

Toward a Networked Rhetorical Ethics of Response-Ability

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This dissertation intervenes in “short-sighted” writing in online communities: how the circulation of opinion (*doxa*) tends to aggregate and culminate in consensus, short-circuiting users’ appreciation of the effects of their writing on the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together. To imagine networked writing spaces in which users care-fully attend to how their writing is contributing to the networking of *doxa* and, in turn, the epistemic and moral growth of the network, I adopt Gilbert Simondon’s concept of ethical individuation as a model for rethinking network-building. Here, individuals participate in the development of systems of norms through actions that put into relation as much as possible latent tensions between disparate values, thereby discovering values which render these tensions compatible and yield more capacious and nuanced norms for moral problem-solving. Such prudent participation in ethical systems is motivated by an affirmation of the networked character of one’s actions, as it intervenes in and the ongoing development of the system of norms which inform how individuals resolve moral problems. Working from this picture of ethical network-building as described in Simondon’s philosophy, chapters one, two, three, and four set out to identify and delineate the communication practices, digital *ethē*, and network literacies that could support online communities in which users’ writing individuates *doxa* through a pondering and restructuring of latent tensions between the experiences, emotions, and values that compose the online community and underwrite its *doxa*. These practices, *ethē*, and literacies constitute to a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability, in which users sense and affirm their participation in the networking of *doxa* and write in ways that cultivate possibilities for deliberating about and knowing together shared matters of interest.

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Preface

In the 13th “Future of the Internet” canvassing, conducted in 2021, the Pew Research Center and Elon University’s Imagining the Internet Center asked 860 technology innovators, developers, business and policy leaders, researchers and activists to predict the state of the online communities in the year 2035. Generally, the experts’ outlook on mis/dis/mal- information and toxic discourse on the internet was pragmatic: it is likely that, in fifteen years, online spaces will improve if reformers, big technology firms, governments, and activists work diligently toward tackling problems (e.g., toxicity and misinformation) affecting the public good. Pragmatics and strategy were also offered in these responses: fixing social media algorithms, intensifying government regulations, and bolstering users’ digital literacy are among those avenues which might prove fruitful in creating healthier communities. Among the experts, optimism: 61% answering that they hope digital spaces will generally serve the public good. However, 39% of experts predicted a worse future, citing increased digital surveillance, abuse and demagoguery, users’ short-sightedness, and the complexity and speed of digital change. Notably, the 61% largely couched their response as more of a hope than a confident assertion of the direction in which the internet is heading (Anderson and Rainie).

Across the respondents’ remarks, whether optimistic or not, predicting the future came down to whether “prosocial behaviors”—behaviors such as helping, sharing, and cooperating that intend to benefit others or society as a whole—can be inculcated in online communities. Pessimistic respondents argued that human frailties cannot be fundamentally altered, such as the inclination to engage information and ideas that speak to our experiences, emotions and values. This renders us vulnerable to messages that weaponize these frailties (demagoguery) and echo

chambers in which users articulate likeminded opinion that fail to stray from the community's established beliefs and norms. These are the true risks of users' "short-sightedness," insofar as users become habituated to communication that is not concerned with cultivating the community's understanding or contributing in ways that benefit users outside the community.

Out of all the diagnoses offered in the Pew report, perhaps the most common phenomenon is the short-sightedness of users: that users communicate and engage others without taking into consideration the quality of what they're contributing or its consequences on the well-being of other users (either within or outside the community). As users become a part of a community, there is a compulsion to imitate the network's norms: its ways of acting, its ways of knowing, and its ways of communicating that establish belonging. As Whitney Phillips argues, this compulsion is not inherently dangerous or problematic, but it can lead to positive or negative outcomes depending on the aims of the community. Examples of this include the way in "Rules" documents in Reddit communities can influence users' writing toward productive deliberation and dialogue (Richter) and how trolling and "shitposting" are normalized on message boards (e.g. 4Chan) that follow absolutist approaches to free speech. This nonconscious conformity can nonetheless enable careless writing, which includes overtly problematic interactions such as cyber-bullying, but also harder to detect phenomena such as groupthink, echo chambers and shallow argument pools. Either way, the compulsion to write in ways that are meaningful to the community can promote short-sightedness, an inability (or indifference) to anticipate how one's participation actively shapes the network and its norms.

If we look across scholarly fields, we see no shortage of overlap with the challenges and dangers identified in the Pew report. Digital studies scholars such as Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Bernard Stiegler (2017) have articulated how social media algorithms, starting from the principle

of homophily, produce “agitated clusters of comforting rage” (Chun 57). Concerning users’ short-sightedness as they engage one another’s writing, Tony Sampson (2012), Eugene Thacker, and Jussi Parikka (2010) articulate how social networks tend to emerge from the circulation of contagious ideas and texts that appeal to users’ common interests, emotions, values, experiences, and desires, oftentimes bypassing the judgment of users who circulate these ideas and texts in an almost somnambulistic manner. Like the Pew report’s respondents, these scholars identify users as more inclined toward engaging writing that appeals to what they already know, and the infrastructure underpinning this writing only amplifies this conduct.

Naturally, the outcome of these factors on online communities are digital spaces that resist writing that might disrupt its dominant opinions and communal beliefs, enabling phenomena such as online aggression, demagoguery, groupthink, and shallow argument pools. Scholars in digital rhetoric have in recent years addressed the issue of users’ short-sightedness. Erika M. Sparby, for instance, shows how on 4Chan any sense of responsibility for the effects of one’s writing dissolves when aggressive behaviors and asocial opinions become a part of the online community’s identity (and, in turn, a way of demonstrating belonging to the forum). Analyzing how online community emerges around the circulation of hashtags, Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang underscore how certain narratives “stuck” to the #YesAllWomen hashtag as it was recirculated throughout the Twitter network, yielding a digital *topos* or “place” where certain embodiments (in their analysis, mainly white feminists) could find community and deliberate about gender-based violence while crowding out other perspectives (women of color). With regard to each case study, these rhetoricians pay attention to the effects of “short-sightedness” as rhetorical phenomena, while also considering how the design of these spaces influences the conduct of users (e.g., 4Chan users’ anonymity, Twitter’s ranking algorithm).

Importantly, a number of scholars in digital studies and digital rhetoric have offered instructive insights into ethical online community building that might counter this toxicity. For example, Catherine Knight Steele has pointed toward the blogging of Black women as fostering caring enclaves in which to discuss the interests of Black women and push back against racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Likewise, in his discussion of Black literacy practices Louis Maraj pinpoints hashtagging as an undertheorized example of Black annotation, in which Black Twitter users care for the community by circulating hashtags whose virality subverts the essentialization of Blackness. Meanwhile, there have been instructive interventions in how the design of social media platforms can be made to serve the flourishing of communities instead of opening them up to abuse online (Arola; Costanza-Chock; Tarsa and Brown). Finally, there have been suggestions among teacher-scholars of rhetoric and writing that the field must enable students to anticipate the consequences of their writing on the digital spaces they participate in (DeLuca 2020; Dieterle et al.; Sparby). Within these different contexts within and beyond the study of digital rhetoric and writing, already there are inklings of intervention in addressing the “short-sightedness” of users, inculcating more care-full attention to how their writing contributes to the network’s flourishing.

College students are, of course, enthusiastic users of online platforms, and deeply embedded in online discourse. If students require assistance in “seeing” the technology they are immersed in, as Erika M. Sparby, Erin A. Frost, Katherina DeLuca, and Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail Hawisher claim, this dissertation offers the building blocks for habituating student-rhetors to more responsible participation in the networked exchanges they undertake in their online communities. This dissertation adds my voice to these rhetoricians and digital studies scholars who argue for care-full writing in online communities, particularly by cultivating rhetorical practices and

dispositions toward networked writing that can hold up in the shifting terrain of digital culture. As a disciplinary intervention, this project continues the abovementioned projects in rhetoric and composition to habituate students in care-full networked writing, extending the field's goal of helping college students engage and respond to writing in the world. If online communities tend to emerge from the circulation of contagious ideas and texts that appeal to common interests, emotions, values, experiences, and desires, oftentimes bypassing the judgment of users as they imitate these contagions to establish connectivity with the in-group, then what strategies are there to help students "see" their activity in building the network together through their writing? What sorts of communication practices and rhetorical dispositions might encourage writing that serves the online community's epistemic and moral growth, toward more nuanced and inclusive understandings?

Considering these questions about the short-sightedness of users' participation in online communities—specifically, how this participation forecloses its epistemic and moral growth—this dissertation considers how online communities emerge through rhetorical processes, particularly the formation of its dominant opinions and communal beliefs—*doxa*. As intimated above, if users in online communities are prone to circulating and engaging writing that appeals to common experiences, emotions, values, etc. in the network, this dissertation imagines rhetorical practices and dispositions that could be conducive to networked writing which cultivate the community's ways of deliberating about and knowing together its shared matters of interest. Specifically, I identify communication practices, digital *ethē*, and rhetorical dispositions that can produce users who write in a manner that care-fully attends to how they are contributing to the network as an evolving, co-produced writing space in which users deliberate and know together matters of interest.

To this end, this dissertation uses the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon's notion of individuation—specifically his networked vision of “ethical individuation”—as a model for imagining ethical network-building. While Simondon offers an admittedly abstract picture of how individuals' actions form a network through which ethical systems emerge and evolve, ethical individuation offers a perspective on network-building in which individuals affirm their relational character. Here individuals see themselves as a part of the trajectory through which ethical decision-making develops and, in response, negotiate the tensions between disparate values in a manner that enables possibilities for responding to the world's complexity, change and novelty.

To address the rhetorical problem of short-sightedness in users' networked exchanges, I translate Simondon's networked vision of ethical individuation to digital rhetoric, proffering a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability. Importantly, a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability entails, à la Simondon, affirming responsibility (and even caring for) the response-ability of the network: writing in ways that amplify users' ability to deliberate and know together shared matters of interest and generatively respond to future exigencies involving these matters. Moreover, such care-full attention to how one's writing is cultivating the network would entail reflexive engagement with its *doxa*. Per Simondonian individuation, this means putting in relation as much as possible the tensions between users' disparate experiences, emotions, and values, structuring these tensions into capacious, generative perspectives on shared matters of interest.

At bottom, I contend that response-ability—being responsible for how one's writing is augmenting or restricting the community's possibilities for deliberating and knowing together—is an enduring need in digital rhetoric, in terms of the field and the actual digital rhetorical practice of users. At the heart of so many unethical phenomena in network culture is an indifference to how one's writing contributes to and actively shapes the network. Differently put, a response-able

orientation toward the network as a writing space can help rhetoricians intervene in issues such as the uncertain quality of writing and deliberation in homogeneous communities (Pfister 2020), the uncritical recapitulation of norms and beliefs (Sparby), and users' tendency to overlook how the writing produced *within* the community affects those beyond it (Lang).

In the introduction to this dissertation, I lay out the theoretical formations that I will be working from in order to imagine a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability. I will define both rhetorical and Simondonian concepts on which each chapter will progressively build. Thereafter, in chapter one I review the notion of the contagion as it has been conceptualized in rhetorical theory, with a focus on its uptake in digital rhetorical scholarship. My interest in the conversation concerning rhetorical contagion regards its limitations in accounting for the emergence and becoming of *doxa*: while scholars such as Jenny Rice and Laurie Gries offer instructive uses of the contagion as a metaphor for the becoming of opinion as it circulates *between* publics or communities, it does not offer a way of thinking how opinion individuates—*doxa*'s ongoing processes of development—*within* the networked responses of communities. Since the problem I address in this dissertation is how to help realize response-able network-building, I first consider how *doxa* can take form differently *within* online communities, in contrast to the nonlinear circulation of rhetorical contagions across network ecologies that promotes consensus within online communities while short-circuiting users' judgment of *doxa*. In the chapter's second half, I turn to Gilbert Simondon's notion of transduction and James Bohman's deliberation theory to envision a response-able process of networked *doxa* production which is typified by the iterative structuration of doxastic potential. Transducing *doxa*—progressively putting into relation latent tensions in the communal values, experiences, and emotions that underpin *doxa*—can open *doxa*

toward more capacious understandings of the community's shared matters of interest or concern, as well as more generative possibilities for responding to future exigencies involving these matters.

In chapter two, I discuss the sort of digital ethos that would be conducive to the responsible, ethical network-building I am imagining. This chapter sketches out how communal ethos positions emerge through the circulation of contagious ideas and texts, eventually ossifying into the opinion or *doxa* through which users persuasively convey themselves in the community. Using theories of ethos as dwelling, I describe this dwelling to be “closed,” insofar as users establish credibility without judging the *doxa* with which they respond to rhetorical exigencies. In contrast, I put forward an alternative, not-yet commonplace digital ethos I term “networked phronesis,” where users establish credibility through a phronetic dwelling in *doxa*. That is, as phronesis concerns care-full deliberation regarding how one's speech or writing will affect others, networked phronesis entails establishing credibility by demonstrating thoughtful judgment regarding a situation and care-full deliberation regarding how one's response to it will contribute to the writing space of the network. In networks that dwell phronetically in *doxa*, users value writing that shows care in their contribution to the building of the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together, proffering more capacious and nuanced ways of understanding shared matters of interest. To help theorize networked phronesis, I look at a unique case study: I Hate Music, a web forum dedicated to discussing electroacoustic improvisation (or EAI). Due to the aesthetics of this experimental genre of music, users are forced to adopt a phronetic manner of dwelling in *doxa* to establish credibility, pondering communal listening strategies before developing alternative strategies through communication practices that transduce doxastic potential (i.e., putting into relation and structuring tensions within the community's disparate aesthetic values to arrive at more capacious and nuanced opinions about EAI).

In chapter three, I synthesize different strains of the technics turn in rhetorical theory to offer a unified vision of how teacher-scholars of digital rhetoric and writing studies can work toward intervention in the practice—that is, the conditions of practice—of networked rhetorics. Here I aim to ground the field of digital rhetoric and writing studies in what Gilbert Simondon calls a “mechanological” approach to the study of networks and their relation to rhetorical activity. For Simondon, mechanology is simultaneously a critical, pedagogical, and speculative project. Bernhard Rieder writes: “mechanology would approach technical function as human gesture, examine technical creation as mediation between human beings and nature, and interrogate the values implied in mechanical operation itself” (16). Additionally, as Simondon remarks across a number of books and essays, mechanology also involves a pedagogical-speculative project of reimagining with others manners of being-with technology that could reorient the relationship between technics and user, particularly toward practices that cultivate the conditions *for* practice. Here, I offer the example of mechanological method by analyzing Twitter’s ranking algorithm according to the capacities that it modulates (i.e., attention and affect) and, in turn, the networks this modulation short-circuits (response-able networks). Ultimately, this example offers a critique of how the values of the attention economy promote certain rhetorical dispositions over others (responsiveness over response-ability) and how mechanology could serve as a framework for reorienting networked rhetorical practice toward the cultivation of networked practices of rhetoric.

Chapter four moves from mechanology as a method of critique vis-à-vis networked rhetorical practice and its conditions, this time addressing the speculative-pedagogical project. Turning to Bernard Stiegler’s philosophy of technics, I make the case that *philia*—i.e., care-full attention to how practice materializes in technics—can serve as a rhetorical disposition toward users’ co-production of the networked writing space, thereby fostering response-able networks.

Here, I treat *philia* as digital literacy—a rhetorical disposition toward networked communication. Afterward, I proffer a sequence of activities and assignments that can help students develop this care-full disposition, specifically through engaging with ephemera from information scientist Ted Nelson’s long-delayed Project Xanadu system. My wager is that enabling students to sense the diachronicity and relationality that typically goes unperceived in networked writing spaces can nurture care-full dispositions toward their rhetorical activity within online communities. Simply, in sensing the relationality and diachronicity of networks *qua technē*, student-users can become more inclined to “see” networks as spaces that are co-produced through the recursive and ongoing (re)structuring of the online community’s opinions and beliefs (i.e., its *doxa*). Moreover, such a way of “seeing” networks can foster communication practices that contribute to the response-ability of other users, particularly by pondering and intervening in the tensions of networked *doxa*. Finally, in the conclusion I consider how the field of digital rhetoric might benefit from my framing of ethical network-building as the collective cultivation of response-ability.

Taken as a whole, this dissertation sets out to theorize a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability (modeled after Gilbert Simondon’s notion of ethical individuation), the communication practices, *ethē*, and literacies that could support such an ethic, and pedagogies that can inculcate in students a responsiveness to the networked conditions of *doxa* formation in online communities. As the dissertation progresses, it culminates in strategies that are centered around instilling in students network literacies capable of fostering response-able participation. Therefore, the scale at which I am directly addressing the short-sightedness of users’ writing in online communities takes place at the level of the individual—specifically, college students.

And while the dissertation focuses on intervening in the problem of short-sightedness in the classroom, I hope future work might inform more large-scale ways of addressing this problem.

For instance, could the notion of response-able networks serve as a portable digital rhetoric that might inform, at a societal level, how we—beyond college students of digital writing—value online community? How does the notion of response-able networks plot onto and productively enter into conversations regarding social media that are seemingly deadlocked (e.g., in light of Elon Musk’s in-process acquisition of Twitter, questions of whether free speech absolutism or content moderation are silver bullets for nurturing generative conversations on the platform)? Ultimately, large-scale interventions stemming from thinking about online communities as response-able networks which cultivate together the deliberation and dialogue happening in the writing space—particularly through the individuation of *doxa* by structuring its latent potential—can be based off this research, with future scholarship devoted to thinking avenues through which this form of online community might emerge.

Moreover, in terms of limitations this dissertation theorizes response-able networks without delving directly into the overlap between response-ability, community, and embodiment. Within digital studies the question of embodiment has been a crucial one, with Katherine Hayles (1999) writing of the importance of paying attention to the body in an age of information. Technofeminisms (Balsamo; Haas; Wajcman) and digital Black studies and rhetoric (Banks; Benjamin; Gallon; Noble; Steele) articulate in their own ways how technology use cannot be bracketed from identity and users’ own embodied experiences, especially in online communities. For these reasons, Angela Haas contends that the study of online communication requires a “negotiation—an interfacing—between bodies, identities, rhetoric, and technology,” a precedent which digital rhetoric and writing studies has already set in an impressive range of essays, books, and collections (412). Early examples include Joanne Addison’s work with Susan Hilligloss and Michelle Comstock, which explores both the homophobia lesbian users in online communities can

encounter once out and, on the other hand, the potential for online communities to serve as enclaves for exploring aspects of one's identity. Likewise, Pamela Takayoshi shows how early internet "grrl power" sites offer empowering spaces of identity formation for adolescent girls. Both examples show the world-making that can take place in online communities for marginalized and multiply marginalized identities, as well as the manner in which markers of identity materialize in online communication and become the target of abuse. In both cases, identity operates in a way that can—through no fault of the rhetor—torpedo credibility or, positively, become a marker of belonging. In sum, markers of embodiment—especially of difference—serve as grist for the rhetorical mill (a signifier of belonging) or a foregone conclusion with regard to how other users engage the user and their writing.

Realizing what I call response-able networks has one central problematic that must be addressed: users—and communities of users—come together for their own reasons, complete with their own life experiences, interests, and needs. To speculate on an alternative manner in which users might engage one another rhetorically in online communities risks universalizing one kind of community for all others, as well as overlooking myriad differences between users, their rhetorical practices, digital literacies, and motivations for communicating within networks.

It is worthwhile here, at the beginning of this dissertation, to discuss how this speculative project accounts for these concerns, as well as limitations that future research could overcome. Firstly, while there is no sense in contesting the fact that users come together for various reasons in online communities—complete with their own embodiments, interests, and motivations—it is nonetheless the case that a great number of online communities take form around a shared matter of interest or concern, dialoguing with other users in order to know together these matters. Across scholarship in digital studies and, more narrowly, digital rhetoric and writing studies, there is an

astounding variety of online communities who leverage the writing space of networks toward understanding and intervening in public issues affecting (offline) communities. That is, this dissertation's insights into networks as sites of writing, as well users' engagement with *doxa*, cuts across online communities in a manner that is not universal but nevertheless broad. Response-ability as a networked rhetorical ethic is applicable generally because our possibilities for responding to exigencies helps to define the limits of our rhetorical interactions, and the potential for engaging our ever-changing, ever-complexifying relations to the world and others. By becoming responsive to the networked conditions of writing, users become response-able participants in the cultivation of the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together, leading to prudent contributions that seek to augment users' possibilities for understanding. Whether in the context of networked activism (see conclusion) or more quotidian affinity groups, such an approach to networked rhetorical ethics can promote online communities that are better able to grasp their effect on the network, users outside the network, and the community's *doxa*. Secondly, this dissertation's insights require extension and complication by pointing toward the way in which marginalized users might leverage their identities—where one is coming from—within online communities so as to initiate reflection on the network's *doxa*, as well as its ethos. Such interruptions of the community's beliefs and its standards of credible writing in the network have the potential to disrupt and shift the rhetorical processes of online communities toward more inclusive conversations and standards of belonging—i.e., more response-able participation. Scholars such as Tamika L. Carey, Kathleen Ryan et al., Heather Lang, and Katherine DeLuca have addressed cases of how embodied rhetorics in communities (especially digital networks) serve to reorient the conduct of audiences as participants in the community space. Therefore, spring boarding from this research, we can consider embodied, digital rhetorical gestures that would be

capable of promoting communities that care-fully engage with their *doxa* and ethos. Indeed, such rhetorical maneuverings have the potential to instill within online communities capacities for attending care-fully to the network in which one is building alongside others. Therefore, future research on response-able networks should be dedicated toward how marginalized and multiply marginalized users can intervene in online communities so as to render users more mindful of how their *doxa* and conduct is enabling the network's possibilities for deliberating about and knowing together their shared matters of interest or concern.

If we wish to promote rhetorical conduct in online communities that leads to hospitable, dynamic, and even transformative rhetorical interactions, users must (whether consciously or not) orient themselves to others in a manner that is responsible for the network's epistemic and moral growth. While short-sightedness can preclude deliberation and writing that cultivates the network's understanding, response-able users affirm their role in building the network—that is, their networked participation in the emergence and evolution of the online community's *doxa*. Ultimately, this dissertation's objective is to theorize the conditions for response-able online communities and provide teacher-scholars of digital rhetoric steps toward realizing them.

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Toward a Networked Rhetorical Ethics of Response-Ability

Within digital rhetoric and writing studies, there has been a reckoning with toxic conduct in online communities, this conduct's roots in rhetorical practice, and how rhet-comp teacher-scholars might promote inclusive, dynamic networked writing spaces. With recent books such as Jessica Reyman and Erika M. Sparby's, *Digital Ethics: Rhetoric and Responsibility in Online Aggression*, James J. Brown's *Ethical Programs*, Jared Colton and Steve Holmes' *Rhetoric, Technology, and the Virtues*, and Jim Ridolfo and William Hart-Davidson's *Rhet Ops: Rhetoric and Information Warfare*, scholars have sought to understand how platforms inform unethical conduct, the ethics of circulation, redesigning interfaces toward inclusion, and how bad actors create digital texts with algorithms in mind so as to promote circulation on social media.

Online communities can become toxic in a number of ways, but one of the primary drivers of toxicity is the issue of what I term "short-sightedness": users' inability or indifference to anticipate or appreciate the networked effects of their writing on the community, its norms, and beliefs. Scholars such as Erika M. Sparby, Damien Pfister (2020), and Katherine DeLuca (2019) argue that short-sightedness derives from the twinned phenomena of users valuing writing which appeals to their experiences, emotions, and values, and imitating this writing to engage others. This manner of engaging writing in the network helps to promote communities typified by "shallow argument pools," which are composed of "a slanted, superficial conversation that favors unity of voices, agreement, like-mindedness, and homogeneity more than pluralized, multiple, or differing perspectives in an environment or space" (Richter 8). Likewise, Caddie Alford (2021)

writes that online communities can become spaces where bad opinions—opinions that are superficial, asocial, and flawed—are shielded by the consensus of users, privileging in-group identity over the cultivation of the community’s ways of knowing. Here, the prevalence of like-mindedness and shared identity can short-circuit the “processing, articulating, refining” of opinion through “interaction with difference” (n.p.). Alford again:

[T]oxic echo chambers emerge because a multitude of homogeneous thinkers continually draw on each other’s logic, looking in to reinforce opinions. The reverberating voices [...] only reference, cite, and believe in one another, echoing the same narrative in perpetuity. With the certainty of untested [opinion], they gain conviction. (n.p.)

In light of these related projects (and anxieties), echo chambers—that, at worst, lapse into aggression toward out-groups and those who offer differing opinions—rely on a shared set of references and beliefs with which to understand their shared matters of interest and establish belonging within the community. Hence, it should not be surprising that, in online communities, users uncritically recapitulate norms and beliefs, failing to consider whether their participation is expanding or restricting the community’s ability to deliberate and know together their shared matters of interest. Given the potential for online communities to become static and inhospitable, Pfister and Alford call for digital rhetoricians to consider how communities take form in social media networks, how else communities might take form, and educating students in the formation and critique of community online. Here, we can intervene in the conduct of online communities by helping students “see” their participation in their communities in a more ethical, relational and rhetorically attuned manner.

Complementing the aforementioned scholarship discussing digital ethics in the context of the short-sightedness of online communities, this dissertation speculates on the communication practices, digital ethē, and rhetorical dispositions that could promote more care-full, dynamic—in a word, response-able—online communities in which users’ writings promote the network’s epistemic and moral growth: the ability of users to understand some matter of interest, in turn augmenting their ways of responding to exigencies involving the community’s shared interests. The underlying assumption of this dissertation is that online communities emerge in a bottom-up, recursive manner through the recirculation of ideas and texts which express opinions confirming the common experiences, emotions, values of users. Eventually, as users circulate and engage these texts and ideas, the opinions they express about some shared matter of interest become the community’s *doxa*: its generally agreed upon opinions and beliefs which users find credible and persuasive. This process of *doxa* formation can lead to the static, short-sighted writing that blinkers users from the effect of their writing in augmenting or restricting its available means of persuasion. The question, then: How else could opinion take form in networked writing spaces? What sorts of outcomes would we want to see in these alternative ways in which communities might participate in the formation of their communal beliefs (*doxa*)? What orientations toward the networked writing space could motivate dynamic and careful *doxa* production?

To address these questions, it is perhaps best to start with the outcomes of rhetorical interaction we would like to see in online communities. Here, I am working with Janet Atwill’s understanding of rhetoric as productive knowledge: an art of discourse (*logon technē*) which creates possibilities for understanding—“diverse standards of value, subjectivity and knowledge” (Atwill 1998, 172)—by “reinterpreting received beliefs to make sense of changing situations” (Kinney and Miller 143). In other words, rhetoric is an art that intervenes in situations where there

is a need for change in beliefs but a lack of understanding in how to respond to the situation (Atwill 2006). Rhetoric in the paradigm of *technē* involves rhetors who can, in the face of novel situations, negotiate the values that underpin communal beliefs and, in turn, transform how the community can understand, respond to, and intervene in its shared matters of interest or concern. Understanding rhetoric as *technē*, we might ask whether networked rhetorical practices transform limitations in users' understanding brought on by the received beliefs of the online community.¹ Or, differently put, in seeing rhetoric as inventive and transformative, we might ask if the networked rhetorical practices of online communities foster epistemic and moral growth or if they short-circuit the community's negotiation of the values that underpin its opinions and beliefs.

Importantly, the practicing of rhetorics that expand the community's standards of judging and responding to shared matters of interest through the reinterpretation of received beliefs demands what James Porter calls a "rhetorical ethics." Rhetorical ethics denotes the "set of implicit understandings between writer and audience about their relationship" (1998, 68). Here, a networked rhetorical ethics enabling epistemic and moral growth would require users to affirm their relational position in the network, as connected nodes through which opinion passes as they "share, reject, dismiss, supplement, continue" opinions about shared interests (Rice 2012, 179). Importantly, this relational disposition would need to be motivated by an ongoing consideration of how one's writing in the space is working to build the network, and how one's writing is contributing to communal understanding. With this shared responsibility (or *response-ability*) toward the network and one's part in building it, users value among themselves prudent writing:

¹ According to Atwill, rhetoric "create paths in uncharted territory—to help one find one's way in the dark" (1998, 68)

thoughtful judgments of received *doxa* which reflect care-full deliberation regarding how one's writing is contributing to the network's possibilities for knowing together some matter of interest.

The relationship between users that would support the enrichment and expansion of the online community's opinions and beliefs, then, would derive from a shared sense of responsibility in how they are contributing to the conversation as it is being networked across the writing space. Participation in the network's moral and epistemic growth would require care-full attention to conditions of rhetorical practice in the network: the circulating beliefs (*doxa*) that precedes users; the values, experiences, and emotions of users that underpin *doxa*; and the rhetorical processes involved in users' co-production of the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together.

To speculate on practices conducive to a networked rhetorical ethic of *response-ability*—where care-full attentiveness to the conditions of networked rhetorical practice habituates users to intervene in *doxa*—I turn to philosopher Gilbert Simondon's notion of “ethical individuation.” Specifically, in translating Simondon's idea of ethical individuation to digital rhetorical studies, I offer a vision in which users' care-full attentiveness to the networking of *doxa*—common opinions which undergird the possibilities for deliberating and making claims about matters of interest—produces writing that intervenes in and transform the limits of the network's communal beliefs. As I will show in chapters one, two, three, and four, users' *ethē* and dispositions would incline them to communication practices that intervene in and transform *doxa* by resolving in an iterative, ongoing manner tensions in the disparate experiences, emotions, and values of the network's users.

Throughout this project, I will be establishing how opinion—or in ancient Greek, *doxa*—forms in the online communities of social media networks: the circulation of digital contagions. Moreover, I will be highlighting how the manner in which the network takes form around contagions can preclude intervention in and negotiation of the online community's *doxa*.

Fundamentally, I construe the formation of *doxa* in online communities via contagion as a rhetorical process, which tends toward an easily obtained consensus that grounds the community while short-circuiting (nonconscious) dispositions toward the judgment and disruption of *doxa*. However, when users are responsible for the networked writing space of the online community, new possibilities for rhetoric emerge. If, as James Porter (2017) writes, rhetorical ethics concerns the ends individuals hope to achieve when they aim to persuade one another, a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability senses and affirms the rhetor's active role in building a digital writing space in which to deliberate about and know together their shared matters of interest or concern.

To make good on this networked rhetorical ethic of response-ability, I claim what is required are communication practices that intervene in and expand *doxa* by iteratively incorporating more and more of *doxa*'s unresolved tensions (at the level of users' values, emotions, experiences, etc.). For ethos, what is required is a standard of credibility rooted in writing that reflects thoughtful judgment and care-full deliberation in how one is contributing to *doxa*—the networked aggregation of opinions and beliefs across the online community's writing space. Lastly, this ethic demands a (nonconscious) disposition toward networks that informs practice, specifically a habituated, care-full attentiveness to the networked emergence and becoming of *doxa* in which one always has a hand. This relational disposition toward networked writing spaces would be the bedrock for the practices and ethos peculiar to response-able networks.

At bottom, if students require assistance in “seeing” the technology they are immersed in, as Erika Sparby, Erin A. Frost, Katherina DeLuca, and Cynthia L. Selfe and Gail Hawisher claim, this project puts forward the building blocks for fostering response-able student-rhetors, who “see” their participation in the *doxa* of online communities, understanding how opinion accumulates, moves and evolves as they write together.

Now, it is paramount to offer an in-depth understanding of the concepts I will work with. In this introduction, I map the theoretical formations that this project in digital rhetoric covers: theories of rhetoric and *doxa*; *doxa* formation in networks via contagion; rhetorical ethics (specifically the notion of response-ability); and Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of individuation (with emphasis on his notion of ethical individuation). First, however, I will address method.

1.2 Methods: Speculating Response-Able Communities

This dissertation takes cues from the speculative turn in rhetorical methods to imagine ethical network-building through users' intervention in *doxa*. For instance, in *Lingua Fracta*, Collin Gifford Brooke (2009) puts forward digital rhetoric as a project involving the sorting and even inventing of strategies for composing with digital technologies. While Brooke's book does more sorting than inventing, scholars such as Adam Banks, Becca Tarsa and James Brown have each focused on specific figures (digital griot) or methods (speculative design) that could reorient the digital's relation to the rhetorical. Moreover, collections in rhetorical theory such as *Networked Humanities* and *Rhetorical Speculations* have grappled with how digital technologies change the landscape of scholarship in rhetorical theory and how the field might intervene in the possible future uses of these technologies.

Similar to these projects in digital rhetoric, this dissertation speculates on the possibilities for digital writing. Like Adam Banks, I center a model on which to base future digital rhetorical practice. While Banks cites the griot and the DJ as exemplars of ethical, community-minded multimedia writing, and Brown leans on Jacques Derrida's concept of hospitality to reimagine the rhetorics of software in relation to the problem of hospitality, I offer a model of ethical network-

building based on the ethics of French philosopher Gilbert Simondon. If the aim is for online communities whose engagement with dominant opinions and communal beliefs (*doxa*) enable the network's epistemic and moral growth, this demands a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability, with users oriented toward—and even caring for—the network as an evolving space of deliberating and knowing together. Simondonian individuation translates to individuals, in building on and layering responses to exigencies in the networked writing space, who affirm their relational character in the building of the network, pondering and resolving the “pre-individual” tensions of the community's *doxa* to arrive at more capacious opinions and beliefs. As regards methods, then, this dissertation looks across trans-historical notions of the network—the network as writing space and the network as the form that ethical individuations take—speculating on new networked rhetorical practices by thinking the former through the latter. Certainly, while speculation risks universalizing a particular vision of how things should be, there is a need for approaches that can habituate users to care for their writing as it networks with that of other users. This dissertation, in turning to Simondon's philosophy, offers starting points for cultivating careful deliberation in online communities and instructing students in such a manner of writing. Nevertheless, this dissertation offers a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability as one possible answer to the problem of “short-sightedness” (as the preface termed it): how users' engagement with ideas and texts that appeal to common experiences, emotions, and values within the network shield communal opinion (*doxa*) from judgment, thereby enabling toxicity in a number of forms (e.g., aggression, echo chambers, groupthink).

Before I move on to the theoretical formations this dissertation is drawing from, I first discuss projects in rhetorical theory that have particular resonances with my emphasis on imagining ethical communities. As I will address in the conclusion, these projects—along with the

fields to which they contribute (digital Black rhetoric, cultural rhetorics)—are instructive in extending the insights presented in this dissertation. Moreover, they provide valuable direction in considering how rhetoric supports the well-being of communities. At heart, these projects center community, ethics, and rhetoric in ways that are theoretically nuanced while offering meaningful strategies toward the cultivation of community through ethical rhetorical practices, which I hope to accomplish in my own way.

Adjacent to this dissertation is Adam Banks's *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age*, outlines the transformation of literacy in African American rhetorical practices through changes in writing technology. Specifically, what resonates with this project is Banks' description of the ideal multimedia composer as a sort of digital griot. The griot of West Africa is a figure who is part musical performer and part storyteller—a binder of time who work to synchronize the generations through their telling of history and stories. For Banks, to compose as a digital griot means demonstrating competency in a number of writing technologies, serving one's community, situating the community in relation to the past, and developing unity through the history, stories, and cultural commonplaces of the community. Digital griots, then, "create a common interpretation of the past to enable arguments about how to move forward through the ruptures and dislocations that mark the current moment and to set an agenda for future action" (100-101). Importantly, Banks's argument complements the rhetorical processes I am lobbying for in this project, insofar as Banks identifies that online communities can serve as enclaves in which to create community, bringing the past to bear on the present and deliberations regarding the community's future.

A project that productively resonates from Banks's and my own is Louis Maraj's *Black or Right: Anti/Racist Campus Rhetorics*, which conceptualizes how Black meaning-making in the

everyday can disrupt and/or subvert white institutional spaces, especially their defensiveness in response to issues centered around race and students' experiences with racism. Throughout the monograph, Maraj introduces a number of Black rhetorical practices with which Black rhetors might reclaim agency in the face of white spaces that seek to smooth over racial tensions. One practice in particular that resonates with my picture of networked rhetorical ethics is Maraj's conceptualization of hashtagging as a marginalized literacy of Black annotation. As a form of metadata that is included in a social media post, hashtags comment on the information that is being shared while linking it in an evolving archive (e.g., #IfTheyGunnedMeDown, #Ferguson). For Maraj, hashtagging not only makes and unmakes meaning through acts of Black annotation: the hashtag's virality spreads in ways that subvert hegemonic white supremacist systems that silence Black voices and thought, in turn "releasing blackness from essentialization" (45). As a Black literacy practice, Maraj identifies a sort of ethic of actualization as regards Black digitality, insofar as the Black body exists in excess of the meanings projected onto it, and as the digital object's circulation produces possibilities for the existence of Black lives. That is, if Elizabeth Grosz identifies in Simondon an "ethics of actualization," in which unstructured potentials are progressively incorporated into the individual in order to resolve problems posed to its being, Maraj's understanding of Black digitality casts the hashtag and its contagious circulation as helping to actualize the excess inherent in Blackness—that Black life escapes capture in identity (or "essentialization") (45). Maraj offers a picture of networked rhetoric that I consider generative in grasping how networked rhetorical practice can produce diverse standards of value, subjectivity, and knowledge on social media platforms. Moreover, Maraj's work here, in contrast to my own, poses an important question that must be addressed: When we discuss how networked rhetorics might produce these other values, subjectivities, and knowledges, how does the meaning of that

work change when situated in communities marked by social difference? How do those practices leverage virality not towards consensus and homogeneity but, instead, dynamic processes of community formation that disrupt and remake networked spaces?

In the sphere of feminist rhetorics, recent work on ethos speaks to this project's interest in generatively responding to and accounting for relationality in the networked production of *doxa*. The 2016 collection *Rethinking Ethos: A Feminist Ecological Approach to Rhetoric*, co-edited by Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones, presents readers with a wealth of scholarship that considers how ethos formation—of how we learn to establish credibility—is always relational, insofar as historical and social locations (including “racial, ethnic, political, class, age, religious identifications”) influence pragmatic possibilities for persuasion (10). Differently put, ethos is always negotiated between rhetor and audience, and this involves locations that precede the relation between rhetor and audience in the act of communication—locations that can affect how one can establish credibility. Moreover, contributions such as Mary Beth Pennington's, Kendall Leon and Stacey Pigg's, and Wendy S. Hesford's underscore how ethos can be established through appeals to a shared responsibility between rhetor and audience.² What this feminist approach to ethos underlines is that ethos can be established through appeals to the relationality of the community and the responsibility of audiences in perpetuating ethos, thereby establishing credibility by forcing the community to address how its *ethē* impacts possibilities for persuasion. Indeed, this emphasis on how ethos can be negotiated through appeals to the audience's

² One area that I believe future extensions of my research will require is a more sustained engagement with how different social locations affect the establishment of what I call “networked phronesis.” While chapter two makes use of feminist rhetorics and virtue ethics, engagement with digital ethos with an eye toward difference—that ethos is embodied, and that this embodiment shapes ethos positions—is a necessary step in continuing this work.

responsibility in responding to (or not) certain ethos positions informs the concept of “networked phronesis,” which is discussed at length in chapter two.

Taken together, this dissertation speculates on ethical and generative writing within the networked writing spaces of online communities, drawing from the speculative turn in rhetorical methods and, moreover, scholarship that centers rhetoric in the well-being of communities. In the following sections, I move beyond method to discuss theoretical formations that guide this project, starting with the networked formation of dominant opinion and communal beliefs (*doxa*) in online communities before moving on to the concepts of response-ability and ethical individuation.

1.3 On Networked *Doxa* Formation

In digital media studies, digital rhetoric, and digital humanities, the term online community describes the aggregation or clustering of users in a social media network—interacting with one another through writing over time about some shared matter(s) of interest. Whether on social networking platforms (e.g., Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr), blogs, or web forums (e.g., Reddit, 4Chan), online communities are networked affinity groups that follow community-specific norms for participation and engage in processes of sharing and acquiring communal knowledge. Moreover, the formation of community can also be impacted by algorithmic infrastructure, such as ranking algorithms that publicize hashtags as “trending,” thereby directing new users to a topic and community which they might find engagement and belonging. Taken together, online communities emerge through the sustained interaction of clusters of users who deliberate about shared matters of interest while abiding by norms for participation and knowledge-sharing processes (which can be shaped by platform infrastructure and network effects).

In the field of digital rhetoric, a number of rhetoricians have set out to describe networks. Jeff Rice writes that networks are writing spaces with their own unique logics and properties, characterizing networked writing as a participatory process of bringing together and layering information in a single digital space that invites engagement and response from other users. Within online communities, the communication that typifies the community is “a rhetoric of networked exchanges” in which users share, respond to, continue, critique, reject, or approve texts or ideas brought to the community (Rice 2009, 294). Jodie Nicotra understands networked writing similarly: “[W]riters are not individuals (or even groups) who produce texts, but participants within spaces who are recursively, continually, restructuring those spaces” (263). As users add information and ideas to the network, then, they create in a recursive, bottom-up manner a shared writing space in which to deliberate and know together some matter of interest.

But this discussion of online communities and the rhetorical processes underlying their formation requires careful unpacking. If online communities are essentially affinity groups that discuss some shared matter of interest in a social media network, what drives their formation? Whether it is a digital public dedicated to discussing and deliberating about a public issue archived under a trending hashtag (e.g., #YesAllWomen, #BlackLivesMatter) or, say, a community which discusses experimental music (Rate Your Music and I Hate Music in chapter two), online communities are sites where opinion and beliefs—or *doxa*—take form and influence how users understand, value, deliberate and respond to their matters of interest. As social knowledge—i.e., opinion or beliefs about human affairs demanding social action or response—*doxa* is that which communities think *with* rather than *about*, and community takes shape through the formation of communal opinion and beliefs: *doxa* as shared ways of understanding shared matters of interest and responding to exigencies involving these interests.

In ancient Greek rhetoric and philosophy, *doxa* is commonly contrasted with *episteme*, with the latter denoting scientific knowledge (which, in the context of ancient Greek philosophy, means knowledge arrived at *a priori*) and the former denoting opinion and beliefs about human affairs that are open to deliberation (especially ethical and political matters). As Caddie Alford articulates, *doxa* plays a foundational role in Aristotelian rhetoric, in which rhetors deliberate starting from *doxa* to arrive at persuasive arguments regarding what should be done regarding a public issue (deliberative) or what actions are deserving of recognition (epideictic). Alford goes on to identify how *doxa* took form in the rhetorical interactions of the Greek *polis*. That is, “mere” opinions become *doxa* because they have borne out in past rhetorical situations: *doxa* are validated by experience—beliefs that have supported expedient acts and virtuous public life. Opinion, then, becomes communal belief (*doxa*) by successfully responding to similar situations. Furthermore, for Alford this shows that opinion is not fixed: a community’s *doxa* can change as individuals offer new opinions that are then, over time, negotiated and revised in new situations.

In this dissertation I make the case that the primary means by which online community emerge and users establish belonging is through “contagious” or “viral” processes of circulation that “train” users in persuasive opinions (*doxa*). Ultimately, such processes can culminate in an easily obtained consensus that creates blockages in *doxa*—of the community’s capacity to understand, value, deliberate, and respond to shared matters of interest. Indeed, across this dissertation’s three chapters, I examine how the viral logics that underpin networked circulation—along with the computational technicities that program in viral logics—help to inculcate users in opinion and beliefs (i.e., *doxa*) which others in the writing space will find persuasive and credible. If contagious or viral logics of opinion’s circulation—and the community building they promote—can short-circuit rhetoric’s intervention in communal beliefs to invent “diverse standards of value,

subjectivity and knowledge,” then what networked processes of *doxa* formation could be conducive to the epistemic and moral growth rhetoric can actualize (Kinney and Miller 143–44)? While the network-building of the contagion, I argue, can create somnambulistic networks in which consensus shields *doxa* from judgment, users who are inclined toward attending to their role in the building of the network (and, therefore, their participation in *doxa*) ponder *doxa* and offer judgments that contribute to capacious and nuanced ways of deliberating and knowing together. This array of communicative practices, *ethē*, and rhetorical dispositions factor into the networked rhetorical practice of what I call response-able networks, where *doxa* takes form through an ongoing process of resolving the latent, “pre-individual” tensions present in the experiences, emotions, and values underlying past actualizations of *doxa*.

While this overarching intervention will be elaborated on in depth throughout, we must first grasp the concept of contagion and virality more broadly before briefly accounting for the concept’s prevalence in rhetorical theory, especially in circulation studies and digital rhetoric.

Offering an overview of contagion as a metaphor for how inventions, emotions, and information spread, Peta Mitchell’s *Contagious Metaphor* traces the concept’s history across fields such as sociology (Gabriel Tarde), psychoanalysis (Sigmund Freud), philosophy (Friedrich Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze, Jacques Derrida), literature (William Burroughs) and media studies (Tony Sampson, Alexander Galloway, Eugene Thacker, Jussi Parikka). While taking pains to map the terrain the concept covers in its specificity, Mitchell identifies that contagion generally denotes processes of imitation through which something spreads, particularly in a “viral” manner, radiating out from person-to-person. Across these fields, imitation-centered processes explain the formation of communities and communal practices, the uptake of social inventions, the evolution of languages, and the emergence of networks. The contagion, then, has a history concerning how

individuals enter into communities, how they maintain belonging, and how social inventions emerge and spread over time through imitation.

Within media studies, Tony Sampson's work on network culture utilizes the social theory of Gabriel Tarde, which shows how societies emerge through nonconscious waves of suggestion. In Sampson's hands, Tarde provides insights into the ontology of "contagious relationality"—the "what" (inventions and beliefs) that "flows" throughout society—the "diagrams" that describe this "flow," and the pre-symbolic nature of contagious relationality that we all depend on to live together: that is, that we are all exposed to nonconscious, contagious influences.

What is highlighted again and again in Sampson's work on digital contagion is the immersion of the individual in the collective, such that they lose control over their actions or reflexivity with regard to their conduct in the emerging group. Just as one might sidestep judgment of their behavior and "lose themselves" when in a crowd, we often imitate actions, emotions, information, or ideas in ways that are nonconscious. In the context of network culture, the emergence of networks—distributed through the imitation of actions and recirculation of beliefs—can sideline the individual's conscious agency: their conscience. As Sampson writes, the conceptual persona of the networked subject that serves as a vector for the circulation of opinion and affect is "somnambulistic": they respond to and circulate information in ways that sidestep reflection, appealing to users' shared "fascinations, passionate interests, beliefs" (25). However, to Sampson's mind—and here I agree—this doesn't mean that we need to "wake up" users so they might become metacognitive when using digital technologies such as social media. Because we cannot help but to encounter the world through nonconscious habits and dispositions, we should not think of this somnambulism as inherently dangerous or deficient; instead, what is needed are other nonconscious dispositions toward how one participates in the writing space of the network.

With this picture of the contagion as a concept for describing nonconscious, imitative processes of community formation, I briefly take stock of the contagion in rhetorical theory and the field's lack of intervention in the rhetorical processes through which contagious ideas and texts—and the opinions they express—circulate and inculcate users in the *doxa* of the online community.

In the field of rhetorical theory, a number of scholars have taken up the theme of contagion to understand rhetorical practice in networked culture. For example, Laurie Gries, Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang, Byron Hawk articulate that affect's accumulation in rhetorical ecologies aids in the circulation of texts. Affect here is a condition for the spreading of opinion, information, and digital rhetorical genres. That is, contagions demand shared structures of feeling for circulation. Additionally, Jenny Rice in her pathbreaking work on rhetorical ecologies sees structures of feeling as but one element of the social field that influences how texts will circulate over time: "To say that we are connected is another way of saying that we are never outside the networked interconnection of forces, energies, rhetorics, moods, and experiences" (10). For Rice, the social's discourses, emotions, experiences, values, and energies serve as the engine driving circulation and the reticulated formation of publics.

Echoing Jenny Rice, in his work on social media Jeff Rice identifies contagions as ideas and texts through which online communities emerge, principally because the beliefs they express appeal to the experiences, emotions, values, etc. which are common to the network of users. Furthermore, as users recirculate these contagious idea and texts in the writing space of the network, what Jeff Rice calls "interest and response networks" begin to take shape (2016, 45). Differently put, online communities emerge through the circulation of ideas and texts—narratives, symbols, terminologies—that appeal to common experiences, emotions and values, thereby

sparkling engagement and training users in ways of knowing together their interests. Here, the formation of communal beliefs—*doxa*—recalls the Aristotelian process outlined by Alford, in which opinion becomes communal beliefs regarding some interest by virtue of its ability to make sense of and respond to similar situations over time. Of course, however, things change in the context of networked relationality: while Alford points toward the process of trying out opinion in public as allowing *doxa* to continually evolve from deliberation and dialogue, contagions that spread in digital networks obtain their rhetorical power—their potential for circulation—by appealing to the common experiences, emotions and values of a network’s users. As contagions spread, an easily obtained consensus is actualized, with these narratives, symbols, and terms—and the opinions and beliefs they express—becoming the materials with which to convey oneself persuasively to likeminded others (i.e., *doxa*).

1.4 Networking Response-Ability

If ethics is part and parcel of practice with a craft or technology (Porter 2020), we might ask what the ethical practices are of the *technē* of rhetoric. In considering rhetoric as a *technē*, we might consider how any technology (per Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler) is a *pharmakon*: simultaneously poison and cure, beneficial or harmful depending on its use. That is, rhetoric can foster possibilities for epistemic and moral growth, but rhetoric can also become disassociated with such a process. Instead, rhetoric can become centered around confirming received beliefs or eristic exercises in argument, closing it off from intervening in the limits of communal opinion and belief. As this dissertation supposes, rhetoric *qua technē* confers its benefits when used *response-ably*.

In the context of this dissertation, the concept of response-ability is a synthesis of different senses in which the term is used across rhetorical theory, posthuman philosophy, and feminist science and technology studies. Principally, when I discuss response-ability and response-able online communities, I am referring to users who affirm their participation in the networking of *doxa* and, in turn, affirm their role in shaping the ability of the community's users to understand their shared matters of interest and deliberate about exigencies involving these matters of interest. Hence, in this section I will focus on the various senses of response-ability as it has been defined in rhetorical theory, applied in digital rhetoric, and discussed in feminist science and technology studies and posthuman philosophies. At bottom, these definitions converge on the idea of the rhetor who affirms their active role in building the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together some matter of interest.

In recent years, response-ability has become a touchstone concept in rhetorical theory. Beginning with her 2010 book *Inessential Solidarity*, Diane Davis suggests through Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Jean-Luc Nancy that relationality—our relations to others—is a pre-symbolic affectability that precedes autonomy, identity, intellection, and intentionality (113). Davis articulates for scholars of rhetoric and composition that speech and writing are not simply the means of communication but “communication itself,” insofar as any act of communication embodies an ethic of response vis-à-vis the others we are always-already in relation with. Here, Davis's notion of response-ability resonates with Christian Lundberg and Joshua Gunn's: “response-ability marks the idea that every action, discursive or otherwise, is only born of an engagement with the set of conditions that produced it. This is the logical implication of the idea that every act of speaking is an act of response” (96). Taken together, Davis, Gunn, and Lundberg

underscore how communication possesses an ethical stance toward the other(s) we are in relation with: the other(s) to whom we are responding, and the other(s) who will respond to us.

Davis's conception of a relational response-ability productively speaks to recent analyses of digital rhetoric. For instance, Mari Lee Mifsud's "On Network" traces the various meanings of "network" in ancient Greek mythology, homing in on a constellation of tropes that convey being caught in our relations and utilizing ambiguity to transform these relations and escape entrapment. In *Ethical Programs: Hospitality and the Rhetorics of Software*, James J. Brown uses a Derridean ethic of hospitality to understand how computer programs structure the ethics of networked environments. Brown considers the pre-symbolic relationality that we are always-already faced with in how programs automate the way connection between users will take place. Software, in other words, programs in certain manners of bringing into relation users and enabling a range of action that can take place amongst users who are connected in the network. Finally, Kaitlin Clinnin and Katie Manthey, Jessica Reyman and Erika M. Sparby have analyzed how the relations and actions between users that programs facilitate impact segments of the userbase unevenly, especially women and people of color.

Additionally, scholars of posthumanism have pursued response-ability as an ethical, relational capacity to be developed in an age of environmental and multi-species catastrophe (Haraway; Wolfe). Here, response-ability denotes developing possibilities for response to the more-than-human world and our "ever-changing, ever-complexifying relations" across ontological registers (Grosz 2006). In other words, such theorists approach ethics as a process of cultivating one's ability to sense the multiplicity of relations that precede and exceed the human and, subsequently, to develop more care-full ways of responding to the more-than-human world.

In the field of rhetorical theory, the idea of response-ability as the development of the capacity to respond to rhetorical exigencies can be traced across a constellation of rhetoricians. For example, Debra Hawhee, John Muckelbauer, and Casey Boyle (2018) all consider response-ability as variability in how rhetors can respond to rhetorical situations. Framing their conceptualization around ancient rhetorical pedagogies (e.g., *paideia*, *dissoi logoi*, *copia*), response-ability is honed through practices that habituate students to a multitude of responses. Historically, practices integral to rhetorical pedagogy such as *dissoi logoi* have helped student-rhetors develop variability and sensitivity to the conditions that make up rhetorical situations. Therefore, successful—and ethical—rhetorical practice and pedagogy centered around an ability to prudently consider the conditions for one’s response and tailor one’s response accordingly: responding in ways that can productively triangulate the community’s beliefs, needs, and desires in the face of urgent problems that require resolution of some kind.

Synthesizing these different senses of response-ability for networked writing spaces—i.e., our orientation toward the relations that precede rhetorical acts, our ability to respond to the world in an increasingly capacious manner—I present a networked ethics of response-ability. Here, rhetors affirm their relationality to the network and—in sensing together how their writing participates in the networking of *doxa* across responses and contributes to users’ understanding—take up an active role in cultivating the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together. Specifically, users would affirm that their writing participates in *doxa* in a rhetorical manner—iterating, building on, accepting, and/or rejecting *doxa*—and shapes possibilities for deliberation. By being responsive to the conditions and processes through which *doxa* emerges in networks, users can perceive their responsibility for the network’s response-ability.

To think more concretely imagine the networked processes of *doxa* formation within response-able communities, I now turn to Gilbert Simondon's philosophy, specifically his thinking regarding the individuation of ethical systems. As aforesaid, Simondon paints a picture where users, in recognizing and affirming their relationality as co-producers of the network's rhetorical space, cultivate more capacious understandings through their engagement with our "ongoing and ever-changing, ever-complexifying [...] problem-generating world" (Grosz 2006). Here, I now turn to sketching Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of individuation before turning to his conception of ethical individuation as a model for how *doxa* could take form in networks, specifically toward the activation of greater capacities for response within the network by resolving "pre-individual" tensions present in the experiences, emotions, values underlying the *doxa* of users in the community.

1.5 Gilbert Simondon and the Philosophy of Individuation

How does the individual come into being? What determines the "final" product that is the individual—a person, a brick, a crystal, a flower? In the history of philosophy, it has been commonly accepted that the cause of the individual involves some preexistent form giving shape. Whether it was form shaping passive matter (Aristotle) or the transcendental Idea that is instantiated in actual beings (Plato), the individual has either an essential unity to it or is a union of form and matter. In either case, we always begin and end with an entity that is static, unified. For these approaches, "the individual *qua* constituted individual is the interesting reality, i.e., the reality to be explained" (Simondon 2020, 1).

But for Gilbert Simondon, these ancient philosophies of individuation neglected the forces at play in the real genesis of the individual. That is, the constituted individual is not the starting point, but the problematics and relations through which the individual will come into being. This idea—that individuation starts with problems and relations from which individuals emerge—is central to the entire philosophical system of Simondon. One could perhaps say that his oeuvre is dedicated to exploring how individuation occurs across different modes of existence: e.g., the material, vital, psychosocial, and technical registers of being (with all the overlap that entails).

In each register of being, the individuation process involves the ongoing resolution of tensions emerging from an incompatible relation between the individual and its external milieu. This incompatibility serves as a problem that catalyzes the individuation process. Here, the individual is actually an emergent, processual being that resolves problems of incompatibility by creating structures capable of transforming conflicting tensions into expanded possibilities for existence in the milieu.

The logic of individuation can perhaps be best grasped by following one of Simondon's primary examples of the individuation of material beings: that is, the crystallization process. Using recent innovations in thermodynamic systems, Simondon posits that the material individual comes about through a relational process between a low-energy material form and a supersaturated solution whose energetic potentials it discharges and structures around itself in order to grow. Through the paradigm of the crystal, Simondon shows how individuals are relational—"more than a unity" insofar as their being is a (provisional) solution to a problem posed to it from outside.

More precisely, in Gilbert Simondon's example material beings emerge through a process of becoming that involves the resolution of tensions that exist between a singularity (a nascent, low-energy material structure) and its milieu (which contains its own latent energetic potentials).

Singularity and milieu begin to interact when the former introduces a low level of energy that breaks the latter's (metastable) equilibrium, initiating a "different energetic process" (Voss 97). This different process is the entropic discharge of energy: the destabilization of the milieu's metastable equilibrium discharges its potential energy, which is then structured by the singularity. As discharged energy is incorporated, the singularity will develop into a complex structure. Here, the crystal-seed's materiality introduces energy that breaks the milieu's metastable equilibrium (the supersaturated solution), discharging energy that is then progressively structured into the crystal seed, creating an individual (the crystal) as a result of resolving the disequilibrium between seed and solution.

While Simondon's picture of individuation introduces a number of new concepts with which to think the individual's emergence and becoming—its individuation—it is metastability that articulates the conditions that underlie the individuation process. In contrast to stability in thermodynamics, where a system is at equilibrium when it has completely depleted its potential, metastability denotes a stable state in which the individual's stability is "held together by tensions and contradictions that are always rife with potential for reconfiguration" (Boyle 2015, 21). For Simondon, beings are able to undergo becomings when put in relation with an incompatible milieu, triggering a structuring of tensions that culminates in a sort of provisional equilibrium or stability.³

As Aud Sissel Hoel writes,

³ As Elizabeth Grosz writes: "Every individual is more than itself. This means that every individual is open to becoming more, to further orders or dimensions of self-complication" (Grosz 186).

[M]etastable equilibrium is conflictual - but the “conflict” in question is a productive one: it is the incompatibilities and tensions in the pre-individual state that make individuation possible, by inducing modifications in the system parameters that break the equilibrium and allow the system to dephase (that is, to change its state) [...] The individual is born out of tensions and sustained by tensions—it even evolves thanks to these tensions. (260)

To review Simondon’s conceptual schema, individuation is the process of the individual’s emergence and becoming which takes place through the resolution of tensions that exist in the individual’s relation to its external milieu. Such resolutions take place through the invention of functional structures that incorporate these incompatible tensions into the being of the individual. In crystallization, the problem encountered is the lack of equilibrium between the supersaturated solution and the crystal seed, with the latter introducing a level of energy capable of breaking the former’s equilibrium, in turn incorporating the unstable solution’s energetic potentials to structure itself ion-by-ion and arrive at a state of temporary equilibrium that results in the individual crystal.

However, the material domain of being is but one mode of existence that individuates. For Simondon, vital, psychic, and collective individuation all resolve different types of problems posed to living, thinking-feeling, and social beings. For living beings, individuation is a process of managing the problem of their relationship to the environment through its affective inner world (registering pain or pleasure), the development of habits, and the invention of actions and goals in relation to the milieu. For psychical beings, individuation is a process of representing to oneself their actions in relation to the milieu and their interior states (their affective interior world). Psychic individuation responds to the problem of coordinating action, perception and emotion vis-à-vis the novel experiences that the external milieu presents to them. When there is a tension between the

milieu and the psychic individual's actions, emotions, and perceptions, the latter begins to sense itself as a problem: that it must make itself compatible to the milieu through means that it alone does not possess. This requires recourse to the collective.

To overcome the feeling of incompatibility that arises from the breaking down of perception, action, and emotion—and to reestablish the subject's coupling with their milieu—what is required is recourse to social inventions that will supply the tools, concepts, norms and beliefs to give sense to and intervene in the problems that are posed by the individual's milieu. Importantly, this movement toward the collective that helps to orient the individual indexes “collective individuation,” where individuals' potential for action and invention become actualized through the overlapping of individuals' shared capacities to affect and be affected. Collective individuation, then, denotes the common capacities of affection that become actualized, amplified, and transformed through the inventions of human collectives. Simply put, the possibility of inventions such as tools, concepts, norms, and beliefs emerge from individuals' common capacities while also exceeding them, opening up an “affective community” composed of human becoming as the species invents itself vis-à-vis a problem-generating reality.⁴ Collective individuation thereby culminates in what Simondon terms “groupal existence,” as individuals are integrated into the collective by inheriting its norms, adopting its inventions, and synergizing its actions toward common goals. Here, collective individuation extends individual capacities—initiating a becoming that takes place through their relation to others—and culminates in a history that passes

⁴ As Daniela Voss writes, “For instance, ‘science is technical perception, which extends vital perception’ (265). In general, the human being is able to extend and amplify biological functions through technology, such as tools and machines. Affectivity and emotions can be integrated in religion” (2018, 108).

down means for establishing compatibility with the world. Simondon calls this group with which the individual identifies and participates in its “in-group.”

Significant component parts of the in-group include the invention of systems of ethics, with which collectives establish norms for responding to moral problems which the group faces. As in-groups invent ethical systems with which individuals intervene in urgent moral problems, individuals undergo ethical individuation by adopting and participating in the in-group’s ethics. Moreover, the ethical system of the in-group—i.e., the norms and values that inform one’s response to problematic situations—is open to transformation because its norms are metastable. Specifically, the in-group’s ethics “mutate under the pressure of becoming,” as novel moral problems force the group to structure the tensions underlying their disparate values (Combes 64). How the group responds to problems—its norms that reflect “fitting responses”⁵ to problems—becomes an ethical matter, and the engine driving the individuation of the in-group’s ethical system. As I will show, Simondon’s offers an instructive picture of how moral problem-solving takes form in networks, resulting in ethical and inventive dimensions for network-building, which we can apply to digital rhetoric and writing studies and the *doxa* formation of online communities. And as I will conclude in the next section, Simondon’s ethical individuation suggests conceptualizations of response-able network-building, cultivating inclusive, capacious, and nuanced ways of deliberating about and knowing together some shared matter of interest.

⁵ Here I am alluding of course to Lloyd Bitzer’s conceptualization of the rhetorical situation, in which one addresses exigencies through “fitting responses”: responses that are, vis-à-vis a particular audience, considered appropriate.

1.6 Ethical Individuation and/as Network Building

Through the invention of a norms with which the in-group devises “right” or “fitting” ways of acting on exigencies, individuals can intervene in moral problems that trouble the group. However, Simondon will claim that there is an ethics to the individuation—emergence and becoming—of the in-group’s ethical system. That is, an ethical subject responds to the problem in a manner that affirms the relational character of their actions in individuating the ethical system. Simondon describes an unethical process as one where the group’s moral absolutism cuts off communication between the problem’s indeterminacy, communal values, and action’s relationality. Here, I will review what typifies the individuation of the collective’s norms for moral action before discussing the ethical stakes of “closed” in-groups. Throughout, I will be emphasizing Simondon’s description of the process of ethical individuation as inherently networked.

In the conclusion to his 1958 doctoral thesis, Simondon raises the subject of whether an ethics can be formulated through his conception of individuation. Affirming this possibility, Simondon briefly sketches an ethics based on individuation. Simply, for Simondon an ethics based on the idea of individuation is the individuation of ethics. In contrast to ethical systems that prescribe norms for ethical decision-making and action based on knowledge of the Good, Simondon proffers an ethical system that “accompan[ies] ontogenesis” and possesses knowledge of the metastability of norms (Simondon 2020, 377). Such a system grasps the in-group’s norms of ethical action “under the pressure of becoming,” as subjects affirm themselves as trajectories through which the unstructured potential of norms are actualized in response to novel problems (Combes 64).

To develop an ethics Simondon does not deduce *a priori* moral values that then decide unshakeable norms for ethical action; instead of ironclad norms which apply unproblematically across situations, ethical decision-making should reflect on the problem in all its novelty and indeterminacy, affirming one's decision as informed by and informing the group's norms. Translated to Simondon's unique understanding of ethical individuation, novel moral problems can be seen as introducing incompatibilities into the norms of the in-group. Differently put, moral problems create incompatibilities because, in their novelty and indeterminacy, they are incompatible with the group's norms—how individuals typically act to resolve a moral problem. However, these incompatibilities can be resolved by negotiating the values of the in-group, inventing more nuanced, capacious norms by putting into communication their disparate values. As Simondon writes, the individual's intervention in the in-group's values invents norms for resolving problems that others can, in the face of future exigencies, take up and develop further:

The relation between acts does not pass through the abstract level of norms, but it goes from one act to other acts just as one goes from yellow-green to green and yellow by increasing the bandwidth of frequencies. The moral act is one that can spread out, phase-shift into lateral acts and link up with other acts by spreading out from its active center the value of an act is its breadth, its capacity of transductive expansiveness. (378)

This is not to suggest that, for Simondon, there is a process that culminates in a perfect ethical system. This is because our problem-generating reality never stops presenting us with problems to resolve, which throw our norms for intervention and their principles into disarray. The process of progressively incorporating and working with the underlying potential of value systems

is meant to be creative; it amplifies the capacity for individuals to respond to and act on problematic situations, or as Elizabeth Grosz writes: “to address the human’s (individual and collective) ongoing and ever-changing, ever-complexifying relations to the problem-generating world it occupies” (Grosz 2017, 206). This is the ultimate outcome of ethical individuation: to achieve greater capacities for productively engaging problems that the in-group will encounter. These capacities for response are amplified through individuals’ ongoing structuring of the in-group’s disparate values, thereby taking up their norms “toward an ever more open structure”—toward more comprehensive and nuanced ways of responding to problematic situations that demand resolution (Landes 167).

Realizing this, however, depends on the participation of individuals in the ethical individuation of the collective, which is to say that there is a subject whose actions are attuned to the metastability of norms: that norms are incomplete, evolving, and rife with tensions that, when structured, open up possibilities for action. Simply put, it requires subjects who possess “knowledge of the metastability of norms”—that their norms (endlessly) require adjustment—and affirm their actions’ amplificative power: that their actions contribute to the becoming of the in-group’s system of norms. Simondon’s subject, then, is motivated by the knowledge of the individuation of ethical systems—the emergence of norms for acting on and resolving problematic situations—and their participation in the becoming of norms through their actions. Orienting oneself to the individuation of ethical systems is a process that Simondon describes as “spiritual,” insofar as the individual perceives their connectedness to the world and others throughout time, which is to say, the relationality that they emerge from and to which their actions contribute (Simondon 2020, 277-282). Continuing the idea of action’s connectedness, Muriel Combes describes the individuation of the in-group’s norms in the form of a network:

In such an ethics, the subject lives on by affirming its relative character, or more precisely, its relational character, by inscribing its acts into the network of other acts as much as it can. To act ethically [...] means in effect to be affirmed as a "singular point in an open infinity of relations" [...] that is, to construct a field of resonance for other acts or to prolong one's acts in a field of resonance constructed by others; it is to proceed on an enterprise of collective transformation, on the production of novelty in common, where each is transformed by carrying potential for transformation for others. (65)

Here, Combes eloquently describes how Simondon's ethics entails amplification of what we have termed "response-ability": a shared acknowledgment of our relations to each other and the world that motivates—and culminates in—acts that have the potential to cultivate our capacities for response.

While much has been said about the networked and responsible (response-able) character of ethical individuation in Gilbert Simondon's thesis, the actual process of deliberation that structures disparate values toward more open possibilities for action has yet to be elucidated. Here, I sketch out this negotiation—and the manner in which others prolong this individuation—in detail before discussing what Simondon deems nonmoral (and even immoral) examples of network-building.

For Simondon's ethical subject, who affirms themselves as participating in and shaping the norms of the group, this knowledge of the metastability of norms—their potential for development, their incompleteness—informs how individuals respond to novel moral problems whose novelty and indeterminacy calls into question the applicability of norms (i.e., the "fitting response").

Sensing this incompatibility between the novel moral problem and their norms, individuals must somehow arrive at another action with which to respond to the problem. For Simondon, incompatibilities between the particulars of the problem and the group's norms compel individuals to discover and act according to principles that structure latent tensions among disparate values toward ever more capacious and generative possibilities for action. Values, then, are the system's metastable potentials for intervening in and inventing norms:

Norms are the lines of internal coherence of each of these [systems], and values are the lines according to which the structures of a system translate themselves into the structures of the system that replaces the former system; values are that through which the norms of a system can become the norms of another system through a change of structures; values establish and make possible the [individuation] of norms as a meaning of the axiomatic of becoming conserved from one metastable state to the next. (375)

With knowledge of the metastability of norms—their incompleteness and ongoing evolution—ethical subjects seek to establish compatibility with the problem-generating world through acts that are capable of structuring the latent tensions between the group's disparate values. However, this doesn't mean indiscriminately adopting entirely new values to invent norms; instead, individuals intervene in the in-group's system of norms by accounting for the limitations of previous norms and resolving these limits by putting into communication as much as possible the in-group's disparate values. Here, individuals seek out solutions to the moral problem through the discovery of values that can resolve the tensions between disparate value systems, expanding perspectives on, and enriching the group's possibilities for, intervening in problems. Therefore, it

is the in-group's responsibility for cultivating the metastability of the system of norms that results in the ongoing structuring of the tensions between the in-group's disparate values: "[W]hat was tension becomes functioning structure. Instability is transformed into an organized metastability that is perpetuated and stabilized in its capacity to change" (Simondon 2020, 291).

An explanation concretizing this process of acting on and resolving problems is in order. By acting in ways that puts their disparate values in communication as much as possible, individuals do not seek principles which negate differences between values by way of synthesis; instead, individuals, who affirm responsibility for their participation in the becoming of norms, explore how disparate value systems can resonate toward the greatest degree of metastability, which is to say, toward the greatest degree of potential for acting and resolving moral problems. Differently put, it is a matter of discovering ways in which the disparate values of the in-group, once unrelated and divergent, can come to communicate with one another so as to generate new, expanded perspective on the problem and possibilities for resolving it. Inventing new directions for action accomplishes what Simondon identifies as the *telos* of all systems of individuation: rendering incompatibilities between disparate values compatible in the discovery of principles that offer new possibilities for problem-solving.

By integrating or resolving pre-individual difference, individuation creates a relational system that "holds together" what prior to its occurrence was incompatible. For Simondon, the wealth and eventual propagation of an individuated system is measured by its capacity to compose as many differences as possible, to maintain the greatest degree of metastability compatible with its own perpetuation. (Toscano 139)

Simply, to be ethical according to Gilbert Simondon's philosophy entails discovering novel and encompassing principles with which the in-group can engage the problem-generating world. This prudent—or care-full—orientation derives from knowledge of the metastability of norms—that the system of norms is open to the world and evolves through the trajectory of our actions. What guides the actions of individuals in this metastable network-building is acknowledgment and responsibility for the in-group's response-ability, as it is the latter which sustains the collective. With this affirmation of one's responsibility for the diachronic, interconnected nature of response, ethics is grounded in the normativity of individuation, as individuation is also grounded in ethics. This means putting as much of the in-group's disparate values—the “pre-individual of norms”—in contact with one another as much as possible in order to discover principles that can integrate the tensions between these different value systems (Simondon 2020, 396). In this sense, then, the resultant actions that follow from these new principles—serving as norms for future responses—are “more satisfactory solutions than those [one] possesses” (Simondon 2017, 71). Such a process actualizes Simondon's philosophy at an ethical level, in which he asks his reader to “consider that life in its entirety seems like a progressive construction of increasingly elaborate forms, i.e., forms capable of containing increasingly elevated problems” (Simondon 2020, 237).

Finally, then, the resonance of acts within the ethical system creates the aforementioned networked structure. Importantly, while we can describe actions as ethical in terms of whether they maintain and cultivate the openness and becoming of the system of norms—its metastability—such cultivation is a collective endeavor, which is to say that Simondon sees ethical individuation as taking shape in networks of action. Simply, in a metastable system of norms that is networked across many individuals and their actions, ethical network-building entails that individuals will inform others with their actions—i.e., new possibilities of responding to situations—while others

will integrate the leftover tensions between values that emerge from the norm's incompatibility with future problems. As David Scott summarizes this point, the matter for Simondon is that "The 'moral' status assigned to norms only ever reflects the ontological status of the system overall" (187).

In contrast, an unethical subject is one whose actions are guided by absolute morals and/or respond to moral problems without considering how they are contributing to the network. That is, unethical subjects guided by absolute morals act in ways that are "excised from other acts, [are] not penetrated by them, and cannot penetrate them but only dominate them" (379). Generally, any act is nonmoral or immoral if its response to a moral problem fails to "index the totality and possibility of other acts, provid[ing] itself with an aseity despite the genetic character of its emergence" (379). In short, unethical actions lose any orientation—any response-ability—to the relations (to other individuals, to their ethical system, to the world) in which they are embedded: "Ethics is that through which the subject remains subject, refusing to become an absolute individual, a closed domain of reality, or a detached singularity [...] Ethics expresses the meaning of perpetuated individuation, the stability of becoming" (380). Differently put, to be ethical is to participate in the formation of a network of acts, as well as amplifying and actively cultivating the potential for response to moral problems, particularly through the incorporation of tensions between disparate values into principles that allow for more capacious, nuanced principles capable of resolving the incompatibility between the in-group's norms and the novel moral problem.

1.7 Conclusion

The implications of Simondon's network-centric vision of ethical individuation helps us to imagine other processes by which *doxa* might take form in networked writing spaces. Specifically, this would be a process of *doxa* formation in which users negotiate *doxa*'s latent "pre-individual potential" in order to progressively incorporate their *doxa*'s unresolved tensions: structuring via rhetorical means the unresolved tensions of the community's values, experiences, emotions, etc., which together underpin the community's *doxa*. Through Simondon's conceptualization of ethical individuation, we see what it means to be responsible for the response-ability of others: to respond to exigencies in a manner that offers more capacious, inclusive understandings, therefore augmenting others' capacity to respond in an inventive way. More, it highlights the sort of disposition that underlies this responsibility for others' response-ability: that one perceives themselves as participating in the emergence and becoming of the network's capacity to understand, intervene in (and yes, write about) their matters of interest. Such a process of network-building can serve as an instructive picture of how users might relationally participate in the *doxa* of their online communities, overcoming short-sightedness while culminating in epistemic and moral growth. In the next chapter, I outline in detail communication practices that can work to progressively incorporate the unresolved tensions in the experience, emotions, and values that underlie the online community's *doxa*. In continuing the Simondonian tenor that this introduction is ending on, chapter one emphasizes Simondon's idea of transduction, incorporating and resolving *doxa*'s underlying tensions such that more capacious, inclusive, and nuanced opinions and beliefs emerge.

2.0 Chapter One. Transducing *Doxa*

2.1 Virality and Rhetorical Becoming

Whether termed “echo chambers” or the more uptown variant of “shallow argument pools,” it is accepted as a truism that online communities that form in social media networks tend toward the homogeneous and (in terms of argument pools) the shallow. Within media studies, the tendency of online communities to skew toward the homogeneous and the shallow is widely considered an enduring principle of social media (Bucher; Dean; Terranova; van Dijck). As the story typically goes, users selectively navigate the landscape of abundant information to join networks that support their needs, interests and values, in turn fulfilling the need for connectivity and community. As this dynamic unfolds in aggregate, networks coalesce into spaces of public writing that produce enduring rhetorics peculiar to the community. Within online communities—whether networked publics on Twitter (e.g., Black Twitter, Crypto Twitter, Trans Twitter, Alt-Right Twitter, etc.), message boards, subreddits, etc.—a shared but limited pool of narratives, symbols, terminologies and arguments function as rhetorical currency, used to make sense of new situations, persuade each other, and establish belonging. At worst, this consensus abets hostility and groupthink.

But this is a story that glosses over the networked circulation of opinion on social media. While the likes of Cass Sunstein and Damien Pfister (2020) have underscored that users’ selective filtering of information shrinks the pool of opinions and arguments from which users access, networked individualism of users omits a vital part of the community formation: circulation. As Robert Hariman points out, the manner in which opinion circulates shapes the formation of the identity, *ethos*, *doxa*, and communication practices of groups of people. Benedict Anderson’s

Imagined Communities demonstrates this point through the example of print capitalism, where publishing in the vernacular and distributing news at a national scale enabled readers to transcend their local dialects and imagine a national community and identity. So, if we want to address the prevalence of “echo chambers” and “shallow argument pools,” there is good reason to ask how the viral circulation of symbols, narratives, images, and terminologies shapes the formation of online communities and their communal beliefs (*doxa*). Additionally, we might ask how viral circulation informs how *ethos* is shaped (see chapter two) or how algorithms affect *doxa* formation by organizing networks through measures of virality (see chapter three). Taken together, these serve as points of entry for understanding the many effects of “viral” circulation: on the formation of character, identity, and opinion (*doxa*) within online communities.

Ultimately, the exigencies of “echo chambers” and “digital aggression” should point us to how digital circulation foments consensus within the publics and communities of social media. As rhetorician Richard Lanham long ago emphasized, material changes in the delivery of information inform how we attend to the world, make sense of it, and eventually respond to it. As regards social media discourse communities, this cycle of attending, interpreting, and acting has been updated through concepts such as viral circulation, contagion, and rhetorical ecologies. Jeff Rice (2017) emphasizes how users’ recirculation of narratives, symbols, and terminologies that appeal to the network’s emotions, experiences, associations, values and taste, yielding online communities whose opinion and beliefs (*doxa*) begin to reflect those expressed in the circulating narratives, symbols, terms, etc. For Rice, this leads to an urgent question: the online communities that emerge through the viral circulation of relatable content are prone to—at the level of the individual or collective—neglecting to reflexively attend to their *doxa* (e.g., rendering explicit what remains implicit, concretizing and complexifying the network’s common opinion, etc.).

Meanwhile, in examining the larger trends of the field of digital rhetoric and writing studies (hereafter DRWS), virality as an analytical category has been rigorously developed in research on digital rhetoric and writing. For those interested in digital circulation and networked opinion formation, virality is naturally an invaluable category to guide analysis of the flows of opinion online, whether in the form of memes, articles, videos, or hashtags, etc. In this regard, many scholars have offered methodologies for following the flow of contagious content (Edbauer Rice; Gries; Wuebben), defined what characterizes the viral circulation of user opinion in networks (Gries and Bratta; Hatfield; Hawk; Kennerly and Pfister) and identified the assemblage of forces—technical, affective, sociocultural—by which user opinion spreads (Boyle 2018; Dieterle et al.; Edwards and Lang; Rice 2017).

The real-world exigence concerning digital circulation's effect on the process of *doxa* formation has a parallel exigence in the field of digital rhetoric and writing studies (DRWS): namely, to imagine alternatives to the consensus-building of online communities, we need rhetorical practices where stability becomes metastability. That is to say, if the rhetorical contagion leads to consensus—networks defined by stability—what forms or genres of communication *within* online communities could negotiate the unresolved tensions of *doxa*, producing response-able—metastable—networks?⁶ In contrast, DRWS has theorized the becoming of *doxa* in a way

⁶ Metastability denotes systems that are temporarily stable yet prone to transformation by progressively incorporating and structuring latent potentials and tensions (which trigger individuation). As per Gilbert Simondon's networked vision of ethical individuation, response-able networks are metastable because actors put in relation as much as possible the leftover tensions residing in the experiences, emotions and values underlying their *doxa*. It is this openness and perpetual individuation of acts within a network that makes it ethical, and therefore, networks are ethical to the degree that acts have "transductive expansiveness" (378).

that emphasizes how viral rhetorics transforms as they circulate *between* and *interact with* various publics. This picture of rhetorical becoming, then, is well suited to tracing digital rhetorics, the ecologies in which they circulate, and users' acts of appropriation and remix that actualize the potentialities of viral rhetorics. However, this picture of rhetorical becoming doesn't particularly aid in responding to the viral, consensus-building *doxa* formation that occurs *within* online communities. Here, we need another way of thinking *doxa*'s becoming as it is networked across the writing space of the online community.

This dissertation, as addressed in the introduction, sets out to intervene in *doxa* formation online through what I have called an ethics of response-ability, whereby *doxa* formation becomes an ongoing process of negotiating and resolving the leftover tensions residing in the experiences, emotions and values underlying their *doxa*. Therefore, the community's *doxa* goes from stable—where the potentialities of what *doxa* could become is covered up by the consensus of its users—to metastable: being made richer, more comprehensive and complex as its tensions are resolved. Here, the *doxa* underpinning online communities would be progressively built on, complexified, and negotiated through acts which incorporate users' emotions, experiences, associations, and values in new ways, taking up *doxa* toward more open and rhetorically vibrant futures. Response-able networks, then, can promote social media discourse communities whose writing tends toward meaningful contributions to the community and the *doxa* with which it thinks its shared interests or concerns. As chapter two will show, this is an ethic grounded in an awareness of one's role in constructing the network and perpetuating the community in which one dwells.

The focus of this chapter centers around 1) identifying in DRWS literature what characterizes virality as a process by which online communities emerge and *doxa* forms, 2) reviewing DRWS literature that theorizes the potentiality of rhetorics to evolve in networks, and

3) differentiating the notion of rhetorical becoming from (borrowing from the parlance of Gilbert Simondon) the transduction of *doxa*, which works with the unresolved tensions underlying *doxa* to contribute to the community's understanding of its shared interests or concerns. Ultimately, readers can expect this chapter to move through these three steps in order to speculate on processes of *doxa* formation (transduction) and the communication practices which could transductively actualize *doxa*'s potentialities and, in turn, to render stable networks metastable.

2.2 Rhetorical Contagion and Consensus in Online Communities

The concept of contagion in the structuration of individuals into enduring collectives has, throughout the twentieth- (and now twenty-first-) century, been utilized in sociological theory (Girard; Tarde), psychoanalysis (Freud), continental philosophy (Sloterdijk; Deleuze and Guattari) and, more recently, affect theory (Ahmed; Brennan; Stewart). As Byron Hawk writes, contagions are circulating ideas and texts which function “through what sticks and replicates, often outside of any kind of initial intent or purpose” (223). Contagions tap into the emotions, values, and shared experiences of individuals in order to “generate a connectivity that coproduces collectivities at macro levels as they bubble up to coproduce a social field” (223). Hawk cites how the 2008 Obama campaign tapped into the desires and hopes of voters, with Obama's slogan of “Yes We Can” expressing an optimism about the future which reflected back voters' enthusiasm. Contagions, then, are characterized by processes of circulation in the social field and processes of accumulation, whereby the recirculation of ideas and texts enables collective identifications.

The concept of contagion, with its logic of circulation and group formation, is an idea that has resonated with many theorists of digital rhetoric and writing. Byron Hawk and Jeff Rice both

cite media theorist Tony Sampson's *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* to support the idea that the contagion serves as a model of digital circulation. As already intimated above, Hawk is interested in how circulating ideas and texts scale: e.g., from a campaign slogan to a politician's base, which will then circulate widely through the social field by tapping into collective desire. Simply put, as Hawk writes, these ideas and texts "circulate and are taken up, imitated, and recirculated" before becoming collectively binding (223). The dynamics of this imitation and recirculation, however, are not straightforward. Turning to French sociologist Gabriel Tarde, Hawk highlights that the contagion propagates through certain mechanisms: imitative repetition, adaptation, and opposition. Imitative repetition sends out what Tarde calls "imitative rays": "noncognitive associations, interferences, and collisions that spread outward, contaminating feelings and moods before influencing thoughts, beliefs, and actions" (Sampson 2012, 19). In adaptations, the imitative ray's spreading can encounter and overlap other rays, producing variations that incorporate a part of another invention that is spreading. Finally, opposition concerns inventions that exist and spread in order to resist another invention. In the context of digital culture, we can think of hashtags that are recirculated, hashtags that are appropriated to signify something else entirely (e.g., #YesAllWomen becomes #YesAllCats), and counter-hashtags that are opposed to another (e.g., #BlueLivesMatter as a response to #BlackLivesMatter).

It is through this description of the digital circulation that Hawk understands the circulating flows of ideas and texts across networked media. Also in line with Byron Hawk's description is Heather Lang's and Dustin Edwards' contributions to circulation studies, which taken together investigate the circulatory and rhetorical processes by which content achieves viral uptake. Representing their work is their co-authored 2018 essay "Entanglements That Matter: A New Materialist Trace of #YesAllWomen." Here, Edwards and Lang consider the conditions by which

popular hashtags such as #YesAllWomen achieve viral circulation and affect the offline world, demonstrating what Jane Bennett calls “thing-power.” These conditions include platform interfaces, algorithms, software, data representations, network infrastructure and protocols that help to shape the possibilities for digital circulation and, on the other hand, the affective intensities that viral content keys into so as to galvanize recirculation.

Drawing on the work of Sara Ahmed, Edwards and Lang claim that content spreads in the network because it amplified affective intensities that already exist within the social field. Moreover, certain meanings tend to stick to hashtags as they are spread, taking on meanings that speak to the common affective responses of those in the network. It is in this way that, as #YesAllWomen spread, narratives peculiar to white women’s experiences stuck while calls for intersectional discussions of gender-based violence were overlooked and obscured.⁷ In this regard, #YesAllWomen became a place or *topos* from which to understand gender-based violence, though it was one that skewed toward a particular way of talking about violence.

On the other hand, as the hashtag spread and achieved resonance, leading to protests, merchandise, and books (e.g., BuzzFeed’s *#YesAllWomen: A Collection*), the hashtag was appropriated toward ends other than bringing public attention to gender-based violence. For example, #NotAllMen became a popular counter-rhetoric for men to express disagreement with the premise that violence against women is wrapped up in their investment in masculine identity. However, regardless of whether you were to recirculate #YesAllWomen or #NotAllMen, these hashtags serve as, per Edwards and Lang, digital *topoi* in which to learn about, interpret and make

⁷ Per Edwards and Lang, this manifested in less popular hashtags that lacked the rhetorical velocity to change the course of the conversation (e.g., #YesAllWhiteWomen and #SolidarityIsForWhiteWomen).

arguments about this public issue. Hence, viral hashtags become places in which *doxa* forms by resonating with the experiences, values, and emotions of the Twitter platform's users.

Finally, Jeff Rice's work on digital rhetorical contagions resonates with Hawk's, Edward's, and Lang's insights while more forcefully underscoring its rhetorical problematic. Rice (2017) describes the *doxa* formation of networks as the circulation of texts and ideas, which are recirculated because they resonate with users' common experiences, emotions, values, etc. Rice describes the circulation of contagions on platforms such as Facebook, Twitter or Instagram (e.g., hashtags, memes, an exclusive, shared set of terminology) as similar to epideictic rhetoric, for contagions function by speaking to users' values and experiences and, on the whole, are easily memorable and repeatable. It is in this way that digital contagions skew toward consensus. This consensus can promote a sort of short-sightedness, insofar as users neglect to reflexively engage the opinions expressed in the texts and ideas around which the community forms, leading users to imprudent conduct (forming beliefs based on fake news, not considering the limitations of one's understanding of an exigence due to groupthink).

To summarize the line I've just traced through DRWS, virality functions as an analytical category for understanding how ideas and texts circulate and opinion (i.e., *doxa*) takes form. Taken together, each theorist articulates how digital rhetorical forms (e.g., memes, hashtags) tap into common emotions, experiences, values, etc. in the network, and in recirculating, coalesce into the online community's opinion and communal beliefs. Moreover, Edwards, Lang, and Rice voice concern over how the contagion, in tapping into what is shared amongst a network's users, skews toward consensus and precludes judgment of *doxa*. As mentioned above, Edwards and Lang see the recirculation of messages privileging white women's experiences as precluding intervention in terms of what the hashtag could signify or who could be heard. Additionally, Rice suggests that

the contagion's circulation in networks can preclude attention to what is implicit in these shared beliefs, thereby closing users off from further scrutiny or cautious deliberation. Such networks become, in the Simondonian sense, stable, whereby consensus covers over and precludes opportunities for incorporating the network's doxastic potentials: putting into relation the unresolved tensions underlying the experiences, emotions and values underlying *doxa* and, in turn, structuring via rhetorical processes these tensions toward more capacious, nuanced, and complex perspectives on some shared matter of interest.

This section has aimed to describe one of the major uses of viral circulation in DRWS. Many scholars have contributed to the field by illustrating how the opinion and beliefs (*doxa*) of networks form around contagions that tap into the experiences, emotions and values of users. This offers an important starting point for addressing how online communities become stable, precluding opportunities for (à la Janet Atwill) intervening in and transforming *doxa*. As argued in the preface and introduction, the fostering of response-able networks necessitates processes of *doxa* formation which involve working with the potentiality of the online community's *doxa*. And as argued, this means identifying communication practices that can integrate these tensions: which, as we will see, are the dialogical mechanisms of deliberation whereby, for example, *doxa*'s applicability to situations is deliberated, what is implicit in *doxa* is pondered, and the tensions between disparate values, experiences, and emotions call for alternative perspectives. Where this leaves us is that we must discuss what it means to work with the network's doxastic potentials: the tensions to be put into relation and structured into nuanced and capacious *doxa*. To this end, the next section turns to DRWS's description of rhetorical becoming and virality, thereby allowing me to identify the point of divergence between these theories of rhetorical becoming and my contribution of transduction as a model of actualizing the becoming of *doxa*.

2.3 Viral Intensities in Rhetorical Becoming

Since Jenny Edbauer Rice's introduction of the ecological paradigm to rhetoric, the potential of rhetorical acts to spread in a contagion-like manner and evolve has become crucial to the study of circulation, whether offline or online. In place of the "static" rhetorical situation, in which rhetorical acts are situated and terminate following the act's completion, ecologies denote the manner in which acts spread throughout the social field, being taken up and transformed as they enter into relation with different communities and publics, each complete with their own emotions, experiences, values, and associations:

To borrow another conceptual metaphor, we are speaking about the ways in which rhetorical processes operate within a *viral economy*. The intensity, force, and circulatory range of a rhetoric are always expanding through the mutations and new exposures attached to that given rhetoric, *much like a virus*. An ecological, or affective, rhetorical model is one that reads rhetoric both as a process of distributed emergence and as an ongoing circulation process. Deleuze and Guattari give us one example of such an affective rhetoric in their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, where they write about the becoming of evolutionary processes that happen between two or more species. Rather than a hierarchical transmission of genetic information, evolution involves a kind of sharing and an emergence that happens in the in-between of species. (13, emphasis mine)

According to Edbauer Rice, following the becoming of rhetorics as they spread throughout the social field entails seeing communication in a new light, where the boundaries of the rhetorical situation are dissolved and the afterlife of rhetorical acts are perpetuated as they are recirculate.

As per her primary case study of “Keep Austin Weird,” an ecological paradigm tracks the emergence of the phrase, the opinion it expresses and the trajectories through which the phrase spreads and the publics and communities it enters into. By entering new contexts, the phrase and the antiestablishment opinion it expresses changes as rhetors draw on and remix it for other ends (such as the appropriation by retail outlets like Starbucks, the Austin Public Library’s “Keep Austin Reading” campaign, or counter-rhetorics such as “Keep Austin Fucking Normal”).

A decade after Jenny Edbauer Rice’s touchstone essay on rhetorical ecologies, scholar of visual rhetoric Laurie Gries translates this tracking of the viral spread of digital images through her method of iconographic tracking, whereby the “rhetorical becoming” of digital images can be traced as they are remixed by users. Like Edbauer Rice, Gries emphasizes that analysis of (viral) circulation requires attention to the instability of images that, in the moment, appear rhetorically stable: “Despite their stable appearance at a given moment, then, visual things—especially those that experience viral circulation—constantly exist in a dynamic state of flux and are always generative of change, time, and space” (161). Through a case study of the Barack Obama “Hope” poster, Gries practices digital methods for collecting and organizing visual data surrounding the poster’s circulation, giving empirical support to how viral images evolve as composers appropriate, remix, and circulate them in their own networks.

In terms of circulation, Edbauer Rice’s rhetorical ecologies make evident the afterlife of rhetoric in the public spaces, particularly in reworking its expression to fit different communities. In terms of network culture, Laurie Gries substantiates the viral and rhetorical nature of digital content such as memes, leading her to the insight that “In a viral economy and participatory culture, in which both intended and unintended audiences play an interactive role in remixing, appropriating, and spreading images, we know that ‘delivery’ is not something that is so direct or

controlled” (158). This notion, of course, is one that has become foundational in DRWS, specifically in the domain of circulation studies where composing for networked delivery in viral environments—where content will rapidly spread far and wide, even being remixed by others—is codified as a strategy for digital writing (Gries; Ridolfo and DeVoss; Sheridan, Ridolfo, and Michel). That said, Edbauer Rice and Gries uniquely ground their theories of viral circulation through the shared conceptual language of Deleuzian philosophy. Specifically, for these tremendously influential scholars, rhetorical acts are suffused with the potential to become, particularly by entering into new relations with various communities and audiences. This deployment of Gilles Deleuze’s notion of potential proves to be useful for their projects, but for the purposes of mine, I briefly focus on Gries’s Deleuzian picture of rhetorical becoming in order to highlight some philosophical underpinnings of viral circulation and set up an intervention in alternative understandings of rhetorical becoming.

In Laurie Gries’ project of theorizing and empirically accounting for the transformation of digital images as they circulate across networks, Deleuze’s distinction of the virtual/actual in the becoming of beings is used to make sense of the potential of images to change in circulation. In a chapter entitled “On Rhetorical Becoming,” Gries describes how the Obama Hope poster, incarnated and remixed in ways that even bear the smallest resemblance to the original image, “haunts and transcends” its variations. For Gries, the original poster is a virtual entity brimming with potential as it “undergoes a multiplicity of actualizations to become something new.” Gries explains the virtuality of the original poster and its potential for meaning:

[T]he virtual is like a field of unexpended energies, or a reservoir of untapped potentialities, that makes the actual capable of coming into existence (“Kant”). The virtual does not

predetermine the actual. Instead, the virtual can be understood as a creative force that affords each materialized version to appear or manifest as something new, “something that has never existed in the universe in quite that way before” [...] Because a virtual image has potential (especially in a viral economy) to enter into a wide range of exterior relations at seemingly simultaneous moments, its actualizations are divergent and multiple. The actual, we must keep in mind, then, is not a singular entity; it is a multiplicity, constituted by heterogeneous materializations with virtual-actual dimensions. During the process of actualization, divergent paths of development constantly unfold in different series, directions, and spatial configurations as well as different time frames, tempos, and patterns. (161-162)

This passage in Gries’ essay on the ontology of viral images is instructive in grasping how virality, as a category for analyzing circulation, emphasizes the potential of a rhetoric—which integrates certain beliefs or opinions in some material form—to actualize in circulation. That is to say, the Obama Hope poster can be appropriated for ends that are critical of Obama, critical of political opponents, or parodical (e.g., an image of Homer Simpson captioned “D’oh”). No matter the end to which the template is put, the original image serves as the virtual image from which future images are actualized by entering into new relations: for instance, by entering new digital publics and online communities (with their own values, experiences and emotions), and by being put in relation to technologies that shape the image’s production and distribution. These relations that are external to the virtual image—the original “Hope” poster—factor into the actualization of latent potential of the image, of the ways it can materialize anew.

Reflecting on these two angles from which to understand viral circulation, there is the formation of *doxa* that the contagion facilitates and, on the other hand, the unbridled potential of rhetorics to transform as they enter new contexts. The former concerns the consensus that emerges through the recirculation of contagions in a network, thereby yielding an online community in which to interpret and make arguments about some matter of interest or concern. The latter, however, involves the underlying potentiality for transformation which comes to define a rhetoric's afterlife, yielding changes in meaning through its circulation in new contexts. So far, then, this chapter has explored the analytical category of virality as a way of *doxa*'s formation and the capacity of a rhetoric (digital or otherwise) to undergo change through the actualization of inexhaustible potential as it circulates *between* publics and communities.

The potential of rhetorical texts and the beliefs they express (e.g., "Keep Austin Weird") to transform as they enter into new relations—whether those relations be new communities, new production tools or networks for distribution—is essential to describing how ideas and texts evolve via the viral processes of networked media. This picture of rhetorical becoming is useful, as it allows rhetoricians and writing scholars to orient themselves and students to the dynamics of viral circulation that determine the afterlife of digital compositions. That said, to address blockages in the development of a network's *doxa* which virality effects—insofar as the viral circulation of contagions can foster online communities based around consensus—we need to speculate, to imagine an alternative picture of rhetorical potential and becoming.

As articulated in the introduction, I am presenting a vision of response-able *doxa* production through Gilbert Simondon's ethical individuation. In Simondon's account of the becoming of ethical systems, he contended that actions are ethical to the extent that they put into relation and structure the in-group's latent tensions which underlie its disparate values, thereby

enabling the emergence of norms that integrate these tensions toward new response-abilities. With the resolution of problems through the production of more capacious, nuanced norms, the in-group's ability respond to moral problems is augmented, with individuals able to connect to, add on to, and transform these norms in the future. Simondon terms this processual, iterative actualization of potential "transduction." As I will argue, in contrast to this vision of becoming is the stable network whose consensus precludes the putting into relation of *doxa*'s latent tensions in deliberation.

Whereas the contagion helps to set in motion imitative processes of *doxa* formation that lead to consensus, and whereas the potentiality of opinion transforms through appropriation and opposition, the formation of *doxa* in what I call response-able communities involves a modified conceptualization of dialogical mechanisms of deliberation and phronesis. While I describe phronesis in the following chapter, herein I present a Simondonian vision of rhetorical becoming, specifically one that resonates with the dialogical mechanisms of deliberation which then render the *doxa* of communities metastable. I will begin by describing Simondon's philosophical treatment of potential in metastable systems—and their actualization via transduction—before differentiating and building on Casey Boyle's own writings on transduction and digital culture. Finally, I apply transduction to describe the actualization of doxastic potentials in networks.

2.4 Potentiality and Transduction

French philosopher Gilbert Simondon, a contemporary of Gilles Deleuze, allows us to emphasize those aspects of becoming that get covered over in theories grounded in virality. Specifically, Simondon's picture of potentiality and its processual actualization underscores an

iterative movement by which an actualized potential continues to be developed through adding on to its past actualizations and structuring the tensions left behind these actualizations.

Gilbert Simondon's individuation is based primarily in the idea of ontogenesis, exploring the relationalities and processes by which individuals come into being. In contrast to ontologies which presuppose a stable individual being and then explain this being's existence through substantialism—that “everything is individual in the world” (qtd. in Barthélémy 228)—or hylomorphism—that beings derive from form and matter which “preexist their union” (212)—Simondon describes individuals as relational, emerging from the interaction with their milieu. That is, all individual beings—whether inorganic, biological, technological or psycho-social—are constantly interfacing with their milieu in order to constitute and maintain themselves, particularly by incorporating its milieu's energetic potentials into its growth and its functioning. For Simondon, individuals are metastable: beings tend to fall out of step with themselves by being put into relations with an incompatible milieu and must perpetuate themselves by resolving this tension. For instance, the problem of living for a plant is resolved through the process of photosynthesis, incorporating the milieu's potential energy (sunlight) into itself. Simply, the individual exists relationally and provisionally as it integrates and finds ways to structure the tensions between it and its milieu. Behind the individual and its milieu, then, is the pre-individual dimension of being, “the bearer of energetic and structural conditions” that precedes and exceeds the distinction between being and milieu, as it is the pre-individual dimension of energetic conditions that supports the individual-to-be's existence (Voss 103).

I offer here an example of Simondon's array of concepts to explain individuation. Through the example of crystallization, Simondon shows how the introduction of a crystal seed into a supersaturated solution functions as what he calls a singularity, or a materiality that can couple

with and disturb the potential carried in the solution, a process he calls “disparation.” Once the seed is introduced, it begins to “resonate” with the energy carried in the solution, catalyzing a structuring operation on the solution’s energy to begin the crystallization process.

This resonance between seed and solution requires the seed to possess a material structure and energetic charge that can break the equilibrium of the solution and release its potential energy. After breaking the equilibrium of the resting solution, the crystal takes form, starting from the seed crystal, by iteratively incorporating the solution’s no longer latent energy, layer-by-layer:

[T]he crystal departs from the initial seed and proceeds continuously in relation to the outer layer of the crystalline structure, precisely at those points that are in contact with the supersaturated solution. Only the outer layer disposes of the power to create growth [...] In other words, the individuating activity occurs at the limit of the crystal. (101)

Here, it is the energy contained within the solution—the crystal’s associated milieu—which represents the pre-individual, the energy that the material form of the seed structures. Moreover, the outermost layer of the crystal will continue to add on to previous layers so long as there are unactualized potentials of energy within the solution. Simondon terms this process of potential’s actualization “transduction”:

By transduction, we mean a physical, biological, mental, or social operation, through which an activity propagates from point to point within a domain, while grounding this propagation in the structuration of the domain, which is operated from place to place: each

region of the constituted structure serves as a principle of constitution for the next region.
(qtd. in Combes)

In this description, we see here a way of understanding potentiality and its actualization in terms that differ dramatically from rhetorical theory's understanding of Deleuzian potentiality. The iterative incorporation of unexhausted potentials—adding on to past actualizations to resolve tensions *hic et nunc*—speaks to the complexification and becoming of a singularity (crystal seed) as it incorporates and expends more of the energy within its milieu (the supersaturated solution). Whereas Deleuzian potentiality underscores that the virtual supplies the inexhaustible funds that support being's becoming, Simondonian potentiality highlights becoming as an iterative process of progressively incorporating unresolved tensions and adding on to what has been actualized.⁸

In order to grasp, as I set out to in this dissertation, the processes by which *doxa* could be formed so as to actualize online communities where users cultivate the network's response-ability, Simondon's notion of transduction effectively models the formation of *doxa* in which such a rhetorical ethics would culminate. Translating Simondon's notion of transduction to *doxa* formation emphasizes the processual actualization of doxastic potentials, such that *doxa* are taken up "toward a more and more open future" through the incorporation of its latent potentialities (Landes 160). Like the crystal that forms point-by-point, layer-by-layer, by actualizing unexhausted potentials, the transduction of an online community's *doxa* proceeds through episodes

⁸ Indeed, chapter two is dedicated to showing how doxastic potential can be incorporated and structured when rhetors individuate themselves as a part of the network, taking on an active orientation toward their participation in the network's past *doxa* and its future response-ability. I term this disposition toward participation in the community "networked phronesis."

where users ponder what is implicit in their *doxa*, deliberate *doxa*'s application to novel situations, and restructure the communal values underpinning their *doxa*. Through this incorporation of doxastic potentials or tensions, users deform and transform *doxa*.

In the following sections, I translate Simondon's description of the transductive movement of potentiality/actualization to the production of *doxa* and the production of "response-able" communities. Here, I rephrase a number of concepts, including singularity, metastability, associated milieu, and the pre-individual to diagram the transductive formation of *doxa*. First, however, I make a brief detour through Casey Boyle's use of transduction in his theorization of posthuman rhetorical practice, from which I will differentiate my project while building on Boyle's modeling of rhetoric's transduction.

2.5 Transducing Memes

In the above section I outlined how individuals undergo becoming via an iterative, relational process of structuring the pre-individual potential energy that populates their milieu. Crystallization serves as an exemplar of becoming for Simondon, whereby potential is actualized via transductive movement, of actualizing potentials point-by-point, layer-by-layer, in the interaction between the individual-to-be and its milieu. Simply, actualizing potentials occurs through a series of individuations which iterate past actualizations of the crystal seed while tapping into unactualized potentials to perpetuate its form-taking. Before I go into depth in describing the transduction of doxastic potentialities through dialogical mechanisms of deliberation, it is vital to address Casey Boyle's understanding of transduction as it has appeared in his work on posthuman rhetorical practice.

In *Rhetoric as a Posthuman Practice*, Boyle's own interest in Simondon eventually leads him to discuss the functioning of enthymemes, the Aristotelian rhetorical form in which a premise—oftentimes a cultural commonplace—goes unstated by the speaker and is provided by the audience. For Boyle, transduction, as the progressive actualization of unexhausted potentials, is useful in describing the process whereby premises serially build on each other to lead to a cathartic conclusion at the enthymeme's conclusion. Behind the serial movement of premises (which, ideally, result in catharsis and persuasion) is the rhetorical form of the enthymeme and its integration of commonplaces that are shared by the community. Using the example of the "Pepper Spray Cop, in which a UC-Davis campus officer is seen nonchalantly pepper spraying detained campus protesters, Boyle points out how the image functions as a visual enthymeme by bringing to mind certain cultural commonplaces. This response then sparked remixes that placed the officer in "scenes of common reference" that, through absurdities or contrasts, "highlighted the actions of the officer as objectionable" (87). In placing the offending officer at the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Washington's crossing of the Delaware River, and the Kent State shootings, these remixes tap into and structure the "associated milieu" of cultural and historical commonplaces in ways that "individuate additional possibilities" (85) for the original image.

What I find instructive in Boyle's example of the "Pepper Spray Cop" and its variations is the suggestion that rhetorical forms—e.g., enthymemes, viral memes—function by structuring commonplaces and associations: a sort of analogue for interaction between individual and milieu. While this is a compelling, useful and important insight into the functioning of memes and enthymemes, it sits somewhat uneasily with the Simondonian notion of individuation. That is, in individuation the new emerges through the resolution of tensions between milieu and the individual-to-be, with the latter incorporating the former's latent, unactualized potentials.

However, Boyle's example of the "Pepper Spray Cop" and its remix is oddly stable. Differently, viral memes tend to activate a set of closely related associations that are "structured" in remixes, "introduc[ing] multiple differences into the image" that, from variation to variation, don't effect significant changes in meaning—the emergence of the new.

While I imagine the application of transduction differently, Boyle offers a useful starting point for modeling transduction in rhetorical becoming. In this chapter's penultimate section, I build on Boyle's translation of transduction to rhetoric by utilizing the concept as a way of understanding how *doxa* takes form through dialogical mechanisms of deliberation, a form of communication I identify with the production of what I am calling "response-able networks." Unlike processes of *doxa* formation based on virality, which can peter out in the stability of consensus—the already-known, in-common, and agreed-upon—the transduction of *doxa* involves putting in relation and structuring anew the underlying tensions of past "actualizations" of *doxa*.

2.6 Transducing *Doxa* through Dialogical Mechanisms of Deliberation

As articulated in the previous section, in Simondon's philosophy the individual-to-be comes into existence when it is introduced to a surrounding milieu with abundant yet unstructured potentials that it might incorporate in order to constitute itself. The individual-to-be is considered a singularity, insofar as it begins from an energetically charged form that resonates with the milieu and sets off the transductive process. The individual-to-be is, therefore, metastable, in that it retains momentary stability while being open to transformation when put in relation to the potentials that disturb its existence. The environment that potential populates is its associated milieu, and these

potentials are pre-individual in preceding the distinction between individual-to-be and milieu. Taken together, this array of concepts helps to explain how the becoming of beings takes place.

Boyle's (2018) example of transduction offers a preliminary sketch of how these concepts translate to rhetorical becoming: rhetorical acts (enthymemes) activate and incorporate emotionally-charged commonplaces composing one's community—the act's associated milieu. Hence, the first image of, say, "Pepper Spray Cop" functions as a rhetorical singularity, remaining a "singular image" as users "introduce multiple differences into the image" by incorporating these commonplaces in remixes of the original image. As highlighted above, however, these variations result in a more or less stable expression of opinion across remixes, conflicting with Simondon's individuation, by which the new emerges through the structuring of tensions between milieu and the individual-to-be into structures and functions which re-establish compatibility with the world. To break out of the cycle of short-sightedness that rhetorical contagions can promote, it is necessary to imagine dynamic processes of networked *doxa* formation. To this end, I adopt while modifying and extending Boyle's model toward the transduction of doxastic potentials that occurs via dialogical mechanisms of deliberation.

The role of dialogism within the context of rhetorical deliberation has been articulated across disparate subfields within rhetorical theory, composition studies, and deliberation theory. As Arthur Walzer points out, scholars such as John Gage, Andrea A. Lunsford and Lisa S. Ede, Gregory Clark, and Richard Leo Enos and Janice Lauer suggest that rhetoric can be seen as a dialogical enterprise, in which rhetors and audiences collaboratively judge what is "good and true" through the invention and uptake of arguments (Clark 27). For these theorists of rhetoric, dialogism involves negotiating communal experiences, emotions, and values that inform opinion (*doxa*) about what is good and true. In the face of novel situations, rhetors speak to these emotions,

experiences, and values, advocating a certain response or action—how we should think of or value something, how we should respond to a public issue—that can begin and end in consensus (stability) or renew understanding of the “good and true” by structuring emotion, experience, and values toward greater potential for engaging the problem-generating world (metastability).

In the field of public deliberation, there is a parallel conversation regarding dialogism. James Bohman has contributed greatly to this conversation, highlighting how deliberation is most dynamic and generative when it is dialogical. That is, as the dangers of consensus are well-documented in theories of deliberation (Asen; Fraser; Mouffe; Warner), consensus risks excluding others on the basis of their norms of publicity, eliminating a range of issues that are relevant to unrepresented parties, and closing off the spectrum of perspectives by which an exigence might be better understood. Here, Bohman identifies dialogism as an effective mechanism for deliberation. The dialogic mechanisms of deliberation that he identifies include 1) rendering explicit what is implicit in the group’s understandings, 2) exchanging backgrounds, 3) judging how a principle applies to a particular case, 4) concretizing ideas into a richer, more complex whole, and 5) listening attentively to others’ perspectives (59-65). When these mechanisms are applied in episodes of deliberation, they can disclose, in the words of Damien Smith Pfister, “new experiences, critiques, and juxtapositions that facilitate new meanings and new publics” (2018 n.p). In the context of deliberation around public issues amongst other citizens in a democracy, Bohman’s dialogical mechanisms of deliberation have the potential to not only complexify shared matters of interest or concern but the communities themselves.

In synthesizing these strains of thought regarding what constitutes generative and ethical communication, particularly as it applies to networked *doxa* formation, I identify Bohman’s dialogical mechanisms as best able to fulfill the aims of rhetorical practice put forward by the likes

of Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede, Richard Enos and Janice Lauer, Gregory Clark, and John Gage. Bohman's mechanisms have the capability to render metastable what is stable. For example, through the mechanism of judging how *doxa* applies to a complex case, one can sense, draw on, and structure tensions between disparate values into more complex and capacious perspectives. Users might also collaboratively complicate stable opinions surrounding a matter of interest or concern by elaborating and listening attentively to what brought them to their beliefs (*doxa*). Specifically, transducing *doxa* occurs by structuring over time as much of the latent tensions of the community's experiences, emotions and values as possible—which dialogical mechanisms facilitate in the face of exigencies that problematize the community's beliefs (cf. Atwill 1998).

Like crystals, which iteratively build on past actualizations by incorporating their milieu's unexhausted potentials, this picture of *doxa* formation describes how *doxa* develops by newly incorporating tensions in that which underpins opinion. When users are disposed to discussing shared matters of interest through dialogical mechanisms, they collectively construct and maintain a response-able network, in which *doxa* is constantly being opened up, negotiated, disputed, challenged, and developed. In this regard, dialogical mechanisms promote the networked "individuation" of *doxa*, echoing Simondon's claim that "Acts are networked to the extent that they are considered [...] the source of becoming via continued individuation" (2020, 380). Through these dialogical mechanisms, the new emerges through the networking of response: *doxa* that is endlessly self-complicating and, therefore, progressively rendered more capacious and nuanced.

Within online communities such as hashtag communities (see above) or affinity groups (see chapter two), in which rhetorical contagions catalyze digital consensus, these dialogical mechanisms are useful in speculating how networks might become increasingly response-able. Turning to the example of the Twitter hashtag public of #YesAllWomen, Edwards and Lang turn

a critical eye towards the way in which narratives speaking to white women's experiences crowd out those of women of color, resulting in spin-off hashtags whose rhetorical velocities were unable to reorient the conversation. These narratives circulated again and again in tweets, becoming the *doxa* or common perspective through which users primarily evaluated and framed the issue of gender-based violence. While this hashtag marked an important intervention, bringing considerable attention to an urgent issue, its *doxa* could have been complexified and expanded. Through sensing how perspectives were sticking, as well as a care-full disposition toward the consequences of the user's communication (a behavior that I later call "networked phronesis"), those participating in the hashtag public might ponder the hashtag and engage in dialogical deliberations to open up the network's *doxa* in a way that increasingly renders it more inclusive. For instance, by rendering explicit what is implicit in the hashtag public's *doxa*—that these narratives center the experiences and narratives of white women—dialogical deliberations amplify tensions between the public's values, experiences, and emotions—such as the value of social justice and embodying writing—to complexify what #YesAllWomen means (e.g., *who is included in this circulation of "All Women"? What do these circulating experiences of "All Women" omit?*). To resolve these tensions would entail writing which puts in relation as many tensions as possible in the community's experiences, emotions, and values, proffering opinions on the issue that structure these tensions into *doxa* that opens onto increasingly elaborate perspectives on the issue, yielding possibilities for responding to the public issue's untapped complexity in a way that generates response-ability toward the networking of #YesAllWomen across users' responses. Here, the *doxa* underpinning the public could undergo change by having the perspectives it houses built on, problematized, and augmented through writing which structures anew users' emotions, experiences, and values, taking up its *doxa* toward more responsible and nuanced perspectives.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to identify the theme of rhetorical becoming and potential in networks, analyze DRWS literature on rhetorical becoming, and offer an alternative way of understanding rhetorical becoming, one that could aid in imagining online communities as response-able: contributing to the response-ability of users. To begin speculating on how *doxa* might take form in response-able communities, I turned to Simondon's concept of transduction as an alternative way of understanding rhetorical becoming and the actualization of rhetorical potential in networked writing spaces. I then identified the dialogical mechanisms of deliberation as particularly suited to transductively actualizing doxastic potentials, opening *doxa* to its variability by progressively building on and structuring the latent tensions left behind past actualizations.

As rhetoricians continue to consider how we might respond to the issue of short-sighted networks, specifically how consensus eludes engagement with the network's preestablished opinion or *doxa* and, for my purposes, fosters a short-sightedness that can culminate in toxicity (Edwards and Lang; Pfister 2020; Pilsch; Rice 2017; Sparby 2017; Reyman and Sparby), the wager I make is that speculating on what more generative, vibrant, ethical and inclusive networks would look like is valuable for a field that is looking to make such interventions. In the following chapter, I observe a form of digital ethos that I claim is conducive to response-able networks and the sort of dialogical deliberations that supports them: what I call "networked phronesis." This chapter will describe in greater depth how the doxastic potentials of online communities can be transductively actualized, in which users' writing structures latent tensions underlying the community's *doxa*, modifying these opinion's trajectories for invention as they are networked across users' responses.

3.0 Chapter Two. Sound Judgments: A Case Study in Digital Ethos and Networked Phronesis

3.1 Speculating Digital Ethē for Response-Able Communities

In the field of digital rhetoric and writing studies (DRWS), the phenomena of social media echo chambers and the prevalence of online aggression within social networks has forced scholars to contend with what networked rhetorical ethics entail. Specifically, scholars such as Erika Sparby (2017), Kaitlin Clinnin and Katie Manthey, and Katherine DeLuca (2020) have discussed the potential for teacher-scholars to intervene in the groupthink and hostility that can typify the networked exchanges of social media. Similarly, Jeff Rice (2017), Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang, Andrew Pilsch, and Damien Pfister (2020) have articulated that social media echo chambers run the risk of reducing networks to spaces of consensus, omitting disruptions of communal beliefs within the online community and their long-term epistemic and moral growth.

This dissertation, as outlined in the introduction, sees the issues of echo chambers and online aggression as greatly related phenomena: both result from the sort of digital consensus that viral processes of networked circulation can favor. While there is no shortage of digital phenomena that warrant ethical consideration, I wager that the digital consensus typifying the networked writing spaces is one that problematizes vibrant rhetorical futures: users' ability to understand and respond to, in a capacious, nuanced manner, their matters of interest or concern. That is, this process of progressively augmenting and expanding a community's possibilities for response—the community's ability to understand and make claims about its matters of interest or concern—requires an orientation that, as I've discussed in preceding chapters, is grounded in awareness of

their participation in the opinion (*doxa*) through which the network deliberates about these matters. Simply, if we see echo chambers and online aggression as exemplary of the dearth of moral and epistemic growth that occasions social networks, how might instructors of digital rhetoric and writing dispose students to more generative and ethical rhetorical interactions online? What kinds of writing would they need to value and, in turn, engage with as an online community?

Thus far, this dissertation has speculated on networked processes of *doxa* formation, translating Gilbert Simondon's concept of individuation to the *doxa* of online communities. Modeled on his idea of ethical individuation—the emergence and becoming of ethical systems—Simondon shows how a system of norms is individuated when individuals incorporate the system's latent potentials—structuring the tensions between disparate values—so as to arrive at more capacious, nuanced norms with which to respond to the problem-generating world. Here, Simondon appears as a consummate theorist of networks and networked rhetorical ethics: For Simondon, ethical reality is structured in a network, where past acts connect to and serve as the basis for future acts by virtue of their unresolved tensions. Simondon notes that ethical networks are characterized by individuals who affirm their participation in the network of acts and its becoming vis-à-vis the world's becoming, maintaining the openness of the ethical system so as to more productively respond to—in an increasingly capacious, refined manner—moral problems.

In the context of networked rhetorics and rhetorical ethics, I claimed this translates to a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability, where users sense their responsibility for shaping the response-ability of the online community: the ability of the network to understand and make claims that respond to exigencies involving users' shared matters of interest or concern. Here, users affirm their relational character as nodes through which the network's *doxa* pass as they “share, reject, dismiss, supplement, [and] continue” others users' idea and texts (Rice 2012, 179).

To be ethical in a networked writing space, then, is to affirm one's role in building the network and to do so in a manner that augments the online community's capacity for deliberating and knowing together their shared matters of interest.

In chapter one I articulated a process of *doxa* formation in online communities which I aligned with Simondon's notion of individuation and the mechanism of transduction, in which individual beings emerge and undergo becomings by structuring latent doxastic tensions left behind from past actualizations. Translated to networked rhetorics, this involved progressively structuring *doxa*'s latent potential—unresolved tensions at the level of users' experiences, emotions, values—in response to exigencies which compel users to ponder their *doxa*'s tensions.⁹ As claimed in chapter one, this process of *doxa* formation serves as a foil to processes of *doxa* formation which typify online communities. That is, I asserted that the viral repetition and imitation of contagious ideas and texts promotes the formation of communities around a consensus which can preclude the disruption of *doxa*. However, while chapter one ended on how dialogical deliberations open *doxa* toward open rhetorical futures, we must ask what sorts of rhetorical conduct in the networked writing spaces of social media could promote online communities in which users participate in *doxa*'s becoming: progressively augmenting and enriching users' *doxa*. To advance this project's speculation into response-able networks—in which users cultivate the community's understanding by progressively structuring *doxa*'s latent and unresolved tensions—I turn to ethos as it relates to online communities and the emergence of *doxa* within networks.

⁹ Specifically, this liberation of potential involved certain communication practices: what deliberation theorist James Bohman terms the dialogical mechanisms of deliberation. Such mechanisms can progressively incorporate the unstructured potential of that which underlies *doxa*, negotiating via rhetorical means the online community's experiences, emotions, values, etc., thereby opening *doxa* onto more capacious, inclusive and nuanced trajectories.

Simply, this chapter asks: What ethos positions—ways of occupying a position of credibility—typify social media communities formed through viral processes? Specifically, what I want to pursue is how the circulation of contagious ideas and texts—and the opinions they express—calcify into the *doxa* with which users establish a position of credibility in the online community, and how this ethos position affects the rhetorical conduct and invention of the online community. Also, I want to put forward alternative networked ethos positions in which credibility is established not through the recirculation of ideas and texts that express opinion appealing to users' common experiences, emotions, values; instead, credibility would be established through conduct that demonstrates thoughtful judgment of a situation and care-full deliberation in how one is contributing to the opinion (*doxa*) of the network.

In the field of digital rhetoric, recent conversations regarding the writing practices around which online communities construct an ethos (Grabill and Pigg; Hübler and Bell; Silvestro) have shown the various forms participatory culture and online identity can take. What this scholarship has yet to rigorously consider is how digital texts circulate in online communities and, over time, calcify into a position of credibility that users can then occupy when writing to the community. In order to better approach the question of how ethos positions emerge in online communities and how users enter them, we need analyses that inquire into the circulatory logics underpinning digital ethos. But our analyses need not stop there: Once we grasp how ideas and texts circulate and become materials from which users draw to convey beliefs that establish positions of credibility, we can ask ourselves what sorts of rhetorical invention this ethos fosters, what the limitations of this invention consist in, and what sorts of invention this digital ethos sidelines.

In this chapter, I consider the emergence of digital ethos positions in the context of the social cataloging site Rate Your Music, in which the circulation of contagious music terminology

socializes users in a communal ethos position of expertise. In analyzing Rate Your Music, I show how the emergence of a communal ethos in online communities depends on imitative processes that can preclude the disruption and judgment of *doxa* and, thereby, opportunities for epistemic and moral growth. As users recirculate contagious ideas and texts—terms, symbols, narratives—that speak to common experiences, emotions, values concerning their shared matter of interest, the opinions expressed in the most imitated ideas and texts become the communal beliefs (*doxa*) that establish belonging and authorize users’ claims regarding their interest. To think “response-able” rhetorical engagement, I turn to a digital ethos position that I term “networked phronesis.” This ethos culminates in users who thoughtfully engage *doxa* and recognize their influence on the becoming of this *doxa*. Here, users’ affirmation of their participation in *doxa* informs their deliberation, disposing them to care-fully ponder *doxa* in the light of novel exigencies and contribute in ways that actively cultivate the online community’s response-ability—that is, the ability of users to understand shared matter of interest and make claims in response to future exigencies involving these matters.

First, I identify in Jeff Rice’s analysis of social media contagions a formation of ethos where the circulation of contagious ideas and texts—terms, symbols, narratives—over time, creates community around a shared set of beliefs and opinions (*doxa*) that the contagions express. Afterward, I put Rice’s framework in dialogue with theories of ethos as dwelling to address how the networked circulation of contagions socializes users in a communal ethos. That is to say, it is the recirculation of contagious ideas and texts in a network that socializes users in the dominant opinions and communal beliefs that other users respond to, resulting in an imitative manner of dwelling in *doxa* to establish credibility. Resultingly, this manner of dwelling in *doxa* to occupy a position of credibility can preclude opportunities for pondering and judging *doxa*.

In the second half of this chapter, I concentrate on two cases of digital ethos in online music communities. I first turn to Rate Your Music, a music cataloging community in which the site's database supplies the expert opinion (*doxa*) that users then recirculate in their reviews to credibly convey their musical experience and expertise. Next, I turn to I Hate Music, a forum dedicated to discussing electroacoustic improvisation (or EAI). I identify on the site a more generative way of dwelling in the network's *doxa* so as to invent arguments and occupy a position of credibility. The constraints that EAI's musical aesthetics places on users disposes them to writing about the genre in a manner reflective of what I term "networked phronesis."¹⁰ This denotes a way of dwelling in *doxa* where users assume responsibility for their participation in *doxa*'s becoming: in the ways of deliberating about and understanding this protean genre of music. In the context of I Hate Music, users grasp the network as an evolving site of knowing EAI, disposing them to prudent, community-minded deliberation in light of novel performances. When deliberating, users consider how their response participates in the becoming of their *doxa*, leading them to judge dominant opinions regarding EAI performance vis-à-vis unique sets and invent possibilities for deliberating about their musical interest. Users, then, collectively value—and establish credibility through—writing that thoughtfully engages *doxa*'s tensions and, in doing so, cares for the dwelling place. Lastly, the conclusion briefly hints at pedagogical inroads capable of producing phronetic users. Here, networked phronesis serves as a guiding concept for informing students' rhetorical conduct as they participate in online communities (a point to be elaborated in chapters three and four).

¹⁰ My updating of phronesis is in part influenced by feminist ethics of care and feminist virtue ethics, which centers care for the flourishing of the community more so than the flourishing of the individual (Cuomo; Held).

3.2 Contagion, Community, and Digital Ethos

The rise of social networks has compelled scholars to inquire into how ideas circulate, with many describing this circulation as “contagious.” In media studies (Munster; Sampson) and digital rhetoric (Boyle 2018; Edwards and Lang; Gries; Rice 2016) terms such as “viral” or “contagion” have been used as metaphors for how ideas are imitated and spread in networks.¹¹ Contagions spread in “Facebook status updates, tweets, Yelp reviews, Instagram photos, and blog posts” (Rice 2016, 13-14) by speaking to the common experiences, emotions, values, tastes, and/or associations of those comprising the network. On this point, scholars agree that contagions animate networks, giving rise to new processes of community formation. Here, within the context of networked exchange in which users build together a communication space through the rhetorical process of “shar[ing], reject[ing], dismiss[ing], supplement[ing], continu[ing] ideas [and] texts” (Rice 179), contagions are ideas and texts that tend to be shared because they engage users and are recirculated in order to establish belonging to a community. This is what makes contagions “viral,” and this is what makes the contagion a vehicle for the emergence of digital ethos.

Jeff Rice’s recent work on social media and the craft beer movement is instructive in understanding how contagions circulate in social networks and culminate in a communal ethos. Concentrating primarily on RateBeer, a cataloging site devoted to rating and reviewing beer, Rice points out that seemingly banal reviews of beer activate “interest, community, and engagement” (204) by repeating a repertoire of terms (which Rice terms “contagions”) that speak to common

¹¹ In addition to work in new media, the concept of contagion has been taken up in affect theory to understand how emotions become sharable and spread in various contexts (Ahmed; Brennan).

beer experiences. In reviews, those terms relate to the taste, smell, appearance, and mouthfeel of a style (“piney” for IPAs, “chewy” for porters), supplying the dominant opinions (*doxa*) about the experience of drinking certain beer styles that binds users and supports “general connectivity across the community” (36). In terms of circulation, Rice connects the repetition of beer terms to how users learn to participate on RateBeer—of what good taste and proper evaluation of beer (i.e., ethos) looks like.

The most imitated terms used in RateBeer reviews to describe Pliny the Elder are grapefruit, pine, resin, hoppy, and floral. If there are commonplace meanings attributed to the IPA or double IPA, these terms provide such meanings since they are stable markers used by beer drinkers to designate and understand the experience of consuming an IPA. Like all rhetorical markers, these terms anchor experience. Across social networks—blogs, video reviews, message boards, books, newspaper accounts—the experience becomes repeated as a continuing narrative of consumption. (73)

As Rice puts it, the most imitated terms become the commonplace opinions about craft beer that are recognized as credible because they speak to the common beer experience and tastes of users. In sum, when terms repeatedly circulate over time, they become the dominant opinions that help those in the network “understand what [they] know” (39-40), offering a shorthand that users can use to evaluate their beer experience, credibly convey this experience, and establish belonging.

Importantly, there is a limitation to the contagion as a vehicle for the formation of *doxa* and community, insofar as imitative processes can preclude a disposition toward pondering *doxa*

and inventing alternative possibilities for deliberating about the network's shared matter of interest. It is crucial, then, to examine how the contagion's networked circulation socializes users in the dominant opinions and communal beliefs that establish credibility within the community, and how this imitative participation can thereby preclude users' critical engagement with their *doxa*. Here, I turn to theories of ethos as dwelling place to parse how the circulation of contagious digital texts leads to the formation of online community by socializing users in commonplace ways of understanding and valuing their shared matters of interest.

3.3 Ethos, Phronesis, and Rhetorical Dwelling

In scholarship on ethos as dwelling place, the definition of ethos is extended beyond the individual rhetor's appeal to credibility. For theorists of rhetorical dwelling, this means considering the ways of making arguments that a given community values and finds credible. These rhetorical forms, appeals, and beliefs serve as the "place" the community "dwells" in to invent arguments about its matters of interest or concern (Miller 2004). Further, describing "dwelling" entails looking at how rhetors are socialized in how to "dwell" in this "place" through their interactions with the community. In the field of rhetoric, ethos as dwelling place was influentially developed by Arthur B. Miller, who distinguished between *eethos* as credibility and other meanings in ancient Greek, particularly as the "accustomed place" (*ethos*) where a community's customs are learned and inculcated: particularly, what is considered credible.¹²

¹² As Kathleen J. Ryan, Nancy Myers, and Rebecca Jones point out, scholars agree that these two meanings—*eethos* and *ethos*—are consubstantial (6).

As the cases in this chapter will show, networked writing environments present new processes by which individuals interact with communities and learn how to establish credibility. Importantly, the literature on ethos as dwelling place can help us glean the nature of the “dwelling” that these processes promote: how a particular digital ethos results in static/“closed” or generative/“open” ways of dwelling in dominant opinions and communal beliefs (*doxa*) to establish credibility. Within the literature, Carolyn Miller’s work uniquely explores a community whose dwelling can be described as “closed.” For my purposes, this language of a community’s dwelling being “closed” is useful in characterizing the invention that the contagion promotes. Further, this sets up an occasion to define *phronesis*, a central concept in this chapter, before contrasting “closed” ways of dwelling to those that are “open,” where credibility is established by demonstrating care-full deliberation and thoughtful engagement with *doxa*.

Throughout her essay “Expertise and Agency” (2004) Carolyn Miller concentrates on what it means to “inhabit” a “dwelling place.” For Miller, this dwelling entails learning the knowledge and ways of making claims that a community finds credible (198). Miller applies this understanding of ethos to unpack how expert systems dispose users to certain kinds of human-computer interaction. Used across disparate fields and industries, expert systems computationally emulate the decision-making processes of experts to analyze and solve problems. Miller points out that these systems presuppose that users adopt a particular attitude as they interact with them: belief that the expert knowledge stored in the system can simply be applied to unique problems. To find the system’s results credible, then, users must value expertise above all else and bracket their own judgment of the results’ applicability to these problems. For Miller, it’s in this sense that the way users dwell in expert systems is “closed.”

Importantly, Miller points out that this belief in knowledge's universal applicability contrasts with rhetoric's situatedness: that rhetors should be sensitive to situational particulars when deliberating. In ancient Greek philosophy and rhetoric, this responsiveness to particulars depends on the intellectual virtue of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* concerns the rhetor's ability to make thoughtful judgments in responding to unique situations that call for social action and response. In practice, *phronesis* manifests in careful deliberation regarding the ends that are desirable for the community (*eudaimonia* or flourishing), the right means to this end given the situation's particulars, and the possible consequences of one's speech on their community (Self; Warnick). In short, *phronesis* makes rhetors' judgments responsive to situational particulars and the well-being of others. As I will show it is this care for the community and the effect of one's writing—how one's writing might contribute to others' ability to understand shared matters of interest and respond to exigencies involving these matters in an increasingly capacious, nuanced manner¹³—that characterizes networked *phronesis* as a digital ethos position.

While there are major differences between the rhetorical interaction enabled by expert systems and contagions, this detour through Miller's work points out a shared rhetorical limitation between the two: neither expert systems nor contagions inculcate in rhetors a disposition toward judgment, where users ponder and critically engage these dominant opinions and communal beliefs in light of novel exigencies (Taminiaux). We might say, therefore, that to dwell *phronetically* involves demonstrating care-full participation in the networking of *doxa* in the online community.

¹³ Again, response-ability denoting the ability of the network to understand and evaluate shared matters of interest, thereby augmenting and expanding its ways of responding to exigencies involving the community's shared interest.

In this sense that users actively care for the network as a site of deliberating and knowing together, and it is this care-full and critical deliberation that is collectively valued and considered credible.

On the other hand, the dwelling that the contagion disposes users can impede care-full attention to one's participation in the networking of *doxa*. That is, in being repeated throughout the network, users are introduced to contagious ideas and texts that speak to the network's common experiences, emotions, values, and/or tastes, and it is these same contagions from which users will imitatively draw to interpret their experiences and persuasively convey themselves to others. Hence, online communities that emerge from the circulation of contagions can become "closed" when users primarily establish credibility by recirculating contagious ideas and texts which appeal to the experiences, emotions, and values on which the network was founded. By repeatedly drawing from these contagious ideas and texts to constitute an ethos within the community, encouraging other users' engagement with one's writing, the moment of pondering the network's *doxa* is precluded, and the dwelling place becomes "closed" from acts that might disrupt and reflexively engage the community's dominant opinions and communal beliefs (*doxa*).

In the next section, I illustrate this rhetorical limitation of the contagion as a networked vehicle of *doxa* formation and community-building through the example of Rate Your Music. Specifically, I show how a communal ethos emerges on Rate Your Music through the recirculation of music terminology derived from the site's database. Here, users who value expertise in genre and music history master the terminology compiled in the database and circulate these terms as shorthand in reviews to convey their musical experience and knowledge. This section aims to show how a communal ethos based on the contagion's imitative processes can yield repetition without difference, as users recirculate terminology that speak to their values (expertise) without pondering their *doxa* and care-fully intervening in the networking of *doxa* across the digital writing space.

3.4 I'm Picking up Good Citations: Digital Ethos on Rate Your Music

Founded in 2000, Rate Your Music is a social cataloging website where users catalogue, tag, rate, and review music. In May 2020, the site boasted 681,476 users, 73,399,098 ratings, and 2,436,880 reviews (MarilynRoxie). Essentially, Rate Your Music provides users a space to (1) rate, review, and catalog albums; (2) create pages for new releases and vote on genre tags from a pre-given, exhaustive list of styles; (3) search charts aggregating the highest rated albums of a particular year or genre; and (4) navigate the site's taxonomy of musical genres (compiled in a list of genres and subgenres) and read encyclopedic entries on these styles.

Rate Your Music's taxonomy of genre comes into play in many ways that are integral to user participation and the site's functionality. For instance, by navigating charts compiling the highest-rated albums in a genre, a straightforward route to familiarizing oneself with the canon of popular music (as decided by the aggregation of user ratings) is enabled. However, for an album to appear on a given genre's chart—which is also linked to its genre entry (Figure 1)—that release must be first tagged by users with that genre.

*rym

charts

lists

community

bwbrev

\$

[x]

Best of 2019

Search...

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help

Genres >

Ambient Pop

Typified by its distinct combination of Ambient sound design and Pop music structures, ambient pop emerged in the wake of Dream Pop and Synthpop during the mid 1980s. Though frequently associated with dream pop, ambient pop sets itself apart from its predecessor by not being directly related to the Alternative Rock movement and incorporating a greater variation of styles ranging from Downtempo, Jazz Pop and Krautrock to even Drone.

Ambient pop's sound is often based around multi-layered atmospheric Electronic instruments such as pads and synthesizers. Vocalists tend to sing in a shimmering, ethereal way and the addition of acoustic instruments is not uncommon, mainly keyboards, strings sections, drums and clean guitar.

The varied and unclear definition of ambient pop leads to close resemblance to Art Pop, with many artists falling into both categories, but these should not be treated as the same genre, as ambient pop focuses mostly on calm, slow pop music, rather than the complexity found in art pop works. Important artists include [David Sylvian](#), [Deux filles](#) and [Julee Cruise](#).

Pop

Ambient Pop

Top releases ([See genre chart](#))

ADVERTISEMENT

Page 1

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8

16

24

32

40

48

56

64

72

80

>>

☐ Only show V/A releases

Released	Artist	Title	Reviews	Ratings	Score
1975	10cc	I'm Not in Love / Good News	30	830	3.94
1978	Gilbert O'Sullivan	Miss My Love Today / Our Own Baby		8	3.86
1980	A.C. Marias	Droo / So	2	82	3.42

Figure 1 Rate Your Music genre entry

Taken together, the site's internal linking between individual releases, charts, and genre entries directs user engagement toward a hyperawareness of genre. That is, the site's functioning depends on the users' organization of releases into genres and presupposes awareness of popular music's history and stylistics. We could say that Rate Your Music presupposes a community that is knowledgeable of—and values expertise in—the history and stylistics of popular music.

In conjunction with charts, an important part of Rate Your Music is tagging releases with genres, informing users of its stylistic makeup and thereby, collectively constructing the release's identity through individual contributions (in addition to user ratings and reviews). Users vote on genres using a pre-given list (i.e., the database's genre taxonomy) to determine the recording's stylistics, offering users opportunities to deploy genre terminologies that are used to describe how one should listen to music, which is to say, what aspects one should notice and appreciate when

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listening (“Since it has MIDI horns as well as pop, soul and jazz influences, I will tag it as sophisti-pop”). To become acquainted with genre so one can tag releases, users can click hyperlinked terms listed under a release (reflecting the genres most commonly tagged to that particular release, as in Figure 2) or, as stated above, search through the site’s listings of entries on genre to learn about a style and catalog its canon via a list of its highest-rated releases.

The screenshot shows the RYM album page for Destroyer's 'Kaputt'. The page layout includes a top navigation bar with links like 'rym', 'charts', 'lists', 'community', 'bwbrev', '\$', and '[x]', along with a 'Best of 2019' badge. The main content area is split into two columns. The left column features the album cover art, a 'Buy this Album' button, and social media sharing options (bc, Apple Music, Spotify). Below this is a media player for the track '1. Chinatown' with a progress bar and playback controls. The right column displays the album's metadata: Artist (Destroyer), Type (Album), Released (25 January 2011), RYM Rating (3.67 / 5.0 from 6,360 ratings), Friends (3.33 from 9 ratings), Ranked (#13 for 2011, #1,741 overall), Genres (Sophisti-Pop, Art Pop, Indie Pop, Ambient Pop), Descriptors (poetic, soft, bittersweet, lush, mellow, cryptic, melodic, male vocals, romantic, warm, ethereal, nocturnal), and Language (English). Below the metadata is a 'Rate/Catalog' section with a 5.0 star rating and buttons for 'In collection', 'Digital', 'Tags', 'Review', and 'Track ratings'. At the bottom, there is a '5 Issues' section with a 'Release view' link and a table listing the release information: 'Kaputt [p] Digipak 2011 CD' with a 'Merge / MRG369' link.

Figure 2 Rate Your Music album page for Destroyer’s *Kaputt*

In these entries on genre (Figure 1), users come to know what these styles sound like through descriptions which list in detail generic conventions (e.g., “electronic new age uses soft synths, long, sustained notes, and simple drumbeats”), its representative acts, and what aspects of this genre one should notice and appreciate (“singing in a shimmering, ethereal way” in the ambient pop genre). More, to supply content for these entries, which are edited by users, authoritative sources are cited (i.e., music critics) and genre descriptions approved by moderators

on the basis of their thoroughness. As a result, not only does Rate Your Music prompt users to master the history of popular music and its stylistics, it also prompts them to master the expert opinion of critics who originally offered their views on how to listen to and evaluate these styles.

Thus, the site's tagging system, charts and genre entries compiled from expert opinion facilitates mastery of genre terminology. More, users' circulation of expert opinion expressed in these terms—of how one should listen given an album's characteristics—in their reviews socializes users in the opinions others, who together value expertise, will find credible. As users recirculate musical terminology to credibly convey their experience of an album, a sense of connectivity is established among users. Having together mastered popular music's stylistics—and the musical opinions of past critics who originally wrote about these genres—these terminologies are recirculated in a heavily referential writing style in the reviews of users:

Poison Season continues his experimentation with sophisti-pop. 'Times Square, Poison Season' could be the dramatic monologue in a Broadway play. 'Dream Lover' resorts to 70's glam-rock pomp a la Cockney Rebel, and ends with a dense instrumental din in the vein of early Roxy Music. (ILY)

Knock Knock is the best place to start any Smog collection. Contained within are some of Bill Callahan's strongest songs and his widest variety of music on one album: throbbing Krautrock ('Held'--which Spoon has covered in concert), somber folk-rock ('River Guard'), metal ('No Dancing'), and VU-like rhythms with children's choruses ('Cold Blooded Old Times', 'Hit The Ground Running'). (Count5)

... in ‘Desert Horse’, you’ve got a groovy desert-rock intro, followed by a weird, Bjork-esque synth-pop breakdown, followed by a vaguely twee interlude sung in French, followed by a brief reintroduction of the introduction’s sonic pallet, which finally makes way for a fleet-footed psych-pop outro- to say nothing of the utterly bizarre transitions that bridge the gaps between one section and the next. (torinn818)

In these reviews, we are presented with a handful of references to bygone genres (krautrock, desert rock), curios (Cockney Rebel), and representatives of the rock canon (Roxy Music, Björk). Importantly, those who could most feasibly decipher the meaning of this shorthand would be other Rate Your Music users, who have likewise trawled the database’s highest ranked and esoteric glam rock albums from the ‘70s or learned to identify the generic conventions of sophisti-pop through its genre entry’s description. This terminology allows for comparisons between new and old that would not otherwise be possible, imitating the expert opinion stored in the database to describe the sounds of the contemporary release (“If it has, à la its genre entry, ‘soft synths, long, sustained notes, and simple drumbeats,’ it’s new age”). Drawing from the same pool of expert opinion, contagious terminology sidelines differences in response, with users uniformly evaluating and conveying to each other their musical experiences.

What I will now suggest is that such a digital ethos—in which users respond to *doxa* that speaks to their shared values (expertise)—can preclude the production of new ways of listening. For instance, when a user writes about Destroyer’s 2011 album *Kaputt* “If you were dismayed that Brian Eno never made a record with The Blow Monkeys” (RustyJames n.p.), one is effectively proffering an example in the Aristotelian sense, with these older, better-known representatives of bygone styles becoming commonplaces from which to construct an argument about how one

should listen to the lesser-known contemporary release. In this way RustyJames's negative assessment of *Kaputt*'s sophisti-pop sound (as conveyed through the reference to the critically panned Blow Monkeys) is instantly conveyed to others who are "in the know."

But what is the similarity between ambient music and sophisti-pop in this discussion of Destroyer's 2011 album *Kaputt*? Would '80s listeners even make the same comparison, when the genre was considered an ultra-cheesy genre of adult contemporary schmaltz, worlds away from *Kaputt*'s twinkling loops, rock instrumentation, and forever-reverberating trumpets? If, as Bruno Latour writes, categorization of what is past and what is present is a matter where it is the "sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting" (76), then does not this shorthand indicate a confused historiography, where we listen to the past in new ways because of *Kaputt*? What is elided in this recirculation of expert opinion is the pondering of phronesis, where rhetors do not merely repeat received opinion that seems right to all but judge the present case in its particularity (of how, say, Destroyer's *Kaputt* exceeds dominant musical opinions).

In contrast to the Rate Your Music user who values and dwells in expertise by imitating genre terminology to achieve an ethos, the online community I turn to next practices what I term "networked phronesis," which culminates in deliberation regarding how one's writing can cultivate the network as a space of deliberation by intervening care-fully in the networking of *doxa*. Here, the case of the I Hate Music forum is instructive in theorizing a response-able manner of dwelling in the *doxa* of networks to invent arguments and establish credibility in the community.

3.5 Networked Phronesis on I Hate Music

Electroacoustic improvisation (EAI hereafter) is an avant-garde genre of improvisational music in which musicians explore the relationship between space, sounding agents, and performer. EAI performances usually feature long durations of silence, microsounds, quiet drones, the affirmation of unintentional sound production, and extended techniques and non-musical instruments (e.g., applying a handheld fan to a prepared guitar, playing sine wave generators or sculpting feedback with mixing boards) (Plourde). While EAI has an international reach and is performed throughout East Asia, Europe, Central America, and North America, the online presence of the genre is relatively slight, as a handful of blogs make up the ecology of EAI listeners who actively discuss the genre. In addition to these blogs, there is the I Hate Music forum, started by Jon Abbey, producer and label head of Erstwhile Records. I Hate Music is a popular gathering place for musicians and listeners to write about EAI performances, and it is here that we can observe an ethos that presents possibilities for response-able digital rhetoric: networked phronesis.

Before transitioning to my case study, it is crucial to acknowledge the demographics behind this community and advise against sweeping prescriptions, as if all communities must fit into the mold of one site. In terms of demographics, I Hate Music users overwhelmingly skew male. Indeed, the perceptible absence of female users on the forum is enough to raise concerns. More, the site's international reach complicates placing users in one national or cultural context. Despite the difficulty in describing demographics, being that this information isn't available beyond the self-disclosed location listed on a user's profile, we can nonetheless say that the prevalent male presence and some rhetorical norms observed have the potential to be alienating. For example, it can be gleaned that this is a site with certain standards of participation that can be rigid: specifically, that users' writing demonstrates a solid grasp of the history, techniques, and aesthetic

principles (*topoi*) which broadly typify EAI performance. Here, these demonstrations of knowledge can create exclusionary boundaries between the site's users and more casual listeners. All that said, I insist that the forum remains a useful starting point in rethinking digital ethos. What truly interests me is how ethos is wrapped up in demonstrating responsibility for the community's response-ability—in care-fully contributing to the network's ability to more capaciously understand and inclusively value future performances in this protean genre.

given how unusual the equipment was, there aren't any short cuts to what it sounded like. taku started with two fans that were close enough together as to touch, clicking against each other in an erratic rhythm washed with the hum of the fan blades. eventually the trash bags and papers were agitated and started to rustle. after several cycles featuring more and more fans and the bags growing from gentle to whooshy and noisy, sean carefully switched on his devices and allowed them to ping gently. after a few moments, he turned them off. taku's work with the fans grew louder and then drifted quieter in irregular intervals, occasionally driving the debris bit by bit out of the circle and off of the sound table. each fan had unique sound, a mix of air sound, motor whine, blade wobble, and click. that allowed taku's sound timbral variation in addition to the pace and timing from his control board. for sean, he adjusted his sound by rotation speed, and by moving hammers out of the way so they wouldn't strike. he also had one crash cymbal which he occasionally played with a mallet to create a gentle airy drone. i can't put events into any sort of order, not just because it's been a couple days but because the focus and patience of both performers made it difficult to retain anything more than what was happening right in the moment. in a sense, this set was mostly about allowing sounds to happen rather than creating sounds, but so much thought and delicacy went into each decision it might well have been the other way around.

Figure 3 mudd's description of an EAI set

As phronesis concerns caring for communal flourishing, especially by being conscious of the consequences of one's speech on the community, networked phronesis concerns care-full participation in *doxa* that augments the network's capacity for deliberating and knowing together. Here, users value writing that demonstrates thoughtful engagement with the particulars of an exigence and reflects care-full deliberation regarding how one's writing is adding to the online community—an evolving space of deliberation in which *doxa* is networked across responses.

Due to the constraints around writing about EAI, users are disposed to this care-full, network-minded deliberation, where the *telos* of writing is to judge EAI performances in ways that will inform future listening and, if need be, proffer alternative ways of evaluating EAI.

Specifically, there are two interlocking features of EAI performance that promote this manner of dwelling in *doxa*—i.e., common opinions about how to listen and evaluate EAI performances—to establish an ethos. First, because performances oftentimes go unrecorded, the writer must explain in detail the set to users who would have no other way of knowing about that performance, set of techniques or instrumentation. Second, the non-musical instruments and extended techniques of performers are oftentimes peculiar to them, resulting in a high degree of variance between performances that forces listeners to thoroughly explain techniques, instrumentation, musical characteristics, etc. and carefully evaluate whether these aspects culminated in a successful performance. Taken together, EAI's evanescence and protean nature requires users to develop ways of listening to EAI, disposing them to the community-minded dwelling in common opinions (*doxa*) about what makes for a successful EAI performance.

If phronesis concerns the “wise handling of ignorance and new information” (Miller 2000, 75), I Hate Music's writerly disposition toward the network comport with this definition. That is, users write thoughtful accounts of performances to handle the community's lack of shared understanding about a performance and, in handling new information about the set, judge whether what was heard comports with or exceeds what users consider to be a successful EAI performance. At the level of the community, this deliberation enacts a hermeneutic, as one's account of the set and whether new descriptions and valuations are warranted is informed by past users' accounts, who likewise deliberated about whether the performance they are reviewing requires new understandings and valuations of EAI to aid users' future listening (and writing). This is another way of saying that the community's opinion of EAI is constantly in process, emerging from the writings of users who are disposed to caring about cultivating the response-ability of the network—its future possibilities for listening and responding to these avant-garde performances.

In the following section, I offer examples of the deliberation that characterizes the ethos of users on the I Hate Music forum. Here I treat I Hate Music as an example of how users dwell phronetically in the network's *doxa* to establish credibility: by demonstrating care for one's active role in building the network and its *doxa* through which users deliberate and understand EAI. These episodes will help to illustrate how networked phronesis fosters epistemic and moral growth.

3.6 “this all happened, i’m pretty sure.” Scenes of Networked Phronesis on I Hate Music

To dwell phronetically in an online community's *doxa* entails having a particular disposition in how one contributes to the community: caring for and cultivating together the network's possibilities for deliberating about and knowing together some shared matter of interest. Users, in turn, value—and establish credibility through—thoughtful, community-minded writing that demonstrates care-full engagement with the *doxa* of the network and one's contribution to it. In the case of I Hate Music, one intervenes in the networking of the forum's *doxa* by judging whether its opinions regarding how to listen to EAI apply to the unique performance they alone attended. When these problematize common ways of listening to and evaluating EAI, users proffer opinions that highlight alternative possibilities for what counts as a successful EAI performance. The scenes below show this credible conduct (and generative rhetorical invention) in action.

In describing the writing on I Hate Music, it is important to highlight that users register a difference in the conventions of EAI affectively, directing their attention to the specific makeup of the performance and stimulating deliberation into what exactly happened in the performance. To illustrate, below is an excerpt of an account of a performance by a user named mudd, in which

they carefully attend to the particulars of Taku Unami and Graham Lambkin's unusual set at the 2015 Amplify festival:

what happened will be extremely difficult to convey. well, there was a backing track, and the fans clicked and clacked against each other in a windy rise and fall. graham set about opening his suitcase, removing objects . . . taku seemed unable to ignore the piano sitting behind him, tentatively reaching up to poke a key or two . . . graham tried to wrap his slide whistle in paper and still play it, when that failed he abandoned the whistle and tried to play the paper alone. he was not terribly successful with that either, but he did have some hand-held toy that made a loud and perhaps satisfying squeak. at this point taku has revealed a significant sensitivity at the piano, playing slow repeating patterns of interesting chords ... this all happened, i'm pretty sure. (n.p)

Here mudd thoughtfully explains the performance by discussing the variety of objects used, the set's characteristics, and the affects (surprise, satisfaction, uneasiness) characterizing their experience. Indeed, attention to affect manifests in a common rhetorical gesture where users mention their affective response to begin their account. For example, this gesture materializes in mudd's review of Jason Lescalleet and Olivia Block's earlier Amplify set of amplified tape loops, describing it as a more conventional set epitomizing EAI's characteristics and sensations: "this was the maybe the most classic 'EAI' set of the weekend, focused on enveloping the room in sound without clear gesture or event. it was also very warm and comfortable to me" (n.p.).

That feeling informs the writing process recalls Thomas Rickert's work on ambient rhetoric, which considers "Affect, habituation, sensation, intuition, environment, and accident" as

essential to invention (60). In mudd's case, their review involves a movement from affect (wonder, uneasiness) to deliberation into how unusual musical characteristics and sensations were produced, prompting reflection regarding what specifically comprised that performance and explain what it is that they were hearing (*Is it EAI? Something else? An evolution in style?*).

While this detour through the role of affect might seem far afield from phronesis, it is important to pursue because the affective response of wonder or surprise—common to users' writing—directs attention to the performance's particulars and the applicability of commonplace ways of listening within the network. These affective responses set into motion the phronetic process of judging common opinions and aesthetic values (*doxa*) as they apply to the EAI performance to which one's responding. When performances seem to exceed what is typically taken to be a good EAI set, users start from their affective response to reflect on what they heard and offer more nuanced, capacious ways of evaluating the success of these unusual performances.

Here I present an example of users inventing and interacting with each other's alternative interpretations. In the popular "Recent Live Reports" thread, a post detailing Keith Rowe's performance with Mills College students resulted in a discussion over EAI's conventions and aesthetics. The controversy involved whether the student musicians had unwittingly sabotaged the performance by not demonstrating the restraint common to EAI, or whether their expressive style complemented Rowe's uncharacteristically chaotic prepared table-top guitar. Both attendees and those who didn't attend discussed whether a performance that allows for such techniques and musical characteristics should be considered a failure, with those who had attended recounting the set in order to highlight what could be considered a successful or failed deviation from what one expects in an EAI performance. For instance, diederich springboards from their affective response

to reflect deeply on the student's performance, attempting to describe the student's technique and appreciate its place in the set:

There were a couple moments in both that were memorable though . . . at one point the trumpet player picked up a second mouthpiece and for a few minutes used it to tap or scrape or rub the outside of his trumpet, I don't know why, but somehow the simplicity of his sound and his movements really worked well for me at that moment. (n.p.)

In their post diderich points out their own feeling of satisfaction from what could be considered a naïve gesture on the trumpeter's part. This response doesn't argue whether this is the right way to perform in the context of an EAI set; instead, it adds to the discussion by offering their own singular perspective ("worked well for me") and expands the range of opinions in a way that invites engagement. In response, a user named surfer offers a differing opinion, describing what they heard as the student's inability to play within the musical context:

The trumpeter I will single out here as being the most bold voice. However, he did not look at all engaged in what was happening, bordering on outright boredom ... His contributions which seemed impatient, were very long single notes, played loudly and held, some extended techniques in the bell of the horn, and later hitting the mouthpiece. I thought he was really inappropriate and just not listening to what was going on. (n.p)

surfer goes on to counter other users' insistence on the lack of restraint by highlighting the students were too restrained, ceding control entirely to the veteran Rowe at key points.

The disagreement underpinning the back-and-forth between surfer, diderich and other users is helpfully supplemented by the input of Jon Abbey, the board's moderator, who finds a way to evaluate the lack of restraint by highlighting the aesthetic value of experimentation, suggesting that, like even the veteran Rowe, these students are trying to find their voices in a difficult musical idiom that is always changing. In concluding the rhetorical episode, surfer responds by expressing their assent to the opinion shared by Abbey and others regarding the value of experimentation ("I hadn't thought about it that way" [n.p.]), even seeing in the performance aspects of sensitivity to the performance that had originally been overlooked.

Importantly, such dialogue doesn't center around seeking consensus or having the final word. It is not about affirming communal values or defining boundaries of community belonging through acts of provocation (trolling users whose opinions conflict with the community's *doxa*). Instead, these interactions are about inviting others to try on ways of listening to EAI and developing their understanding of what EAI is and can be. This interaction between users is wrapped up in a shared disposition of care toward the network's possibilities for knowing EAI. So, when users discuss the free rein given to expressivity in the Mills College set, what is collectively valued in EAI performance can be rethought and, from there, even become a new starting point from which to listen, interpret, and write about EAI in the future. In short, this participation is about collaboratively negotiating communal beliefs and aesthetic values (*doxa*) so users might understand, evaluate, and respond to EAI performance in a more generative manner.

3.7 Individuating *Doxa* on I Hate Music

This dissertation has so far reimagined processes of *doxa* formation that could lead to online communities defined by epistemic and moral growth, as well as the networked rhetorical ethics—the relationship between users and the rhetoric that actualizes this implicit relationship—that would facilitate this process. Thus far, I have outlined how a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability could enable rhetoric’s function as a *technē* for transforming communal beliefs that “effectively stymie the possibility” for future response, negotiating the opinion and beliefs (that is, *doxa*) through which the community understands its shared matters of interest (Long 26). Such a reactivation of rhetoric’s ability to foster epistemic and moral growth would require users who affirm (consciously or not) their participation in the emergence and evolution of the opinions and beliefs (*doxa*) through which the community understands their shared interest and responds to exigencies involving this interest.

Being responsible for the networking of *doxa*, however, requires communication practices, digital *ethē*, and rhetorical dispositions. To think a digital *ethē* for response-able networks, this chapter offered a digital ethos position in which credibility derives from demonstrations of care-full participation in the online community’s *doxa*. Additionally, this standard of credibility feeds into the “transductive” communication practices discussed in the preceding chapter. That is, as the I Hate Music example shows, users who care about how they are contributing to the online community’s understanding consider the latent tensions in *doxa* that appear when faced with a novel exigence (e.g., whether their aesthetic values accommodate or not performances that flout performative restraint). More, it is writing where users’ deliberations put in relation as much as possible their disparate aesthetic values and musical experiences so as to arrive at perspectives on EAI that generate more nuanced and capacious standards for future listening. Such acts

demonstrate the thoughtfulness and care for the network as a dwelling place for deliberating which users rely on to know together their shared matter of interest. Hence, networked phronesis as a digital ethos position promotes care-full writing that “transduces” *doxa*.

To illustrate, in the Mills College example above, users deliberate through mechanisms outlined in the previous chapter to make sense of listening to unorthodox EAI performances, principally by negotiating aesthetic values to novel performances, elaborating listening histories, and reading each other closely so as to expand and enrich their ways of knowing and writing EAI. Actualizing doxastic potentials, as outlined in the previous chapter, involves rhetoric which puts in relation and integrates the tensions between affects, experiences, and values underpinning *doxa*. These doxastic potentials—the affects, values, and experiences that underpin opinion about EAI—can be structured in rhetorical acts which amplify tensions in one set of opinions (what makes an EAI set successful is its performance restraint) to arrive at a more capacious and generative one (that expressive playing creates cathartic music if we shift our expectations of what EAI can be). As users respond to, build on, complicate, and augment the *doxa* circulating in the network, dominant opinions and communal beliefs are opened up to their own variability and taken toward an ever more open structure—insofar as it expands how users might deliberate about their interest.

The users comprising the I Hate Music forum are disposed to writing this way, in part, because the aesthetics and performance of EAI obliges users to continually renegotiate what is valued in this peculiar genre of improvisational music. Due to EAI’s protean, evanescent nature, the genre resists easy shorthand with which to describe performances. Having attended a performance that flouts what is taken to be “EAI,” users must ponder the *doxa* used to evaluate EAI sets and invent alternative possibilities for understanding performances that one has attended. As this chapter has underscored throughout, it is this phronetic participation (or “dwelling”) in

doxa that users depend on in order to make sense of EAI performances and, therefore, it is a networked form of rhetorical conduct that users tend to value within the I Hate Music community. From here, users seek to maintain their *doxa*'s openness, negotiating and resolving its tensions so as to cultivate more capacious understandings and productive responses to rhetorical exigencies (e.g., making sense of strange EAI performances). Simply put, as illustrated above, I Hate Music users affirm themselves as active participants in the networking of *doxa*, and therefore value amongst themselves writing that cultivates future possibilities for deliberation and response.

3.8 Conclusion

The beating heart of this chapter has centered around the “dwelling” in the *doxa* that characterizes online communities: those in which participation is based on the circulation of contagions and those based on networked phronesis. While Rate Your Music demonstrated how a digital ethos based on the imitation of contagious terminologies create “closed” communities, the I Hate Music forum suggests that the prudent deliberation of networked phronesis can be a generative way of dwelling in the *doxa* of networks to invent arguments and establish credibility. Taken together, a larger picture of online community—and what it could become—is offered, one that instructors of digital writing and rhetoric might take up as a starting point for informing students’ rhetorical habits as they engage with and contribute to online communities.

There are, however, potential limitations to phronetic dispositions in online communities. For instance, on I Hate Music it is often the case that discussion doesn’t stray far from EAI and that users engage certain kinds of “thoughtful” participation over others, particularly an in-depth knowledge of EAI and the board’s history. Despite common opinions and aesthetic values always

being in process, the topic of discussion and kinds of participation to which users respond fail to diversify. In this way, it might seem that networked phronesis, as digital ethos, can close community. However, this rigidity in participation and topic need not be the case. Networked phronesis involves a disposition toward networked community that is receptive to alternative ways of writing about some interest, insofar as users demonstrate care for the network as an evolving space of deliberating and knowing together their shared matter of interest or concern. Therefore, diversifying the ways of engaging with, say, EAI or introducing non-EAI-adjacent topics would be received as worthy contributions—so long as users perceive it to be phronetic: demonstrating care for the consequences of one’s writing on the networking of *doxa*, with which users deliberate about and know their shared interests or concerns.

Crucially, networked phronesis is a manner of dwelling in networks that can be fostered. By promoting care-full dispositions in students, digital writing instructors could enhance social media discourse communities by helping students, in the words of Jodie Nicotra, recognize themselves as “active participants in the building of a network” (274). Expanding on Nicotra’s point, we can say that the prudent deliberation and community-minded participation of networked phronesis presents a picture where users are disposed to making meaningful contributions and valuing such writing. This is a compelling image of networked writing that instructors of digital rhetoric can support, especially since online communities serve as popular writing spaces in which students might seek to affect change (small or large) that is significant to them and their community.

Realizing a digital writing pedagogy capable of producing phronetic subjects could entail exploring the circulatory logics at play in the formation of communal ethos in online communities and, moreover, the effect this ossified ethos has on the invention and interaction of these

communities. This might also involve students making a pattern of judgments about the rhetorical dispositions capable of enabling dynamic online communities. These approaches converge on a central insight: that networks are evolving spaces in which opinion is produced and reproduced through the activity of users. In this way networked phronesis becomes a central concept for informing the rhetorical conduct of students as they write within online communities: to exercise an awareness of one's role in building the network and contributing to the opinion through which the community responds to exigencies concerning shared matters of interest.

As I conclude, I consider the question surrounding how to inculcate phronetic dispositions to be a pressing concern, one that will be delved into further in chapter four. Whatever pedagogical routes one might take to this end, such writing instruction would be responding to a formidable challenge for the field: How to open up networks to response-able rhetorical engagements.

4.0 Chapter Three. Being-with Rhetorical Machines: Simondon and Mechanology

4.1 Speculating Response-Able Futures

In the introduction to their 2019 collection *Rhetorical Speculation*, Scott Sundvall and Joseph Weakland identify a perennial problem in rhetoric and writing studies: that the field often engages the technologies of writing reactively, describing and accommodating them into research and instruction after they have already significantly shaped the social field of writing. Sundvall and Weakland offer the examples of social media platforms, programming, augmented reality, and 3D printing as digital technologies that teacher-scholars incorporate into their work as rhetoricians and compositionists, oftentimes without “getting ahead” of these technologies in terms of teaching their potential future uses and considering their wider societal implications. While this is perhaps too harsh a point to make for a field with a number of precedents for such “speculation,” the point is nonetheless compelling that the field should aim to invent futures instead of accommodating these technologies as they come to us.

Outside the conversation of rhetorical speculation, scholars of digital rhetoric and writing have begun arguing that we must imagine how the opinion (or *doxa*) of digital publics and online communities could more generatively and dynamically take form. Caddie Alford and Damien Pfister point out that social media platforms have become the infrastructure in which our opinions form and are reinforced, and we should consider how *doxa* forms in this infrastructure and how else it might take shape. Likewise, Andrew Pilsch remarks in his analysis of Facebook’s Flux architecture that attention must be paid to the infrastructure which precludes productive rhetorical engagements on social media platforms. Finally, in surveying the groupthink and aggression

present on social media, Erika M. Sparby (2017) identifies rhetoric as the field that can best adjust user conduct toward more ethical and productive engagements. These scholars insist that we imagine and invent the future of social media.

Taking together this range of scholarship in digital rhetoric and writing studies (DRWS), the field is increasingly posing the question of how teacher-scholars can intervene in our conduct in online communities: specifically, how to make our rhetorical engagements more prudent, careful, and generative in these homogeneous, static, and inhospitable networked writing spaces. This dissertation offers through the thematic of individuation ethical and rhetorical frames that can inform participation in the networked formation of *doxa* within the context of online communities. As presented in previous chapters, such communities would be one where users care for the network by affirming their responsibility in producing and perpetuating *doxa*—with these communal beliefs serving as the foundation for the network’s response-ability—and, in turn, judging these beliefs before resolving their doxastic potentials in response to novel exigencies.

Thus far, this project has identified communication practices and *ethē* that could underpin the epistemic and moral growth of users who are responsible for the network’s response-ability. As regards communication practices, chapter one offered dialogical deliberations through which doxastic potentials are transductively actualized. And while chapter two showed how online communities that dwell phronetically in *doxa* might facilitate dynamic network-building, it nevertheless begged a difficult question. Simply, we may have another rhetorical subject—a responsible (response-able) subject—we may also have communication practices that enable the transduction of *doxa*, and we may have a code of rhetorical conduct that demonstrates prudence and care for the network (networked phronesis), but what sorts of conditions for rhetorical practice (dis)allow the communication and character that would be conducive to response-able networks?

This chapter extends calls for imagining rhetorical futures—in my project, speculating response-able networks—by translating Gilbert Simondon’s approach to inquiry and instruction in technicity, which he calls “mechanology,” to the field of DRWS. Simondon’s program of mechanology is simultaneously critical, pedagogical, and speculative. That is to say, mechanologists are teacher-scholars who analyze the functioning of technicities in particular assemblages, the values informing their functioning, and speculate on the potential values and operations of technicities. For Simondon, this speculation involves thinking how technicities might complement the becoming of the human. To actualize this shift in how we regard technology, Simondon’s mechanology features a pedagogical aspect, where the mechanologist engages with others, who might be less sensitive to what he calls the technicity of technics, imagining how to intervene in the conditions of practice in technics so as to cultivate greater capacities for practice.

Translating mechanology to DRWS, I present rhetorical mechanology as a framework through which teacher-scholars: (1) examine how the platform incorporates and structures the affective, perceptual, and cognitive capacities of users; (2) identify how this structuring of affective, perceptual, and cognitive capacities affects rhetorical practice; (3) interrogate the values operative in the functioning of platform infrastructure; and (4) speculate other possibilities for how user capacities (e.g., affect, attention) might be activated in networked writing spaces, particularly in ways that promote users’ long-term care for the network’s past and future.

At heart, this third chapter focuses on transposing Simondon’s critical-pedagogical-speculative project to DRWS in order to imagine the technicities and digital writing pedagogy that could help response-able networks flourish. Simply put, this chapter will involve proffering a framework to critique platform infrastructure and speculate on networked writing’s futures, while also developing in our digital writing pedagogies strategies for instilling in students a sensitivity

(per Casey Boyle, “sense-ability”) to the networked formation of *doxa* within online communities. Not unlike the *paideia* of Isocrates, the aim of this digital writing pedagogy will be ethical, cultivating in students care-full attention to the conditions of networked rhetorical practice

This chapter moves in three steps. First, I review the “technics turn” that has greatly added to the analysis of computational infrastructures and their effects on networked rhetorical practice. I draw a thread in this body of scholarship and attempt to offer a more unified turn toward technics, specifically how scholars understand the relation between computational technicities and rhetorical practice. Here, I suggest that these accounts of platform infrastructure and their effect on digital rhetorics can be fleshed out when we theorize the relations between computational technicities, their effect on the capacities of rhetors (attention and affect, specifically), and the *doxa* formation process. Second, I offer an overview of Gilbert Simondon’s framework of mechanology before presenting algorithmic technicities (specifically, ranking algorithms) as technicities whose functioning, determined by economic forces, modulate attention and affect in a way that precludes the character and communication that could support response-able networks. This chapter concludes by enacting the method of rhetorical mechanology, turning to Bernard Stiegler’s philosophy to critique the blockage in *doxa* formation that ranking algorithms (Twitter’s Trends) produce. Specifically, Trends hyper-synchronizes attention and affect according to measures of virality, short-circuiting long-term care for the becoming of the *doxa* of networks. This critique of Trends *qua* platform infrastructure sets up the next chapter, which imagines alternative dispositions toward writing in relation to the network and alternative couplings between attention and affect in these writing environments, which in turn foster the character, communication, and care that response-able networks require.

4.2 On the Infrastructures of Rhetoric

With new media becoming integral to communicative and compositional practices, DRWS has reassessed the relationship between writing technologies and rhetorical practice. Douglas Eyman, in his overview of the field of digital rhetoric, identifies analysis of the effects of digital technologies on writing as a core functions of the field. Citing James Porter's introduction to the formative volume *Digital Writing Research*, Eyman picks out and identifies a concept in Porter's essay that connects across the field: that there exists a "hybrid, symbiotic relationship between humans and machines" (Porter 2007, xv-xvi). Instead of abstracting writing from its technological conditions, research in digital rhetoric and writing acknowledges all composition as an assemblage of human capacities and non-human agents. The efficacy of this approach to analyzing digital writing has been demonstrated by a number of scholars, many of whom have taken up updating traditional rhetorical concepts in ways that accommodate the affordances of digital media (Brooke 2009; Hatfield; Hawk; Lanham; Reid; Rice 2012, 2016). From the turn of the century to the contemporary moment, this interest in computational technicities as material conditions for digital writing practice has yielded in important insights: from the affordances of platform infrastructure in constructing an ethos (Fleckenstein; Silvestro) to the influence of algorithms and interfaces on compositional decisions (Carnegie; Gallagher). Such analysis of digital writing and rhetoric can be termed, à la Porter, "cyborgian."

Simply, DRWS is a field where writing research and pedagogy centers the relationship between non-human actants and the human composer. That human capacities are entangled with and activated by technologies, then, is a common starting point for analysis and instruction. However, this insight has been expanded to include the relations between public communication, users' affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities, and digital technologies. Within DRWS,

there has been a recent “technics turn” in thinking how computational technicities shape public culture, or “the envelope of communication practices within which public opinion is formed” (Hariman n.p.). Scholars such as Damien Pfister, Jonathan Carter, and Casey Boyle offer analyses of how computational technicities affect communication practices online. The next section reviews this scholarship and treats it as a jumping off point from which to theorize how the coupling between embodied human capacities and computational technicities affect communication. Afterward I will translate Gilbert Simondon’s notion of mechanology to DRWS. I will use mechanology framework to theorize how the computational technicities that make up platform infrastructure shape networked rhetorics, particularly by structuring attention and affect in ways that short-circuit long-term care for how one is taking part in the co-production of the network.

4.3 Assembling Rhetorical Infrastructure: The Technics Turn

At the 2018 RSA conference, Damien Pfister headed a panel on the “technics turn” in rhetoric, which concerned how technics shape the horizon of possibility for rhetorical exchange. Fashioning a robust theory of the role of technics in rhetoric is panelist Jonathan S. Carter, who has recently pursued Stiegler’s conceptualizing of technics and individuation to illuminate how rhetoric, as the “architechnic,” informs the organization of networks. In Stiegler’s writings collectives—e.g., a social movement, a school of philosophy, a nation, a subculture, a public—come to be through processes of individuation. That is, collectives constitute and maintain themselves through the individuals’ contributions to the collective, and the uptake of these contributions—such that they transform the identity and knowledge of the collective—is mediated through technics (for Stiegler, this first occurred through the advent of writing).

While Carter acknowledges this mediation of individuation via technics, he spends less time on how this mediation can yield more generative and ethical invention (a concern aligned with my aim of promoting response-able networks via phronesis and dialogical deliberation); instead, for Carter, rhetoric's role in informing the technics that support individuation is key. This positioning of rhetoric as the "architechnic" through which networks are organized offers a framework with which to politicize and critique platform infrastructure and the rhetoric behind it. Carter demonstrates this framework's use by analyzing Facebook's changes to its algorithmic organization of user feeds, guided by the slogan of "Time Well Spent," which prioritizes friends' content over public content such as news (a response to the platform's role in influencing the 2016 presidential election). This change to Facebook's platform infrastructure, in Carter's words, "shape[s] the conditions under which this network individuates" (550) by technically curating the content with which users engage. Whereas individuation, according to Stiegler, involves drawing from and participating in a manner that transforms communal knowledge, history and identity, Facebook's algorithm blocks individuation; instead of enabling users to individuate themselves by participating in community matters, Facebook's privileging of content from friends and family blacks out content that speaks to public issues.

While Carter's project and mine overlap, his attention to how rhetoric itself organizes networks differs from my focus, which is aimed toward those conditions which might enable alternative processes of *doxa* formation. However, toward the end of his article, Carter does acknowledge that his framework for analyzing platform infrastructure leads critics of digital rhetoric to ask whether social media platforms amplify individuation, fostering online communities in which individual users takes up agency in shaping the network:

In the Stieglarian idiom, the most basic question would be, “*Does the network promote individuation or proletarianization?*” To translate this into a more rhetorical sense: “*Are the actants able to reshape the network?*” or “Does the network allow multiple and conflicting modes of arrangement (*dissoi logoi*)?” (560, emphasis mine)

Damien Smith Pfister takes up a related line of thinking in his essay reflecting on the discourse surrounding Google Glass and the technology’s effect on democratic public culture. Resonating with Carter’s concern about the way in which infrastructure mediates our relationship to the public, Pfister reflects on augmented reality technologies such as Glass and their potential for reworking the stranger sociability and civic desire of democratic culture. That is, augmented reality technologies such as Glass have the potential to produce user experiences that flout stranger sociability, locking users into personalized information environment which divert user attention from the “outside” world of flesh-and-blood strangers and urgent community matters. In expressing this concern, Pfister ponders whether there could be infrastructure that helps to amplify the civic desire on which democratic culture is based. For Pfister, it is civic desire that moves individuals to actualize a democratic public culture in their rhetorical engagements. It is

the desire to develop a culture of care with others, to engage in conversation about our collective future, with strangers as well as familiars, in a way that opens up to the development of a non-hegemonic commonness necessary for collective action in a democracy. Civic desire is civic attention with a positive valence; civic attention conjoined with democratic conviviality. (2019, 195)

Importantly, this desire is based on a feeling of commonness, a sense of mutual interdependence in public issues and interests that, for Pfister, is “a rhetorical achievement that occurs within a specific infrastructure” (194). Because access to a common world cannot avoid mediation—whether through Google Glass or, à la Benedict Anderson, newspapers—Pfister claims that renewing the “media infrastructures capable of countering the otherwise homophilous tendencies of the *zoon politikon*” is a “constant challenge” for public culture (194). Simply, Pfister implies that technologies can foster or attenuate civic desire by diverting attention from and suppressing public issues, the solutions for which depend on the care-full, collaborative deliberation of fellow citizens.¹⁴

Taken together, Carter and Pfister offer meditations on the effects of infrastructure: platform infrastructure can preclude user individuation and, for Pfister, infrastructure can distract from the common world that citizens occupy. Both Carter and Pfister offer insights into the “violence” of infrastructure: technicities affect communication practices by structuring attention in ways that impede dialogue and deliberation. Both scholars, then, see technics as influencing the democratic possibilities for networked public culture, which is to say, “the envelope of communication practices within which public opinion is formed” (Hariman n.p.).

In theorizing the infrastructures of rhetoric—one that is in keeping with Carter’s and Pfister’s interest in the consequences of platform infrastructure for networked public culture—

¹⁴ Pfister concludes with a call to arms, suggesting that rhetoricians “must be involved in the task of making our digital glass interfaces resemble more dispersive prisms instead, showing how new technologies can be designed to refract common experiences into rich gradients of difference” (197). Pfister, then, appears to be inviting speculation and invention of another vision of networked public culture—of other networked communication practices that might nurture more democratic processes of online deliberation.

Casey Boyle suggests that changing technological conditions introduced by digital media require us to become “sense-able” to networked technologies’ role in shaping the potentials of rhetoric. On this point, Boyle writes that “Given the computational abundance that our age of information poses ... it has become necessary to develop sensibilities to the processes through which social practice unfolds in and among our informational systems” (14). Later on, Boyle outlines a pedagogy through which students might attune to and experience rhetoric’s networked conditions as a mediated, habituated, material practice. Generally, Boyle sees such instruction—e.g., toggling between online Internet and offline DIY networks—as means of having students sense “the fund of material relations that precede and coincide with the incorporation” of users in these networked information environments (13). In other words, Boyle’s pedagogy enables students to experience how acts of writing are *materially assembled* and lived through *relationally* as capacities to be activated in a distributed media ecology.

Casey Boyle’s overall project is relevant to this dissertation in a great number of ways. The conclusion of this dissertation will utilize Ted Nelson’s early hypertext systems Xanadu as means by which to make the conditions of networked writing—the relationality and diachronicity of networks—“sense-able” to students and provide occasions for developing dispositions crucial to the flourishing of response-able networks. But as regards the formation of *doxa* in networks—a more generative, affirmative, and dynamic process of formation—Boyle complements Carter and Pfister by closely linking the infrastructures of rhetorical practice to embodiment, habit and the material relations which couple with and incorporate the human’s affective, perceptual, and cognitive capacities. While rhetorical theory has inquired into and turned toward these capacities in rhetoric’s contagious circulation—that is, the body’s place in the conjunction of intensities informing viral circulation—Boyle’s contribution can be developed further by considering *how*

technicities of circulation modulate rhetorical being by coupling with users' capacities (e.g., attention and affect), especially toward some desired *telos*.¹⁵ If technics in part influence the horizon of possibility for our communication and character, then this chapter theorizes the relation between computational technicities and the capacities of users, specifically how the activation of certain embodied capacities affect the cultivation of practice in (rhetorical) infrastructure.

In my effort to understand the material, technological conditions that amplify or attenuate response-able conduct and, therefore, the transductive becoming of *doxa*, I turn to Gilbert Simondon to address the following: What computational technicities shape communication and character? How do these technicities incorporate users' affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities? What imperatives guide this incorporation? How do these incorporations of affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities help produce blockages in *doxa*? How do they promote certain kinds of participation over care-full, phronetic conduct? I respond to these questions by offering a framework with which to consider the effects of computational technicities on *doxa* formation. Simondon's notion of mechanology surveys the human's relationship to technical objects, specifically the human's recognition of the latter's technicity: machinic becoming's relationship to the human, particularly in the latter's cultivation of itself through practice at the level of technics. Adopting the program of the mechanologist, I claim that the over-specialization of computational technicities through the imperatives of capital privileges measures of virality in structuring user attention and affect. Just as Simondon's mechanologist critiques, speculates on, and inculcates another relationship between the human and the technical, this chapter critiques the relationship of

¹⁵ Indeed, scholars such as Jenny Edbauer Rice (2018) and Jonathan Bradshaw (2020) have already gestured toward the ways in which rhetoric keys into circulatory intensities to achieve rhetorical ends.

computational technicities (ranking algorithms) to the users of the popular Twitter platform: its structuring of attention and affect, and this structuring's effect on *doxa* formation within the network's hashtag communities. This analysis is grounded in a framework I call rhetorical mechanology, translating Simondon's critical-pedagogical-speculative program to DRWS. Lastly, this critique of how attention and affect is structured according to measures of virality will set up the next chapter, which speculates on manners of "sensing" and building up dispositions and practices suited to the network and its conditions—relationality, diachronicity—that can culminate in response-able online communities.

4.4 Defining Mechanology

Gilbert Simondon's philosophy is a significant contribution to the study of individuation—the becoming (or ontogenesis) of individuals—and the logics underpinning the evolution of technology. As shown in preceding chapters, Simondon's thought on individuation concerns how the individual emerges through a process of structuring itself and its environment by incorporating the potential residing in its milieu. While Simondon, as philosopher of individuation, has had uptake in rhetorical theory (see Boyle), Simondon's philosophy of technology has very much to offer in the analysis of rhetorical infrastructure. Particularly, Simondon's thinking concerning the relationship between the human and technics can help us think the critical and pedagogical function of DRWS research and instruction in new ways. Rhetorical mechanology is a program for DRWS research and instruction suited to 1) attending to the possibilities for networked communication and character, 2) unpacking the technicities that problematize response-ability to conditions of networked rhetorical practice, 3) identifying the forces over-specializing a rhetorical

technic's operation, and 4) considering how else the capacities of users (e.g., attention and affect) might be activated in networked writing spaces, particularly in ways that cultivate the conditions of practice, promoting the pondering of *doxa* and care for the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together (culminating in a digital ethos position I termed "networked phronesis").

At its heart, Simondon's philosophy of technology understands the distinct becoming of the technical object and its relation to the distinct becoming of the human. While technologies naturally lend themselves to intervening in the world of the human—the shovel intervenes in the burden of digging, the wheel intervenes in the burden of traveling—the technical object nonetheless has a reality and becoming of its own, which Simondon refers to as "concretization." For Simondon (2017), technical objects are ontologically distinct because, over time and changes in design, technologies resolve problems related to their functioning by better incorporating their (geographic, technical, or social) environment into their functioning. Simondon also underscores the ontological distinctness of technologies by pointing out that novel technologies have the power to interrupt cultural norms and engender new values (what he calls "technicity"). This occurs because technics harbor within them modes of perception, affect, and cognition that are actualized in use. The goal of Simondon's philosophy is to usher in a society that responds to the becoming ("concretization" and "technicity") of machines and their relation to that of the human. Here, humans become sensitive to the realities that technics actualize and reflexively shepherd their affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities toward engagements that survey the technical conditions of practice and actively cultivate more expansive possibilities for practice¹⁶:

¹⁶ See Simondon 2009 for an extended discussion of what he terms "technical mentality."

Whether or not he wills it, man [sic] is the technician of the human species; a form of feedback loop operates in human groups, alternately comparable to either the farmer or cultivator who prepares the soil, or to the gardener or breeder who deforms species and obtains new varieties. When the feedback loop is comparable to the cultivator who acts on the soil rather than the plant, we speak of technique: man acts on the environment he exploits, transforms and develops, and in this case man only acts on himself indirectly. (Simondon 2015, 18)

On the other hand, Simondon identifies a long-standing alienation of humans from technics that results from the place of technical objects in the technical ensemble of capitalism. That is, scaling up past the technical object or machine, technical ensemble denotes the ways machines are set up in relation to other machines. On the factory floor, for instance, complex machines are set up to increase productivity at an industrial scale for the purpose of profit. Simply, the functioning of machines in a technical ensemble is closely tied to “social, technological, political and economic forces” (Hayles n.p.). Extending our example, the worker and owner both become alienated from the machines making up the technical ensemble of the factory, as the goal of profit crowds out alternative ways of relating to machines beyond the criterion of value creation. In response to capitalism’s over-specialization of machine functioning, Simondon seeks to, through philosophy and education in the technicity of technics, open up machines to human judgment at a societal scale, particularly in a way that realizes a meaningful synergy between machinic and human becoming:

[M]an [sic] is the permanent organizer of a society of technical objects that need him in the same way musicians in an orchestra need the conductor. The conductor can only direct the musicians because he plays the piece the same way they do, as intensely as they all do; he tempers or hurries them, but is also tempered or hurried by them; in fact, it is through the conductor that the members of the orchestra temper or hurry one another, he is the moving and current form of the group as it exists for each of them; he is the mutual interpreter of all of them in relation to one another. Man thus has the function of being the permanent coordinator and inventor of the machines that surround him. (2017, 17-18)

In this quote, the figure that interprets and intervenes in machinic and human becoming goes by a particular name: the mechanologist. This figure interprets the machines' functioning and the values informing it, identifies the capacities they activate, and speculates on how to make machinic becoming complementary to human becoming and its long-term development. The mechanologist, then, aims to "understand their increasingly technological environment [and] meaningfully participate in its evolution" (Mazzilli-Daechsel 239). Here I suggest that mechanology can be translated to DRWS research and instruction. In order to enable students to differently perceive, meaningfully critique, and practice anew within networked writing spaces, it is essential to make students sense-able (in Boyle's parlance) to how networked technicities shape communication as well as our character as communicators by activating affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities in particular ways. In the next section I show how embodied capacities couple with computational technicities before enacting rhetorical mechanology through an analysis of Twitter's ranking algorithm Trends, showing how platform infrastructure can short-circuit the communication and character required of response-able networks.

4.5 Defining Rhetorical Mechanology

What Simondon's mechanologist aims to help effect is an appreciable change in the relationship between humans and technology. Mechanology involves analyzing the potential functions of machines, the forces informing the functioning of machines in a technical ensemble, and the relation between the becoming of machines and the becoming of humans. For Simondon, over-specialization by imperatives such as those of capital can close off the human from other manners of being-with machines. Hence, Simondon envisions a societal rethinking of machines, where citizens consider technology not in terms of its productivity but of its *technicity*, of its ability to bring realities into being by shaping the world and human capacities. This means responding to technics' novel couplings with its environment and its users such that it invents "new material orders that transform pre-established boundaries and expectations of what is possible" (Lapworth 115). Responding to technicity means attending to how these new material orders, these new realities, "give rise to new ways of thinking, new affective relations and new values" (110). For Simondon, it is the mechanologist's pedagogical task to speculate along with others, who may be less sensitive to technicity, regarding the realities technics make possible, how these realities implicate the human's capacities, and how machinic becoming and human becoming can be made complementary.

Now, we ask what human capacities technics couple with to shape rhetorical practice. That is: How do technics couple with these capacities and affect the communication and character that underpin rhetorical practice? As I will go on to show, rhetorical mechanology is instructive for the critical-pedagogical methods of digital rhetoricians: (1) to examine how platforms incorporate and structure the affective, perceptual, and cognitive capacities of users; (2) to identify how this structuring of affective, perceptual, and cognitive capacities affects users' communication

practices and character; (3) to interrogate the values operative in the functioning of platform infrastructure; and (4) to envision other possibilities for how users' capacities might be activated in networked writing spaces, particularly in ways that promote care-fully attention to the network *qua technē* as providing conditions and unactualized possibilities for rhetorical practice.

With rhetorical mechanology defined, I consider it crucial to differentiate this framework from others within the field of DRWS. Firstly, like much of the “cyborgian” research in DRWS, rhetorical mechanology takes digital writing to be an assembled, distributed act that involves ecologies of code, software, digital interfaces, human capacities, network relations and effects. Likewise, scholars have begun arguing that this distributed writing assemblage shapes users' networked rhetorical practices by affecting their affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities. For example, DRWS' abovementioned technics turn (Boyle 2018; Carter; Pfister 2019) considers in-depth the ways in which cognitive capacities such as user attention are directed, and how platforms such as Facebook or wearables such as Glass complicate the affective investments of civic desire by turning the world into a personalized interface. However, what differentiates this framework is that I speculate on how capacities might be activated in support of response-able networks. Specifically, if networks continually transform themselves to the extent that they are response-able—producing *doxa* that is responsive to the networking of *doxa* in the writing space—then how can attention and affect be activated in digital technicities such that conduct (networked phronesis) and communication (dialogical deliberation) foster response-able online communities? Here, the biggest difference between the cyborgian approach and rhetorical mechanology is that the latter not only describes and critiques the technicities of digital rhetoric but also speculates on and practices another—response-able—future for digital rhetoric.

As this dissertation responds to Collin Gifford Brooke (2015) call for “engaging with and shaping the structures, technologies, and cultural logics” which underpin viral circulation, the framework of rhetorical mechanology is well-suited to addressing to this particular exigence. The remainder of this chapter demonstrates this point by using the framework of rhetorical mechanology to describe and critique how user attention and affect are structured on Twitter. Focusing on Twitter’s ranking algorithm Trends, I return to this project’s description, critique, and speculation concerning alternatives to viral processes of *doxa* formation in social media. Trends, as an algorithmic technicity, structures and activates user attention and affect in a way that leads to what Bernard Stiegler calls hyper-synchronization, a condition where algorithms short-circuit care-full participation in the *doxa* of the communities comprising the platform. Describing the process of *doxa* formation through viral platform architecture in this chapter, then, sets me up to speculate in the next chapter alternative manners of dwelling in networks which realize new possibilities for “attending together [and] disclos[ing] other possible ways of becoming together” (Rivers, 62). As addressed in the preceding and following chapters, this means caring for the response-ability of the network by individuating ourselves, affirming our responsibility in participating in *doxa*. If networked phronesis (see chapter two) describes how this care-full participation in the networking of *doxa* materializes as a digital ethos, hyper-synchronization provides its foil, where attention to the networking of *doxa* is precluded by viral logics programmed into the platform, structuring attention and affect toward short-sighted response.

4.6 Hyper-Synchronization and Ranking Algorithms (Trends)

Hyper-synchronization is a central concept to Bernard Stiegler's critique of mass media. In the first volume of his *Symbolic Misery* series, Stiegler (2014) explicates the forces of synchronicity in the consumption of mass media such as film, tv, radio, and recorded music (what Stiegler terms "symbol production"). Specifically, Stiegler views broadcast media as a synchronizing force, whereby the attention of viewers is synchronized to industrially produced symbols without the possibility of audience contribution. Synchronization, therefore, produces the sort of "proletarianization" that Carter addresses above, insofar as broadcast audiences aren't able to individuate themselves—act as an individual—through the contribution of their knowledge or meaning-making. In this regard, the audience becomes alienated from the production of symbols and, in consuming the same media, share history without differentiation. The "I's" of the audience, then, cannot participate in the constitution of the "We."

Within the context of social media, however, Stiegler sees hyper-synchronization operating differently. Throughout Stiegler's later work, the philosopher expresses concern over the role of algorithms in mediating the participatory environment of social media, particularly in how these algorithms capture, standardize and direct users' activity. That is, Stiegler critiques the capturing of metadata and segmenting of users into data profiles to offer personalized content, a process based on the belief that similar user demographics, psychographics and user behaviors (people of a similar background liking similar things on Facebook, for instance) will want to see related content in the future. For Stiegler, this process resembles an anthill, where each ant releases pheromones in order to seamlessly coordinate with the rest of the ants inside the colony. In reviewing Stiegler's allegory of the anthill as the myth that encapsulates our digital condition, where social media platforms quantify the attention of likeminded users in order to further attract

and direct it, Damien Smith Pfister (2020) writes: “[C]apitalism economizes conscious time (attention) through grammatization (breaking up a singular individual to the discrete particularities that can be measured and controlled) in order to increase the calculability of life in the service of consumerism” (12). At heart, Stiegler’s point is that the algorithmic real-time capturing and formatting of user attention—showing content that similar users have also consumed—is essential to the functioning (and success) of social media platforms today. Stiegler, then, concludes that this hyper-synchronization of user attention based on algorithms reduces the ability of users to individuate themselves on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. What characterizes social networks is not the long-term process of deliberating about and negotiating communal beliefs or knowledge; instead, algorithms automatically direct users’ attention to content according to how (supposedly) likeminded users have directed theirs, removing all processes of dialogue and deliberation from the emergence and becoming—i.e., individuation—of online communities and their *doxa*.

Certainly, Stiegler’s discussion of hyper-synchronization should move us to consider the technicities that undergird social media platforms and their effect on users’ rhetorical practices. My interest in Stiegler’s notion of hyper-synchronization feeds into this consideration insofar as I am specifically interested in the functioning of ranking algorithms in social media platforms, which quantify the engagement of its users to organize content according to measures of virality. As scholars of digital media suggest, including Matteo Pasquinelli, Yves Citton, and Taina Bucher, user attention is directed according to measures of what counts as a valuable contribution. With regard to ranking algorithms, attention becomes hyper-synchronized in the sense that users are, *en masse*, directed toward contributions or topics that have a sudden, significant uptick in activity. Hence, for ranking algorithms, what is valuable is a post’s virality. Ranking algorithms, as I will

show, organize the network according to viral logics, emphasizing response to the trending present over long-term care for the network and one's participation in it.

While there are different kinds of ranking algorithms, I focus on how algorithms ascribe value to a network in order to organize it for users. For example, Google's PageRank organizes search results according to the number of pages that link back to it. Importantly, the method of calculation that inspired the PageRank algorithm derives from the impact scoring of academic journals where, in the words of Matteo Pasquinelli:

[T]he value of an academic publication is notoriously calculated in a very mathematical way according to the number of citations that an article receives from other articles. Consequently, the general rank of an academic journal is the sum of all the incoming citations received by its articles. (5)

The ranking of contributions to guide attention to what is most important is not a digital practice. However, as Matteo Pasquinelli remarks, ranking systems have become part and parcel of network theory and the actual organization of networks, insofar as the density of networks requires organization and the ascribing of value to nodes (for instance, webpages or tweets). Hence, tech companies such as Google or social networking giants such as Twitter utilize highly sophisticated ranking algorithms that, in line with Herbert A. Simon (who theorized the "attention economy" in 1971), are designed to provide users with information they need to know.

Indeed, Twitter's ranking algorithm enacts Simon's underlying argument regarding the organization of information in an attention economy: by algorithmically directing users' attention to topics based on who they follow, their interests, and location, Trends prioritizes and directs

users to what should be of interest in the here-and-now.¹⁷ By organizing the network according to “trending topics” and what the platform terms these topics’ “top tweets”—determined by high levels of recent engagement—Twitter can efficiently deliver relevant and (ostensibly) important information to the network’s users. It is in this sense that the network becomes useful and valuable to users as a platform for accessing and discussing information that is significant to them.¹⁸

It is by being able to efficiently organize and deliver relevant information to users that ranking algorithms such as Google’s and Twitter’s help each company achieve financial success. At bottom, then, ranking algorithms are about providing this information by measuring what others have already referred or engaged with (e.g., Google’s PageRank search results, Twitter’s Trends). This assumption regarding how networks should be arranged undergird the most powerful and successful companies, platforms and services. With this in mind, I now turn to the second move of mechanology: critique. Specifically, I will be presenting a critique of how Trends incorporates user attention and affect in its organization of the Twitter network, in turn shaping how the *doxa* of its hashtag communities takes form.

¹⁷ Twitter’s description of the Trends algorithm resonates with Herbert Simon’s underlying supposition regarding the organization of information in an attention economy: “Trends are determined by an algorithm and, by default, are tailored for you based on who you follow, your interests, and your location. This algorithm identifies topics that are popular now, rather than topics that have been popular for a while or on a daily basis, to help you discover the hottest emerging topics of discussion on Twitter” (n.p.).

¹⁸ In line with network analysis, as a network scales up through the presence and participation of users, it becomes increasingly valuable to users. This scaling up of networks is called a “network effect.” The success of social media platforms depends on achieving this network effect, which entails attracting users and capturing their attention through the efficient, effective organization of information that is relevant to them.

4.7 Trends' Structuring of Attention and Affect

In the context of social media, ranking algorithms are computational techniques that measure and organize user attention in an attention economy. In this sense ranking algorithms are what Simondon calls over-specialized techniques, in that the functioning of the algorithm is suited to functioning in a particular technical ensemble: the larger attention economy in which users, advertisers, code, interface, network effects and infrastructure, and business plans all participate. In a high-speed, competitive attention economy, the ascendance of social media platforms is part and parcel of its ability to produce network effects, where platforms become valuable to users (and advertisers) as the scale, rate and intensity of user participation increases. With this influx of information and the comparative dearth of attention, the need arises for methods of organizing and delivering information that users will find useful. Ranking algorithms respond to the issue of network effects—of their organization as they scale—and capitalize on them by making the network more valuable: the larger a network and the more navigable it is, the more useful it becomes for contributing and receiving information (Srnicek).

The Twitter social network is a micro-blogging platform in which users compose messages up to 280 characters. These messages can be mundane or, in the case of networked social movements, tailored toward horizontal non-hierarchical activism and protest (Tufekci). Importantly, Twitter's trending topics have been instrumental in publicizing events and issues (Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, #BringBackOurGirls) which then experience viral circulation. Users can share media such as video, images, and audio by sharing external links or uploading files from one's computer. Additionally, users can share other users' tweets with users who are following them. Twitter's user interface now comes equipped with a timeline and two sidebars, one of which displays trending topics personalized to one's location or interests, while the other

includes a button to explore a broader selection of trending topics on Twitter. Additionally, users can search through the archive of tweets through keywords or hashtags, which Twitter organizes into the category of “Top” recent posts and “Latest” posts.

In the case of Twitter’s ranking algorithm, Trends is a means of quantifying and directing user attention to need-to-know (“trending”) topics which are experiencing a surge in popularity. Tarleton Gillespie explains Twitter’s targets for measuring trending topics:

Twitter explains that Trends is designed to identify topics that are enjoying a surge, not just rising above the normal chatter, but doing so in a particular way. Part of the evaluation includes: Is the use of the term spiking, i.e. accelerating rapidly, or is its growth more gradual? Are the users densely interconnected into a single cluster, or does the term span multiple clusters? Are the tweets unique content, or mostly retweets of the same post? Is this the first time the term has trended? (Gillespie n.p.)

What is important to note in Gillespie’s summary of Trends is his emphasis on quantifying engagement and organizing content on the basis of measures of engagement which, in being assembled into lists of what’s “trending,” involves a choice about what tweets will be valued. Quantifying how attention is being spent in the network transforms an otherwise impenetrable infosphere into a system for delivering information that is vital to its users, not “normal chatter.” In other words, with the help of Trends, Twitter prioritizes the publicizing of the trending present.¹⁹

¹⁹ As Gillespie explains, it is also a process of determining how diffused among network clusters a topic has to be to trend, what the window of time is in determining “trending topics” over merely popular ones, etc.

To describe the structuring operation that Twitter's ranking algorithm Trends effects is to consider the algorithm as a technical operation incorporating the attention and affect of users. Simondon (2020) articulates that technical operations bring together a matter charged with transformable potentials and a form that actualizes and structures this potential. Attention takes form on Twitter according to trending topics and top tweets, which are calculated according to viral metrics. That is, if we understand virality to be, per Gillespie, part and parcel of a sudden uptick in the engagement of users with a particular piece of media or a particular topic of discussion, then user attention serves as the embodied material to be shaped according to what other users are engaging with. Again, attention is homogenized and oriented toward the present.

What is perhaps a more novel point is that this incorporation of attention affects how *doxa* takes form in Twitter's hashtag communities. As Stiegler underscores, the hyper-synchronization of attention tends to eliminate the dimension of "diachronicity." Hyper-synchronization's focus on the present and real-time, "trending" responses to the present shrinks temporal horizons, where users tend to be occupied with responding to what is trending now instead of intervening in the past of the network or contributing to the network with the intention of intervening in its future.²⁰ Solely occupying and responding to the trending present, then, can create blockages in the formation of *doxa* by precluding processes of elaboration, critique, revision, and complexification of the network's beliefs and values.

²⁰ The infrastructural violence that hyper-synchronization effects has been, in an indirect way, discussed within rhetorical theory. In *Political Perversion* Joshua Gunn (2020) highlights how digital culture's dilation of time to "real-time" has resulted in "now-centered" user behaviors that lacks regard for questions of culpability or the consequences of actions (e.g. teenagers livestreaming violent assaults on Facebook). Gunn here echoes Stiegler, citing evidence of a collective loss of the self-policing superego through digital technologies that mediate sociality.

A by-product of attention to the trending present is a short-circuiting of response-ability. Collin Gifford Brooke (2015) gives the example of important topics such as #Ferguson falling out of Twitter's list of "trending topics" because they are no longer recent enough. Likewise, what gets indexed under the Ferguson hashtag are tweets that are experiencing upticks in attention. Trends, in these instances, functions in a way that can preclude future developments in discussion regarding race, police brutality and militarization, and how users might later respond to future exigencies. With this hyper-synchronization of user attention on what is trending in "real time," Twitter's ranking algorithm actualizes a more pessimistic premonition of Stiegler's, who asks

Could "real time," tending toward reduction as floods of information perpetually erasing themselves, along with all possibility of rereading, in a repetition eliminating repetition, drain away all productive repetition of difference in order to exist exclusively on the terrain of "bad repetition?" (Stiegler 2009, 125)

Put simply, could organizing the network around topics that are experiencing upticks in attention in the "real time" of the present divert attention from tweets or topics that are no longer trending and, in doing so, preclude the elaboration, revision, critique, and/or rejection of the opinion and beliefs (*doxa*) of the communities forming around these topics? Moreover, does this emphasis on soliciting responses to trending topics in the present promote the sort of deliberation that could progressively actualize the latent potentials and tensions underpinning the network's *doxa*?

This does not seem to be the case, as Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang point out how whiteness stuck to the hashtag #YesAllWomen as it trended, with the hashtag community unable to reorient discussion around intersections of race and gender despite pushback from many users.

As #YesAllWomen began to trend and attract attention, it was the narratives of white women that were recirculated most and became associated with the hashtag. Here, the *doxa* of the hashtag community—the most commonly represented perspective on the issue—became stable through recirculation, as users interacted with the hashtag in terms of the relatability of recurring narratives. To render the community “response-able,” user participation would intervene in the hashtag community’s past and reorient its future by opening up what has gone undiscussed regarding #YesAllWomen. Differently put, Edwards and Lang’s example of #YesAllWomen not only demonstrates how the *doxa* of hashtag communities form but also how the algorithmic infrastructure of Twitter publicizes topics that invite engagement based on contagious, emotional response without promoting engagements that aim to intervene in the past and future of the network’s *doxa*.

Here, we arrive finally at how affect is activated by Twitter’s ranking algorithm: Trends. It is instructive to understand ranking algorithms not only as directing attention to useful information but as a technicity that functions by structuring affect according to viral metrics. Ranking algorithms publicize topics that, by their nature, activate excitations which impress on users the existence of an exigence.²¹ Through the hyper-synchronization achieved by Trends, structuring attention around topics that are trending in the present, users’ affect-laden rhetorical energies are continually solicited as they encounter ever-newer topics demanding their response. It is in this way that the ranking algorithm activates and draws on affect: the algorithm’s calculation of trending topics is functional if it can consistently elicit an affective response and compel user

²¹ In recent years, scholars such as Jenny Edbauer Rice, Nathan Stormer, Debra Hawhee, and Thomas Rickert have centered affect as integral to sensing and responding to exigencies.

participation, galvanizing cycles in which emotions are solicited and, subsequently, discharged. This solicitation of affect structures the network's rhetorical energy toward the temporality of the trend or "real time," discharging emotion in response to the trending present and diverting attention to the diachronic horizon of the network's past *doxa* and its future response-ability.

To conclude, I ponder whether there is a way attention can be structured toward intervening in *doxa* and contributing to the network as a writing space for deliberating and knowing together. I also ponder whether affect can be incorporated and rhetorical energy structured so as to enable sustained engagement with *doxa*—through forms of disruption, disagreement, self-complication and critique—and care for communal response-ability. If hyper-synchronization truncates the horizons of rhetorical possibility by directing attention and affect to the trending present, then what structurations of these capacities might lead to orientations to the online community that are characterized by care and prudence? This other orientation to networks will be described in the next chapter as *philia*, care for the materialization of rhetorical practice in technical systems. *Philia*, as paying care-full (affect) attention (cognition) to the conditions for rhetorical practice in the context of networks, describes users who grasp (consciously or not) their role in shaping the network and, in turn, contribute response-ably. In the spirit of Simondon's mechanology and Stiegler's philosophy, I speculate that *philia* could serve as a rhetorical disposition toward the network that functions so as to *diachronize* the online community: to write in a manner that responds to its past *doxa* and contributes to its future response-ability.²²

²² This problematic—how to prevent media's short-circuiting of prudence and care—is one that philosopher Peter Sloterdijk touches upon briefly in considering the reception of his infamous essay "Rules for the Human Park." In discussing the controversy surrounding the piece, Sloterdijk offers an aside that touches on the question of how we can support prudent and careful processes of deliberation (which he calls "pondering") in the face of exigencies.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I translated Simondon's concept of mechanology to the analysis of platform infrastructure, seeking to identify the capacities these technicities activate in their functioning and how this activation of attention and affect shapes networked rhetorical practice. To realize an ethic of response-ability within online communities, another orientation toward the networked writing space is required. Oriented in this way, one would be aware of their writing's effect on the past and future of the network, progressively structuring the potential and tensions of the network's *doxa* in ways that cultivate its response-ability. Consequently, response-able orientations toward the online community requires an ethos (what I call "networked phronesis") and communication practices (chapter one's dialogical mechanisms) in order to flourish. As I have intimated

Thereby, Sloterdijk offers instructive connections between media, affect, rhetorical dispositions and rhetorical ethics: "We live constantly in collective fields of excitation; this cannot be changed so long as we are social beings. The input of stress inevitably enters me; thoughts are not free, each of us can divine them. They come from the newspaper and wind up returning to the newspaper. My sovereignty, if it exists, can only appear by my letting the integrated impulsion die in me or, should this fail, by my retransmitting it in a totally metamorphosed, verified, filtered, or recoded form. It serves nothing to contest it: I am free only to the extent that I interrupt escalations and that I am able to immunize myself against infections of opinion. Precisely this continues to be the philosopher's mission in society, if I may express myself in such pathetic terms. His [sic] mission is to show that a subject can be an interrupter, not merely a channel that allows thematic epidemics and waves of excitation to flow through it. The classics express this with the term 'pondering.' With this concept, ethics and energetics enter into contact ... Remarkably few are those that manage to develop a unique opinion, one that is independent of the induction of excitation, and are thereby able to interrupt the wave. In the future, it will be necessary to raise the following question incessantly: am I contributing to a debate, or am I running along with the mob? Or is this the same thing?" (84-85).

throughout this chapter, however, platform infrastructure can have effects on networked rhetorical practice, insofar as the structuring of attention and affect precludes this (non)conscious awareness toward one's participation in the networking of *doxa*'s past and future. This chapter, then, continued this dissertation's overall project of 1) describing the impact of viral circulation on the communication practices that lead to *doxa* formation in networks, and 2) speculating on the conditions—and dispositions toward these conditions—that can support a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability.

In the next chapter, I will employ the second step of Simondon's mechanology: envisioning alternative manners of writing within the mediated writing space of networks such that the activation of users' affective, cognitive, and perceptual capacities supports long-term care for the network as a space of deliberating and knowing together its shared matters of interest or concern. How can attention be structured so as to enable care-full participation in *doxa*? How can affect be incorporated and rhetorical energies structured to promote care for the becoming of the online community's *doxa*? Through the inclusion of early hypertext systems, I put forward a pedagogy concerned with making students sense-able to the conditions of networked writing, inculcating students to response-able rhetorical dispositions.

5.0 Chapter Four. Love and Xanadu: Response-Ability in the Digital Writing Classroom

5.1 *Philia* and Network Literacy

Taken together, preceding chapters have argued that online communities are products of rhetorical contagions. Here, the circulation of ideas and texts over time results in the agreed upon opinion (or *doxa*) that constitutes the identity and belonging (ethos) of online communities. Contagions invite recirculation and secure uptake by appealing to users' common experiences, emotions, values, associations, *topoi*, or tastes. As this dissertation has pointed out, the rhetorical process of digital consensus-building specific to contagions can result in the stasis of *doxa*. Digital rhetoricians such as Jeff Rice (2017), Jonathan Bradshaw, Erika Sparby, Caddie Alford, Damien Pfister (2020), Jake Cowan, and Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang argue that users require ethical and rhetorical frames of engagement to work against the digital consensus that viral logics of *doxa* formation culminate in. If students are unaware of their perpetuation of contagions as they communicate with others in the network, they risk foreclosing reflection on the meaning of these contagions, resulting in problematic discourse in the form of aggression, echo chambers, demagoguery, or shallow argument pools. I've argued that what leads to blockages in the formation of *doxa* is users' lack of care-full attention to the effect of their writing on the network: the rhetorical space that houses the circulation of *doxa* and cultivates the community's capacity for deliberating about, knowing, and responding to shared matters of interest or concern.

To imagine rhetorical processes of *doxa* formation that lead to more ethical and generative participation in the formation of *doxa*, I used Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of individuation to think how else *doxa* might take form within online communities. In chapter one, I used Gilbert

Simondon's philosophy of individuation to imagine alternative processes of *doxa* formation in online communities and, toward the end of that chapter, identified dialogical mechanisms as useful in actualizing doxastic potentials and cultivating the network as a space for knowing together and responding to rhetorical situations. Chapter two identified a digital ethos (networked phronesis) in which users establish credibility by dwelling in *doxa* in a manner that demonstrates care for the network, pondering its past *doxa* and writing so as to add to or develop its possibilities of response to future exigencies. Chapter three introduced Gilbert Simondon's idea of mechanology to the field of digital rhetoric, adapting its critical-speculative-pedagogical project to imagining and practicing with students alternative manners of being-with the networked writing technologies and systems with which we write and persuade each other.

Foregrounding the loose ends of this dissertation, there are important questions that remain to be addressed: What dispositions toward the network can lead to networked phronesis? What pedagogical strategies can be utilized in the digital writing and rhetoric classroom to help produce student-users who care for the network and work toward its response-ability?

In this chapter, I offer that a phronetic ethos in networked writing spaces can be nurtured through an embodied network literacy. My approach to developing network literacy is based on sensing networks as open, relational, evolving, co-produced writing spaces. Putting in dialogue Casey Boyle's embodied understanding of mediated rhetorical practice and Ted Nelson's Project Xanadu information system, I outline pedagogical strategies that can actualize this embodied network literacy. The outcome of sensing networks is a disposition that inclines users toward phronetic ethos positions, particularly by attending care-fully to networks as a technological condition for rhetorical practice: what philosopher Bernard Stiegler calls *philia*.

Resonating with Simondon’s philosophy of technology—which seeks to help inaugurate a revaluation of technicity and its relationship to the human and its possibilities for living—Bernard Stiegler’s later work deals with how the disposition of *philia* informs the individual’s and community’s practices with technology. Typically defined as “love” or “friendship” in ancient Greek philosophy, Stiegler offers a renewed understanding of *philia* as another type of care for community that grounds one’s use of technology. Specifically, *philia* denotes a type of care for community that is grounded in knowledge of the community’s “prostheticity,” that is to say, the community flourishes by care-fully attending to that which exists outside it: its *technē*. Since *technē*—examples include law, language, tools, techniques, and systematic practices—underlies all making (e.g., writing, governing, crafting, laboring) and is, at bottom, the “continuation of life by means other than life” (Stiegler 1998, 50), *philia* denotes the care-full attention to *technē* that enables the flourishing of life (biological and social). Without this shared attention to *technē*, Stiegler writes that the human—and human collectives—risk returning to what he calls “the default,” a condition that describes the human’s reliance on technics and, simultaneously, the tendency to experience “ill-being” when unable to utilize *technē* in a care-full manner. Translated to digital rhetoric, I suggest that our “ill” engagements online derive from short-sighted writing practices and social media technicities that short-circuit *philia* vis-à-vis the network, itself a *technē* housing the circulating *doxa* with which users respond to rhetorical situations. However, when users attend to the network’s past and future rhetorical practice—when they see themselves as actively building the network through the rhetorical process of “shar[ing], reject[ing], dismiss[ing], supplement[ing], continu[ing] ideas [and] texts” (Rice 179)—they embody *philia*: care-fully attending to how *doxa* takes shape in the network and how their participation in *doxa* will shape the possibilities for future rhetorical practice.

This chapter will take up how sustained student engagement with various networks in the writing classroom can provide opportunities to sense the relationality and diachronicity inherent in network-building and, thereby, activate capacities (*philia*) for more ethical network-building. As an example of this, I will discuss Ted Nelson's early hypertext system Project Xanadu as a pedagogical tool for sensing the diachronic and relational aspects of networks, inculcating a care-full, prudent orientation to their participation in network-building and their long-term becoming. By sensing the diachronicity of networks that Xanadu's bi-directional linking (or "transclusion") allowed, students engaging with Xanadu's ephemera—e.g., interface mockups, software trials, and descriptions—can activate the capacity of paying attention care-fully (*philia*) to networks in a way that platforms tend to short-circuit (see chapter three's discussion of ranking algorithms). *Philia* is a much-needed form of attention, of taking care of *technē* together, of attending "with care jointly and collectively along not simply a course of individual acts but along environments we will build together" (Rivers 62). Sensing networks' diachronicity and relationality can instill *philia*, enabling student-users to care-fully attend to what they are building together.

5.2 Fostering *Philia*: Sketching an Alternative Network Literacy

Discussions of network literacy in digital rhetoric and writing studies (DRWS) takes up how to rhetorically and critically engage in the communicative practices that networks enable. As the NCTE express in their 2019 position statement "Definition of Literacy in a Digital Age," networked literacy involves the honing and intentional deployment of a number of skills, competencies, and dispositions toward networked writing spaces. In recent years, with the influx of mis/dis/mal-information in the networked public sphere, scholarship on network literacies has

focused on fostering an awareness of what constitutes credible information and how this information spreads (Craig; Laquintano and Vee; McComiskey; Miller and Leon; Minnix). Others interested in network literacy have put forward pedagogies that try to inform users' networked individualism: their selective creation of information ecosystems (Overstreet). Finally, scholars of digital literacy have emphasized the need for literacies that contend with the speed of the networked circulation of information (Faigley; Keller). While there is a considerable range of perspectives on the sorts of communication practices, competencies, and dispositions network writing demands, the lion's share of these contributions are not concerned with rhetorical or ethical frames of engaging opinion in online communities. As this dissertation has based such frames on Simondon's philosophy of individuation, thinking the communication practices (dialogical mechanisms of deliberation) and rhetorical *ethē* (networked *phronesis*) that can sustain the long-term process of the individuation—or the transductive becoming—of *doxa*,

I am seeking pedagogies that orient students toward networks' diachronic and relational aspects. That is, I am seeking approaches that help students see themselves as active participants in the long-term building of the network, as vectors through which its potential for response is cultivated together. As I will show, this means allowing students to sense their networked relationality: that rhetorical practice takes shape in unique ways in the network's mediated space.

To this end, it is best to begin with scholars who lay the foundation for such a pedagogy. In the field of digital rhetoric, a number of rhetoricians have set out to describe networks. As Jeff Rice writes on networks as writing spaces with their own unique characteristics, networked writing is characterized by a participatory process of bringing together and layering information in a single digital space that compels responses from other users. Indeed, social media networks are spaces of encounter in which users “share, reject, dismiss, supplement, continue ideas, texts, images, and

other information” (Rice 179). Here, users’ responses to each other’s ideas or texts, as in the case of *I Hate Music* in chapter two, don’t seek resolution or conclusion so much as they compel, nurture, and continue user engagement over time. Likewise, Jodie Nicotra understands network writing as a collaborative co-production of a digital space for the engagement of users. For Nicotra, networked writers are not simply producing or sharing digital texts in a digital space but “recursively, continually restructuring those spaces” (Nicotra 263). Differently put, in bringing together information and ideas in the digital network, users are creating together a shared space of information and ideas with which they collectively engage.

Taken together, Rice and Nicotra articulate how writing in social media networks involves the collective building of a digital space, in which the individual participates in the restructuring of the space of the collective by adding to or developing what has come before. That is, both highlight that there are diachronic and relational aspect to networks. Regarding diachronicity, both conceptualize networked writing as building a space that will inform how users understand, evaluate, and respond to new situations related to some matter of interest. Moreover, this networked writing space is restructured over time through user contributions, evolving through the ways in which users, in Rice’s parlance, “share, reject, dismiss, supplement [or] continue ideas, texts, images, and other information” (Rice 179). The network’s evolution, then, depends on how users interact with the writing space: whether they tend to ponder, continue, and/or disrupt communal opinion and knowledge (or per the contagion, tend to repeat). This capacity to restructure the writing space by intervening in communal opinion or knowledge describes the relationality that characterizes the network. Simply put, users’ relation as writers is characterized by the ways in

which they affect the networked space they participate in together.²³ Simondonian parlance would define this as a process of collective individuation, where the individual individuates (acts in their full capacity as an individual) by individuating the collective (that is, restructuring the collective's norms, beliefs or concepts such that the new emerges).

Relating this scholarship to the network literacy I seek to promote in the classroom, helping students see networks as first and foremost as collectively and collaboratively produced gives some orientation to their participation in these spaces and, moreover, their active role in co-producing the network. If we accept that students oftentimes need frames of engagement for their technology use (Bradshaw; Frost; Sparby)—along with opportunities to engage particular capacities for rhetorical practice (Boyle 2018)—then Simondon's philosophy of individuation points to an ethical manner of being in networks that cultivates users' response-ability—their potential for understanding their shared matters of interest and responding to exigencies involving these matters—through care-full deliberation, lest they become removed from the doxastic tension that provide the tensions and contradictions through which networks undergo perpetual reconfiguration (metastability). Without this incorporation of doxastic potential into communal opinion—without dispositions and practices that work to ponder and disrupt *doxa*—networks become home to toxic effects (demagoguery, echo chambers, online aggression) by shielding its *doxa* in digital consensus. Affirmation of their role in building the network—participating in the transductive

²³ As Tiziana Terranova writes: “A piece of information spreading throughout the open space of the network is not only a vector in search of a target, it is also a potential transformation of the space crossed that always leaves something behind – a new idea, a new affect (even an annoyance), a modification of the overall topology. Information is not simply transmitted from point A to point B: it propagates and by propagation it affects and modifies its milieu” (Terranova 51).

becoming (individuation) of *doxa*—calls for users whose rhetorical practices actualize doxastic potential and, what’s more, student-users who can slow themselves down and care-fully participate in the opinions and beliefs that make up the online community.

In keeping with this call for care-full rhetorical practice in networks, this dissertation has proffered ethical and rhetorical frames of engagement that can inform user participation in *doxa*. Indeed, as intimated above, what is needed is a disposition of *philia* toward the network, which is to say, care-full attention to how one’s writing will affect the networked writing space that houses the circulating *doxa* with which users make sense of and respond to rhetorical situations. The question, as also remarked above, is how to help foster such an orientation in student-users. That is, if networked phronesis was an example of digital ethos in which users establish credibility through writing that demonstrates care-full deliberation and cultivates understanding, we now ask how we might promote in students care-full attention to their participation in *doxa*. We can instill attention to the network’s *doxa*, along with the care that underpins this attending, by fostering these capacities in the digital writing classroom. In other words, to enable students see themselves as vectors through which *doxa* evolves and cultivate more inclusive, capacious understandings, they need to orient themselves in networks and perceive their activity ethically. Toward this end I offer that the condition of *philia* as developed by Simondonian philosopher of technology Bernard Stiegler best encapsulates this care-full orientation and ethical attending to technical systems and our activity in these systems. In the next section I define Stieglerian *philia* and connect the disposition to networked rhetorical practice. Thereafter, the second half of this chapter will be dedicated to showing how the sensing of diachronicity and networked relationality by engaging Ted Nelson’s Xanadu can instill *philia*. But before I move on, I will conclude by connecting the

work of Casey Boyle on developing students' capacities for rhetorical practice through their sensing of their practices' mediation.

As discussed in chapter three, Boyle puts forward a posthumanist theory that emphasizes rhetorical practice as a mediated and embodied process of activating capacities for rhetoric vis-à-vis particular writing technologies. Boyle sees technologies as enabling the development of rhetorical ability through practices in which users sense the possibilities for rhetorical invention that a technology—even an entire media ecology—makes possible: the “intensity of a practice’s mechanics (contrasting two-logics, assembling many instances of one topic, a production of difference though similarity) informs new [rhetorical] capacities” (Boyle 2018, 23).²⁴

Here, this conceptualization of rhetorical practice offers useful inroads into helping students develop dispositions and communication practices (i.e., literacy) toward networks as unique spaces of rhetorical co-production. Boyle’s work lends itself well to this end because he considers how engaging the affordances of media ecologies for rhetorical practice can cultivate greater capacities for conducting oneself in these ecologies: “each iteration of a practice is itself a contribution for activating new worlds. Practice incorporates a body by building up its sense and sense-abilities for activating new capacities” (Boyle 2018, 192). After building up a storehouse of rhetorical ability through a variety of practices with a given media ecology, this storehouse opens

²⁴ As articulated in the previous chapter, the computational technology of ranking algorithms—organizing the network via viral logics—activates user capacities of attention and affect in ways that short-circuit users’ long-term care for the building of the network. That is, the network programs in users’ responsiveness to the trending present by organizing attention and affect around the most “surging” posts at the moment, thereby deemphasizing past posts on a topic (i.e., past conversations among users) and incentivizing writing that triggers intense feeling (which is, oftentimes, not demonstrative of the care-fullness of *philia*).

up the potential to ask “which one” when engaging these technologies: that is, to engage in rhetorical practices that will allow rhetors to become more “affective within any given ecology of practice” and tend to the “development and habituation of material practices” (Boyle 2018, 162). Through a series of practices with the networked writing space of Xanadu, my wager is that students can build up such a storehouse of rhetorical ability that will allow them to become sensitive to the network’s relationality and diachronicity. In sensing these aspects of networks, students can then become disposed (*philia*) to participating in networks such that they become (à la Boyle) “more affective” in how they habituate themselves to and cultivate the rhetorical practices that the network helps to mediate (i.e., cultivate response-ability).

Just as Boyle gives the example of *dissoi logoi* and Erasmus’s *copia* as mediating practices by which abilities for rhetorical invention were cultivated in students, I contend that early information systems—such as Ted Nelson’s perpetually delayed Project Xanadu system—can become sites of engagement that help students perceive otherwise networked writing. Therefore, I will suggest that the classroom could become a space to engage a series of networked writing environments and, ideally, activate care-full capacities for networked rhetorical invention, specifically by sensing networks’ diachronicity and relationality. This disposition is best represented by what philosopher of technics Bernard Stiegler calls *philia*: a care-full disposition toward the technologies and practices that support communal flourishing. It is to Stiegler and his conception of *philia* that I now turn.

5.3 *Philia* and Taking Care of Rhetorical *Technē*

For Bernard Stiegler, technics has a guiding role in the becoming of the human. Famously, Stiegler contends that tools and practices (*technē*) inaugurate the human's becoming by coupling with the biological organism and, in this coupling, enabling systems of practice that aid in biological and social flourishing. However, tools and practices are what Stiegler calls (à la Derrida) *pharmaka*: simultaneously poison and cure, indeterminate as regards their status as medicine or toxin in relation to the user. With the invention of any technology, its uses in practice and effects on the user (and the community at large) cannot be foreknown, therefore demanding care on the part of its users and attention to current and future practices. In order for *technē* to contribute the continuation of human life and society, the human, then, must pay care-full attention to its tools and the way it practices using these tools (Stiegler 1998).

At the level of social and civic life—and rhetorical practice, as we will extrapolate—Stiegler applies these insights to how writing enables citizens to live well together and flourish. That is to say, Stiegler shows how tools and practices of writing bring about the possibility for the community to participate as equals in the evolution of the laws which govern the community. Specifically looking at the example of the *polis* in ancient Athens, Stiegler identifies the writing of the law—and its publication in the city for all to read—as essential to creating a political community where citizens are enabled to come together to interpret, critique, and transform law. In this way, the technics of writing—and the literate activity of citizens that follows—allow for the possibility of a community that comes together in public to participate in its own becoming: responding to new situations by interpreting the law, deliberating together about what is just, and proposing new laws that promote a better future for the *polis* (Stiegler 1998).

It is important to note that the *polis* takes care of itself by attending to the writing tools and literate practices that support the “communitization” of the law, that law emerges through the participation of citizens whose literacy enables them to interpret and transform the law (39). However, because the inscription of the law, which enables generations to adopt and critique it, relies upon practices and tools that are exterior to the human, there is always the risk that the literate practices of citizens in reading and interpreting the law will become poisonous *pharmaka*. For instance, citing the influence of the sophists on civic life in ancient Greece—the Assembly, the courts—Stiegler articulates that the sophists used language and taught writing (i.e., rhetoric) that aimed to secure power in the city instead of producing contemplative subjects who ponder the nature of justice and virtue. Hence, the technics of writing—the literate activity of citizens—required in the *polis* a shared orientation toward the practice of interpreting and critiquing law, which Stiegler identifies as *philia*. According to Stiegler, the *polis* recognized the need to take care of itself by taking care of its *technē*, projecting a shared future—e.g., a more just society—that guides their literate activity. Differently put, *philia* is a disposition toward practicing *technē*, affirming care-full attention to the latter insofar as the conditions for practicing *technē* shape our possibilities for living together, sharing meaning, and engaging the problem-generating world.

Here, Stiegler’s conceptualization of *technē* resonates with many of the precepts of rhetoric *qua technē*. Like Stiegler’s account of *technē*, Janet Atwill (1998) outlines rhetorical practice—*qua technē*—as creating social and/or political possibilities by intervening in the status quo’s beliefs. Because rhetoric addresses practical matters and questions of value in context-bound situations that cannot be resolved *a priori*, rhetoric *qua technē* can intervene in and deform opinion (*doxa*) such that alternative means of responding to and acting on rhetorical situations are articulated.

But then what makes a Stieglierian understanding of rhetorical practice *qua technē* novel? It is the Stieglerian emphasis on *philia*: practice as not only producing or making something but also as care-fully, critically attending to practice as it comes to materialize in technical systems. This can be clarified by revisiting a past case that exemplifies rhetorical practice based on *philia*, a collective taking care of the network: I Hate Music. Without recordings and faced with a protean idiom of music, users were compelled to care-fully and reflexively attend to the network's *doxa* through their singular acts of interpretation, addressing how performances fit or frustrate what users commonly take to be the aesthetics of a successful EAI performance. This is a deliberate process of rhetorical practice as cultivating and taking care of communal opinion. Moreover, users here also showed an awareness of the networking of its communal opinion, or the technical system of the forum (an example of a social media network) and its effects on practice (per Nicotra and Rice, users' collaborative and ongoing co-production of the space). Here, *philia* is reflected in users' affirmation of their role in their building of the writing space—in the community's networked production of *doxa*. By accounting for the networking of opinion, users adopt practices that help create possibilities for users' response-ability, developing together their capacities for understanding, valuing, and responding to EAI sets. The I Hate Music example from chapter two, then, shows *philia* at work, as users care-fully and reflexively attend to their co-production of the network together as it takes shape through the rhetorical process of “shar[ing], reject[ing], dismiss[ing], supplement[ing], [and] continu[ing]” of ideas and texts (Rice 179).

However, when users fail to recognize themselves as vectors for shaping the network, the networked community can, à la Stiegler, become toxic. No longer pondering the history of the network's opinion and contributing in ways that care for the community's response-ability, the network's users' rhetorical practice shields its *doxa* from reflection (as we saw in chapter two).

That is, without care-fully attending to the relationality and diachronicity specific to network-building—of how one’s writing crafts the network by “shar[ing], reject[ing], dismiss[ing], supplement[ing], [and] continu[ing]” user opinion (Rice 179)—the network risks defaulting into a community whose practices fail to evince care for its users’ response-ability, their cultivation of communal ways of understanding and responding to some matter of interest. Networks without *philia*—without care for the materialization of rhetorical practice in networks or contributing to the possibilities for practice—lapse into toxic rhetorical spaces wherein users are oftentimes resistant or hostile to the disruption of *doxa*.

While teacher-scholars of digital writing have less say in the design of platforms, we can imagine how epistemic and moral growth might take place through networked rhetorical practice and the rhetorical conditions of that practice. These conditions include communication practices (dialogical mechanisms of deliberation), *ēthe* (networked phronesis), and rhetorical dispositions. This disposition, as I have intimated, is *philia*: care-full attention to networked rhetorical practice and its conditions so as to cultivate the online community’s response-ability—its capacity for deliberating about and responding to rhetorical situations regarding some matter of interest. Importantly, such a disposition calls for, as Boyle might insist, pedagogical strategies that “develop and habituate” students to the networked writing space’s unique conditions in mediating rhetorical practice (Boyle 2018, 162). Therefore, to this end I offer in the penultimate section ways of having student-users sense networks’ diachronicity and relationality. Specifically, by engaging with Ted Nelson’s Xanadu student-users can sense these aspects of networked writing that can go overlooked. The goal, then, is building up this experience by attending to the network’s diachronicity and relationality, culminating in student-users who are disposed to care-fully attending to the network as a mediated space of rhetorical practice.

5.4 Ephemeral Xanadu

Initially conceptualized in 1960 by information scientist Ted Nelson as a program for storing and linking text stored on a computer, Project Xanadu is a long-overdue (perhaps unfeasible) vision of how to organize large bodies of information that eventually developed into a vision of internetworking documents across many computers: an alternative to today's internet. While deliverables have been announced and subsequently shelved since publishing his seminal 1981 book *Literary Machines*, with a pared down version made available in 2014, Nelson has established himself as a perspicacious critic of the World Wide Web for decades now. Specifically, Nelson sees today's internet as failing to overcome the limitations of print media in the organization of information, offering users "one-way, ever-breaking links and no management of version or contents" (Nelson 2017). According to Nelson, solely giving users the ability to move from page to page debases the idea of the hyperlink, which instead enables in a unique way the possibility for tracking how a document is being sourced through bi-directional linking (Barnet 2019).²⁵ For Nelson, hypertext should allow users to navigate in a side-by-side manner the original context of a piece of text and how it is being integrated into new ones. The bi-directional linking enables what Nelson calls "historical backtrack," seeing the history of the text as it is being sourced, cited and built on (see Figure 4).

Historical backtrack is a unique affordance to Xanadu that the World Wide Web's founder Tim Berners-Lee never took up in his vision of the internetworking of documents. Instead, on the

²⁵ Nelson, of course, had his predecessors. He cites Vannevar Bush's "As We May Think" for coming up with the idea of hypertext, of linking together bodies of information for retrieval (Barnet 2013, 78).

internet we're accustomed to, an embedded link to another webpage will simply transport the user, with the new page having no record of these other links. In the "docuverse" of internetworked webpages that would make up Xanadu, the difference is that any document a user might access shows on the same interface (what Nelson terms a "parallel" structure for linking) the links that have been created to that document, such as direct quotations, commentary, disagreement, etc. (Nelson 1999, 6). Nelson intended this parallel structure and the trails of writing it makes visible to render traceable the evolution of ideas over time (Barnet 2019, 222). This ability to track this development of ideas was what made the computer, as a technology of writing, unique compared to paper, especially its reliance on static citation practices and bibliographies (Nelson 1999, 8).

It should be noted here that this evolution of ideas across documents takes on a network topology, which becomes perceptible in more advanced mockups of Xanadu (see Figure 4). Between documents, one sees the many directions in which an idea is being pulled over time. Despite the fact that there is no easy equivalence to be made between our World Wide Web and Xanadu, this internetworking of writing across documents recalls Rice's and Nicotra's point that networked writing is writing that adds to in some way the conceptual space of the network. Xanadu, then, is a system of linking documents that envisions a practice of writing similar to Gilbert Simondon's notion of collective individuation, whereby the individual individuates—or emerges as an individual amongst the collective—by individuating the social group it belongs to (participating in the emergence of "norms, beliefs, actions, words, concepts etc.") (Bardin 87).

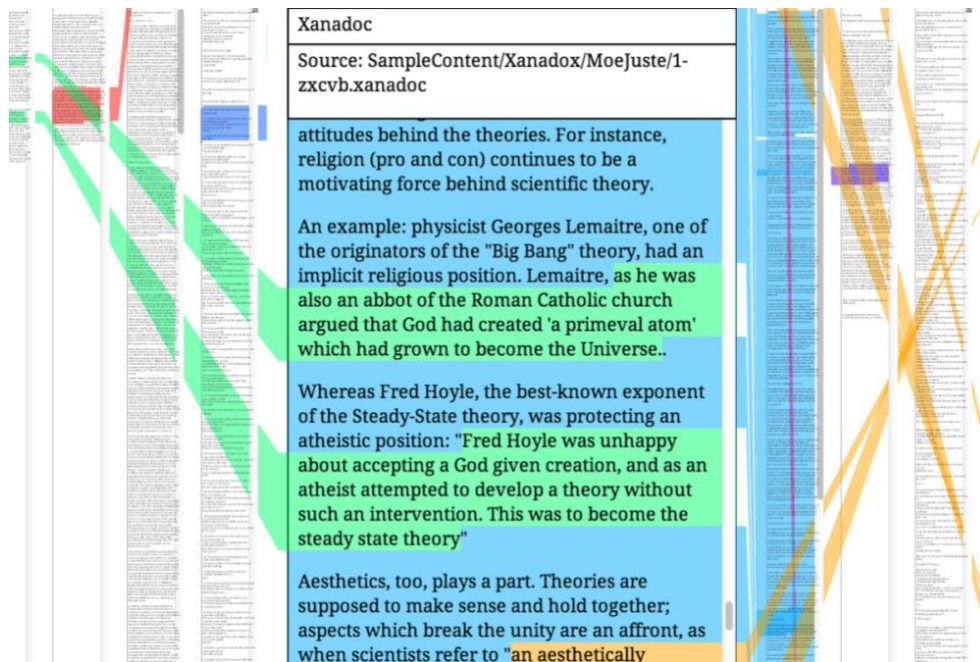


Figure 4 Transclusion in OpenXanadu

To develop a sense of the diachronicity of networks—of the way *doxa*’s development over time—and their relationality—of the way users intervene in and shape *doxa* by writing—such that students become disposed to care-fully engaging in networked rhetorical practice, Xanadu and its historical backtracking feature is a potentially useful inroad. If, per Casey Boyle, we activate new capacities for rhetorical practice by engaging a variety of ways in which a technology mediates rhetorical practices, we might explore how Xanadu’s ephemera can help students sense the relationality and diachronicity condition networked rhetorical practice. That is, perhaps engaging the ephemera of Xanadu can help students perceive the processes of individuation that networked writing spaces can uniquely enable and, from there, pose the question of “Which one?” as it relates

to rhetorical practices conducive to these processes.²⁶ Here, my wager is that, by having students engage over time the ephemera of Xanadu and the affordances by which the system mediates writing, they begin developing the disposition of *philia* outlined above, whereby users care-fully attend to practice as it takes place in/as *technē*.

By focusing on materials and mockups that stand in for the unfinished Xanadu system, students are given opportunities to immerse themselves in ephemera that resist and rework preconceptions of networked writing. The practice here includes engagement with everything Xanadu: from pictures to essays, emails to software. Not unlike Casey Boyle's emphasis on pluralizing practice with technology to build up a storehouse of rhetorical abilities with a particular tool, my approach widens the net to accept a multitude of materials as capable of cultivating rhetorical ability. That is, because Xanadu's historical backtracking enables attention to be a paid to the history (or diachronicity) of networks and the relationality of users as they collectively work to develop the writing stored in the network. By practicing paying attention in this way, students activate a capacity for rhetorical practice—paying attention to the network and one's role in building it—that the care-full, critical attention of *philia* demands: attention to how one's practice is materializing in technical systems and contributing to possibilities for practice. Sensing diachronicity and relationality in networks, then, can make students “see” these writing environments in a new light and engage in them in a more rhetorically attuned manner.

²⁶ Specifically, in framing this ephemera as another vision of the internetworking of documents, while situating this engagement in a larger sequence of activities, student-users can build up experience with writing differently in network spaces.

5.5 Stage One. Sensing Networks Anew

In the digital writing classroom, instructors could assign readings that introduce students to the digital contagion as a vehicle for opinion formation and community building. Moreover, instructors could make use of students' immersion in popular social networks to discuss and engage in activities that explore the rhetorical processes of *doxa* formation and community building via digital contagions.²⁷ In this section I will focus on outlining an activity that involves immersing student in the ephemera of Xanadu, which could logically proceed activities or assignments that ask students to identify the contagions that comprise their online communities or, say, compose digital texts with the intention of tracing its circulation and uptake in a network.

The activity revolves around introducing students to a series of mockups of Xanadu (e.g., see Figure 4), perhaps after having students engage the affordances that mediate rhetorical practice on, say, Twitter, Reddit, or some other network. In presenting these images to the large group for discussion, it becomes crucial that one invites students to speculate about the functioning of the parallel windows displaying two or more linked documents. Questions like: "Without knowing anything about this system or its functioning, what do you think is happening here? Why do you think the designer might have structured the interface in this way?" Importantly, the point of these questions isn't to get students to reflect on the interface in a critical manner or as a formality in discussing the specifics of Xanadu. As Boyle insists, pedagogies centered around building a storehouse of experience through a variety of practices need not likewise center conscious

²⁷ Or, in the language of chapter two, how the contagion's circulation in social media networks creates a digital ethos or "dwelling place" through which the community can deliberate about and collectively understand some matter of interest or concern.

reflection (or metacognition) on practice or its tools; instead, what is paramount is the activation of a range of embodied rhetorical capacities through practice. What these basic questions do is not only introduce materials with which the class will engage over time; these questions invite students to “try on” new ways of paying attention to the relations between documents, to “sense” the relationality and diachronicity of networks.

Here I do not recommend a set of *topoi* from which to interpret Xanadu amongst students. For example, instructors need not discuss or immediately transition into discussing Xanadu in terms of the relationality and diachronicity of networks it renders visible; instead, resonating with the mechanological approach outlined in the previous chapter, instructors should intensify the process of speculating and sensing anew the potential of *technē*. In order to intensify this process, instructors should probe with questions such as “What makes this arrangement of information unique compared to what we have seen so far?” “What strikes your mind as particularly interesting about this arrangement?” The answers here don’t matter insofar as whether or not they move the large group toward a central idea regarding Xanadu. Rather, such questions are meant to defamiliarize networked writing and enable student-users to attend to the mediation of their existence in networks as writers, initiating an important step toward honing their embeddedness in networks. Which brings us to the next step.

5.6 Stage Two. Sensing Diachronicity in Networked Response with OpenXanadu

After presenting students with these mockups and stimulating students’ speculation, instructors can then begin having students engage in more grounded practice with Xanadu. Specifically, in the same session following the discussion of Xanadu or in the next session,

instructors can begin to allow students to engage in practices that mediate networked writing differently—allowing them to sense diachronicity and relationality—through OpenXanadu. Released in 2014, OpenXanadu is as close as Ted Nelson has come to realizing the Xanadu design, though not as a complete internetworked docuverse but as a more modest mockup demonstrating transclusion (see Figure 4).

Here, the intent is that student engagement with OpenXanadu can foster another way of paying attention to the internetworking of writing, one that sees the individual as taking part in shaping the network by participating in the development and emergence of ideas and beliefs. Importantly, to help frame student engagement with OpenXanadu it can be useful to recapitulate students' responses to the mockups included in the initial discussion. After this summary, instructors should start to frame student engagement with OpenXanadu, which itself takes place in a lab setting of independent work. Instructors at this point can explain OpenXanadu, the long history behind Xanadu, and even the intellectual trajectory of Ted Nelson, whose interest in bridging the divide between humanities (especially literature) and computer systems supplied the impetus for Xanadu. Following the summary of student responses and the history of Xanadu, the final point to deliver to students is that their lab work is meant to primarily explore the functionality of OpenXanadu. Instructors can then give the students a range of twenty to thirty minutes to use the OpenXanadu interface.

After using OpenXanadu, discussion is again the focus of attuning to the Xanadu system. Instructors can ask students what the use of such a system might be if the internet were structured this way. Instructors can also ask what they noticed was different about the Xanadu interface compared to the organization of documents in terms of isolated webpages. This questioning might appear to be inviting conscious reflection that reneges on the emphasis on the practice of

experiencing differently the mediation of networks, but I insist this is not the case. This is a process not of reflection so much as it is a process of what Bernard Stiegler would term “exclamation”: that these responses to what is sensed in the student-users’ embodied experience “exteriorizes” and expresses their defamiliarized perception or sensing of networks, thereby “enlarging” and extending these perceptions into future practice in the class (Stiegler 2015). Again, the instructor is here looking not to instill some central idea regarding what Xanadu is; instead, instructors are in a sense goading students to sense in new ways the networks relations that mediate our “rhetorical manner of being” (Boyle 2015, 15). As I articulate next, this practice with OpenXanadu and “exclamation” or expression of defamiliarized perception is continued in an activity that imposes on the classroom a “Xanalogical” structure for large-group discussion.

5.7 Stage Three. Sensing Networked Relationality in Xanalogical Dialogue

The final activity involved in this sequence of sensing networks relations is discussion-based, specifically involving discussion of the (pre)history of hypertext. Before this week’s readings, students should have thought about and become conversant with how opinion and community form in social media networks through the circulation of digital texts. In other words, students will be conversant with certain networked process by which community comes together. As this dissertation has identified, these processes concern the networked circulation of texts that speak to users’ common beliefs, values, principles (*topoi*), emotions, associations or experiences. This can happen through imitative processes in a “bottom-up” manner (e.g., Rate Your Music) or in a technically assisted one (e.g., algorithms that organize attention according to viral logics). Regardless, students should be aware that, from the standpoint of circulation, these digital texts

secure uptake and encourage recirculation through how they tap into digital audiences, turning otherwise unconnected nodes in the network into digital publics and online communities. Ideally, students will have completed assignments that probe the viral logics of opinion and community formation in the classroom. This week's readings and large-group discussion activity will put these two series of practice—writing with contagions, writing with Xanadu—into relation and allow for meaningful resonances concerning the way the network mediates rhetorical practice.

Here, I recommend that instructors of digital rhetoric assign work in the history of hypertext, such as selections from Belinda Barnet's 2013 monograph *Memory Machines: The Evolution of Hypertext*. Barnet's book does not so much advocate to her reader a particular viewpoint on how information should be organized in the internetworking of computers; instead, Barnet offers an instructive historical perspective that denaturalizes how we "see" computers. For example, in Barnet's overview of Ted Nelson's original conceptualization of hypertext, Nelson's entire idea of a hypertext is informed by the intertextual relationships between literary texts. Focusing on the relationship between documents accessed between a number of computers through the notion of an intertextual network—preserving and highlighting those connections—is an altogether different paradigm for the organization of information on the internet. Moreover, chapters describing Ted Nelson's, Vannevar Bush's, and Douglas Engelbart's early ideas for information systems convey a notion of computers and writing where the principal function of computer is to preserve knowledge as it takes form in a "network structure" (Barnet 2013, 41). Taken together, Barnet's book on the evolution—and deferred promise—of hypertext showcases engineers who understood that computers can reshape the possibilities for producing knowledge, and that to take advantage of these possibilities meant considering how computers are uniquely suited to the collaborative production of knowledge. What is made evident in these chapters, more

than anything, is that the history of thinking hypertext is wrapped up in a kind of *philia*: that is, attention to how computers might affect the practice of writing (i.e., the networking of knowledge).

In reading about the evolution of hypertext, students gain a background in an important aspect of the history of computers and the internet and, most importantly, have the opportunity to take their confused and defamiliarized perception of computers and writing (see earlier activities) and read their experiences against the alternative, nearly utopic motives of these early thinkers. Still, students require an opportunity to go beyond putting their experience in dialogue with Nelson and others. That is, they need to be able to “try on” and practice this awareness for the networking of knowledge and care for their role in participating in cultivating knowledge. Therefore, after having speculated about the function and purpose of historical backtracking, after practicing paying attention to information as it is progressively iterated over time, and after reading about the motivations—or *philia*—that animated the conceptualizations of hypertext, student-users discuss Xanadu through a Xanalogical structure.

To implement a Xanalogical structure means to, like Xanadu, focus on the way contributions build on one another over time. Here, the instructor announces before discussion that the class will be experimenting with ways of discussing the assigned readings, particularly through connecting one’s contribution to specific contributions from one’s peers. This logic replicates in the classroom setting the internetworking of sourced documents in Xanadu. Additionally, if there is a student who wishes to introduce a new angle for the discussion, they will announce their intention to the large group. The reason for this announcement is to the benefit of a peer who has been designated as the class’s “weaver”—tracing and “weaving” the network of contributions that are being made over the course of the large-group’s discussion. The weaver identifies comments

that inaugurate a line of discussion, who initiated it, and who is building on it. Afterward, the weaver then presents the class with the tracing of the large-group discussion.

As a class, the instructor then examines the network with the students and asks what it reflects about the discussion. Useful follow-up questions include asking how the structure affected how they contributed to the discussion and if they felt the discussion was more or less productive given the structure. At this point, reviewing and discussing what was woven out of the class's contributions to the discussion should broach the question of prudence in relation to the network the class is building together. One might ask or push students to consider if this networked structure encouraged more mindful participation or care-full attention to how the discussion has unfolded so far and where it could still go. One can refer to earlier course content around writing with contagions and explore what made the large-group discussion different. Finally, one might ask the riskier question of whether the exercise speaks positively or negatively to Ted Nelson's ideas. In addressing these questions about participation in networks more head-on, instructors can capitalize on the series of ruminations on networks that had taken place through other activities.

The hope is, in defamiliarizing and reattuning students to the structure, conditions, and processes of networks, student will develop care-full dispositions to how their writing is tending to the "development and habituation" of the possibilities for networked rhetorical practice (Boyle 2018, 162). Through a series of engagements with the ephemera of Project Xanadu, students can perceive differently the structures, conditions, and processes that undergird our contributions to networks. With this sensitivity to the network as a collaborative, co-produced writing space, students can be habituated to asking "Which one" in their everyday practices: that is, "How can my contribution shape the network, continue or open up the conversation, or intervene critically in its trajectory? How can it contribute meaningfully to this space and others' understanding?"

Embodying a care-full disposition in how one's practicing rhetoric in networked writing spaces begins with perceiving and reattuning to the conditions that characterize network writing. Moreover, in developing *philia* as a disposition toward practice, of how their practice produces the shape the network takes, they can resist rhetorical processes that produce toxic networks.

Of course, this leaves the door open to consider how to combat toxicity beyond *philia*. There will be no shortage of avenues to pursue in terms of communication practices, *ethē*, and literacies. There will also be no shortage of paths to take in instilling *philia* beyond Xanadu. Ultimately, sensing the relationality and diachronicity that are the condition of networked writing, and becoming habituated to responding to these conditions in a productive manner, is but one approach. If we wish to help develop students' capacities for ethical digital rhetoric, however, this approach can perhaps meet the challenge of positively shaping users' practices.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I identified *philia* as a disposition toward networked rhetorical practice, one in which users care-fully attend to the rhetorical space they are building together. Specifically, this means being disposed to attending to the space's networked relationality and its diachronicity, deliberating in ways that proactively respond to these networked conditions and cultivate the community's response-ability. This care-full rhetorical disposition, however, emerges through student-users' habituation to networked writing spaces as technical systems in which rhetorical practice uniquely unfolds. Turning to the ephemera of Ted Nelson's Project Xanadu system as a pedagogical resource, I insisted that student-users can begin to practice care-fully attending to network-building as a rhetorical process. By engaging the conditions of networked rhetorical

practice differently, student-users can develop the disposition of *philia*, of paying care-full attention to their practice and how this practice takes place in technical systems.

In developing the disposition of *philia* as care-full practice within the conditions for writing that networks create, digital *ethē* supporting ethical networked rhetoric (i.e., networked *phronesis*) become a reality for online communities. When users collectively attend to the processes and relationalities that compose the network, they can habituate themselves to the network as a site of deliberating and knowing together. To conclude, if we wish to instill more ethical manners of being-with the networked technicities of social media, ideally so that users can attend responsibly to the “environments [they] will build together,” *philia* becomes an important component toward a networked rhetoric ethics of response-ability (Rivers 62).

Table 1 Sensing Networks Sequence

	Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three
Readings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jeff Rice, <i>Craft Obsession</i> - Nahon and Hemsley, <i>Going Viral</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ted Nelson, Selections from <i>Computer Lib / Dream Machines</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Belinda Barnet, Selections from <i>Memory Machines</i>
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examining and discussing together Ted Nelson’s Project Xanadu mock-ups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent OpenXanadu lab. - Large-group discussion of OpenXanadu. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Xanalogical large-group discussion of chapters. - Tracing the “web” of classroom discussion.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understand how online community forms around the circulation of contagions. - Defamiliarizing networked writing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enable students to notice the relations between internetworked texts. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enable students to notice the evolution of ideas and texts through their being networked.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 Responding to Networked Response-Ability

In this dissertation, I imagine how *doxa* might form in online communities, particularly toward the network's epistemic and moral growth. I contended that such an outcome calls for a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability, where users are habituated to care-fully cultivating in their writing the network's ability to deliberate about and know their shared matters of interest and respond to future exigencies involving these matters in a more capacious and nuanced manner. In sensing the relationality and diachronicity of networks, users respond by affirming together their relational character, as nodes through which opinion passes as they "share, reject, dismiss, supplement, [and] continue" the ideas and digital texts circulating in the network (Rice 2012, 179). In honing more care-full and rhetorical dispositions toward one's networked participation in *doxa*, users come to ponder *doxa* in response to exigencies involving their shared matters of interest. Users then, as the I Hate Music example showed, intervene in their *doxa*'s limitations for responding to exigencies and resolve these limitations so as to cultivate response-ability.

While chapters one and two imagined the communication practices and digital ethē that could support this flourishing of response-able networks, chapter three outlined how the writer's manner of coupling with writing technologies can amplify or attenuate embodied capacities (attention, affect, memory, perception, etc.) that contribute to response-able conduct. Building off the third chapter, chapter four offered a digital rhetorical pedagogy devoted to inculcating in student-users care-full attention toward the relationality and diachronicity of networks, particularly through engaging ephemera surrounding Ted Nelson's Project Xanadu. By sensing the

relationality and diachronicity of network-building, students can see writing in networks as a rhetorical process in which they are actively shaping the online community, including the epistemic and moral growth of the community's users. Finally, to conclude I articulate the specific contributions this dissertation makes to a number of fields in rhetoric and writing studies and, through the theoretical concept of "abstract diagram," briefly suggest future directions in which this dissertation could lead the field of digital rhetoric. Specifically, I highlight contributions to ongoing conversations in the subfields of digital ethics, posthuman theories of rhetoric and composition, and digital cultural rhetorics.

6.1.1 Digital Ethics

The subfield of digital ethics in digital rhetoric and writing studies has, since the early days of the World Wide Web (Fredrick; Howard; Porter 1998) considered the rhetorical conduct that typifies communities who meet digitally to dialogue about shared interests and concerns. Generally, how users engage one another in online communities has become, over time, a running thread in the subfield of digital ethics. Broadly tracing the contours of this conversation since the intensification of research on digital writing since the turn of the century, scholars have focused on analyzing how users communicate together as a networked community, particularly how the implicit understandings between users about their relationship produce ethical effects. This aspect of digital ethics is best represented in Jessica Reyman and Erika M. Sparby's 2020 collection *Digital Ethics*, which explores through various methods and platforms how certain types of relationships among users facilitates hostile and toxic conduct.

Specifically, contributors to Reyman and Sparby's collection analyze and intervene in toxicity in online communities at the level of interface production (i.e., how interfaces encourage

certain types of communication over others) (Gallagher), the need for circulatory practices that promote inclusion (Dieterle et al.), and the importance of addressing how platforms program in affordances that enable harassers and disempower targets of harassment (Brown and Hennis). These works, taken together, point toward the problem of how to promote, per Christine Ann Nguyen Fredrick, more care-full and inclusive communication spaces. With this goal in mind—promoting inclusive, care-full spaces through research and pedagogy—we are centering the fact that the digital writing we produce or recirculate in online communities “shape who we are, how we relate to one another, and the world we inhabit,” and that there are ways of engaging each other as writers that are more generative and responsible (Purdy 321).

To achieve this outcome that is tied to the functioning of rhetoric *qua technē* in the context of networks, I offered a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability, where users affirm their responsibility in shaping response-ability as it is networked across users’ writing. Such responsibility for response-ability is grounded in an (at least) implicit understanding that their writing helps to build on and expand (or iterate and render recalcitrant) communal beliefs with which users draw upon to understand, value, and deliberate about shared interests and concerns. Without such a responsibility for response-ability as it is networked across users’ digital writing, the community’s available means of persuasion—the *doxa* that users both think and write with—can become closed off from judgment and constitute a rigid set of beliefs which support consensus.

In the preceding chapters, I pursued a model by which to reimagine the processes of networked *doxa* formation in online communities. Turning to Gilbert Simondon’s notion of ethical individuation—i.e., individuals’ participation in the emergence and development of their ethics—I identified an instructive logic for *doxa* formation within response-able networks.

Here, individuals in the group see themselves as a part of the trajectory through which their ethics evolve and, in response, negotiate the tensions between communal values in a manner that enables more nuanced, complex, and encompassing ethical systems for resolving moral problems. In Simondon's ethics individuals who affirm themselves as participants in the becoming of ethics grasp and resolve the latent tensions of the disparate values underpinning communal norms (ambiguities, inconsistencies, contradictions) by negotiating their values so that other individuals can respond to future problems whose novelty and complexity upend the in-group and its norms. Taken together, this attention to relationality and the emergence of ethics in response to novel moral problems "open[s] norms to their own variability, to that tendency which they carry within that invites transformation" (Scott 186).

But what does this have to do with rhetorical ethics, and what does it have to do with the way beliefs and opinion—i.e., *doxa*—emerge and evolve over time within online communities? Simply, if we seek online communities in which users are disposed toward a responsibility for response-ability as it is networked across users' writing, then Simondon's ethical individuation pinpoints a specifically networked process through which *doxa* can be continuously negotiated and progressively augmented and expanded. When users affirm (consciously or not) their relational character and the effect of their participation on circulating *doxa*—that their participation can either enrich or restrict the ways of responding to shared interests or concerns—they can become inclined toward writing that contributes to the community's response-ability. Through this augmented response-ability, the flourishing of the network is fostered, insofar as, per Simondon, our flourishing derives from our ability to respond in an increasingly capacious manner to the exigencies we encounter together as interconnected, response-able, individuating beings.

If we wish to promote rhetorical conduct in online communities that leads to hospitable, dynamic, and even transformative rhetorical interactions, users (whether consciously or not) must orient themselves to others in a way that is responsible for the network's epistemic and moral growth. What I've termed a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability benefits from the theory of Simondon in showing response-able, networked processes (ethical individuation) that our communication practices, *ethē*, and rhetorical dispositions would have to help facilitate. In progressively incorporating and resolving *doxa*'s latent tensions in response to exigencies, dialogical mechanisms of deliberation move communal beliefs and opinions toward "their own variability, to that tendency which they carry within that invites transformation" (Scott 186). Moreover, *ethē* such as networked phronesis establish credible participation in the writing space through writing that demonstrates care-full participation in the *doxa* of the online community. Lastly, *philia* as a nonconscious disposition in which users pay care-full attention to their relationality and *doxa*'s diachronicity encourages response-able processes of network-building.

6.1.2 Posthuman Theories of Rhetoric and Composition

In recent years, the turn to posthumanism in composition studies and rhetorical theory has produced insights into how writing and technology should be considered as "cognate practices," insofar as words, like tools, work to "monitor, nudg[e], adapt, adjust—in short, respond to the world" (Cooper 16). Resonating with the language of Gilbert Simondon (the concept of "collective individuation") and Bernard Stiegler (his posthuman conception of *technē*), compositionist Marilyn Cooper suggests that writing, as a tool, extends the capacities of the human and enables the emergence of the collective through the exteriorization of experience:

Arising as an epiphenomenon of engaged action in the world, tools and words play the same role in our lives. As concrete objects that can be manipulated and can store information, tools and words extend cognitive processes beyond the individual brain. (18)

Through writing, then, the exteriorization of one's experience engaging the world produces meaning that can be shared with others and help mediate their engagement with the world. Additionally, writing is, in posthuman theories of composition, distributed along an ecology of tools and materials. In this regard, writing practices "are not the product of minds somehow separated from bodies nor of innate technical or linguistic abilities" (18). Given writing's status as distributed and embodied, it follows that our ability to engage the world and the problems we encounter in it can be affected according to how ecologies of tools and practices mediate the writing process and the delivery of this writing.

Similarly, Casey Boyle's theory of rhetoric as a posthuman practice understands rhetoric as exercising across rhetorical situations the possibilities inherent within an ecology of practice. For example, Boyle sees the media abundance characterizing everyday digital rhetorical practice as requiring teacher-scholars of digital rhetoric to develop in students a storehouse of practices: or a variability in how they can conduct themselves as rhetors within these new media ecologies. For Boyle, this means being able to discern in a rhetorical situation the practices within an abundantly media-rich ecology that can generate new possibilities for persuasion (90). Ethical rhetorical practices generate possibilities for persuasion by exercising practices available to a new media ecology. Here, posthuman practices of rhetoric center around "the becoming of what can be done" (28).

Taken together, Cooper and Boyle suggest that posthuman theories of composition and rhetoric concern the way in which writing extends our capacity to respond to the world (Cooper) and the way in which rhetorical practice engages new media ecologies to cultivate our response-ability (Boyle). In examining the rhetorical functioning of networks in this dissertation, specifically how *doxa* might take form within response-able networks, I have contributed to projects such as Cooper's and Boyle's. I extend Boyle's posthuman precepts in rhetorical theory by imagining networked rhetorics in which response-able practices "proceed on an enterprise of collective transformation, on the production of novelty in common, where each is transformed by carrying potential for transformation for others" (Combes 65). Specifically, my turn to Gilbert Simondon's concept of ethical individuation provided a model for networked *doxa* formation in which individuals cultivate together, through rhetorical practice that (consciously or not) attends the online community's response-ability: the network's ability to understand and evaluate some matter of interest, in turn augmenting its ways of responding to exigencies involving the network's shared interest. While the network-building of the contagion created somnambulistic networks in which consensus shields *doxa* from judgment, users who are inclined toward attending to their role in the building of the network and, therefore, their participation in *doxa*, ponder communal opinion and offer alternative judgements that can contribute to more capacious, inclusive ways of knowing together. If we, to paraphrase Boyle, consider our era of media abundance as one that formats our relations to one another in the form of the network, then this project offers a rhetorical ethics suited to the networked conditions of writing in today's online communities. If networks emerge from users' participation in *doxa*'s circulation, then a habituated attention to networked relationality that deliberates care-fully about one's intervention can foster online communities which are more hospitable and dynamic in their network-building.

6.1.3 Digital Cultural Rhetorics

The codification of digital rhetoric and writing as a field has been accompanied by a much-needed uptick in scholarship discussing questions of difference as they relate to composition across digital media. While the conversations that one might file under the heading of digital cultural rhetorics are great in number, a general tenet of the subfield has been the use of networked writing spaces to combat the stereotypes (or in Louis Maraj's words, "essentialization") that (multiply) marginalized communities face online and offline (45). With the proliferation of social media networks such as Twitter and Reddit in which users can discuss together shared matters of interest, users can come together and form online communities (e.g., Black Twitter) where they might together produce counter-stories to marginalizing, mainstream depictions of these communities.

Throughout this dissertation, I've alluded to conversations around the community-building that takes place through hashtag activism, citing scholarship discussing potential blockages in how hashtag-based communities can inadvertently overlook and obscure perspectives that could expand the pool of opinions around what should be done to address issues. To return to Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang's analysis of #YesAllWomen, as the hashtag circulated in clusters of users, the tweets that were spread and engaged with the most featured narratives that resonated with the emotions, experiences, and *topoi* of white feminism. In Black Twitter networks, users crafted hashtags (e.g., #YesAllWhiteWomen) that critiqued #YesAllWomen's lack of engagement with the perspectives of women of color. However, these counter-hashtags lacked the velocity necessary to intervene in the original hashtag and dislodge the monological perspective that had stuck to it. Similarly, in a separate essay on circulation and hashtag activism, Lang identifies #MeToo, while successfully bringing attention to a major public issue, as emphasizing accusations against celebrities and, on the other hand, the experiences of white women, thereby obscuring the

concerns of “non-elite women, women of color, working-class women, women with disabilities, trans women, and queer women, even as the movement was propelled into virality by those women” (18). Indeed, Lang, calls for more active attention to hashtag feminisms that foreground experiences and backgrounds that “may be overshadowed or left out of conversations like #MeToo,” such as the #NotInvisible hashtag circulated to demonstrate violence against Native American women (19).

This dissertation’s potential contribution to digital cultural rhetorics is an attention to relationality as it materializes in the networked writing spaces of social media platforms: that is, a responsiveness to *doxa* in light of novel exigences, one’s participation in shaping the network, and the response-ability of current and future users. In short, it is a matter of being responsible for the response-ability of the online community, grounded in care-full attention to one’s part in building the network. Just as rhetoric *qua technē* is an art that produces new possibilities for understanding and acting on the world our ever-changing relations to the world, this project can offer embodied users—perhaps *especially* users whose embodiments are privileged—response-able dispositions to networked writing that constantly invent and renegotiate the beliefs, opinions, and values of online communities. For example, by being more responsible in how they were interacting with each other’s circulating digital texts, how these perspectives attenuate response-ability, and how platform infrastructure amplified perspectives over others, those participating in hashtag activist communities such as #YesAllWomen could work collectively to widen the pool of beliefs and perspectives represented in order to more capaciously understand and respond to myriad issues related to gender-based violence it applies across social difference. This responsibility for cultivating the community’s response-ability, especially to public issues as they materialize differently for different bodies, could inform a more dynamic solidarity between privileged and

marginalized embodiments. Importantly, this attention to how one is augmenting the ability of the online community to respond to issues that contribute to and compound overlapping marginalization already goes by the name of intersectionality, as theorized in critical race theory (Crenshaw) and Black feminisms (Hill Collins). In this regard, a networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability can meaningfully ground the manner in which users engage public issues in online communities, engaging with and valuing writing that progressively renders evident the effects of public issues across different bodies, centers these accounts in the community's exchanges, and works toward understandings of these issues that are inclusive of the materialization of various embodiments.

While this offers paths toward more inclusive conversations, particularly through the sensing of how *doxa* takes form virally in social media networks, it is one that elides struggle for recognition or the messy work of reorienting users to the role embodiment plays in community. As remarked in the preface of this dissertation, markers of embodiment—especially as signifiers of difference—do enter into play in online communities (a profile picture that shows difference, discourse that signifies aspects of one's identity or difference from the community's identity). Significations of embodied difference can create problems for establishing belonging to the community, prompting other users to disregard one's opinions or even actively target users. Given this, how might marginalized and multiply marginalized users intervene in the community when their perspectives are failing to be engaged with, or when other community point them out for “derailing” conversations? If the desire is to promote communities in which users engage critically with *doxa* by care-fully attending to the relationality and diachronicity of networks—and their participation in this relationality and diachronicity—then what gestures might be apt?

The exemplary work being done in feminist ecological approaches to ethos could be helpful here in thinking through what some of these rhetorical gestures might entail (Ryan et al). Drawing from these ecological approaches, for example, perhaps it is a matter of finding ways of articulating the relationality between users' perspectives and experiences—the interconnection between them for which those in the community must be responsible in acknowledging. Such a gesture would work to bring users attention to the unspoken universality of what users take to be the community's identity, experiences, and beliefs, turning an eye toward users' social locations as grounding what is taken-for-granted in the community. Moreover, this gesture's second step involves connecting the well-being of individuals to one another across location, insofar as our beliefs, experiences, and values interact in ways that shed light on our mutual entanglement in not only the problem-generating world but each other's responses to this world. This gesture, which directs attention to partiality and relationality, therefore has the potential to render others responsive to the relationality that underpins our engagements with others, especially those with whom we do not identify.

I am not here prioritizing this as a response to inhospitality in networks, one that might render communities responsible for the shape the network is taking. Instead, I am suggesting that rhetorical gestures that interrupt and intervene in the taken-for-granted identities of networks is a crucial next step in thinking embodiment in relation to response-able online communities. Certainly, there is a limit to such interventions, and there are likely certain spaces whose conduct are so wrapped up in championing a particular identity and array of beliefs that intervention of this kind might be limited. However, radically inhospitable spaces should not be assumed to be the default of online community, which gives us good reason to take stock of the response-able rhetorical strategies that could steer networks toward inclusive and intersectional interactions.

6.1.4 Digital Studies, Rhetoric, and the Politics of Platforms

As regards future directions, this theorization of online community-building based on *doxa*'s individuation must address the question of platform affordances, infrastructure and politics, namely whether the individuation process can inform what Ronald Walter Greene (2012) describes as the struggle for digital rhetoric's "productive excess." Greene applies his materialist approach to digital rhetoric, arguing that corporate social media capture and transform the "digital rhetoric of distributed publics into dividual units for advertisers," with the attention economy's capitalist accumulation strategies alienating users from the surplus of their unpaid communicative labor (276). This surplus which is "beyond value" is the "the potential autonomy of labor power" (279). In the context of communication, we can say with the help of Paolo Virno that the autonomy of communicative labor is the common, natural-historical capacity of language to actualize a relation between the individual and collective that creates social worlds. Therefore, to recuperate communicative labor is to recuperate communication's potential for individuation, to struggle for communication in which the formatting of the interplay between the "I" and "We" individuates the latter through that of the former. In this way, individuation can serve as a diagram—as a way of specifying digital rhetoric's antagonism with digital capitalism. As Greene suggests, struggle for another social structure of value for digital communication—communication and cooperation founded on the collective needs and desires of the community—opens rhetoric up to a field of contention: the struggle over what we see as communication's value.

In digital studies, the work of scholars such as Bernard Stiegler and Yuk Hui have explored the tensions between the attention economy and the individuation of online collectives, insofar as the computational technicities underpinning platforms (e.g., ranking and recommendation algorithms) automate community building through the curation of content instead of the dialogue

and deliberations that might shape the network's knowledge and beliefs. Among the critiques are proposed solutions that revise the purpose and function of social media. For example, Hui has imagined social networks that are organized not around the laissez-faire activity of individual users but participation in tangible projects and collaborative problem-solving specific to certain online communities. For Hui, then, it is a question of how to

transform individuals into groups [...] One of the answers that we proposed is through finding mechanisms to regulate these relations [...] That is to say, after registration, the user can only use the full functions when he or she participates in a group or creates a project. This rearrangement of relations makes the group and project the default instead of the individual. The group can have liaisons with other groups and create intergroup relations, which comprise a milieu. In this sense, we can see that the project and the group become the associated milieu for the individual and other groups and also the mediators between discursive relations and existential relations. (251)

In this regard, Hui speculates on the conditions for networks based on individuation—offering systemic interventions that help support shifts in users' participation. Seemingly, such interventions escape communication's articulation to digital capitalism's accumulation strategies. However, while such platforms recuperate the "productive excess and joy of communicative labor" through the collaboration and cultivation of the online community, we should ask how this alternative valuation of communication opens onto a more radical politics in general: beyond being structured toward intervention in and care for the community and its needs and projects, what political potentialities does this recuperation of communicative labor's autonomy actualize?

Perhaps the best answer to this question emerges from Greene's work on rhetorical materialism, contending that the productive excess of communication which escapes capitalism (and the network's appropriation of it) is essential in actualizing possibilities for radical politics. For Greene, creating forums of deliberation and community-building outside the state's administrative apparatus and capitalism's capturing of communication is a pre-requisite for assembling the multitude toward alternative political organizations (namely, communism). As Greene articulates, the recuperation of cooperation toward the community's needs is immanent to communist praxis, one that actualizes in deliberation what we might term (à la Virno) "non-representative democracies." Regardless of whether one is inclined toward Greene's "orator communist," the point stands that communication's self-valorization—the valuing of communication beyond the profit it brings—provides the terms of engagement with the politics of platforms in an age of digital rhetoric. Here, we might hope to trade the viral logics that homogenize swarms of users around the trending present to something akin to individuation, where the individual individuates themselves by drawing from and developing the knowledge, norms, and beliefs of the collective. How platforms should be designed to realize this end is a question open to scholars of digital rhetoric and writing, as well as consideration of the tensions between digital capitalism and processes of individuation that resist viral logics of capitalist accumulation.

6.2 Speculating the Future of Digital Rhetoric and Writing Studies

To foster online communities that exceed and complicate themselves instead of being short-sighted and recalcitrant to writing that disrupts communal beliefs, I have put forth a picture of how else users might write together: being responsible for the community's response-ability.

As a model for this, Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of individuation offers an instructive picture for how individuals might contribute to the emergence and becoming of communal *doxa*, rendering capacious, nuanced and inclusive opinions toward their shared interests and concerns. Specifically, it is in affirming one's relational character—being a “singular point in an open infinity of relations”—as well as pondering the limitations of “fitting responses” in the face of exigencies that individuals “proceed on an enterprise of collective transformation,” thereby acting in ways that augment the group's ability to respond to novel moral problems (Combes 65). Hence, ethical reality, as Simondon claims, is structured in a network insofar as individual actions and judgments connect to past norms and values, resolving their pre-individual tensions by negotiating its values so as to invent more nuanced norms that can productively respond to exigencies.

Within digital rhetoric, the idea of individuation in the rhetorical process of community-building that takes place through the formation of opinion can play a guiding role for the field. Here, imagining community-building via individuation positions rhetors as individuating themselves by being responsible for the collective, particularly by participating in *doxa* so as to cultivate the collective's response-ability—complicating, expanding, and enriching its beliefs. Individuation, then, becomes what we might call, per Deleuze and Guattari, an abstract diagram that describes the potential “relations, forces, and functions” in the rhetorical processes of community-building in networks (Hawk 10). Just as the contagion has served as a useful diagram for describing circulation and community-building in networked writing environments, individuation describes another manner in which networks can be built through rhetoric. Implementing the abstract diagram of individuation in digital spaces can inform or even guide efforts within and beyond the field of digital rhetoric as teacher-scholars reckon with today's contagious networked rhetorics and, on the other hand, the shape of networked rhetorics to come.

If we, as teacher-scholars of digital rhetoric and writing, seek more hospitable communities, more fruitful relationships among users and, in turn, more transformative rhetorical interactions, this dissertation's conceptualization of networked *doxa* formation via individuation offers a way forward.

Using individuation as a diagram for networked rhetorics can serve the field in the future. For example, in response to Alford and Pfister, Tarsa and Brown, and Sundvall, what computational technicities might support the transduction of doxastic potentials (chapter one), phronetic manners of dwelling in networks (chapter two), and capacities for responsible (response-able) participation in the networking of opinion (chapters three and four)? Moreover, if we are to follow Sundvall's call for rhetoricians to assist in the invention of digital systems, could the diagram of individuation serve as a *telos* for rhetorical interactions in these systems? And how might individuation frame rhetorical approaches to the study of software and code?

In the context of pedagogy in digital rhetoric and writing, how might we teach networked rhetorics if we start from how *doxa* takes form (contagion) and the possible outcomes of alternative formations (individuation)? What approaches to inculcating responsibility for response-ability might there be beyond those outlined in chapter four? And more concretely, what would a semester dedicated to networked rhetorical ethics of response-ability look like?

Finally, how might the network-building premised upon Simondonian concepts help inform the rhetorical conduct of networked activisms, especially those activist communities that emerge through viral logics? How might digital cultural rhetorics speak to and complicate the diagram of individuation, and how might networked rhetorical processes of individuation speak to digital cultural rhetorics? And could the diagram of individuation serve liberatory politics, freeing "digital rhetoric from its enclosure into digital capitalism" (Greene and Nelson 280)?

These questions probe the imagination of what networked rhetorics could accomplish and how the field's goals align with some of the insights derived from this dissertation. It is my hope that the field can work toward response-able digital futures by resolving the tensions of this speculative enterprise, enabling something new to emerge.

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