital rhetoric entails more than critiquing writing we encounter in digital environments or producing simple web texts; instead, studying digital rhetoric requires examining theoretical and ideological issues involved in the shift from writing in a text-only medium. Accordingly, digital rhetoric does not just mean that more people write with computers or that more people are online; rather, it entails larger cultural shifts in recognizing new patterns of thinking, rethinking familiar conceptualizations about both the self and human interaction, and re-envisioning attitudes and expectations toward reading, writing, and rhetoric, regardless of the physical presence of machines. (1)

Each of the courses presented here asks students to use rhetoric for both analysis and production. Arroyo's syllabus states that

digital writing performs and analyzes and critiques. Instead of only critiquing digital culture as is usually done by writing academic papers, we will critique digital culture within the medium itself. We will be introduced to a set of theoretical problems put forth mainly by Roland Barthes, Giorgio Agamben, and Greg Ulmer. We will work through these problems by creating short projects. We will then perform the

theories we study by making short digital movies and/or web-based multimedia projects. (1–2)

Examining the reading list for the course, I noticed that readings in classical rhetoric and those that specifically invoke digital rhetoric (such as Warnick's [2007] *Rhetoric Online*)—with the exception of Zappen's (2005) *TCQ* article—were not included; rather, Arroyo focuses almost exclusively on contemporary rhetorical theory (including postmodern and poststructuralist approaches) combined with a number of readings on social networking, YouTube, and new media (the majority of which are freely available online—a common feature of many digital rhetoric courses since there are so many examples and approaches that are available on the Web and published in open-access journals such as *Kairos* and *Vectors*).

The absence of readings in classical rhetoric is not a weakness; Arroyo clearly situates her approach as one that works through the lens of cultural studies, which she specifies in the first course objective listed on the syllabus:

Upon completion of the course, you should be able to apply both traditional cultural studies practices (critiquing our consumption of digital writing spaces) and emerging digital studies practices (participating in the production of digital writing spaces) and discern rhetorically appropriate ways to do so. (5)

Both Arroyo and Hawk use the Ning platform, which allows users to quickly and easily set up a shared social networking site where participants can upload text (blog posts), images, and video. Ning also includes built-in integration with Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The incorporation of a social networking aspect into the course follows the DigiRhet

recommendation of providing ways for students to experience (not just critique) online community as a key feature of digital rhetoric practice. Arroyo requires students to engage each other through online discussions, thus emphasizing the social aspect of networked discourse.

The other aspect of the course that resonates with the DigiRhet recommendations is the importance placed on producing digital texts (rather than only on traditional seminar papers) as the main product composed by students in the course. Arroyo asks her students to complete two short projects, each of which includes both a written argument and a version of that argument presented in a digital medium (“audio, video, web-based, or a combination”). The larger product for the course is a multimedia project (which may consist of multiple media, but the coursework appears to promote video as the default option). The multimedia project’s instructions begin with the following description:

This video or multimedia presentation will grow from your work in the course and will respond to a set of issues raised in the readings. You can think of it as a “postcritical” object, rather than the usual critical essay we write in graduate seminars. This will not be a critical analysis of the texts we read, but instead will be a performance of your responses to them. It will take on the same topic you address in your seminar paper and will “argue” by way of a different medium.  
(7)

Students also produce a twelve- to fifteen-page seminar paper that accompanies the project; Arroyo provides the rationale for engaging in both new media and traditional print literacies in the course by noting that “we are living in a time on the cusp where traditional literate practices are still highly valued” (7); I have yet to encounter a digital rhetoric course whose

products are *only* new media, but I believe that the perspectives gained by using the more familiar critical approaches in print literacy to reflect upon, analyze, and critique digital rhetoric production are a beneficial pedagogical practice and I hope that we do not shift to purely nonprint-media works in such courses as long as print literacy is still a dominant mechanism for knowledge production in our society.

## Byron Hawk: Advanced Writing—Digital Rhetoric

Byron Hawk's course is at once similar to Arroyo's (particularly in terms of the use of a class-based social network and the focus on digital text composition as the main product of the course) and also a bit different in terms of its theoretical focus. Because this is an advanced undergraduate course, there are far fewer readings, and most of those are less formidable than the theory texts required in Arroyo's course (although both Hawk and Arroyo draw on work by Gregory Ulmer—for Arroyo, there are several required readings; for Hawk, *Internet Invention*, which is a suggested reading on Arroyo's syllabus, is one of the key required texts). However, Hawk's main divergence is the focus on rhetoric (rather than cultural studies) as the primary disciplinary lens (evidenced in part by his use of Warnick's *Rhetoric Online* as the first required text listed on the syllabus). The course description reads (in part):

Since the emergence of the Internet in the early to mid nineties, attempts to understand its impact on writing and rhetoric have shifted almost as fast as new software, hardware, and social worlds have come onto the scene. This means that any understanding of digital writing is always in process and understood through the process of participation and production. This class will discuss some key rhetorical

concepts in relation to digital spaces, explore those concepts in the contexts of blogging and social networking, and then give students the opportunity to engage those concepts through a final digital writing project of their own.

Students in the course use Ning for a class-based social network, although they are encouraged to investigate and participate in other, real-world social networks as well. An element of play is also present in the use of Ning, as Hawk explains that students will “participate in the network via blog posts, forum discussions, real time chat, and posting found content from the web. Each week I’ll post some kind of assignment on the syllabus or announce it in class and we’ll hack around in the network after class discussions.” In previous versions of this class, Hawk had also required students to post “vlogs”—video blog posts—as response to course materials.

Like Arroyo’s course, Hawk’s features two shorter projects (one of which is a traditional paper while the second includes print, multimedia, or video options) and a primary media project. Although he keeps open a number of possibilities for the media project, the main description states

For the final media projects, students can select a web site, blog, or video format. . . . In class we will be studying a particular rhetorical approach to these projects and doing small assignments along the way that can be built into the final project. Each media format has its limits and possibilities that you may not be able to completely anticipate ahead of time. So, I would choose the technology you are least familiar with (so you can have a chance to learn it) or that might suit your future needs (so you can learn more about it).



## **Douglas Eyman: Web Authoring and Design**

Unlike Arroyo's and Hawk's courses, my course shifts attention away from theories and critiques of digital rhetoric and focuses almost exclusively on production (which is not an unexpected departure; unlike the courses above, which are designed to study digital rhetoric explicitly, my course is essentially a course in web design). I include it as an example here because I teach principles and practices of digital rhetoric as foundational elements for website production, but I situate such principles as intrinsic and embedded in the design activities themselves rather than as theories or methods to be studied independent of the lived experience of making a digital text.

In contrast to the extensive descriptions provided by professors Arroyo and Hawk, mine is relatively brief:

Web Authoring and Design provides a rhetorical foundation for web authoring and design in professional settings. Students will learn basic principles of writing for the web, information architecture, coding for accessibility, and usability testing. The production-oriented component of the course provides instruction in writing valid code and practice with web- and graphic-editing software tools.

I also apply digital rhetoric as a framework both implicitly and explicitly (although in the latter case identified simply as "rhetoric") in the course goals and objectives:

We will approach authoring for the World Wide Web from a variety of perspectives:

We will look historically at patterns and trends that have shaped the Internet and the web and how these patterns and trends characterize the web today.

We will look critically at how individuals, businesses, government organizations, and others construct and distribute knowledge within and through electronic spaces.

We will look rhetorically at a variety of web sites to better understand effective and not-so-effective web design and to identify trends in digital design and information architecture.

We'll learn to apply rhetorical principles as both heuristic and method for the design of websites. We'll explore design as a key element of web authoring. And we'll learn to code XHTML and CSS.

We will then apply these principles and practices by designing our own web spaces (working in raw code as well as composing with website editors), and by capturing, creating, and manipulating graphics. And, most importantly, by reflecting upon and writing about the choices we make as we select among available technologies and approaches to perform web-authoring tasks.

The majority of the coursework consists of completing a series of design and coding activities; the focus on rhetoric occurs in course discussion and site critique (which draws on both classical rhetoric and visual rhetoric/design principles for critical analysis). There are relatively few readings in theory, rhetoric, or other digital studies, although when I teach the course with a technical communications focus, I include Chanchu Lin's (2007)

“Organizational Website Design as a Rhetorical Situation” and Kevin Hunt’s (2003) “Establishing a Presence on the World Wide Web: A Rhetorical Approach.” The main course text is *The Elements of User Experience* (2011) by Jesse James Garrett.

Garrett presents a web design and development process that engages five “planes”:

- the strategy plane, which focuses on product objectives and user needs
- the scope plane, which addresses functional specifications and content requirements
- the structure plane, which considers interaction design and information architecture
- the skeleton plane, which focuses on interface design, navigation design, and information design
- and the surface plane, which applies sensory design (primarily visual for web sites)

In the course, I map these planes to the considerations of classical rhetoric, where the strategy plane connects to audience (user needs) and purpose (product objectives), the scope plane (invention), the structure and skeleton plane (arrangement), and the surface plane (visually representing ethos, pathos, and logos). We also address questions of memory (storage, site hosting, whether to allow indexing and archive in webarchive.org) and delivery (circulation, accessibility of flash objects, HTML 5 versus XHTML,

and search engine optimization) through class discussion and online examples.

From my perspective, I see this course not as a study of digital rhetoric but as using digital rhetoric for specific kinds of digital text production. In the next section, I'll examine a similar pair of approaches as expressed in published scholarly work that either examines digital rhetoric practices or enacts them as part of the scholarly argument.

## Digital Rhetoric Research and Scholarship

Examining digital rhetoric scholarship as practice means not just looking at research on digital rhetoric but also highlighting the publication of scholarly work that is presented as digital text, utilizing digital rhetoric to craft the research itself within the framework of new media. To that end, after a brief review of selected works that are published in traditional print journals, I provide a series of examples of scholarly webtexts. These are drawn from *Kairos* because, as editor and publisher, I am most familiar with what is available and I can speak to the productive work that went into creating these examples—but also because there are relatively few venues that publish peer-reviewed scholarship in digital-native formats (*Enculturation*, *Fibreculture*, *Vectors*, and *Computers and Composition Online* are some of the other journals that support such digital-native scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies).

## Scholarship of Digital Rhetoric

Depending on what “counts” as digital rhetoric, a literature review of traditional scholarly works would be quite extensive; since I do cast a very wide net in terms of what falls under the purview of digital rhetoric, rather than compile an exhaustive list of works, I will instead provide a selection,

first highlighting the approaches singled out in Zappen's (2005) catalog of digital rhetoric scholarship and then providing an overview of recent work that exemplifies a range of methods and objects of study for digital rhetoric research.

Jim Zappen's (2005) "Toward a Digital Rhetoric" article (which, paired with Lanham's [1993] "Digital Rhetoric and the Digital Arts," serves as the impetus for my own interest in digital rhetoric) focuses on four main areas: refiguring rhetorical traditions for digital texts, defining characteristics of new media, developing digital identities, and forming online communities. Zappen provides three to four examples of work in each of these areas. What is interesting is that he sees the work of digital rhetoric as taking up rhetorics *of* technology as well as taking technological invention, process, and text as the object of study. For instance, the first example he uses is Laura Gurak's (1997) examination of rhetorical proofs at work in two online debates that focus on then-new technologies and their effects on users. While Gurak's analysis is on the function of ethos (in particular) in online debate, it is both an investigation of the character of the discourse within the context of digital media and a consideration of the rhetorical moves deployed by the technology makers and marketers.

Zappen also draws on Gurak's (2001) work as an example of the move to catalog and define the characteristics of new media. Gurak identifies speed, reach, anonymity, and interactivity as key elements of digital communications (features that Ian Bogost [2007] critiques as "subordinate" rather than primary processes, as speed, reach, and anonymity "simply characterize the aggregate effects of networked microcomputers" and Gurak's use of interactivity is a "vague notion of computer-mediated discussion and feedback" [25]). Zappen also cites Anders Fagerjord (2003), who doesn't so much focus on understanding the characteristics of new media as to suggest (drawing on Bolter and Grusin [1999]) that they

synthesize the characteristics of previous media in a process he calls “rhetorical convergence.” Fagerjord issues an early call to draw on interdisciplinary methods (in addition to close reading) to better understand digital texts: by reading such texts “with the concept of rhetorical convergence in mind, we become aware of the constant mingle of rhetorical forms inherited from earlier media and acknowledge as well the emergence of new communicative ways enabled by computer technology” (319).

For the final two elements, identity and community, Zappen provides a very brief gloss of his examples. The only work he cites that focuses fully on identity is Sherry Turkle’s (1995) *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet*, and the consideration of community-building looks only at social networking researchers—in both cases, there were a number of works that focused on identity and/or community formation (a number of which appear in Taylor and Ward’s [1998] *Literacy Theory in the Age of the Internet*, for example, not to mention Howard Rheingold’s work on virtual communities [1993] and “smart mobs” [2002]).

The value of Zappen’s call to consider the development of digital rhetoric lies not in the abbreviated literature review that he provides but in the categories of work in digital rhetoric (which serve as a usable framework for identifying what kind of work qualifies) and in his suggestion that digital rhetoric could be theorized and framed as a field of inquiry.

Finally, I will round out this overview with a brief review of more recent work that has appeared in *Computers and Composition* (the print journal of the computers and writing field) and *New Media & Society* (the print journal of Internet research studies). My first two selections focus on the concerns and questions of building community in online networks (as one of the key practices of digital rhetoric), but each takes a different

methodological and disciplinary approach.

Christian Pentzold (2010) studies how Wikipedia authors understand and articulate “community” by examining online discussions among editors and applying a grounded theory approach to the analysis. Pentzold concludes that the Wikipedia community sees itself as an “ethos-action community” that follows a specific ethic that has developed through shared practice. He notes that his study “shifts the focus from structural criteria for communities to the discursive level of community formation” (704). While rhetorical theories and methods are not explicitly invoked, the outcome (which is a well-understood construction of community within rhetorical studies) arrives at a rhetorical conclusion. Pentzold’s use of grounded theory can itself be seen as a rhetorical method, and he notes that “the analytical process unfolded as flexible accessing, sampling, structuring, linking, tentative conceptualizing and reviewing that resulted in the empirically grounded theory of the ethos-action community of Wikipedia authors” (716); in other words, a rhetorical construction that arises from his investigation. At the level of theory, this work would certainly have benefitted from a rhetorical approach to community and to ethics. The detailed structural framework that he develops (and the visualization of the “discovered network of categories” [713] produced by the study), however, shows that the methods he is using would certainly be useful to the study of digital rhetoric as well.

In contrast, Giuseppe Getto, Ellen Cushman, and Shreelina Ghosh (2011) approach the question of community from a new media composition perspective that is rooted in rhetorical understandings of community and identity. And rather than examine a community as an outside observer, each author provides data from communities they worked in and in which they functioned as both researchers and digital text composers, creating a video that profiles a local neighborhood center, a digital installation on the

history of the Cherokee Nation, and a digital project focused on the preservation and practice of Indian classical dance amid its remediation via new media technologies. They use these case examples to “explore a model of community mediation that is cognizant of the practices and structures of communication within a given community. This model also acknowledges the boundary between the definition of community identity and the possibility of connection to both internal and external audiences” (160).

While very different in approach, both this article and the one by Pentzold examine community in ways that may well be complementary. Each of these works certainly stand alone and do not require the application of additional methods, but I would suggest that there are opportunities for researchers coming from different perspectives to work together under the auspices of digital rhetoric (and, of course, I am claiming both articles as instances of digital rhetoric scholarship—regardless of the disciplinary perspective of the authors—because the focus is on digital community formation).

Another area of continual development in digital rhetoric research focuses on methods and methodologies. In “Towards a Mediological Method: A Framework for Critically Engaging Dimensions of a Medium,” Melinda Turnley (2011) draws on Régis Debray’s development of mediology as an interdisciplinary method to develop a framework specific to new media production from a writing studies perspective. She notes that Debray’s system “can help us account for both the conceptual and material aspects of media at both the macro levels of cultural structures and the micro levels of practice. Its emphasis on intersections between praxis and ideology can inform critical analysis of media artifacts and discourses as well as authorial decisions about media composition” (126). Turnley’s appropriation and application of such a methodological framework to the analysis and production of digital texts is one of the practices that digital rhetoric can engage when developing new theories and methods. As she explains,



Inspired by this approach, I have developed a framework for analyzing media specifically within the context of composition studies. This framework includes seven dimensions—technological, social, economic, archival, aesthetic, subjective, and epistemological—which are particularly relevant to media’s functions as cultural formations and sites of rhetorical praxis. (126)

She then goes on to show how this framework can be applied as a generative (as opposed to definitive) rubric for the assessment of digital texts and performances (and those that cross digital/physical processes, such as flash mobs that are organized via Facebook but enacted in specific “real-world” locations). What is interesting about this approach is that it would lend itself very well to the kind of coding, analysis, and visualization undertaken in Pentzold’s (2010) grounded theory approach to the development of community in Wikipedia.

Finally, one of the more interesting recent developments in digital rhetoric is a renewed interest in digital economies as rhetorical structures. Richard Lanham (2006) in *The Economics of Attention* suggests that rhetoric (and specifically the rhetorical canon of style) can support a new economic model that depends on acquiring and maintaining the attention of the audience in order to accrue economic value (in terms of monetary as well as social capital). James Porter (2010) believes that Lanham’s view of rhetoric is not broad enough—that “a broader view of rhetoric would include inquiry procedures (that is, inventional tactics) aimed at understanding what motivates people to create, search, and circulate knowledge” (174). In “Rhetoric in (as) a Digital Economy,” Porter argues that economics has always been an important component of rhetoric and that “rhetorical contexts themselves rely on an economic system of exchange . . . an exchange of value that serves as the motivation for the production and

circulation of digital objects” (174). Porter examines a range of social networking interactions in terms of their economic activity and suggests that there are a range of ethical concerns (access, control, labor exploitation) that must be addressed by designers of interactive systems (this approach is reminiscent of Kreiss, Finn, & Turner’s [2011] Weber-inspired examination of the relationship between peer-production and bureaucratic control systems). The connection between digital economies and digital rhetoric is a productive space for continued digital rhetoric research, and I will finish with Porter’s argument for the appropriateness of making that connection:

. . . is it possible that rhetoric can help shape and influence the digital economy and social networking? My answer to that question can be summed up in two phrases: “information” and “knowledge work.” If the basis of a digital economy concerns (a) the development of “information”—and not just information as a static product, but more important the transformation of information into useful knowledge; and (b) if the digital economy concerns the delivery and circulation of information via social networks in ways that create value for users, then writing teachers, communication scholars, and rhetoric theorists certainly have a lot to offer this discussion. (190)

While there is a broad range of very exciting work being done in digital rhetoric, what I find even more encouraging is the possibility of developing not just new theories and methods but new forms of scholarship that can take advantages of the affordances of new media digital texts—that is, scholarship *as* digital rhetoric. Christopher Basgier (2010) applies the dual lenses of author-function (à la Foucault) and genre-function to examine three digital-native scholarly texts in order to examine “how scholarly

webtexts construct and respond to the very problems they themselves manifest: the relationships and differences between print and digital texts” (157). Basgier finds that scholarly webtexts “mobilize ownership and transgression, multimodal complexity, and multivocality as significant, valued practices in new media scholarship” (157)—and it is to such practices that I turn as I consider some key examples of digital-native scholarly webtexts.

## Scholarship as Digital Rhetoric

As the editor and publisher of *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*, I have had the pleasure of watching (and in some respects, participating in) the development of many digital texts that both engage digital rhetoric as method and object of analysis and as framework for the production of what we at the journal call “webtexts” (in order to differentiate them from “hypertexts,” which hypertext theorists have claimed have somewhat different affordances and constraints than simply existing as texts on the Word Wide Web). Founded in 1996, *Kairos* has been the longest continually published online peer-reviewed academic journal in writing studies, and one of only a handful in the humanities in general that publish work that falls outside the genre of the traditional print scholarly article. Our goal has been to publish work that makes an academic argument not only through text but also through design, drawing on as many media and modes as an individual author cares to employ (see Ball [2004] and Ball & Moeller [2007] for arguments in favor of the value of this approach). In this section I’ll review four webtexts published in *Kairos* between 2004 and 2011.

It was difficult to select just a few examples from among the very many available in *Kairos* (we have published well over three hundred webtexts in our first sixteen volumes), and, as senior editor of the journal, I certainly

encourage readers of this work to peruse the current issue of *Kairos* and its archive, where you will find many more examples of digital-rhetoric-in-action. The four I have selected to review here all relate in some way to the theories presented in chapter 3 [[http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/13030181.0001.001/--digital-rhetoric-theory-method-practice?g=dculture;trgt=div1\\_ch3;view=fulltext;xc=1](http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/13030181.0001.001/--digital-rhetoric-theory-method-practice?g=dculture;trgt=div1_ch3;view=fulltext;xc=1)], and each one deploys a variety of media types and interactions in order to represent their arguments. The webtexts I have selected are Ellen Cushman's (2004) "Composing New Media: Cultivating Landscapes of the Mind"; "Re-situating and Re-mediating the Canons: A Cultural-Historical Remapping of Rhetorical Activity" by Paul Prior, Janine Solberg, Patrick Berry, Hannah Bellwoar, Bill Chewning, Karen J. Lunsford, Liz Rohan, Kevin Roozen, Mary P. Sheridan-Rabideau, Jody Shipka, Derek Van Ittersum, and Joyce R. Walker (2007); Susan Delagrange's (2009) "*Wunderkammer*, Cornell, and the Visual Canon of Arrangement" (along with the follow-up *Inventio* article that describes the production process); and Justin Hodgson, Scott Nelson, Andrew Rechnitz, and Cleve Wiese's (2011) "The Importance of Undergraduate Multimedia: An Argument in Seven Acts."

The works we publish in *Kairos* should ideally invoke rhetoric as design as well as design as rhetorical practice; scholars should make their arguments not just verbally but also visually and structurally—in this sense, the aesthetic becomes rhetorical as well. As Cheryl Ball (2004) suggests in her discussion of new media scholarship, we need to "approach these texts with an appreciation of the aesthetic qualities that new media elements can offer toward creating the author's overall meaning" (413) when we read and critique these works; a reciprocal move should therefore be in play when producing this kind of scholarly work.

Because these are digital-native works, I will provide only a brief description of each (Cushman's work, in particular, requires interaction for

the user to make meaning from the piece and a textual description will most definitely not be able to capture the essence or the argument of her webtext), focusing instead on why these are important examples of digital rhetoric practice.

## **“Composing New Media: Cultivating Landscapes of the Mind”**

The crux of the argument in this work is presented through the requirement of interaction—in each screen, the user can move elements, click on them, or mouse-over to achieve different effects; the user is presented with a new screen of interactive possibility in response to the user’s actions. There are no instructions, and no clear indications of what effect any given interaction may have on the current screen—the user is required to play with the interface in order to access enough of the overall design to begin to understand that the argument is about design choices and about both the constraints and affordances of interactivity itself. There is an explanatory essay that discusses the goals of the webtext and its overall argument, but it is inaccessible unless the user finds it in the course of interacting with the design. (This explanatory text was originally available at the outset of the webtext, but the editorial board members who served as peer-reviewers requested that it be made available as a result of the interaction, rather than as an alternative means to present the argument that would allow the user/reader to circumvent the requirement to play with the design.) This work is particularly interesting for the way that it portrays interactivity, and the way that it enacts its argument nonverbally, using only image and motion. Like Wysocki’s (2002) “Bookling Monument,” this is one of the *Kairos* webtexts that has completely erased the traditional elements of the genre of the academic essay.

## **“Re-situating and Re-mediating the Canons: A Cultural-Historical Remapping of Rhetorical Activity”**

One of the reasons that I think this work is important is that it reimagines the canons of classical rhetoric through a cultural-historical activity theory lens and then provides examples of how such a revision would be enacted in the production of digital texts. It is digital rhetoric both in the sense of addressing the issue of reframing the canons in digital contexts and in the wide range of examples that accompany the core argument. This work is also one of many we have published that have far more authors than is common in humanities scholarship (twelve in this case). The authors provide a series of individually or jointly authored “data nodes” that are arranged around a central “core” argument. In the main argument, the authors contend “that a new set of canons is needed to re-situate rhetoric in complex sociohistoric worlds and to realize not simply a consistent multimodality, but a deep orientation to mediated activity and agency. Re-situating and re-mediating the canons takes us beyond any single setting and mode and offers a new map for an expansive attention to the rhetorical dimensions of all activity” (25). The data nodes around the core argument use different media and take up a range of different topics and ideas (they don’t map neatly onto the elements of the main argument as examples so much as they *enact* some elements of those arguments—another of the key features of digital rhetoric scholarship).

## **“Wunderkammer, Cornell, and the Visual Canon of Arrangement”**

In this webtext, Susan Delagrange presents a digital *wunderkammer* (a box of curios that held doors and drawers full of smaller objects) that the user

opens in order to examine each of the elements of the overall argument. Much of the work focuses on arrangement in digital rhetoric, placing examples and instantiations of the argument alongside explanatory text found on each lexia. Delagrange introduces the webtext by explaining that her work with digital media

focuses on the complementary areas of embodied digital representation and the canon of arrangement refigured as *techné*, as a productive art of arranging (bodies of) evidence to discover ethical bases for action. For me, designing constructive digital media is a process of mapping and remapping our physical and conceptual worlds in order to determine their meaning. (n.p.)

This approach to arrangement is carried out via mapping and remapping within the webtext itself.

I selected this piece in particular because we published a follow-up webtext in a new section we instituted in the journal called “Inventio.” This new section aims to uncover and show the overall process that leads to the production of a webtext, providing access to the author’s design decisions as well as editorial feedback and responses. In “When Revision is Redesign: Key Questions for Digital Scholarship,” Delagrange (2009) helps to answer an important question for born-digital scholarly works:

When the interface of an interactive, digital, scholarly article is designed as an integral part of the article’s argument, what are the rhetorical, conceptual, and technical challenges of re-designing the project to better enact that argument?

This kind of meta-reflection is critically important for producers of digital rhetoric scholarship, both to show that the process is indeed scholarly (and not simply aesthetic) and that the production of this kind of text is deeply labor-intensive, from both technical and intellectual perspectives.

## **“The Importance of Undergraduate Multimedia: An Argument in Seven Acts”**

This webtext, built in Adobe Flash, utilizes text, audio, video, and animation in a series of seven vignettes, each of which draws on a different media metaphor: tower-configuration desktop PC, flash drive, Macintosh OS interface, super-8 projector, DJs turntables, comic book, and antique camera. Each piece reimagines the medium or platform—for instance, the PC becomes a three-dimensional model that becomes a museum of past technologies as the user zooms inside of it; the comic book has an animated computer screen in one panel, a short film in another. Each act has its own visual and auditory aesthetic (some of the acts were designed to be listened to using headphones, as there are two distinct audio channels). Although the overall argument is about the value of teaching multimedia production as part of the undergraduate curriculum in rhetoric/composition, the form that it takes also realizes several degrees of what Bolter and Grusin (1999) would consider remediation (although more on the side of hypermediation than of transparency). Each act also deftly uses juxtaposition and intertextuality as a rhetorical device. The framing device (and interface) for all of the acts is represented as a classical theatre, with red curtains and proscenium arch (yet another remediation of a more traditional or analog form). Each of the acts is persuasive in its own right (some taking more practical approaches to the value of teaching multimedia design and others focusing on the critical/theoretical rationales), but the sum of the acts leads to a well-developed and cohesive claim. In effect, acting as discrete units that function both together and separately, this work both enacts and



champions digital rhetoric.

The examples I have selected here are several of the impressive scholarly works that both interrogate and enact digital rhetoric practices; but digital rhetoric is not a purely academic pursuit and the following section focuses on the development of new media forms for artistic and political purposes.

## Digital Rhetoric and Production: Rhetoric, Design, Code

In this final series of examples, we'll look at digital rhetoric as employed in the production of a range of digital texts, including websites, remixes, multimodal composition, and games. I'll first review examples from three key texts in digital rhetoric—Warnick's *Rhetoric Online*, Bogost's *Persuasive Games*, and Losh's *Virtualpolitik*—and then provide three examples of digital rhetoric at work: DJ Kutiman's Thru-You project, Sean Tevis's political campaign for Kansas House of Representatives, and a selection of exemplary parodies and remixes.

## Rhetoric at Work: Parodies, Government Sites, and Games

In her chapter on intertextuality and public discourse in *Rhetoric Online*, Warnick focuses mainly on two examples that use parody as a rhetorical trope in order to engage in political speech and media activism through digital rhetoric. The first example concerns animated parodies produced by jibjab.com, one that addresses the George W. Bush and John F. Kerry campaigns from the 2004 presidential election ("This Land is Your Land") and one that critiques the pharmaceutical industry ("The Drugs I Need"). [1]

[<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/d/dh/13030181.0001.001/--digital-rhetoric-theory-method-practice?>

[g=dculture;id=N4\\_1;note=ptr;rgn=div1;view=trgt;xc=1\]](#) Warnick situates the rhetorical appeal of these parodies in their use of intertextuality and reads the examples “in light of their relation to recognizable public events and themes, the verbal and visual texts the parodies draw on and the message they convey” in order to “illustrate how JibJab exploits its textual and contextual environments to hold users’ attention and influence their thinking” (111). The second example in the chapter comes from Adbusters’s use of parody in pursuit of media activism and culture jamming, focusing mainly on the use of spoof ads that are static, visual texts.

While the moves that Warnick makes point to some of the most prolific new media forms on the Internet (parodies, remixes, mashups) and provide a solid reading of their use of intertextuality as a rhetorical appeal, the methods are those of traditional rhetorical analysis, and the end result is that the examples don’t appear to be any different than a printed visual parody or video parody despite their existence as digital texts.

In *Virtualpolitik*, Elizabeth Losh, like Warnick, is interested in political speech, but she is more concerned with the deployment of digital rhetoric as a means of power and control on the part of governments and bureaucracies than on public deliberation, activism, or resistance (although these moves do play a role in her project as well).

Like Warnick, Losh also addresses parody as a rhetorical construct, but rather than reading individual texts, she looks at the activities and processes that make such parody possible, from the affordances of replication in everyday software, to digital photo manipulation available in image editing programs, to online instances of “auto-generators” that create digital text representations of real-world objects in response to user input (such as the creation of fake airline boarding passes, warrants, or images of text on signs outside of churches). She charts the serious repercussions of

the tension between parody-makers and government institutions and interrogates the way the digital rhetoricians who make the parodies are characterized: “While fans are seen as parasitic and lacking in content-creation abilities, hackers are seen as devious and likely to subvert the deliberative practices that others engage in openly and honestly. In other words, both groups are portrayed in print and broadcast culture as bad citizens who abuse existing power relationships” (200).

But Losh’s examples of digital rhetoric as text and activity are not limited to parody, and she examines a wide range of genres, from the home pages of the websites of members of the US House of Representatives Intelligence Committee (21–24), to the extensive use of PowerPoint as a communicative medium by government agencies (165–81), to government-sponsored digital library initiatives (239–79). Losh also examines both military-funded videogames and simulations and serious games about national security and health as government-produced examples of digital rhetoric, much as Ian Bogost takes up videogames as sites of digital rhetoric in *Persuasive Games*.

In *Persuasive Games*, Bogost argues for a new digital rhetoric approach that he calls “procedural rhetoric” because the internal logic of processes within digital texts (and in nondigital texts as well, including workplaces, organizations, and institutions) supports the persuasive activities of those texts. Learning to read game-logic can lead to opportunities to work against the hardcoded paradigms and also to learn to expose how these processes work as agents of influence both in and out of games: “Videogames themselves cannot produce events; they are, after all, representations. But they can help members of a situation address the logic that guides it and begin to make movements to improve it” (332). Bogost examines a number of games, including the controversial *Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas*, “to show how the production of discourse can help trace the status of

persuasion in procedural rhetorics” (333).

What is compelling about the examples used in each of these cases is the range of digital texts that are available for critique using digital rhetoric methods; but these examples also highlight the way that digital rhetoric undergirds the production of digital texts (whether implicitly or explicitly). The more sophisticated analytic methods employed by Losh and Bogost help to reveal not just the effect of these texts but the principles that drive their production. In the next sections, I will provide additional examples of digital rhetoric at work in the process of production for multimodal/multimedia composition (taking up Warnick’s focus on parody, appropriation, and remix, and adding circulation as a rhetorical feature) and how rhetoric can be deployed not just through the surface features of digital texts but in the code itself.

## **Multimodal/Multimedia Composition: Appropriation, Remix, Circulation**

In the tradition of digital rhetoric scholars that have come before me, I will present a series of examples that illustrate specific engagement with digital rhetoric practices or methods. Although the first series of examples is brief, I will finish with more in-depth considerations of multimedia composing and circulation as rhetorical practice. The following examples have in common a focus on remediation, appropriation, and remix as practices of rhetorical production.

### ***Textual Appropriation and Remix***

At spam-poetry.com (a no longer extant site), Kristin Thomas produced poetry from the subject lines of spam email, a practice she began in 2003. On her site, she noted that she saw her work as “a little bit Found Art, a

little bit Whimsy, and mostly, just to find a way for me to find a peaceful intersection between digital communication and my life” (qtd. in Hurvitz, 2006). Although likely not the first person to create poetry from spam, Thomas’s work received a great deal of attention and inspired others to create their own spam poetry (or “spoetry”). The genre of spam poetry has become quite popular, and a number of fine examples can be found on the website of the Spam Poetry Institute (<http://www.spampoetry.org> [<http://www.spampoetry.org>]), which bills itself as “an organization dedicated to collecting and preserving the fine literature created by the world’s spammers.”

Jonathan Lethem, author of *You Don’t Love Me Yet*, is offering several stories on his website ([http://jonathanlethem.com/promiscuous\\_materials.html](http://jonathanlethem.com/promiscuous_materials.html) [[http://jonathanlethem.com/promiscuous\\_materials.html](http://jonathanlethem.com/promiscuous_materials.html)]) for others to appropriate, remix, and adapt (but not copy in their entirety). On his site, he explains that he likes “art that comes from other art” and likes to see his stories adapted into other forms: “My writing has always been strongly sourced in other voices, and I’m a fan of adaptations, appropriations, collage, and sampling.”

Micah Ian Wright’s “Propaganda Remix Project” (<http://propagandaremix.com> [<http://propagandaremix.com>]) presents classic wartime propaganda posters with new, antiwar slogans replacing the originals. In this case, the remix happens at the littoral zone of contact between text and image.

A blogger who goes by the handle “Canis Lupus” has created a parody remix (<http://www.aaronsw.com/2002/valentiRemix> [<http://www.aaronsw.com/2002/valentiRemix>]) of Jack Valenti’s “Moral Imperative” speech, given at Duke University February 24, 2003; this remix

converts Valenti's antipiracy message into a pro-fair-use rights message.

Peter Gabriel has created a site that promotes the remixing of his and other artists' work; at Real World Remixed (<http://realworldrecords.com/remixed> [<http://realworldrecords.com/remixed>]), users are encouraged to "to download our 'sample packs'—multitrack recordings from Real World Records and Peter Gabriel" and use them to create remixes, which are then uploaded to the site and voted upon by other site users. (See, for example, <http://realworldrecords.com/remixed/group/84776/peter-gabriel-shock-the-monkey-remix-competition> [<http://realworldrecords.com/remixed/group/84776/peter-gabriel-shock-the-monkey-remix-competition>].)

An anonymous artist has created a mashup of rapper 50 cent's "In Da Club" and "Yakkety Sax" (better known as the theme song from the Benny Hill show); this is considered a mashup rather than a remix because neither song was edited for content, they were simply layered one atop the other (although the 50 cent song was sped up just a bit). The mashup, accompanied by the original video for "In Da Club," is available on YouTube (<http://youtube.com/watch?v=jkyc1dxL3No> [<http://youtube.com/watch?v=jkyc1dxL3No>]).

In 2006, Luis Hernandez and Paul Holcomb (formerly <http://www.boldheaded.com/podcast>) created a techno-dance track that featured an edited and remixed version of former Alaska senator Ted Stevens's commentary on net neutrality (they later created an even more pointed parody remix using more of Stevens's words to create another techno-dance song called "The Internet Must Die").

### ***Appropriation and Editing (Remix)***

Working in both audio and (music) video, Alanis Morissette has produced a parody video of the Black Eyed Peas song “My Humps.” Although she does not change the lyrics, her ballad-like rendition certainly provides pointed commentary on those lyrics, and the video itself has many elements of the original video for the song, thus qualifying as remix. This example is also available on YouTube (<http://youtu.be/pRmYfVCH2UA> [<http://youtu.be/pRmYfVCH2UA>]); however, there doesn’t appear to be an official upload, so it is likely that NBC Universal will at some point issue a takedown notice for copyright infringement.

Johan Söderberg created a parody that synchronizes several different video clips of George W. Bush and Tony Blair in a way that appears to show them singing Diana Ross and Lionel Richie’s “Endless Love” to each other (<http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/bushvideos/youtube/bushblairlove.htm> [<http://politicalhumor.about.com/od/bushvideos/youtube/bushblairlove.htm>].)

A popular form of video remix for anime fans is the creation of music videos: clips from anime cartoon serials or films are edited together to create a video that thematically represents (or even lip-synchs to) whatever song the remix producer has chosen.

One of the most impressive examples of multimodal composition, appropriation, and remix that I have seen thus far is the “Thru-You” project created by an Israeli DJ who goes by Kutiman (<http://thru-you.com> [<http://thru-you.com>]). Kutiman selected clips from several hundred video posts to YouTube, mostly of people playing instruments or singing (some include instructional videos, others are children showing off their musical skills, and one memorable example is of a mother singing a lullaby to her baby); Kutiman extracted the audio from these clips and remixed them into an album’s worth of original songs—these video clips became the instrument *he* played as he crafted his composition

(<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tprMEs-zfQA>  
[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tprMEs-zfQA>]).

But Kutiman didn't just use the music; he cut all of the video together in technically precise configurations to create a visual representation for each of the songs as well. He also provided a means to access a series of citations that can be followed back to the original clips, and placed the full project on a website that collects all of these multimodal compositions together so they are available and accessible through a single interface—an interface that appropriates and remixes the interface of YouTube itself (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzogYbqOZXQ>  
[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KzogYbqOZXQ>]).

This is a masterful example of arrangement as invention and of the ways in which digital networks can provide the means to discover new forms and new ways of making meaning via the (re)combination and juxtaposition of digital texts.

## Rhetoric *in* the Code

As a final example, I want to relate a case that enacts digital rhetoric in a number of ways: Sean Tevis for Kansas State Representative. Tevis's campaign first gained national recognition for a cartoon that he drew to explain why he was running. The cartoon was an appropriation (and, in part, homage) to *XKCD*, a very popular comic among those who consider themselves Internet savvy (the comic is subtitled "A Webcomic of Romance, Sarcasm, Math, and Language"). In addition, the comic referenced a number of Internet-specific activities (such as "downmodding" or adding negative votes against an online comment) and rick-rolling; Tevis also drew on the then-popular meme of creating parodies of the film *300* (itself a remediation of Frank Miller's graphic novel). Tevis's comic was so well



executed that it was noticed by the same audience who reads *XKCD* and was circulated through a number of blogs and news aggregator sites (such as metafilter.com and fark.com). Once the link to his site was in greater circulation, more and more people went to view it and pass on the link, to the point where he received enough exposure to be noticed by the mainstream media, which garnered him a number of television and print news interviews.

One of the reasons that such circulation qualifies as digital rhetoric as productive force is that Tevis's appeal was an intentional bid to reach a wider audience (and it is likely that he had a specific kind of audience in mind: one that would agree with his progressive policy stance): "I made an appeal that was both personal and that leveraged the power of social networks to quickly communicate with others. . . . By using the ability to collaborate online, connect with an audience, and communicate in a way that, say, mailing a brochure simply can't, we were able to break the record for the most number of donors to a State Representative campaign in Kansas."

Tevis did not just have a comic, however, he had a website for his campaign—a website that included an option to donate to the campaign via PayPal. The stated goal expressed in the comic was to convince three thousand people to each donate \$8.34 (which he had calculated would yield the minimum amount—\$26,000—to run a potentially successful campaign). In less than forty-eight hours, he had reached his goal; over the span of two months he received over \$100,000.

Although Tevis's use of the comic format, intertextual references, and knowledge of how to leverage aggregators and blogs for circulation (the latter being an example of what Jim Ridolfo [2005] would call "rhetorical velocity") would qualify as an example of digital rhetoric, I was also

interested in the way that he developed his ethos via a hidden appeal designed to communicate with a technologically knowledgeable audience. On the page of the campaign website that included the comic, the following was placed in a comment in the HTML source code: “Hello person who cares enough to read source code. Please donate \$8.88 to my campaign. Any amount with 88 cents at the end is flagged for me to let me know that it came from someone who I guess is a lot like me. You’ll also be entered into a drawing to win a prize and it will help save the world. Thank you.” In other words, Tevis used all of the persuasive resources at his disposal to increase the success of his argument that there was value in supporting his candidacy.

While the comic and website proved to be financially successful, Tevis ultimately lost the election (although it was fairly close at 52–48 percent, which is a positive outcome for a young, first-time candidate running against a three-term incumbent). In fact, the fundraising tactic was perhaps too successful, as after the election a bill was introduced that would require full disclosure of contributors who donated even small amounts to a campaign, but only if those small donations reached over \$1000 (in other words, it added an onerous accounting requirement that would only kick in for situations like the one that Tevis engineered). Nonetheless, the employment of digital rhetoric practices propelled the campaign to much greater visibility and success than would otherwise have been possible with more traditional campaign marketing techniques.

## Digital Rhetoric Practice—Call for Case Studies

One of the difficulties of working with digital rhetoric—and particularly with publishing works on the moving targets of digital innovation and online activity—is that many of these examples have moved or vanished just in the six months between my original draft of the chapter and a subsequent

revision. It is therefore important for digital rhetoric scholars to archive the digital products they study. It is equally important that born-digital scholarly work consider issues of stability and sustainability and select appropriate venues for publication. I plan to review and update the links to examples in the digital version of this text on a quarterly basis, which should help to keep the links current. But there are, of course, many other examples of digital rhetoric practice currently available for examination and research, not to mention new forms (such as mobile applications, augmented reality systems, and digital games) that I have not covered here. Thus I end this chapter with a call for digital rhetoric case studies and continued work on areas covered in this book. There are three venues in particular that I would recommend to digital rhetoric scholars:

The Sweetland Digital Rhetoric Collaborative (<http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/about> [<http://www.digitalrhetoriccollaborative.org/about>]), which hosts a curated blog, a digital rhetoric wiki, and a new digital rhetoric book series published by the University of Michigan Press.

H-DigiRhet (<http://www.h-net.org/~digirhet/> [<http://www.h-net.org/~digirhet/>]) is a discussion list (part of the H-Net collective of discussion and reviews-oriented lists). The H-DigiRhet network provides an online discussion space for teachers, researchers, and scholars who are working at the intersections of writing, rhetoric, communication, and digital technologies, focusing on issues of digital composition, computer-mediated communication (CMC), digital literacy, information and communication technologies (ICTs), human-computer interaction (HCI), and digital rhetoric. The list has over six hundred subscribers as of June 2012, and it is a perfect venue for announcing digital rhetoric work to an interested audience; the list and reviews editors also seek reviews of books and digital projects related to digital rhetoric.

And, of course, as senior editor of *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* (<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net> [<http://kairos.technorhetoric.net>]), I welcome born-digital submissions (that we call “webtexts”) that take up questions of digital rhetoric theory, method, or practice.

## Coda

I hope that this book will serve as a useful resource to students and scholars and will provide a framework for digital rhetoric scholarship, as well as a representation of the scope and interests of digital rhetoric as an emerging field of study. I also hope to see a surge in works that address digital rhetoric across several fields of inquiry, and I welcome your updates, suggestions, and queries.

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