Actants, Agents, and Assemblages: Delivery and Writing in an Age of New Media

Steven Holmes

Clemson University, stevenkeoniholmes@gmail.com

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ACTANTS, AGENTS, AND ASSEMBLAGES: DELIVERY AND WRITING IN AN AGE OF NEW MEDIA

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Rhetorics, Communication, and Information Design

by
Steven Keoni Holmes
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Accepted by:
Dr. Victor J. Vitanza, Committee Chair
Dr. Richard Scot Barnett
Dr. Todd May
Dr. Andrea Feeser
ABSTRACT

My dissertation redefines the rhetorical canon of delivery by drawing on interdisciplinary theories of technology and materiality, including hardware and software studies, assemblage theory, and actor-network theory. Rhetorical theorists and composition scholars have correctly equated the technological medium with delivery, but also have focused exclusively on the circulation of symbolic forces rather than the persuasive agency of technology itself, thus eliding the affordances and constraints posed by technological actors at the non-symbolic levels of hardware, software, protocol, and algorithms. The first section of this dissertation (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) traces the historiographical development of rhetorical materialism through a genealogy of major theoretical developments (epistemic, anti-realist, poststructuralist, postmodern, and posthuman) in twentieth-century American rhetorical studies. In consideration of this history, I suggest that the elision of nonhuman actors within delivery scholarship parallels a larger linguistic, social, and cultural constructivist paradigm within rhetorical studies as a whole. This paradigm is particularly evident within contemporary digital and visual rhetorical scholarship. Scholars focus largely on the elements of delivery that the user perceives and interacts with and not on the complex nonsymbolic factors that co-constitute the activity of delivery.

In my second section (Chapters 4, 5, and 6), I seek to fully realize the claim that delivery is the medium by establishing a historical precedent in classical theorists such as Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian. This precedent illuminates these theorists’ recognition of delivery as both central to rhetoric and engaged with embodied, ecological,
and material nonhuman actors. With this classical framework in mind, I argue that assemblage theory, actor-network theory, and hardware and software studies enable digital rhetoric scholars to realize a similar view of delivery in the present moment that has otherwise been overlooked. These contemporary theories of materiality and agency share a rejection of a “modern” (Cf. Latour) view of an active human subject using a passive object to achieve a communicative aim. By contrast, I offer a “nonmodern” vision of technological agency where rhetorical agency and delivery are equally distributed across human and nonhuman actors and assemblages. I specifically reclaim “realism” in relationship to materiality in order to suggest a nonmodern rhetorical realism grounded in delivery as ontological hypokrisis.

A nonmodern realist theory of delivery enables rhetorical scholars to study how material artifacts and writing technologies circulate, transform, and affect rhetorical consequences as they enter into various assemblages and networks to shape emergent political publics. By examining how delivery occurs through a complex ecological and material milieu, I define a more nuanced theoretical framework that allows rhetoricians and composition theorists to address the various non-symbolic aspects of digital rhetoric and nonhuman agency that increasingly serve as a condition of possibility for the ways in which we communicate today.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my partner and wife, Caitlin Holmes. Her patience and support were integral in completing this dissertation over the last few years.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is a rare experience in life to be able to work with one’s intellectual heroes in a disciplinary field. I have now worked with two of them: Victor Villanueva, Jr. and Victor J. Vitanza. Victor Villanueva fostered my interests in rhetoric and politics in the first place, and Victor J. Vitanza is one of the figures whose sub/versive writing style inspired me to pursue a doctoral degree in rhetoric and composition. I could not have asked for a better teacher, mentor, and advisor over the last four years. Along similar lines, I owe a great debt to Scot Barnett for all of his assistance, mentorship, and friendship in helping me to negotiate the difficult theoretical terrain. Scot’s advice was also integral to helping me narrate a project produced in a transdisciplinary space for a disciplinary audience. Todd May’s unflagging commitment to praxis and political approaches to philosophy have served as an additionally source of inspiration for my scholarship. His careful attention to the full range of implications of my arguments has made me a better writer and thinker. Andrea Feeser has also provided this project with a great deal of artistic perspective. She specifically pointed me toward ways in which artists have approached the history of objects that has definitely challenged and informed my arguments in this dissertation. Thomas Rickert, who generously volunteered to served on the committee as a consultant, has also offered a encouragement and support over the last two years as I have explored this subject matter.

I also want to acknowledge three professors who were not directly involved with the dissertation project: Steven B. Katz, Cynthia Haynes, and Jan Rune Holmevik also helped inspire my work. Dr. Katz has been a great friend and mentor to me throughout
my intellectual development. He greatly encouraged my work on rhetoric of science and object-oriented ontology in the first place. In a similar manner, Cynthia and Jan encouraged my fledgling interest in videogames and digital rhetoric. Without developing an appreciation for algorithmic actors and gaming scholarship, there is little chance that my project would have turned out the way that it did. Three specific graduate student colleagues at Clemson University, Jared Colton, Patricia Fancher, and Glen Southergill also deserve specific acknowledgment and my grateful thanks. Both have raised tough and interesting challenges to my nascent interest in the world of objects and nonhuman agency, and have provided me with a generous sounding board for my ideas as they have progressed in the last few years.
## TABLE OF CONTENTS

| TITLE PAGE .................................................................................................................. | i  |
| ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. | ii |
| DEDICATION .............................................................................................................. | iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ................................................................................................. | v |

**CHAPTER**

1. **MATTER WITHOUT SUBSTANCE ........................................................................... 1**
   - Anti-Realism in the Rhetorical Tradition ......................................................... 1
   - Four Symptoms of Anti-Realism ........................................................................ 6
   - Symptom 1: Rhetorical Materialism’s Problem
     with Matter ........................................................................................................ 12
   - Symptom 2: The Rise of Anti-Realism ............................................................... 22
   - Symptom 3: Anti-Realist Pedagogy and the Rise
     of Rhetorical Invention .................................................................................. 29
   - Symptom 4: Anti-Realism and Technology ......................................................... 33
   - The Legacy of Anti-Realism: Matter Without Substance ..................................... 37
   - Lines of Flight: Openings for New Materialism ............................................... 41
   - Outline of Chapters: From Invention to Delivery .......................................... 51

2. **THE PARADOX OF SUBSTANCING ..................................................................... 58**
   - Realism and Anti-Realism Continued ................................................................. 58
   - Kenneth Burke’s Rhetorical Recalcitrance ......................................................... 65
   - Realism Post-Burke ............................................................................................ 74
   - Constructing the Nonmodern Constitution ....................................................... 79
   - From Invention to Delivery ............................................................................... 89
   - Reconfiguring Rhetorical Realism ....................................................................... 94
   - Delivery as Circulating Reference .................................................................... 97
   - Circulating Rhetorical Referents ....................................................................... 102

3. **THE OBJECT STYLES ......................................................................................... 108**
   - Delivery’s Problem with Matter ................................................................. 110
Table of Contents (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Platonic Mimesis: The Noise of Delivery</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eliminating the Noise of Delivery in the <em>Republic</em></td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aristotle’s Platonic Remediation of Delivery</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery Matters without Mattering: Digital Delivery</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery is Still (Not) the Medium: Problems with Delivery’s McLuhanism</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delivery is (Almost) the Medium: McCorkle and Brooke</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toward Ontological <em>Hypokrisis</em></td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. CONCRESCENCE, CIRCULATION, AND ECOLOGY ......................................... 160

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Matter and <em>Hypokrisis</em></td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embodying Delivery: A Materialist Counter-History</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cicero and Quintilian: Delivery as Performance</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Renewal of Realism in Object-Oriented Delivery</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Object-Oriented Delivery</td>
<td>180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agential Realism: Leaving Plato’s Cave</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compactants: Matther Fuller’s Nonmodern Media Ecology</td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences for Rhetoric</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. MISPLACED CONCRETENESS ...................................................................... 217

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing and Agency in Rhetorical Assemblages</td>
<td>217</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The (Im)materiality of Digital and Visual Rhetoric</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procedural Rhetoric</td>
<td>234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics of Procedural Rhetoric</td>
<td>238</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenges to Procedurality</td>
<td>245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Assemblages: Emergent Delivery</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practices in Videogames</td>
<td>255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newsgames as Rhetorical Assemblages</td>
<td>264</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modeling Allegorithmic Assemblages</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. MATERIAL METAPHORS ........................................................................ 274

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politics and the Nonhuman</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rancière, Delivery, and Appropriate Indecorous Speech</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of Contents (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>From Objects of Discourse to Objecting Objects:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bennett’s Politics of Nonhumans</td>
<td>293</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latourian Political Morality: When Means</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Become Ends</td>
<td>302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetics and Morality</td>
<td>307</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OOO and Metaphor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figures of the Post-<em>Techne</em>: Material Metaphors</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as Nonmodern Indecorous Speech</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Materialist Pedagogy</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>328</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENDNOTES</td>
<td>334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WORKS CITED</td>
<td>352</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
MATTER WITHOUT SUBSTANCE: ANTI-REALISM IN THE RHETORICAL TRADITION

Trees Have Nothing to Teach Me; Only people in the city can do that
Socrates

Man is the natural owner and proprietor of nature
Descartes

The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and You—beside—
Emily Dickinson

Anti-Realism in the Rhetorical Tradition

I have a relatively simple presupposition for this dissertation project: the vast majority of twentieth-century theories of rhetoric labor under an unacknowledged anti-realist paradigm and, furthermore, this paradigm unites a wide array theoretical positions that most of us would consider to be distinct. Such a generalization claim will surely be greeted with suspicion as very few in our field would immediately self-identify as an anti-realist. Yet, if we raise the question of realism or a mind-independent reality that is knowable by science or philosophy, my point becomes immediately clear. If discussions of anti-realism enjoy little critical valence among contemporary trends in rhetorical studies, then realism is what Kenneth Burke would identify as a “devil term”: an ultimate term of repulsion. The philosopher of science Manuel DeLanda humorously, yet accurately, expresses realism’s status across most intellectual disciplines, “for decades admitting that one was a realist was equivalent to acknowledging [that] one was a child
molester” (*Intensive Science* 4). By contrast, rhetoric’s “god terms” are all manners and variants of linguistic, epistemic, semiotic, social, or cultural constructivisms.

The bogey man of realism is by no means reducible to a unified set of positions. Some rhetorical theorists who oppose realism are reacting to the general thesis that a world exists independent from our perception and knowledge (e.g., a mind-independent reality). For others, realism simply rests in opposition to idealism. By extension, realism is often related to the claim that our representations of reality correspond to the ways in which reality actually exists independent of our beliefs (e.g., correspondence theories of truth). Regardless of the specific understanding of realism, rhetorical theory has traditionally held a deep-seated suspicion of any form of realism and any related variants such as “direct realism,” “naïve realism,” or “common sense” realism. Plato famously dismissed rhetoric as cookery and anointed philosophy as the mode of inquiry that could reveal intelligible forms of reality beyond the realm of appearance. Similarly, Aristotle allowed rhetoric to address matters of contingency or probable proof, but nevertheless maintained that only science or philosophy could produce knowledge of eternally invariable objects. Scientific proofs (*pisteis*) were for those who were inartistic (*atechnê*) because they required no techniques of persuasion intrinsic to the art (*technê*) of rhetoric to demonstrate their validity. Stated schematically, if rhetoric’s diminishment has often occurred at the hands of what remains extrinsic to rhetoric, then rhetoric is understandably argued as a *technê*—a status Plato denied it—on par with philosophy and science in direct proportion to the degrees of contingency that can be said to exist in our knowledge of reality. Charles Bazerman affirms such a generalization for twentieth-
century rhetorical theory: “Science, especially physics, is the archetypical ‘hard case’ for rhetoric: if one can show rhetorical forces at work in this so-called hard discipline then a fortiori such forces must be at work elsewhere throughout knowledge discourse” (4).

In rhetorical history, a rigorous debate over the relationship between rhetoric and realism followed the 1967 publication of Robert Scott’s “On Viewing Rhetoric as Epistemic.” This debate pitted constructivism against variants of scientific or philosophical realism. Scholars such as Edward Schiappa, Barry Brummett, and James Berlin defended a neo-Kantian epistemic position that all of our experience of the world was mediated by language, rendering the question of a mind-independent reality a fruitless metaphysical speculation (see Royer). By contrast, rhetorical realists such as James Hickens, Earl Croasmun, Richard A. Cherwitz, Sean Sayers, and Kenneth Zagacki posited the necessity of some manner of realism to avoid epistemic relativism. In his entry on “Realism” in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Alexander Miller observes, “Although it would be possible to accept (or reject) realism across the board, it is more common for philosophers to be selectively realist or non-realist about various topics: thus it would be perfectly possible to be a realist about the everyday world of macroscopic objects and their properties, but a non-realist about aesthetic and moral value” (para. 2). Miller’s description is fairly accurate for rhetorical history as well because rhetorical realists invariably preserved the space of culture (“aesthetic and moral value”) as the province of rhetorical interaction while articulating a “selective” realism for scientific representation or objectivity in general. In one such example, Trevor Melia
and J.E. McGuire’s “minimal realism” granted science discourse immunity from rhetoric in that empiricism could describe the reality of natural phenomena.

This debate between relativists and rhetorical realists was not definitively settled. Yet, even a cursory glance at rhetorical scholarship over the years following Scott’s essay demonstrates that a prevailing epistemic approach to rhetoric has become the de facto norm that undergirds much in rhetorical theory and pedagogical practice. Articles and book-length manuscripts directly devoted to the subject of realism are far and few between with Daniel J. Royer’s “New Challenges for Epistemic Rhetoric” (1991) serving as one of the last essays to fully make a case for rhetorical realism. As a likely consequence of the elision of realism, the term “anti-realism” carried little intellectual currency seeing as though it would only make sense to identify oneself as an anti-realist if one were planning to acknowledge realism.

When seen from the vantage point of anti-realism, disparate theoretical and disciplinary movements within rhetoric theory such as epistemic rhetoric and poststructuralism can be seen to share a common ontological underpinning; namely, that is it an active cognitive subject alone who constructs reality. Let me offer a well-known example from two different theoretical revisions of Lloyd Bitzer’s rhetorical situation. On the one hand, Richard Vatz offered an epistemic revision that was predicated upon a fully intentional and agentive rhetor who constructed rhetorical reality through the mind alone. On the other hand, Barbara A. Biesecker’s poststructuralist revision held that rhetorical agency was perpetually displaced by the slippage of signs and signifiers. She specifically refutes Vatz’s point of view that rhetorical outcomes are entirely the work of mental
processes within the rhetor’s conscious grasp. While Vatz’s and Biesecker’s respective views on agency and their assumptions about language differ, both share the anti-realist position that language mediates all experience of reality and that no unmediated knowledge of reality is possible.

Anti-realism’s authorization of constructivism has also resulted in a marginalization of the role that material actors and materiality play in the constitution of rhetoric. On the one hand, James Berlin admits that rhetorical theory overwhelmingly privileges linguistic access to reality: “This is not to deny the force of the material in human affairs: people do need to provide for physiological needs, to arrange refuge from the elements, and to deal with eventual physical extinction. However, all of these material experiences are mediated through signifying practices. Only through language do we know and act upon the conditions of our experience” (“Poststructuralism and Cultural Studies” 21). Berlin’s point of view is a dominant paradigm among twentieth-century rhetorical theory. Granted this anti-realist warrant, a specific consideration of realism is rendered unnecessary.² The human mind creates and shapes rhetorical reality independent of the world of natural forces.³ Culture, symbols, language, and nomos (culture, convention) are immune from physis (nature). In a discussion of reality in a book aptly named Rhetoric and Reality, Berlin writes,

Language never acts as a simple referent to an external, extralinguistically verifiable thing-in-itself. It instead serves as a terministic screen, to use Burke’s phrase, that forms and shapes experience. . . . Thus, language practices engender a set of ideological prescriptions regarding the nature of
“reality”: economic “realities” and the distribution of wealth; social and political “realities” regarding class, race, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender and their relations to power; and cultural “realities” regarding the nature of representation and symbolic form in art, play, and other cultural experiences. (92-93)

Berlin’s stylistic gesture is common among rhetorical theorists who place scare quotes around the word “reality” to performatively emphasize its constructed vision. Berlin’s title Rhetoric and Reality could just as easily have been titled, “Rhetoric and Anti-realism.”

On the other hand, Edward Schiappa’s 2003 manuscript Defining Reality fails to even acknowledge that there might be an outside to language. While it is a common syntactical habit to place “reality” in quotes to signify the constructed nature of reality in Berlin’s sense, Schiappa did not even acknowledge the possibility of any mind independent reality. For Schiappa, rhetorical reality is what humans create in an autonomous and isolated sphere of language without regard for how representation mirrors reality. His elision of realities beyond the mind or the actual material presence of nonhuman actors in the world is a widely held warrant that goes largely unchallenged within recent decades of rhetorical theory.

Four Symptoms of Anti-Realism

As I will demonstrate in this dissertation, rhetorical theory’s unwillingness to develop a more complex understanding of rhetoric vis-à-vis realism has several practical and ultimately negative consequences for rhetorical theory. Simply put, the tacit
acceptance of an anti-realist paradigm poses problems when rhetorical theory attempts to deal with the embodied, ecological, material, and medial aspects of communication. To date, realism in rhetorical theory largely remains an impoverished version of Alan G. Gross’s commonsense realism, leaving language free to float free of the body and the world save for a few rhetorical realists who claim a special status for scientific representation. The denial of realism has slipped into the lack of theoretical attention to the specific ways in which communication is a materializable phenomenon. Anti-realism, I will argue, makes assessing the material and physical influence of nonhuman entities in relationship the rhetorical situation a truly difficult task. Schiappa writes of an actual interchange between Larry Rosenfield and Richard McKeon at an academic conference in the 1970’s. In a debate over the value of so-called “Big rhetoric”—the argument that rhetoric has extended from a narrow concern with oral persuasion to a generalized discursive epistemology that constituted knowledge in any discipline—Rosenfield complained that rhetorical phenomena “includes everything but tidal waves” (“Critiques of Big Rhetoric” 269). Richard McKeon shot back, “Why not tidal waves?” indicating his conviction that rhetoric should account for even inanimate entities. Schiappa takes the fact that this semi-humorous anecdote had not come true in thirty years—no rhetorical scholar has written about the rhetoric of tidal waves—as proof of Rosenfield’s overstatement, and as a reaffirmation that rhetorical epistemology and social constructivism remain the foundation for rhetorical theories. Ironically, even when we are tempted to write about tidal waves, it would invariably be the discourse about tidal waves. Its status as a real entity that “persuades” humans to built homes on stilts on the north
shore of Oahu, Hawaii, where I visited my grandmother when I was younger, would be secondary to genre analysis of policy statements attempting to mine the use of asymptotes in City Council deliberations about the proper housing code for said stilts.

My purpose, then, in this dissertation is to suggest a new and reconceived version of rhetorical realism that can in fact account for objects such as tidal waves as real, vital, actual, present, and affective forces in the world. Indeed, I will locate rhetoric’s anti-realist problem with nonhuman actors and materiality within a “modern” ontological division between active human subjects and passive objects inherited from a Cartesian-Newtonian ontology. In its place, I will articulate the need for a nonmodern rhetorical realism grounded in Bruno Latour’s actor-network theory (“realistic realism”), assemblage theory in Jane Bennett and Manuel DeLanda (“material realism”) as well as Matthew Fuller’s Deleuzian media ecology, and “agential realism” in Karen Barad. These theories hold a “nonmodern” ontology—Latour’s concept—where humans and nonhumans share the same space of entanglement, prompting us to revise anti-realist rhetorics to conceive of the relationship between materialism and realism.

Anti-realism leaves us with what Latour identifies as the modern Constitution (described below): an ontological separation between the active human subject and the passive, inert, and static object. While it is true that I could just as easily argue for a new form of nonmodern rhetorical materialism, I have strategic reasons for retaining the term realism. Of those affiliated with the nonhuman turn, the speculative realist branch have indeed made the ontological claim that reality exists independent of the mind—claims that I will address in detail in Chapter 4. At the present, I want to acknowledge that for
Latour, Barad, DeLanda, and Fuller, the invocation of the term realism does not necessarily mean a return to naïve realism or hypotheses of a mind-independent reality. Rather, realism’s devil term status means that the term can be usefully recontextualized to signify the return to the qualified assessments of the concrete, scientific, and quasi-empirical material effects and affects that epistemic accounts of rhetoric have tended to ignore. Similarly, I seek to employ the anti-realist mechanisms by which rhetoric elided realism as a way to illustrate why rhetoric has a much larger problem with the sorts of vitalist materialism, ecologies, alien phenomenologies, and hyperobjects that nonmodern thinkers define as reality sans quotation marks in a world of human and nonhuman actors.

While I will articulate this nonmodern rhetorical realism in detail in the remaining chapters, I want to clearly indicate the exigency for such a revision in the present chapter. This chapter functions simultaneously as an Introduction and as a chapter that will advance my argument throughout the dissertation as a whole. In other words, I want to conclusively demonstrate why anti-realism poses unproductive limitations for rhetorical theory’s relationship to matter and nonhuman actors. The major consequence of anti-realism’s focus on the subject’s active construction authorizes the typical process-movement to writing and rhetoric. As a consequence, the canons of invention, style, and (an invention-heavy) arrangement have been the sole focus of rhetorical theorists for much of the twentieth-century. Canons such as memory and delivery that addressed the nonsymbolic aspects of rhetoric fell into obscurity. Thus, the recovery of these canons will prove to be a core part of realizing a nonmodern rhetorical realism. In particular, I will suggest that delivery’s marginalization at the hands of epistemic rhetorics holds a
crucial component wherein delivery could be seen as the first canon of rhetoric.

This chapter proceeds as follows: I offer four primary and by no means comprehensive symptoms of anti-realism that I in turn employ as points of contrast through which to re-think the relationship between rhetoric and realism for the dissertation as a whole. The first symptom examines anti-realism within the context of rhetorical materialism, focusing primarily on the writing of Dana Cloud. Cloud’s example is telling because she conflates a neo-Marxist materialism with realism, reducing reality to lived human experience and symbolic action. In assessing Cloud’s rhetorical materialism from the standpoint of anti-realism, I also draw parallels between anti-realism and Richard Lanham’s “strong defense” of rhetoric as a knowledge-creating technê. The rejection of the reality of nonhuman actors and matter-in-itself will become a major way in which rhetoric rises to prominence in the twentieth-century; however, this anti-realist warrant simultaneously complicates attempts to talk about the world of physical objects, gravity, nail polish, GPS units, and plaid shirts in ways that do not automatically reduce them to human representation and instrumentality.

My second symptom lies in the failure of rhetorical theorists to interrogate the ontological assumptions that epistemic and constructivist rhetorics are predicated on. Although rhetoric is widely held to be epistemic, such a claim is premised upon a distilled and unacknowledged form of neo-Kantianism and Cartesian mind/body dualism. An impoverished reading of Kant’s a priori cogito provided the explicit exigence for early twentieth-century figures such as Ernst Cassirer to simply propose that there was no need for rhetorical theorists to even consider the noumena—the mind-independent nature
of reality. Furthermore, I suggest that anti-realism in this context is no mere theoretical construct or idle philosophical speculation. A brief pedagogical analysis of writing pedagogy related to rhetorical invention in C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon’s scholarship demonstrates a clear link between common *topoi* of writing’s invention-heavy focus and neo-Kantian anti-realism.

The third symptom relates to rhetoric and composition pedagogy. I will make an initial case for the rise of invention and the diminishment of delivery. The fourth and, for my dissertation’s purpose, most important symptom lies in the problems that an anti-realist paradigm holds for rhetorical treatments of technology. Anti-realism plays out in technology scholarship as a form of covert humanism. Technology only matters when humans directly instrumentalize it for symbolic aims. An active cognitive subject employs a passive object. As a result, rhetorical theorists are ill-equipped address how technology creates constraints and affordances in material and medial ecologies that obtain at nonsymbolic registers such as hardware, software, algorithms, and protocol. I intend to apply the insights of a nonmodern rhetorical realism to digital rhetoric, visual rhetoric, and matters of delivery and circulation. Therefore, an initial diagnosis of the modern Constitution within technology studies will pave the way for the content in future chapters.

Given my treatment of these four symptoms, I suggest that anti-realism leaves rhetorical theory in a position where matter has no substance, a claim that I epitomize through Jacques Derrida’s anti-realist attempt to theorize a “materialism without substance.” To move beyond a view of rhetoric as “matter without substance,” I propose
a new understanding of rhetorical realism that is not predicated on anti-realism and dualism but on a flat ontology where human and nonhuman actors share the same space of entanglement. I turn to Karl Marx’s early writings to describe his exploration of a vitalist materialism where objects and nonhuman actors possessed a conative and affective influence on human activity. Marx, like many post-enlightenment thinkers, subsequently rejected this early treatment of objects, but I use his example as a way to introduce the possibility of a rhetorical materialism where nonhuman actors are real, substantial entities in the world who serve as a condition of possibility for rhetorical interaction. Furthermore, Marx served as a frequent point of departure for rhetorical materialists including Cloud, William Colvin McGee, and, more recently, Ronald Green. Re-thinking which parts of Marx are invoked for rhetorical materialism offers an important precedent for a revitalized rhetorical materialism. In order to develop this point of view, I identify anti-realism’s Cartesian-Kantian ontology through Bruno Latour’s thinking of the modern Constitution in *We Have Never Been Modern*. Through Latour’s actor-network theory and other related theoretical positions that seek to take the reality of nonhuman actors as a scholarly concern, I propose a “nonmodern rhetorical realism.” The remainder of the dissertation will develop a nonmodern rhetoric in detail by turning away from the epistemic and subject-centered canon of invention and toward the ontological and object-codependent canon of delivery.

**Symptom 1: Rhetorical Materialism’s Problem with Matter**

One major consequence of anti-realism lies in scholarly conversations around the materiality of rhetoric. Materiality for rhetorical theorists generally means “discourse”
and the linguistic mediation of materiality. It does not mean matter as such, matter-in-itself, or the mind-independent existence of nonhuman actors. In past and recent conversations regarding “rhetorical materialism,” we can clearly see the ambivalence over realism and the privileging of constructivism. At best, much of contemporary rhetoric and politics in rhetorical materialism remains undertheorized as Jack Selzer wrote in the “Introduction” to the edited collection *Rhetorical Bodies*, one of the first substantial collections designed to addressed rhetorical materialism, “Even though rhetoric has long been concerned with the situatedness of literate acts and the real effects of discourse rather than with ideal possibilities, the relationship of rhetorical events to the material world that sustains and produces them has not often enough been fully elaborated or clearly articulated.” (9). Selzer’s point, written in the late 1990’s remains largely true today, and, in this section, I would like to use contemporary thinking about rhetorical materialism as a way of illustrating the problems with anti-realist rhetorics and matter. Throughout the dissertation, I will make gestures toward more general trends within rhetorical materialism as well as offshoots such as ecological and vitalist rhetorics. For the present, I will focus on the writing of a prominent rhetorical materialist, Dana Cloud—a decision made principally on the numerous citations that she enjoys within scholarship that attempts to connect rhetoric and materiality.

For Cloud as well as for a variety of prominent rhetorical materialists such as Ronald Greene, materiality does not mean the world of atoms, LED-lights, shoelaces, academic job wikis, writing teachers, and pinecones as they exist as material or physical forces in the world. While ecological and vitalist offshoots of rhetorical materialism
(Hawk; Dobrin; Gries; Cooper) have turned to Gilles Deleuze, Henri Bergson, Alfred North Whitehead, Spinoza, Diderot, and other philosophers who were very interested in questions of material ontology, rhetorical materialists continually pair materialism with “class consciousness” in the Marxist sense. This trend is in keeping with William Colvin McGee’s neo-Marxist definition of rhetorical materialism in essay, “A Materialist Conception of Rhetoric” In their introduction to *Rhetoric, Materiality, Politics*, John Louis Lacaites and Biesecker credit McGee’s essay as the first scholar in the rhetorical tradition to theorize a proper materialist rhetoric. Alternatively, rhetorical or cultural materialism has been associated with Althusserian or Foucaultian awareness of institutionally legitimated sites of power, identity formation, and control.\(^4\)

In order to demonstrate the connection between rhetorical materialism as discourse or class consciousness and the anti-realist legacy within rhetoric, I first need to define Marx vis-à-vis realism and anti-realism. Furthermore, this analysis will provide me with a context later on in this chapter to use a forgotten (vitalist) aspect of Marx’s early work to begin to reconceive of rhetorical materialism. Indeed, as I will demonstrate below, an alternative reading of Marx will actually enable me to theorize an alternative conception of rhetorical materialism that is not predicated on anti-realism. Furthermore, considering Cloud’s arguments in detail allows me to establish connections to broader anti-realist trends such as ideological criticism (Crowley) and various forms of linguistic constructivism.

Orthodox Marxist materialism is predicated upon a view where every rhetorical activity either reinforces or erodes the superstructure. For Marx, symbolic structures are
engaged in legitimating (reflecting) or challenging the prevailing modes of production that authorize non-egalitarian balances between labor and capital relationships in social space. Material reality—albeit it one utterly and totally determined by capitalist modes of production—is what produces the conditions under which we practice rhetoric. In Reality and Reason, Sean Sayers notes that Marx did not spend much time with epistemology because of its idealist connotations in Kant (see also Cheah Specters). Although Marx did not elaborate on this point, Marxist materialisms are often predicated upon a variant of realism that Sayers calls the “reflection theory of language.” The theory goes that, Sayers writes, “The objective world can be known to consciousness . . . only because consciousness is a reflection of reality. This idea, in some form or other, is basic to all versions of realism and materialism in epistemology” (7).

Thus, if reality is contingent, socially constructed, and not a reflection of Plato’s invariable metaphysical nature, then reality as a reflection of consciousness can be changed exclusively by shifting signifiers and challenging acts of negation. Orthodox Marxist materialism was unattractive precisely because it was too deterministic. Not every linguistic entity is engaged in a relationship with every other entity, and this comment applies to all scales of human and nonhuman entities—not just symbols. Such a narrow definition of reality leads us to what the philosopher Todd May calls “strategic politics” in The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism. Stated a bit reductively, strategic political philosophy limits political intervention to action targeting the one (economic) base that organizes all relations. If we do not target this base as the locus of our political and rhetorical efforts, then we are merely enacting Don Quixote’s
jousts with windmills or trapped inside Marx’s non-Platonic cave by concerting our efforts on social ephemera that maintain the base rather than identify and fix the “real problem.”

Many rhetorical theorists subsequently rejected an orthodox Marxist materialism. It is not hard to see why. In perhaps the most famous distancing of rhetoric from orthodox materialism, Kenneth Burke, as Frank Lentricchia has well documented, was rejected from the American Writers Conference—a communist-socialist collective. Why? Because Burke noted that regardless of the Hegelian-infused historical dialectic that centered on the laborer as the empirical analysis, symbols, Burke argued, could create their own realities independent of any telos grounded in the economy. Thus, using the term “worker” as a Marxist “God term” of transnational identification carried symbolic resonances with an American audience that would actually create realities that were counter-productive to the desired ideal form of class identification. In this similar way, rhetoric has always been concerned not with the relationship to the truth, but with how language performs different functions in different social contexts and rhetorical situations—the anti-realist essence of Schiappa’s *Defining Reality*.

Marx’s narrow version of materialism served as a point of contrast for subsequent rhetorical materialisms. Following from McGee’s precedent, rhetorical materialism largely became a way of helping citizens and students to identify these widely distributed institutional ideologies and to debunk them. Thus, rhetorical theorists who wanted to retain Marx’s materialist class consciousness while talking about rhetorical creativity and labor’s materiality are often trapped, in the rhetorical materialist Dana Cloud’s words,
“between the Scylla of idealism and the Charybdis of ‘vulgar’ economism or simpleminded orthodoxies” (“The Materiality of Discourse as Oxymoron” 141). In attempting to restore “materiality” to rhetoric, Cloud notes “critical scholars are trying to navigate safe passage by way of a particular theoretical hypothesis: the materiality of discourse, or the idea that discourse itself is influential in or even constitutive of social and material reality (including the lived) experience of work, pleasure, pain, and hunger)” (“142). What is “real” is the fact humans create linguistic meaning independent of concrete referents in the world.

Cloud’s rhetorical materialism is unique because she is very well aware of the anti-realist position that informs her rhetorical materialism while nevertheless retaining a version of realism to support her materialism. This retention is not a contradiction. In a comment that reflects Miller’s sentiments above, the philosopher Levi Bryant argues, “all materialists are invariably realists at some level” (n.pag). The reverse position, however, “all realists are materialists” is not true as Plato believed that material reality was ultimately derivable from a transcendental realm of intelligible forms. Cloud’s position is thus not realism in the ontological sense, but a form of epistemic anti-realism where the human mind alone shapes reality. She argues this point in her comment elsewhere “Although there is no permanent, essential, or universally experienced reality, the category of reality is necessary to political judgment even as it finds intelligibility, conscious meaning, and strategic import in discourse” (“The Matrix” 331).

Yet, as the same time, Cloud recognizes this tension with a mind-independent (ontological) realism, citing Hickins’s comment “Historical materialism is one version of
realism, or a philosophy that insists that there is a truth independent of the individual knower or perceiver of reality” (“Materiality of Discourse” 145).Yet, Cloud ultimately recognizes that the need for rhetoric to remain a creative linguistic force and to avoid strategic politics necessitates a rejection of a mind-independent realism. She offers a definition of reality as such: “This article defines reality as the site of lived experience, the place where the embodied experience of labor generates contradictions with regard to knowledge and consciousness” (146). Here, we see an attempt to combine a distilled Marxist “class awareness” that is tied not to a mind-independent realism or even to the ecological or material affect and influence of buildings, trees, cars, woodland creatures or other entities, but to critique and de-mystification of labor relations that “nonsense” words cover up. For Cloud, the “real” is of interest for the purposes of ideological demystification—an epistemic problem but not a perspective that sheds light upon the actual materiality of language. The “materiality” of language is simply that it can cause effects for humans independent of biological or physical determinism.

For Cloud, rhetorical materialism increasingly just means the awareness of when symbolic statements do not accord to “actual” events such as when Apple claims to be a socially responsible company while exploiting and enabling deplorable worker conditions in Chinese factories. Neo-Marxist materialism and “realism” become almost interchangeable. In a different essay, Cloud specifically theorizes rhetorical materialism through appealing to Alcoff’s “imminent realism.” Imminent realism insists that “truths are perspectival and that we should privilege the truths of subordinate groups in society” (e.g., the factory workers) (qtd. in Cloud 146). The excluded remainder becomes a “truth”
in relationship to dominant metanarratives that legitimate the neoliberal order and social hierarchies, leading Alcoff to declare that some version of (constructivist) realism is necessary to political judgment and action. Ironically, this mind-dependent understanding of imminent realism is the exact opposite of a mind-independent realism. Alcoff’s variant does not argue over the ontological status of matter as it informs our attempts to bring Nature to Culture, but instead that ideology and hegemony cause us to value the arguments and grounds for argumentation (and entry points) that exclude points of view that would challenge these. Cloud concludes via Alcoff, “An unmitigated rhetorical relativism is at odds with both materialist and idealist realisms because in principle, relativism affords the critic no privileged perspectives by which to judge economic or political realities” (153). Despite her efforts to promote a rhetorical materialism, Cloud’s cannot avoid anti-realism. Matter does not mean matter-in-itself, but the discourse about labor, bodies, and the environment. Cloud’s essay well identifies the political and ethical stakes in maintaining an anti-realist argument, writing “On the other hand, social constructionism usefully challenges the idea that a given economic or political reality is natural, permanent, and transparent and argues that representations of that reality are persuasive constructs that obscure the real interests at stake and the possibilities of change” (149-50).

Let us leave Cloud for the moment and look more broadly at the topography of rhetorical theory in the context of her claim. The canonical figures of the cultural studies terrain who are drawn on by rhetorical theorists is littered with anti-realists who hold similar positions. Robert Wess has documented how rhetorical approaches to the cultural
studies trinity of race, class, and gender are almost identical when seen from the viewpoint of anti-realist constructivism. In the example of racism, constructivism challenges the assumption of a naturalized hierarchy of white skin over non-white skin through biological essentialism or foundationalism (see also Rorty, Contingency). Thus, anti-realism or anti-foundationalism allows us to argue that race is not an essence but a product of nomos, convention, history, and particularist interpretations. The political and ethical argument is subsequently to throw out realism and nature (physis) and to maintain that humans are incapable of transparently or neutrally representing represent a biological or natural reality (physis). Here, the basic impulse seen in the anti-realist tendencies within rhetorical materialism becomes symptomatic within humanities approaches that extend far beyond rhetorical theory. Donna Haraway has well documented that the physis and nomos distinction inevitably universalized nature and culture, elevating the discourse of “natural scientists and philosophers” over rhetorical theorists. Furthermore, such issues connect with the historically Western obsession “with racial purity, categories authorized by nature, and the well-defined self” (60).

By positing that humans have no knowledge of essences, constructivism allows rhetorical theorists to construct new (non)racial identities, politics, and representations by privileging the effects and dissemination of the social construction of symbols rather than an individual’s immanent reasoning capacity—a faculty historically limited to propertied white males—or biological self that generate them. Despite her express desire earlier in the essay to at least acknowledge a concern with realism, Cloud specifically invokes Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau’s unapologetic anti-realism that is tied to political
intervention and agency. Laclau and Mouffé write, “Human beings socially construct their world, and it is through this construction—always precarious and incomplete—that they give to a thing its being” (89). Laclau and Mouffé define their project as “anti-realist” rather than anti-materialist (86-87), an intentional move (perhaps) to separate their epistemic view of language from vulgar Marxist materialism while nevertheless reinforcing anti-realism. Yet, by Cloud’s standards, Laclau and Mouffee are materialists at the level of discourse producing effects in the world. Cloud affirms that Mouffee and Laclau reject the “usefulness of the notion of ontological, pre-discursive reality, not the imbrication of discourse with power. . . . They reject the idea that the world falls into line according to some set of a priori idealized forms or concepts” (152). Simply put, we cannot declare what is real and invariably for all time given that, following from Burke, all orientations are necessarily partial and that any claim of objectivity would only reflect the interests of the institutionally privileged group who could benefit from having their version of reality naturalized.7

It is not only rhetorical materialists and those interested in politics who cling to an anti-realist worldview, and this observation will tie directly back to my previous observations about rhetoric’s historical dislike of realism. Anti-realism as an unspoken warrant that legitimates what Richard Lanham called a “strong defense of rhetoric” in “The Q Question.” The “weak defense” is given by Plato wherein rhetoric is cookery and amoral manipulation if performed by a non-virtuous man and, at best, stylistic adornment if employed by an elite moral individual. In no small coincidence, the strong defense of rhetoric—rhetoric as a knowledge producing technē—occurs when the linguistic and
epistemic turns blurs the lines between what science can and cannot know. The more that reality is argued to be a matter of historical convention, individual or social contingency, and does not mirror an invariable metaphysical order of things, the more that all matters of knowledge can be said to possess some degree of rhetoricality. The strong defense lurks behind Bazerman’s statement about physics and rhetoric above. Countless times at national rhetoric and writing conventions can one hear unchallenged assumptions that all knowledge is rhetorical because all knowledge is mediated by language. Epistemological uncertainty has been collapsed into a de facto anti-realist ontology. In other words, rhetorical theorists seemingly have everything to gain and nothing to lose by maintaining a strong anti-realism defense of rhetoric. I should note here that this thesis does not mean that language is necessary freed from materiality. It is more the point that what is considered to be essential and rhetorical about language is only its symbolic character. Burke defines rhetoric as “an essential function of language itself. . . the use of language as a symbolic means of inducing cooperation in beings that by nature respond to symbols” (Rhetoric of Motives 53). A common reading of Burke is that anything nonsymbolic lies in the realm of what he calls “mere motion”—that is, physical and biological causation.8

Symptom 2: The Rise of Anti-Realism in the Rhetorical Tradition

My previous discussion of rhetorical materialism should make it clear that actual considerations of mind-independent reality, scientific discourse, the ontology of matter, or nature per se is not at stake in any consideration of a rhetorical materialism. For the vast majority of rhetorical theorists, it is the discourse about bodies or the discourses that privilege white but not non-white bodies that is of interest for rhetorical theorists.9 How
did rhetorical theory get to a point where matter in itself does not matter for the vast majority of scholarly practice? The locus of critical attention has been on the subject while the reality or status of the object has been ignored, bracketed, or reduced to signification. Diana Poole and Samantha Frost in the introduction to the edited collection *New Materialisms* writes: “It is true that over the past three decades or so, theorists have radicalized the way they understand subjectivity, discovering its efficacy in constructing even the most apparently natural phenomena while insisting upon its embeddedness in dense networks of power that outrun its control and constitute its willfulness. Yet it is on subjectivity that their gaze has focused” (2). According to Thomas Rickert in *Ambient Rhetoric*, rhetorical theory tends to elide a common fact; namely, “every theory of rhetoric implicitly or explicitly organizes and invokes a theory of materiality and the human relation to it” (n/a). Berlin as well acknowledges to argue for a theory of rhetoric (and writing) is to argue for a version of reality and thus was confident in his exclusion of matter as such and the world of nonhumans from his understanding of the rhetorical situation.

The second symptom of anti-realism is that of the fixity of matter: the Cartesian-Kantian paradigm and the Newtonian worldview of static objects. In this section I want to explore the ontological foundations of anti-realism. Although many rhetorical histories begin with the Greeks and Romans, mine begins by arguing for the centrality of an enlightenment philosopher seldom discussed outside of philosophy and rhetoric scholarship who had a ironically negative view of rhetoric: Immanuel Kant. In “Transgressive Realism,” Lee Braver notes three ontological steps to anti-realism: Kant’s
“active mind,” Hegel’s “objective idealism,” and Kierkegaard’s “transgressive realism”; however, Kant, in my opinion, ends up being the most significant figure for rhetorical theorists to focus on. Prior to Kant, Braver notes that Cartesian dualism sowed the seeds for modern divisions between perceiving and knowing subjects and passive objects. Poole and Frost make a similar claim.

Many our ideas about materiality in fact remain indebted to Descartes, who defined matter in the seventeenth century as corporeal substance constituted of length, breadth, and thickness; as extended, uniform, and inert. This provided the basis for modern ideas of nature as quantifiable and measurable and hence for Euclidian geometry and Newtonian physics. According to this model, material objects are identifiably discrete; they move only upon an encounter with an external force or agent, and they do so according to a linear logic of cause and effect. (7)

This view also has the convenience of coinciding with our common sense view of reality, missing, as Jane Bennett notes in *Vibrant Matter*, the slow grammatological rewriting of techtonic plates and other things that occur either too fast or too slow for humans to perceive. Descartes identified the *cogito* as ontologically other than matter. Locke and the empiricists would similarly shift the location of substance from things-in-themselves to the impressions of the human senses. Simply put, prior to Kant’s *a priori* synthetic judgment, a dualist foundation was established that would respect the thing-in-itself by allowing that we could only really be sure of impressions produced by our mental patterns to inform our partial experience of objects.
According to a general narrative established by speculative realists such as Quentin Meillassoux, Bryant, Latour, and Graham Harman, Kant is largely responsible for two thrusts in the twentieth-century. First, building upon empiricism’s observation that we only encounter substances as they exist for us and not as they exist in themselves, Kant argued for the active construction of knowledge:

But though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience. For it may well be that even our empirical knowledge is made up of what we receive through impressions and of what our own faculty of knowledge (sensible impressions serving merely as the occasion) supplies from itself. (Critique 275)

According to Braver in A History of Continental Anti-Realism, Kant united Cartesian dualism with an empirical skepticism in “the epoch-making claim that the mind actively processes or organizes experience in the construction of knowledge, rather than passively reflecting an independent reality” (3). Latour facetiously describes Descartes’ contribution: “Only a mind put in the strangest position, looking at the form from the inside out and linked to the outside by nothing by the tenuous connection of the gaze, will throb in constant fear of losing reality” (Pandora’s Hope 4).

Secondly, Kant is alleged to have perpetuated Cartesian duality in the form of a separation of mind and matter or, in his terms, noumenal and phenomenal:

Since the oldest days of philosophy, inquirers into pure reason have thought that, besides the things of sense, or appearances (phenomena), which make up the sensible world, there were certain beings of the
understanding (*noumena*), which should constitute an intelligible world. . . . And we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself but only know its appearances, viz., the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something. (798)

Kant would build upon dualism and British empiricism, noting that substances are, as Braver describes, “particulars that endure in time and space, which we use (through impressions and senses) to give unity to our sense of place in the world. We use things and our ability to differentiate things as a way to locate ourselves in the world (Irwin, it should be noted, notes that Aristotle wanted this too)” (11). 10 Despite the existence of noumenal forms, Kant is still very much in the mind.11 Unlike empiricists, and this insight is key for understanding the connection between rhetoric and anti-realism, Kant argued that the mind actively constituted reality in order to determine necessity for causal relations. Sensation thus required supplementation by the mind as no relations were directly given in impression. Since the mind therefore imposes the limits of knowledge, humans required then to distinguish not between the thing-in-itself and its localized manifestation, but between judgments of intersubjectivity or social consensus. Some positions and claims could be universalized (e.g., a cup of hot coffee is warm)—scientific and objective—and some could not (e.g., “I think this cup of hot coffee is delicious”)—nonscientific and subjective. Consensus, be it of a Habermansian or social-epistemic variety in Berlin, is identified—much as Aristotle situated rhetoric to deal with matters of
probability and science to deal with an invariable nature—not against a consideration of a mind-independent reality (the thing-in-itself), but of epistemic construction. Like Locke, he believes that we have no access or good reason to believe in a mind-independent reality as an explanation for qualities that we experience.12

In the speculative realist narrative of post-enlightenment thought, Kant inaugurated a paradigm that Meillassoux identifies as “correlationism”: “By ‘correlationism,’ we mean the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (5). Meillassoux describes a gradual philosophical shift in how questions of ontology—considerations the nature of all beings, of substance—were replaced by questions of epistemology—questions of human access to knowledge. Bryant et al. confirm Meillassoux and Braver’s observation: “The origins of the correlationist turn lie in Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy. . . . [I]n Kant’s famous Copernican revolution, it is no longer the mind that conforms to objects, but rather objects that conform to the mind” (4). Kant himself writes, “We suppose that our representations of things, as they are given to us, does not conform to these things as they are in themselves, but that these objects, as appearances, conform to our mode of representation” (*Critique of Pure Reason*). Summarily stated, humans pay a price for securing the metaphysical privilege of the *logos*; namely, “the renunciation of any knowledge beyond how things appear to us” (4). We can think of being, exist among other beings-in-the-worlds, or even have phenomenological encounters, but we are incapable of speaking of a reality independent of thought. In essence, this is a subtle form of idealism. Meillassoux writes, “Such
considerations reveal the extent to which the central notion of modern philosophy since Kant seems to be that of correlationism” (12). Sensation, the realm of empirical intuition, is chaotic, and, contra David Hume’s empiricism, cannot provide us with a means to structure experience. Why would we ever trust the body or the senses? Kant declares, “our entire sensibility is nothing but the confused representation of things, which contains solely that which pertains to them in themselves but only under a heap of marks and partial representations that we can ever consciously separate from one another” (234). Here, we can see that Kant, while preserving a space for the noumenal, nevertheless—in Graham Harman’s term—overmines the reality of individual objects in favor of the manifold of intuition, along with *a priori* forms of space/time and categories of the mind. As Bryant writes in *The Democracy of Objects*, objects—nonhuman actors—“are ‘effects’ of something more immediate and accessible (empirical experience and mind)” (26).

There are several points about correlationism is worth mentioning. First, the term correlationism is very general and Meillassoux’s claim that the vast majority of post-Kantian philosophers are obsessed with the mind-world correlate seems at times overstated. Whitehead, Henri Bergson, Deleuze, Donna Haraway, and others certainly were not guilty of correlationism at all times. Secondly, Kant is an odd choice as a whipping boy for the speculative realists. Hegel absolutized consciousness and many elements of his philosophical thought would certainly be said to fit into a correlationist mindset. Kant, however, definitely retained a degree of respect for realism as Sayers has noted (10-14). He “brackets” the *noumena* not because it exists in a Platonic world of forms, but more out of his belief in the limitations of human perception and experience.
Braver notes the paradox that Kant never actually desired to avoid an engagement with realism. When Kant “founds anti-realism . . . it is still conceived strictly along the lines of a realist metaphysics,” requiring the realism of the transcendental subject – something that could produce order in an “unordered” mass (27). We do interact with objects, but we cannot be sure that our impressions truly reflect the real existence of objects as they would exist freed from any representations. Our experience of the world is all we have and that the world is not equal to our impressions of it. Nevertheless, given the trouble that rhetorical realists have with matter and realism as I have sketched above, I am very confident in the claim that correlationism applies eerily well to philosophical currents rhetorical history and theory in their neo-Kantian formations.

Symptom 3: Anti-Realist Pedagogy and the Rise of Invention

After Descartes’s and Kant’s twinned assaults on reality outside of the mind in favor of epistemic construction, we have a position where the subject functions both the object and origin of knowledge. In The Archaeology of Knowledge, Foucault has identified this post-Kantian move as the “transcendental-empirical couplet.” Philosophers no longer begin by observing the world like Aristotle did with his substances and plant-animal-human taxonomies, but by observing the observer. Braver comments, “The observer becomes both that entity that observes the observer (the transcendental) and the entity to be observed (the empirical)” (5). Given that the two never align as Sayers’ mirror theory or realist correspondence theories require, we are left with Burke’s “paradox of substance” as articulated in The Grammar of Motives. In Burke’s well-wrought description, “Men seek for vocabularies that will be faithful reflections of reality.
To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are *selections* of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality” (59). The paradox of substance referred to the fact that we could only ever describe what was intrinsic to a thing—its essence—by means of something extrinsic to that thing—a re-presentation of the thing through language.

Much in rhetorical theory—mostly unacknowledged—reflects a tacit Cartesian-Kantian ontology. Many of our rhetorical and pedagogical strategies mirror metaphysical assumptions about substance and the activity and passivity of humans and Nature. By bracketing realism and focusing on how the mind constructs patterns on an unordered chaos, pedagogical strategies mirror this dualist assumption. In “New Challenges for Epistemic Realism,” Royer writes, “That is, where Kant insisted on the participation of the knower with regard to things known, writing instructors should admit as much, regarding writing as one more way, one chief way, in which new knowledge is attained” (287). Hence, writing teachers involved in the process movement are engaged in “. . . nurturing this fundamental human competence to make meaning” (287). We generally begin rhetoric and writing classes by focusing on pre-writing and invention (e.g., freewrites, visual concept maps, and brainstorming), honing these skills over processes of delivery, memory, circulation, and processes that shift rhetoric toward materiality and non-cognitive embodiment. Royer offers an example from Knoblauch and Brannon’s *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing*. In Knoblauch and Brannon, our commonplace notions of student-centered activity over the top-down Platonic dialectic of teacher or the banking model of pedagogy are predicated upon several Kantian
assumptions: “the assumption that writing is a natural competence rather than an acquired skill; the assumption that writing needs to be facilitated rather than directed; and the insistence that the development of meaning should always take . . . all find metaphysical support in Kant’s dualism” (287).

To recall Berlin’s previous quotation about how all methods of teaching writing reflect a reality, epistemic rhetoric’s distilled Kantianism supports Berlin’s contention that “all learning is based in ideology and signifying practices” (“Postructuralism” 863)—a claim that I will directly challenge in Chapter 5. Laclau and Mouffe’s anti-realism or Crowley’s ideology criticism also reflects similar understandings. In terms of invention, Knoblach and Brannon note, “the subsequent pedagogy offers a valuable replacement for writing instruction that has been reduced to naming parts” or “a convenient packaging of preconceived thought” (60). Their claim, “Discourse enacts the world: its knowledge is not about the world but is rather constitutive of the world” is a distilled form of Kantianism (60). Consequently, there is no “objective” reality that can be known, reducing all knowledge to what Michael Polanyi describes as “personal knowledge” in opposition to Karl Popper’s objective knowledge (Sanchez). Consequently, philosophy and science—the traditional proponents of an invariable nature—become ways to study how humans explore the world, and not statements about the nature of the world they explore. The phenomenon is pervasive among theorists of pedagogy and rhetorical invention. Knoblauch and Brannon point out “it is this dialectical [e.g., social-consensus] notion of rhetoric—and of rhetoric as the determiner of reality—that underlies the textbooks of Young, Becker, and Pike” (774). With respect to this neo-Kantian legacy
in pedagogy, Royer convincingly concludes “the epistemological heritage of Kant has served to greatly enlighten pedagogy” (288).

This basic ambivalence—that is, we need to claim that rhetoric creates knowledge (is substantial, is material) rather than acting as stylistic adornment to the proper work of scientific discernment or logical positivism—plays out through the two largest trends in twentieth-century rhetoric: epistemological realism and anti-realism. Ironically, given Kant’s infamous rejection of rhetoric, most in rhetoric have little difficulty in subscribing to some version of dualism as a way to carve out the strong defense for rhetoric. Where Kant’s account of realism was considerably more nuanced, many rhetorical theorists, such as Ernst Cassirer, took dualism—one cognitively knowable reality and one unknowable materiality—as warranting a strong anti-realist defense of rhetoric grounded specifically in epistemic rhetoric. Where Kant at least acknowledged paradoxes, antinomies, and problems of dualism, Cassirer simply retreated to subjective idealism as the strong defense of rhetoric. No possibility of an objective, material, or realist world was entertained. In his book, An Essay on Man Cassirer writes: “No longer can man confront reality immediately; he cannot see it, as it were, face to face” (25). He continues:

Physical reality seems to recede in proportion as man’s symbolic activity advances. Instead of dealing with the things themselves man is in a sense constantly conversing with himself. He has so enveloped himself in linguistic forms, in artistic images, in mythical symbols or religious rites that he cannot see or know any-thing except by the interposition of this artificial medium. (25)

32
Cassirer’s decision—which sounds like an early statement of Jean Baudrillard’s hypersimulation—had the farthest-reaching consequences for treating invention and rhetoric as processes immanent to the human mind. While I will have much to say about epistemic rhetoric in relationship to realism in Chapter 2, it is crucial to observe Royer’s conclusion; namely, “epistemic rhetoric is the culmination of many influences that ultimately sink their roots in the philosophies of Cassirer and Kant” (287). Royer goes on to suggest more far reaching consequences of dualism: “Given that different people see the ‘same thing’ differently coupled with Kant’s insight that special categories of the mind give shape and meaning to reality, much of modern thought has gone the way of denying that objects of reality exist apart from our thoughts about them including our values, attitudes, and symbolic use of language” (288). Such was the price that rhetoric would pay for the strong anti-realist defense of rhetoric. Seen from the perspective of ontological realism, the primary difference between nature and culture is that epistemic rhetoric negates nature, and that postmodernism de-negates nature while leaving a split between nature and culture. Language cannot refer in any way to physis and all knowledge is therefore cultural and constructed. Ironically, as Vickie Kirby and Latour will both argue, humans were consequently not a part of nature, but at once removed from the world.

Symptom 4: Anti-Realism and Technology

A related yet distinct version of anti-realism’s “matter without substance” effects areas of concern beyond pedagogy, and this is the final symptom of anti-realism that this chapter will explore. Technology is one of the areas in which anti-realism’s unspoken
warrant is seldom observed. Over the past few decades and in no small part thanks to the spread of global wireless networks and handheld mobile devices, rhetoricians are especially sensitive now to technology and materiality’s influence on the rhetorical situation. In contrast to the anti-realist rhetorical materialisms and pedagogical theories that I have traced, it would seem very unlikely to encounter anti-realism in technology scholarship as notable digital and visual rhetoric scholars such as Christina Haas and Kathleen Blake Yancey are obviously aware that communication practices have altered from print to networked and multimodal media. In digital media, the object’s presence cannot be avoided or downplayed simply because communication cannot occur without it.

The concern for my dissertation with technology and the legacy of anti-realism is not directly neo-Kantian constructivism but an additional consequence of the subject/object split of modernity: humanism and technological instrumentality. Simply put, it is a pervasive view of active human subjects using passive technological objects to complete instrumental rhetorical aims. Similar to how Cloud used materialism to signify not actual physical objects but symbols and practices of labor relations, humanism allows technological objects have “substance” (materiality) only to the extent to which humans symbolize them or use them. The status of matter as a “real” entity becomes an index through which to study the enduring legacies of anti-realism. Celeste Condit offers a non-technological example: “the complaint that DNA is nothing but immaterial code is frustratingly similar to the ‘common-sense’ dismissal of language by many people on the grounds that it is immaterial—mere words, nothing but air vibrating, the opposite of ‘deeds’ or the real” (327). In other words, who and what is allowed to count as a
substance, a being worthy of being accounted for not only animated rhetoric’s marginalization, but it now contributes to how rhetoric remains complicit in a sort of re-marginalization of matter in itself. In the *Electronic Word*, Lanham offers an analogous example for digital media, writing “The electronic world embodies a denial of nature: *copia* can be kept and yet given away. Making a digital copy for you does not impoverish me; the only substantial exchange of such a desubstantiated “property” is the physical disk that contains the data, and to send the text over a modem from your hard disk to mine involves no expenditure of substance at all” (18). Lanham’s electronic “materialism” is reduced entirely to what material humans perceive; any flows we do not perceive are “immaterial,” thereby imposing a hierarchy of substance or *physis* even where Lanham would seek to call our attention to its presence.

We will see this pattern repeated by scholars of visual and digital rhetoric in Chapters 4 and 5 of this dissertation. The terms of technology alone disclose these phenomenological biases. For both Jay David Bolter and Lanham, print had terms such as “stiffness,” “immutability,” “stability,” “solidity”; it is “given,” “static,” “fixed” (qtd. in Golding 250). An overt ontological line is then drawn between print literacy’s allegedly neutral transmission of thinking—a form of anti-realist idealism—and the materiality of electronic media by virtue of its perceived and instrumentalized material difference: electronic media are characterized by “instability,” “variability,” “fluctuation,” and “change”; they are “oscillatory,” “malleable,” “a matter of ‘fluid signs,’ of ‘signifiers in motion’” (qtd. in Golding 250). Mark Poster echoes Lanham’s account in an early essay on cyberdemocracy in the late 1990’s: “the computer dematerializes the written trace. . . .
The writer encounters his or her words in a form that is evanescent, instantly transformable, in short, immaterial” (111). To sum up by quoting Eric Vos, “In terms of the labels often attached to new media, we are dealing with a virtual, dynamic, interactive, immaterial poetry” (216). The attributions of visible and invisible or static and fluid are not based on any ontological consideration of the human-technology relationship. Rather, these attributions are simply made upon the convenience of perception, reducing technology’s materiality to an instrument and preserving the separate spheres of culture and technē.

Beyond rhetorical theory, the attribution of substance to human creative activity alone is common, especially in technology scholarship. Technology remains humanized and instrumentalized with great consequences for how we think of rhetoric and politics. Let me offer a popular example. In “Cyberspace and the American Dream: A Magna Carta for the Knowledge Age,” cyberlibertarians Esther Dyson, George Gilder, and George Keyworth offered a utopian manifesto for the cyberage: “The central event of the 20th century is the overthrow of matter. In technology, economics, and the politics of nations, wealth—in the form of physical resources—have been losing value and significance. The powers of mind are everywhere ascendant over the brute force of things” (n.pag, my emphasis). Paradoxically, what luddites take as the rise of the machine, the technological romanticists interpret as a fulfillment of human creative genius. Their stance is paradoxical. The mind’s transcendence or ascendance over the technological object only occurs through its reliance on a technological prosthesis. It makes sense only
given certain anti-realist assumptions about the materiality of human action and thought and the passivity of nonhuman matter.

The Legacy of Anti-Realism: Matter Without Substance

The four symptoms of anti-realism mean that attempts to deal with physical objects, matter, pedagogy, and technology are inevitably circumscribed into a neo-Kantian-Cartesian framework in the name of the strong anti-realist defense of rhetoric. Given this pervasive and enduring epistemic focus on rhetoric and ontological humanism, Lacaites and Biesecker claim in 2010 that rhetorical scholarship has only had two major paradigms of rhetorical materialism since Burke, McGee, and Perelman’s respective “rhetorical materialism” is unsurprising (vi). In “Poststructuralism,” Berlin unsurprisingly invoked Burke’s division between symbolic action and the “mere motion” of the World’s Body (physis) in order to ground his claim that the linguistic mediates all access to reality. The exclusive focus on how language shapes reality is characteristic of this first phase of rhetorical materialism. Even when Burke considers nonsymbolic and nonverbal factors in his discussions of incipient action and attitude, he inevitably concludes “the nonverbal element also persuades by reason of its symbolic character” (*Rhetoric of Motives* 172). Including the insights of Derrida, Lacan, and Foucault, Lacaites and Biesecker identify a second stage of rhetorical materialism: the concern with “rhetoric’s materiality.” In this second stage, it was not enough to look at the effects of language in producing reality, but it became necessary to examine the subject’s cognitive ability to produce language and meaning. For instance, Lacanian rhetorics look to libidinal drives that lurk behind the manifestation of symbolic content.\(^{14}\)
Yet, Burke, unlike the majority of twentieth-century rhetorical theory, struggled throughout all of his writing over where to draw the line between action and motion, rhetoric and reality, wondering at one point whether the division between them was an “illusion” and whether or not humans were just “things in motion” (*Lang. as Symbolic Action* 32). Thus, I offer a “representative anecdote”—a Burkan idiom—for my four symptoms of rhetoric and anti-realism grounded in Derrida’s own problem with materiality and realism, “matter without substance,” which I take to be a representative anecdote for much of twentieth-century rhetorical theory. Toward the end of his intellectual life, materialist fault lines had begun to appear in Derrida’s overwhelmingly linguistic approach to realism. At one point late in his intellectual life, he even contemplated the necessity of a “post-deconstructive realism,” in his analysis of Jean-Luc Nancy’s *Corpus* (see *On Touching*; Marder), a phenomenology of touching and sensory interaction irreducible to signification. Yet, Derrida’s earlier attempts to discuss what I call simply “matter without substance” marks the problem with anti-realist accounts of materiality and, furthermore, will inevitably plague any attempt to think rhetoric as a material force in the world. The anti-realist legacy, the elevation of the active subject and the rejection of the passive object cross deeply into the humanist core of rhetorical theory.

By many accounts, Derrida insisted on reducing the reality of nature to linguistic intra-referentiality and discourse but nevertheless needed to deal with the world that was filled with material forces and physical objects. In *Specters of Marx*, Derrida wrote of his “obstinate interest in a materialism without substance: a materialism of the *khora* for a despairing ‘messianism’” (168-69; Cheah). He further elucidated what he meant by this
strange phrase, a “materialism without substance,” when subsequent interviewers demanded his clarification of the relationship between deconstruction and Marxism. Derrida made it clear that Marxism and materialism were incommensurable in his thinking: “It follows that if, and in the extent to which, matter in this general economy designates . . . radical alterity . . . then what I write can be considered ‘materialist’” (Positions 64). This invocation of materialism was a “paracept”—a third term like differance—that would “postpone the reinvestment” of “[logocentric] values associated with those of thing, reality, presence in general, sensible presence, for example, substantial plenitude, content, referent, etc” (64). Derrida’s concern is not whether objects actually exist or the ontological condition of reality. Rather, Derrida wants to safeguard the question of knowledge and representation of reality from being answered through the lens of positivity. Derrida’s approach to matter mirrors his approach to subjectivity. Postponing reinvestment is a political strategy to avoid the negation and social exclusion of the (non-white, feminine, queer) Other. It is discussing matter in relationship to a transcendental signified that he wishes to avoid at all costs. Consequently, as Pheng Cheah argues, defining matter as anything but “absolute exterior or radical heterogeneity” is the only manner to avoid such a reinvestment (Cheah 64). Matter as presence is what arrests the fluid movement of the text:

Realism or sensualism—“empiricism”—are modifications of logocentrism. . . . [T]he signifier “matter” appears to me problematical only at the moment when its reinscription cannot avoid making of it a new fundamental principle which, by means of a theoretical regression, would
be reconstituted into a “transcendental signified.” . . . It can always come
to reassure a metaphysical materialism. It then becomes an ultimate
referent, according to the classical logic implied by the value of referent,
or it becomes an “objective reality” absolutely “anterior” to any work of
the mark, the semantic content of a form of presence which guarantees the
movement of the text in general from the outside. (65, emphasis original)

Thus, in this passage and in this particular instance, Derrida’s “materialism”
paradoxically has nothing to do with matter per se and has everything to do with how
humans signify and make meaning about matter.

His representative anecdote—matter without substance—has come to characterize
not just the theoretical landscape of the humanities, but rhetorical theory as a whole—a
claim I shall demonstrate time and time again through this dissertation. This charge of
matter without substance is especially crucial to locate in cases where rhetorical theorists
have sought to add nature or to add materiality to the rhetorical situation while only
reinscribing subject-centered and linguistically-mediated paradigms. In this passage,
Derrida’s claim is firmly in support of anti-realist strictures, impacting his ability and
desire to examine concrete traces and alliances made by entities outside of the text. It is
not that there is no world outside of the text; it is that we cannot know the reality of this
world without language. In a move that authorizes rhetoric’s epistemic focus, since
reality cannot be established as a mirror of nature, then “matter” means nothing unless we
invest it with language. Derrida registers that a Cartesian-Kantian anti-realist paradigm
leaves us with only an option between realism and relativism while leaning toward
relativism as a way to avoid the use of realism—whether in philosophical or scientific points of view—to substantiate and legitimate social hierarchies.

**Lines of Flight: Openings for New Materialisms**

In his articulation of the paradox of substance which is the epitome of anti-realist rhetorics in the twentieth century, Burke makes an interesting aside that will serve as the foundation for my dissertation’s interest in rhetoric, materialism, and realism. Namely, he writes that despite needing to observe the paradox of substance, “I doubt we shall ever be able to be rid of the concept of substance” (*Grammar* 68). Burke’s aside is an apt one. When we actually search canonical philosophical, theoretical, and rhetorical figures in the twentieth-century, various stances on realism and the substantiality of matter begin to emerge. If “matter without substance” marked the representative anecdote for rhetoric through Derrida’s struggle with Marx and realism, then I will introduce this dissertation’s nonmodern rhetorical materialism vis-à-vis realism through Bennett’s unique reading of Marx in an self-consciously and ironically Derridean fashion of taking one of Marx’s marginal and inconsequential writings and making it a way of deconstructing Marx’s materialism.

Marx, interestingly, *did* address a non-orthodox Marxist materialist realism, but not in the works of the *Grundrisse*, the *Manifesto*, the *Eighteenth Brumiere*, or his other famous writings. If I were to tell a modern counter-history of materiality in rhetoric and composition studies, the Marx that I am interested in is not the Marx who wrote well-known material-historical dialectic and polemics with Hegel that were then picked up by virtually everyone—from McGee to Cloud, Berlin, Horner, and Green—interested in
rhetorical materialism in the 20th century. Rather, I am interested in the Marx who wrote his doctoral dissertation on Democritus’s student Epicurus. Figures such as Diogenes of Sineope with his excretory (bodily) rhetorics, Heraclitus, Gorgias, the sophists, Sapho, Favorinas’s multiple sexuality are the Greek figures that many such as Kathleen Welch, Victor J. Vitanza, John Poulakos, and others have turned to in order to ground (or unground in Vitanza’s case) counter histories of rhetoric. Yet, Epicurus, to the best of my knowledge, has yet to be picked up in a major way by any rhetorical theorist dealing with materiality and counter-histories of rhetoric.

Writing after Platonic philosophy, Democritus was a material monist, positing that an atom was the element of reality, undermining any phenomenological encounter with an object as a primary relation. In The Enchantment of Modern Life, Bennett explains that prior to settling on a single base (production and labor) that determined all other superstructural (social and symbolic) relations, “Marx turned to ancient atomism because he was intrigued by the possibility of a materialism that was not deterministic, that is to say, a philosophy that gave primacy to the sensuous, natural world but did not picture that world as a mechanistic realm of necessity” (119). Rejecting the French Enlightenment philosophers such as Diderot who posited a “concept of the internal movement of material elements,” Marx located in Epicurus an “idea that the atom occasionally swerved from its straight, downward path through void. Democritus held, along the lines of Plato, that chance was a product of humans’ attempts to wrestle with their confusions about the order of things” (qtd. in Bennett 119). But, as Marx writes, for Epicurus, “‘necessity . . . does not exist . . . some things are accidental, others depend on
our *arbitrary will* . . . It is a misfortune to live in necessity, but to live in necessity is not a necessity” (qtd. in Bennett 119) As Cheah and, earlier, C. J. McFadden note, the young Marx was in search of a vital theory of matter that lay beneath the perceptible natural order of things. In some places in his later writing, we can still find traces of this thought. As the older and more cynical Marx writes, the “facts of commodity culture always [turn] . . . out to be . . . a fantastic realm in which things act, speak, rise, fall, fly, evolve” (qtd. in Bennett 121).

Unsurprisingly, then, Epicurus would be drawn upon as inspiration by a number of vitalists: Lucretius, Spinoza, Hobbes, La Mettrie, Diderot, Bergson and Whitehead. Yet, the later Marx proved to be too much of a student of Hegel’s absolutization of consciousness. By positing a base as the root, language became transparent. Jim Aune in *Rhetoric and Marxism* echoes the tacit critique of neo-Marxists, claiming that Marx lends us “an implicit theory of language and communication that was an unstable mixture of romantic expressionism and a positivist dream of perfectly transparent communication” (143). Bennett describes how the “swerve” of the Epicurian atom from the stasis of Democritus became not an ontological materiality but a “symbol of the active self”; matter’s vitality was reduced to an analogy for the self’s desire to realize itself in the *geist* (120). Bennett interprets Marx’s sublation of matter to consciousness: “the swerve is thus preserved as belonging to human self-consciousness rather than to both nonhuman and human matter” (120). Consequently, there ceases to be a need for Marx to discuss a vital realism or the nature of matter qua matter in order to make a claim about materialism. The later Marx was no anti-realist to be sure. Yet, in his assumption that it is the human
mind alone that is the prime mover for reality, he turns what might be a rather provocative and radical view of the self-organization of matter into a human mental projection of the world. Indeed, who or what causes something to be set into motion, \textit{technē}, from Martin Heidegger’s world-disclosing to Aristotle, who reserved the final cause for human actions (and collective labor relations) alone, the question of the vibrancy of matter is the question of ecology, matter and realism. Laments Bennett, “[Marx] loses touch with the remarkable appreciation of agency within nature that Epicurus actively affirms” (121). From this moment, then materialism, in its early variants, has often dealt with known or perceptible elements.

**Nonmodern Rhetorical Realisms: Why Realism?**

I think we can use this struggle within Marx’s materialism before he settled, like much of materialism in rhetorical theory, with an anti-realist “matter without substance,” as a way to rethink the relationship between these nonmodern reinvocations of realism and rhetoric anew. In a twentieth-century saturated with epistemic accounts of rhetoric, Poole and Frost, however, announce that the tide is turning and resurgent interests in materiality and realism are on the rise with theories such as “new materialism.” If the subject has been de-centered and deterritorialized by psychoanalysis, poststructuralism, and posthumanism, they claim, “Our motivation in editing this book has been a conviction that it is now time to subject objectivity and material reality to a similarly radical reappraisal” (2). While Althusser, Derrida, Butler, Haraway, and Foucault were undeniably interested in a form of anti-humanism, these nonmodern critics believe that these earlier forms of anti-humanism maintained the human and language apart from
ecology and materiality. In the post-2000 theoretical landscape, other radical reappraisals such as “object-oriented ontology,” speculative realism, agential realism, ontological realism, critical realism, actor-network theory, alien phenomenology, assemblage theory, the nonhuman turn, and many more all want to pick up Latour’s call: “it is time to return to things again.” In what could be considered a manifesto statement for the motivations for a return to a revitalized notion of material realism, Barad writes:

Language has been granted too much power. The linguistic turn, the semiotic turn, the interpretative turn, the cultural turn: it seems that at every turn lately every “thing”—even materiality—is turned into a matter of language or some other form of cultural representation. . . . Why are language and culture granted their own agency and historicity, while matter is figured as passive and immutable or at best inherits a potential for change derivatively from language and culture? How does one even go about inquiring after the material conditions that have led us to such a brute reversal of naturalist beliefs when materiality itself is always already figured within a linguistic domain as its condition of possibility? (114).

I believe that Barad slightly overstates her case here. However, she correctly identifies the anti-realist legacy of the linguistic turn that has characterized much of twentieth-century rhetorical theory. My efforts in this dissertation, building from these past and new attentions to realisms will be to rethink the realism/relativism and matter/rhetoric divide all-together. I want to seriously consider in this dissertation what a view of rhetoric means when nature and matter are seen from a conative or quasi-
agentive capacity. I have already demonstrated that such a conception is difficult to achieve given an anti-realist warrant in rhetoric. As I will describe in detail in Chapter 2, Latour calls anti-realism a product of the “modern Constitution”, an ontological gap between human and nonhuman. In its place, he recommends a “nonmodern ontology” where human and nonhuman are seen as (ontologically) equal actors. The hypothesis of this dissertation is that a flat ontological view, what I will call “nonmodern rhetorical realism” after Latour’s “realistic realism,” Barad’s “agential realism,” Haraway’s “figural realism,” and other new approaches to realism, can allow rhetorical theory to actually address a complex rhetorical materialism, the vitality of things and objects and their relations with humans and with other nonhuman actors. Nonmodern rhetorical realism can help us overcome the stale realism/relativism divide wherein we accept the gap between human/nonhuman as an a priori given, and concentrate instead on reconceiving of rhetoric as it emerges from a shared plane of interaction between humans and nonhumans. As Margaret Archer has argued, the only way to actually overcome this divide is a view of social realism that “makes our real embodied selves living in the real world really load-bearing” (25). Postmodern theorist David Harvey suggests that while the “multitude in motion” or “postmodern spatial constructions” are crucial considerations, “no one knows that any of that mean until real bodies go into the absolute spaces of the street” (32). Further, he suggests, “Radical constructivism rests on the overestimation of human construction and authorship” (32).

Again, in the fashion of the nonmodern thinkers who have retained this term, I also prefer to invoke the term realism to get at the concrete and quasi-empirical and to
point in a very general way to a realm of materiality that is irreducible to representation and human instrumentality. As I have noted above, too often materialism and materiality simply slip into discursive constructivism. By contrast, in a nonmodern universe, “science” has become the new bracketed term to emphasize both our awareness of its constructed nature while at the same time indicating how we must employ its empirical findings to decenter the human subject. “Science” and the concrete has become the way in which rhetorical ontologies of matter can be productively rethought. Poole and Frost wisely caution, “And while scientific theories cannot simply be imported into philosophy, the tropes and rhythms they suggest can transform theoretical discourses. In fact, it is evident from new materialist writing that forces, energies, and intensities (rather than substances) and complex, even random, processes (rather than simple, predictable states) have become the new currency” (13). To offer a very loose analogy, if Derrida deconstructed the subject’s relationship to self-presence and representation, then these contemporary nonmodern theorists want to deconstruct materiality itself as a way to fully decenter the modern human subject. One major confirmation of this ontological view occurred when the Higgs-Bosson particle was discovered during the summer (2012) while I was writing this dissertation, it became empirically demonstrable that reality itself “came from nothing.” Dark matter is a Leibnizian monad unto itself, a vital force capable of splitting and dividing into universes. Non-linear dynamics, complexity theory, and the actor-network and assemblage theories necessary to describe them and the speculative realism ontologies of matter that they spawn become both new metaphors for human symbolic action as well as descriptive of the actual processes of non-symbolic affect.
From this example, Bazerman’s claim that rhetoric needed to demonstrate rhetoricality in physics has been inverted. It is now matter that shows rhetoricality in human embodiment and ecology.

Although I will explore the return of realism through the lenses of actor-network theory, new materialism, assemblage theory, and media ecology, I want to first acknowledge that precedents for such a reconception exist within the margins of the rhetorical tradition. The actual behavior of material entities independent of human perception and their influence on the sphere of culture and rhetoric has never actually been far from the direct concern of many canonical figures. Burke entertained the realist notion of “recalcitrance.” Later in life, the ardent anti-realist George A. Kennedy pondered whether animal phone could actually be rhetorical, positing a wonderfully bizarre theory of rhetoric as animal-to-animal energy exchange in “A Hoot in the Dark.” In this articulation, Kennedy could even be thought as offering a third stage of rhetorical materialism to Lacaites and Biesecker’s two stages: “materiality’s rhetoric.” In another example, Blair offers a potentially radical vision of materiality in “Contemporary U.S. Memorial Sites” despite her overwhelming focus on language. She argues “There are some things that rhetoric’s symbolism can’t account for . . . [o]ne is its consequence” (19). What she means by this is that dynamics internal to the subject’s cognitive process cannot explain the full work of rhetoric as it anticipates and outlives the rhetor’s strategic aims. Further, she goes on to muse, “[W]hat about the things that happen as a result of texts that lie outside the goal orientation, or even the perceptual field, of the rhetor?” (22, emphasis mine). 16 What Blair could be taken as meaning is that diverse complexes of
human-nonhuman sites of affect and influence condition and work over symbolic action. Turning to Spinoza, Nathan Stormer has also theorized a “will-to-matter” in relationship to rhetoric that comes very close to the nonmodern rhetorical realism that I seek to define. These, as I will argue, are only starting to be picked up by affect theorists, posthumanists, and other trends beyond the linguistic turn; however, without fully engaging with the reality of matter, anti-realism, and the nonhuman, such theories—and Blair is no exception—have a tendency to reinscribe the Cartesian-Kantian division of active subject and passive object. Ronald Greene’s more recent work also tends to fit into this category.

To anticipate one major objection to my project, this emphasis on the object does not in any way undermine the power of language to create reality. Poole and Frost indicate that the strong defense of rhetoric’s “either/or” binary—it is either realism and not rhetoric or rhetoric and not realism—is a false dilemma resulting from the modern Constitution. They argue,

It is entirely possible then to accept social constructivist arguments while also insisting that the material realm is irreducible to culture or discourse and that cultural artifacts are not arbitrary vis-a-vis nature. Even as the most prosaic or carnal lifeworld unfolds within a socially constructed milieu, it does not follow that a) material objects or structures are devoid of efficacy in the way they affect either our moods or well-being, or our concepts and theories, b) matter is without recalcitrance or directness in its own brutish way, or c) acknowledging nondiscursive material efficacy is
equivalent to espousing a metaphysical claim regarding the Real as ultimate truth. (27)

Thus, my prescription for rhetoric’s “matter without substance” paradigm is not an abandoning of the term realism and nor it is to calmly assert that a mind-independent reality exists, but a refashioning from a nonmodern perspective borne of actor-network theory, assemblage theory, OOO’s neo-Heideggerianism, and agential realism. These theories can help us more fully realize how rhetoric emerges alongside the world of material forces and, furthermore, how understanding the interplay between them is equally as important than understanding how symbols themselves create, sustain, and circulate realities.

Although rhetorical theorists have only recently taken to Latour, with the first citation perhaps being Charles Bazerman (2004), followed by Rice (2009), Cooper (2010), Rivers (2011), Gries (2012), and many more such as Rickert’s *Ambient Rhetoric* by the time that I am writing this dissertation in the summer of 2012, and while interest in things across the humanities has never been higher stemming from articles such as Bill Brown’s “Thing Theory” essay or Farias’s edited collection *Urban Assemblages*, it is not true that what I am arguing is “new.” New materialism feminism predates object-oriented ontology and speculative realism by at least five to ten years (cf. Elizabeth Wilson). Rhetorical ecology and vitalism in Cooper, Byron Hawk, and, more recently, Christian Weisser, Laura Gries, and Sid Dobrin have consistently raised questions about rhetoric and language’s non-discursive materiality (although without largely realizing the prevailing Kantian paradigm). Even earlier, Whitehead and Henri Bergson pulled on a
vitalist thread initiated by Epicurus and continued by drawing on thinkers such as Spinozan *conatus* and Diderot. The point is that—and I feel that my previous anecdote about rhetorical materialism remains true—these conversations remain exceptions rather than rules for the vast majority of rhetorical theorists, Schiappa’s *Rhetoric and Reality* being a key case in point. Alaimo confirms in *Bodily Natures* that for most social theorists and humanities scholars, it is the differences to culture that humans contribute that have substance and that matter whereas material objects remain blank screens for inscription. Each of the nonmodern realists that I will feature in this dissertation have this active/passive divide of the modern Constitution clearly in mind in a way that other attempts to deal with materiality and language simply fail to fully encompass. Again, what I am arguing is not original. Far from it. What is novel is my attention to rhetorical theory per se and my field-specific diagnosis—anti-realism and the elision of matter. What is new is my specific attention to how the modern Constitution has played out and continues to play out across rhetorical theory in the present.

**Outline of Chapters: From Invention to Delivery**

As I have gestured to above, an undeniable consequence of the anti-realist legacy has been the primacy given to cognitivist and subject-centered theories of invention. By contrast, nonmodern rhetorical realists are interested in flipping modernity’s privilege of the subject, to a temporary privileging of the object in the serve of placing the subject and the other in the same plane of material entanglement. Thus, as a framework for describing and detailing nonmodern rhetorical realism(s), I will perform a bit of what Burke calls “perspective by incongruity.” If the privilege of invention is the tacit consequence of
antirealism, then will similarly privilege canon of delivery as an overarching framework for this project. Of all the canons, delivery has been the most impoverished in large part due to constructivist assumptions about rhetoric. Yet, of all the canons, delivery has taken on special importance for digital rhetoric, new media, and networked rhetorics. Thanks to the widespread use of technologically mediated communication and multimodal rhetorics, as Latour has argued, the proliferation of human-nonhuman hybrids has increased, making it more apparent that the cognitive subject has always relied on external prostheses such as hypomnnesis (artificial memory) or hypokrisis (delivery) in the activity of communication as parts of the rhetorical situation that are equally as important as invention (cognition). The proliferation of small tech and handheld media now coincides with unparalleled networked communication as well as the “prosumer” revolution of new media. Whereas delivery was historically relegated to the “fifth canon” by Aristotle in favor of invention, many have started to call attention to the canon of delivery, equating it with medium (Welch; Trimbur; McCorkle; Porter; Yancey; Sheridan). New media, electronic, and digital rhetoric scholars have reclaimed delivery, at times making it almost co-extensive with rhetoricality itself.

This rise of importance of medium and delivery is a microcosm for rhetoric’s larger problem with the possibility of nonhuman actors as real, vital, and self-organizing entities. I am going to at once accept the argument of delivery as medium and yet fulfill its implications by drawing on nonmodern rhetorical realisms. The largest problem with this claim is that this group of rhetorical theorists interested in the canon of delivery by and large maintains the modern Constitution (Collin Brooke’s work in Lingua Fracta:
Toward a Rhetoric of New Media being a close exception). Humanist views of technology abound alongside instrumentalist and cognitivist-based assumptions about the rhetorical situation. Consequently, delivery as medium is reduced from any complex understanding of technology or embodied materiality as reduced to instrumentalization. Anti-realism, in other words, underwrites the delivery as medium claims, making it difficult to refer to medium as anything other than a passive brute material object used by humans to give form to rhetorical events.

Furthermore, delivery, as we shall see, was always already a particular locus of anxiety for Plato and Aristotle because it was where the moment of material embodiment and non-logical affect became almost unavoidable. Their process of disembodying rhetoric (de-materializing rhetoric) in favor of—more for Plato than for Aristotle—matter without substance offers an early allegory for how epistemic rhetoric and digital delivery theorists maintain the modern Constitution. Furthermore, the Platonic and Aristotelian concerns over delivery are predicated on “acting”—a worry over someone being able to simulate mimesis without actually possessing a moral soul. Delivery’s root—hypokrisis—becomes a metaphor and ontological condition for how the objects and technologies that we use to deliver the work of invention, cognition, and logic are always withdrawn, dissembling, and moving us in ways that we did not entirely initiate, control, or set into circulation. I will argue that performance, in a materialist sense, is not a negative condition that elevates science and philosophy over rhetoric, but an ontological condition that structures the way in which rhetorical interaction and delivery are possible. Delivery in this sense is simultaneously a microcosm for rhetoric’s diminishment by Plato and
Aristotle and yet particularly singled out become of the necessarily reliance of “logic” on embodiment, materiality, and affect—elements that Plato and Aristotle both sought to minimize.

Delivery does not get nearly enough attention from rhetorical theorists who attempt philosophical points of engagement with the rhetorical tradition for the reason that I mentioned above. We are dealing with the abstract idea of Being in language, we are always assumed to be dealing with some sort of human cognitive faculty or mental mediation. Delivery would seem to be an afterthought. Thus, by privileging—even speculatively because as Brooke rightly notes, no theory of rhetoric is complete without considering the entire canon—delivery, I think I will be able to perform a bit of sophistic dissoi logoi. That is, it makes a point about the entrenched nature of anti-realism and invention emerge more clearly by pretending that delivery is now equivalent with being-in-the-world. What nonmodern rhetorical realism helps lead us to a view of delivery as “ontological hypokrisis”—not an instrumental technē or medium but as a point of material and ecological interconnectivity that greatly outpaces any individual act of oration, putting a premium on terms and theories that deal with circulation, delivery, rhetorical velocity, iconographic circulation, and other performatively inclined rhetorical theories. Here, I will exploit the ancient Greek etymology of hypokrisis as acting to rethinking rhetorical materiality as essentially performative. Acting is not a negative but a positive phenomenon that marks the ontological condition of human and nonhuman actors.
Following from Chapter 1, each dissertation chapter is organized around a representative anecdote that directly reflects a different aspect of my nonmodern realist account of delivery.

Chapter 2 ("The Paradox of Substancing") works through some of the realism/relativism divide that haunted attempts to theorize a rhetorical realism, touching on epistemic rhetoric in detail. Kenneth Burke’s “recalcitrance” is offered as an example of how the best that rhetorical realism theorized from the subject’s point of view can accomplish is always already a human produced reality. I offer Burke as a proto-typical example for anti-realist rhetorical theories’ problems with realism. In its place, I suggest that Latour’s “realistic realism,” overturns the modern constitution and helps us understand what is meant by a nonmodern realism. I close by offering Latour’s notion of circulating reference as a performative enactment that establishes the exigence for needing to re-think delivery vis-à-vis epistemic accounts of invention and rhetoric. I start with nonmodern rhetorical realism in order to provide a strong point of contrast for the remaining dissertation.

Chapter 3 ("The Object Styles") turns to classical rhetorical conceptions of delivery in Plato and Aristotle and contemporary scholarship on delivery. Plato and Aristotle’s anxiety over delivery as the necessarily non-logical embodied part of rhetoric stems from their concern over acting. I take this originary articulation of “matter without substance” and then jump to how contemporary delivery scholars have yet to actually overcome Aristotle’s reduction of the role of the body and the nonsymbolic in delivery.
Chapter 4 (“Concrescence”) offers a proto-nonmodern materialist account in Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian. I then turn to Timothy Morton’s OOO-infused idea that delivery could be the “first” canon in a world of objects. However, I ultimately turn to a vision of ontological hypokrisis through a combination of Barad’s performativity and Fuller’s media ecology. By turning to Barad’s agential realism, specifically contrasted to the resurgent interest in delivery and technology, I argue that delivery should be seen as ontological hypokrisis, requiring us to understand delivery and realism not as a problem of representation and relativism, but of performative enactment and the entanglement among a variety of human-nonhuman actors.

Chapter 5 (“Misplaced Concreteness”) offers a case study in Bennett and DeLanda’s respective uses of Deleuzian assemblage theory. I examine how software and hardware studies’ focus on computational actors are ignored by anti-realist/perceptual biases in digital rhetoric. In order to establish the persuasive work of new media texts such as videogames, I argue that assemblage theory offers a more accurate method of talking about how persuasion obtains. I offer a detailed analysis of Markus Piersson’s Minecraft videogame.

Chapter 6 (“Material Metaphors”) proceeds directly from Chapter 5, turning to a politics of delivery aimed at aesthetic bearing witness to the nonhuman actors that structure the space of culture. I explore Jane Bennett’s reading of Ranciere through Ethan Stoneman’s connection between Ranciere and decorum. Decorum, I suggest, has a direct link to Ciceronian anxiety over delivery and rhetoric, making “indecorous” speech a viable political action designed for human-nonhumans collectives. In extending Ranciere,
I explore how DeLanda’s assemblage theory can concretely inform political practices in the contemporary networked communications environments, what MacKensie Wark calls “gamespace.” On the one hand, focusing on non-symbolic material affects allows us to better understand political representation, a case study that I ground in analyzing the newsgame videogame genre. On the other hand, we can use object-oriented ontology and similar practices to foreground new “post-techne” of indecorous delivery designed to call attention to nonhuman activities in digital rhetoric through what I define as rhetorical allegorphisms, material metaphors, and augmented reality in the writing of Harman, Bogost, Hayles, Mackensie Wark, and Alexander Galloway.
CHAPTER 2
THE PARADOX OF SUBSTANCING: CIRCULATING LATOURIAN ACTANTS IN THE BURKEAN SCENE

I suggest that anything which possesses any power [dunamin] of any kind, either to produce a change in anything of any nature or to be affected even in the least degree by the slightest cause, though it only be on one occasion, has real existence [ontws einai].
For I set up as a definition which defines being [ta onta], that it is nothing else than capacity [dunamis]

The Eleatic Stranger

Things-in-themselves? But they’re fine, thank you very much. And how are you? You complain about things that have not been honored by your vision? You feel that these things are lacking the illumination of your consciousness? But if you missed the galloping freedom of the zebras in the savannah this morning, then so much the worse for you; the zebras will not be sorry that you were not there, and in any case you would have tamed, killed, photographed, or studied them. Things in themselves lack nothing.

Bruno Latour

Man being generically a biological organism, the ideal terminology must present his symbolic behavior as grounded in biological conditions.

Kenneth Burke

Realism and Anti-Realism Continued

In a loose sense, rhetorical realists and anti-realists remain in opposition on the epistemic question that Socrates, Hermogenes and Cratylus debate in Plato’s Cratylus dialogue: can there be an essential or natural correspondence between word and thing or does convention alone establish our understanding of reality? The debate between realists and relativists in rhetorical history has largely proceeded without the benefit of a Socrates trying to forge a middle ground— albeit one that favored philosophy over rhetoric. Yet, Lawrence J. Prelli, Floyd D. Anderson, and Matthew T. Althouse have recently (2011) argued that Kenneth Burke offers us a realist middle ground more favorable to rhetorical theory. Discussed primarily in Permanence and Change, “recalcitrance” is Burke’s
idiosyncratic version of rhetorical realism. Interestingly, Burke does not intend to settle this debate by siding with either Hermogenes and anti-realism or Cratylus and philosophical or scientific realism. Rather, Burke reframes rhetorical realism altogether as the reality of our ability to construct symbols and to revise these symbols depending on the different perspectives that a rhetor can bring to bear on any given social or natural phenomena. On the one hand, Burke’s paradox of substance traced out in *The Grammar of Motives* holds that man, the symbol-using animal, can only refer to the intrinsic essence of a thing by an extrinsic referent (a word). As a result, all orientations and knowledge claims are necessarily partial. On the other hand, metaphors or even logically false and unverifiable claims—such as myths of Aryan supremacy—are productive of real effects in the human world. “Words of nonsense,” Burke maintains, “would themselves be real words, involving real tactics, having real demonstrable relationships, and demonstrably affecting relationships” (*Grammar* 57-58).

Burke obviously does not support the rhetorical realists because science in his assessment has no way to avoid the paradox of substance. The scientist may enjoy the appearance of a more literal or denominative relationship with her objects, but scientific enterprise cannot be separated from symbolic action. Burke argues, “Men can so arrange it that nature gives clear, though impartial and impersonal, answers to their questions. The dialectical motives behind such methods usually escape our detection, though we get a glimpse of them when Galileo speaks of experimental testing as an ‘ordeal’ ” (*Grammar* 38). In other words, Galileo did not perform his scientific experiments in a political vacuum. Rather, his findings were continually subjected to competing
ideological forces, such as Pope Urban VII’s demand that he speak out against heliocentrism.

Recalcitrance also does not ally Burke with the constructivists because the partial points of view of objects “disclose recalcitrant materials that cannot initially be encompassed within their terms” (101). If a rhetor can revise her terms, recalcitrance offers a more accurate reading of the “situation’s supportive as well as resistant materials” (101). Since all orientations are partial, the rhetor is bound to encounter recalcitrant material, cultural, or natural phenomena that have been excluded by a given point of view. Recalcitrance refers to actual factors that can resist, substantiate, or prompt revision of a statement about the world, and it is the human agent who consciously affirms or determines these revisions. In my earlier example of Aryan supremacy, racism in our current era can no longer be grounded in pseudo-science as there is no demonstrable genetic basis for racial inferiority. However, I do not believe that it is an overstatement to argue that Burke’s rhetorical realism is less interested in the relationship between the scientific discovery of genetic equality and realism than it is in arguing that even empirically nonsensical positions such as Aryanism nevertheless have a great power to create human-specific realities for certain audiences in response to recalcitrant factors. When confronted with genetic evidence, white supremacists have gradually shifted from arguments predicated on genetic essence to arguments grounded in race-based cultural deficiencies.

While I am in firm agreement with Prelli et al. that Burke does make a significant advance in our understanding of rhetoric and realism, I will suggest in this chapter that
Burke’s notion of recalcitrance cannot actually overcome the realist/relativist divide in the sense that Prelli et al. suggest. In epistemic fashion, Burke maintains an ontological gap between human and nonhuman, culture (nomos) and nature (physis), or, in his familiar refrain, action and motion. In as far as realism is concerned, Burke is more interested in preserving symbolic activity from reduction to scientific description, positivism, or logic than he is in assessing the relationship between science and realism. In this sense, Burke’s rhetorical realism is intertwined with the epistemic and representationalist paradigms of anti-realism that dominate a great deal of twentieth-century rhetorical theory. This view of realism places Burke (and rhetorical theory) at odds with the view of delivery as nonmodern rhetorical realism that I seek to define in this dissertation. Burke is thus a necessary point of analysis for this dissertation. Recalcitrance offers, in my opinion, the best attempt to address realism within the modernist Constitution while simultaneously highlighting the primary limitations of working within this paradigm in the first place.

As I noted in the previous chapter, the nonhuman turn has in part begun to eliminate the ontological gap between human culture and the world of nonhuman activity and, consequently, to recast realism through the active participation of nonhumans beyond linguistic signification. Working from this point of contention and in a way similar to Nathan Stormer’s “will-to-matter,” the political scientist Jane Bennett argues for the concept of “thing-power” grounded in assemblage theory and Baruch Spinoza’s conatus: “the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi-agents or forces
with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii). For Spinoza, there is only one substance—god or nature—and as such all entities—conceptual and inanimate—share the same ontological plane and impact each others’ realities. Bennett’s thing-power is a form of material (or substantial) realism that examines how nonhuman agents actively “impede” human physical and rhetorical activity while requiring that scholars discuss humans and nonhumans equally as agents and actors. In Bennett’s account of reality, there is no separation of *physis* and *nomos*.

In contrast to Bennett’s thing-power, Burke’s recalcitrance is limited to the adjudication of language claims within the confines of what is disclosed to humans, and it does not refer to any non-linguistic sites of affect in Bennett’s sense. In fact, Prelli *et al.* criticize Bryan Crable for trying to extend recalcitrance to encompass non-symbolic factors. Crable, they argue, “too narrowly focuses on extra-verbal and non-symbolic factors that resist orientations, requiring terminological corrections. That emphasis risks muting, if not neglecting, communication and other symbolic sources of recalcitrance” (114). Prelli *et al.*, like Burke, want a realism that only encompasses the reality of humans who use symbols to communicate meaning. Rhetorical realism thus conceived is severely limited because it fails to tell us anything about how nonhuman forces are allowed to participate in the shaping of rhetorical activity in a way that realism in Bennett’s sense would require.

While Burke’s recalcitrance is undoubtedly a crucial component of a nonmodern rhetorical realism, I argue that recalcitrance must be placed alongside a realist conception of nonhuman activity if rhetorical theory wishes to radically rethink the
relativism/realism divide. I argue that a true middle ground can be located in Latour’s “realistic realism.” Although seldom placed in conversation with rhetorical scholarship beyond the rhetoric of science subfield, scholars are increasingly turning to Latour in the context of posthumanist theories of agency. Latour is admittedly not a rhetorical theorist, but he nevertheless offers a way of re-thinking realism, language, and, I will ultimately suggest, rhetoric. Latour, as I noted in the previous chapter, criticizes a hierarchy established by the “modern Constitution,” an Enlightenment ontology that splits society (humans, culture, philosophy, politics) and nature (nonhuman entities, scientific practices) into discrete assemblies. This division is artificial and predicated upon presuppositions about the separation of nature and culture that cannot be sustained. According to Latour, the conspiracy of modernity denies that nature and culture share the same space of entanglement. As the object-oriented philosopher Graham Harman remarks, “Latour maintains that all actors— both human and nonhuman—are ‘socially’ constructed not just by human minds, but also by bodies, atoms, cosmic rays, business lunches, rumors, physical force, propaganda, or God” (16). Latour asks us to work on the “cultivation of a stubbornly realist attitude—to speak like William James” (“Critique” 233).

In what follows, I will briefly map Burke’s concept of recalcitrance where his description of rhetorical realism is substantially developed. While Robert Wess, Crable and other Burke scholars have previously explored recalcitrance in detail, Prelli et al’s article will serve as my focus. Prelli et al., in my understanding, are correct both in their understanding of recalcitrance and in their criticism of the limitations of previous
scholarship. By extension, Prelli et al. best reveal the moment at which Burke’s rhetorical realism falls short of being able to encompass nonhuman realism. I then turn to Latour in order to develop his realist notion of the “social construction” of humans and nonhumans. I explicate Latour through an example of Robert Boyle’s 1657-1660 construction of a vacuum air pump that Latour develops in We Have Never Been Modern. Boyle’s pump offers an opportunity to rethink the relationship between nature and culture, motion and action, and science and rhetoric in what Latour suggests is a founding moment of the modern Constitution.

By focusing especially on how humans must use technology to “reveal nature” in the science lab, Latour argues that the realism/relativist debate is a false dilemma that only proceeds from our acceptance of the modern Constitution. As Marilyn R. Cooper writes, “In contrast, Bruno Latour argues that ‘humans no longer have to make this choice that is imposed on subjects’ by Plato’s myth of the Cave, the choice between a free disembodied interiority, cut off from other subjects and from objects, or an unfree social construction (Politics 51)” (424). In its place, Latour’s realistic realism offers rhetorical theorists a conception of what I would call a nonmodern realism that is co-constructed by human and nonhuman actors “in the sense that their actions make a difference to other Actors” (Cooper 424). Rhetorical realism then would not be an exclusive matter of adjudicating knowledge claims, but of seeking out and understanding how our relations with nonhumans produce what we, after the fact, accept as human initiated symbolic activity. In turn, I will employ an extension of Latour’s thinking in the
concept of “circulating reference” to make a bridge between nonmodern realism and the need to re-think delivery in the world of nonhuman actors.

Kenneth Burke’s Rhetorical Recalcitrance

Prelli et al. locate the first critical deployment of Burkean recalcitrance by rhetorical scholars in a debate between Barry Brummett’s social consensus theory (“Rhetorical”) and Earl Croasmun and Richard A. Cherwitz’s objective realism (“Beyond”). Croasmun and Cherwitz held that Brummett’s notion that social consensus “creates reality” necessarily “begins with the premise that no person can directly confront an object. Rather, knowledge is gained through the mediation of symbols” (2). Arguing that Brummett’s epistemic ground results in an unproductive relativism, Croasmun and Cherwitz posit an objective world that could be considered apart from social constructivism. They maintain that truth resides in the observable object and not in the audience’s perception or the mind’s construction. Through this position, Croasmun and Cherwitz hope to avoid constructivism and crude form of empiricism that defines the world only according to human experiences (e.g. “what you see is what you get” realism or naïve realism). Their realism is a variant of what the philosopher Levi Bryant describes as “epistemological realism.” Epistemological realism “seeks a correspondence or adequation between subject and object, representations and states-of-affairs” (14-15). In the vein of enlightenment critique that wishes to abolish reality from superstition, epistemological realists “wish to distinguish between true representations and mere imaginings, arguing that true representations mirror the world as is, reflecting a world as it is regardless of whether any represents it” (15). Although Croasmun and
Cherwitz did not invoke Burke, McGuire and Melia’s articulation of minimal realism directly referenced recalcitrance. McGuire and Melia argue that in *Permanence and Change*, “Burke has implicitly at least argued for the special nature of scientific texts” because physical scientists “encounter a special ‘recalcitrance’ from the world they hope to describe” (qtd. in Prelli *et al.* 100). The physical world in itself contributes this “extra-textual” recalcitrance and it “is not fully accounted for in sheerly linguistic or rhetorical terms” (100).

It is not clear, however, that Burke intended recalcitrance to refer only to scientific discourse or to support minimal realism. Indeed, quotations such as “[m]en can so arrange it that nature gives clear, though impartial and impersonal, answers to their questions” which I cited above undoubtedly led Edward Schiappa to criticize McGuire and Melia’s interpretation of Burke. Schiappa cited Brummett’s view that recalcitrance applies to scientific and non-scientific approaches alike (Schiappa 409; see also “Some Cautionary Strictures” 89 and *Permanence* 257). Brummett admits that physical reality exists: “We simply cannot talk rocks and trees into existence” (425); however, he concludes that the (human) experience of reality is mediated by symbols and, furthermore, that social constructivists must remain “agnostic” (anti-realist) on the question of “an independent, objective, reality”(425). He endorses “rhetorical relativism”: “the belief that what is real and true is determined only by the social, symbolic, and historical context from which the knowing human arises” (p. 82, emphasis original). For the rhetorical relativist, recalcitrance could mean any sort of intra-linguistic resistance to a symbolic mediation of reality. “Even death,” Brummett hyperbolically claims, “the Great
Recalcitrance, is not so objective that it cannot be symbolically shaped through and through” (426).

Prelli et al. propose to resolve this scientific/non-scientific difference in interpretation by revisiting not only the sections in *Permanence and Change* that are marshaled in defense of constructivism or objectivism, but also by considering Burke’s off-ignored explanation in *Attitudes Toward History* and other neglected allusions. They argue for a comprehensive view in which recalcitrance is a realist term, a communication term, and a critical term. Here, I will only focus on the realist term. This focus is not against Prelli et al.’s wishes. Regardless of how recalcitrance is deployed across any of these three terms, they maintain that recalcitrance always remains open to the structure that Burke defines in *Attitudes*: recalcitrance “refers to factors that substantiate a statement, the factors that incite a statement, and the factors that correct a statement (*Attitudes* 47n, emphasis original). I will explain the significance of this statement below, but I first need to clarify how the realist understanding of objective and minimal realists “misread” what Burke intends by recalcitrance.

According to Prelli et al., rhetorical realists are interested in Burke in order to demonstrate “the extent to which knowledge is rhetorical and the degree to which the discourses of the physical sciences are fully amenable to rhetorical analysis, obscuring its relationship to Burke’s realism in the process” (103). They maintain that Burke’s realism does not support either relativism or epistemic realism: “From Burke’s realist position, any perspective and not just scientific perspectives could escape relativism, solipsism, or subjectivism insofar as it grappled with the recalcitrant factors it disclosed” (103). In
general, recalcitrance is tied to “perspective,” a term roughly commensurate with Burke’s
definition of “orientation.” An orientation is not a manifestation of transcendental reason,
but a necessarily contingent, partial, prejudicial, or biased view upon the motivations and
interests of the rhetor. At first glance, orientation sounds like an endorsement of
constructivism. However, perspective is not limited solely to humans and is grounded in
the phenomenological experience of the world. Burke notes, “the grasshopper will find a
universe that is different from ours because the vocation [e.g. perspective] or ethics of a
grasshopper is different” (256). Encountering the same phenomenological object, a field
of freshly harvested wheat, the farmer may be pleased with the aesthetic appearance, the
smell of freshly threshed stalks, a high protein count, and the prospect of a high yield, but
the grasshopper, even though it lacks self-consciousness, possesses a biological
reflexivity that would make it likely seek more cover from predators in a neighbor’s
unharvested crop. As Prelli et al. describe, “The universe ‘yields’ to our point of view by
disclosing the different orders of recalcitrance which arise when the universe is
considered from this point of view” (Permanence 257).

Recalcitrance, or the “new realism” as Burke calls it, suggests that any orientation
will necessarily come up against recalcitrant factors and prompt revision with respect to a
given situation’s resistant or supportive materials: “Once you introduce a point of view
into the universe . . . (as it is introduced by biological vocation) [that] point of view
requires an interpretation of events, a reading of the recalcitrant factors favorable and
unfavorable to the point of view” (257, n2). Prelli et al. allege that Burke’s commentators
have missed a crucial aspect of recalcitrance in that “Burke thought recalcitrant materials
could be incorporated within a perspective through revisions that worked to substantiate a situated extension of that point of view” (101). Commentators have been largely interested in the corrective applications, such as pointing to empirical evidence to challenge true or false claims, but “recalcitrance also denotes factors that can substantiate a point of view” (102). In other words, recalcitrance could also refer to factors that do not challenge but support a necessarily particular orientation. Prelli et al. claim that recalcitrance incorporates materials that support a thesis, materials that challenge a thesis and provide support for an antithesis, and materials that motivate the generation of a statement in an intermediate position in between a thesis and a counterthesis (102).

Prelli et al. stress that recalcitrance is not just an intralinguistic form as in Brummett’s rhetorical relativism. Burke suggests that recalcitrant materials are also “revisions made necessary by the nature of the world itself” (Permanence 257). However, I must register an additional distinction here. In this claim, the nature of the world is not a nature composed equally of humans and nonhumans as real actors as they would be in Bennett’s or Latour’s respective realisms. Rather, the nature of this world is consistent with rhetorical realism, explaining only the reality of our partial orientations and the inability of language to refer to an essence. Recalcitrance calls our attention to linguistic realities in moments where claims that an empirical realist might declare as “false” might in fact turn out to be true depending on what materials are disclosed from a given orientation. Prelli et al. provide examples of a sunrise and the non-scientific understanding of the color green from Permanence and Change. If an astronomer argues that the claim, “the sun rises in the east” is an illusion when weighed against the fact that
“the earth is rotating eastward,” then “[Burke’s] new realism would respond that from our situated point of view the sun does, indeed, rise in the east; it is not an illusion” (102).

The orientation of the astronomer encounters recalcitrance in the “commonsense” perspective of non-astronomer: “Suddenly, the rotating earth becomes irrelevant, while the contrary assertion that the sun rises in the west is flatly wrong; the ‘fact,’ in this situation, is clear. Burke made a similar point when he contended that, from a strictly scientific perspective, the experience of seeing green leaves is an ‘illusion’ founded in ‘a mere phenomenal restating; of certain vibrations affecting nerve tissues’” (102). Rather, to quote Burke in *Permanence and Change*, “real experience” meant the complete “arc” of “external vibrations, the nervous responses, and the resultant sense of green” (260).

Seen through the lens of Burke’s new realism, “the quality green becomes as ‘real’ in our speculations as it is in our everyday experience. It is not an ‘illusion,’ but like the rising sun, is ‘an actual part of the universe’” (*Permanence* 260). Of these examples, Prelli *et al.* conclude, “We can see from these examples that recalcitrant materials from the nonverbal world are real, but so too are the purposes and interests motivating the points of view that disclosed them” (*Permanence* 263).

As it relates to rhetorical realism, this view of the color green is important because it means, as Burke concludes later on, that the any “discovery” from a new orientation has an “objective validity” as they “are nothing other than revisions made necessary by the nature of the world itself” (257). The world is not reducible to a “product of our interpretations” (256), and yet our interpretations—depending on our orientation—construct reality just as much as the astronomer’s empirical orientation and
more so than the reality of the entities-in-themselves or their relations with other entities. The factors that “incite” change include nonverbal and nonsymbolic sources of affect, but these sources are reducible to linguistic symbolization. Rhetorical realism is necessary only in so far as it avoids reducing rhetorical activity to the terms of biological, ecological, or mechanistic motion. Here, Burke’s distinction between the dramatistic and the scientific directly informs his thinking of recalcitrance and realism. In Burke’s understanding, science is not prone to accept recalcitrance from perspectives that are not grounded in science due to its denotative and static vocabulary:

The scientists, technologists, represent the group that turned the defect into a virtue. Their language . . . is devoid of the tonalities, the mimetic reinforcements, the vaguely remembered human situations, which go to make up the full, complex appeal of the poetic medium. To the scientist’s symbols one can respond adequately by looking them up in a book. The very lack of pliancy helps to assist them in avoiding the appeal of pliancy. The language by which [the technological order] is being rationalized may largely surmount the temptations of the anthropomorphic by reason of its low anthropomorphic content. It is designed for machines. (Permanence 58)

Of the ideas represented in this passage, Prelli et al. draw the conclusion “. . . perspectives based on mechanistic metaphor resist revision when confronted with recalcitrant materials other than those disclosed from their own terms while perspectives founded on poetic metaphor yield to revision when confronted with recalcitrant materials
disclosed by other terminological perspectives” (112). Recalcitrance does stem from our “objective” condition of living in a world seen through the paradox of substance and from our interactions with physical reality; however, recalcitrance is ultimately bound up in the cycle of observation and revision made by the rhetor’s necessarily partial perception.

The question that I raised in my introduction of this chapter is whether or not recalcitrance is adequate as a way to overcome the human-nonhuman ontological divide. From Prelli et al.’s reading, I think it is clear that Burke’s realism only describes human realities. It makes no claim about the material reality of nonhuman actors or how they might agentively participate in the shaping or impeding in Bennett’s sense of rhetorical interaction. Recalcitrance reveals little about how nonhumans contribute to symbolic activity other than as a source of reflection for the rhetor. In his view of realism, Burke is not an idealist or a relativist, but is nevertheless indebted to the neo-Kantian world view. The active cognitive subject produces and reflects upon the known and passive object and it is the former’s mind that creates “objective” differences. The problem with thinking of recalcitrance from the perspective of language and what appears to humans, as Nathaniel Rivers suggests, is that recalcitrance is limited to “a way of adjudicating statements or claims about the world” (“Intensely”17).

To reiterate my claim, what is at stake for me is not whether Prelli et al. are correct in their reading of recalcitrance, and, again, I believe that they are correct. Nor do I want to dispute that symbols have great powers to draw hierarchies of being and formations of political agency for human communities. My point of disagreement with Prelli et al. is I maintain that recalcitrance cannot be defined in Burke’s sense and
effectively assess the contributions of nonhumans in a way that overturns the ontological gap of nature and culture figured through an active perceiving subject and a passive and inactive nonhuman object. For Burke, recalcitrance and rhetorical realism are largely bound up with adding symbolicity (and rhetoricality) to scientific descriptions as well as with explaining differences among humans’ linguistic connotations about natural objects. Given this understanding of realism, I feel as though my concern about how Burke’s realism relates to nonhuman entities in nature is justified.

Working from Kant’s *a priori* mental forms that in the end imposes meaning on the chaotic manifold of nature, recalcitrance could be seen as a quasi-idealist form of constructing symbolic realities. Far from forging a truly alternative middle ground between the relativism/realism debate, Burke might be seen to replace Melia and McGuire’s “minimal realism” with a form of “minimal idealism.” A minimal idealism would leave the subject’s use of symbols apart from the world of motion in order to carve out a dramatistic realism that proceeds from a rejection of epistemic realism. In his theorization of rhetorical realism, Burke places meaning first, and—from this position—rhetoric only emerges as a part of symbolicity itself. From the active subject’s point of view, terministic revision is more important to consider than the actual existence and affectivity of nonhumans themselves. Timothy Crusius insists, “Burke is no idealist. There is much more to existence than mind. Nor, in Burke’s view, can phenomena be reduced to linguistic constructions. Language is not all there is” (88). Crusius is correct, and yet the outside of language—Latour’s nonmodern realism or Bennett’s material realism—remains circumscribed not to epistemic realism—as it is for Croasmun and
Cherwitz and McGuire and Melia—but to our active construction of symbolic forms which we revise according to the different perspectives and orientations that the mind alone produces and encounters. Despite Crusius’s assertion, Samuel B. Southwell confirms that Burke, in a typical gesture of modernity, “. . . is always ready to refer to a distinction between the realm of experience created by language and ‘reality’ (though ‘reality’ is always in quotation marks)” (43). In the context of recalcitrance, such a position again is really only ever aimed at adding material consequences to how humans respond to non-logical, nonsensical or non-scientific forms. We cannot establish a form of realism that can acknowledge Bennett’s “thing-power” or Latour’s realistic realism. We are also unable to reframing the realism/relativism divide altogether in a revitalized sense of realism.

**Realism Post-Burke**

Burke’s recalcitrance does indeed mark an improvement on certain aspects of the realism/constructivist debate. Before moving to Latour, I want to quickly trace out some of the major commentators on this debate that Prelli et al. do not mention. For example, Cherwitz published a version of “perspectival realism” with Thomas Darwin to trace a “relational theory of meaning.” They hold that perspectivalism has an “inability to account for the simultaneous capacity of language to be constrained by and shape objects” (17, italics in original). Promisingly, Cherwitz and Darwin theorize rhetoric as a dynamic force that evolves out of substance (“language, objects, rhetorics, and auditors”) (20), history (“the etymology and past usage of language”), and context (roughly “scene” in Burkean terms—physical locations of language, objects, and their relations to one
another). Each aspect—substance, history, context—is interconnected and “no one constituent is sufficient to articulate how meaning is made” (25). “Perspectival realism,” Royer notes, is one of “. . . a variety of neo-realist positions ranging from the dialectical posture of Sean Sayers to the philosophy of organism of A. N. Whitehead. Each in its own way avoids the problems inherent in dualist and anti-realist positions by positing a reality that is not disjunct but is yet neither merely physical (phenomenal) nor merely mental (noumenal). For an alterative need not be chosen from these poles of crass realism on the one hand and subjective idealism on the other” (234). Royer is absolutely correct regarding the Cherwitz and Darwin’s aims; however, as we saw with Burke above, many are not very successful in repositioning realism away from a post-Kantian framework. Cherwitz and Darwin diagnose the symptoms of modernity, but their framework lapses into a representationalist account of science where human mental constructions remain all that is at stake in the constitution of rhetorical realism. They are still avoiding factoring in what Latour calls the “missing masses” of nonhuman presence.

In another prominent example, Sayers’s rhetorical realism rearticulates an epistemic realist claim: “In order to go forward towards an objective and realist theory of knowledge, on the other hand, it is necessary to recognize that there are things-in-themselves. There is an objective material world which is not forever cut off from us, but which on the contrary is knowable by consciousness” (Sayers 22). Sayers is closer to Aristotle than Plato, arguing that mind and matter are transcendentally separated: “In concrete reality, these opposites interact and interpenetrate—they are constantly being transformed in relationship to each other. Such opposites are dynamically related” (35).
Again, Sayers’s founding hypothesis is modern and he is ultimately unable to explain how it is that the human being crosses the ontological gap to nature but without disturbing the realm of culture.

Royer, very generously, tries to draw points of overlap between Sayers’s “materialist” account to the philosophy of Whitehead. Whitehead’s opposition to any “bifurcation of nature” into nature and culture (or motion and action) is very similar, as I will argue below and in future chapters, to Latour’s nonmodern Constitution, Karen Barad’s agential realism, or Andy Clark’s neurological thesis that the objects that we interact with actually affect the development of our cognitive abilities and patterns. Whitehead does not go this far, but does posit a “provisional realism.” Speaking of idealism which, he explains, “finds the ultimate meaning of reality in ‘mentality that is fully cognitive,’” Whitehead points out its limitations, concluding: “My point is that a further stage of provisional realism is required in which the scientific scheme is recast, and founded upon the ultimate concept of organism” (*Science* 93). Further, this provision realism “involves a fundamental duality, with material on the one hand, and on the other hand mind. In between there lie the concepts of life, organism, function, instantaneous reality, interaction, order of nature, which collectively form the Achilles heel of the whole system” (*Science* 84). While I do not have the space to mount a full exposition of Whitehead’s scholarship, all I would comment is that he does not always attend as much to the specific reality of nonhumans at least to the extent that Latour and others require.

Yet, other than briefly in Sayers and in Royer’s lone essay, “Challenges for Epistemic Rhetoric,” Whitehead is *never* mentioned by rhetoric of science scholars.26
Rhetorical theorists such as Anne Berthoff actually mention Whitehead, but the issue of realism in his work is greatly elided. Latour fares slightly better than Whitehead within the scholarship that specifically attends to the question of rhetorical realism and science, being confined to a footnote alongside Woolgar by Allan Gross in *Rhetorical Hermeneutics*. Gross has waffled between “minimal realism” and anti-realism, arguing in “Rhetoric Without Constraints,” that “the brute facts of nature” and scientific knowledge are rhetorical but reversing course to privilege philosophy in *Starring the Text*. The landscape of rhetorical theory, in other words, and this point is not well-emphasized by Prelli et al.’s account, of rhetoric of science and, indeed, rhetorical theory as a whole remains thoroughly epistemic, constructivist, or simply, anti-realist in postmodern and poststructuralist accounts. In no other area of rhetorical inquiry has realism enjoyed such sustained entertainment than in rhetoric of science, a truly noteworthy occurrence for a field, that by most accounts, has never even been postmodern (Ornatowski para. 3; see also Zerbe).

In response to growing critical attention in the late twentieth-century, *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* featured a special issue in 1996 advocating its “support” for an emerging subfield of communications studies designated as the “rhetoric of science” (7). Editors Leah Ceccarelli, Richard Doyle, and Jack Selzer note that the rhetoric of science is concerned with how a “traditional understanding of rhetoric” can lend itself to the analysis both of the inscriptions (essays, descriptive statements) and deliberative policy decisions of scientific discourse (7). Representative approaches were Jeanne Fanhnestock’s study of the mobilization of rhetorical figures (metaphor, *gradatio*, and
incrementum) in scientific writing or William Kinsella’s argument that the route from observation of the physical world to the establishment of scientific knowledge involved rhetorical considerations. “All authors,” Ceccarelli et al. maintain, “examine oral or written discourse initiated [and disseminated] by responsible (and often calculating agents)” (3). This link between rational or rhetorical agency and purposive activity in knowledge creation have come to define the rhetoric of science along with, as Fahnestock says elsewhere, the general questions: “To what extent does language do our thinking for us? [and] How do the structures or options available in language lead us into certain prepared lines of thought or argument?” (ix). In far more than a coincidental acknowledgement, the editors note their deliberate oversight: “Missing from this special issue are the more postmodern perspectives that call into question the assumption that reasoned arguments and intentional persuasive strategies of free agents are the discursive realities that rhetoricians should examine” (3). As of the present moment (2012), RSQ has, finally, one article by Carl Herndl on Annemarie Mol, the postfeminist actor-network theorist, and medical technology. In other words, even postmodernity let alone more complex accounts of reality such as Latour’s or Whitehead’s remains something that those who are most closely attuned to the rhetoric/realism debate have yet to fully grapple. In a lone exception, Michael J. Zerbe reiterates this point for rhetoric in 2007 in his outstanding book on postmodernism and science. He notes, “This oversight [of postmodernism] is all the most startling given that several prominent postmodern theorists—Lyotard, Zizek, and Foucault among them—identify scientific discourse as the most influential contemporary rhetoric or science in general as the most powerful
institutional in contemporary culture” (24). Thus, I mention this account of rhetoric of science before turning to Latour because while it is true that, especially since 2009, Latour is starting to enjoy citation from rhetorical scholars (Rice; Cooper; Barnett; Rickert; Hawk; Rivers; Spinuzzi; Dobrin; Gries;), these remain a small minority in comparison to the deeply held anti-realist and epistemic foundations of rhetorical theory.

Constructing the Nonmodern Constitution

One primary reason that I am dissatisfied with an understanding of realism that theorizes rhetoric through symbolic realities that humans create for one another alone lies in the outcome that we tend to use this reality to account for how rhetorical events and situations emerge. This narrative is invariably an asymmetrical narrative of rhetorical interaction where the morphisms of mirror neurons in the brain that alter in response to our idiosyncratic behavioral ecologies are (in)active at the scene of rhetoric. Mirror neurons, Diane Davis argues, function as “eloquent deconstructions of [Kenneth] Burke’s ultimate order of things, shattering the presumption of an originary biological disconnect between self and other” (131). Working from a transcendental (e.g. “conditions of possibility”) argument grounded in Emmanuel Levinas’s philosophy, in Inessential Solidarity Davis begins with Burke’s claim that rhetoric arises because humans are divided as singular being, adding that rhetoric does not occur first or only at the level of symbolic action, but from the pre-symbolic exposure and relationality to the (human) Other’s unrepresentable alterity. In other words, there is no “gap” between biology and self, but an ecological co-constitution irreducible to reflection (the adjudication of knowledge claims), leading Davis to argue for an “originary (or preoriginal)
rhetoricity—an affectability or persuadability—that is the condition for symbolic action” (5).28

I hold that this affectability can be extended to include the material influence of nonhumans and this extension can bring us closer to placing Burke and Latour’s respective realisms in dialogue. Thomas Rickert suggests in Ambient Rhetoric that we can think of nonhuman reality (objects) and rhetoric through the philosopher Martin Heidegger. Heidegger is a necessary illustrative detour as it is necessary to begin to gesture toward alternative conceptions of materiality in order to eventually re-think the relationship between rhetoric and realism in Latour’s nonmodern constitution. As opposed to the “presence-at-hand” (Vorhandenheit) of phenomena in consciousness, the withdrawn being of equipment is called “readiness-to-hand” (Zuhandenheit) that we generally notice only when our tools break (Being and Time 90-105). Our consideration of tools and nonhuman entities is often limited to a modern—in Latour’s sense—hermeneutic that separates the user’s intentionality from the tool’s instrumentality. Rickert counters, “[t]here is no person + environment: there a fundamental entanglement, with individuation of particular facets being an achieved disclosure” (26). “World disclosure” is Heidegger’s term for a space of emergence that cannot be cleanly reduced into a priori categories such as the act, agent, scene, agency, or purpose of Burke’s pentadic ratios. Disclosure refers to a pre-symbolic background of concealed things in which our pragmatic and ecological encounters disclose different things to us in different contexts and affective registers, and these contexts include material sources. The act of writing includes the context of actors such as the “ink-stand, pen, ink, paper, blotting pad,
table, lamps, furniture, windows, doors, [and] room” (*Being and Time* 97). According to Heidegger, we are already “thrown” into these conditions, left without the ability to demarcate between the given and the constructed.

Disclosure means that Being (of all actors) is never fully abstracted or represented or instrumentalized. As a result, humans do not originate or initiate symbolic action. Humans disclose symbolic action in contexts and alliances with human and nonhuman actors who themselves are involved in disclosing different qualities to different actors. Disclosure is an originary affectability that attunes us to the multiple sites of symbolic and material affect. This affectability maintains the object’s withdrawn, readiness-to-hand status while simultaneously searching out how the recalcitrant factors it generates “incite” *not* mere terministic revision or substantiation, but the conditions of our very rhetoricity that engage in relations with a variety of nonhuman actors. For Heidegger, Davis, and Rickert, symbolic action cannot appear as immanence—an activity occurring entirely within the *res cogito*—in the Cartesian or Kantian sense, but rather as an abstracted end result that emerges from a more complex relationship to nonhuman entities. This emergence blurs the ways in which lines can be drawn between action and motion.29 Considered apart neither term captures the entirety of the reality that the object discloses in its relations with other actors.

This active, unfolding, and living experience is a rhetorical dimension of disclosure that Burke theorizes for language and recalcitrance, but Latour can more fully realize its potential for the purposes of thinking rhetorical realism. Latour’s realism is not an asymmetrical hierarchy of human action and nonhuman motion, but a symmetrical
accounting of reality where both human and nonhumans are treated as equal ontological actors. Echoed throughout all of his publications since *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour’s claim, summarized eloquently by the quotation that opens this essay, is that the study of human social relations must return to concrete and real things in order to reverse the modern Constitution. As Latour pantomimes his postmodern interlocutors, “But if you are not talking about things-in-themselves or about humans-among-themselves, then you must be talking about just discourse, presentation, language, texts, rhetorics” (5). Latour vehemently disagrees: “When I describe Pasteur’s domestication of microbes, I am mobilizing nineteenth-century society, not just the semiotics of a great man’s texts; when I describe the invention-discovery of brain peptides, I am really talking about the peptides themselves, not simply their representation in Professor Guillemain’s laboratory” (5). Latour’s argument does not set aside the importance of language. He maintains, “rhetoric, textual strategies, writing, staging, semiotics—all these are really at stake, but in a new form that has a simultaneous impact on the nature of things and on the social context, while it is not reducible to the one or the other” (5). Latour shares Burke’s interest in how symbols create partial and incomplete realities; however, he argues for a more complicated understanding of the relationship between scientism and the nonhuman object to the point where science and society (the symbolic world) and the objects themselves are inseparable and mutually constitutive.³⁰

Latour’s nonmodern realism places renewed emphasis on scientific techniques of representation to challenge idealist linguistic constructionism. At the same time, he does not resort to epistemic realism or scientific reductionism of cultural phenomena. In
Latour’s words, “Far from perspectives that debate man’s access to reality,” as both postmodern and modern perspectives endorse, “the Resistance of objects to observation is reality!” (Pasteurization 145, emphasis original). Latour’s view of resistance marks a key difference between his thinking of realism and Burke’s. Recalcitrance, for Burke, is not specifically tied to nonhumans’ interactions with each other at the level where any interaction between actors is significant, whether or not it is noticed by or impacts human actors. For Latour, even a tiny drop of spilled British Petroleum oil swallowed by a Louisiana Gulf Coast marlin in the 2010 spill that resulted in a case of mild indigestion would be as authentic of an instance of recalcitrance at the level of physical force as a representation of the same marlin in a congressional subcommittee hearing. Anything that makes a difference is an actor, from the microscopic perturbation of atomic particles to hallucinations that only occur in an individual’s mind. All entities share in a common principle of irreducibility: “nothing can be reduced to anything else; nothing can be deduced by anything else, and everything may be allied to everything else” (Pasteurization 163). As Latour argues in The Pasteurization of France, any encounter between entities reduces the reality of any entities involved in an act of “translation.” For Latour, a “thing” is not just an object out there, as part of a stable subject-object dichotomy that an active subject constructs or a true object that a passive observer reflects. Things operate in a reality “where nonhuman things escape the strictures of objectivity twice: they are neither objects known by a subject nor objects manipulated by a master (nor, of course, are they masters themselves)” (“A Collective of Nonhumans” 163).
Objects exist as real entities that Latour, in terms borrowed from Michel Serres, calls “quasi-subjects” and “quasi-objects”: entities unevenly and incompletely engaged in networks of translation. Latour would argue that all entities as recalcitrant. If I take the example of an original Platonic dialogue written in Greek, the point is not only that the Benjamin Jowett translation differs from the Greek penned by Plato, but also that the process of translation—by Jowett, by Heidegger, or by Derrida—generates something new with any new relations whether they are made by consciousness minds converting Greek to English, Greek to German, or Greek to French or made through relations between objects such as the original Greek markings bonded to the papyrus (or velum) interacting with the atmosphere in a vain battle to bear its marks for eternity. Each actor mediates and reduces others actors differently, making recalcitrance a processes that must apply equally to all actors. The “guarantee” of the modern Constitution that humans and nonhumans are separate “forbids” us to acknowledge these “translation networks” whereby nonhumans and humans are constantly changing as their qualities are translated and engaged differently by different actors (*Modern* 52). Burke’s thinking of recalcitrance, if limited to language, participates in eliding the importance of these translation networks. If I were to use Burke’s terminology, by positing the “form” of the modernist Constitution, Burke might be seen in his separation of action and motion to induce the conditions for entelechial fulfillment by “the official work of purification” by denying translation, “the unofficial (linguistic and representational) work of mediation” (172).
Latour locates a founding moment of the modern Constitution through the invention of empirical science by offering a novel reading of Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer’s *Leviathan and the Air-Pump* (1985). According to Latour, Shapin and Schaffer’s purpose was to “examine how Boyle and Hobbes fought to invent a science, a context, and a demarcation between the two” (*Modern* 16). One half of the modern Constitution is composed of science and the empirical proof of transcendental natural laws in Boyle’s air pump, and the other half is composed of human culture, philosophy and politics represented by Thomas Hobbes’s political leviathan. Hobbes employed apodictic argumentation and the “political reasons of primary philosophy” in support of the plenists who held that an “invisible ether” occupied the space in-between both cosmic and molecular bodies. Furthermore, his political philosophy maintained that nature was not made for human beings but was instead a hostile foreign place (“rough brutish nature”) that only reason and law could overcome. By contrast, Boyle represented the vacuists, positing that a vacuum existed in the in-between space among bodies. Boyle thought that science could produce knowledge of the universal natural laws freed from human construction and Hobbes flatly rejected the premise by maintaining that only logically verifiable principles could provide knowledge of nature’s universality.

In this split between Boyle and Hobbes, the modernist Constitution provided the form that will induce the separation between science and reason and the ontological gap in between human and nonhuman that will plague the realism and relativism debates in the twentieth-century. Latour suggests that Hobbes leaves us apart from nature: “[N]ature’s very transcendence overwhelms us, or renders it inaccessible. Symmetrically,
if society is made only for and by humans, the Leviathan, an artificial creation of which we are at once the form and the matter, cannot stand up” (31). To a far greater extent that Burke’s “minimal idealism,” Hobbes, relegates recalcitrant factors to representation while ignoring any recalcitrant influence of nonhumans entities in themselves. Yet, observes Latour, nonhumans sustain the durability of Hobbes’s social Leviathan—nonhumans such as horses, carriages, pens, paper, print presses, bodies that compose the leviathan itself, muskets, ploughs, merchant boats, cannons, swords, sewer organization as Alain Corbin has described *The Foul and the Fragrant*, and germs as Jared Diamond has documented in *Guns, Germs and Steel*. Latour summarizes, “Despite the solidity procured by the mobilization of things (as revealed by the work of mediation), [for Hobbes] we alone are the ones who constitute it freely by the sheer force of our reasoning” (31).

Even though he was firmly focused on physical objects, Boyle performed the same separation, maintaining that he could fabricate the laws of nature in the laboratory leaving no traces of human hands in a movement to bring a controllable, manipulable part of nature into human control. In other words, Boyle would be only a passive observer or a neutral conduit who added nothing socially constructed to the events observed. Thus, Scot Lash claims, “Boyle gives us a repertoire for speaking about nature (as constructed in the laboratory): ‘experiment,’ ‘fact,’ ‘evidence’ and ‘colleagues’—as Hobbes does for culture, i.e., politics (as embodied in the Leviathan): ‘representation,’ ‘sovereign,’ ‘contract,’ ‘property’ and ‘citizens’ ” (25). Taken together, Hobbes and Boyle articulate a view of human culture and reason immunized from contamination with nature and vice
versa. One would see recalcitrance in operation in language, and the other would deny recalcitrance’s existence, maintaining that transcendental knowledge of nature’s truth was achievable.

Boyle claimed that he could discover the truth of this ideological debate between plenists and vacuists by returning to the thing-in-itself and revealing the empirical existence of “air” by weighing it. Boyle’s air pump allowed for “the discovery of Toricellian space at the top of a mercury tube inverted in a basin of the same substance” (23). In an apparatus modeled on Otto von Guericke’s, Boyle sought to produce a vacuum in a transparent glass container by expelling all air. Latour well-describes this technological apparatus: “He enclosed a Torricelli tube within the pump’s glass enclosure and thus obtained an initial space at the top of the overturned tube. Then, by getting one of his technicians . . . to work the pump, he suppressed the weight of the air enough to bring down the level of the column, which descended nearly to the level of the mercury in the basin” (23). Further, “Boyle undertook dozens of experiments within the confined chamber of his air pump, starting with attempts to detect the ether wind postulated by his adversaries [such as Hobbes], or to explain the cohesiveness of marble cylinders, or to suffocate small animals and put out candles—these experiments were later popularized by eighteenth-century parlor physics” (We Have Never 17). Latour’s reference to parlor physics lies in the fact that Boyle’s device allowed “observers to directly perceive the experimental processes as well as introduce or even to manipulate samples,” due to “ingeniously constructed lock chambers and covers” (171). In a very real sense, as Rivers has suggested, Boyle anticipated the successful Mythbusters television show genre.
By making alliances through all of these human and nonhuman entities, Boyle could produce a durable arrangement of actors—a controlled environment—to allow “speech”—the discovery and harnessing of the forces of air—of nonhumans. But what kind of speech is this? The answer to this question demonstrates the way in which Latour reframes the realism/relativism debate. Latour writes, “We know the nature of the facts because we have developed them in circumstances that are under our complete control. Our weakness becomes a strength, provided that we limit knowledge to the instrumentalized nature of the facts and leave aside the interpretation of the causes” (18). Our flaw or weakness is that “we produce only matters of fact that are created in laboratories and have only local value” (18). Further, “these facts will never be modified, whatever may happen elsewhere in theory, metaphysics, religion, politics or logic” (18). It is possible to discover the “facts” of nature, but such facts cannot be made meaningful (interpreted) without acknowledging the imbrication of culture. After all, Boyle’s demonstration of air’s visibility is already a rhetorical appeal to human construction and not to nature in-itself; however, Boyle’s facts about air were not the exclusive result of reason (symbolic action) alone. According to Latour, experiments do not produce transcendental knowledge of nature but only concrete evidence that a certain alliance of actors can be made durable for a certain period of time. The example of the air pump is important because while scientists such as Boyle believe that they are engaging with an “objective” nature, Latour holds that it is necessarily inseparable from social implications. Although the air pump produces real knowledge of an aspect of nature in a localized condition, the air pump is nevertheless political in that Boyle uses the air pump to
legitimate \textit{not only} his political theories of scientific knowledge, but to help delineate who should be given power within society (e.g., scientists over philosophers). Hobbes actually denied Boyle’s findings. The former claimed the grounds of empiricism were not commensurate with those of reason, seeking to supplant reason and reason alone as the condition of possibility for political interaction without regard to nature.

\textbf{From Invention to Delivery}

Latour’s point in his explication of this episode from scientific history is not that nature and culture are the same. Instead, his point is that there is has never been a pure subject and a pure object with science as a “neutral” intermediary removed from the realm of persuasion. Although the symbol-using animal desires to be modern through achieving a clean ontological split between human and nonhuman, the truth, Latour claims, is that we were never modern. Boyle did not discover the universal “truth” of air. Air never becomes universal, except in as far as “its network is extended and stabilized” (24). With each reproduction and dissemination of Boyle’s prototype, “and the progressive transformation of a piece of costly, not very reliable and quite cumbersome equipment, into a cheap black box that gradually becomes standard equipment in every laboratory, the authors bring the universal application of a law of physics back within a network of standardized practices” (24). A black box, as Latour suggested previously in \textit{Science in Action}, is a set of functioning technological practices taken for granted. Once established, black boxes are never opened and questioned, but, unlike Thomas Kuhn’s paradigm shifts motivated by humans, the technologies of representation and the material arrangements of actors all participate in the shaping of a paradigm. As Latour argues,
Boyle certainly could not have predicted what would occur ahead of time with perfect certainty. Boyle was “told” by the existing technology of the time period that his materials were inadequate to reveal what he wanted to reveal. His process of invention is not a product of the res cogito, the divine whisper of Ion, or Aristotle’s belief that the artist beings with the form already in mind, imposing his grand design on matter. Boyle’s process began in perpetual dialogue with what his materials revealed and failed to reveal to him. Similarly, the operations of the elements in the experience also play this role, “choosing” to confirm various hypotheses which could not have been anticipated in advance by Boyle.

I will make a very specific argument for the relationship between nonmodern realism and delivery in all subsequent chapters. For now, I want to note that even at a very basic level, Latour’s nonmodern realistic realism has shifted the point of emphasis of rhetoric from invention to delivery. It is equally as if not more important to focus on how blackboxes circulate and ally with other material actors than it is to analyze the rhetorical forces immanent to Hobbes’s or Boyle’s respective mental constitution. Following from Latour’s analysis, the pump itself must be seen as a complex delivery machine of assemblage of glass tubes, air particles, wind, rhetoric, scholasticism, fantasies of empirical mastery, electricity, water, eyeballs, Kuhnian paradigms, and much more: “Discourse is a population of actants that mix with things as well as societies” (Modern 90). Invention and delivery cannot be separated and delivery—nonsymbolic factors—cannot be subsumed to invention. Participants “all translate, mediate and extend the networks” (90). Objects “trace networks” but simultaneously compose “actor-
networks” (90). By this claim, Latour urges us to use the same terms to discuss humans and nonhumans, without privileging action over motion or motion over action. Objects are not caused by subjects, but are similar to subjects. Both construct the space of the social and the nature through processes of “sorting,” “delegation,” and “mediation.”

Burke’s recalcitrance would hold that things could be ideally constructed but without regard to how natural forces contribute to the act of communication itself to the degree that Latour’s nonmodern constitution requires. Yet, while discursive elements contributed by humans are a necessary condition for reality (e.g., invention), language alone in not a sufficient causal condition. Representation is a necessary activity for humans and it is only one part of the reality of society and nature. To return to Brummett’s claim that we cannot talk a tree (or a vacuum) into existence (or out of existence in Hobbes’s case), idealists are correct that a tree clearly is not a tree without our prior and agreed upon representation (abstract container) of a tree. However, if we use the tree to build a house, then we must fabricate the house with a variety of allies such as nails, hammers, band saws, power drills, and flooring laminate (e.g., delivery). The tree undeniably possesses a real physical presence in the world that is irreducible to our conceptual significations. Moreover, the binding or linking of these materials must accord with laws of physics, geometry, mathematics, and geology. From Latour’s perspective, we are constantly in representative, sensory, and empirical dialogue with these nonhuman forces as we build, as the reality of nature informs where and when materials can be combined or linked at a certain place at a certain time. Historically, as I will suggest in the following chapter, the canon of delivery is best suited to describe these
According to Latour, science labs are where “objects are made to speak,” but they can only do so through technologies of mediation. Elsewhere, Latour develops this claim through the example of a Spanish river (“Interview”). In Spain, the politics of water is important due to scarcity. Latour argues that the river is a political actor “on two conditions: one of them is that the river has to be made to speak through plenty of techniques of representation. The question is ‘what is the speech of this river?’ and the second one is ‘what is the role played by the river speech where people in charge of water management talk about it?’” (37). Experiments of verifiability tending toward blackbox status are ways of developing techniques to represent objects such as the river as a real entity that gathers humans who need to drink from it and other allies such as fish, animals, and soil who may or may not factor into decisions to allocate water to humans. These decisions bolster the human population in Madrid or encourage water management officials to search out other sources of water while allowing the local animal population to flourish. The role played by the river will change depending on whether it is translated (mediated) by an ecologist from the University of Barcelona communicating ecological consequences in a research article to an audience of scientists in relationship to the impact on the local ecosystem or the local Spanish radiocaster equivalent of Rush Limbaugh who constantly reduces the river to human use ecologies with without regard for the ecology as a whole.

The river, like the air pump, is an “actant.” According to Lash in “Another Modernity, A Different Rationality,” Latour’s notion of “actant” (actor), a term that
refers equally to human and nonhuman participants, is taken from Émile Beneviste’s narrative theory, where humans and nonhumans share roles in a story. In as far as any entity is allowed to play a role (no matter how large or small), it is an actant. The river cannot actually talk to us, but, as Latour argues, the point is that “it is useless to tell humans from nonhumans in [such stories]. [Rivers] are things we need to assemble around in order to solve cohabitation with” (56). Scientists contribute and develop many tools for representing objects that neither poetics nor ideal reason can discover alone. Agency, Bennett notes, “it is distributed along a continuum, extruding from multiple sites or many loci” (28).

Where Burke argues that the sunrise’s reality is established not on appeals to scientific grounds but on differences in orientation, the ability to even observe the sun in the first place is inextricably bound up with the real and actual recalcitrance of nonhumans. Human communication, notes Bennett, is already composed of humans and nonhumans, “my speech, for example, depends upon the graphite in my pencil, the millions of persons, dead and alive, in my Indo-European language group, not to mention the electricity in my brain and laptop computer” (462). This realization of nonhuman participation, I would argue, goes beyond the critique that Bennett (or Latour) describes action in the terms of motion. For Latour, this critique would be an artificial separation: action is inseparable from motion in reality and we can realize this inseparability without resorting to the terms of causal determinism or mechanistic description of which Burke complains in scientism. In direct contrast, the refusal to engage with how empirical descriptions of the forces of nonhumans condition the scene of action is another way by
which the modern constitution remains unquestioned. If we were to consider two additional Burkean terms, agency (equipment used for action) and act (action itself), Latour would likely claim that neither designates a separable element for the rhetorician to extract in her reading of a rhetorical situation. When it comes to discussing reality, act and agency are perpetually imbricated. Invention and delivery cannot be separated.

Reconfiguring Rhetorical Realism

In a Latourian account of Boyle’s vacuum pump, the vacuum pump’s recalcitrance is more than just inert matter given form by humans that then induces changes in humans who respond to affective and symbolic statements about the pump. In a description of a speed bump, Latour writes, “[a] speed bump is ultimately not made of matter; it is full of engineers and chancellor and lawmakers, commingling their wills and their story lines with those of gravel, concrete, pain, and standard calculations” (190). The vacuum pump, like the speed bump, is present in a way that allows us to point to its concrete existence as a way to disprove statements of the scholastics or Hobbes. Yet, as an intact yet withdrawn quasi-object, the vacuum pump is engaged differentially by scholastics, Boyle, chicken feathers placed in the vacuum to mock Hobbes, politicians, tools, technē, and terministic screens. I agree firmly with Rickert that this “presencing” of nonhumans is rhetorical, as it invites subsequent battles over causation, the attribution of motives, and quandaries over who or what contributed what part to the functioning of the assemblage. Recalcitrance in Latour’s sense is not commensurate with symbolic action, but serves as part of the conditions of possibility for it. What the overall assemblage discloses creates a palpable and contextual need for action or even scapegoating as
Hobbes refused to admit Boyle’s visible empirical demonstration as anything other than fraud.

A Latourian worldview should not be taken as a suggestion that everything is rhetorical. According to Rickert, the point of viewing reality through human-nonhuman assemblages “. . . is that the dynamic relationality emergent in the encounter [of human and nonhuman] reveals the world differently, brings to presence vectored forms of affectivity galvanized by these interactions” (*Ambient* 172). To say that the vacuum pump is rhetorical means to say that rhetoric is more than the Boyle’s intentional design strategies that built the tubes and locking mechanisms. Yet, it also means to stop short of arguing that biological or cognitive *motion* (e.g., reducing all action to motion) is rhetorical. Nor, as is the case with any human-nonhuman assemblage, is it sufficient to add up all the parts to form a whole. The way the arrangement of elements is given will affect the relations that actors taken on as they encounter a space. The style of each element changes from the assemblage as a whole and human intention is not sufficient for an account of the behavior of each part. Latour’s project is one that attempts to better account for and describe—that is, to create a symmetrical account—of all of the background elements that allow an assemblage to be suasive and contribute to persuadability in Davis’s sense. Since these quasi-objects and quasi-subjects ultimately take on different meanings when allied with different actors, Rickert argues that the rhetorician cannot merely “extract” the means of persuasion from humans alone.

From Rickert’s point of view, the vacuum pump could be seen to be materially persuasive while nevertheless entangled with networks of relations, which are themselves
rhetorical to the “extent that an originary affect is already built in, awaiting catalysis as it were” (173). A nonmodern rhetorical realism involves going beyond the claim that the pump’s nature induced a set of responses and actions. The pump is already composed of human and nonhuman actions that could not have been composed in a way reducible to constructivism or nature alone, and furthermore, scientism is essential to help represent a fuller picture of the reality of mediation. In the opposition to Burke’s rhetorical realism where scientism must be de-privileged to privilege human symbolic action, Latour retains and highlights scientific representation and its translation features without allowing science to pretend that nature is transcendent. This latter step, as I argued above, is how Latour avoids slipping back into relativism. For this reason, Latour and Burke can and should be placed alongside each other. Burke is often fascinated with how dramatism plays out through things; however, even in his essay “What Are the Signs of What,” when he entertains the idea that things could be the signs of words, things remain in the end subsumed to act. If we were to place them together, Latour would likely advise Burke to drop his exclusive focus on the symbolic and to see how recalcitrance is not just a problem of science and symbols, but of any and every exchange of force without resorting to the terms of mere motion.

It bears repeating that Burke’s attitude toward language is very much ingrained in twentieth-century rhetorical theory. Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s representationalist claim that “there is no neutral choice” in language use—a restatement of Burke’s “deflection, reflection, selection” mantra—argues that no language is neutral and that even simple facts or reports that strive for denominative language are bound up
with the motivations that structure. Schiappa affirms this position suggesting that rhetoric “functions ideologically as a strategy even if its use is not intentional” (254). David Zarefsky indicates the consequences of an anti-realist worldview, arguing that becomes “another perspective, one that accounts for the production, circulation, reception, and interpretation of messages” (635). Such an approach means that “rhetorical critics bring to any object the focus of making arguments about how symbols influence people” (634).

**Delivery as Circulating Reference**

In closing, I want to clearly articulate how Latour’s realism constitutes an advance in the realism/relativism debate. In the opening chapter in *Pandora’s Hope*, entitled, “Do You Believe in Reality?” Latour answers this question with a qualified “yes.” In Latour’s assessment, both the relativists and epistemic, philosophical, and scientific realists share a false view that an ontological gap separates the “mind-in-a-vat” (cognitive subject) from nature (the outside world). If this ontological gap is accepted as a given, then the debate over realism can only be whether we can build a stable bridge across this gap through science or whether we are ultimately unable to cross it resulting in anti-realism and relativism. Modernity allows social constructivism to float free from of material confines while simultaneously allowing science to act as if it transcends social relations and political imbrications. On this latter point, Burke’s suspicion of science’s neutrality—science’s Boyle complex—is well founded. Latour would only add that realism cannot be a matter of just placing science back within the realm of language and rhetoric and culture. Culture (quasi-subjects) needs to be placed into the same space of entanglement as nature (quasi-objects), and this space of entanglement marks the space of
a nonmodern rhetorical realism. Thus, composing the “common world” of humans and nonhumans means “that we refuse to grant [the outside world] the ahistorical, isolated, inhuman, cold, objective existence that it is given only to combat the crowd” (12). By crowd, Latour references Socrates and Callicles’s settlement in the Gorgias where reason can establish truth in order to avoid mob (demos) rule. As Latour concludes, “But realism became even more abundant when nonhumans began to have a history, too, and were allowed the multiplicity of interpretations, the flexibility, the complexity that had been reserved, until then, for humans” (16).

Burke’s many hesitations over where to draw the line between action and motion, attitude as a space of “personal mediation” between motion and action, metabiology, incipient action where materiality conditions our receptivity to symbolic action, and many other terms testify to his desire to see language as materially instantiated. In “Rhetorics of Nonsymbolic Cultivation,” Rivers identifies attitude as opening in Burke’s thought to nonhuman agency. Attitude, writes Burke, is “the point of personal mediation between the realms of nonsymbolic motion and symbolic action” (Attitudes 394). Matter is physiological motion while action is “modes of behavior made possible by the acquiring of a conventional, arbitrary symbolic system” (394). Attitude is something that stems from the “centrality of the nervous system,” which obtains from the “experience as marked by the powers of symbolicity” (394). Rivers takes this passage in Burke as an example of “how humans act out in the world reflect their positions as organisms capable of symbolic action” (37). As Burke’s famous line states, the “dancing of an attitude” forms a bridge between the body in motion and the body-less symbol. Rivers concludes,
“attitudes exist ambiguously as postures we actually take and as a repertoire of postures available in our culture and as that subset of cultural postures which we, as individuals, harbor as potential. Attitudes are physical, social and individual” (53). Attitude allows for embodiment, where, Rivers says, a dancer’s body position “mediates” the symbolic components, these positions are themselves symbolically controlled and arranged in a dance. For example, a ballet is undeniably discursive and organized by a relationship to the study of the history of dance; however, ballet is organized around the limits of the motion of the body itself as the body is able to respond to symbolic organization.

In contrast to accounts of ballet that privileges only the choreographer’s individual genius or his engagement with the history of ballet techniques and forms, a nonhuman-specific view of “identification” can increase our attunement to the contributions of nonhumans, such as costumes, wooden stage, acoustics, and seating pads in the theater in order expand the number of actants that participate in shaping attitude. Such a view on the body in language is what in part leads Deborah Hawhee to suggest in Moving Bodies that Burke’s scholarship is the ground for an “anti-Cartesian, noncognitive, nonrational perspective” wherein “a focus on the body as more than just the obverse of the mind can enable a productive theoretical move to the thought-work of rhythm, energy, material, and movement” (2). Citing Bennett’s material realism, Hawhee even extends the implications of her re-reading of Burke to nonhuman actors: “such syncretic approaches [that complicate the mind/body division], too, allow a consideration of the nonhuman conditions of humans, in other words, the importance of things—‘natural’ as well as synthetic” (8).
While attitude may encourage us to consider a limited spectrum of the “nonhuman condition of humans,” Burke will point us only at the presence-at-handness of objects—their symbolically mediated aspects—as rhetorical participants. Thus, attitude could be productively coupled with an ethical form of identification. Burke observes “The shepherd, qua shepherd, acts for the good of the sheep, to protect them from discomfiture and harm. But he may be ‘identified’ with a project that is raising the sheep for market” (*Rhetoric* 27). In other words, our immediate context in Latour’s sense of translation networks carries multiple identifications. These identifications for Burke only obtain in a network of symbolic relations, but for Latour they obtain in a network of object relations. If Burke were to read Latour, I suspect that he would see that order (the act or identity of a thing) is emergent, an ephemeral phenomenon. In Burkean terms, identity of the self would be an emergent order out of a parliament of selves in rhetorical competition. “Blame,” the attribution of motive, would entail reduction of complexity (or uncertainty), as would the assignment of agency, act, purpose, and the other pentadic ratios. From this point of view, a nonmodern rhetorical realism would be a kind of resistance to the reduction of complexity, to the idea of identities as a stable phenomenon. This, in my opinion, would be tantamount to a rich Burkean understanding of identification, one that his poetics and aesthetics are ideally suited to participate in. Latour can offer rhetorical scholars a way to think of rhetoric without falling into subject-object dichotomies, where persuasion is not reducible to symbolic action. Instead, rhetoric should be concerned with material organization, mediation and translation, processes which themselves are related to their participation in larger human and nonhuman collectives. After all, Latour still
needs language to communicate these ideas to others, claiming

> Every word is good if it can be used to cross the boundary between people and things . . . the whole notion of actor-network theory is not a very well packaged argument, but the rule is simple: do not use culture, the content of science, or discourses as the cause of the phenomenon. So the vocabulary of actor-network theory is voluntarily poor. It is not a metalanguage, but an infralanguage. Its core principle is not to limit *a priori* who or which are the actors and their properties. (*Reassembling* 263)

Latour’s view of language requires rhetorical theorists to see language not in terms of the paradox of substance, but in terms of the reality of objects. In the *Meno*, Socrates asks, “how can we inquire into the nature of virtue without first knowing virtue?” For Plato, a definition of virtue already exists, then there is no basis to inquire as to its nature or essence. Bryant suggests that Burke’s paradox of substance turned on a similar problem, and he “unwittingly provides us with a fundamental clue as to the ontological structure of substance and why it is necessarily characterized by withdrawal” (*Democracy of Objects* 63). Burke turns to Aristotle for the “paradox of substance.” In discussion Locke, Burke writes, “the word ‘substance,’ used to designate what a thing is, derives from a word designating something that a thing is not. That is, though used to designate something *within* the thing, *intrinsic* to it, the word etymologically refers to something *outside* the thing, *extrinsic* to it” (*Grammar* 66). If substance is external, then, following Locke, we only encounter the qualities but not the substance of the object.
Burke, argues Bryant, is not mistaken, but that his epistemic standpoint traps him into making it seem paradoxical instead of real. “It is only when we begin from the standpoint of epistemology, from the standpoint of what is given in experience, that substance appears paradoxical. And if this is the case, then it is because beginning with epistemology leads us to simultaneously claim that the object we experience is its qualities and that it is something radically other than its qualities” (83). “Infra-language” requires not the paradox of substance—an epistemic standpoint, but the paradox of “substancing,” that captures how humans and nonhumans withdraw and emerge alongside each other.

Circulating Rhetorical Referents

In Laboratory Life, Latour and Steven Woolgar develop an ethnography of the scientific laboratory in order to argue for their version of the paradox of substancing: “Interpretations do not inform as much as they perform” (285). By this claim they mean that representation is not the goal of science. Science’s goal is the performance of constructing reality. It is my contention that a nonmodern rhetorical realism not only requires scholars to re-think the modern foundations that inform much of rhetorical theory, but, as I will argue for the remaining chapters of the dissertation, places a renewed emphasis on tracing the material-semiotic flows, enactments, and performances that constitute reality. Indeed, the canon of delivery, with its deep connections to acting and the diminishment of rhetoric, will emerge as an important if not the most important element of rhetorical theory to rethink.

What Latour pushes us to realize is that we have to re-think rhetoric in particular
in a world where truth and false is not necessarily a productive conversation. What does the term construction mean? As we can see with anti-realists, “construction” means an active subject and a passive object, social constructivism, and a distilled Kantianism of Cassir as I noted in the previous chapter. For most, constructionism refers not to “real” entities, but to social phenomena such as signs. If gender is constructed, it is not natural, restricting performance to discourse and human initiated action. Construction for anti-realist thinkers means construction without the nature/society distinction. Latour thus replaces society with collectivity, because there is no social real that is not bound up with reality. Construction refers to how these collectives are drawn and established.

Mimesis, intimately connected with problems of rhetoric and, as well shall see, delivery, becomes impossible under thinking of reality as an enactment—an idea that Latour well-documents in *Laboratory Life* in the section called “Circulating Reference.”

This whole tired question of the correspondence between words and world stems from a simple confusion between epistemology and the history of art. We have taken science for realist painting, imagining that it is made an exact copy of the world. The sciences do something else entirely—paintings too for that matter. Through successive stages they link us to an aligned, transformed, constructed world. We forfeit resemblances, in this model, but there is compensation: by pointing with our index fingers to features of an entry printed in an atlas, we can, through a series of uniformly discontinuous transformations, link ourselves to Boa Vista. (78–79)
Thus, we remain either in the Cartesian “Mind-in-a-vat” or vacuum-sealed nature. The ties for rhetorical realism and a theory of power are very clear. By following the scientist’s practice, Latour says, we find “reference”—not adequation or mimesis: “. . . the quality of the chain of transformation [and] the viability of its circulation” (310).

Latour follows the laboratory work of a geographer and a botanist, and the two pedologists in Boa Vista. Their laboratory is the jungle. Their question is whether the jungle advances on the savannah or whether the reverse is true. Given the disciplinary differences—the trained incapacities and recalcitrant interests—there is no consensus. The botanists locate varieties of trees native to the savannah inside the forest, indicating the forest is colonizing the savannah. The pedologists disagree because one of their disciplinary paradigms holds that soil never goes sand to clay, and the botanists’ theories would require this. Sandy savannah soil would necessarily become clay: the forest’s soil.

Latour and Woolgar question, “How do we pack the world into words?”

Reference is thus a series of transformations or translations, that is, the ways in which the facts can and cannot be constructed. The epistemic problem is how to localize the differences of all the different actors involved. It is important for scientists not to retreat back to the brain-in-a-vat as Burke is prone to do, but to prepare the object to better let its differences emerge. First, the scientists study the botanists’ maps to get the “lay of the land.” At the actual site, the region is marked and divided by metal tags and other markers, allowing plant and soil samples to be collected. From Latour’s point of view, this “decontextualization” of the object allows for a new approach. It is not the thing-in-itself that is captured, but an enacted construction of reality. The trees, like the
zebras in the quotation at the top of this Chapter, as things in themselves perpetually withdraw and are unknown in their “contextualization.” Yet, the soil samples, in keeping with Latour’s observations about Boyle, are meaningless without being compared to color cards established and legitimated by scientific institutions around the world. The eye cannot register the differences unaided, but with the cards, numbers can be assigned that can identify the soil properties. Numerical patterns, in accordance with “black boxed” procedures, will reveal or challenge or revise patterns. The data in turn is transformed to data designed to communicate these findings to scientific audiences.

What is revealed, in the end, contrary to the pedological truth, is that worms and microbacteria helped create the anomalous clay. Scientific paradigms are themselves altered by the material constraints of the Amazon itself. Latour and Woolgar conclude that reference is enabled not by the resemblance between word and thing. Neither it is established through a proposition and the nature that it presumes to represent. Rather, reference and realistic realism are established through the complex cycle of translations when the Amazon soil samples are shuttled from research to final propositions and back again. I will cite Latour at length:

The philosophy of language makes it seem as if there exist two disjointed spheres separated by a unique and radical gap that must be reduced through the search for correspondence, for reference, between words and world. While following the expedition to Boa Vista, I arrived at a quite different solution. Knowledge, it seems, does not reside in the face-to-face confrontation of a mind with an object, any more than reference designates
a thing by means of a sentence verified by that thing. On the contrary, at
every stage we have recognized a common operator, which belongs to
matter at one end, to form at the other, and which is separated from the
stage that follows it by a gap that no resemblance could fill. The operators
are linked in a series that passes across the difference between things and
words, and that redistributes these two obsolete fixtures of the philosophy
of language: the earth becomes a cardboard cube, words become paper,
colors become numbers and so forth. An essential property of this chain is
that it must remain reversible. The succession of stages must be traceable,
allowing for travel in both directions. If the chain is interrupted at any
point, it ceases to transport truth—ceases, that is, to reproduce, to
construct, to trace, and to conduct it. The word “reference” designates the
quality of the chain in its entirety, and no longer adequatio rei et
intellectus. Truth-value circulates here like electricity through a wire, so
long as this circuit is not interrupted. (69, my emphasis)

It is the process—the performance—through which the “truth” is constructed that
becomes, for Latour, more important than the truth of this episode that we cannot
discover in advance. And this conclusion has far-reaching consequences for more than
just the typical realm of science. As we shall see in Bennett, who knows what material
consequences impact on the social if we open ourselves to the nonhuman exterior?
Bennett speculates the consequences

But what if we loosened the tie between participation and human language
use, encountering the world as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages? We might then entertain a set of crazy and not-so-crazy questions: Did the typical American diet play any role in engendering the Widespread susceptibility to the propaganda leading up to the invasion of Iraq? Do sand storms make a difference to the spread of so-called sectarian violence? Does mercury help enact autism? In what ways does the effect on sensibility of a video game exceed the intentions of its designers and users? Can a hurricane bring down a president? Can HIV mobilize homophobia or an evangelical revival? Can an avian virus jump from birds to humans and create havoc for systems of health care and international trade and travel? (162)

In any case, my conclusions here about needing to locate rhetoric in the flux and circulations of material-semiotic channels will require us to rethink fundamentally not only rhetoric’s relationship to realism, but also to shift from an anti-realist privilege of invention to a nonmodern realist emphasis on how humans and nonhumans deliver, perform, and enact the conditions of possibility for rhetorical interaction.
CHAPTER 3
THE OBJECT STYLES: CLASSICAL AND MODERN HISTORIES OF RHETORICAL DELIVERY

While the environment sometimes offers challenges that are exclusively mental . . . the total environment within which we live and constantly interact is clearly a massive and complex mix of the physical and mental

Lloyd Bitzer

The content or message of any particular medium has about as much importance as the stenciling on the casing of an atomic bomb.

Marshall McLuhan

We have a long trek before we reach the point of even rudimentary understanding of rhetoric’s material nature

Carole Blair

I closed in Chapter 2 by suggesting that the forceful separation of nature (\textit{physis}) from culture (\textit{nomos}) has haunted scholarly attempts to acknowledge the material presence of nonhuman actors in the rhetorical situation. Following from Bruno Latour’s nonmodern ontology, I argued that the way to combat the modern Constitution in rhetoric is to view how the concrete and actual participation of nonhuman actors serve as a condition of possibility for rhetoric. However, while the critiques that some feminist rhetorical theorists, rhetorical materialists, and rhetorical realists have underestimated the contributions of “matter” as a concrete and affective materiality are easy to demonstrate, many scholars would point, nonetheless, to contemporary research conversations in technology and digitality as evidence that the materiality and mediality of communication have indeed been addressed by rhetorical theorists. Even those who accept my arguments about anti-realism’s role in neo-Kantian and epistemic accounts of rhetoric may be
tempted to claim that I am setting up a straw man, especially with regard to the
technological turn in rhetoric and writing studies.

Before 2000, the implication that rhetoric and writing scholarship had ignored
technological actors would likely have been less controversial. In an address to the entire
Conference in College Composition and Communication, Cynthia L. Selfe argued “Our
tendency to avoid focusing on the technological means that—while we are tolerant of
those colleagues interested in the ‘souls’ of machines,’ to use Latour’s term—we assign
them to a peculiar kind of professional isolation ‘in their own separate world’ ”
(“Technology and Literacy” 1164). This separate world is composed of “computer
sessions and computer workshops and writing conferences that many CCCC members
consider influenced more by the concerns of engineers, technicians, and technocrats than
those of humanists” (1164). Yet, by 2004, in their edited collection, Writing New Media,
Anne Frances Wysocki, Johndan Johnsnon-Eilola, Cynthia L. Selfe, and Geoffrey Sirc
define new media texts as “those that have been made by composers who are aware of the
range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality” (15). In other words,
scholars interested in digital and multimodal composition have increasingly sought to
study the material role of technologies (Sheridan et al.) and the materiality composition
in general (Rice, Digital Detroit; Shipka).

However, given rhetoric’s troubled relationship to materiality and agency that I
have sketched out in the first two chapters, it is crucial for us to examine whether
materiality for rhetorical theorists who are interested in technology remains a metaphor or
an actual condition of communication practice. Along these lines, I want to offer a
cautionary tale from another post-2000 composition movement: ecocomposition. Marilyn R. Cooper observed in the “Foreword” to the first edited collection on the subject, *Ecocomposition: Theoretical and Pedagogical Approaches*, that ecocomposition was supposed to move beyond the social constructionist foundations of previous ecological approaches to writing—a previous paradigm that included Cooper’s foundational essay, “The Ecology of Writing.” In the “Foreword,” Cooper argues for an almost nonmodern view of writing: “the systems that constitute writing and writers are not just like ecological systems but are precisely ecological systems, and that there are no boundaries between writing and the other interlocked, cycling systems of our world” (xiv). Yet, by 2012, Sid Dobrin vented his frustration in *Postcomposition* that ecocompositionists largely succeeded only in adding “nature” as a critical concept of discourse alone along with the trinity of race, class, and gender. Simply stated, ecocomposition scholars were unable to overcome the *nomos/physis* divide that characterizes modern thought. The materiality of *physis*, complex systems, and material affect remained and remains circumscribed within *nomos* and human agency.

**Delivery’s Problem with Matter**

The ecocomposition analogy for technology and digital rhetoric scholarship lies in the limited ways in which technological actors are allowed agency, that is, are allowed to *matter*. In Wysocki et al.’s articulation of materiality, the problem is less an explicit embrace of anti-realism, and more a reduction of technological materiality to instrumentality and agency. In perhaps no other area of digital and new media rhetoric has the reduction of rhetoric’s materiality—its potential or possible range of material and
ecological affectivity—been as evident as in conversations about the canon of delivery. Sensitive to our classical and contemporary privileging of language and the canon of invention, many digital rhetoric scholars have sought to elevate the canon of delivery by equating it with the technological medium. In Electric Rhetoric, Kathleen Welch has specifically argued that delivery should not be the fifth, but the first canon, by extending the McLuhanesque claim that the “medium is the message” to delivery, thereby maintaining “delivery is the medium” (1-28).

This claim was re-echoed by virtually all delivery scholarship. In doing so, delivery scholars seek to challenge Aristotle’s infamous reduction of delivery to its marginalized “fifth canon” status. Aristotle disliked delivery in that its nonsymbolic aspects involved emotional falsehoods, acting, and non-logical appeals, such as when a plaintiff suffering from a mild case of whiplash exaggerates an injury by appearing in court with a full-body cast. In other words, visuality, mediality, gesture, and the body’s role in rhetoric became in some places a negative form of non-logical persuasion that Aristotle thought should be only employed—if at all—due to the lack of logical competence in the audience (Rhetoric 1404a). I will discuss this point in detail below. While Aristotle certainly does document the importance of the body to oratory and persuasion, delivery became the way in which the nonsymbolic was reinscribed to the canon of invention.

However, in the rush among contemporary scholars to revitalize the fifth canon and re-privilege delivery, there have been very few considerations of how technologies themselves work independently of human agency in the process of delivery. Here, Karen
Barad’s phrase “matter doesn’t matter” from Chapter 1 in this dissertation does not mean that digital rhetoric scholars have not considered the presence and influence of technological actors in their work. Rather, the problem is the limited ways in which technologies are considered as actors in and of themselves. Let me offer a representative example. In James E. Porter’s definition of digital delivery, his consideration of the rhetoricality of the medium is restricted to technê as technical knowledge: that which the writer controls and intends, or, in Porter’s words, “how audiences are likely to access, engage, and interact with information” (208). Other delivery and circulation scholarship follows a similar pattern. Some have argued, for example, that the writer’s selection of a file format is a primary rhetorical activity (Sheridan et al. 140-51). Choosing a .pdf file format will enable one’s composition to be widely read and easily distributed online. By contrast, electing to publish in some obscure eReader format like .mobi will likely limit one’s audience if the audience does not feel like downloading and installing extra software just to read a single file. To reiterate my earlier point, the standpoint of nonhuman agency is not that these elements and decisions about file formatting are unimportant. Rather, it is more that these accounts fail to theorize the activity of delivery as it participates in, and is shaped by, a complex and evolving system of nonhuman actors beyond the immediate rhetorical situation. Only two very recent (2012) titles on delivery—Ben McCorkle’s Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse and Sheridan et al.’s The Means of Persuasion—even acknowledge Latour’s scholarship and other nonmodern approaches to technological agency as a possible way to conceive of delivery and circulation. Consequently, I would suggest that contemporary scholars of delivery
and digital/new media rhetoric have yet to overcome Aristotle’s partial reduction of the role of delivery and the activity of nonsymbolic forces in persuasion. In terms of re-theorizing technological and material agency for new media, the canon of delivery then is a particular important area of focus for a nonmodern rhetorical realism as I have gestured toward in Chapter 2.

If digital rhetoric and delivery scholars seek to admit technology and nonsymbolic factors into the rhetorical situation, then my argument is that we should move beyond an instrumentalist and modern view of these factors. It my purpose to articulate what an expanded and noninstrumental view of technology, materiality, and delivery can reveal about the conditions under which we practice and theorize rhetoric. I will suggest in this chapter that Platonic and Aristotelian anxieties over allowing communication to be conducted through the use of nonlogical forces has been tacitly repeated by contemporary scholars of digital rhetoric and technology in reducing technology to “matter without substance.” This trend cuts across Welch’s assumption in *Electronic Rhetoric* about delivery being a critique-centered process of technological de-mythification and up through, in part, Collin Gifford Brooke’s recent reclassification of delivery as “performance” in *Lingua Fracta: Toward a Rhetoric of New Media*. In Martin Heidegger’s sense that I described in Chapter 2, delivery theorists treat technology as a presence-at-hand Object and not a withdrawn readiness-to-hand Thing. It is precisely for this reason why I believe that examining nonmodern rhetoric through the canon of delivery is a crucial project toward challenging the anti-realist legacy of rhetorical materialism. It enables us to see how a mere focus on technology and technological
materiality in the interest cannot adequately answer Selfe’s challenge without radically overturning the symbolic/constructivist paradigms that inform the vast majority of rhetorical theory. Delivery additionally serves as a convenient scholarly conversation through which to organize a nonmodern theory of technological agency and rhetorical materiality for the remaining chapters.

In what follows, I will first address Platonic and Aristotelian reductions of delivery to establish the point of contrast for contemporary scholars. Then, I will demonstrate how contemporary scholars unsuccessfully attempted to reclaim the materiality and mediality of the fifth canon, focusing especially on Welch, Porter, Brooke, and McCorkle’s work. Finally, I will close by arguing that a nonmodern realist view of delivery can actually benefit from the classical understanding of delivery’s etymological root: hypokrisis (acting, dissembling, concealment). Hypokrisis must come to serve as an ontological (realist-like) condition of materiality, objects, and human and nonhuman actors alike. This redefinition will offer a foundation toward a more complex understanding of the types of agencies and material affects that composing and delivering with algorithmic actors in new media such as videogames and augmented reality entail in subsequent chapters.

Platonic Mimesis: The Noise of Delivery

McCorkle accurately suggests that of all the five canons “delivery has perhaps the most problematic history” (2). In classical terms, delivery is primarily considered in orality as the “right management of the voice to express various emotions and is tightly coupled with style” (Honeycutt 12). Across its historical understandings as hypokrisis,
elocution, *actio*, or *lexis* “it has been variously regarded as the most importance component of the entire rhetorical system, scrutinized as the most suspect or disdainful, and even outright ignored as the canon non grata of rhetoric” (2). It is precisely for the engagement with non-verbal, non-logical, and non-symbolic factors that delivery has such a “disdainful” reputation.

The following section will trace this “problematic history” in Plato and Aristotle. Many scholars who are interested in reclaiming delivery as the medium quickly move beyond Plato and Aristotle to Demosthenes and the Romans’ more sympathetic treatments of delivery. Yet, I want to hesitate over Plato and Aristotle’s respective accounts because their conceptions of delivery clearly expose the vexed relationship between realism, materialism, and rhetoric in relationship to delivery. In Plato, the demand that language and identity reflect a metaphysically invariable order—an orderly *cosmos*—is well documented by rhetorical theorists (Vitanza, “Notes Toward”). What is less discussed is how this demand relates to delivery through Plato’s particular concern over acting (*hypokrisis*) and nonsymbolic forms of rhetoric and these in turn relate to norms of who and what are excluded from the rhetorical situation as present and agentive beings. In particular, I want to tease out the connotations between acting and delivery because this foundation will be employed to reconceptualize a nonmodern theory of delivery as ontological *hypokrisis*.

Platonic notions of mimesis were grounded in a concern with acting as a form of concealment opposed to dialectic and metaphysical truth. Plato’s famous line in the *Republic* states, “The same thing clearly cannot act or be acted upon in the same part or
in relation to the same thing at the same time, in contrary ways” (436b). If the cosmos is to be an orderly whole and not an “unruly shambles” as Socrates feared then identity and social movements similarly had to be stable and transparent. Classicist Anne Duncan claims that acting for the Greeks introduced a deep suspicion for a mimetic notion of stable identity (Swearington, Ethos). Duncan describes “mimesis as the act of theatrical impersonation, and identity as the sense of possessing a self that is an integrated whole, consistent over time and in different settings” (2). Duncan notes that the Greeks possessed an almost postmodern concern with identity: “A conception of identity as fluid or constructed, in particular, was something the ancients often attributed to actors, and not admiringly” (7). For example, “Lucian’s discussion of pantomime recalls a story where a barbarian talks to a pantomime actor in the process of laying our his five character masks for a play. The barbarian complained, ‘My friend, I didn’t realize that although you have one body, you have many souls’” (7).

Displaced onto the foreign Other, the barbarian’s voice is that of the Greek thinkers such as Plato: bodies (appearance) and souls (essence) must strive to mirror each other. To offer a famous example from before Plato’s time, the Iliad discusses how the warrior’s body enables battle and the actor’s body enables drama. For the Greeks, the body’s visible manifestations and oral articulations are thus the mirrored extension of personal identity and moral identity. This basic struggle between mimesis and concealment is central to understanding the idea of performance and its relationship to modern constructivist accounts of rhetoric (Miller, “Kairos”). It is true that hermaphrodites such as Favorinus and characters in Ovid’s Metamorphoses described
moments of gender instability and physical change. However, Duncan maintains that these accounts were considered to be exceptions and the classical world stressed consistency, unity, and self-control, particularly in their political and rhetorical texts. The Greeks required predictability and responsibility for legal reasons and accountability reasons. The ideal was “possession of personal identity as the possession of a stable, coherent, integrated self where appearance matches essence” (7).

Acting and drama were consequently a source of anxiety for philosophers and political thinkers. Acting in particular foregrounded the idea that someone could act or speak in a way that was different from their internal stable character. According to Duncan, Greek drama is nothing more and nothing less than “the capacity of the body to ‘lie’—to appear other than what it ‘really’ is—that enables mimesis to occur” (8). Given this anxiety over acting, it is unsurprising that delivery’s Greek word is hypokrisis, the English root of hypocrisy—saying one thing and doing another. As George A. Kennedy noted in his translation of the Rhetoric, hypokrisis is the act of playing a part on the stage—a simulation of the unstable gap between presence and absence, essence and appearance, acting and truth-telling, and the philosopher and the actor (or sophist) (195n). It is in this alignment of soul and body that we find the perpetual anxiety in Plato over acting in relationship to rhetoric. “At a fundamental level,” Duncan argues, “[Greek] theater is a confrontation between the actor and the spectator. No matter how well the actor plays the role, the spectator retains a sort of awkward awareness of the actor’s ‘otherness,’ his or her body beneath and behind the costume” (9).
Coupled with the individual self-division is an additional political and social anxiety about “the way in which theater makes the socialization process of a given society apparent and transparent” (9). In anticipation of contemporary cultural studies concepts such as Judith Butler’s “performativity” and mimicry in *Gender Trouble* (xiv), or Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the “habitus” (“The Logic of Practice”). Greek communities, like many social formations in human history, tended to naturalize the historical and material contingencies that gave rise them. Many social groups like to imagine—mythologize—that their collective identity is the product of divine, historical, or immanent telos, “making [their] workings seem natural or inevitable and not contingent or constructed” (Duncan 11). Yet, by contrast, Duncan suggests that “A play, on the other hand, shows actors reproducing those norms through conscious study and imitation” (11), begging the question of whether identity and “stability” is authentic or reflective of one’s inner moral intention and virtue.

In a microcosm, acting is a space where the logics of non-contradiction, identity, and politics are continually placed into question by mimicking the forms of identity that give rise to political interaction. As Solon complained, “Yes, but it won’t be long... if we hold this sort of ‘play’ in such high esteem, before it rears its head in our contractual engagements too” (18). In this comment, we are able to glimpse additional implications for acting’s association with rhetoric. Invoking the same Platonic slippery-slope fallacy that the Bush administration used against cartoon and videogame violence, Solon refused to allow the audience the ability to differentiate between fiction and falsehood. He claimed that familiarity with drama (or, by extension, rhetoric) would enable spectators to
engage in financial or political dealings with dishonestly. Such an attitude is a common classical problem for rhetorical theorists. Along similar lines, Isocrates argued that the surest path to virtue while studying rhetoric was to study speeches on virtuous topics, presumably encouraging one not to act but to believe and know. Thus, the philosopher who knows truth has the responsibility to express it while the sophist—the actor who “plays” or acts as a philosopher—is the one who attempts to pass off enthymemes as equal to syllogistic reasoning.

_Hypokrisis_ is an additional way in which Platonic rejections of rhetoric as an art can be situated. In the _Gorgias_, Plato writes, “[Rhetoric] seems to me then . . . to be a pursuit that is not a matter of art, but showing a shrewd, gallant spirit which has a natural bent for clever dealing with mankind, and I sum up its substance in the name _flattery_. . . . Well now, you have heard what I state rhetoric to be—the counterpart of cookery in the soul, acting here as that does on the body” (466a). Neither rhetoric nor acting could be arts. According to Duncan, “Plato’s unwillingness to grant acting the status of a skill, a _technē_, and his insistence that people should only do one thing (and thus should not impersonate different characters, if they engage in impersonation at all) . . .” (19). Truth is the Platonic demand for “transparency” in all acts of communication. There can be no possibility of acting, mimicking, or concealing if one actually communicates the truth. To take the example of non-logical speech such as poetry, Socrates maintains that it is divine inspiration in _Ion_ inspires the performance of Homer and not poetic or rhetorical _technē_. In fact, _Ion_ is so effective as a rhetor in “concealing” the origins of his poetic speech that he actually deceives himself! In Plato’s caricature, the danger of poetics (or rhetoric) is
that Ion actually believes that his ability to recite Homeric lines about sailing and fighting actually give him true knowledge ocean navigation and military command.

Plato confirms his hostility to acting by banning actors along with poets from his ideal political community. In The Republic, the Guardians can only engage in mimesis in proportion to their essential character (“do not imitate slavish or unworthy people”) as imitation alters “habit and nature” (395d). Actors who played more than one character were to be sent off along with the sophists and rhetoricians, “because people in this city should only be able to do one thing,” that is, the one thing in accordance with their nature wherein soul and body are unified (398a). In The Republic, rhetoric, quite literally, would not exist and “acting” would be indistinguishable from reality and the natural social hierarchies reflected in them. Platonic rhetoric, like acting, is the art of appearance but not truth. Elsewhere, Plato has Socrates conflate style and delivery, wherein a good rhetor can adjust the content of a speech to the needs of the “souls” of the audience (Phaedrus 62-63; 72). Acting, however, is more ambivalent than rhetoric because there remains the possibility that the actor could self-present in a way that accorded to his character. By contrast, the rhetor must conceal some part of his aim or else he would have no need to engage in rhetorical deception. He could just speak the truth as a philosopher without pretending to be one.

Eliminating the Noise of Delivery in the Republic

For Plato, hypokrisis is an enactment, a performance of the logos, using ideally words that are one’s own and that reflect knowledge and truth but not self-interest. It is the rhetor who is alleged to move the audience to her own self-interest which is
necessarily set in opposition to truth. Such was not often the case as even famous Greek rhetors employed speechwriters (Duncan 2). Delivery thus conceived means—if one is practicing non-logical persuasion—employing a self-othered body that one does not possess or that acts in ways contrary to the speaker’s intentions. In a small bit of historical coincidence, the Romans often viewed prostitutes and actors as occupying the same social level. For the Greeks, delivery is hypokrisis—a deceitful judgment—but judgment predicated on a dissembling, a doubling of the gap between invention and embodiment, dialectic and rhetoric, that undoes the relationship between essence and appearance. Sean Morey’s Delivery@Machines offers an excellent parsing of delivery’s etymological roots as well as suggests some novel ways to recontextualize them. Hypo etymologically has a variety of meanings, “under, beneath, down, from below; underhand, secretly; in a subordinate degree, slightly” (“Hypo,” OED 3). Krisis (krinein) roughly translates to judgment. If we take the roots together with the context of acting we end up with acting—hypokrisis—as the ability to “undercut” the truth. As Morey notes, the English derivative (hypocrises) also reinforces this idea of dissembling and concealment: “To alter or disguise the semblance of (one’s character, a feeling, design, or action) so as to conceal, or deceive as to, its real nature; to give a false or feigned semblance to; to cloak or disguise by a feigned appearance” (“Dissemble” 5). In many ways this dissembling could be conceived as re-representing, making manifest, or better, delivering what the other canons invented, memorized, styled, or arranged. As a judgment, hypokrisis refers to this subterranean realm that operates not at the cognitive and logical level of the head and brain, but through the visceral—abject—faculties of reason (and I
will define what I mean by reason momentarily).

The suggestion that I am about to make regarding the significance of *hypokrisis* and embodiment is tentative and speculative. However, it is a necessary path to explore in order to develop a thread between delivery and materiality that Aristotle more directly engages. Plato’s demand for transparency and stability manifested through the *logos* results in a denial of the materiality and ecological situatedness of his audience. Sharon Crowley observes, “Classical rhetorical theory was devised a long time ago in cultures that were rigidly class bound and whose economies depended upon slavery. They were invented for the use of privileged men, speaking to relatively small audiences. Those audiences were not literate, and the only available technology of delivery was the human body” (*Composition in the University* 8). In a very important way, the negation of the material, “responseable,” and affectable body is the negation of the *demos* and the recognition of their capacity for speech as an equal political subject. Plato’s “orderly *cosmos*” is reflected in his elitist elevation and privileging of logic as a form of discourse.

This claim about elitism is not controversial. In *The Gorgias*, Socrates satirically rejects Callicles’ claim that an elite intellectual “might” should rule over the *demos*, arguing instead that a single individual’s “might” would be inconsequential compared to the physical power of the “10,000” in the Athenian mob. Thus, Socrates grounds his inferential system of dialectic in transcendental and metaphysical principles, thereby legitimating inegalitarian social arrangements. Those who do not have logical training should never pretend or “act” (like the Sophists are held to imitate philosophers) as if they possess this training (e.g., pretend to be something other than what they are). Thus,
if elite dialectic is the only permissible language game, then Plato has radically denied the audience or the participant in a conversation any emotional or affective response as an embodied participant in the world. Michel Serres beautifully articulates the Platonic elitist dialectic in *Hermes: Literature, Science, Philosophy*. For Serres, the ideal dialectic must transfer or disseminate an ideal message from sender to receiver while *minimizing* or ignoring the effects of the medium and ecology of other potential debators or interlocutors. In information theory terms of Claude Shannon, Plato wants to communicate—or incarnate the soul—through a channel—the body—without having the logical content contaminated by extraneous noise (e.g., nonverbal factors or equal interlocutors that expose the arbitrary exclusion of material and affective processes of concealment).

Serres rejects the antagonism (sender/receiver) model of the dialectic, and argues that the more plausible scenario is triadic. As William Rasch summarizes, “Rather, [speaker and interlocutor] are united against a common enemy, the parasitic third party called ‘noise,’ in whose interest it is to interfere and promote confusion” (*Niklas Luhmann’s Modernity* 58). Serres writes, “To hold a dialogue is to suppose a third man and to seek to exclude him; a successful communication is the exclusion of the third man” (67). Thus, Plato secretly desires for geometrical harmony of mathematics in all speech acts, the “kingdom of quasi-perfect communication, . . . the king of the excluded third man, in which the demon is most definitely exorcised” (69). Serres’ account of the dialectic directly relates to Plato’s rejection of the technology of writing. To offer Jacques Derrida’s well-rehearsed phenomenological interpretation of the *Phaedrus*, writing
foregrounds a material interruption to the self-present immediacy of speech as is well known from the *Phaedrus* dialogue (*Dissemination* 66-90). Plato couched his rejection of writing via *poiesis* through the restoration a particular type of audience: the Socratic interlocutor. Writing was *hypokritical*: it could be disseminated and dissembled and be interpreted in ways that the speaker did not intend. Writing potentially affects different actors in ways other than what the designer intentionally inscribed upon it.33

Plato’s desire is not to restore equality to an audience, despite his boasts that a blacksmith or a slave could follow the linear form of the dialectic, but to have the ability, constantly, to control the definition of terms and the pace of logic for an interlocutor (audience), a privilege denied him by writing in either poetic, mythical, or mimetic forms of acting other than what one could held accountable to be. Elements of acting and delivery—the nonhuman interlocutors—were to be minimized at all costs. Thus, to return to Serres, “the act of eliminating cacography, the attempt to eliminate noise, is at the same time the condition of the apprehension of the abstract form and the condition of the success of communication” (*Hermes* 68). The exclusion of “noise” becomes the exclusion of the Other—the blacksmith and the slave, and the communicating, material body. Even when Meno the slave boy can be taught “math.” Meno can be taught to “act” like something other than what his innate moral nature is capable of. However, at best, all he can do is simulate mathematical thinking and dialectical intercourse. Thus, Plato’s rejection of “noise” comes in his desire not to allow anything to appear as anything other than what it is at the present moment of communicating to meaning. There can be no due
consideration of the process of circulation or delivery under this restrictive view of the materiality of language and the embodiment of the speakers.

The extension of the desire to make the *logos* transparent to the exclusion of “noise” then will become in Aristotle an occasion to deny delivery a central role. Delivery—acting—ends up being the degrees of “noise” which threaten to dissimulate and dissemble the work of logic. For Plato, it is sufficient to say that “noise” is equivalent to *hypokrisis*—acting. At both the level of reason and the materiality of speech as writing, Plato attempts to immunize the *logos* from contamination from noise. Further evidence of my claim can be seen in Socrates’s death in the “The Apology.” At the end of his life, Socrates physically turns away from speaking to the representatives of the *demos* face-to-face, and speaks to the Ideal judge. The Ideal judge is freed from being moved by noise, concealment, and *hypokrisis* and, therefore, cannot be possibly be an embodied human being who will necessarily engage multiple senses in the activity of communication. The Ideal judge is immune to “noise” and acts only to acknowledge the correct processes of reasoning coming forth from Socrates is actually inhuman. In his reading of the *Gorgias* in *Pandora’s Hope*, Latour indeed makes this claim that Platonic reasoning is predicated on an appeal to a “nonhuman outside” of transcendence (15). In a speculative sense, the Platonic judge is a metaphoric computer responding automatically to algorithmic prompts. There can be no dissembling of the *logos* or active interpretation and singular, affected, and embodied *responseability* from the audience. The Ideal audience can only perceive truth where speech and invention (*logos*) or the soul and the body are aligned. Following from Serres’ invocation of Shannon, Plato’s Ideal judge is an early prototype for a
computer algorithm. Such a prominence of rhetoric would be the end of rhetoric, reducing all responses to an act of communication to “Yes,” “No,” and “Why of course, Socrates.”

Aristotle’s Platonic Remediation of Delivery

As has been well established by rhetorical scholars, Aristotle clearly addressed how to create an effective rhetorical persona as a form of communication. In contrast to Plato, he allows rhetoric the status of an art and he does not consistently raise the same moral objections. Despite this more sympathetic articulation of rhetoric, delivery—in as far as the scraps of Aristotle or his students’ notes that we have access to confirm—remained a particular and remarkable source of concern for him due to its connotations with acting and hypokrisis. In various writings, Crowley has reminded us that Plato and Aristotle cannot and should not be unproblematically lumped together. However, delivery may offer an exception to this rule. In his translation of the Rhetoric, Kennedy suggests that this ambivalence or “negative attitude toward delivery probably also derives from Plato” (195n). Beyond Aristotle’s inherited suspicions of acting and delivery from Plato, Kennedy describes how Aristotle additionally worried “about the use of acting and performance in court to embellish or even to lie about certain ailments” (195n2). No doubt because of these negative sentiments, historical surveys of delivery such as Martin Jacobi’s essay in Delivering College Composition tend to focus on Cicero and Quintilian. Jacobi, like many in rhetorical scholarship, is interested in practical suggestions for performance and his lack of attention to Aristotle is understandable. Jacobi comments that Aristotle was “merely conflating delivery with style” in keeping with Plato (18). As
Timothy Morton humorously writes, following from Aristotle, “We often assume that delivery is secondary [to rhetorical invention], kind of like the volume control or the equalizer on a stereo—it’s a matter of conditioning the externals of rhetoric” rather than being a primary rhetorical force in its own right (“Sublime Objects” 25).

Yet, the simple fact that we do not have access to all of Aristotle’s notes makes it difficult to establish his thinking on the canon as a coherent argument. However, this fact has not stopped commentators such as Don Bialostosky for making grand inferences about Aristotle’s position on delivery. Bialostosky argues that Book III of The Rhetoric offered no practical advice or a characteristic list of techniques for delivery. Bialostosky suggests that this is a strange occurrence for the philosopher who was first and foremost a master taxonomizer with the other canons. Bialostosky comments, “It is interesting that Aristotle, who rarely holds back from being the first to investigate a subject or to formulate the art of practice, dismisses this one as too vulgar to be worthy of his attention” (397). Yet, given not only the possibility that Aristotle’s notes were lost, but also the fact that there are competing versions of Aristotle (including Persian translations), it is simply impossible to maintain this claim to the extent that he suggests. It is true that within the nineteen sections that contemporary scholars have organized The Rhetoric into, eleven sections focus on lexis (style, literary tropes) and taxis (arrangement). It is also true that the first section focuses on hypokrisis but offers a critique instead of advice for successful physical performances. Yet, when Bialotowsky concludes, “It is rare to see him take as many conflicting turns of evaluation as he does in the brief section in which he takes up the topic” (396), unfortunately, it is often difficult to substantiate these claims beyond the
realm of conjecture. Thus, I believe that the safer and qualified claim is that delivery represented a potential source of moral danger to the practice of rhetoric.

A more productive and tempered reading of Aristotle’s account of delivery can be found in Morey’s *Delivery@Machines*. As Morey observes, in the *Poetics*, Aristotle is not even convinced that delivery, due to its connotations with acting, deserves to be included as a part of rhetoric. In section 19 of the *Poetics*, Aristotle dismisses delivery as rhetorical. He actually classifies elements of delivery such as “Modes of Utterance” and diction as a species of the genus “poetic delivery”: “But this province of knowledge belongs to the art of Delivery and to the masters of that science” (XIX). Throughout these passages in the *Poetics*, Morey, turning back to Bialostosky, notes that Aristotle writes a more straightforward or “neutral” account of delivery in contrast to its diminished role in poetics. Invoking Plato’s concerns above over the poets’ responsibility for the dissemination of their language, Aristotle wonders whether the poet who writes the lines must not be responsible for whether a poetic line is a “command, a prayer, a statement, a threat, a question, an answer, and so forth. To know or not to know these things involves no serious censure upon the poet’s art” (XIX). Intriguingly, Morey argues that Aristotle introduces a clear distinction between the poet and the one who delivers (acts) the lines of poetry. In my terms, the medium and the message are quite distinct! It is the actors of such poems who must know how to deliver the lines, not the poet, and, Aristotle argues, “we may, therefore, pass this over as an inquiry that belongs to another art, not to poetry” (qtd. in 395). As Bialostosky observes, Aristotle refers this mode of speaking “to an ‘art of Delivery’ that belongs in neither poetics nor rhetoric” (396).
What we can take away from this reading is that in certain passages in the *Poetics*, *hypokrisis* offered a vexed relationship with materiality and non-logical factors that Aristotle tries to immunize while safeguarding the primary work of invention in logic, speech, and language. In one way, we might infer that he has retained Plato’s “mimetic” requirement for speaking beings where body and soul must align to the exorcism of *hypokritical* noise. In one related example, he privileges moments where authors acted in their own plays. In these circumstances, Kennedy notes, “Thus there was no need to consider the oral interpretation of a play separately from the presentation of it by the author. With occasional exceptions, plays were only performed once, but written copies were available to the reading public” (195 n.4). As was the case with Plato, we see Aristotle worried about dissimulation and the *logos* taking on different meanings than the logical invention of the rhetor. To draw a modern day parallel, we might imagine that Aristotle could express horror by reader-response theory and poststructuralist approaches to rhetoric where, to invoke Roland Barthes, “the death of the author” is the birth of the reader. To be “material” is to be circulatory and bound up with other actors and in other networks.

As has been more well-documented, *The Rhetoric* also offers fragments of writing that further indicate Aristotle’s potential distrust of delivery. He firmly concedes that any comprehensive treatment of rhetoric will necessarily address the topic. In other words, delivery has a role in rhetoric that should not be completely eliminated. Yet, it is also true that it that it is in *The Rhetoric* that delivery gained its infamous “vulgar” status, and I will quote him at length on this subject,
An art concerned with [the delivery of oratory] has not yet been composed, since even considerations of lexis was late in developing, and delivery seems a vulgar matter when rightly understood. But since the whole business of rhetoric is with opinion, one should pay attention to delivery, not because it is right but because it is necessary, since true justice seeks nothing more in a speech than neither to offend nor to entertain; for to contend by a means of the facts themselves is just, with the result that everything but demonstration is incidental; but nevertheless [delivery] has great power, as has been said, because of the corruption of the audience.

(III.i.5)

I want to draw another speculative comparison to my reading of Plato above via Serres. This passage indicates that Aristotle has retained the Platonic conceit of wishing to eliminate various sources of “noise”—nonsymbolic forces, emotion, styles, affects—from spoken facts. The body—and any potential ability of language to be a materializable and interactive affect at phenomenological registers other than the symbolic—is cast aside because any persuasive elements that the body responds to that is not logic is irrational. The audience’s ability to respond, deliberate, and be affected is removed in a similar sense to the Socratic Ideal judge.

What we find in Aristotle’s scattered notes on delivery is the desire to limit the non-symbolic “accident” or semblance—dissembling or concealment—from the work of delivery. Delivery is where even bare facts that should be transmitted without artistic proof (atechnē) become exposed to the possibility of cookery. In keeping with Plato’s
metaphor, Aristotle refers to delivery as “adultering wines” (III.ii.4), an analogy that hearkens back to Socrates’ complaints of the intoxicating effect of rhetoric in the Phaedrus. The full passage reads:

Authors should compose without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally. The latter is persuasive, the former the opposite; for [if artifice is obvious] people become resentful, as at someone plotting against them, just as they are at those adultering wines.

(III.ii.4 1404b)

Aristotle’s notion of rhetoric as concealment is commonly understood, as Carolyn Miller has suggested in “Should We Name the Tools?” Paradoxically, Aristotle here admits that some degree of artifice is in fact necessary to the act of persuasion, while his previous condemnations of delivery are intended to minimize its “adultering effects.”

Thus, I do not believe it is any great stretch to claim that Aristotle considers delivery a part of the canon not because it is part of the art of rhetoric, but because of its potential to undermine truth (and I credit Morey with calling my attention to this dimension). Aristotle writes, it is “because of the corruption of the audience” that delivery has great power (Rhetoric 1404a). In the end “to contend by means of facts themselves is just,” and rhetoric tends toward stylistic adornment in that “everything except demonstration is incidental” (1404a). By corruption, Aristotle surely means that the audience does not understand dialectic (episteme) and settles for (doxa). In his desire for the transparency of the logos and for the motivation of the rhetor to match the facts (e.g., for the soul and body to be aligned), Aristotle, like Plato, implicitly wishes for the
actual disappearance of an embodied audience, the _demos_, who responds to any other form of affect than the idealism of the _logos_. Audiences must be present, but Aristotle desires to negate certain affectable elements of their presence, especially their ability to respond to something other than proofs grounded in dialectic or oral persuasion. Again, to repeat my earlier point, Plato and Aristotle differ greatly, but it would seem as if they share many points of overlap regarding their distrust of delivery. Thus, Aristotle writes, “the assemblyman and the juryman . . . friendliness and hostility and individual self-interest are often involved with the result that they are no longer able to see the truth adequately, but their private pleasure or grief casts a shadow on their judgment” (1.1.7).

The Greek reductions of delivery as well as style were far reaching. Richard Whatley suggests in the current-tradition/neo-Aristotelian movements that followed the Enlightenment, “[to] be sure that style does not outshine the sense” (17). In this sense, delivery must mediate between the realms of invention-style and an actual audience while being carefully restrained by—as we shall see in Chapter 6—decorum and morality.

**Delivery Matters without Mattering: Digital Delivery**

To recap the points raised in the previous section, Plato can be interpreted as basic split between logical/propositional/content and delivery/medium/form. As a necessary form of “embodiment” delivery is viewed as a disruptive but essential property of the artifice of rhetoric. From Plato and Aristotle’s respective views, delivery was not a _technē_ to be embraced, but an abject—a source of noise—to be safeguarded against or employed only out of recognition of the intellectual inferiority of the _demos_. The body, in other words, was to be the “featherless biped” that Diogenes of Sinope, another classical
thinker interested in visual and bodily rhetorics, criticized in Platonic accounts of language and, we could add, in the Aristotelian disembodiment of the rhetor’s audience.\textsuperscript{34}

One possible reading of Plato is that he desired a state of pure communication where an argument would issue forth from a de-sexed, de-materialized, ghostly, and absent body.\textsuperscript{35}

Any broader considerations of material ecology, dissemination, and circulation were also to be avoided.

In the next chapter, I will actually redefine a typical reading of the Platonic understanding of \textit{hypokrisis} and concealment as a nonmodern/realist ontological condition of all material entities as they engage in and structure the activity of delivery. Of course, this argument will necessarily constitute a speculative extension of Plato.

Before making this argument, however, I want to compare these classical understandings of delivery to its reclamation by rhetorical theorists in the late twentieth-century. My argument is that contemporary delivery theorists have only partially overturned Plato and Aristotle and still far short of a theory of delivery that can account for a nonmodern theory of technological agency. Delivery theorists are sensitive to how the canon of delivery has historically exposed the nonsymbolic character, mediality, and materiality of all speech acts. Adrian Johns, a frequent touchstone in these conversations, points out in \textit{The Nature of the Book} that print culture provides only the illusion of a fixed text, and the digital only makes this illusion more visible. Such is still a testament to the influence of McLuhan’s influence seen in claims such as “environments are invisible. Their ground rules, pervasive structure and overall patterns elude easy perception” (\textit{Medium is the Massage} 84). What he means by this is that new communications technologies make
visible the technological mediation of older communications technology. The modern tendency is to “naturalize” technology, rendering its complex affective influences to instrumental invisibility. Along similar lines, delivery scholars specifically reject Plato and Aristotle’s respective attempts to preserve the transcendental nature of reason/logic by eliminating its material and embodied dimensions.

However, by equating delivery with the medium, delivery theorists nevertheless preserve a social constructivist view of language and rhetoric while circumscribing “medium” to the instrumental use of technology or the transmission of symbolic content. As I will go on to argue in Chapters 4, 5 and 6, this reduction of technology to human perception and instrumentality haunts discussions of new media rhetoric where rhetorical theorists have generally joined the humanities writ large in looking at the meaning and cultural contexts of technologies without actually examining the role played by hardware, software, and algorithms. Delivery is the medium but only in so far as scholars do not actually have to engage with technology beyond what appears on the screen.

Demosthenes, one of the few Greek thinkers who embraced delivery, famously used to practice oratory by shouting at waves (Lucian 1-16). As I will suggest below, the analogy with contemporary delivery scholars would be the equivalent of Demosthenes practicing his oratory by shouting at a painting of waves, and pretending as if human perception and mental images could always substitute for a more complex and reciprocal accounting of the ecological unfolding of delivery within complexes of human and nonhuman action. In refusing to allow materiality itself to possess an affective hypokritical hidden nature, delivery theorists have missed some of the most crucial insights offered by new media
theorists, actor-network theorists, hardware and software studies, and assemblage theorists who, I will suggest in the next chapter in a way similar to Sean Morey’s re-classification of delivery via Deleuze and Ulmerian avatar, but with a specifically ontological emphasis, form the contemporary equivalent of the classical precedent in delivery seen in Demosthenes, Diogenes, Quintilian, and Cicero.

In the centuries that followed its classical formulations, delivery largely diminished in prominence in Western rhetorical traditions until the 1990’s. Despite the resurgent interest in delivery, as of 2006, Jacobi is correct in his claim, “delivery today is often sidebarred in rhetorical theory courses, and perhaps because of the privileging of written over oral rhetoric . . . it is not studied or taught in the way that invention, arrangement, and style are” (21). Delivery was not alone in its marginalization. Welch also argues that that the “truncation” of the five canons into style, arrangement, and invention is also reinforced by the majority of writing textbooks with both delivery and memory falling by the wayside. Delivery is implicitly taught in acting courses in the theater department or through elocution in speech studies or a small number of communication studies departments. Delivery’s importance as it still is today in public speaking classrooms, is often in exercitation (practice exercises) and declamations of rhetoric (Jacobi 17). Retaining its link to embodiment and acting, delivery is often reduced to a form of rote training that ensures that the logos has been inscribed upon the soul or the mind, and can be recalled effortlessly and, at best, stylistically. It is heavily regulated by “memory” in other words. For many in rhetoric, there exists the general impression that delivery is a list of obvious elements for effectively delivering the
primary canons (e.g. invention, style, and arrangement) much in the same sense as one delivers a pizza. Brooke writes, “Delivery, in everyday parlance, is a transitive process; it is rare to speak of delivering without an object that is being delivered” (170). When it is acknowledged, delivery is a secondary consideration that remains subsumed to invention and cognition.

This legacy of neglect helps explain why the rise of pervasive technological mediation, computers, and digital and visual rhetoric became a natural exigence to revitalize the fifth canon. McCorkle offers an excellent literature review of contemporary delivery scholarship since Richard Lanham and I have no intention of doubling his efforts (10-65). I will instead simply emphasize some of the major works that will allow me to demonstrate the limitations inherent in the delivery-is-the-medium claim. The reclamation of delivery owes large inspiration to Lanham’s landmark text *The Electronic Word*. In *The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment*, McLuhan writes, “An environment is naturally of low intensity and low definition. That is why it escapes observation” (15). In McLuhan’s assessment, humanists traditionally focus on the symbolic content and not the ground. Drawing on McLuhan, Lanham productively redefined rhetoric from an invention-centered and de-materialized activity to an act of “composing with various materials to create diverse kinds of communications for various purposes and audience” (148). As Lanham maintains in *The Electronic Word*, print culture and codex book supported a “transparent” aesthetic: “In this world, language is a neutral and transparent conduit for preexistent facts. . . . One can see how easily this transparent ideal for language mapped onto the aesthetics of print. The ‘crystal goblet’
theory of typography that matured in the nineteenth century was simply a Ramist theory of language transferred to the aesthetics of print” (195-96). Such observations form the foundation for Lanham’s famous “at/through” division that would inform the extra-text features of objects, whereby homogenous formal elements (uniform typeface) encourage us to look through the text, ignoring the material and visual instantiations that we can only see by looking “at” it. In other words, he made a strong move to emphasize the materiality of writing while simultaneously overturning the form/content and message/medium splits that sustained a view of writing as unmediated. Lanham importantly made a connection between delivery and technology provoked by the increasing mediation of society through electronic texts.

While Lanham certainly provided a strong impetus to consider the medium of rhetoric, he was by no means alone. Prior to Lanham, William E. Tanner’s (1976) “delivery, Delivery, DELIVERY” used delivery to analyze material or physical attributes of text, focusing on elements such as “layout, typography and related textual design elements” (171). The different fonts in his title performatively and self-consciously highlight the materiality and visuality of print aesthetics. Tanner and Lanham’s work were both cited as exigences for revitalizing the canon of delivery in subsequent essays such as Kathleen Hall Jamieson’s *Eloquence in the Electronic Age*, John Frederick Reynolds’s “Classical Rhetoric and Computer-Assisted Composition,” Reynolds’s edited collection *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery*, Robert J. Connors’ two part essay, “Actio,” and Sam Dragga’s “The Ethics of Delivery.” This edited collection remains a landmark study of electronic delivery, looked to resurrect the “problem canons” of memory and
delivery. They were problem canons precisely because of their imbrication with archival technologies and technologies of communication that computers were making more visible. In the introduction, cultural materialist Bruce Horner stated the exigence clearly: “there can be no complete rhetoric without a consideration of all five of its canons” (15). Several theorists in this collection immediately tied delivery to Walter J. Ong’s thinking of secondary orality. Sheri L. Helsley writes in the afterword, “when we interpret delivery as presentation or secondary orality, we do important things for our students. We restore the reclusiveness and synthesis originally envisioned in the interaction of the five canons” (182).

Another noteworthy essay in this collection is Jay David Bolter’s “Hypertext and the Rhetorical Canon,” where he actually makes the claim that delivery should not only be reinstated but conceived of as the master canon. If for static texts, a piece of writing is linear and it is arranged and organized so that it appears to mirror the cause-effect reasoning of thought, then the nonlinear narratives of hypertext make up an interactive assemblage: “In electronic rhetoric, delivery once again becomes central, because the text itself is defined in the act of delivery” (99-100). In electronic texts such as hypertext websites or fiction, the rhetor cannot ultimately control how the reader interacts with the various links and nodes present on the text. Delivery, for Bolter, means an entirely post-rhetorical or posthuman view of rhetorical interaction more akin to Roland Barthes’s *Pleasure of the Text* where the reader and not the author create the text’s meaning. Connors as well examines how the absent author is delivered in electronic environments.
If Plato already suspected a self-division in the actor/rhetor, then electronic writing was held to have multiplied and fragmented this split self.42

At this point, I want to highlight the specific claims of scholars who equate delivery with the medium. According to Welch’s essay “Reconfiguring Writing and Delivery in Secondary Orality,” delivery should be taught as a form empowerment and critical consciousness about the effects of the medium on rhetoric. Further, Welch maintains that “delivery is a site for excavating how electronic forms of discourse have changed the way that rhetoric operates now and how strong-text theorists . . . have not taken account of it. Delivery now is secondary orality in the sense that Walter J. Ong develops it” (22). Later in Contemporary Reception, Welch renewed her arguments for study of the delivery predicated on McLuhan and Ong: “rather than limiting delivery to physical gesture and expression that take place during speaking, we can relate it to the idea of medium. This point is made in Patrick Mahony’s article “Marshall McLuhan in the Light of Classical Rhetoric” when he reveals that the fifth canon ultimately signifies medium” (Contemporary Reception 99). Mahony writes, “As a theoretician of rhetoric, McLuhan’s main contribution lies in the fact that he has developed and broadened the fifth category of traditional rhetoric” (qtd. in Welch 99). Welch concludes, “If delivery is regarded as medium, then the dynamics of the canon are reinvested with their original power” (100).43 To Welch’s argument, Jamieson adds an important criteria: the renewed attention to delivery should not only include the analysis of media but the production through media as well. This sentiment is echoed by Reynolds’ declaration: “the full original power of the classical canons is restored only if they can be sued for both
encoding and decoding. Further, as writing teachers, we must help our students discover not merely their medium, but what to do when using that medium” (106). Given the history that I have sketched, such a view sounds very empowering in the sense of Donna Haraway-esque definition of cyborg writers: “cyborg writing is about the power to survive . . . on the basis of seizing the tools to mark the world that marked them as other” (“A Cyborg Manifesto” 175). Subsequently, scholars such as Jamieson began to engage in an Aristotle-like examination of the technê of multimodal delivery itself including “pans of audience, fade-out effects” and other techniques of televisual editing (156).

**Delivery Is Still (Not) the Medium: Problems with Delivery’s McLuhanism**

Andrea Lunsfords’ Computers and Writing Conference address, “Writing, Technologies, and the Fifth Canon” (2005) and Kathleen Blake Yancey’s *Delivering College Composition* (2006) both demonstrate that renewed attention to delivery has indeed been widely called for in recent years. “In our present moment,” McCorkle confirms, “a number of rhetorical theorists are extending our body-centric notion of delivery so that it no longer deals exclusively with the vocal or gestural aspects of an oration but also with the medium, design elements, or paratextual features of non-oratorical artifacts” (2). Following from the claim that delivery is the medium, delivery has now taken center-stage to the point where it is firmly imbricated in processes of invention and logic. By 2009 in “Why Napster Matters,” DeVoss and Porter baldly argue that we should not merely reclaim the fifth canon; rather, we should posit a unique “theory of digital delivery” itself that reflects contemporary developments in networked writing, multimodal production, digital literacy, and technological development. Carolyn
D. Rude writes

These analogies to visual design and medium reinforce the important concept that until an idea becomes public (through publication or through delivery of a speech to an audience), it cannot influence an audience to act. The presentation of content influences its availability and reception. Performance has the power to make concepts understandable and to convey urgency. Delivery is essential to persuasion. (58)

Subsequent contributors to scholarship on delivery have also extended or supplemented delivery through considerations of “post-rhetorical” features such as circulation through various technological networks (Eyman; Porter; DeVoss). Delivery is now frequently allied to non-symbolic aspects of rhetoric, including the “construction of websites, graphic design, digital video, and related digital texts” (Lynch and Horton; Farkas and Farkas), document or interface design (Brooke), paratextual features, or, more recently, the selection of computer file format (Sherida et al.). All delivery scholars explicitly or tacitly accept Welch’s presupposition that delivery should be the medium of communication or the technology used in the creation of symbolic content. Granted this presupposition, the most recent debates over the past five years now center on whether postproductive activity, recomposition, “rhetorical velocity” (DeVoss and Porter), and circulation are part of the canon of delivery and primary rhetorical activities or distinct postrhetorical events that occur after the act of delivery as Douglas Eyman has maintained.
There are three major points that are worth emphasizing at this late 1990’s/early 2000’s juncture in the historical reclamation of delivery. First, the focus on McLuhan and Ong comes at expense of considering theorists of technology who argued that technology was much more than its instrumental affects such as can be seen in the work of Martin Heidegger or Friedrich Kittler. Also not considered were posthumanist perspectives in N. Katherine Hayles or actor-network approaches in John Law (and Latour). To be more accurate, it is that the invocation of technology comes by only a partial realization of McLuhan’s actual thoughts on the medium. McLuhan’s famous figure/ground shift is predicated on gestalt psychology where, to reinvoke Lanham’s at/through distinction, we look at symbols/representations and *through mediums*. To very clear by what I mean here, I am not accusing delivery theorists of avoiding a focus on mediality as the ground—far from it! It is more the case that what actor-network demonstrated in the previous chapter, and I will continue to demonstrate in subsequent chapters, we are still looking *through* technology—at the figure and not the ground—when invention, anti-realist constructivism, and human agency is the hermeneutic paradigm. Indeed, this pattern of selectively drawing on certain technology theorists who complement but do not interrupt the constructivist mindset of rhetoric will continue throughout the present given the anti-realist/culturalist bias of humanities scholars.

For example, it is worth mentioning that McLuhan himself did not actually focus on our instrumental use of technology alone. Where Porter equates delivery with information (a passive technological object), McLuhan indicates that technology was an affective agent in the world: “the effects of technology do not occur at the level of
opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance” (18). Although Latour and McLuhan are seldom placed into conversation, McLuhan definitely recommends a Latourian form of “accounting” (as I defined in Chapter 2 of this dissertation), that is, he recommends probing the “ground” of technology and compiling a list of objects engaged in relations without being specific about their relationships. Simply put, the medium for McLuhan is more than merely learning instrumental techné in Jamieson’s sense. Similarly, Latour, like the assemblage theorists and hardware and software studies theorists I will consider later, is interested in an empirical account of “science” as a ground for practices “in the making” and the process of establishing and forging new alliances. Against Welch’s account, Latour, like McLuhan, does not begin with stable passive objects which the user encodes and decodes, but in the Deleuzian middle: “Things and thoughts advance or grow out from the middle, and that’s where you have to get to work, that’s where everything unfolds” (“On Leibniz” 15). In fact, as Harman has pointed on in “Everything Is Not Connected,” McLuhan actually makes a move to dissociate rhetoric from symbolic activity: “If dialectic is the art of the surface, rhetoric is the art of the background” (“McLuhan” 3).

Second, from Lanham to the present, we can observe the emergence of a single-overarching problem that will haunt with the selective or incomplete “recovery” of delivery’s materiality. Lanham’s (like McLuhan’s) primary motivations for “revealing” the mediality of print communication were predicated on the emergence of new technologies of communication seen from the immediate perspective of the user. I do not want to be misinterpreted in making this claim. In McLuhan’s sense, Lanham desires to
analyze the “ground” beneath the figure (the symbolic). However, while Latour’s actor-network theory strives for an empirical, archaeological, and symmetrical narrative, Lanham’s narrative remains asymmetrical and modern. As McCorkle has observed, following from Lanham’s McLuhanism, the general interest in delivery as the medium was not born, in other words, of a more complex and historical engagement with technology as a material actor or ecological force in the world. Such a problem has been widely noted by new media theorists like Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, who writes in the introduction to *New Media, Old Media*, “the moment one accepts new media, one if firmly located within a technological progressivism that thrives on obsolescence and that prevents active thinking about technology-knowledge-power” (xiv). In other words, “new media,” not unlike scholarly interest in delivery, is a term that tells more about the motivations and critical lens of the theorists who desire to carve out new media as a singularly unique analytical entity—a set of discrete objects for study—than it ever does describe the material contingent human and nonhuman forces that give rise to the human-nonhuman technological relationships. Thus, McCorkle warns that delivery scholars must be careful of fetishizing the current prominence of delivery as exceptional. He makes this claim not only because delivery was in fact prominent in other classical thinkers such as Demosthenes and Quintilian, but also because such claims tend to reflect a Western ethnocentrism. As Angela Haas has documented, American Indians wampum trade was an era social arrangement that privileged delivery as a rhetorical medium.

Three, and this claim is really an extension of the second point that McCorkle raises, it is worth questioning why mediality becomes the privileged locus and not
materiality in general. Jodi Shipka’s *Toward a Composition Made Whole* suggests that too often technology’s materiality is reduced to digital or televisual media. Similarly, while McLuhan is very valuable in many respects, he only gives us a theory of technological agency to the total determination of the affective capacities of other non-technological actors in the activity of delivery. McLuhan fetishized the medium as the prime mover in modern societies, ignoring, actually, the constitutive agency of human and non-mass media technological participants. In other words, McLuhan replaced the view of a subject totally determining the technological object, with the view of the technological object totally determining the subject. In the evaluation of cultural, social, and rhetorical phenomena, the medium is the *only* mover for McLuhan while Latour and other nonmodern thinkers are also interested in non-technological actors such as sidewalks, scientific reports, disposable coffee cups, summer blockbuster films, cow herding practices, and freeways. An actant can be an automatic door opener in Latour’s vision of reality, or it may be Michel Callon’s scallops in the sea. Furthermore, although materiality is a necessary concern in the interests of telling a symmetrical narrative of reality, a nonmodern view also respects Burke’s understanding that symbols and ideas themselves create affects independent of their medium of transmission as they circulate through neural pathways, social movements, handshakes, and barred arms in front of tanks. In other words, scholars would not only need to examine “pan-outs” and fades in Jamieson’s example above, but include the other actors—human as well nonhuman—within other networks that condition the complex emergence of producing a television show.
Delivery is (Almost) the Medium: McCorkle and Brooke

While a restricted and, in certain places, uncritical McLuhanism govern the origin of the delivery is the medium claim, two of the most recent scholarly treatments of delivery in Brooke’s *Lingua Fracta* and McCorkle’s *Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse* do offer crucial revisions on this perspective. In fact, the way in which I will argue that the seeds of the way in which the canon should be defined in a nonmodern *cosmos* can be found in element that lie within both scholars’ work. I will suggest that each has articulated a part of a nonmodern theory delivery that the other is missing, and I intend to combine them into a cogent statement. From McCorkle, we get a rigorous attention to the empirical practices of materiality and technology divorced from a fetishization of the symbolic, instrumental, and representational. Yet, McCorkle does not offer a new theory of materiality through which to conceive of delivery. He is ultimately interested in taking a broader material and historical look at how the canon has been theorized. Simply put, he has diagnosed the problem, but has yet to actually take the step of arguing for the way in which the canon can be redefined.

By contrast, Brooke does in fact offer a theory of delivery predicated on a non-instrumental view of delivery in new media technology. He is less interested in historical studies than in articulating a unique theory of delivery specific to new media composition and digital rhetoric. However, Brooke suffers from the problem that McCorkle identifies: he is too fixated on what is ontologically distinct about new media technology, and fails to develop a broader understanding of the canon historically and materiality. He successfully decenters invention and starts to grant technology a sense of agency, but his
understanding of delivery as performativity falls short. Thus, taking a nonmodern 

historiographical accounting from McCorkle and ontological redefinition away from 
instrumentality from Brooke, I will close this chapter by locating the way in which I will 
argue that canon can be productively redefined.

McCorkle offers a broad historical perspective of materiality, technology, and 
delivery. McCorkle’s very accurate claim,

one that will carry great resonance for helping us complicating delivery 
and materiality, is that while the idea that delivery’s scope can be widened 
to accommodate the practices associated with graphic design, digital 
editing, or the manipulation of formal elements within a medium is a 
powerful and fruitful notion for the field’s analytical and productive 
efforts, what these new theories of delivery do not acknowledge that this 
interaction with technologies of communication has happened throughout 
the history of rhetoric as a discipline. (152)

He mainly faults some of the previous theorists that I have discussed (Welch; Porter; 
Trimbur) for failing to situate delivery beyond the current historical moment. McCorkle 
continues,

Rhetoric itself is part of that cultural process of remediation, one that 
operates on a level distinct from the formal or technical. In other words, 
rhetoric is not only is a passive means by which writing enters culture but 
also actively helps writing become an increasingly invisible or naturalized
component of the media landscape by virtue of enfolding speakerly and writerly qualities together in prescriptive oratorical performance. (53)

Such a redefinition is an almost archetypal pattern in a long history of interaction between rhetoric and technology. It offers a sort of symbiotic relationship where delivery rises to prominence when massive changes in the way we communicate are subject to technological change. Technological change makes rhetoric’s materiality “visible” and delivery theories rise in prominence. By contrast, when the post-Gutenberg printing press becomes naturalized, logocentrism once more avoids any self-conscious attention to mediation and pretends as if communication were an unmediated representation of thought. Invention and social constructivist models once again reign supreme.

McCorkle’s point is that the Lanham-McLuhan-Welch bloc limited their gaze to modern technology. I noted the American Indian wampum examples above, but even the Greek pynx, for example, amplified the speaker’s voice in order to reach the back row. In a sense, as Sean Morey has suggested, we practice rhetoric now in an era where the pynx is networked through cameras, speakers, and networks that enable a similar goal: the universal and pervasive means to reach an audience via multiple mediums and to offer a message (70; see also Benkler; Shirkey). According to McCorkle,

. . . rhetoric has always been concerned with prescribing rules that deal with the manipulation of material and formal elements of nonverbal texts, even if such rules haven’t always been explicitly labeled as ‘delivery.’ . . .

What these new theories of delivery do not acknowledge is that this interaction with technologies of communication has happened throughout
the history of rhetoric as a discipline. . . . Prima facie, redefining delivery works based upon the logic of immediacy. It takes natural advantage of the canon’s traditional connection to the comparably more ‘natural’ mode of spoken discourse and uses it to build a new association with the emergent technologies of digital writing. In short, the act of redefining delivery generates a direct equation between the performing rhetorical body and the entire class of texts that otherwise have no direct material connection to the body. (29, 3)

McCorkle’s argument boils down to the idea that delivery scholarship lacks a broader conceptual of the historical development of the canon as well as a more open and comprehensive understanding of the materiality of delivery.

In making this observation, McCorkle stops just short of realizing the nonmodern argument about delivery that I want to make simply because his interest is broader than re-theorizing delivery. In other words, one cannot find a claim in his book along the lines of, “delivery should be rethought through considering new ontologies of materiality and nonhuman agency.” Rather, his primary point in *Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse* is to open delivery to a broader dialectical history and to show how its comparative privileging or marginalization corresponds to our naturalization instincts. Frankly, McCorkle’s study is a welcome exercise in historiography more than a novel redefinition of the canon. We can see this in such claims as: “To assume that the arrival of digital technology has somehow ‘allowed’ us to make such a connection [between delivery and technology] glosses over the various ways in which delivery has functioned
as a kind of discursive and institutional validation of new emerging technologies at various moments in Western culture” (36). Here, we can see McCorkle’s focus primarily on the discourse about delivery and how the canon’s relative degrees of privileging or marginalization function as a lens for rhetoric’s more general anxiety about technology.

Where McCorkle provides an exigence for re-thinking of the canon as an emergent relational phenomena distributed across a range of technological actors, Brooke actually poses a redefinition of delivery in new media environments. Similar to my purpose in this dissertation, Brooke wants to reclassify “delivery as performance” in order to reflect the “newness” of new media, arguing that we cannot treat new media objects as “discrete ‘objects’ ” that we deliver and instrumentality. Rather, he urges us to work toward an “intransitive, constitutive performance, rather than transitive or transactional delivery, when it comes to new media” (175).

Brooke usefully situates his definition of delivery in between Welch’s *Contemporary Reception* and John Trimbur’s essay “Delivering the Message.” With respect to Welch’s criticism of the “form/content” divide in composition classrooms that I noted above, Brooke wisely notes that one problem with equating delivery with medium is that the demand of “visibility” that such a claim rests upon (174). He offers the example of one of Welch’s classroom exercises that involved, “interpreting an apparently ordinary electronic text, such as a Coca-Cola advertisement, and probing its ideological positioning as it emerges from the rhetorical canon of delivery” (*Contemporary Reception* 160). Welch adds to the students’ ideological analysis by having them locate Jamieson’s instrumental dimensions of “camera and actor positioning, editing, lighting,
production qualities related to camera and actor position” (162). Brooke offers two specific points of criticism. First, similar to my discussion of Boyle’s invention in Chapter 2, Brooke argues that Welch’s definition of means that the parts— the rhetor’s immanent technē and conscious elements—never add up to the emergent and delivered whole. To recast his criticism in the language that I have been using in this dissertation, the participants’ presences in delivery are never fully exhausted in any relation. Secondly, he observes that an “ironic subtext” exists in that Welch’s questions do not actually talk about the networked medium, its technological specificity, but could apply to nearly any television show regardless of whether it was viewed online or through a standard television screen. Given Brooke’s interest in theorizing a form of delivery specific to new media, this criticism of Welch is highly relevant.

In contrast to Welch, Brooke suggests that Trimbur’s emphasis on circulation over delivery allows scholars a more productive lens. “Delivering the Message” remains a discursive touchstone within technology and composition scholarship. He argues that aspects such as the typographical analysis of the material dimension of printed static texts is a way to help composers locate themselves within labor processes and the “rematerialization” of literacy practices. Trimbur’s essay is notable because he suggests that a focus on typographical conventions are what allow us to “see writing” as it is embedded within a given compositional product. To take up Welch’s television example again, for Trimbur, “students would inquire into the way that advertisement circulated on particular TV channels, at specific times, during certain shows, and so forth” (178). In comparison with Welch, Trimbur moves beyond the immediate and isolated rhetorical
situation toward theorizing the ongoing and circulating affect of delivery. In other words, delivery is not strictly a process that is isolatable to symbolic content or instrumental use of medium.

However, Trimbur fails to consider a complexity of material relations involved in the activity of writing. For example, Cynthia Haynes notes in her essay “In Visible Texts” that Trimbur does not consider the materiality of scrolling textchat in virtual worlds or moving images. There are two additional problems with Trimbur’s formulation. On the one hand, he points us to a material dimension in rhetoric only insofar as it enables our sight. On the other hand and much more problematically, Trimbur’s understanding of “materiality” is limited a fairly orthodox Marxist labor paradigm. In both bases, these is no possibility that the materiality of writing in the processes of delivery and circulation has any semblance of agency. Brooke makes a similar criticism but through a different point of emphasis. Brooke argues, “Circulation captures the importance of movement in the way that information spreads, but it is too easy to fall back into traditional characterizations of physical transfer. The equation of delivery with medium acknowledges the shaping role that information and communication technologies play, but it can too quickly become static set of features the deconstexualizes delivery” (175).

Brooke’s own notion of delivery as performance attempts to remedy this point of contention. He turns to Barthes’s concept of the middle voice (“intransitive”) as he hopes to work against delivery models where “the author delivers ‘reality’ to a passively consuming reader through the medium of language” (176). In this choice, however, we see an immediate limitation. His model in turning to Barthes (and in other chapters) for
new media is hypertext fiction. Barthes shifts performance from the author to the reader, as have numerous commentators such as Bolter. Hypertext is a privileged locus because it is a material and phenomenological instantiation/performance of the author relinquishing final control over her symbolic content, and enabling the reader to complete the meaning of the “finished” product. All new media, to a certain extent, share this property of hypertext. In contrast to old media such as television that flowed one-directionally into a user’s home and never from a user’s home to the producers, networked new media, Web 2.0, and so-called prosumer cultures are characterized by user-generated content. Delivery thus obtains in the complex and embodied encounter between reader and text and is not a neutral reflection of the work of the author, or, better, the one who designed the operating system.

In making this theory of delivery specific to the material and technological properties of new media, Brooke has the right idea and contributes an incredibly valuable refashioning of all of the canons for their applicability to new media. However, one potential difficulty lies in his overemphasis of the interactivity component of new media, retaining the modernist view that “old” media was predicated on a passive audience dictated to by corporate presence. This decision is likely a product of the times when the book was written. When “new media” gained critical currency, new media was trying to actively differentiate itself from “old media.” In other words, Brooke in part falls pray to the ahistoricity of the canon of delivery that McCorkle and Chun respectively complained of above. Let me make this point clear. Brooke notes that performance is not an either/or to set against transitive objects: “The saw Web whereon we can find
Wikipedia [performative] also contains links to .pdf files – graphic replications of printed pages that are frequently uneditable. Put simply, there are plenty of examples of each kind of delivery” (171). Here, performance is akin to a description of a technological “interface,” Brooke’s proposed term for all new media artifacts. Interface prompts us to avoid viewing new media as a static object. By avoiding an ontological engagement with technology and materiality and in strongly differentiating new from old at the level of the visible and encountered interface, he places too much stock in the view of technology from the user’s point of view, missing an invitation to speculate more broadly about the relationship between delivery and rhetoric’s materiality more broadly construed in Latour’s nonmodern sense. To repeat my earlier claim, this is the part where McCorkle’s perspective on delivery is required to supplement Brooke’s. As I will go on to argue in the next chapter, an nonmodern universe of objects would have to hold that all objects have this interfacial characteristic.

Another point of contention with Brooke’s understanding of delivery as performance lies in his commendable but problematic tie of delivery to politics and morality. For example, he cites the Q question where the weak defense of rhetoric is tied to Plato and Isocrates, but also to Ramus’s division of the canon into philosophy and rhetoric as style and delivery. The Strong defense is social-epistemic and assumes that all truths are manmade. Rhetoric is allowed to become a fully creative art in the sense of how Richard McKeon shifts rhetoric from decorative art to architectonic practice. Brooke claims that this makes “performance” the key ingredient, because it is the liberated “hypertext”-like new media creator who creates meaning. Yet, ironically, for an author
who wants to bring technology back in, Lanham is an anti-realist. Performance, thus, is human initiated and human constructed. Brooke attempts to extend these into strong and weak defenses of technology, wherein the weak defense, “treats it analogically as separable into good or bad technology” and locates values within the technologies themselves but not the particular practices, and a strong defense that “would see technologies value only in specific uses; information technology, in particular, would not simply represent messages conceived prior to their ‘physical presentation,’ but rather would be understood as a crucial element in the constitution of the message,” seeing as an “interface, rather than an object” (178); Brooke is correct to value this dimension of media; however, performance only emerges through considering technology from a human user’s standpoint. This again is why performance is drawn upon to offset to “transitive” view of technology and it has no hold on the ontological reality of objects themselves.

Here, my point is not that what Brooke is arguing is fundamentally different from the notion of performance as ontological hypokrisis that I will propose in the next Chapter. Rather, it is that by failing to theorize delivery, circulation, and rhetoric through a nonmodern view of technology and human relationality, delivery and circulation remains a human initiated phenomenon. Culture remains separate from physis and technology. Technologies do, in fact, structure our existences to a far greater extent than is reflected in a reclassification only of new media objects as “interface.” I agree fully with McCorkle in that I do not believe we should think of performativity from the standpoint of the technological specificity of the internet and web 2.0 technology. Rather,
all objects, all technologies, from the pynx to activist newsgames, are engaged in a form of interactivity, presence and absence, material performativity that is not just restricted to the user’s instrumental ability to interact with a .pdf; seen from the standpoint of circulation, a .pdf can be made searchable, commentary added, and so on. Brooke’s view is a definite improvement to “seeing discourse as circulating rather than something that we circulate” (179), but delivery still remains not a Thing, but an “object”—albeit not a fully instrumentalizable one. However, we cannot keep re-emphasizing, as Mark B. Hansen does that “digitalization underwrites a shift in the status of the medium—transforming media from forms of actual inscription of ‘reality’ into variable interface for rendered the raw data of reality” (178). Indeed, in “New Media Dwelling,” Jenny Bay and Thomas Rickert have maintained that Hansen, like Brooke, reduces technological essence to shifts in human perception alone, reinscribing a covert form of humanism even within the pretenses of maintaining of posthumanist view of technology. Maintaining this gap and seeing “performativity” as a unique property of new media rather than as a property of all acts of delivery, is yet another way of retaining a humanist measure for technological intercourse.

**Toward Ontological Hypokrisis**

Delivery has yet to actually overcome Aristotle’s reduction of the role that nonsymbolic actors play in the activity of delivery. Compare Brooke’s notion of interface to the understanding of computational and algorithmic new media articulated by software and hardware studies theorists. In Programmed Visions, Wendy Chun describes how the very material contingency and circulatory nature of computer code in itself should also be
taken into consideration. The commonplace view of code as fixed and static is misleading. Chun argues, “Code does not always or automatically do what its says . . . it carries with it the possibility of deviousness . . . execution, and a whole series of executions, belatedly makes some piece of code a source, which is again why source code was initially called pseudo code” (24). In excellent Derridian fashion, she maintains, “source code becomes a source only through its destruction, through its simultaneous nonpresence and presence . . . it is neither dead repetition nor living speech; nor is it a machine that erases the difference between the two. It, rather, puts in place a relation between life and death, between present and representation, between two apparatuses” (24-25). Chun’s argument confirms the view of delivery through code and procedural rhetorics is a form hypocritical self-deception. Hypokrisis etymologically means dissembling, acting, and performing while nevertheless retaining a hidden—concealed—potentiality for new actions across new assemblages of actors. Chun confirms once more the relevance of the classical understanding of delivery as hypokrisis at the material/medial level for contemporary considerations of technological agency and materiality.

Chun’s comments point to the fact that it is not just rhetors who conceal their means of persuasion and affect by “acting” in the event of delivery and the materialization of rhetoric. When we move the rhetorical situation from Welch’s isolatable view of delivery or from Brooke’s phenomenological view of technology, all computational actors are “devious” and not fully disclosed. Why stop with language or technology? In a biopolitical era of genetic decoding and neurorhetorics and nonhuman actors, I would argue that it is necessary to consider how the body itself gathers and is
gathered. How do technologies self-organize into emergent totalities with human users?

In Spinoza’s conatus or Heideggerian Dasein, DNA’s disclosure itself contains accidents and self-organizing tendencies—performances. Celeste Condit offers a non-technological example: “the complaint that DNA is nothing but immaterial code is frustratingly similar to the ‘common-sense’ dismissal of language by many people on the grounds that it is immaterial – mere words, nothing but air vibrating, the opposite of ‘deeds’ or the real” (327). Indeed, Diana Coole and Samantha Frost argued that the human genome project upon completion abandoned any pretension of genetic determinism, looking instead at the complex interplay among genes, environment, diet, and environmental conditions (7). As I will suggest in the next chapter, concealment—acting—is both a metaphoric and actual property of all material actors in a nonmodern realism. Agency and rhetoric are thus emergent phenomena. We cannot isolate the rhetorical situation a la Lloyd Bitzer. Instead, as Jenny Edbauer writes in “Un/Framing Models of Public Distribution,” rhetoric is a “doing,” an unfolding event of the circulation of forces. In other words, who and what is allowed to count as a substance, a being worthy of being accounted for not only animated rhetoric’s marginalization, but it now contributes to how rhetoric remains complicit in a sort of re-marginalization of matter in itself.

The most recent new media scholarship is already drifting in these directions. Sarah Kember and Joanna Zylinska argue in Life After New Media that we need to stop thinking of new media as a “set of discrete objects (the computer, the cell phone, the iPod, the e-book reader)” study instead the “interlocking of technical and biological processes” (1). To invoke Cooper’s claim above about whether writing is an ecological metaphor or
reflective of the actual processes themselves, Kember and Zylinska note, “doing so quickly reveals that life itself under certain circumstances becomes articulated as a medium that is subject to the same mechanisms of reproduction, transformation, flattening, and patenting that other media forms (CDs, video cassettes, chemically printed photographs, and so on) underwent previously” (2). In contrast to Michael Carter’s postmodern assertion in Where Writing Begins that writing begins with the decentered subject in language, the nonmodern view of new media writing and delivery does not begin with affect set into motion by a human actor. Rather, rhetoric and writing emerge relationally within the specific material conditions of possibility for communication within a number of complex points of emergence, while allowing objects to conceal themselves. In contrast to Brooke, “intransitivity” for Kember and Zylinksa is not merely a property of new media, but of all actors—hardware along with software and graphic user interfaces. Thus, in Chapter 4, I will argue that the key to understanding new media rhetoric and writing in a world of nonhuman technological actors will be to revise our understanding of delivery’s hypokritical nature as an ontological material condition—a variant of a nonmodern agential realism.
CHAPTER 4
CONCRESENCE, CIRCULATION, AND ECOLOGY

The [object] is . . . directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it; the invest it, mark it, train it, . . . force it to carry out tasks, to perform ceremonies, to emit signs . . . power is not exercised simply as an obligation or prohibition on those who do not have it; it invests them, is transmitted by them and through them; it exerts pressure upon them, just as they themselves, in their struggle against it, resist the grip it has on them.

Michel Foucault

According to Bohr, the central lesson of quantum mechanics is that we are part of the nature we seek to understand . . . Matter, like meaning, is not an individually articulated or static entity. Matter is not little bits of nature, or a blank slate, surface, or site passively awaiting signification; nor is it an uncontested ground for scientific, feminist, or Marxist theories. Matter is not a support, location, referent, or source of sustainability for discourse. Matter is not immutable or passive. It does not require the mark of external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity.

Karen Barad

Just link. Just link. Just link

Victor J. Vitanza

Matter and Hypokrisis

Building on the history of classical and contemporary delivery that I documented in Chapter 3, my suggestion is that a nonmodern conception of delivery will enable us to more productively describe the activity of delivery in new media and digital rhetoric. Unlike general humanist accounts of rhetoric, David Metzger argues in The Lost Cause of Rhetoric that Aristotle calls rhetoric a dynamis, “a faculty for discovering the available means of persuasion” (17). For Metzger, Aristotelian rhetoric is not isolatable to a specific performance or act. Rhetoric is instead a condition for any such act. Despite Aristotle’s dislike of certain elements of delivery, Metzger’s interpretation offers a view of rhetoric as an unfolding and emergent practice. This interpretation is more in keeping
with Thomas Rickert’s ambient rhetoric than with Kathleen Welch’s or James E. Porter’s reduction of delivery technology to the user’s manipulation of symbolic information. Unlike Aristotle, dynamis in Rickert’s sense would not be an exclusively human-initiated or cognitive faculty, and it is my argument in this chapter that it is along these lines that delivery as an activity of “ontological hypokrisis” can be articulated.46

In particular, delivery’s Greek etymological root—hypokrisis—and its relationship to acting and concealment must extend far beyond the rhetor’s concealment of artifice and instead refer to the rhetor’s agentive emergent within networks of nonhuman material actors. In a nonmodern universe, the body does not simply deliver symbolic content through a neutral medium. The body—the object or the nonhuman—delivers: it writes and is written upon. In Bodily Natures, Stacy Alaimo offers the example of her hair follicles. During Greenpeace’s 2004-2005 campaign against mercury contamination, Alaimo describes how she took advantage of their offer for consumers to send in a sample of their hair to be tested for mercury contamination. She writes, “When I received my results, I imagined various routes that mercury may have taken to my body (tuna sandwiches in childhood? Dallas air pollution?), but I was also struck by the bare number on the page (.35) and the process by which scientific testing transformed my hair into a chunk of data (not unlike Latour’s ‘circulating reference’) (19-20). Regardless of her conscious actions, Alaimo’s hair has been written on by her ecological relationships with chemicals and other environmental factors. She offers the nonmodern concept of “Trans-corporeality” to describe both humans’ perpetual entanglement with nature (physis) and all bodies’ capacities to act and to be acted on by complex material
complexes and agencies. Matter “conceals” in the sense that its self-organization and conative vibrancy transcends our instrumental aims and representational mastery.

A view of new media delivery as ontological hypokrisis should offer an identical vision as the one that Alaimo suggests in transcorporeality. Ontological hypokrisis should be able to describe technology’s self-organization and our trans-corporeality with and through nonhuman actors. A realization of delivery scholars’ goals of equating medium with delivery needs to account for Kevin Kelly’s articulation of the “technium”: “a word to designate the greater, global, massively interconnected system of technology vibrating around us” (282). Kelly argues that technologies have always co-produced the instrumental conditions under which we use them. Humans produce technologies and technologies help to produce the human. Technologies participate greatly in shaping the conditions—material dynamis—under which agency and rhetoricality obtain. The fact that technologies can be instrumentalized is not as important as the analysis of network of interdependencies in which technological actors are situated and the degrees of influence that they exercise on other human and nonhuman actors. Thus, we must improve on Bruno Latour’s nonmodern framework of technological agency from We Have Never Been Modern that I discussed in Chapter 2. Referenced by Alaimo previously, Latour’s concept of circulating reference makes little ontological claim about matter’s substantiality or reality. Latour is what Graham Harman describes as a “relationist”: he examines relations and provides accounts for how meanings circulate and take form within the human-nonhuman collective (Prince of Networks 213). As Latour readily concedes in Reassembling the Social, actor-network theory does not provide a “positive”
account of reality (e.g., an ontological statement of what exists) (151-175). His primary goal is to offer new conceptual and analytical means of analyzing the composition of the social. To offer a proper ontological consideration of nonmodern delivery, I will need to incorporate not just the Latourian procedure of accounting, but also an ontological re-envisioning of matter itself away from its neo-Kantian, Cartesian, and Newtonian legacies. In other words, I suggest that it is necessary to offer a rhetorical ontology that departs radically from its anti-realist and epistemic roots in the twentieth-century.

To accomplish this aim, I have three main goals. First, I want to draw on Morey’s *Delivery@Machines* and Duncan’s *Performance and Identity* to locate a nonmodern prototype for delivery in the classical thought of Demosthenes, Quintilian, and Cicero. Largely ignored or not fully explored by contemporary delivery scholars, these classical thinkers offered a view of rhetoric where delivery was the privileged canon. Furthermore, they articulated a nascent conception of delivery as a process that occurs in an ecological space of entanglement and emergence. I will draw largely on Morey’s reading of these figures because my primary purpose in this dissertation is not to make a classical but a contemporary intervention. I consequently will suggest that the contemporary equivalents of these classical models can be found in the work of certain nonmodern scholars who are associated with the nonhuman turn. In particular, I will draw on the Heideggerian-inspired object-oriented ontology (OOO) branch, including Graham Harman and Timothy Morton. In particular, I will focus on Morton’s essay, “Sublime Objects,” as he specifically theorizes what he defines as an “object-oriented delivery” (14). Morton’s
OOO provides conceptual frameworks that are very useful for conceiving of delivery as an ontological condition of rhetoric.

Secondly, I will extend and modify the OOO emphasis on the object’s withdrawn (e.g., concealed) reality through Karen Barad’s concept of “agential realism.” These two theories—OOO and Barad’s agential realism—overlap in very productive ways. Agential realism is useful as a point of contrast with OOO because Barad focuses not only on what objects conceal in the activity of delivery, but also the ways in which objects emerge as concrete forces in the world with regard to human perception and representation. Where delivery as performativity for Collin Gifford Brooke referred to the human perception of new media, Barad turns to the physicist Niels Bohr to propose a neo-vitalist understanding of material performativity as an ontological condition of all human and nonhuman actors.

Third, I will connect Barad’s realist performativity to Matthew Fuller’s critically underused theory of media ecology to develop a nonmodern theory of delivery that accounts for the material presence and affect of nonhuman actors. Neither Barad nor Morton are particularly interested in media studies or technological objects. I will argue that Fuller offers a productive inroad for connecting agential realism to how delivery occurs in new media artifacts. In particular, I will focus on his account of the Deleuzian figure of the metalworker and what he calls the “machinic phylum” of materiality in relationship to the phenomena of pirate radio. Far from abstract or metaphysical speculation, this redefinition of new media delivery as ontological hypokrisis will in turn ground my case studies of videogames and algorithmic actors in Chapters 5 and 6.
Embodying Delivery: A Materialist Counter-History

Where Plato was critical of acting and Aristotle expressed a distrust of delivery in certain areas of *The Rhetoric*, other classical rhetoricians retained a more positive endorsement of delivery. Many revisionist accounts of delivery will reference in passing the Attic orator Demosthenes (Welch; McCorkle). Yet, other than noting a few of his unusual training practices and lauding his attention to delivery, few commentators have attempted to rigorously connect Demosthenes’ precedent to contemporary frameworks in a complex way that acknowledges his unique ecological approach to rhetoric. In this section, I will suggest along with Morey that Demosthenes offers a precedent for a material and ecological understanding of delivery that rejects our ability to immunize the *logos* from the processes of acting, materiality, delivery, and circulation. In his chapter in “Remixing Hypokrisis” (22-69), Morey also productively ties this framework to Cicero and Quintilian. Both Roman rhetoricians greatly expanded delivery’s role to encompass nonsymbolic factors. All three rhetoricians will serve as an important point of contrast that will allow me to articulate a nonmodern theory of delivery where delivery is conceived as a process of working with and alongside nonhuman actors.

Held by Plutarch to be either an “orphan” student of Isocrates or rumored student of Plato, Demosthenes purportedly listed delivery as the first, second, and third most important elements of any speech (14). Plutarch asserts that it was the actor Satyros who is held to have taught Demosthenes “deportment and delivery” (14). Other accounts such as Cicero’s in *de Oratore* agree that Demosthenes was acutely aware of the body’s important role in persuasion and regulating the caprices of the mind. Demosthenes even
shaved half of his head at one point to force himself to stay inside and train as appearing in public with such a haircut would have subjected him to a great degree of social ridicule (5-8). Quintilian suggests that head-shaving fit within Demosthenes’ broader purpose: “he used to hide away in a place where no sound could be heard and no prospect seen, for fear that his eye might force his eye to wander” (The Orator’s Education 347-349). In contrast to the autonomous Cartesian cogito of modernity or the Platonic fear of poetry’s circulation and dissimulation freed from the exacting strictures of the dialectic, Demosthenes—as both Duncan and Morey suggest—felt that his own mind was already compromised by an “internal dissimulation.” To invoke a contemporary cliché, rhetorical training for Demosthenes was an issue of “matter over mind” and not “mind over matter.”

Indeed, Demosthenes’ broader point is that “ecology” (oikos, dwelling) is no mere metaphor for writing and rhetoric. Rather, persuasion occurs ecologically through materially-situated beings, bodies, and environments in the world. In a famous example, his ability to vocally project was weak, and so he spoke with pebbles in his mouth to improve his mouth’s muscles (11). Quintilian would later indicate that great physical strength was required of any great speaker, “And when the great part of the speech is over, at least if fortune smiles upon us, almost anything goes—sweat, fatigue, disordered clothing, toga loose and falling off all round” (XI.3.147-148). Other descriptions suggest that Demosthenes would run while practicing his speeches to make sure that his body was very prepared for the physical strain of a lengthy oration (Plutarch 16; Duncan 18). As Morey notes, Demosthenes’ example proved to be so influential that Cicero praised him, instructing aspiring Roman rhetors to
do as the famous Athenian Demosthenes did, whose preeminence in oratory is unhesitatingly admitted, and whose zeal and exertions are said to have been such that at the very outset he surmounted natural drawbacks by diligent perseverance: and though at first stuttering so badly as to be unable to pronounce the initial R. of the name of the art of his devotion, by practice he made himself accounted as distinct a speaker as anyone; later on, though his breath was rather short, he succeeded so far in making his breath hold during a speech, that a single oratorical period—as his writings prove—covered two risings and two fallings of tone. (de Oratore 193)

Morey also observes that Demosthenes often “overloaded his senses in what is perhaps the best-known scene of his training” (72). Demosthenes “used to rehearse his speeches on the beach, against the crash of the waves, to accustom himself not to be frightened by the roar of the assembly” (de Oratore 351). Where Aristotle could be seen in some places in The Rhetoric to minimize the role of delivery to present the audience with only the facts, Demosthenes wanted to engage all of an audience’s senses in the service of persuasion. If Platonic mimesis required the body to mirror the soul, then it would appear as if Demosthenes had reversed this order: it is the soul that must appear to mirror the material and ecological gestures of the body.

Unsurprisingly, delivery was the central point of concern for Demosthenes’ rhetorical theory. At one point, a potential client came to him complaining of being assaulted and Demosthenes said, “on the contrary, you have suffered none of the things
you describe” (qtd. in Duncan 11). The client “raised his voice” and became indignant, to which Demosthenes then said, “Yes, by Zeus, now I hear the voice of someone who has been wronged and suffered” (11). For Demosthenes, as for many of the Sophists, “truth” was always already a contingent affair. More importantly, even logical persuasion always already relied on non-logical factors of delivery. These anecdotes not only lend credence to Ben McCorkle’s claim that delivery did in fact occupy a central framework for rhetorical theory in the past, but they also serve to indicate a fundamental fact about delivery. Rhetoric and persuasion are achieved by an unavoidable interaction with the world not only for strength training but for “responseability” and affectivity with the audience in Diane Davis’s sense. Responseability does not only refer to the Levinasian withdrawal of the human Other. It takes on an additional meaning in that the mind is never freed from its material confines. The Demosthenian mind is never the Cartesian “brain-in-a-vat” that Latour has suggested is a symptom of modernity. In many ways, Demosthenes anticipates visual and ecological theories of rhetoric in that rhetorical effectivity is something that occurs within the constraints and affordances of the physical environment and the world of objects that work on and condition our bodies and minds. There is no separation between medium and message.

Cicero and Quintilian: Delivery as Performance

As we move from Demosthenes to the Romans, delivery has clearly switched to an essential component of rhetoric. Morey describes how “pseudo-Cicero’s” Rhetorical ad Herenium (RAH) states, “Delivery, I am telling you, is the one dominant factor in oratory. Without it, even the best orator cannot be of any account at all, while an average
speaker equipped with this skill can often outdo the best orators” (III.213). The canon of invention gathers materials into conceptual topics; the canon of delivery becomes a way to gather listeners and objects. In Quintilian and Cicero, we find a form of rhetoric that is very much attuned to the ecological mediation of the speaker and is much more forgiving of comparisons between delivery and acting. Quintilian writes of the great actors that “they add so much to the charm of even the greatest poets, that the verse moves us far more when heard than when read, while they succeed in securing a hearing even for the most worthless authors, with the result that they repeatedly win a welcome on the stage that is denied them in the library” (III.2.15). Unlike Plato’s fear that poetry (or acting by extension) would convince Ion to embark in a surely hazardous journey across the Mediterranean, Quintilian and Cicero view acting’s ability to evoke emotion—regardless of the content of the speech—as a way that non-logical and affective persuasion should be employed.

Morey describes how delivery in the RAH enjoys greater prominence than a pejorative connotation with acting, and I want to expand on this idea a bit. In contrast to Aristotle, pseudo-Cicero fully prescribes techniques for delivery, but notes that one must disguise them when performing, so not to look like one is performing: “the gestures should not be conspicuous for either elegance or grossness, lest we give the impression that we are either actors or day labourers” (IV.4.2). Contra Aristotle, “concealment” does not refer to “truth” or “falsity” but to a condition of possibility for all speech acts. It is not only in symbolic action, but in the activity of delivery as well where the rhetor must conceal her artifice. This concealment is not borne necessarily out of a desire to mislead,
but out of respect for the power of delivery. Despite the fact that she is indeed “acting” or performing, rhetorical gestures must appear spontaneous, natural, or unrehearsed. 

*Hypokrisis* (delivery) could now be conceived as a bottom up process that begins with the body’s central role in rhetoric. Delivery could be seen as part of the reclamation of the full spectrum of the embodied and present act of speaking. Yet, when RAH declares, “This, nevertheless, one must remember: good delivery ensures that what the orator is saying seems to come from his heart” (III.15.27), we see a shadow of the seed of Plato’s distrust of acting and rhetoric. Through delivery, it is possible to make it seem as though the body and soul are aligned when the words that the rhetor utters have no relationship to truth.

In contrast to pseudo-Cicero or Demosthenes, Cicero’s writing offers detailed descriptions of specific techniques of delivery. He does retain a distinction between the actor and the orator. Martin Jacobi comments “the [orator] should not use gesticulation but ‘emphatic delivery,’ should have ‘a strong and manly exertion of the lungs, not imitated from the theater and the players, but rather from the camp and the *palestra,*’ and ‘should stamp the foot’ ” (Cicero qtd. in Jacobi 28). Cicero also provides a solid ground for contemporary delivery scholars’ claims that delivery should be the technological medium. Of course, Cicero’s medium was the body. He writes, “every emotion of the mind has from nature its own peculiar look, tone, and gesture” (*de Oratore* 18). Furthermore, he adds “The entire body of the human being, all facial expressions and all the utterances of the voice, like the strings on a lyre, ‘sound’ exactly in the way they are struck by each emotion” (III.216). Along similar lines, Cicero identified specific
techniques for the instrumental use of the body. As Morey notes, Cicero pays particular attention to the face: “But everything depends on the face; and this, in turn, is entirely dominated by the eyes. . . . For delivery is wholly a matter of the soul, and the face is an image of the soul, while the eyes reflect it” (III.221). In this passage, we see a more specific articulation of the body/soul dichotomy that was only an implied part of Demosthenes’s oratorical practice.

In a way similar to the author of the RAH, Cicero’s concern is that the artifice of rhetoric—including the act of delivery—must not be discerned by the audience lest the rhetor be confused with an actor. I will quote him at length:

The face is the only part of the body that can produce as many varying signs as there are feelings in the soul; and there is surely no one who could produce these same effects with his eyes closed. . . . Consequently, it is quite important to regulate the expression of the eyes. We should not alter the appearance of the face itself too much, so as to avoid distorting it or acting like a fool. (III. 221)

Here, we can see that Cicero remains plagued by the connotations between delivery and acting. He continues,

It is the eyes that should be used to signify our feelings in a way suited to the actual type of our speech, by an intense or relaxed, or a fixed or cheerful look. Delivery is, so to speak, the language of the body, which makes it all the more essential that it should correspond to what we intend to say; and nature has actually given us eyes, as it has given the horse and
the lion their manes, tails, and ears for indicating our feelings. So the most
effective element in our delivery, next to the voice, is the expression on
our face; and this is controlled by our eyes. (III.222-23)

In a greatly expanded sense by comparison to Demosthenes, Cicero’s comments indicate
that it is human nature itself that requires the use of non-symbolic aspects of rhetoric.
Although the rhetor must conceal her artifice, delivery and nonsymbolic elements are
now firmly classified as natural aspects of communication that humans invariably
respond to. It is also worth noting that this passage and many others in de Oratore offer a
taxonomy of delivery-related technē. This taxonomy anticipates the twentieth-century
taxonomies of delivery seen the scholarship of Kathleen Jamieson or Porter.

To a far greater extent than either Cicero or Demosthenes, Morey suggests that
Quintilian even more radically anticipates nonhuman participation in rhetoric while
subsuming invention beneath delivery. Quintilian claims, “[Invention] is not so important
as the manner in which we produce it, since the emotions of each member of our
audience will depend on the impression made upon his hearing” (XI. 3. 243). Morey
offers the following passage from Quintilian as possible evidence of his prototypical
posthumanity:

Gesture conforms to the voice and joins it in obeying the mind . . . a dance
too is often understood and emotionally effective without the voice;
mental attitudes can be inferred from the face or the walk; and even dumb
animals reveal their anger, joy, or wish to please by their eyes or some
other bodily signal . . . Nor is it surprising that these things, which do
after all involve some movement, should have such power over the mind, when a picture, a silent work of art in an unvarying attitude, can penetrate our innermost feelings to such an extent that it seems sometimes to be more powerful than speech itself. (XI.3.67)

Unlike Cicero’s primary focus on the face, Morey describes how Quintilian extends the scope of delivery to the entire body, noting that “the head occupies the chief place in Delivery (as does the body itself)” (XI.3.68). Of special importance are the hands, “without which Delivery would be crippled and enfeebled” (XI.3.69-70). The hands “almost match the entire stock of words. Other parts of the body assist the speaker: the hands, I might almost say, speak for themselves” (XI.3.69-70). Much like in Cicero’s writing, Morey suggests that delivery for Quintilian is assumed to be a part of human nature. Quintilian notes that the hands are “the common language of the human race” (XI.3.85-87). In the terms of Chapter 3, the point here is that the hands are a nonverbal form of but Platonic mimesis and truth are not the goal: “For example, you can suggest a sick man by imitation a doctor feeling the pulse, or a lyre-player by shaping your hands as if you were striking the strings. You should refrain from such things in pleading” (XI.3.88-90). Instead, an orator should be “very different from a dancer; he must adapt his Gesture to his sense more than to his words . . . I do not approve of his miming attitudes and making a visual display of whatever he says” (XI.3.91-93). Drawing on Deleuze, Morey notes that the body becomes an “assemblage”—a term I will return to below—that supplements the work of the rhetor. Quintilian does not describe physical appearance, although cleanliness and a “handsome toga” were a must (XI.3.94). As a
prosthesis or a form of sensory immanence, persuasion and delivery for Quintilian involved a complex understanding of the relationships among delivery, space, and materiality. Yet, Quintilian does ultimately stop short of articulating a true prototype of a nonmodern theory of rhetoric.

There is an undeniably larger history to be told about these three figures that connects delivery to bodily histories of rhetoric and to issues of politics, gender, and materiality. I would definitely encourage interested readers to read Morey’s account of these three figures in detail. As I mentioned in Chapter 3 of this dissertation, given the undeniable solutions and problems that hypokrisis poses for truth, it should come as no surprise that actors were held in the same esteem as prostitutes in ancient Rome (Duncan 20). Thus, Cicero and Quintilian’s respective reclamations of a covert form of acting for a model of delivery carries within them this continued hypokritical tension. Delivery is potentially the leasing or renting of one’s body for energies and actions that do not reside in the logos—that which is immanent to the cognitive working of one’s mind. However, my immediate concern with these classical figures lies in how they variously conceived of delivery as a central element in the rhetorical canon. Furthermore, they situate delivery as an ecological activity through the necessary reliance on nonhuman actors such as waves, bodies, togas, and faces. Classical delivery in Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian always works to productively negotiate the relationship between delivery and acting. In their writing, delivery as a necessary moment of the embodiment of the logos or as an independent force in the world capable of producing its own effects offers a way to problematize the Platonic relationship between physis and nomos and episteme and
The Renewal of Realism in Object-Oriented Delivery

As I have noted in the previous section via Duncan and Morey, Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian embraced a robust proto-material theory of delivery. Delivery was once central to certain theorists of rhetoric as a practice that existed alongside the canon of invention in importance. After all, one still had to plan, arrange, and memorize body positions and gestures in advance for effective oratory. Yet, this composing-thinking subject was held to invent within the material and ecological affordances and constraints of nonhuman actors. The rhetor needed to train the body to be responsible to the myriad multiplicities of affects and sensations—actors and networks—that confronted any rhetor in the activity of delivery. Such is the classical attunement to the necessary “materialization” of rhetoric. Simply put, all bodies (all objects) are actors and hypokrites in delivery: they conceal their true reality and virtual potentiality for agency. Agency is something that is only revealed in part through objects’ interactions with other actors. However, in a nonmodern universe composed of and by the actions of nonhuman actors, delivery must be seen as a process that emerges as part of a larger whole where the roles and influence of material actors themselves are concealed. This claim that objects conceal is not one that presupposes that inanimate objects are intentional or conscious actors. Such would be the “polypsychipist” thesis explored in part by Harman in The Quadruple Object and more recently by Alex Reid in his blog the Digital Digs. Within our hermeneutic paradigms in rhetoric, we refer to objects and language as “concealed” when they are part of our instrumental artifice. By contrast, an ontological understanding
of *hypokrisis* refers more to the fact that we never fully control or represent the objects around us as they condition the space through which our rhetorical agency obtains within a given act of persuasion.

In this section, I want to flesh out the relationships among *hypokrisis* (acting), rhetoric, and materiality by turning, in part, to the object-oriented philosophy camp within the broader context of the nonhuman turn. Drawing on Harman, Morton’s essay, “Sublime Objects,” actually proposes an “object-oriented rhetoric” grounded in the canon of delivery that can serve as a connection between the classical models of material performativity that I just described and Barad’s agential realism. While problematic in certain respects, Morton’s use of Harman’s thinking does in fact offer a connection between nonmodern realism (and materiality) and delivery that I will use Barad and Fuller to build on.

Before moving to Morton, I want to briefly describe Harman’s OOO in the context of nonmodern realism debates. In *Tool-Being*, Harman begins with Edmund Husserl’s theory of objects. Husserl hoped to return to discussions of the reality of the object after the Cartesian *cogito* and Hegelian absolutization of consciousness. While it is true that phenomenology like empiricism “‘brackets’ the natural world, focusing solely on an object as it appears to us,” Harman argues that the key difference between an empiricist and Husserl is that Husserl “introduce a new and profound dualism *within* the phenomenal realm” (“Technology, Objects and Things” 18). Husserl argues that we encounter an object as a unity even if we only encounter it incompletely in sensation. Let me offer the example of a coffee cup that I brought back from my year living in Beijing,
China. When I see my coffee cup, I am seeing my coffee cup, and not light waves emitted to the receiving cones in my eyes that transmit signals to my nervous system. Even though an ant crawling up the side of the coffee cup, a Chinese speaker who can interpret its Chinese characters as “lo po, wo ai ni,” (literally, “Wife, I love you”) and non-Chinese speakers each experience vastly different facades of the coffee cup, for Husserl, it is nevertheless the same coffee cup as a sensory unity. The coffee cup, like any object, is never “identical with the qualities through which it is presented, since it can be viewed via countless different profiles while still remaining the same things in our eyes” (18).

Harman continues that Husserl’s return to “the things themselves,” did not mean a return to realism. Rather, the latter referred to “things as present in consciousness, not independent things hidden from view in a real outside world” (qtd. in 18). According to Harman, this distinction is where Husserl’s most famous student, Heidegger, “makes a permanent break with his teacher” (18). I have already alluded to Heidegger’s famous tool analysis and his understanding of the difference between presence-at-hand/readiness-to-hand in Chapter 1. However, Harman’s repurposing of the tool analysis forms a key part of OOO. Harman writes, following from Heidegger,

our most frequent mode of dealing with things consists not in having them in consciousness, but in taking them for granted as items of everyday use. If I perceive a table and try to describe its appearance, I silently rely on a vast armada of invisible things that recede into a tacit background. The table that hovers visibly before my mind is outnumbered by all the invisible items that sustain my current reality: floor, oxygen, air
conditioning, and bodily organs. (18)

As opposed to the presence-at-hand of phenomena in consciousness, the being of equipment is called readiness-to-hand that we generally notice only when our tools break.

Combining parts of Husserl and Heidegger, Harman’s OOO works from a fairly simple yet rich hypothesis. Heidegger only extends the withdrawal of technological objects to humans’ relations with objects, whereas Harman argues that even the reality of nonhuman objects withdraw from one another in this fashion. In other words, all entities—human and nonhuman—encounter each other as broken tools—presence-at-hand—in a phenomenological manner while never fully exhausting the “readiness to hand”—the realist essence—of an object. In Harman’s definition in *The Quadruple Object*, “objects are those which both display and conceal a multitude of traits” (25). He posits a theory of substantial objects with the following two self-described “weird” conditions: “[Objects] must be autonomous in two separate directions: emerging as something over and above their pieces, while also partly withholding themselves from relations with other entities” (25). In Harman’s assessment, an object’s substantial reality is never fully revealed or, to borrow Latour’s term, “translated” in any interaction with other objects. If entities can engage in different relations while reserving the potential to engage in others (that is, to display different qualities to different actors), then Harman believes that concealment and withdrawal is an ontological condition of all objects. Objects are locked into what Harman describes as a “duel” between their visible sensual qualities and their inner withdrawn subterranean essence. It is these “sensual qualities” that unconceal and appear, but, to borrow Aristotle’s terminology, we cannot confuse an
object’s substance with its accidents or qualities.

As Harman’s thinking demonstrates, Aristotle’s thinking has gained new currency. He argues “The Platonic or Kantian doctrine of a world beyond the senses is fused with an Aristotelian-sounding distinction between the unity of a substance and its plurality of traits” (Quadruple Object 95). However, at its core arguments, a philosophy of objects demands that what we hold to be ontologically true of relations among humans and nonhumans must also apply to the relations among nonhumans and nonhumans. Thus, OOO can be used to locate moments of human centrality or ambiguity regarding the status of objects within a given theory of reality. Take the so-called process philosophies of Bergson or Alfred Whitehead that invoke a metaphysics of Becoming instead of Being. Harman remarks that process philosophers find it naïve to think of coffee cups as basic elements of the world, since coffee cups really must be just aggregates of inorganic chemicals, fragments of apeiron, or an active ‘coffee cupping’ rather than the stasis of a solid coffee cup-thing, or result of a long evolutionary struggle. In this view, objects only gain their reality from elsewhere and thereby destroy the reality of individual objects because objects are too shallow to be the fundamental reality. (17)

In The Quadruple Object, Harman offers numerous arguments of how various philosophical traditions from Anaximander to Deleuze have either “overmined” or “undermined” the object’s reality as a basic ontological unit.
Object-Oriented Delivery

Working from Harman’s OOO, Morton makes a specific connection between OOO and delivery in “Sublime Objects.” With due respect to the scholarly tradition of philology, I want to be very clear from the outset of this section that Morton’s goal is not to maintain fidelity to classical definitions of delivery. In a goal not unlike Brooke’s redefinition of the canons of rhetoric for new media in *Lingua Fracta*, Morton’s intention is to creatively repurpose classical definitions to create new analytical ratios that can elucidate how delivery and rhetoric might work in a nonmodern ontology. If objects are never fully translated in their encounters with other objects, then objects exist at all different sizes and scales. Morton suggests that all objects are objects wrapped in objects:

Objects encounter one another inside another object—electromagnetic fields, for instance, or a valley. . . . More generally, media translate and are translated by messages. We never hear a voice as such, only a voice carried by the wind, or by electromagnetic waves, or by water, or by kazoo. Water makes whales sound like they do. Air and gravity make humans speak certain words in certain ways. Valleys encourage yodeling. (14)

In other words, regardless of Plato’s and Aristotle’s best attempts to immunize logic and speech from non-logical and nonsymbolic forces, humans have always been reliant upon their ecological relationships with nonhuman actors to create conditions of affordance and constraint for how their speech acts materialize in specific material practices. Morton goes on to suggest that delivery is the first part of what he calls an “object-oriented rhetoric”: “Because rather than simply being the envelope in which the message is
handed to you, delivery is the message, directly” (16). By extension, he argues, “We could rewrite the whole of rhetoric as object-oriented by reversing the implicit order of Aristotle’s five parts of rhetoric. Instead of starting with invention and proceeding through disposition to elocution, then on to memory and delivery, we should start with delivery” (12).

As I documented in Chapter 3, Brooke argues that as of 2010, digital rhetoric studies and rhetoric and writing studies as a whole retain a rather commonsense view of delivery: “Delivery, in everyday parlance, is a transitive process; it is rare to speak of delivering without an object that is being delivered” (170). By contrast, Morton’s definition is actually closer to some of the Greek and Roman understandings. Richard Lanham argues that delivery (and rhetoric) was much more constitutive for many Greeks than for twentieth-century rhetorical theorists: “Delivery did not deliver its messages as simply as United Parcel or FedEx, which bring the stuff to your door, ring the bell, and leave. It involved communicating the message in such a way that would be accepted and attended to rather than refused, ignored, or thrown in the wastepaper basket unread” (23-24). Combining Lanham’s observations with Morton’s reclassification, delivery in this sense would not be reducible to Ciceronian taxonomies or Porter’s “digital delivery” as instrumental technē. Rather, delivery would be a material potentiality for interaction that would be closer to a version of Metzgar’s Aristotelian dynamis that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. However, dynamis would take on an expanded sense of describing the ability to act and to be acted on that all actors possess. While not in direct dialogue with rhetorical scholarship, Morton usefully makes a similar connection
between Quintilian and OOO. Morton writes:

> If we rethink delivery not as a bottle into which the already-existing argument is poured like a liquid, nor as an envelope that delivers the message like mail, but as a physical object and its sensual medium, we will be thinking of it like Quintilian, who says of great actors that “they add so much to the charm of even the greatest poets, that the verse moves us far more when heard than when read, while they succeed in securing a hearing even for the most worthless authors, with the result that they repeatedly win a welcome on the stage that is denied them in the library.”

We can proceed from thinking of voice as an object in its own right to asserting that a pencil resting against the inside of a plastic cup is a delivery of a pencil, a certain kind of physical posture similar to a loud voice or a cajoling whine. A house is delivery, disporting its occupants and its rooms and its backyard into various configurations. A record player is delivery, as is an mp3 player. A book is delivery. A waterfall is delivery. A computer game is delivery. A spoon is delivery. A volcano is delivery. A ribbon is delivery. A black hole is delivery. (17)

From Morton’s OOO-infused redefinition of delivery, it is clear that the sensual qualities of objects and their concealment—matter’s organization itself—has been conflated with the activity of delivery. Delivery has become an ontological condition of an object’s substantial reality and its generalized faculties for affect. Delivery for OOO is not reducible to any specific or particular manifestation or technê.
Morton’s creative originality seen here in “Sublime Objects” and across his corpus of writing (especially in *Ecology Without Nature*) lies in his ability to revitalize classical figures into nonmodern contexts. Thus, he specifically indicates moments where classical terminology related to delivery can be productively re-thought along the lines of OOO: “Consider the Latin root of persuasion (*suadeo*), which has to do with how one object urges, impels, induces or sways another. The aesthetic, in other words, is not a superficial candy coating on the real, but is instead the lubrication, the energy and the glue of causality as such. To think so is truly to exit the Ramist pinball machine” (15).

“Exiting the Ramist pinball machine” is Morton’s Burkean representative anecdote for leaving the realm where non-logical forces, affect, and sensation are carefully sutured from logic and thinking. Peter Ramus is infamous in the rhetorical tradition for reducing rhetoric to style and equating invention with philosophical logic. Morton continues to argue along a similar vein: “*Pronuntiatio* is more like the manifest appearance of an object to another object. It speaks to the dissembling part of *hypokrisis*. *Actio* sounds more like execution (Heidegger’s *Vollzug*); the dark unfolding of an object’s hidden essence. *Actio* speaks to the way objects magically foam with being” (19). Like Brooke’s reclassification of delivery as new media performance, Morton wants to resist the idea of objects are “transitive” and passive actors. Yet, he goes on step further in making delivery synonymous with the Being (*DaSein*) of all Beings. In a sense, delivery marks the qualities and relations that objects are capable of taking on—the ways in which they move and evolve through ecological phase spaces and are capable of interacting with other entities to move them to action and reaction.
For my purposes, a nonmodern rhetorical theory does not need to go as far as Morton’s division between *pronuntiatio* and *actio*, as intriguing and insightful as his novel reconfiguration may be. In particular, I want more fully to explore Heidegger’s term *Vollzug* in the context of OOO and delivery. *Vollzug* means “execution” in the sense of executing an order or a law. There are clear resonances in *Vollzug* to the Greek understanding of *hypokrisis* as judgment. The possibility of delivery as a materialization of *Vollzug* interests me because this is the precise moment when an object discloses its relation or quality while remaining withdrawn, virtual, and a quasi-object or a quasi-subject. Furthermore, such an understanding shares obvious points of overlap with the early Platonic understanding of *hypokrisis* as acting. Unacknowledged by Morton, Harman had previously argued in *Guerilla Metaphysics* that *Vollzug* is closer to our conventional understanding of the word “performance” (104). Harman writes,

Performativity [in Judith Butler] is a recent concept forged to fight all notions of hidden essence, which it replaces with a kind of nominalist essence fabricated on the outside by a series of public actions. Execution, by contrast, is an essentialist concept through and through, even if not in the traditional sense of an essence that could be made present in an adequate *logos*. Rather than an essential list of properties that the philosopher could gradually make visible, the executancy of a thing is a dark and stormy essence that exceeds any such list of properties. (104)

Performance does not refer to linguistic or discursive phenomena, but to material engagements. Objects *perform* as they gather and disclose with one another. “The object
styles,” as Harman claims, in a comment that also reinforces the fact that style and delivery are often closely paired together in rhetorical history. Harman might as well have written, “the object delivers.”

Vollzug—performance—emphasizes not just the withdrawal but the appearance, the hypokrisis: the manifestation of acting through local and concrete practices. In other words, by focusing on the moment the object discloses and performs and by respecting its “withdrawn” characteristics that are never exhausted in perception or instrumental use, performance thus takes on a definition that would describe at once Brooke’s new media performance but also the behavior of a vast range of material objects—technological and non-technological alike. A nonmodern realism necessarily encompasses a variety of human and nonhuman actors performing from a milieu of culturally- and materially-real forces. Where for classical delivery theorists, concealment was something that the rhetor consciously practiced, this nonmodern definition of delivery means that concealment simply is. Concealment and hypokritical acting would be qualities of all objects.

Rhetorical agency in the activity of delivery then is something that radically precedes the initiation of rhetor. This declaration does not foreclose the possibility of agency. Rather, Latour like Morton questions the degree to which human actors are intentional or meaningful. As Latour puts it in his essay “A Collective of Humans and Nonhumans” in Pandora’s Hope,

What interests me here is the composition of action marked by the lines that get longer at each step. . . . Who performs the action? Agent 1 plus Agent 2 plus Agent 3. Action is a property of associated entities [my
emphasis]. Agent 1 is allowed, authorized, enabled, afforded by the others. The chimp plus the sharp stick reach (not reaches) the banana. The attribution to one actor of the role of prime mover in no way weakens the necessity of a composition of forces to explain the action. It is by mistake, or unfairness, that our headlines read “Man flies,” “Woman goes into space.” Flying is a property of the whole association of entities that includes airports and planes, launch pads and ticket counters. B-52s do not fly, the U.S. Air Force Flies. Action is simply not a property of humans but of associations of actants, and this is the second meaning of technical mediation. Provisional ‘actorial roles’ may be attributed to actants only because actants are in the process of exchanging competences, offering one another new possibilities, new goals, new functions. (184)\textsuperscript{51}

\textbf{Agential Realism: Leaving Plato’s Cave}

Part of realizing the value of delivery as ontological \textit{hypokrisis} (\textit{Vollzug}) for new media will first require us to admit that, beyond actor-networks of emergence, \textit{matter itself} is fundamentally hypocritical. This “\textit{hypokriticality}” extends beyond OOO’s metaphysical speculations about realism and refers to an actual concrete condition of the ways in which objects interact and unfold. Relationality itself is \textit{hypokritical}. In my assessment, Morton’s emphasis on OOO-style concealment and delivery is only one step toward a redefinition of delivery for a nonmodern \textit{cosmos}. Concealment, however, must extend from a description of an object’s withdrawal to encompass the concealment of objects in a different sense: the ways in which objects actually and agentively circulate
and interact to establish the conditions of agency and rhetoric within complex systems. As Rickert has observed in *Ambient Rhetoric*, Heidegger’s thinking is not necessarily incompatible with actor-network theory. Latour draws on and extends Heidegger in several key moments across his writing. Neither is Heidegger’s thinking incommensurable with Fuller’s ecology or the realist assemblage theories that I will discuss in Chapter 5. However, I will readily observe that the ways in which Heidegger has been principally taken up by those involved with OOO seldom work back from ontology to a Latourian form of accounting for the ways in which objects and humans co-materialize together. Thus, concealment, for me, needs a different inflection which is why I prefer the term *Vollzug* (performance). *Vollzug* means paying attention to the specific materialization and performativity of objects—more in the sense of a potentiality or virtuality that accompanies an object’s actuality—and not just observing that objects possess a concealed realist core. Thus, while I believe that delivery can and should be reframed as an ontological condition of all objects and nonhuman actors, I believe that a different ontological understanding of agency and matter help tie ontological *hypokrisis* to the pragmatic analysis of technological actors as they engage in actor-networks and ecologies. I will suggest that this alternate model can be found in Barad’s work and writing about agential realism. Discussed in detail in *Meeting the Universe Halfway*, agential realism is a posthuman concept inspired by Niels Bohr’s quantum physics as a way to rethink performativity. In this section, I want to discuss her definition of agential realism through an example of the piezoelectric crystal in fetal imaging technology.

Barad’s scholarship is part of a growing movement called “new feminist
materialism.” New feminist materialism includes many scholars such as Elizabeth Grosz, Elizabeth A. Wilson, Rosi Braidotti, and Poole and Frost. Like most associated with the movement, Barad specifically wants to shift theoretical paradigms from linguistic/cognitive representation to material performance within critical and cultural theory. According to Rosia Braidotti and, more recently, Vickie Kirby in *Quantum Anthropologies*, Butlerian performativity in *Gender Trouble* is held to have relegated materiality to discourse about the body.\(^{52}\) Although Butler’s arguments remain a crucial tool for analyzing how gender normativity has been established, the criticism is that her early work tells us comparatively little about the status of the body’s materiality beyond discourse and signification. Simply put, Butler’s thinking of performativity is held to be limited to the anti-realist/representationalist paradigm of modernity. Barad writes, “The move towards performative alternatives to representationalism shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e. g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices/doings/actions” (*Meeting the Universe* 802). In Barad’s assessment, representation—mimesis or imitation in Plato’s sense—forbids materiality the ability to act or conceal by requiring a correspondence between mental image (word) and thing. Here, she is clearly in dialogue with a typical anti-realist or epistemic realist gestures of rhetoric’s linguistic and epistemic turns wherein scholars assumed either that the thing-in-itself is fixed and recoverable as it exists *a priori* or that the thing-in-itself was not knowable at all.

In contrast to a view of representation as a perfect representation of a fixed Newtonian point, Barad receives of representation as performative “*enaction,*” a term she
takes from Jerome Brunner and Francisco Varela—who describe the human not as a being endowed with transcendental reason, but as one material actor among many material objects who is constantly interacting with material forces. In a claim that is very similar to Alaimo’s notion of trans-corporeality, they write, “[the human is] a sensory-motor-based embodied agent in which meaning emerges through a continually historical process of ‘active living’—a history of coupling between us and the dynamical environment ‘not as a representation system, but as constrained imagination (which the name enaction evokes)’ (1). By turning in part to the language of systems or complexity theory, Barad sees not necessarily an overturning but a radical extension of Butler’s notion that gender is an “active doing” (Meeting the Universe 804). However, Barad always reminds Butler scholars that reality is not just composed by humans manufacturing discursive images and nor is the manufacturing of these images freed from material acts of delivery.

Barad suggests that Bohr’s epistemology offers a way to conceive of a performative or, to use a related term from Nigel Thrift, “nonrepresentational” reality because Bohr radically challenged representation and the subject/object distinction (Nonrepresentational Theory). In classical physics, following—apparently—its own empirical laws of non-contradiction, only waves were held to be able to produce diffraction patterns. It is waves and not particles that could simultaneously occupy the same location. Yet, Bohr was able to demonstrate that at the quantum level, particles are able in some circumstances to behave like waves. In other words, there was no invariable metaphysical essence of light. Light emerged through a paradox wherein the same
substance—light—takes on the appearance of different emergent phenomena depending on what it is allied with and who is observing it. According to Barad, Bohr allows us to see the undecideability inherent in how all of our representation practices do actually have an impact on the object of investigation, “given that diffraction not only shows the entanglements of meaning and matter, but is itself an entangled phenomenon” (24). Bohr concluded that it was impossible to differentiate the act (agency) of observing from the object. Building on this observation, Barad suggests that an observer achieves meaning “on the condition that the experimenter introduction a constructed cut between the two [e.g., either particle or wave]” (25). By extension, the objective reference of measurement is not the object-in-itself, but phenomena where “phenomena” are what Barad reclassifies as “intra-actions” of the “object” and the “agencies of observation” (805). Interaction marks the world of Newtonian physics and Platonic rhetoric where the simulation of truth cannot occur in hypokrisis, concealment, and acting. By contrast, “intra-action” marks the space of Vollzug: material enactment. Here, multiple audiences—human and nonhuman—are embodied, present, and actively participating in communication activities that humans after the factor impose order upon. What Barad calls the human “agencies of observation” are not reduced to passive actors in an inversion of the Latourian modern Constitution. Humans actively participate in the construction of the scene of observation (26).

In her essay, “Performing Culture, Performing Nature,” Barad offers an illustrative example of how ontological performativity occurs at a material quantum level via a comparison with Butler’s performativity vis-à-vis gender analysis. She specifically
criticizes Butler’s reduction of performativity to discourse through the example of the fetal imaging sonogram in *Gender Trouble*. Butler writes,

> consider the medical interpellation which (the recent emergence of the sonogram notwithstanding) shifts an infant from an ‘it’ to a ‘she’ or a ‘he’, and in that naming the girl is ‘girled,’ brought into the domain of language and kinship through the interpellation of gender. But that ‘girling’ of the girl does not end there; on the contrary, that founding interpellation is reiterated by various authorities and throughout various intervals of time to reinforce or contest this naturalized effect. The naming is at once the setting of a boundary and also the repeated inculcation of a norm. (*Gender Trouble* 8)

For Butler, the temporal materialization of the sexed body is what produces gender. It is discourse about the body that when applied to the body will encourage the conscious self to perform its gender in certain ways. Yet, Barad believes that we should not fail to analyze how the technology itself participates in the construction of gender alongside discursive norming. Barad complains: “Butler explicitly brackets the questions of how the relatively recent emergence of ultrasound technologies might affect this process” (15).

Barad points to studies such as Rosalind Petcheskey’s “Fetal Images” to analyze the impact of fetal imaging technologies both on abortion politics and on women’s experience of pregnancy. Where 2-d technology worked with visual appeals, then new 3-d imaging technology that Christian anti-abortion groups are attempting to force into Planned Parenthood clinics nationwide, dramatically raises the sensible magnitude,
“inducing a kind of manic exhilaration over the epistemic earnings potential of this virtual reality tour of the body that makes real-time 2-d ultrasonography seem downright rudimentary” (16). Ironically, giving an anticipatory nod to the unpredictable conditions of agency that structure delivery and circulation, she observes that anti-abortionists had already taken advantage of these “Nilsson-esque” qualities, to constitute valid scientific proof of their viewpoint (16). Barad comments that “discoursing” in Butler’s Foucaultian sense is not just about discourse, but about how technologies themselves come to matter alongside discourse. The specific argument that she makes is worth reproducing in entirety:

However, while Butler’s temporal account of materialization displaces matter as a fixed and permanently bounded entity, her theory of performativity focuses exclusively on the discursive/citational nature of the iterative process of materialization and thus leaves unexamined the material dimension of regulatory practices, including the productive and enabling aspects of material constraints and exclusion and the material dimensions of agency. (17)

Barad concludes “Butler theorizes performativity only in terms of how discourse comes to matter; she fails to analyze how matter comes to matter” (17, emphasis original).

By contrast, Barad turns to her understanding of agential realism to locate how apparatuses such as the fetal imager are “constituted through particular [material] practices that are perpetually open to rearrangements, rearticulations, and other reworkings” (18). As is the case in point with the 3-d imager enabled by the non-related
developments of a new piezoelectric crystal, it is one element in a larger whole composed of “apparatuses and material-discursive phenomena, materializing in intra-action with other material-discursive apparatuses” (18). They materialize in conditions of “medical needs, design constraints (including legal, economic, biomedical, physics and engineering ones); market factors; political issues; other research and design projects using similar materials; the particularities of education background of the engineer; and so on” (17). In making such a claim, Barad is not seeking to privilege the material over the immaterial or the object over the subject. She readily concedes that Foucault remains correct in that the production and reproduction of technology involves particular disciplinary practices of the hospital or the prison or the military. Furthermore, “technicians, physicians, and engineers are surveiled” in these spaces (18). Although regimes of subjectification have changed through the control society or governmentality, we can still see the uneven production of docile bodies in these spaces.

Given this complex ecology, Barad is able to use agential realism to redescribe how gender and delivery function at the material-semiotic level. She writes, “the piezoelectric transducer is the interface between the objectification of the fetus and the subjectivization of the technician, physician, engineer, and scientist” (20). The traducer produces subjectivization and it is indissociable from the body it images: “That is, the marks on the computer screen (the sonogram images) refer to a phenomenon that is constituted in the intra-action of the apparatus and the object (commonly referred to as the ‘fetus’); the objective referent for the properties that are observed is the phenomenon, not some presumably independent object of this knowledge of practice” (21, emphasis
original). Closely related to Heidegger’s sense of Vollzug, Barad has identified agency and delivery as emerging from the space of disclosing and attunement (Stimmung). Attunement in Heidegger’s sense refers to how a body adjusts to the ways in which Being—adjusting for OOO’s extension to all objects—is disclosed or unconcealed. Yet, for Barad, concealment does not only refer to the substantial withdrawn reality of objects. Rather, it allows for this dimension while also incorporating the emergence of multiple points of agency and subjectification that occur with the context of the wand as a technological actor—an aspect that OOO theorists generally avoid theorizing.

Thus, “realism” in Barad’s sense has taken on a different point of emphasis than the speculative realism that informs OOO. Despite its devil term status, she suggests that realism is useful term to retain because it enables us to “consider whether technoscientific practices might be usefully considered as open-ended regulatory practices through which human, nonhuman and cyborgian forms of agency jointly produce the phenomena being investigated, rather than a mere description of observation-independent reality” (Meeting the Universe 803). For me, her account of realism emphasizing Vollzug—the moment of disclosure—more than Harman’s emphasis of metaphysics and concealment.

Representation is predicated upon the ontological gap between nature and culture, but “intra-action” in a realist sense means considering the “mutual constitution of entangled agencies” such as is the case in the 3-d imager (803). Meaning does not necessarily reflect a metaphysical order of substantial realism, but is generated through complexes of relations. Meaning is not subjective, rational, or an exclusively human property. Matter is thus not a stable referent for discourse, but an “always already an ongoing historicity”
that participates in the ways in which we represent reality (821). Representations (enactments) of reality do not diminish in importance. They are always already materializing, circulating, and *hypocritically* delivering actors. Barad suggests that representations are “condensations or traces of multiple practices of engagement” (“Performing Nature” 53).

In this definition, we can see clear resonances between Barad’s thinking and Latour’s view of circulating reference (as I discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation) but with a more specific ontological claim about material self-organization. That is, representations are performances of our struggle with real material entities and constraints. Barad writes, “[If] intra-actions are constraining but not determinate,” then we have neither a transcendental reality that science can reveal in Boyle’s sense nor a completely free subjectivity (*Meeting the Universe* 805). Rather, we have a “material-semiotic” field, to borrow Donna Haraway’s phrase, where “particular possibilities for acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail a responsibility to intervene in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering” (826–827). “If,” Barad articulates, “our descriptive characterizations do not refer to properties of abstract objects or observation-independent beings, but rather through their material instantiation in particular practices contribute to the production of agential reality, then what is being description by our theories is not nature itself but our participation [our performance] within nature” (827).

Realism, then, takes on a very specific terministic redefinition quite unlike the realism referenced by Latour, rhetorical realists, or anti-realists. Barad writes, “That is,
realism is reformulated in terms of the goal of providing accurate descriptions of agential reality—that reality within which we intra-act and have our being—rather than some imagined and idealized fixed external reality. According to agential realism, reality is sedimented out of the process of making the world intelligible through certain practices and not others” (804). Crucially, the observation of a reality that we along do not produce does not alleviate our responsibility or accountability for our relative degrees of intentionality and agency within intra-action. Rather, it makes agency emerge more clearly albeit in a distributed ahumanistic fashion. Barad claims, “Therefore, we are not only responsible for the knowledge that we seek, but, in part, for what exists. In anticipation of complaints that symmetry elides a critical examination of why some bodies are materialized in negative ways . . . these fail to integrate the human construction of gender, ethnicities” (804).

In reconceiving of matter along these lines, Barad joins a number of thinkers in the new material feminist group who want a new ontology predicated upon material realism where we want to conceive of matter as a vital entity that possesses its own modes of “self-transformation, self-organization, and directedness” (Poole and Frost 10). Matter is no longer the Cartesian inert and thereby “disturbs the conventional sense that agents are exclusively humans who possess the cognitive abilities, intentionality, and freedom to make autonomous decisions and the corollary presumption that humans have the right or ability to master nature” (10). The take away for rhetoric and delivery scholarship is that matter does not tend toward inertia or equilibrium and is self-organizing. Thus, Poole and Frost claim that performativity marks the way in which
material actors deliver:

tumbleweeds, animal species, the planetary ecosystem, global weather patterns, but also new social movements, health and crime and economics are all amenable to the kind of explanation developed by complexity theorists. Such phenomena are now understood as emergent systems that move with a superficially chaotic randomness that is underlain by patterns of complex organization, which in turn function as foci for further organization and development. Such systems are marked by considerable instability and volatility since their representation is never perfect; there is a continuous redefining and reassembling of key laments that results in systems’ capacities to evolve into new and unexpected forms. (15)

In a clear nod for thinking circulation and delivery, Poole and Frost claim, “their logic of proliferation is again resonant with new materialist senses of contingent, immanent self-transformation” (14). Agential realism as ontological hypokrisis means a greater accounting for the material role of objects as they produce and undermine subjectivities.

“Compactants”: Matthew Fuller’s Nonmodern Media Ecology

At this point, with agential realism established to provide a framework for delivery as ontological hypokrisis, it is necessary to begin working toward how this view of delivery can pragmatically influence the ways in which we read new media objects and technologies. Simply put, it means conceiving of delivery in an even more radical way than Demosthenes’ ecological sense. Technological objects must be seen to actively establish the conditions of possibility for human agency and symbolic action, that is, the
conditions under which we are able to materialize rhetoric. In particular, delivery as ontological *hypokrisis* means that we have to study the hardware of digital rhetoric—its world of nonsymbolic actors—in addition to the world of representations, symbols, and mythologies that these technologies sustain. I will specifically illustrate through a case study of videogames in the next chapter why this is the case. Before leaving ontological *hypokrisis*, I want to make a specific connection between agency and the material processes of delivery by turning to Fuller’s critically neglected theory of media ecology in *Media Ecology*. Much like Barad, Fuller starts moving from theoretical and ontological considerations of matter and technological self-organization to the articulation of specific compositional strategies that describe what it means to theorize and practice rhetoric in a world of nonhuman agency. Fuller offers—akin to Morton—new rhetorical figures for the analysis and production of new explanatory idioms while nevertheless elucidating the materially affect role of objects. I will suggest that Fuller’s ecology is a necessary stopping point because Barad leaves it into question what specific mode of material or conative self-organization is unique to digital media and hardware as these are not her primary objects of analysis. By contrast, Fuller offers more specific connections between a material vitalism and digital media. Furthermore, he offers specific strategies for resistance as defined within a nonmodern world of technological actors.

Fuller’s approach to media systems is not Heideggerian but Deleuzian. Thus, his text employs collage and the rhizome as its lens for viewing objects. Fuller’s point of view is often difficult to grasp because his text performs the content of its theoretical framework. *Media Ecologies* does not offer straightforward and linear arguments. Rather,
like Dada painters “who played off actual real objects by nailing them or gluing them next to each in a painting,” Fuller argues through collage, juxtaposing various heterogeneous elements to blur clear conceptual boundaries (2). Ecology, much like Barad’s performativity, is a “massive and dynamic interrelation of processes and objects, beings and things, patterns and matter” (2). Similarly, his examples often seem incongruous as he moves seamlessly from John Hillard’s photo series *A Camera Recording Its Own Condition* to London’s pirate radio scene. In the example of pirate radio, he describes an ongoing battle for the regulation of London’s airwaves between pirates and the London police officials that can only be fully explained through an ecological analysis. The pirates constantly challenge the police’s regulation of airwaves and limitation of their freedom of expression, but the technologies themselves play an active and agentive role in the unfolding space of public resistance and activism.

A conventional rhetorical analysis of this situation as it relates to delivery might begin by analyzing the representational content and the specific mediums through which the pirates’ content circulates. However, Fuller’s notion of ecology begins with the objects themselves seen through Deleuze’s “minoritarian literature” (13). A minoritarian literature mobilizes “an ‘infinite patchwork’ of ‘singularities, remarkable and non-totalizable parts extracted from a series of ordinary parts’” (Fuller 13). Thus, Fuller offers an extensive list of all the “intra-acting” elements involved in maintaining pirate radio:

Pirate radio: transmitter, microwave link, antennae, transmission and studio sites; records, record shops, studios, dub plates; turntables, mixers, amplifiers, headphones; microphones; mobile phones, SMS, voice;
Pirate radio is undeniably activist in nature but without being predicated upon an fully “intentional” or humanist agent in the sense of an autonomous rhetor who is entirely responsible for the control of his or her message and medium. Pirate radio is illegal and bound up with governance and police action, causing a broadcast technology “arms race” to escalate between police and pirate radio stations. As a result pirate studios began to separate themselves from their transmitters so that the discovery of the transmission did not mean that delivery-machines would stop. Pirate radio is predicated upon violating commonly held material-technological literacies; or, simply put, black boxes and present-at-hand broadcast objects are always viewed primarily existing in readiness-to-hand states. In their analysis of the pirate radio incident in “New Media Dwelling,” Jennifer Bay and Thomas Rickert note that elements such as the turntable are actually “stalled computers,” when used as intended—they only read previously recorded data on a turntable (25). By contrast, hip-hop DJs make the turntable into a recomposition instrument that could actually function as both a new delivery and memory device when combined with digital technologies or processes such as scratched. They write, “The turntable introduces another kind of feedback loop into music production, and this in turn radically transforms what can happen in the studio. Fuller concluded, ‘the turntable invents the DJ in order to compute’ ” (x). This statement is a full realization of Harman’s claim that the object styles (e.g., delivers). Where Barad is correctly interested in how technologies participate both in complex ecologies and how they engender certain forms
of subjectification, Fuller more accurately diagnoses how technologies themselves never fully unconceal even when they are instrumentalized. Concealment here is something more akin to a Deleuzian “virtual” potentiality that always exists and threatens to deterritorialize a stable system.

Fuller refuses to separate the process of delivery into form and content or medium and message. He specifically turns to Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of the “machinic” in *1000 Plateaus* to explore how these connections obtain through “a whole interrogative field of social, juridical, legislative and economic formations” (*Media Ecologies* 20). As an emergent phenomena greater than the sum of its individual parts, pirate radio refuses these dichotomies through its “capacity to generate medial growths that ground themselves in the attempt to impose form on them. . . . That is, the attempted hylomorphism itself becomes ‘content’—there is a coevolution, an arms race that feeds the machinic phylum” (23). Thus, what resonates with one part of the ecology will affect what occurs in the other parts at both symbolic and nonsymbolic registers. Let me offer an example. In the case of pirate radio, the police force originally was just allowed to confiscate transmitters only. Yet, the legal regime in London eventually attempted to curtail pirate radio’s delivery and circulation range by expanding their jurisdiction to seize pirate radio equipment, including the “ability in law and practice to seize studio equipment” (23). The pirates’ response reflected not only intentional resistance, but an awareness of how the technologies themselves were vital components that could undermine the police. The pirates began to physically separate the space of the studio from the space of transmission by drawing on microwave links to sustain the networks.
As a result, Fuller claims, “it is now harder to locate and capture a studio connected in this way to a transmitter than it was before the legislation was introduced” (23).

Rhetorical theorists have indeed picked up complexity theory and assemblages (Hawk, *A Counter-History, Small Tech*; Reid, *Two Virtuals*) as a way to re-think ecological rhetorics beyond social constructivism (Cooper, “Ecology”) and ecocomposition’s reduction of nature to discourse. Yet, we have been slow to actually engage and examine the specific role of the machinic phylum in rhetorical phenomena: the non-symbolic actuality of delivery machines that enables the possibility space of pirate radio’s political and rhetorical activity. For example, Jim Ridolfo and Nicole DeVoss (2011) recently offered the term “rhetorical velocity” to describe delivery and circulation in networked spaces. This term referred to how composers in new media and networked environments had to take into consideration how their given composition would inevitably be circulated and recomposed by other actors. However, rhetorical velocity does not extend to an ontological or affective property of the objects themselves. From the perspective of ontological *hypokrisis*, the recomposition of the DJ’s turntable or the pirate’s radio is surely as much of a part of the rhetorical velocity of pirate radio. Thus, I believe that further exploration of the machinic phylum offers models to help reconceive of delivery-related digital rhetoric concepts such as rhetorical velocity.

Fuller makes a productive comparison between media ecologies to the “machinic phylum” of Deleuze and Guattari that provides a technology-specific update on Alfred North Whitehead’s metaphysics of process: “The *machinic phylum* is materiality, natural or artificial, and both simultaneously; it is matter in movement, in flux, in variation,
matter as a conveyor of singularities and traits of expression”, or simply, “persistence and change of many individuals through time” (2). Thus, a “machine” includes technology, but it also includes the conative striving of the body’s DNA as it gathers and responds to attractors within its phase space. Phyla, notes Fuller, “are replaced or added to by other systems of reference, such as clades, analytical tools produced by emergent tools and discourses, such as genetic databases, which provide access to dimensions and interpretations of evolution other than those simply available to the interpretative eye” (2).

Manuel DeLanda, who Fuller draws on for his own understanding of Deleuze, describes the machinic phylum as “The overall set of self-organizing processes in the universe. . . . These include all processes in which a group of previously disconnected elements suddenly reaches a critical point at which they begin to “cooperate” to form a higher level entity” (qtd. in Fuller 24). When objects reach a critical mass and emerge, it becomes necessary to speak not only the symbolic velocity that these machines house, but—if I may suggest a new terms—their rhetorical viscosity (e.g., their material substance, agency, and affectivity)—their Vollzug. Under such a term, it becomes possible to see the space of rhetorical interactions where existing state of constraints has been switched into another. Thus, while Latour is often interested in an after the fact analysis of the distribution of agency, Fuller via Deleuze begins to argue that what Gottfried Leibniz calls the “fold” or what rhetorical theorists could just as easily call kairos, means not only choosing the mode of composition as DeVoss and Ridolfo mean and anticipating the circulatory energies of human users, but attempting to anticipate the emergent moment of delivery at the level of the machinic phylum. In Heidegger’s terms, the machinic phylum
is not a space that emerges from critique and representation, but attunement to the projection space enabled by the mood (*stimmung*) disclosed by what he frequently calls our authentic “being-in-the-world” (e.g., existing as we do as unconcealed Beings). To return to Morton’s reclassification of delivery via OOO, the machinic phylum offers an accurate analysis of the materialization of moment of *Vollzug*: delivery as ontological hypokrisis.

Deleuze and Guattari illustrate the machinic phylum through an example of the metallurgic artisan—a nonmodern equivalent of the rhetor Demosthenes shouting at waves. Fuller describes the metallurgist:

> Tracing this flow of matter and the intensive points at which it changes from ore into a purer form, from solid into a molten state, is complicated by and echoed in the flow’s relation to the points at which following it becomes subject to circuits, to arrangements between a here and a there, between one fixed state and another. Flows are connected, for instance, to the mercantile, to divisions of labor that separate out the roles of merchant, prospector, and artisan into distinct categories of behavior and access to modes of perception and action. (182)

Importantly, the metallurgist is “Not properly nomadic, not capable of becoming sedentary, metallurgists become itinerant. Cursed into this border category by their knowledge, they must engage, carefully, with each strata and work with seams and thresholds” (183). Simply put, there is no “line of flight” that is sufficiently free from material intra-action and enaction in Barad’s sense. In contrast to Giorgio Agamben’s
excellent appropriation of Herman Melville’s Bartleby the Scrivener who says, “I prefer not to,” to dis-engage in demands for essentialism in identity and community, the metallurgist has no place that she can turn to in order to disengage from the dominant material and affective game that is ecology in a world of nonhuman actors. In Fuller’s sense, we can never say, “I prefer not to” to the objects that are always working on us as rhetorical actors.

In the metallurgist, the actual and manipulable—and Heidegger reminds us that manipulation means a modern Cartesian directive to fix and “to hold in the hand”—meet their withdrawn virtual dimension of any hypokritical unfolding. Such an in-between state implies that the rhetor in the act of delivery is more of a conduit and a point of transmission than the originator of rhetoric. Fuller argues

The metallurgist possesses an intense relation to materiality: a proprioception of and through the changes of state of the matter that one is working with, becoming aware of its tics and glitches in terms of how they are mobilizable, in what realms they operate in topological terms, what they connect to or elide. (184)

The metallurgist does not view the process of delivery in Porter’s sense of technê as technical knowledge. Rather, the metallurgist employs “experiential science or tacit knowledge formed through the use of impurities and changes in structure and integration of metals by leaps between temperatures through heating and quenching. (An alliance of access to wood or charcoal, ores, and water was needed)” (184). This minoritarian science contrasts to the hylomorphism—what Fuller calls the “form-matter model”—of
many philosophers of materiality since Aristotle (Hansen, *Technēsis*). By contrast, Fuller suggests that nonhuman actors themselves are able serve as efficient causes that work toward a permanently unsettled final cause of the social and the *polis*. Fuller writes, “In the treatise on nomadology by contrast, Deleuze and Guattari propose an emphasis on the morphogenetic capabilities of material itself: the moments when a series of forces, capacities, and predispositions intermash to make something else occur, to move into a state of self-organization” (184). Turning again to *1000 Plateaus*, Fuller argues, “Hylomorphism is ‘a model of the genesis of form as external to matter, as imposed from the outside like a command on a material which is thought inert and dead.’ Yet, the machinic phylum, following from Simondon’s account, is the ‘process of individuation, whereby materials produce their own capacities of formation in relation to the morphogenetic affordances around them’ ” (185).

The significance of this allegory for ontological *hypokrisis* can be seen by returning to Fuller’s pirate radio example to fully explicate how the machinic phylum relates to the activity of delivery. Friedrich Kittler correctly argued long ago that “electricity does not equal electronics” (*Discourse/Network* 74). Thus, what produces events like pirate radio are analogue electromagnetics (“transmitters coils, T21200 gramophone, and other components”), and digital delivery mechanisms (“the GSM phone—something of a bastard case in that it necessarily maintains an interface to electromagnetic waves; and computationally based samplers and synthesizers, etc.”) (*Media Ecologies* 27). Fuller offers the following conclusion:

Both electric and electronic sound technologies also allow a sense of a
doubling of the machinic phylum in that the manipulation of singularities and flows at one level becomes explicable only when it manifests at another—in sound waves. Just as for generations of zoology, organic phyla were sensible only through our seeing them in particular senses as mutational fields of a shared body-plan, this area of the machinic phyla is operated in and manifest through sound. The threshold into self-organization is crossed only when a bunch of components becomes something else. (186)

This doubling of electricities of sound transmission in this performative space echoes the hypocritical nature of code that Wendy Chun describes in *Programmed Visions* as I noted at the end of Chapter 3. Fuller concludes, “The machinic phylum of the radio in this sense is that of the creation of flow among dense population, an expanded form of phyla that at once multiplies the domains in which it is traced but is also produced in the attempted or actualized imposition of hylomorphic patterning—law, the state, or the technologies of capture employed by it” (185).

Thinking back to the shift from Butler’s discursive-material performativity to Barad’s material entanglement and intra-action, Fuller clearly shows us the complex material interplay in delivery between symbolic and nonsymbolic factors and agencies. In a media ecology, no actor truly gains mastery of the system. For example, the law and London police order are never able to fully subsume their area of authority to what is actualized, as the case of pirate radio demonstrates. Here, the relationship is not one of “submission” but of forging and conditioning—the space of the metallurgist. Importantly,
this model of delivery and enaction at once encompasses yet supplements the decoder-encoder hermeneutic of Welch’s theory of delivery in Electric Rhetoric. Fuller claims, “Readings of these formations, their utilization, the finding of such loopholes within them—all constitute a way in which hylomorphic patternings themselves can become hyle, matter for the constitution of flow” (186). Specifically, he describes how “Radio’s section of the electromagnetic spectrum was born regulated. At the end of the nineteenth century, the British government made the wireless telegraph a state monopoly, assigning it to the Post Office, with oversight granted to the Admiralty. The only portion of the spectrum not directly falling under state control and procedures of licensing is that visible to the naked” (186). Thus, Fuller’s observations can be seen in relationship to most recent decisions by US and European authorities to close down the PirateBay, Rapidshare, and other repositories of copyrighted media that are illegally distributed and downloaded.

What constitutes a “line of flight,” or an effective way of realizing the emergent protocological whole as a metallurgist attempt to deliver rhetoric in a nonmodern universe, will undoubtedly have to take into account not merely the symbolic import—the deliberative arguments about the pros and cons of state interference and regulation—but also the alterations in the machinic phylums that structure the space of these encounters, deliver, and rhetoricity in general.

Fuller confirms that idea that all media and technological structures possess virtual dimensions that exceed any protocological control:

All standard objects contain with them drives, propensities, and affordances that are “repressed” by their standard uses, by the grammar of operations
within which they are fit. (This “repression” should not necessarily be construed negatively. It is likely itself to arise as the result of a previous or immanent recombination, disassembly, or adaptation.) Together in conjunction with another such object, a chance arises for something to happen, a signal to get strange by coming out the wrong end. To list out a grammar for the set of ideas developed here should simply provide an opportunity for reduction to fall into this same trap and start sprouting. (186)

Here, Fuller’s point of view really is not very different from Heidegger’s. He wants to avoid reducing our considerations of media environments to calculative enframing [Gestell] while respecting the always new and creative tactics for resistance inherent within our relationality with objects’ concealed subterranean essence (e.g., Harman’s OOO) or virtual potential (e.g., Deleuze). As metallurgists who operate through and alongside media machines, our rhetorical agency obtains only from within this particular assemblage and configuration of humans and nonhuman by exploiting the noise, the chance, and the elided. Fuller concludes,

Indeed such parts can no longer be disassembled; they produce an ecology. Not a whole, but a live torrent in time of variegated and combinatorial energy and matter . . . The pirates, from the sounds broadcast to their collaging approach to technologies, are founded precisely on a sense of this synergistic and livid capacity. Other work here exists in between this permutational power and its edges. Such a torrent can be used to drive other little machines that dip a drive or an organ into it, setting them
Consequences for Rhetoric

One way to locate ontological hypokrisis then is not merely positing that objects—like rhetors—conceal their artifice and reality, but through the type of analysis that Fuller and Barad articulate. We could propose rhetorical counter-histories like pirate radio that describe how objects’ material properties exercise quasi-intentional agentive influence on the social beneath the symbolic. For example, Cynthia Cockburn and Susan Ormrod in Gender and Technology in the Making argue that there is a symbolic history of the microwave oven and a material history. In the symbolic history, early microwaves targeted men by playing on the high tech aspect. Microwaves’ usability offered a great degree of control over heating coils, watts, and temperature. Amazingly, early microwaves were sold in electronics stores along with video recorders! It was only after the male market reached its saturation point, that the female audience was considered as a market segment. In this shift, Cockburn and Ormrod note that “the operating ‘bells and whistles’ were replaced by simple knobs with pictures. In order to heat a cup of soup, it was no longer necessary to follow a series of complicated instructions regarding how to control the intensity and duration of the electromagnetic radiation; one had only to touch the little-picture-of-a-cup of soup button” (57). They comment, “The two microwaves were equally functional, intended to speed the preparation of meal, but the one gendered its users as technologically competent, the other as incompetent” (57).

This symbolic-material history is a crucial part of the instrumental side of hypokrisis. However, ontological hypokrisis cannot treat this symbolic history as a finite
resting point. The functionality of the microwave itself will necessarily create emergent effects as it engages with different actors and networks across its heliomorphic plane. Regardless of its originary inscription in gender relationships, the entelechy of the microwave—the fact that it enables food to be quickly heated—began to encourage the development of a certain type of mean: frozen foods to be consumed by a single person. The microwave is not an intentional actor; however, when human markets realize its entelechy, the microwave itself will actually prompt change in our eating habits. The microwave enables more meals to be eaten alone or to be consumed on the job in order to minimally interfere with one’s work. In a sense, the microwave begins to participate in the decline of communally produced meals and prompting the deterioration of family socialization around the stove.

Yet, the microwave is only a single affective force, and not the sole causal agent in the ecological system. Agency is distributed among a variety of actors such as human capitalists and mobile refrigeration units. The microwave only fulfills another dimension of its virtual proper being when frozen foods and other easily reheatable meals are widely available, and second, when human beings are prepared to adopt these as an alternative to preparing a meal from scratch with fresh ingredients—a dimension accelerated by the increased cost of living, slashed wages to the middle class, and the erosion of union and collective wage bargaining. More globally than microwaves, Levi Bryant reminds us that “flows of capital and the ability of capital to exercise its power literally needs highways, satellites, trains, farms, land, fiber optic cables, ocean going ships, and so on” (“Onticology and Politics” para. 3). If such channels do not develop, and if the energy
necessary to run these channels is not available, then capitalism’s flows disappear. As David Harvey observes, “capital only exists in the motion of capital” (15). We can see with this history that it is not enough for rhetorical theorists of delivery to focus on the symbolic action alone or the instrumentalization of delivery. Rather, they must turn to a non-Platonic form of episteme (realism), where rhetoric includes not only uncertain statements—all statements are uncertain statements and are not matters of fact but matters of concern—but materializing influences of the rhetoric’s materiality.

In terms of our understanding of delivery as a process that is intimately intermeshed with material actors, the microwave and Fuller’s account of pirate radio mark a definite improvement toward understanding delivery as ontological hypokrisis. Fuller adds that we must go beyond the Latourian re-description of how elements are composed, and to theorize how elements themselves “produce their own capacities of formation in relationship to the morphogenetic affordances around them” (18). Fuller’s theory of ecology looks at how material actors themselves circulate meaning by delivering. Events emerge out of a near-Brownian motion, aleatory, semi-random, and chance re-contextualization: rhetorical velocity and rhetorical viscosity that emerge out of a successive series of machinic phyla and matter’s performative self-organization alongside human agency. Successful delivery machines can harness and allow invention to cohere, creating post-hermeneutic affordances and constraints or, in Heidegger’s terms, spaces of projection and gathering: Vollzug.

A nonmodern realist theory of delivery, then, would have to account for the fact that material things deliver and gather, and, furthermore, acknowledge that our
audiences—in opposition to Plato’s de-materialization of the rhetorical situation—are affective—both human and nonhuman. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford’s classic text “Audience Addressed, Audience Invoked” differentiates writing for a known, material, and real audience from the inventive process of imagining this audience. In the latter, our imagination has to devise rhetorical tricks in order to inculcate a sense of this audience in the reader. To help develop our imaginations, they seek to move beyond a fixed or static notion of audience, by adding several sub-types: “invoked audience can include your self, friends, colleagues, critics, a mass audience, future audiences, past audiences, or anomalous audiences (such as fictional characters); addressed audience can include future audiences, mass audiences, critics, colleagues, friends, as well as your self” (166). In a clear resonance for delivery and circulation beyond the immediate rhetorical situation, they write: “the term audience refers not just to the intended, actual, or eventual readers of a discourse, but to all those whose image, ideas, or actions influence a writer during the process of composition. One way to conceive of ‘audience,’ then, is as an overdetermined or unusually rich concept, one which may perhaps be best specified through the analysis of precise, concrete situations” (168).

In his 2010 Rhetoric Society of America presentation, Byron Hawk speculates about how we might radically expand the idea of audience for a cosmos populated by nonhuman actors. Delivery as ontological hypokrisis means that audiences are, to repurpose Hawk’s arguments for my context, “materially real and in some cases imaginable and in other cases totally emergent, all of which are equally constitutive of the discourse, and to the recognition that any such analysis has to be of precise and
specific material situations and relationships. This is a real call for rhetoricians that, as far as I can determine, hasn’t been taken up to its fullest potential” (“Audience” 5). Hawk’s conclusions are especially apt if we do not limit our analysis to what “influence[s] a writer during the process of composition” as Ede and Lunsford do, while, in a sense, collapsing invention and delivery to see how invention changes through different modes of circulation. This is what it means for an object to perform in a way that is irreducible to the writer-text-receiver model or simple transmission models of rhetoric—some of which I located in delivery scholarship in Chapter 3. What if our first audience is the hardware-software feedback loop, object-oriented delivery, or Chun’s hypocritical computer code? Is it the keyboard? The air? Ontological hypokrisis makes these concerns manifest and part of thinking of delivery as “the first canon” of networked communication and digital rhetoric. Drawing on Margaret Syverson’s The Wealth of Reality, Jenny Edbauer posits what remains one of the clearest ecological approaches toward a nonmodern vision of agency and writing as a distributed activity. Through Syverson it is possible that “we can speak of the distribution of . . . [text composing] across physical, social, psychological, spatial, and temporal dimensions . . . [T]he social dimensions of composition are distributed, embodied, emergent, and enactive” (23). Edbauer gives an extended example that is worth citing in length:

Writing is thus more than a matter of discrete elements (audience, a writer, text, tools, ideas) in static relation to one another (a writer types her ideas into a computer for an audience who reads the text). Rather, writing is distributed across a range of processes and encounters: the event of using a
keyboard, the encounter of a writing body within a space of dis/comfort, the events of writing in an apathetic/energetic/distant/close group. A vocabulary of ‘distribution’ points to how those elements are enacted and lived, how they are put into use, and what change comes from the in-processes-ness itself. (“Unframing” 13)

According to Edbauer, the rhetorical situation is not a “noun” of static-ness, but an “event-ful” verb of action. City space is not fixed, but designed by the verb “to city” in order for us to “do rhetoric.”

In his webtext installation “Stomp Box Logic,” Hawk echoes Edbauer in making a specific case for how technology is indeed our “first” audience in a nonmodern cosmos. Stomp boxes allow for a hypokritical form of invention and delivery: “the performance and the mix. Both are aspects of composition, and converge on the same object—the digital track—but activate different aspects of the object” (2). He looks at artists such as Ashanti’s Beatjazz, “a born-digital genre played through samples and loops that he records and develops through improvisational instruments” (3). He identifies, for materialist rhetorics, (at least) three audiences for Beatjazz: “1. the objects and machines and as a primary audience, 2. the entire system or assemblage as a secondary audience, and 3. the human affects created through the system’s feedback as a tertiary audience” (3). There is no rhetorical situation without this technological audience. In fact, there never was one without these entities, despite Plato’s best attempts to rid himself of those troublesome (non-logical) subjects and objects. Thus, Hawk’s example helps demonstrate why it is necessary for delivery—itself bound up with ecologies of technology from the
to move far beyond the “tertiary audience” which is where much scholarship on delivery has yet to move.
CHAPTER 5
MISPLACED CONCRETENESS: WRITING NEW MEDIA ALLEGORITHMS AND PROCEDURAL RHETORICS

When and in what way do things appear as things? They do not appear by means of human making. But neither do they appear without the vigilance of mortals. The first step toward such vigilance is the step back from the thinking that merely represents—that is, explains—to the thinking that responds and recalls.

Martin Heidegger

Writing and Agency in Rhetorical Assemblages

One of the points of reclassifying delivery as ontological hypokrisis is that it enables us to ask new questions about rhetoric by interrogating what it means to write through new media and technology. In recent years, circulation has emerged alongside delivery scholarship as a part of the canon of delivery or as an extension. Sensitive to instrumentalist conceptions of technology, circulation scholarship rigorously engages with a fuller range of technological actors and networks through which persuasion occurs. In their 2012 publication, The Available Means of Persuasion: Mapping a Theory and Pedagogy of Multimodal Public Rhetoric, David M. Sheridan, Jim Ridolfo, and Anthony J. Michel are correct when they suggest “Rhetorical theory has yet to confront the full implications of taking circulation into account. Circulation has not yet reached the theoretical richness of other key concepts such as ‘process’ or ‘audience,’ to illustrate what is might mean to take circulation seriously as a key theoretical concept” (61). Yet, it is also true that circulation scholars—like delivery scholars—are largely focused on human-initiated acts of circulation.

It is my claim that rhetoric and writing scholarship can benefit from such specific understandings of agency and delivery as an emergent and distributed phenomenon
distributed across an assemblage of human and nonhuman actors. Turning to Bruno Latour and neurophenomenology, Marilyn R. Cooper articulates how perspectives such as Bennett’s can inform our conceptions of composition pedagogy and rhetorical agency. In contrast to “commonsense” views of agency as intention or as a product of free will, she suggests, “agency is an emergent property of embodied individuals. Agents do reflect on their actions consciously; they do have conscious intentions and goals and plans; but their agency does not arise from conscious mental acts, though consciousness does play a role” (421). Furthermore, Cooper argues, “Agency instead is based in individuals’ lived knowledge that their actions are their own,” concluding via Bennett, “agency is the . . . capacity to make a difference in the world without knowing quite what you are doing” (Bennett qtd. in Cooper 421).56

Cooper ultimately believes that agency is an emergent property and not a possession that “function[s] as part of the systems in which they originate. And causation in complex systems is nonlinear: change arises not as the effect of a discrete cause, but from the dance of perturbation and response as agents interact” (421). Following from Cooper’s analysis, it is not enough for rhetorical theorists to focus on the symbols and representations that we make about the world of objects. Rather, we must begin to pry open the blackboxes of the technologies and mediums around us as they condition the material and embodied spaces through which agency obtains and meaning is delivered and circulated. Rhetors and writers undeniably possess some level of understanding of their intentionality when they attempt to persuade an audience through a given medium. Nevertheless, Cooper’s arguments confirm that rhetors and writers are not always certain
or aware about the full range of material and ecological consequences of their actions within the various technological assemblages that they communicate in. The view of rhetoric and the processes of delivery/circulation as an assemblage requires rhetorical theorists to focus not merely on the symbolic or representational content of cultural phenomena, but to consider the role played by the material instantiation of symbolic phenomena as they enter into and are affected by different nonhuman actors.

Such a view of reality dramatically shifts the ways in which we are able to conceive of rhetoric, politics, and ethics as theories of rhetoric and writing predominantly focus on the subject’s inventive processes that are then manifested through a passive technological object. Against such a perspective and to return to the quotation that I cited at the end of Chapter 2, Bennett speculates: “But what if we loosened the tie between participation and human language use, encountering the world as a swarm of vibrant materials entering and leaving agentic assemblages? We might then entertain a set of crazy and not-so-crazy questions: Did the typical American diet play any role in engendering the widespread susceptibility to the propaganda leading up to the invasion of Iraq? In what ways does the effect on sensibility of a video game exceed the intentions of its designers and users? Can a hurricane bring down a president?” (162).

This chapter explores nonsymbolic forms of rhetoric such as procedural and algorithmic rhetorics as conceptual and practical (and vibrant) tools that allow us to explain rhetorical and writing practices in a world of nonhuman technological actors. In the quotation above, Bennett intended the question, “In what ways does the effect on sensibility of a video game exceed the intentions of its designers and users?” as a mere
passing hypothetical. She does not offer any analysis in *Vibrant Matter* related to digital rhetoric or video games. In this chapter, however, I will in fact consider and elaborate on her question in detail. My case study involves questions of digital rhetoric and multimodal public writing in the context of activist newsgames and “do-it-yourself” (DIY) video games. These video games represent an emergent form of “born digital” new media that are designed specifically for viral circulation, recomposition, inter-textual citation, and being embedded within social media. In this context, I will take up the media studies theorist Alexander Galloway and Jane Bennett’s Deleuzian assemblage theory, and work toward a nonmodern understanding of the persuasive political work that occurs in newsgames, video games, and digital interfaces in general by considering the affective influence of the nonsymbolic or nondiscursive aspects of digital technology. In particular, the Bennett has raised regarding politics and nonhuman agency will require us to focus on nonsymbolic aspects of new media and technology or else we will miss a great deal of the rhetorical work that occurs when we write with and through technologies as they, to invoke Marshall McLuhan’s famous quote, “work us over completely.”

I will highlight at first what will seem like a promising route for digital rhetoric theorists to explore nonsymbolic aspects of technology; namely, how procedural literacies in James Paul Gee and Michael Mateas and procedural rhetorics in Ian Bogost attempted both to demonstrate and to overcome symbolic, representationalist, or semiotic accounts of new media and video game interfaces. As I will briefly note in the first section, scholars have tended to follow Porter’s view above and focused on the user’s interaction with the symbolic content in the act of composition and delivery. The interest
for rhetorical theorists in these conversations is that proceduralist accounts are specifically tied to improving our understanding of political activism through the persuasive capacities of digital new media. Simply stated, procedural rhetorics also help answer the question of what it means to write, compose, and persuade through video games as a medium of delivery and networked circulation.

However, my claim is that procedural rhetoric simultaneously marks an improvement in the interpretation of the nonsymbolic aspects of new media and constitutes an additional interpretative obstacle. Consequently, I maintain that assemblage theory allows us realize why such proceduralist accounts of the role nonhuman actors within new media ultimately fail to realize a vibrant world of nonsymbolic agencies. Proceduralist theorists’ principle failing lies in that they replace a monolithic focus on “symbols” with an equally monolithic focus on “coded procedure” while retaining an instrumental view of rhetoric. They presuppose a view of rhetoric and delivery where it is the human and not the technology that becomes the passive object, captive to the game designer’s Aristotelian manufacturing of a “soul” that can be incarnated into the player (audience). In its place, I will articulate a view of nonsymbolic agency in new media interfaces that treats both the player and the technology as symmetrical actors within a dynamic and emergent assemblage. What I describe in this chapter answers Nicole DeVoss and Jim Ridolfo’s call for rhetorical scholars to develop a unique “theory of digital delivery,” while nevertheless addressing what Jenny Bay and Thomas Rickert call the “ontological weight” of digital rhetoric: the full ecological and material presence of the nonhuman actors that serve as a condition of possibility for
rhetorical agency. Rickert and Bay forcefully declare, “[Technology and rhetorical scholarship] need to accommodate things [e.g., nonhuman actors] more than they need to accommodate us” (“New Media and the Fourfold” 182). While this conclusion and the attention to hardware, software, and algorithms may tempt some to invoke the specter of technological or material determinism, I will demonstrate in this chapter and in Chapter 6 that these considerations do not foreclose the possibility of political intervention. Indeed, Sheridan et al. note that for those such as Bennett, Cooper, and Latour who argue that “agency ‘exceeds the subject,’ [and] is distributed across complex networks of human and nonhuman actors, including people, discourses, and technologies” it is also true that “none of these theorists excludes the roles of education, planning, or design” (106). Consequently, this framework will enable me to explore in Chapter 6 how and in what way these theoretical concerns relate directly to forms of political intervention and forms of indecorous delivery through new media delivery such as videogames.  

The (Im)materiality of Digital and Visual Rhetoric

Far from esoteric philosophical discussions of reality, the issues that I outline in the following section directly concern rhetorical theorists, delivery, circulation, and digital and visual rhetoric scholars, and composition theorists and teachers. Specifically, these issues impact the ways in which we allow nonhuman actors to be present and visible in the rhetorical situation without subsuming them into what Latour calls “modern Constitution”: an ontological separation between active human actors and passive or instrumental nonhuman objects. In “The Programmable City,” the software studies scholar Robert Kitchin describes what it means to view a technological actor such as
software not through a lens of instrumental *technē*—Porter’s concern with delivery and circulation—but as a participant in a vital and conative assemblage:

[S]oftware has been understood from a technical, instrumental perspective that treats it as largely an immaterial, stable, neutral product, rather than as a complex, multifaceted, mutable set of relations created through diverse sets of discursive, economic, and material practices. Where the role of software has been acknowledged, the focus of analysis has been the technologies and infrastructures that software enables, rather than the underlying nature of software that powers such technologies. The consequence is to study how telematic networks shape, for example, traffic management, but to largely ignore how such effects are manifestly the result of the rules. (945)\(^{59}\)

Kitchin’s quotation illustrates the consequences for technology and media studies when they fail to develop a larger ecological picture of technological agency. In the example of traffic management software, I read Kitchin as suggesting that cultural (and rhetorical) critics avoid considerations of protocol and algorithmic procedurality precisely because of the stigma that these elements are “technical” and “fixed.”

Arguably, rhetorical theory and composition studies’ institutional attitudes toward technology have dramatically improved since 1999 when Selfe wrote these words. However, Kitchin’s conclusions demonstrate that her point is nevertheless valid in a different but related register. It is not that scholars have not focused on technology. Rather, what is “humanistic” about technology largely includes its symbolic content.
Hearkening back to Aristotle, the blackboxed functionality of technological objects largely remains the domain of *episteme* and expert discourse (e.g., “engineers, technicians, and technocrats”), and not *doxa* and the rhetorical, symbolic, and discursive analysis of the language that we use to describe and make meaning about technological objects. As a result of this oversight of the actual properties of technology, Kitchin suggests, “The way the discourses and practices of traffic management are translated into the routines and algorithms of code is vitally important to how the traffic system operates and yet we know hardly anything about how such translations occur: traffic system into code; code reshaping the traffic system” (945-46). To express the matter more schematically, rhetorical theorists are historically more interested in the language that engineers use about their objects than in the technical properties of the objects themselves. The lesson that we should draw from the renewed attention to software, hardware, and nonhuman technological actors is not necessarily Stephen Ramsey’s claim in *Toward an Algorithmic Criticism* that humanities scholars need to learn how to program textual search algorithms. Rather, Kitchin’s (and Bennett’s) point is to concede that treating technological objects as visible and present actors *only* through considering the user’s direct manipulation is inevitably to miss the deeper material registers that influence and constitute technological rhetorics and the activity of delivery.

The rise of new media theory was roughly commensurate with the development of software studies in the early 2000s, leading the media studies theorist Lev Manovich to declare confidently that code was the new hermeneutic key to interpreting digital media since all digital devices shared this property in common. However, when digital rhetoric
scholars generally examine media interfaces such as a videogame as a form of new media writing, they demonstrate the validity of Kitchin’s observation. A 2008 *Computers and Composition* special issue entitled “Reading Games: Composition, Literacy, and Video Gaming” is typical of this approach. Topics in the special issue included public writing in online gamer communities (Johnson); textual conversation produced in games (deWinter and Vie); and semiotic approaches to video games seen in the work of New Literacies theorist Gee (Alberti), whose scholarship I will engage below. No attention was given to the operation of code, algorithms, hardware, software and hardware studies, platform studies, or ecologies of rhetorical interaction in the sense of Bogost, Galloway, or other games studies or new media theorists. I make this observation not in any way to dismiss the validity or necessity of this scholarship. Indeed, I firmly agree that such efforts are crucially valuable to understanding the operation of rhetoric in video games, new media, and online virtual worlds and to recognize them as valid forms of rhetorical expression. My point is more that this sort of scholarship misses including the role of important nonsymbolic elements as they participate in the shaping of meaning. In as far as “writing” and “rhetoric” involve new media including video games, the overwhelming tendency is for scholars to focus on the contents of the screen and not the technologies themselves (Haas).

Noting a definite human perceptual bias that many have called “screen essentialism,” media studies theorist Lisa Gitelman observes that, “critics [starting with McLuhan] have long noted, the success of all media depends at some level on inattention or ‘blindness’ to the media technologies themselves (and all of their support protocols) in
favor of attention to the phenomena, ‘the content, that they represent for users’
edification or enjoyment” (6). Working from a similar set of concerns, Bogost views
screen essentialism as a dominant paradigm within digital rhetoric. “Digital rhetoric,”
Bogost observes, “typically abstracts the computer as a consideration, focusing on the
text and image content a machine might host and the communities of practice in which
that content is created and used . . . [F]or scholars of digital rhetoric, to ‘function in
digital spaces’ often means mistaking subordinate properties of the computer for primary
ones” (Procedural 25). Elizabeth Losh confirms Bogost’s point of view: “in the standard
model of digital rhetoric, literary theory is applied to technological phenomena without
considering how technological theories could conversely elucidate new media texts” (9).
Losh and Bogost indicate that “literary theory” means the interpretation of narrative or
representational elements independent of the interactive and algorithmically-governed
nature of new media texts. Wendy Chun seconds Bogost’s opinion, writing that visual
culture studies also “treat the interface or representations of the interface, as the medium”
(Control and Freedom 18). I want to make it very clear what these sorts of arguments are
suggesting. Gitelman’s argument is not that representations and symbolic content in
videogames are unaffective or that they do not contribute to persuasion or gender and
identity formation. It is more the point that in videogames and any computational media,
the meaning of representations are inseparable from their algorithmic manifestation—that
is, the way in they materialize which we have to access to them.

This focus on the screen is a common hermeneutic problem within media studies
as a whole. In Mechanisms: New Media and the Forensic Imagination, notable digital
humanities scholar Matthew G. Kirschenbaum offers a distinction between “phenomenological materialism”—graphic user interfaces and digital symbols—and “ontological materialism”—the material underpinnings for the former (12). The problems with screen essentialism and phenomenological materialism lie in the fact that scholars generally only attribute materiality, presence, affect, and agency to the elements that the user interacts with and perceives. By contrast, N. Katherine Hayles argues, “the visual form of the letter on the screen [is] fully material . . . even though the ‘letter’ exists as a stored sequence of binary digits with no tactile, material apparency to it in that fundamental condition” (171–172). While what the user perceives are “flickering signifiers,” to limit the critical gaze to the screen constitutes “a selective focus on certain physical aspects of an instantiated text that are foregrounded by a work’s construction, operation, and content” (qtd. in Gitelman 131).

Phenomenological materialism or screen essentialism is significant because this oversight plagues some accounts of digital and visual rhetoric even when the intention is to address the nonsymbolic visual aspects of delivery and rhetoric. In the introduction to one of the first major visual rhetoric collections, Marguerite Helmers and Charles A. Hill addressed scholars’ needs to see how arguments and persuasion operated in photographic and cinematic expression. They write,

Rhetoricians working from a variety of disciplinary perspectives are beginning to pay a substantial amount of attention to issues of visual rhetoric. Through analysis of photographs and drawings, graphs and tables,
and motion pictures, scholars are exploring the many ways in which visual elements are used to influence people’s attitudes, opinions, and beliefs. (2) Despite this commendable attention to visual forms of persuasion and affect, Helmers and Hill (tacitly) warrant their arguments for a visual rhetoric by resurrecting Aristotle’s anxiety over delivery as acting. As I noted in Chapter 3, Aristotle disliked delivery in that its nonsymbolic aspects involved emotional falsehoods and non-logical appeals, such as when a plaintiff suffers from a mild case of whiplash exaggerates an injury by appearing in court with a full-body cast and an IV drip. In other words, visuality, gesture, and the body’s role in rhetoric become a negative form of non-logical persuasion that Aristotle thought should be employed only due to the lack of logical competence in the audience.

In a subsequent essay, Hill concludes that visual rhetoric necessarily includes a similar anxiety over the use of nonsymbolic persuasion: “It is likely that verbal text, because of its analytic nature (being made up of discrete meaningful units) and because it is apprehended relatively slowly over time, is more likely to prompt systematic processing, while images, which are comprehend [sic] wholistically and almost instantaneously, tend to prompt heuristic processing” (“The Psychology of Rhetorical Images” 25). As more “vivid” than speech or text, somatic and sensory responses manipulate the viewer and, consequently, an “awareness” of this manipulation is what they advocate for “enlightening the critical mind” (10). Advertisers, Hill concludes, don’t want to persuade people to buy their products, because persuasion implies that the audience has given the issue some thought and come to a conscious decision. Instead, advertisers want to […] compel people to buy
a product without even knowing why they’re buying it—as a visceral response to a stimulus, not as a conscious decision. And this is best done through images. (33)

At a purely phenomenological level, Hill is correct in drawing a distinction between reading text and viewing moving images. Roland Barthes expressed a similar distinction in *Camera Lucida* when he argued that a “punctum,” an unconscious piercing of affect, was possible only in consideration of the static photograph and not the motion picture which progresses too rapidly for contemplation. Barthes’ division parallels Hill’s division: both draw an ontological or definitional line in terms of “persuasion” being always already a purely symbolic and semiotic phenomenon. As a consequence, Hill indicates his hope that images should serve reflective rhetorical purposes while not attempting “to banish emotional and aesthetic concerns” (and he regretfully does not offer any examples of how to achieve the desired reflection) (3). Images (the nonsymbolic) lack the deeper analysis that textual interpretation alone provides.

This mindset is so entrenched that even J. Anthony Blair’s criticism of Hill on the grounds of reducing visual rhetoric to “symbolic inducement” nevertheless would improve upon the latter’s framework only if “it would possible to construct from what is communicated visually a verbal argument that is consistent with the visual presentation” (23). Extended to video games, both Hill and Blair would surely urge scholars to focus only on narrative and symbolic elements that can be isolated and reflected on within the medium, marginalizing important or constitutive role played by the algorithms or other nonsymbolic aspects. Hill and Helmers assume that if materiality is admitted into the
rhetorical situation as an affective agent, then nonsymbolic factors will entirely determine the rhetorical situation, effectively arguing against the possibility that nonsymbolic factors have any relationship to persuasion. Yet, challenging this claim is one of the main points of contention for the rhetorical consideration of nonhuman agency. Hill and Helmers’ argument presupposes that communication—even oral communication—can be freed from materiality and nonhuman affect. While video games may foreground their algorithmic rules, even Plato acknowledged that the sweetness of the voice—the specific way in which it materialized for an audience in delivery—could make a weaker logical argument appear the stronger. While there is a consideration of truth and falsity to be had, my larger point is rather that delivery is always already a materializable event. Thus, marginalizing nonsymbolic factors as nonrhetorical is frequently taken as a logocentric, speech-privileging invitation to ignore how all rhetorical acts involve mobilizing and being affected by nonhuman relations of force.

James Paul Gee’s frequently-cited scholarship on videogame literacy is another example of this trend. However, I want to gesture toward two more recent examples serve to demonstrate why this division between symbolic and nonsymbolic is problematic. In one example, the scientific journal *Cognition* recently (2012) demonstrated, having students read textbooks in non-standard fonts actually increased their retention: “making material harder to learn can improve long-term learning and retention. More cognitive engagement leads to deeper processing, which facilitates encoding and subsequently better retrieval” (qtd. in Lang 3). The researchers concluded that humans are actually wired to learn and retain information better in “disfluent” conditions. Thus, nonsymbolic
factors in text actually create more lasting retention than arguments mounted through standardized fonts that are designed to render the medium invisible. In terms of conceiving of visual persuasion, the nonsymbolic factors at least equally if not more important, in a very loose sense of the term, in the “persuasion” of the reader than the symbols and meaning that is communicated. What I take from this neurocognitive study is that language is always already a materializable and materializing force in the world. Bennett reminds us that speech was never just a product of the voice alone. Our agency as speakers emerges through an assemblage. To revisit Bennett’s quotation again that I cited in Chapter 2, she argues, “my speech, for example, depends upon the graphite in my pencil, the millions of persons, dead and alive, in my Indo-European language group, not to mention the electricity in my brain and laptop computer” (462).65 My point is that retreating from the analysis of the constitutive affect of the nonsymbolic aspects of the medium by calling them “coercive” and privileging an ostensible “non-material” focus on the reflective/symbolic ultimately avoids engagement with the messier entanglements between rhetoric and nonhuman actors that, as I will demonstrate momentarily, will be a prerequisite for understanding how persuasion operates in video games and other interactive media.

In a second example, I want to consider the philosopher Steven Shaviro’s formulation in Post-Cinematic Affect of a profound shift in the experience of filmic environments. Even though human audiences always experience film in analogue, the mechanisms that produce commercial films have become heavily digitalized. Shaviro observes that this digitalization enables a small but growing trend wherein commercial
films are manufactured via market-demographic research in order to maximize an audience’s biological pleasure and pain cycles to the detriment—prominently featured in Michael Bay’s admittedly terrible *Transformers* series—of editorial ingenuity, plot and narrative coherency. Unfortunately, the “death of the director” in this case is not as liberating for the viewer in a proportionate sense to how Barthes noted in the poststructuralist death of the author. In fact, the death of the director corresponds to the potential enslavement of the viewer in a seeming confirmation of Hill’s fears about nonsymbolic coercion. One way in which Shaviro explains post-cinematic affect is through the allegory of neurocinema. Whereas commercial film editing historically functions in the “interpretive mode” (e.g. montage requires the viewer to compare two distinct series of an image), post-cinematics are marked by an “executive mode” where demographic research and data collection are used to inform cuts that pace the film. Cuts in action sequences within films such as the *Bourne Identity* do not relate to each other or to the action, but simply operate in a way to suggest a sort of disorienting speed of disparate visual perspectives. In fact, the online video-sharing platform *Vimeo* offers an interview with *The Dark Knight* trilogy director, Christopher Nolan, who offers details shot-by-shot analysis of the temporal and spatial incoherency of some of his own sequences.

These trends indicate that the nonsymbolic production of affect is received as a perceptual stimulus and not as symbolic action. As I read Shaviro’s criticism, post-cinematic affect and neurocinema have moved us from the production of ideology in mass media cinema theorized by scholars such as Walter Benjamin to a second-by-
second manipulation of a viewer’s affective state through complex nonsymbolic factors. However, this detailed consideration does not allow us to merely to decry the nonsymbolic as coercive. Indeed, one could hardly call Bay’s executive mode coercive because it does not communicate any overall persuasive message. Rather, these cuts are designed as a specific nonsymbolic *technē* to maximize an audience’s emotional sensory input for action sequences in order to sustain interest in an otherwise dramatically and narratively incoherent film. Bay’s plan, in a sense, is to manufacture just enough interest in order to fulfill the broader and by no means unified goals of the complex of actors and networks involved in the overall production of *The Transformers*. As an assemblage, we can situate post-cinematic affect in the *Transformers* within the production of new digital Foucaultian figures of subjectification, the military-industrial complex, jingo-istic nationalism, Fox News right-wing ideology seen in Bill O’Reilly’s cameos, Hasbro’s toys, and the increasing market-driven big data digitalization of all media. Slowing down the action sequences would hardly allow the viewer to better reflect on the symbolic content. Given these two examples—visual disfluency and post-cinematic affect—theorizing digital rhetoric increasingly means heeding Jodi Deane’s claim in *Blog Theory* that, “At certain levels, media are very influential, and their material properties do (literally and figuratively) *matter*, determining some of the local conditions of communication amid the broader circulations that at once express and constitute social relations” (10).66
Procedural Rhetoric

To return to Kitchin’s observations above, the problem with treating video games’ and technology’s nonsymbolic aspects as passive, invisible, or static is that video games and many new media interfaces have meaning that is intimately bound up with their algorithms as I will detail below. It is only within the last few years that a handful of rhetoric and composition scholars have begun specifically examining the materiality of technology and its nonsymbolic aspects of software and hardware. As I will argue in this section, viewing video games as part of an assemblage means accounting for one nonhuman actor in particular: the algorithmically-bounded procedure. As Bogost defines it in *Persuasive Games*, procedural rhetoric is an analytical term unique to this nonsymbolic aspect of the computer medium. Conceiving of procedural rhetoric as a complex point of interconnection between technological agency and symbolic action will allow me to better indicate how to realign the symbolic vis-à-vis the nonsymbolic without subsuming the latter into the former. Along these lines, Collin Gifford Brooke correctly argues in *Lingua Fracta* that new media “texts” should be reclassified as “interfaces” precisely because of their interactivity, and focusing on the relationship between rhetoric and algorithms as technological actors can help supplement such understanding. On the one hand, I will demonstrate how Bogost’s procedural rhetoric constitutes a basic advance for nonsymbolic understandings of digital rhetoric while nevertheless subscribing to a variant of the modern Constitution. On the other hand, I will also seek to refashion the concept of procedural rhetoric in order to suggest how procedures can undermine symbolic content—an undermining that can be detected through a rhetorical
or compositional post-*technê* (defined below) that Galloway and Wark call “the allegorithm.”

Bogost’s neologism procedural rhetoric joins Galloway’s conception of protocol (discussed below) as part of a growing trend to analyze all media including video games as cultural artifacts through software, hardware, and platform studies. As the titles of these studies denote, media scholars have begun to focus on the operation and functionality of media devices alongside symbolic or representational content that they host. Procedurality became a source of concern for new media theorists in the pioneering work of Lev Manovich (2002) and Janet Murray (1998). Bogost’s procedural rhetoric directly engages with what he sees as an elision of the operation of code in favor of semiotic analysis among digital rhetoricians of all shades. The result of focusing on the representational content has been a tendency to semioticize game elements in Gee’s sense and to consider them in the abstract from their medium of transmission in a way similar to how we might analyze a novel or a poem for its metaphors and allegories but not in terms of the material of its paper, the chemical makeup of its ink, or in relationship to prevailing printing press technology. Cultural critics want to know what a video game means at a narrative, representational, or conceptual level, but not necessarily how a video game technologically structures the reception of semiotic or symbolic meaning. Bogost challenges this semiotic or representational bias through procedural rhetoric wherein software inscription can persuade gamers “through rule-based representations, modeling real-life processes, and interactions rather than the spoken word, writing, images, or moving pictures” (3).
In an outstanding review of the rise of proceduralism in new media theory and games studies scholarship, Miguel Sicart argues “Proceduralism both justified the cultural validity of computer games providing arguments for the exceptionality argument (computer games as unique, expressive cultural objects), and opened the possibility for a new take on serious games that combined design approaches with a strong humanist discourse” (11). According to Sicart, procedurality is not only what defines video games as a medium, but it is also the unique or “specific way” that ethical, political, and aesthetic values can be constructed. Bogost began thinking through procedural rhetoric in an earlier work, *Unit Operations* (2006), arguing “. . . games create complex relations between the player, the work, and the world via unit operations that simultaneously embed material, functional, and discursive modes of representation” (106). In the previous quotation, Bogost clearly argues that narrative and symbolic elements cannot just be “read” or interpreted without considering how they are uniquely embedded by computational media. By simulating rules and presenting pre-designed values, the player’s processual understanding of these values in a video game is what allows a game to produce meaning. Bogost argue that “A simulation is the gap between the rule-based representation of a source system and a player’s subjectivity” (107), and “. . . the unit operations of a simulation embody themselves in a player’s understanding. This is the place where rules can be grasped, where instantiated code enters the material world via human players’ faculty of reason” (99). These statements contain a nuanced and complex point. Literary critics and cultural theorists are accustomed to ascribing meaning to things that already signify—words, phrases, ideas and concepts that can easily be recognized as
linguistic forms created by humans to communicate linguistic meaning. By contrast, the radicality of Bogost’s idea is that he treats unit operations—“discrete, disconnected actions” of individual actors such as coded-procedure over “systems operations” such as our experience at the graphic user interface—as primary elements. Critics would typically fall prey to screen essentialism by focusing on the graphic interface that clearly signifies meaning to us while avoiding ascribing meaning that occurs in the non-semiotic, asignifying, and non-intentional realm of code. That is, code is written in a binary language. We never actually perceive or comprehend all of the zeros and ones that the computer reads when we open Microsoft Word while the code is nevertheless the governing logic of our encounter with the software program. Bogost offers an example of the contrast between unit and systems operations: “In software technology, object technology exploits unit operations; structured programming exhibits system operations. In human biology, DNA nucleotide bonding displays unit operations; the Darwinian idea of acquired characteristics illustrates system operations” (3).

Bogost draws the idea of unit structures to claim in Persuasive Games that video games were equally if not more capable than other media of contributing to the formation of cultural attitudes. Bogost argues, “for my purposes, procedural expression must entail symbol manipulation, the construction and interpretation of a symbolic system that governs human thought or action” (Persuasive 5). An example is instructive to demonstrate to illustrate his point. Bogost describes a hypothetical situation of a customer who wishes to return a defective product that she has recently purchased. “The very concept of returning a defective product,” he maintains, “is only made possible by the
creation of rules that frame that very notion [e.g., store policies for returns]” (5).

Therefore, he continues, “When we do things, we do them according to some logic, and that logic constitutes a process in the general sense of the world” (7). For video games, procedure is an inscription that “enacts processes” after they have been “authored in code, through the practices of programming” (29). The relationship between procedure and symbolic action stems from Mateas’s notion of procedural literacy, which is about “the ability to read and write processes, to engage procedural representation and aesthetics, to understand the interplay between culturally-embedded practices of human meaning-making and technically-mediated processes” (53).

The Politics of Procedural Rhetoric

Yet, while procedures are what legitimate video games’ expressive capacities, we see here the emergence of a Faustian bargain that will ultimately trouble all strict proceduralist accounts of video games. The first Bush administration exploited such assumptions about procedural literacy in criticizing violence in video games. If games persuaded through following and manipulating systems, then it followed that if games might persuade in favor of socially positive methods then we could also learn violence toward others in first-person shooters. Rather than engaging in an abstract or representational musing about violence such as that which occurs in Fyodor Dostoyevski’s Crime and Punishment, first-person shooters allowed fantasies to be enacted, simulated, and performed—a problem that video games continually encounter due to correlational associations with the motivations of the perpetrators of the Columbine Massacre. More recently, the Norwegian mass killer Anders Breivik joined
the line of post-Columbine shooters when he cited video games as an enabling influence on his behavior. By defining itself in this way, procedural rhetoric cannot avoid the ancient Ciceronian complaint about any systematic and deterministic effect of rhetoric. We “place weapons in the hands of madmen,” hoping that the good (historically) man will use rhetoric for good (De Oratore III: xiv.55). Losh confirms this reduction, suggesting that those who call for video game literacy support procedural rhetoric when game literacy models good behavior (collaboration, solving puzzles), but retreat from this position when the behavior is negative (stealing cars) (21).69

The issue of how nonsymbolic forces relate to persuasion and how this relationship can be mobilized for strategic political ends as a form of new media rhetoric and writing is critical for my argument. After all, a detailed accounting of nonsymbolic factors would be interesting but not useful if it could not be directly tied back to the operation of rhetoric in a set of emergent literacy and digital rhetoric practices. Thus, I will offer a few concrete examples of how procedural rhetoric is held to work by considering the newsgame genre and use these as a point of contrast to make my turn back to assemblage theory. Despite my attention to nonsymbolic aspects, I firmly concede that older forms of biological essentialism and identity politics remain in play and are remediated through ever more novel and subtle procedural and protocological ways. For example, as central narrative devices, serious topics, or minor characters, gay, lesbian, bi-sexual, and transgender themes and identities enjoy little presence in popular and mainstream video games. While invisibility is a result of heteronormative exclusion that takes the form of explicit or thinly-veiled homophobic slurs from soldier avatars such
as Duke Nukem, some popular games make heteronormativity a core element of the game experience. Mia Consalvo complains in her essay, “Hot Dates and Fairy-Tale Romances,” that Electronic Art’s The Sims (2000) only spawns heterosexual marriages. This is a particularly blatant form of exclusion in a video game in which players control variables to influence the natural evolution of an urban society. Same sex marriages have to be manually forced together by the player, thus coding queer identities as abnormal.

In 2009, Singapore-MIT GAMBIT Game Lab created the experimental game A Closed World as a strategic political response to institutional homophobia across gaming industries and cultures. Intended as an exploratory bildungsroman, the player follows a young queer character who tires of oppression and insensitivity in a hometown called Gest. The initial goal is to overcome the fear of the “forbidden forest”—the area of non-heteronormativity metaphorically figured as an unknown and dangerous outside by the character’s parents and friends. As Judith Butler has argued in Gender Trouble, figuring the Other in such terms is a cultural policing mechanism designed to perpetuate, in words of one villager, a “normal Gest” (n.pag). After the character faces back-and-forth dialogues with family and villagers who attempt to persuade the character to stay, the character braves the forbidden forest and discovers that the villagers were correct. The forbidden forest does indeed contain monsters; however, once engaged in dialogue, the character discovers that the monsters serve as metonymic representatives of other historically marginalized identities. The game designers challenge a historical figuration of Otherness and social deviancy as monstrous—a figuration that Butler and other queer theorists correctly argue is a historically-specific cultural construction and not a
biological essence. In contrast to many commercial games where battle and player-controlled avatar movements are the procedures that allow one to progress in the game, *A Closed World* feels uncanny. The player operates at the Socratic level, valuing “courage,” “composure,” “passion,” “logics,” and “ethics,” in the face of existentially probing questions about the construction of social identities.

*A Closed World* offers an excellent opportunity to reflect on the relationship between politics and representation in video games in relationship to procedural rhetoric. What initially interested me in this game as an example of procedural rhetoric was the presumed alliance between what the Galloway has called “social realism” at the symbolic level and procedural persuasion in gaming (“Social Realism” 1). If social realism—mimetic or literal models of actual social exclusion mechanisms—is what perpetuates heteronormativity in video games then an identical invocation of social realism that is inclusive of the Other is an understandable response. In this sense, *A Closed World* attempts to persuade heterosexual players to develop self-reflexivity about the ways in which their heteronormative selves are constructed vis-à-vis the queer Other. Persuasion (e.g., procedural rhetoric) occurs by limiting progress in the game to procedurally-ordained steps that correspond to social realist enactments of social alienation. Such procedural assumptions about persuasion are widely employed by many Other-directed political games. To take a recent (2012) example, Auntie Pixelante’s *Dys4ia*, a transgender video game, requires players to progress through her autobiographical narrative, dodging metaphorical and literal verbal bullets from the feminist allies that Auntie Pixelante (aka Anna Anthropy) had expected support from after her operation. In
another scene, the player must repeatedly push the down-arrow button on the keyboard in a failed attempt to get women’s garments to fit on Anthropy’s post-op body. The player metaphorically engages in the “process” of dressing rather than only interpreting a symbolic representation of the activity.

After spending a lengthy amount of time playing *A Closed World, Dys4ia*, and similar activist gender games, I am in firm agreement that such procedural strategies are conducive to meaningful existential contemplation about the ways in which gender and the body are constructed. Furthermore, these video games are vital resources for the development of an Other-directed politics that utilizes the unique persuasive, nonsymbolic, and affective capacities of the video game medium deployed in social media and networked environments. The title of Anthropy’s latest (2012) book, *Rise of the Videogame Zinesters* details how DIY game design is a rising form of digital literacy given the rapid development of user friendly design programs such as GameSalad that allow anyone to create games for smart phones, web browsers, and virtually any other digital interface. Given all of these factors, procedural rhetoric seemingly offers a vital conceptual tool in order to theorize the interplay between symbolic and nonsymbolic forces in digital rhetoric and multimodal composition as they work toward persuasion without reducing the latter to narrative, symbol, representation, semiotics, or other cultural manifestations divorced from material instantiation. Still, I question the presumed alignment between procedure and persuasion held tacitly by the designers themselves and explicitly by canonical game studies concepts such as Bogost and Mateas (and, to a lesser extent, Gee). Despite the positive political content of these video games,
these prevailing analytical approaches to video games with political content nevertheless help to reinforce two problematic assumptions that prevent us from a more complex and accurate picture of the relationship between procedural persuasion and politics in a nonmodern ontological universe: first, that persuasive political games necessarily deal with expressly or primarily with political content and, second, that persuasion occurs when a player’s role in “learning” or being persuaded is reduced to a passive object of following the pre-determined narrative of the game designer.

My concern emerges more clearly through some examples drawn from the emerging persuasive game genre of “newsgames” discussed in great detail by Bogost, Ferrari, and Schweizer in *Newsgames: Journalism at Play*. Newsgames are the casual video game equivalent of a newspaper political cartoon. They are designed in and for social media networks for the widest possible circulation due in part to their simple interfaces and short play periods. While fans of the television program *The Colbert Report* might recall Bogost’s July 8, 2007 guest appearance and subsequent demonstration of the newsgame *Oil Gods*, my favorite example of a newsgame is Gonzalo Frasca’s *September 12*. The universes of single-player newsgames are easily reduced to persuasion governed by code when the player takes on a single or limited persona—a U.S. bomber in *September 12*—and can only advance in the game by committing morally problematic actions, such as bombing both civilians and terrorists in a Middle Eastern village setting. Bombing inevitably creates collateral damage and kills innocent bystanders. The game persuades the player by generating more and more terrorists after each bomb strike to the point where bombing becomes a pointless way to
solve the problem. While most video games require direct player input, *September 12* makes player input an undesirable goal. If the player does not elect to pursue an ineffective bombing campaign and just observes the village, then the terrorists will eventually disappear. Thus, *September 12* argues against patriarchal assumptions that non-Western societies are incapable of policing themselves or forming organic political orders within their own societies unless aided by a benevolent Western father-figure who can liberate and teach them—a semblance of the master-slave, colonizer-colonized, or imperialist dynamics criticized by postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, or Homi Bhabha.

Although I enthusiastically agree with Frasca’s anti-imperialist political message, the persuasive genre of his and other newsgames is identical to the Socratic dialogue of *A Closed World* and *Dys4ia*, with the game designer serving as Socrates, and the player as young Phaedrus who eagerly follows along. Recalling the general import of postmodern *ur*-theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard’s criticism in *Just Gaming*, Plato’s dialectical mode of teaching is *not* empowering to the interlocutor’s (player’s) intelligence. The player does not actively participate in the shaping of knowledge as an equal with her interlocutor but enters the terrain as an intellectual inferior—a Phaedrus concealing his written notes in fear that his immature mental powers of logical understanding will fail him. Phaedrus cannot discover the truth through his own innate cognitive abilities and is in need of the wisdom and the modeling of a logical progression of reasoning that philosopher, Socrates, alone will perform. Socrates reveals the primrose path of reasoning that leads to the truth, and the pupil’s participation is limited to passive affirmation—a never-ending cycle of
Phaedrus saying, “yes,” “of course,” and “I wish and pray for things to be just as you say” (Phaedrus 554: 278b).

**Challenges to Procedurality**

Bogost attempts to negotiate this tension between pre-determining the gamer’s subjectivity while needing to acknowledge the existence of non-coded additional factors that would prevent procedural rhetoric from being mobilized by the military’s *America’s Army* series that glorifies combat in an attempt to persuade teenagers to enlist (Mead). He writes, “while we often think that rules always limit behavior, the imposition of constraints also creates expression” (Persuasive 7). Yet, despite this acknowledgment, he concludes in the end “. . . play refers to the possibility space created by processes themselves” (42). By locating the meaning of the game in the formal properties of the rules which the player then completes and fulfills while being guided by the rules, Sicart maintains that for proceduralists, “the game is the rules, both in terms of its ontological definition (the *what* in “what is a game”), and in its function as an object that creates meaning in the contexts in which specific players *use it*” (Sicart 16). Sicart goes on to argue that a player’s creativity is ultimately disregarded by proceduralist accounts. A similar criticism is suggested in the title of Brathwaite and Sharp’s article “The Mechanic is the Message.” The title is pun on Marshall McLuhan’s “medium is the message” axiom whereby Brathwaite and Sharpe suggest that for proceduralists the meaning of the game is not on the act of playing it, but in whatever meaning the designer embeds in the system itself (and there are clear resonances here with the delivery is the medium argument as well). While Bogost is quite correct to call our attention to unit operations such as codes,
he nevertheless limits what counts as an affective actor within a video game to the
programmer’s design of the code. Christopher A. Paul makes a similar claim: “Bogost’s
approach to rhetoric is rather narrow . . . If rhetorical analysis is a critical perspective,
focusing beyond mere persuasion, all elements surrounding games are influential
symbols worthy of study, as all games function persuasively” (9). Along these lines, we
could also recall Wendy Chun’s discussion of the hypokritical nature of code in
*Programmed Visions* that I discussed in Chapter 3.

Indeed, algorithms definitely possess an effective and an affective influence on
persuasion in gaming. Following from Paul’s criticism above and before turning to
assemblage theory, I want to note two quick examples, the first adapted from Paul’s use
of the art of “theorycraft” to challenge procedurality and the second from Galloway’s
understanding of what he calls the informatics of code. Theorycraft is a term that comes
not from games studies scholars but from players. According to WoWWiki “Theorycraft
is the attempt to mathematically analyze game mechanics in order to gain a better
understanding of the inner workings of the game. The term originated in the Starcraft
community as composite colloquialism between the name Starcraft and Game Theory”
(n.pag). *The World of Warcraft* (WoW) more popularly employs the term and the
WoWwiki’s description is worth quoting at length:

> The term DPS [damage per second], itself, was one of the first advents of
> theorycraft as it applies to real-time games. Gearscore is another highly
> used, yet still incredibly controversial, result of theorycraft. Theorycraft
> has an impact upon everything from Player Interface setup and
customization, to build and rotation discussions, to event recording. In
general, as a player becomes more involved in the game, they also become
(wittingly or unwittingly) more involved with theorycraft and the effects
of its practice. (n.pag)

Tied intimately to the algorithms of the game, theorycraft is an emergent practice that
procedural rhetorics cannot account for as procedural rhetorics largely limits itself to the
designer’s Platonic logics. By contrast, theorycraft is a clear indication that semi-
autonomous player initiative undermines the designer’s ideal of a finished product;
however, at the same time, Paul reminds us that theorycraft is neither separable from nor
commensurate with procedure. As a result, in WoW, some player builds became more
popular for different statistical reasons as the makeup of raid parties changed, causing in
turn Blizzard’s need to alter character builds and boss strengths in relationship to
theorycraft’s prominence. Theorycrafting is firm evidence of one common bit of gamer
wisdom: players play the procedure (the game) and not necessarily the representation. In
my opinion, such *topoi* offer great insight into the development of nonsymbolic forms of
literacy. The type of “insider knowledge” that Gee identifies at the level of semiotics also
obtains at nonsymbolic registers.

One of the better arguments for a consideration of politics seen through
procedurality divorced from any presumed connection with social realist representation
lies in Galloway’s *Essays on Algorithmic Culture*. In an analysis of Sid Meier’s
*Civilization* series, most critics are drawn to what Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman and
Brian Sutton-Smith identify as the “cultural rhetoric” of games: racist representations,
Eurocentric narratives of civilizational conquest, and gender. Thus, in considering *Civilization*, Galloway suggests that a cultural rhetoric approach “might then construct a vast ideological critique of the game, focusing on its explicit logocentrism, its nationalism and imperialism, its expansionist logic, as well as its implicit racism and classicism” (96). Just as *The Sims* teach us that gays do not form civil unions naturally, *Civilization* teaches us that non-white peoples are “athletic” and women are “emotional,” thus implicating players in the normative stereotyping within the game (96). Furthermore, like many of the cultural representations of the newsgame genre, *Civilization* simplifies the diversity of human life by selectively focusing on some changes (Tsarist Russia) but not others (Soviet), excluding indigenous peoples such as the Inuits and avoiding questions of imperialism, hybridity, diaspora, and migration that challenge metanarratives of global development grounded in the nation-state and capitalism. If these egregious examples of cultural rhetoric were not enough, Galloway concludes that the game enacts Western logocentrism: “[Civilization] is structured around a question of knowledge, with all human thought broken down into neatly packaged discoveries that are arranged in a branching time line where one discovery is a precondition for the next” (*Essays* 92).

While cultural rhetoric would confirm the validity of a procedural rhetoric analysis, Galloway has an alternative viewpoint on the relationship between politics and procedure. When we consider the algorithm that the player interacts with in *Civilization*, the point is not merely that the game contains racist representations, but “whether it embodies the logic of informatics control itself . . . The massive electronic network of command and control that I have elsewhere called ‘protocol’ is precisely the visible,
active, essential, and core ingredient of Meier’s work in particular and video games in general” (*Essays* 92). The context of Galloway’s claim is his interest in how the management of Western post-industrial societies is controlled by horizontal, distributed, and noncentralized networks. Whereas earlier populations were managed by centralized power formations and sovereign figures such as monarchs, neoliberal democratic societies are managed without kings and queens (e.g., Foucault’s shift from Sovereign to Disciplinary power). The transnational flow of commodities and information instead structures our experience of being a participant of a given nation-state. “Protocol,” taken from the Greek *protokollon*, meant an element (a flyleaf) glued (*kola, kollon*) first (*protos*) to any document guaranteeing its authenticity: an apt description for the process that Galloway is tracing. By protocol, he means the technologies—the unit operations—through which all information flows are regulated.

In a way similar to Bogost, Galloway locates political operations in technological protocols that many would ordinarily just ignore in the assessment of video games or media systems in favor of studying cultural rhetoric. Instead, Galloway maintains that dominant internet protocols such as TCP, IP, DNS, and HTTP actually structure what would be an otherwise chaotic networked space: “Like their diplomatic predecessors, computer protocols establish the essential points necessary to enact an agreed-upon standard of action” (7). In Galloway’s understanding, protocol represents an absolute triumph of technological form over representational content as there can be no discussion of meaning without protocological assistance: “[Technological] protocols are highly formal; that is, they encapsulate information inside a technically defined wrapper, while
remaining relatively indifferent to the content of information contained within” (8). Thus, rather than seeing a computational process as necessarily having a causal relationship to representation, Galloway argues the converse that procedure—protocol—actually has an autonomous level of affect and interaction from representation. For example, a packet sniffer program such as Wireshark can reveal all of the Internet Protocol (IP) addresses of any wireless devices near a computer. Prior to any user opening a specific webpage in a mobile phone browser, the mobile phone has already been engaged in constant communication with the wireless network, sending and exchanging empty packets of information that would be the human equivalent of shouting, “Is anyone there?” every second (Chun, Control).

Galloway’s specific interest in Civilization—or any video game—lies in how the user is forced to be very self-conscious of how algorithms are mobilized to influence the evolution of the gamespace. While it is true that Civilization has a linear representational narrative that would be guided by procedures, there are also nonlinear narratives that must unfold in algorithmic form during gameplay.

In this sense, video games deliver to the player the power relationships of informatic media firsthand, choreographed into a multivalent cluster of play activities. In fact, in their very core, video games do nothing but present contemporary political realities in relatively unmediated form . . . by making it [e.g. protocol] coterminous with the entire game, and in this way video games achieve a unique type of political transparency. (92) Simply put, if our lived existences are increasingly regulated by technological
protocols, then video games’ importance can be measured by how their algorithms invite us to think about our relationship to protocol—the Platonic world of coded harmony where each element in the gaming cosmos has a clear role and purpose in the moment of gameplay and is incapable of acting in any other way than its assigned role. Galloway maintains, “the gamer is not simply playing this or that historical simulation. The gamer is instead learning, internalizing, and becoming intimate with a massive, multipart, global algorithm” (90). Civilization reduces all elements of social evolution to quantifiable bits of information subject to algorithmic manipulation, asking us to think about how the algorithms of control parallel or mirror those in our daily lives. If we think of how credit scores structure access to personal or home loans, pervasive GSP surveillance through smart phones, or the current (2012) arguments by the Obama administration over whether social media companies such as Facebook should allow the FBI to wiretap all users’ communications without permission, Galloway certainly has a point about how much our lives resemble a video game or video games resembles our lives (see Yin). In what Deleuze refers to as a post-disciplinary “control society,” such issues are a crucial aspect that some video games not only foreground but actively participate in. In Gameplay Mode, Patrick Crogan observes, “Most media studies and video game researchers either outright reject or avoid engaging the mainstream moral panic approach to video games and their relation to violence. They throw the baby out with the bathwater, avoiding the question concerning technoculture’s relation to war and the military that computer games pose so insistently beyond the media effects debate, which itself is unable to articulate it adequately in these terms” (13).
By examining how the player responds to the act of controlling and manipulating the limited set of variables that she can control within a gamespace, it is not procedural rhetoric that seamlessly produces persuasion, but what Galloway calls “allegorithms”: “Instead of offering better clues, the ideological critique (traditional allegory) is undermined by its own revelation of the protocological critique (control allegory)” (90). Allegory refers to the sorts of analytical findings of cultural rhetoric accounts that argue that Civilization participates in the continuing patriarchal or racialized logics of normative exclusive. Allegorithms are allegories that follow from tracing how the algorithm models information control independent of the representations. In Galloway’s protocological framing of video games, Bogost would be seen as applying persuasion through traditional allegory and missing the dimension of allegorithms, specifically in the sense of how players actively construct meaning through the gap between the ideal world of the code and imperfect social and physical algorithms that structure embodied existence. In Galloway’s words, an allegorithms is an analysis that detects “a special congruence between the social reality depicted in the game and the social reality known and lived by the player” (83). This ability to compare the code to the world is a space of creativity, agency, and political subjectivity that proceduralist accounts cannot account for in their desire to make sure that persuasion is entirely controlled by the game designer and the immediate coded-procedural world of the video game. Thus, in Civilization, avatar skin tones are “not an index for older, offline constructions of race and identity,” but “an index for the very dominance of informative organization and how it has entirely overhauled, revolutionized, and recolonized the function of identity” (102). Civilization is
at once about racism and also the technological protocols and procedures that sustain racism—a technological answer to Gayatri Spivaks’ claim that “It is crucial that we extend our analysis of [any] example beyond the minimal diagnosis of ‘racism’” (121, emphasis original). The player enacts and completes meaning primarily at the level of informatics and other protocological game elements, but these elements do not result in a deterministic universe of procedurally-bound representations.

In consideration of Galloway’s framework, allegorithms are no longer in the realm of an asymmetrical determination for any of the given members of the assemblage: machine, designer, or the player. They are instead emergent phenomena in both Cooper’s and Better’s respective understandings. These technologies possess agentive capacities that correspond to their relations with other actors. In terms of connecting these thoughts back to rhetoric, it is clear that rhetoric, circulation, and delivery have taken on a different understanding. The reduction of rhetoric and writing to rational and instrumental control is a common view. In a way similar to Porter above, Joseph Petraglia has also argued that the technê of writing and rhetoric should only include the mastery of technical genres and exclude unconscious and nonsymbolic sources of affect. Byron Hawk counters such a perspective, suggesting “[t]echnique is both a rational, conscious capacity to produce and an intuitive, unconscious ability to make, both of which are fundamental to technê” (“Toward a Post-Technê” 372). Hawk has identified a nonmodern perspectives on rhetoric and writing that deal with animate and inanimate bodies called “post-technê”:

“For me, this notion of [post-]technê pushes the discussion away from a humanist conception of the subject that is caught in a subject/object dilemma (i.e., do humans
control technology or does technology control humans?) toward one that is posthuman. Such a move does not do away with the human as much as it redescribes the human in terms of complexity” (372).

To draw connections back to my previous consideration of digital rhetoric and Gee, post-technē allows for the consideration of complex ecological picture of the various material and affective agencies within video games. Brian Street has correctly challenged the positions of scholars like Walter J. Ong, Eric Havelock, and others who claim that alphabetic technology (e.g. writing) produced different forms of subjectivity, including the claims that the unique makeup of the Greek alphabet produced the West’s sophisticated bureaucracies. Harvey Graff argues as well that “literacy is above all a technology or set of techniques for communications and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials: it cannot be taken as anything more or less” (Labyrinths 19). In making this claim, he takes a large swing at Elizabeth Eisenstein’s scholarship. As a literacy technology, quoting Eisenstein, he maintains that the printing press cannot be an “agent of change” by itself (qtd. in Labyrinths 19). Yet, the benefit of assemblage theory is that it does not ask us to choose from Graff’s “either-or” binary (e.g., “either” it must be a pure subject and pure passive technical object “or” all of reality is subject to technological determinism). Of course the print press is not agent of change by itself. Yet, neither could the public sphere and the modern nation state have evolved with it. Furthermore, no human genius alone manifested it instrumentally. As Stephen Johnson observes in Where Good Ideas Come From, the printing press emerged as part of “the adjacent possible,” the title of the first chapter of his book. Gutenberg the printing press
technology was appropriated from an already black-boxed technology: the wine press. Furthermore, other actors such as movable type, ink, and paper all needed to exist as well before the printing press could be realized. Their conative drives themselves of movable type itself had already influenced rhetorical history through Peter Ramus’s spatial view of invention (McCorkle, “Pressing Matter,” 68-89). Tracing the complex material and agentive ratios within video games as persuasive mediums enables scholars to perceive the “adjacent possible” in rhetoric where accounts such as screen essentialism and procedural rhetoric limit who or what counts as a contributing or affective actor.

Rhetorical Assemblages: Emergent Delivery Practices in Videogames

I interpret Hawks’ point to mean that the claim of delivery as medium requires a non-instrumentalist view capable of negotiating and accounting for the various human and nonhuman actors that contribute to persuasion and meaning. Post-technê occurs through a specific form of delivery that co-emerges through our interaction with new media technology. Learning how to “write” and persuade through new media, video games, and, by extension, other computational media such as augmented reality apps, HTML5 web projects, Flash, and so on require an intimate understanding of nonsymbolic post-technê such as allegorithms. My interest in allegorithms is tantamount to revealing the nonsymbolic forms of rhetorical “concealment” in Carolyn Miller’s sense. Concealment is bound up in the delivery of video games as persuasive mediums that function as rhetorica docens: the metacritical awareness of how certain hidden mechanisms constitute and, in my case, work against symbolic action and persuasion (“Should We Name the Tools?” 20). If rhetorica utens (the activity of rhetoric) conceals
the rhetor’s artifice in order to persuade, then *rhetorica docens* serves to highlight its presence not only at a symbolic or figural level, but at a material and allegorithmic instantiation. Simply stated, what procedural relations do game designers conceal and what allegorithmic relations can the civically minded rhetorical critic exploit and manipulate in the evaluation and construction of a persuasive game as a form of new media writing? I will revisit this point below.

It is my belief that assemblage theory and allegorithms can provide a better understanding of *rhetorica docens*—the civic pedagogical goal of rhetorical training—because it is able to situate procedure *and* the user within a more diverse and emergent set of material and ecological rhetorics. For Bogost’s newsgames, persuasion indeed can be said to occur in “a closed world” where it might seem as though the designer can be Plato to the player’s Socrates. Political affect and persuasion in videogames occurs where neither political representations nor the predetermined narrative of the game designer are in play. However, these emergent agencies cannot be detected through symbolic accounts of the games’ non-political representations or in terms of procedural rhetoric alone even though, as I will readily concede, symbols aligned with procedures do play a definite role in creating affect and persuasion. Rather, their role can be better seen if we consider videogames allegorithms through Bennett’s Deleuzian-DeLandian assemblage theory.

While it is an improvement, the problem with procedural rhetoric as Bogost defines it is that the human agent, the programmer, ultimately remains at the center of the rhetorical situation. What is persuasive and affective are *only* those instrumental elements established by the coded procedure, to what I believe is the complete overdetermination
of other emergent forms of meaning and material affect. Thus, I want to more thoroughly develop Bennett’s articulation of thing power and assemblage in relationship to procedural rhetoric in order to explicate this point.

For Bennett, the various value judgments that we might have about September 12 should proceed from an understanding of a game not as a self-contained or transparent set of parts and wholes but as a component of an “assemblage.” Yet, if we revisit to Bennett’s vitalist concept of “thing-power” from Vibrant Matter that I mentioned in Chapter 2, it is clear that the attribution of “agency” to nonhuman actors in the context of circulation scholarship means that objects deliver and circulate meaning alongside humans. The relationship between “thing-power” and delivery/circulation is better understood if we consider this diverse ecology of nonhuman actors through another one of Bennett’s conceptual terms, “assemblage” that I gestured toward via Matthew Fuller as the end of Chapter 4. At the outset of this chapter, I want to articulate in detail what is meant by the term “assemblage”—a form of material realism—as it will directly inform the rest of the chapter’s subject matter: namely, how we should conceive of pragmatic political activities and rhetorical agency through new media writing seen through the lens of assemblage theory. Bennett’s invocation of assemblage derives heavily from philosophers of materiality such as Manuel DeLanda, Gilles Deleuze, and Felix Guattari. In Bennett’s understanding, nature (physis) is a heterogeneous “phase space” composed of the interactions of parts that do not add up to the emergent whole, as “the effects generated by an assemblage are . . . emergent properties, emergent in that their ability to make something happen . . . [and they are] distinct from the sum of vital force
of each materiality considered alone” (24). In her chapter “Edible Matter,” Bennett illustrates this abstract description by considering the example of omega-3 fatty acids and potato chips. Eating potato chips not only causes increased body mass, but also includes the memory-stunting effects of hydrogenated fats (41). Seen from the perspective of thing-power and memory loss, agency is not a sole property of human actors: “In the case of . . . potato chips, it seems appropriate to regard the hand’s actions as only quasi- or semi-intentional, for the chips themselves seem to call forth, or provoke and stoke, the manual labor” (41). Further, even though it is “I” who thinks before and after the fact that “I” intentionally eat chips, Bennett claims, “To eat chips is to enter into an assemblage in which the ‘I’ is not necessarily the most decisive operator” (40).

To offer a point of contrast, Bennett’s description of the chips’ agentive capacities within the assemblage does not hearken back to psychoanalysis and the Freudian unconscious. While these factors might certainly be said to apply at some level (depending on one’s theoretical preference), Bennett employs the de-centered “I” to demonstrate that all rhetorical actions are bound up with affordances and constraints of nonhuman actors in addition to cognitive elements. If we were just to theorize the potato chip example through Freudian psychoanalysis, we would necessarily undermine any potential influence of the chips-in-themselves as actual forces in the world, holding that representations or forces within the mind are more “real” or primary than the chip’s interaction with the body or other actors (and this is not, of course, to claim that the unconscious is not itself a force that produces reality). According to Bennett, a typical cultural studies perspective often reduces the reality of potato chips in a similar manner.
by treating obesity as a product of a human decision (e.g., poverty, long work days, convenience, and so on) conditioned by corporate fast-food advertising. Similarly, I often employ such an approach in my first-year composition classes when I ask my students to perform an analysis of the visual rhetoric and pathos-laden appeals of fast-food advertising. Aided by Gunther Kress and Theo Van Leewuen’s *Reading Images* and Hans Enzenberger’s *The Consciousness Industry*, my students easily argue that visual grammars enable the fast food industry to conceal their products’ unhealthy contents and to coerce the unwitting viewer.

At the same time, focusing only on symbols and representations means that I also ask my students to ignore any material role played by the food itself, overlooking the fact that fatty foods are heterogeneous and they perform different activities as they interact with elements of our bodies. As essential fatty acids necessary for metabolization, omega-3 fatty acids differ greatly from saturated fats. The former are not nutritional and therefore stimulate the physiological drive for eating—an empirical confirmation of Lay’s famous slogan: “Betcha Can’t Eat Just One.” When consumed in Lay’s potato chips or McDonald’s french-fries, omega-3 fatty acids add fat to our bodies, stunt our memories, and they also improve human moods which affects how humans interact with one another. Pointing to national depression statistics, Bennett notes that Omega-3 fatty acids that occur in wild fish offer more positive ways to interact with this element. Food, Bennett concludes, is “an actant in an agentic assemblage that includes among its members my metabolism, cognition, and moral sensibility. Human intentionality is surely an important element of the public that is emerging around the idea of diet, obesity, and
food security, but it is not the only actor or necessarily the key operator in it. Food, as a self-altering, dissipative materiality, is also a player” (51).

Assemblages challenge the pervasive trend among social and critical theorists who hold that meaningful social analysis is only possible by studying “society as a whole” (macro-level phenomena) or individuals (micro-level phenomena). An assemblage is a concept that allows us to describe a social form’s concrete interactions with other actors without reducing it to either macro-level or micro-level explanations. Finished and stable forms such as discrete individuals or pervasive social institutions are only an a fortiori (after the fact) designation that we make while excluding an account of how individuals and institutions emerge and take a specific form. Assemblage theory argues that social entities exist at all levels of scales, from an individual who purchases a copy of Max Payne 3, to a team of North American programmers who design the game engine, to a graphics design unit in South Korea who handles the rendering of Max’s face, to Electronic Arts’s transnational corporate marketing presence. Rather than seeing a video game as a finished or static product that reflects a programmer’s design, an assemblage urges us to see video games as evolving and emerging phenomenon engaged in a host of agentive and affective interrelations with a variety of extra- and intra-game actors.

In one of the first articles to explore not Bennett’s specific articulation but the idea of video games as assemblages, Taylor argues, “The notion of assemblage is one way to help us understand the range of actors (system, technologies, player, body, community, company, legal structures, etc.), concepts, practices, and relations that make up the play moment” (332). While Bogost correctly urges us to explore one
interrelationship—procedure and representation—that had been ignored by previous games studies theorists, Taylor suggests that there are still many interrelations that must be explored in order to account for the “play moment” (332). In the case of September 12, there are the interrelations between macro-structures such as Persuasivegames.com, fan input and mods, and other game designers; the online space of the game and its histories; the emergent practices of gamer communities which include behavior such as adding instructional content to wikis and YouTube; the micro-practices of our unique subjective appreciation of the game that is conditioned by our personal histories; the broader social world which still tends to look negatively on games and gamers; technological systems and software interactions; the material forms and constraints of keyboards, screens, bodies and vision; and broader legal, institutional, and protocological structures that shape our activities as players.

One could argue that these extra-game phenomena are secondary to the primary processes of procedurality that the player directly experiences. After all, there is no programmer actively recoding the software on my computer at the exact moment of the player’s encounter with the bombing algorithm. Such an objection misses entirely the point of thinking of video games and social phenomena as assemblages and rhetoric as an ecological and emergent phenomenon. Just as we cannot abstract semiotic readings of procedural unfoldings within a game, we cannot abstract the game from a broader continuum that produced and continues to influence the space that the player directly encounters. As Taylor writes, “In arguing for such an approach, we can see then that computer games are not simply the packaged products that come off the shelf (or tucked
neatly into the downloaded executable) but artifacts that traverse multiple communities of practice and can hold multiple, often contested, meanings” (333).

Assemblage theory thus provides us with a way to explore social and political realities in more complexity and with special attention to how concrete, material and empirical forces unfold through processes within assemblages. Indeed, as DeLanda would suggest in *Intensive Science*, we cannot focus on an overall system (capitalism) or an individual (player), but must study all of the various components—themselves composed of assemblages—that make up the process of playing a game. Thinking back to Chapter 4, John Trimbur’s neo-Marxist account of circulation was prone to this problem in that he reduced the materiality of cultural phenomena to their labor input alone. He would likely undermine video games as actors in a same way the psychoanalysis undermines the reality of the potato chips in the example above.

“Thinking about games as assemblage,” Taylor argues,

wherein many varying actors and unfolding processes make up the site and action, allows us to get into the nooks where fascinating work occurs; the flows between system and player, between emergent play and developer revisions, between practices and player produced software modifications, between local (guild) communities and broader (server) cultures, between legal codes, designer intentions, and everyday use practices, between contested forms of play, between expectation and contextualization. (332)

Thus, it is the analysis of the distributed and dispersed process of emergence for any
given social phenomena that we would otherwise attribute to individual initiative or overall social structure that marks the difference between an assemblage and typical social theory.\textsuperscript{81}

There are two additional assemblage theory concepts that can help us to understand the complex interrelations among the bombing algorithm and the player through an assemblage: “attractor” and “phase space.” It is possible to conceive of the bombing algorithm as a virtual “attractor” within the assemblage. DeLanda suggests that the virtual designates a realm that the programmer could not have anticipated or set into motion as this anticipation would mean that he could determine how each of the parts of the game are attributable to an emergent whole. This explains DeLanda’s concern with “catalysis,” emergent behavior, and the lack of an overall mechanism of mechanical causation to which emergent behavior can be reduced. In one example, DeLanda suggests that smoking is a catalyst rather than a cause of lung cancer. Lung cancer can be caused by environmental fumes for some and other lifetime smokers never develop a full cases. Similarly, our genes and diets also play a factor in the onset of lung cancer. Smoking, thus, is just a catalyst for lung cancer. To return to \textit{September 12}, as far as “procedural” advancement in the game is concerned, the bombing algorithm could just as easily turn off students from playing before they receive the other persuasive message. No activity of the programmer “caused” all affective outcomes within the game. An attractor is not a pre-determined entity; rather, it is a state toward which a dynamical system evolves over time. Attractors are what help any set of systems from degenerating into utter chaos.
As an illustrative example, let me consider a very basic system that is composed of a marble and a bowl. If I drop the marble into the bowl, then the attractor or “singularity” of the system will be the bottom of the bowl. In other words, the bottom of the bowl is the attractor for the system that the two actors tend toward over what DeLanda calls the “phase space” of their encounters. In *The Democracy of Objects*, Levi Bryant offers a useful analogy for DeLanda’s distinction between the of phase space of an object and its powers. He provides the example of a pendulum that swings through a series of points (two maxima and a minima): “Each of these points is a point in phase space. Moreover, none of these points are ever occupied all at once. Likewise, we can think qualities or properties as points an object manifests or actualizes as points in a phase space. The power of the pendulum is its ability to move through this phase space, to produce these actualizations, while each point the pendulum moves through is a local manifestation of this power of the pendulum” (175). Frasca’s *September 12* has one major attractor that tries to overdetermine all other possibilities. The player either bombs and spawns new terrorists or is inactive and the terrorists disappear. Newsgames reflect the sort of classical understandings of potentiality such as when Aristotle’s acorn contains the oak tree in their orientation that the programmer controls the outcome in the pre-player definition. By contrast, an attractor is similar to a coiled spring—a virtual possibility contained within an actual state.

**Newsgames as Rhetorical Assemblages**

Following from a vitalist theory of emergent affects, the task that assemblage theory asks of videogames is to examine, in Bennett’s reading, what is *not* set into motion
by the programmer. Thus, the emergent agential ratios of videogames even within
allogrithms must be clarified as a post-techné that works to undermine the humanist
agent’s actions. For example, of all forms of procedural rhetoric, first person military
shooter games such as the Call of Duty Black Ops series often gain the most notoriety
among popular commentators who cite the correlation between playing violent
videogames and the horrific behavior of those such as Anders Breivik, the Norweigian
mass murderer. First-person shooters also attract criticism because of their blatant
misogyny where the denigration of females is often a common symbolic topoi.

Yet, a 2010 study by Jing Feng, Ian Spence, and Jay Pratt claims that a
neurocognitive effect of playing first-person shooters produce material affects that, at an
ontological level, actually undermine the gendered symbolic content. As the ex-President
of Harvard, Larry Summers, infamously argued, men are innately hardwired to be
mathematical spatial thinkers and women are contextual, emotional, and relational
thinkers. Feng, Spence, and Pratt, however, asked female volunteers to play several hours
of first-person shooter games, and were able to demonstrate that spatial reasoning in
females is actually developmental; that is, it is enacted and not innate. They found that
there is no biological or genetic reason why women “lack” the same spatial cognitive
reasoning skills as men. These researchers’ findings echo those of cognitive philosophers
such as Andy Clark, who suggests that spatial reasoning, like cognition in general, is a
process of individuation that is the result of the morphogenesis of the body as it relates to
space. Invoking the specific descriptive terminology of assemblage theory, we could say
that both the female and male brain will function as a field of potentials whose local
manifestations will form and re-form through a variety of spatial dispositions and in response to a multitude of attractors. Thus, regimes of attraction are formed by algorithms in certain videogames, that, contrary to the Cartesian split of mind and matter, will actually encourage the brain to particular formations of affect. In a very general sense, assemblage theory redefines the brain through its various but certain capacities to act and to be acted on. To invoked a clichéd phrase, the brain on videogames is not the same as the brain not on videogames. In Feng, Spence, and Pratt’s study, the emergent phenomena of increased spatial perception, despite being surrounding by negative gender constructions, actually has a ontological implication about the ways that all human bodies form meaning against technologies that can be used to undermine these negative gender constructions.

Still, the “ontological” complexity of spatial cognition itself cannot be treated as a finite resting point for analysis of the affective work of videogames. Assemblage theory demands that we connect this unexpected emergent property to greater complexes of actors. As Claude Pias has suggested, the post-WWII military was largely responsible for the emergence of video games in terms of developing flight and combat simulators – a relationship that games scholars often downplay or ignore. In the present, the America’s Army videogame series endorsed by the U.S. Military relies on procedural persuasion to encourage children and young adults to think about enlisting by simulating the processes of boot camp and being deployed for war. Let me offer a deliberately hyperbolic argument for illustrative purposes. Let us imagine that females, who make up 74% of all casual gamers, were to start playing more first-person shooters such as Halo. Might we
not infer because of the procedures involved that they might become more susceptible—at a neurocognitive level—to symbolic arguments in games such as America’s Army that they should enlist? Regardless of whether this outcome is likely or improbable, it serves to highlight that this new emergent attractor of spatial reasoning will inevitably participate as an affective agent in the other complex social and material assemblages in which videogames participate. Does this realization in any way replace or dismiss the need to theorize and criticize the symbolic and the ways in which gender and cultural ideologies are produced in video games? Absolutely not. I want to be very clear on this point. What assemblage theory serves to highlight is the need to more concretely analyze the complex range of material actors involved in instrumental acts of persuasion. At this same time, assemblage theory simultaneously functions as an ecological resource to undermine modernity’s presuppositions of the human’s rational, social, and cognitive autonomy apart from our entanglement with nonhuman actors in technology and nature. Technology, thus, will take on emergent products and establish conditions for our rhetorical agency that both reflect and yet will be exceeded by an instrumentalist conception of delivery. As I will argue in the next chapter, such a conception places a great premium on politics and ethics: how and why we choose to represent certain material actors and not others.

**Modeling Allegorithmic Assemblages**

It should be clear that while considering video games as assemblages requires us to consider the evolving interrelations among many procedural and nonprocedural actors, assemblage theory also serves to highlight nonrepresentational relations among different
intra-game elements. I have already gestured in previous chapters to the relationship between rhetoric and actor-network theory and, by extension, assemblage theory. But does assemblage theory amount to a politics? I would argue that assemblage theory is not political in the sense of forming direct acts of coercion or persuasion. Rather, assemblage theory gives us a descriptive means of tracing the ways in which political hierarchies in video games are formed and contested under material constraints, diverse complexes of actors, attractors, and phase spaces.

The point of applying assemblage theory to videogames is that linear causality is not the only area of affect or persuasion. Agency and action—the use of the bombing algorithm and other attractors within a phase space depend on what we and others in the assemblage put into play in the world. This conclusion, it bears repeating, is the opposite of that reached by the proceduralists for whom player initiative and creativity is foreclosed. I, along with Jennifer Whitson, Stefano de Paoli, and Michael Kerr, emphasize that assemblages for DeLanda are a concrete phenomenon where “social and natural phenomena should be conceptualized as the dynamic result of the empirical and historical relations among empirical elements, rather than thorough listing their essential traits or making timeless classifications” (3). It is the simplicity and serious political content of newgames that confirm for some the need to discuss video games and rhetoric through a deterministic persuasive universe; yet, newsgames such as September 12 are also allegorisms with a single main attractor. Whereas the interest for proceduralists in lies in the alliance between the player’s completion of the meaning pre-established by the game designer, digital rhetoric scholars need to examine at the more subtle
interrelationship between player and algorithm. The player cannot play the game in the traditional sense of agent or player-driven completion. Enactment is non-engagement, allowing the algorithm to model the complexities of a metonymic Middle Eastern society. The attractors thus place a level of persuasive affect occurring in the moment of recognition where the player “wins” by allowing the Middle Eastern society to—I imagine—sort out its own problems free from Western terrorist-inducing foreign policy.

In a popular undergraduate textbook on terrorism, Jonathan R. White argues that for every one terrorist in the field, over one hundred and fifty people are needed as tacit support (e.g. those who either directly support the terrorist or are aware of him but do not turn him in to the authorities). Thus, military bombing ostensibly increases—if I may invoke former President Richard M. Nixon—the “silent majority’s” tacit support of terrorists in the field.

Digital rhetoric and composition scholars interested in gaming rhetorics and literacies must not be misled by the lack of creative opportunities for the player within newsgames that indeed tempt one to limit persuasion to procedural rhetoric. Instead, scholars must seek to highlight game mechanisms beyond procedural control, looking at informatics, attractors, and phase spaces. Persuasive affect obtains at the level of the modeling of the informatics of control or, in this case, the abdication of control. September 12 situates terrorists as an attractor moving through a phase space. Because of the dominance of the algorithm, the possibility exists that the player will only actualize what she or he wants to directly control and affect, become frustrated with the lack of progression and quit, gaining a part of the message (her actions only cause more
terrorism) but missing the virtual dimension (if we leave it alone, it goes away). If I were to apply DeLanda’s assemblage and Galloway-Wark’s allegorithms to Anthropy’s Dys4ia, I might wonder what a video game that did not prescribe a narrative outcome but enabled transgendered and hetero-elements to function as attractors for the modeling of informatics of oppression would look like. What if The Sims were The Queer Sims San Francisco Edition, and heterosexual couples had to be placed together manually and same sex couples were the ‘natural’ evolving norm? This revision would still be social realism, but a social realism aided by an informative modeling and not merely reshaping the relations of representation. Such a distinction would necessarily alter how we tend to think of the types of persuasion involved in video games as they relate to politics. Along these lines, Anthropy notes that revisionary mods of popular games such as Extra Mario Bros gives more levels, powerups, and expansion of Mario’s “moveset”; however, revisions such as Super Daisy Land attempts a “feminist” revision by allowing players to play as Daisy and not just male avatars of Mario and Luigi. Anthropy concludes, “But that’s not exactly a hack of Super Mario, and there’s a richer subject for gender correction in game mods” (74). I fully agree with Anthropy’s assertions, but I might also point out that activist game designers might do well to think of representational correction as a process that occurs through a complex assemblage and not just an alliance of representation and procedure.

To be clear, I do not intend my comments in this chapter to pose a limitation to video games theorists interested in politics. After all, art, creativity, and rhetoric do not do well with limitations, as I noted above in my appreciation for A Closed World and
Dys4ia. Neither it is my suggestion that describing games in the terms of assemblage will make us more politically engaged or less responsive to simulations of anti-social behavior in Grand Theft Auto or homophobia in Duke Nukem. After all, we are always already involved in a complex milieu of competing and emerging assemblages that work to contribute toward the effectiveness of a direct act of symbolic persuasion by a rhetor or a video game. Nevertheless, I do maintain that assemblage theory aligned with rhetoric will better position us to interpret and perhaps intervene in the delicate political work that comprises video game interactivity.

In terms of theorizing persuasion, while a gesture toward pre-symbolic or pre-representational affect is heavily implied in my reading, I want to return to Miller’s distinction above between rhetorica docens and rhetorica utens. Miller productively argues that rhetoric has been marked by two historical trends: aggrandizement and self-denial. On the one hand, many follow the paradigmatic examples of Kenneth Burke—“where ever there is persuasion, there is rhetoric. And wherever there is ‘meaning’ there is ‘persuasion’”—and Robert Scott in claiming that all epistemic meaning is contingent and inherently rhetorical. Indeed, as I noted in Chapter 1, Richard Lanham’s “strong defense” of rhetoric is firmly predicated on the fundamental inability of scientific, technical, or any disciplinary language to mirror or represent nature. Yet, one of the consequences of the “strong” constructivist or “strong” epistemic defense of rhetoric manifests in hermeneutic problems such as screen essentialism and phenomenological materialism. On the other hand, treatises as early as Aristotle’s have urged the artifice of rhetoric to remain hidden or concealed the techniques at work “authors should compose
without being noticed and should seem to speak not artificially but naturally” (Miller 20). Michael Cahn goes so far as to call concealment the “heart of rhetoric.”

As a form of civic engagement, newsgames attempt to hide their procedural artifice and to conceal the invisible hand of the designer, thereby making the designer the privileged agent of persuasion. However, Miller suggests that concealment goes beyond the “dissimulation of intentions” (20). It is far closer to hypokrisis (acting) as the complex and emergent materiality of delivery in the way that I have described in Chapter 3. Miller writes, “It is the conviction that the means by which intentions are concealed must also remain undetectable. It is a dissimulation of means as well as ends” (20). In Miller’s reading, public rhetoric is perpetually trapped in a cycle of practicing effective public rhetoric (rhetoric utens) and learning metacritical and theoretical awareness (rhetorica docens) about the means of persuasion. Yet, Miller locates a paradox: namely, if we teach students to become better judges of rhetorical practice then we implicitly argue that they should learn and employ the tricks of concealment. However, as a consequence, “the strategies of the cunning practitioner will increasingly be revealed by the increasing critical acuity of the citizen-audience. We seem to have another endless regress, a continual escalation of cunning concealment and critical unmasking” (32). Likewise, learning post-techné such as allegorithms does not actually answer Cicero’s worry about arming madmen or the “Q Question” that Lanham names in honor of Quintilian: is the individual who knows how to write with allegorithms also a good moral and ethical rhetor? Will these new media post-techné such as post-cinematic affect remain effective once they can no longer be concealed to an audience? These questions may be impossible
to answer. In any case, my conclusions demonstrate that any conception of an analytical and productive approach to “new media rhetoric” (Brooke) requires a better attunement to the contingent and emergent interplay between nonsymbolic factors in technology and symbolic agency. As I will demonstrate in the next chapter, foregrounding the materiality of software, hardware, and nonhuman actors more broadly speaking will take the form of an ethical *rhetorica docens* that has direct relevance for new media and multimodal composition pedagogy. Along similar lines, these conceptions will also enable me to pose, finally, the question of how and in what way nonhuman actors actually shape political and rhetorical publics.
CHAPTER 6
MATERIAL METAPHORS: INDECOROUS DELIVERY, MORALITY, AND POLITICS IN THE DEMOCRACY OF THINGS

[B]ut perhaps the better question to ask is not that of the relevance of these new materialisms to political thought and their implications for concrete politics but how they radically put into question the fundamental categories of political theory, including the concept of the political itself. For what we consider as concrete political forms, institutions, practices, and activities, and the discourses that irrigate them, such as rational choice theory, positivism, empiricism, and dialectical materialism, are underwritten by ontologies of matter and life.

Pheng Cheah

It’s always been the artist who perceives the alterations in man caused by a new medium, who recognizes that the future is the present, and uses his work to prepare the ground for it.

Marshall McLuhan

Let us contrive not merely the merger of contradictions recommended by Bergson, but also the multitude of imperfect matchings, using scientific terms for words usually treated sentimentally, or poetic terms for the concepts of science.

Kenneth Burke

Politics and the Nonhuman

In Chapter 5, I offered an analysis of newsgames through the lens of assemblage theory. In the context of my dissertation, assemblage theory offers another articulation of the broader conception of nonmodern realism that, in turn, I have suggested should characterize the canon of delivery (ontological hypokrisis). However, any relationship between these various approaches to rhetorical ontology and politics has yet to be specifically argued. Politics in the liberal political tradition is interested in the distribution of the goods, rights, and duties that compose the common. Unless nonhuman actors suddenly gain human speech capabilities, politics and ethics are still debated and established through language. With due regard to the self-organization of matter and the emergence of agency in actor-networks and assemblages, humans nevertheless retain the
ability to instrumentalize multimedia delivery systems for symbolic and nonsymbolic action. Furthermore, while declarations of nonhuman agency may recast human agency from a cognitive or linguistic property to an activity that emerges from material, cognitive, social, and nonhuman forces, humans definitely retain the agency to commit acts of negation, political exclusion, violence, and environmental harm. Regardless of how we might speculate about the rights of any nonhuman entity, our commonsense relationship with the objects in the world also means that we will inevitably tend to theorize political arrangements in terms of their relationship to the assemblages sustain human interests and values.

Many scholars affiliated with the nonhuman turn have suggested that nonhumans function as autonomous actors that create and shape political publics. Bennett directly makes such a case in her “Political Ecologies” chapter in Vibrant Matter. Across his various writings, Bruno Latour has also reclassified the human polis as what he calls a “collective of humans and nonhumans” in Politics Without Nature (14). Along similar lines, John Protevi’s Bodies Politic specifically suggests that politics is not the isomorphic and homogenous body politic of post-enlightenment political theory. Protevi argues that humans and nonhumans dwell in an affective “bodies politic” composed of multiple material bodies (or attractors)—symbolic, non-symbolic, civic, and ideological—that exist at all different scales of existence. He writes, “The concept of bodies politic is meant to capture the emergent—that is, the embodied and embedded—character of subjectivity: the production, bypassing, and surpassing of subjectivity in the imbrications of somatic and social systems” (xii). Language and deliberative rhetoric do
undeniably shape reality in Protevi’s account of political interaction. However, it is simultaneously the case that human-nonhuman hybrids such as Terri Shiavo’s machine-supported existence in a hospital bed also function as attractors that affect the unfolding of political debates and issues.

Echoing Bennett, Latour, and Protevi, ecocritics such as Stacy Alaimo have drawn political conclusions about nature’s agency. Alaimo writes, “[c]ivil rights, affirmative action, and identity politics models of social justice—all of which assume that individuals are bounded, coherent entities—become profoundly altered by the recognition that human bodies, human health, and human rights are interconnected with the material, often toxic, flows of particular places” (23). Drawing on Ulrich Beck’s risk theory, she suggests that political decision making for individual citizens must increasingly draw on scientific knowledge simply to comprehend the vast number of toxic risks in the contemporary global environment. Alaimo concludes that environmental justice should strive to be “rather literal, demonstrating material connections between specific bodies in specific places” (33). She refers to the emergence of human-nonhuman “hyperobjects” such as global warming. A hyperobject is the literary theorist Timothy Morton’s term for human-nonhuman assemblages like Styrofoam or plutonium (The Ecological Thought 148). The vast circulation and chemical half-lives of either chemical substance are massively distributed in time and space. According to Morton, hyperobjects are impossible to entirely document, represent, control, describe, or categorize as they involve so many discourses, actors, networks, and affective materialities.

From these examples, it is clear that many who are affiliated with the nonhuman
turn and nonmodern realisms presuppose an implicit or explicit political duty and ethical obligation. In this concluding chapter of the dissertation, I want to leave my direct discussion of ontological hypokrisis and realism, and explore the broader relationships among rhetoric and politics in a world of nonhuman actors. I firmly agree with the aforementioned group of scholars that politics as well as ethics are subjects in need of clear articulation in relationship to claims of nonhuman agency. I also echo Pheng Cheah’s sentiments in the quotation that opens this chapter. Cheah argues that the agentive capacities of nonhuman actors call into question the very category of the modern political subject itself. At the same time, I want to be clear from the outset that the path from nonmodern ontology to the realm of politics and, in turn, political rhetoric is far from self-evident. Even when scholars are willing to acknowledge the need to theorize the nonhuman, Gerard de Vries summarizes the view of many in his criticism that Latour and other actor-network theorists “closes off the quest for the object of politics” (805). For others who are openly hostile to the nonhuman turn, the act of flattening all objects and actors into ontologically equal footing and challenging humans’ immanent reasoning and agency capabilities makes it difficult to return to theories of politics that presuppose human agency and rational-critical debate (Galloway, “The Poverty of Realism”). Nevertheless, Graham Harman offers an equally as valid rejoinder to these criticisms: “if it remains unclear how we would go about letting nonhumans be political actors, it seems clear enough that any politics based on a bad ontology of human-versus-world will reach bad political conclusions” (Harman, “Review” 128).

If we are to accept claims such as Latour’s that objects can “form political publics”
and that humans should function as “representatives” in the “parliament of things,” then it is clear that we must define the stakes of this project in detail as it relates to delivery and nonmodern realism (*We Have Never* 154). One promising starting place lies in Bennett’s combination of Latour’s Deweyian pragmatism and Jacques Rancière’s political philosophy of dissensus. However, Bennett’s efforts are largely in the service of wrestling Rancière’s humanism into an unwieldy Latourian framework. In comparing Rancière and Latour, I am less interested in trying to extend or challenge Rancière than I am in suggesting how his thinking can help provide a political and aesthetic framework to guide rhetorical responses in a world of nonhuman actors. Rancière offers a very specific idea of politics as dissensus and aesthetic effects that are generated through action. In my reading, Rancière can be said to offer less a cautionary lesson of the humanist pitfalls of modernity—Bennett’s reading in part—and more a unique theory of aesthetic political expression in relationship to the appearance and visibility of excluded actors within the *polis*. I will suggest that the political project for ontological *hypokrisis* should involve the invention of aesthetic or—more accurately—*rhetorical* ways of communicating to one another the ways in which objects are allowed to be acknowledged as political actors or agentive forces. Where Bennett wants to use Latour to push against Rancière’s humanism, I will suggest that we should use Rancière’s emphasis on the aesthetics of visibility in relationship to politics to extend some of the latent aesthetic-political connections within Latour’s conception of politics.

In what follows, I will first take up the rhetorical theorist Ethan Stoneman’s connection between Rancière and rhetorical scholarship on decorum and indecorum. In
my reading, decorum and indecorum directly relate Rancière’s politics to delivery scholarship through Ciceronian theories of delivery, rhetoric, and decorum. I will then shift to Bennett’s attempt to extend Rancière’s humanism in an attempt to theorize the indecorous delivery of objects. Working from and yet slightly departing from her reading, I will turn to Latour’s notion of “emergent publics” as an alternative conception of indecorous delivery that works against the modern Constitution. While the self-organization of matter and nonhuman actors in global-warming accelerated hurricanes and gas-fracking in themselves can autonomous “disrupt” the space of the polis and create emergent political publics, Latour frequently calls upon us to be more proactive in bearing witness to invisible nonhuman actor-networks. He consequently develops an intriguing relationship between morality and politics where indecorous aesthetics and morality (ethics) can be closely aligned with politics. Rancière wants aesthetic dissensus to occur out of presupposition of human political equality that dominant regimes of the sensible will not allow. Latour desires aesthetic dissensus that occurs out of a presupposition of ontological equality in which we maintain all actors—human and nonhuman—as what he calls active “mediators” (things) rather than passive “intermediaries” (objects). Aesthetic interruptions as a form of political/ethical action borne out of a presupposition of ontological equality therefore forms a viable form of political activism and indecorous delivery.

In this final chapter, my goal is to offer a form of political-aesthetic action as indecorous delivery suitable for a world in which nonhuman actors are allowed to be present in the activity of delivery (ontological hypokrisis). Returning in the end to this
dissertation’s concern with rhetorical realism, I will close by drawing on models in the object-oriented philosophers’ turn to metaphor as a way to “simulate” the withdrawal of the object’s reality. I will offer my own novel extension of metaphor as a form of indecorous speech through what I define as “material metaphors” via Katherine Hayles. I will offer several illustrative examples of how multimodal publics might emerge around protocological actors in videogames and new media art.

Rancière, Delivery, and Appropriate Indecorous Speech

Despite his increasing influence across the humanities, Rancière enjoys surprisingly little citation in rhetorical scholarship. To the best of my knowledge, Stoneman’s article, “Appropriate Indecorum,” is the first that places Rancière’s philosophy into dialogue with a set of concerns for rhetorical scholarship. Stoneman recontextualizes Rancière’s idea of “politics” the concept of decorum to define a new category of political speech entitled “appropriate indecorous speech” (129). Indecorous speech is enabled by the recognition of the speaker’s ability to address the polis as an equal political subject. It necessarily interrupts what Rancière labels as the “partitioning of the sensible” and the “police order”: the sum total of institutions, ideologies, and discourses that support unequal distributions of political subjectivity. As I noted in Chapter 4, where Cicero recommend decorum—speech that supports the ideals of the community and the polis in an inherently conservative project that reigns in the morally suspect elements of rhetoric and delivery—Stoneman recommends indecorous rhetorical acts by drawing on Rancière’s framework. In this section, I will provide a partial
introduction to Rancière, drawing in part on Stoneman’s reading, and directed in the
service of teasing out a relationship between delivery and decorum/ indecorum.

Decorum has been held to be relevant to contemporary social phenomena by a
number of rhetorical scholars. According to Stoneman, these efforts paralleled attempts
by other rhetorical theorists interested in continental philosophy “to foreground the
aesthetic capacity of rhetoric to create, sustain, and transform perception via the symbolic
manipulation of appearances” (130). However, Stoneman goes on to suggest that those
who have studied the aesthetic in relationship to decorum “surprisingly” failed to theorize
the possibilities or potentialities of indecorum (130). He contextualizes his efforts as an
attempt to update these aesthetic interests through more recent post-continental work in
aesthetic evidenced by Rancière’s political philosophy. Stoneman offers a comprehensive
literature review of scholarship on decorum that I will not rehash in this limited space. It
is more important for my project to focus in on Robert Hariman’s scholarship on
decorum in great detail as Hariman’s account describes the most relevant links between
delivery and decorum.

According to Hariman, Cicero’s understanding of decorum “blended significant
aspects of rhetorical practice, social awareness, and political structure into an aesthetic
sensibility that directed the selection of diction appropriate to one’s subject or situation”
(152). In an early articulation of Richard Lanham’s strong defense of rhetoric, decorum
became the way in which rhetoric moved from the production of self-interested lies and
falsehoods to a socially-responsible technê. In De Oratore, Cicero offers a definition of
decorum: “In oration, as in life, nothing is harder than to perceive what is appropriate.
The Greeks call this to prepon; let us call it decorum or ‘propriety.’ . . . The universal rule, in oratory as in life, is to consider propriety” (20.70–71). In contrast to Greek thinkers where appropriate speech (to prepon) included lists of rules and techniques for the adaptation of speeches for any rhetorical situation, Hariman suggests that Cicero’s sense of decorum expanded it in a more theoretical and epistemological sense. Cicero definitely provided Aristotelian-style lists of rules for composition and delivery. While he attempted to restore the canon of delivery to prominence, he nevertheless felt that an understanding of decorum was necessary to provide moral guidance and control for any such rules or techniques. Thus, delivery as “acting”—hypokrisis—would be seen as an appropriate action instead of an inappropriate form of flattery or lying that bent the audience to the rhetor’s self-interested aims. In this understanding, canons such as delivery moved beyond the memorization and adoption of rules to a more fundamental awareness of the political and social codes that structured the rhetorical situation. These latter codes included nontechnical understanding of the ways in which any instance of decorous speech is influenced by social relations. In a sense, Cicero knew that social knowledge and guidance was necessary to avoid mere “hypocrisy” (saying one thing and doing another in the colloquial sense). Elaine Fantham and Michael Leff have also noted the moral complexity of his treatment in the context of decorum.90

By extending decorum beyond techniques of speech making, Hariman indicates that Cicero creates a continuum between the awareness of social relations and decorum. Cicero writes, “But the decorum to which I refer shows itself also in every deed, in every work, even in every movement and attitude of the body” (De Oratore 1.126). Here,
Cicero has implied the existence of a symbiotic relationship among the proper invention(al (moral) attitude in the mind and the rhetor. To borrow the terms of Aristotle’s material causes, the ideal rhetor is in effect a supplementary presence who must possess the commitment to the “final cause” of the constitutionally-bound *polis* as established by the “efficient causes” of the politicians. In a direct connection to the materialization of delivery, the rhetor needed to consider the appropriateness of “action as well as words, in the expression of the face, in gesture and in gait” (20.74). For Cicero, this moral core was what must be incarnated into an audience. It enabled the rhetor to employ all the means at hand and the full range of non-verbal delivery systems in the effort to conserve social norms. Hariman suggests that “higher-order decorum” has three main features: “(a) the rules of conduct guiding the alignment of signs and situations, or texts and acts, or behavior and place; (b) embodied in practices of communication and display according to a symbolic system; and (c) providing social cohesion and distributing power” (156).

Stoneman’s account of decorum draws heavily on Hariman’s reading of Cicero, asserting “decorum sustains social order through the creation and interiorization of decorous modes of subjectivity” (Stoneman 133). An additional example could be drawn from Richard McKeon in that social awareness thus conceived marked an “architectonic force” that integrated “thought and action, form and content, and wisdom and eloquence” (112). Simply put, rhetorical morality or sensibility is “the sensibility of an active mind attuned to its social environment” (155).

The problem with such a view of delivery and decorum is that Cicero was not an egalitarian political theorist. According to Hariman, decorum consequently reproduces “a
world of distinct classes maintained largely by heredity: higher responsibilities have been assigned to the class with the higher character, and the social and natural worlds correspond in making the classes speak and think as they are” (153). Unlike Plato, who grounded political and social hierarchies in a cosmologically invariable order, Hariman indicates that Ciceronian decorum is established entirely by social consensus. Yet, social consensus still retains the basic distinctions between the polis (those capable of political speech) and the excluded demos (women, slaves, non-propertied men). This distinction will prove to be of crucial importance to connecting Rancière’s thinking to decorum. If the political status quo is that aristocratic males gain rhetorical training while the slaves such as Meno were denied the faculties for speech on a priori grounds, then rhetorical decorum consists of Socrates and Callicles debating in the Gorgias dialogue (Latour, Pandora’s Hope 216-235). Socrates and Callicles’ disagreement over the use of rhetoric is predicated on their prior agreement that the demos, the mob of “10,000,” should be excluded from the polis. Delivery’s (and rhetoric’s) moral or ideal aim is to be strategically manipulated by processes of invention infused by the logic, gesture, pose, and attitudes of decorum. Decorum, in Cicero’s words, is what helps us avoid “put[ing] weapons into the hands of madmen” (De Oratore III.XIV: 55). By this phrase, Cicero sought to resolve the moral problem of teaching rhetorical technē to individuals who were had no innate faculties of phronesis and arête.

Given this context for the conserving—conservative function—of decorum, Stoneman finds a clear exigence to turn to Rancière in order to tease out a rhetorical theory of appropriate indecorous speech. If decorum reinforces unequal political
hierarchies, then indecorum was never considered as a legitimate form of rhetorical interaction. Seen through the lens of Rancière’s major English translated work, *Disagreement*, Stoneman maintains “indecorum is elevated [by Rancière] from a negative constraint on rhetorical performance to a political standard marked by dissensus, appearance, and the assumption of equality” (131). He argues, “[Rancière’s] constellation of politics, aesthetics, and rhetoric affords rhetoricians the conceptual material with which to treat decorum as a normative and perceptual system of social identification and to reframe indecorum as an emancipatory and self-suasory mode of political subjectivization” (130).

Rancière’s thinking makes sense in the context of indecorum because of his idiosyncratic definition “politics.” Politics is not something that must obtain in decorous speech, parliamentary halls, logic, nature, or social intercourse. Rather, politics is the demonstration of political equality in an act of dissensus. Furthermore, it is an act undertaken not in relationship to other competing factors (e.g., within previously sanctioned channels and institutions), but through an internalized dialogue with the self. The first step toward politics begins not with a Platonic interlocutor—a demonstration of equality in a message delivered to another—but within the self in recognition of how it has been subjugated to partitions of the sensible: “Proving to the other that there is only one world and that one can prove the legitimacy of one’s action within it, means first of all proving this to oneself” (*Disagreement* 50). Politics is not circulating a Facebook petition in August 2012 to ban Mitt Romney from the ballot in my home state of Washington because he failed to register in time as the GOP ballot candidate. In this case,
activists are working within normal procedural channels of election intercourse and, in a sense, their actions have affirmed the legitimacy of America’s de facto two party election system. If decorum makes a necessary movement of conserving, and if any given social arrangement is hierarchical, then Rancière concludes that the presupposition of equality will necessarily be symbolically disruptive of these hierarchies. Politics is Rosa Parks and other African-American activists actually sitting down on the bus and acting as if they were politically equal to white passengers.

Stoneman’s connection between indecorum and dissensus makes more sense if we better comprehend Rancière’s two key forms of community-making: police inequality (decorum) and political equality (indecorum). These two forms, he writes, “must remain absolutely alien to each other, constituting two radically different communities even if composed of the same individuals” (34). The police order, however, is not the false consciousness of Marx where all “false” social identities are derivable to the layer of labor relations and the historical dialectic. Also unlike Michel Foucault’s early scholarship on the knowledge/power combination, the police order is not concerned exclusively with the production and control of docile bodies (e.g., discipline). The police order is much less specific and concerns in general the establishment of communicative and behavior norms as they are invented, circulated, reaffirmed, and produced to be then distributed to how bodies are ordered by these norms. “The police,” Rancière argues, “is thus first an order of bodies that defines the allocation of ways of doing, ways of being, and ways of saying, [and] sees that those bodies are assigned by name to a particular place and task” (29). As a result, he claims “Policing is not so much the ‘disciplining’ of
bodies as a rule governing their appearing, a configuration of *occupations* and the properties of the spaces where these occupations are distributed” (29).

The police work to ensure the exclusion of the *demos*, or, the count of those “who have no count”—those who cannot play an active part in the decision-making processes of society. In keeping with aesthetics, police ordering regulates visibility and invisibility: “It is an order of the visible and sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise” (29).

Stoneman clearly articulates the significance of these distinctions in Rancière: “That is to say, the police does not simply assign to each body certain norms, occupations, and tasks; at a more general level, it inscribes in the very recognition of social performance the more or less automatic perception of status, identity, and entitlement and disentitlement” (134). Performance here means that humans who are divided or rendered invisible are made to “perform” as if their egalitarian political selves were already realized and confirmed by their fixed identity in the social order. Inscription is thus a “*partition or regime of the sensible*” (*Disagreement* 14, emphasis original).

In my perspective, rhetoric and delivery have a primary role in the establishment of decorum—a major manifestation of the police order—as it is symbolic statements that enable markers of identities to order social roles and tasks. The police “puts bodies in their place and their role according to their ‘properties,’” and these properties are not innate, but naturalized (27). In Rancière’s articulation, the police thus constitute “the set of procedures whereby the aggregation and consent of collectivities is achieved, the organization of powers, the distribution of places and roles, and the systems for
legitimizing this distribution” (28). There are additional points of overlap between the history of delivery and Rancière’s thinking in this passage. As I documented in Chapter 3, Plato often expressed his dislike of acting (delivery) on the same grounds: acting entertained the possibility that non-logical forms of persuasion were in operation. The body’s movements—its delivery—and its soul must be aligned for the articulation of mimetic truth to occur. Thus, Plato declared in the *The Republic* that actors must be dismissed along with poets (and rhetors). The Guardians were permitted to engage in mimesis *only* in proportion to their essential character (“do not imitate slavish or unworthy people”) as imitation alters “habit and nature” (395d). In this context, the police order would be very hostile to the notion of “acting” (that is, appearing as something other than one’s prescribed essence) and would do its best to eliminate any political notion that an identity could be performed or indecorously incarnated by the *demos*. All police orders must appear to be naturalized from the police order that Latour calls the modern Constitution that separates human from nonhuman to the police order of the ontology of racism that refused to grant African-American actors equal political or economic whites.

Given this discussion of the police and the partitioning of the sensible, politics is an inherently dissensual act—“a rupture in the logic that presupposes superiority and inferiority” (24). Politics does not consist of voting in standard elections as we standardly conceive of political participation, but in “an extremely determined activity antagonistic to policing: whatever breaks with the tangible configuration whereby parties and parts or lack of them are defined by a presupposition that, by definition, has no place in that
configuration—that of the part of those who have no part” (29–30). In Rancière’s specific understanding, politics only occurs by those who are symbolically dispossessed by the police order, but this exclusion is what marks the space of the political. Politics occurs when an individual shifts a socially-produced identity for a political inscription of equality. “In the final analysis,” Rancière writes, “inequality is only possible through equality. This means that politics doesn’t always happen—it actually happens very little or rarely” (17). Furthermore, politics does not take the form of a new police order, a new mode of government or a more equitable distribution of wealth and commodities, but what “shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place’s destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen, and makes heard a discourse where once there was only place for noise” (30).

To return to Ciceronian decorum, Rancière’s understanding of politics as dissensus places a real premium not on invention but on delivery—the space of emergent political transaction and action of bodies and speech acts within space. Delivery has always been concerned with how communication and thinking appears and materializes for an audience. Invention only occurs in the “self-suasory” phase while, as Stoneman confirms, the major enthymematic premise has already been supplied. Rancière suggests the outcome: “This means starting from the point of view of equality, asserting equality, assuming equality as given, working out from equality, trying to see how productive it can be and thus maximizing all possible liberty and equality” (51–52). As its goal is not to form a new institution or mode of government and redistribute political equality, politics has no life except in enunciation, circulation, performance, and demonstration.
Political equality is not a goal but rather “the presupposition which everyone must strive to validate on their own account” (51). The specific form itself is not as important as the form that it reacts against and its inventive logics could be numerous. Dissensus specifically ties rhetoric to political practice, by “the production through a series of action of a body and a capacity for enunciation not previously identifiable within a given field of experience, whose identification is thus part of the reconfiguration of experience” (35).

The ties between dissensus and delivery and performance are clear. Without the necessity of logical invention, Rancière declares that aesthetics is “a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience” (Politics of Aesthetics 13). Rhetorical activity as politics would be “a matter of appearances,” by introducing “a visible into the field of experience” Disagreement 74, 89). Where human voices were invisible, unrecognizable and reduced to phone (noise) of animals, politics is what enables speech, “thus making apparent both a body and capacity that had been discounted from the sensible arrangement of police aesthetics,” working toward a community born of aestheticization the “virtual or immaterial community of equalities” (x). The virtual community is “An insubstantial community of individuals engaged in the ongoing creation of equality” (84). The insubstantial community does not exist beyond the space of its appearance in dissensus. In a kind of articulation of an Arendtian place, Stoneman notes, “the concept of an immaterial community simply means that subjects cannot achieve a reality that would outlast their moment of appearance” (139) Political community appears and fades that exists only in the moment of its delivery and its
demonstration. Yet, since it is not a permanently achievable legislative or deliberative state, it is an “endlessly renewable community independent of constitutional amendments, communicative norms, and the approval of those who have a part” (139).

While my interest in Rancière’s thinking lies in the relationship between indecorum and delivery, Stoneman offers several productive and intriguing connections between rhetoric and dissensus that are worth noting. Stoneman writes, “Despite Rancière’s virtual silence on the subject of rhetoric, the active and enthymematic character of political equality has bearing on its rhetorical effectivity” (137). What Stoneman means by this claim is that dissensual arguments—much like those for nonhuman agency against the modern Constitution—are going to be seen as the “weaker, less persuasive argument” (137). Where Protagoras argues that Sophistic rhetoric should be for “making the weaker argument stronger” (6b), Rancière’s conception of dissensus is not a movement to make the weaker argument the stronger. It disavows the narrow hierarchies of decorum (e.g., police orders) that have already established what will count as weaker and stronger arguments. Thus, dissensus does not work to side with either Callicles or Socrates, but to make visible the prior exclusion of the demos—the count of those who have no count—that their disagreement presupposes. In Stoneman’s words, the aim of indecorous speech “aims toward disruption rather than assent” (138). To make the weaker argument the stronger would be to accept the presupposition of inequality that allows us to make distinctions between white and nonwhite (human and nonhuman) in the first place. “There is order in society,” Rancière writes, “because some people command and others obey, but in order to obey an order at least two things are required:
you must understand the order and you must understand that you must obey it. And to do that, you must already be the equal of the person who is ordering you” (16).

Along similar lines, Stoneman’s refashioning of dissensus as appropriate indecorous speech attempts to avoid reasserting hierarchies of the police order. Whereas propriety denotes “specific but impersonal rules for correct behavior in familiar situations,” appropriateness is the rule that determines “whether or to what extent one ought to adhere to the instructions of a specific code” (Stoneman 164). Stoneman concludes,

To the extent that all systems of decorum cohere with a principle of inequality, rendering bodies unseen and voices unheard, they are ethically unsound and do not “fit” the moral situation of fundamental equality. To these unethical configurations of human being-together, political subjects oppose demonstrations of equality that are both appropriate and indecorous. They are ethically appropriate insofar as inequality is always unjust, and they are indecorous to the extent that they antagonize police renderings of the social body. For that reason, we may interpret Rancierian politics as a mode of appropriate indecorum. (142)

From Stoneman’s account of appropriate indecorum, we can see that rhetorical adaptation—the manufacturing of an ethos appropriate to the audience in delivery—means that rhetors should not merely adjust to but react against norms of decorum and delivery. Rancièrean politics is thus thoroughly rhetorical or at least intimately combined with forms of delivery that must be indecorous, antagonistic, and aesthetic. Rancière’s
goal is not to motivate action by, to invoke Kenneth Burke’s terms, creating identification by division, that is, by appealing to common interests. The “common” already reflects the police order. Rather, Rancière wants to make manifest the exclusions in the composition of the “common,” and this making manifest constitutes politics. Consequently, we see a key reason why Rancière is gaining interdisciplinary appeal across the humanities. Politics in his sense cannot be co-opted into existing neoliberal political frameworks while nevertheless retaining a framework for political action.

From Objects of Discourse to Objecting Objects: Bennett’s Politics of Nonhumans

In my understanding, Rancière helps address Melissa Deems’s call for rhetoric and communication theorists to study and articulate forms of intervention without allowing norms of decorum to appropriate or reconstitute themselves as a metanarrative and a positive political program. However, it is clear that Rancière is primarily interested in human-initiated forms of political action and agency. Although I have alluded to the modernist Constitution as a partition of the sensible, it is unclear how Rancière’s key terms relate to politics in a nonmodern universe. In this section, I will turn to Bennett’s attempt to extend and complicate certain Rancièrian concepts. I want to acknowledge up front that I enthusiastically endorse his analytical principle that humans should think of politics from a presumption of equality. I have no problem with this presupposition. At the same time, I do not believe that a world of ontological hypokrisis is necessarily incommensurable with this presupposition. We do not live in a zero sum conceptual world where the nonhuman’s political gain is the human’s political loss. Indeed, this
either-or mentality is already a product of police order thinkers relative to the modernist Constitution in ecology and environmental issues.

Nevertheless, I am in agreement with Bennett in one regard. Even if we unconditionally grant Rancière-Stoneman’s theory of indecorous speech, such acts of disruption will never obtain without the assessment of the role played by material and ecological substructures. In the so-called Western “first world,” the relationship between dissensus and technology should also be rigorously examined given the pervasive reliance of the police order on networked and digital technologies. Thus, Rancière’s turn—in Stoneman’s assessment—from ideal Reason and the logos to the contingencies of the enthymeme still ignores or marginalizes the embodied and materializable activity of delivery and its circulation of affects beyond the immediate rhetorical situation. Should we act out of presupposition of equality only to downplay or ignore presuppositions of ontological inequality in our relations with nonhuman actors? Rancière’s vision of rhetoric, much like Lloyd Bitzer’s elemental model of the rhetorical situation, seems in many ways predicated on the face-to-face assembly of the Greek agora. The notion of a lone rhetor addressing the crowd with his voice must be seen to encompass all forms of indecorous speech and their emergent material effects and affects. Yet, indecorous speech must be located among buildings, Paris Communes, Che Guevara’s Chilean mines, transmedia, and distributed networked cultures such as YouTube, 4Chan, PostSecret, or other viral networks.

At the same time, I am not willing to entirely accept Bennett’s argument that we should be suspicious of any theory of politics that only encompasses human-initiated
interruptions into social identities. In my mind, the accusation that Rancière remains “modern” in Latour’s sense should simply take the form of an acknowledgement that he is primarily interested in analyzing the operation of theorizing symbolic action and politics dissensus. In a similar sense, Burke is also guilty of this focus, while he nevertheless offers crucial rhetorical resources for determining rhetorical effect and affect at the level of the symbolic. Where Foucault was interested in institutions such as madhouses and prisons, Latour is interested in the science lab in relationship to ecology. In my opinion, both sets of analyses—culture and nature, and symbolic and nonsymbolic—are necessary to help diagnose how partitions of the sensible are formed from multiple and overlapping ontological contact zones.

In this section, I will take up Bennett’s extension of Rancière in Chapter 7 of Vibrant Matter (“Political Ecologies”). In particular, I will make some inroads between Bennett’s extension and the context of indecorous forms of delivery. To repeat my early point, Bennett specifically conceives of her project as political in nature. She seeks to create a hybrid politics between Rancière and her Spinozist-Deleuzian version of assemblage theory. Thinking back to her example of Omega-3 fatty acids that I discussed in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, she maintains that in a nonmodern ontology, objects create these “worlds” without our conscious intention or control. That is, objects “speak” in their material presence and as forces in the world by behaving in unpredictable and non-linear ways. These nonlinear points of emergence defy our ability to cleanly separate the world into active humans and passive nonhumans in order to attribute the human as the sole causal agent for cultural phenomena. These worlds extend beyond our
calculability and representational capacities, but humans are nevertheless obligated to the set of duties placed upon them by such empirical revelations as global warming, gas fracking, and Omega-3 fatty acids. Bennett imagines that the emergence of these aleatory, transversal, and unpredictable worlds places a set of ethical obligations and distributes duties to us not from any top-down liberal state model, but from within the assemblages that we find ourselves entangled. She declares, “If [traditional] environmentalism leads to the call for the protection and wise management of an ecosystem that surrounds us, a vital materialism suggests that the task is to engage more strategically with a trenchant materiality that is us as it vies with us in agentic assemblages” (111).

One valuable contribution of Bennett’s extension of Rancière lie in the moments where she is able to locate openings for nonhuman material affectivities and a Latourian notion of the emergent public. She argues that Rancière is attuned to these points of concern as he “both talks about dissonances coming from outside the regime of political intelligibility and models politics as a unique realm of exclusively human endeavor” (xviii). Bennnett points to a “before” space that exists prior to any symbolic/human-initiated political space. This “before” space is composed of “singular disruptions [that] are neither intentional acts nor aleatory eruptions; Rancière locates them in the between-space of the staged event [e.g., politics as dissensus]” (105). This view would shift dissensus from a human-initiated event to something that more closely resembles the view of delivery as ontological hypokrisis that I have been outlining. Dissensus would be achieved as a product of nonhuman autonomous (aleatory) action, and human responseability to these forms of action in Diane Davis’s sense of being responsive to the
Other’s (the Object’s) withdrawal from perception. Given the existence of this “between-space,” Bennett suggests a comparatively straightforward connection between these dissonances and “[Latour’s] notion of publics as human-nonhuman collective that are provoked into existence by a shared experience of harm. I imagine this public to be one of the disruptions that Rancière names as the quintessentially political act” (xix). Rather than politics being only a result of an individual’s self-suasory activities, Bennett recasts Rancièrian politics as an acknowledgment of our material and ecological existence.

Of course, Rancière would likely object that a rock will not come to a self-recognition born out of a presupposition of equality, spurring itself to speak on its own behalf in an act of disruption. Simply put, it is impossible for us to apportion the right of an inanimate actor’s right to entelechial or conative striving to persist in its being as a form of political solidary and collective anarchism against police orders.95 Thus, “harm” would invariably be something that we had to notice and reflect on regardless of whether we entirely set political issues into motion or not. In fact, Bennett relates a story where she asked Rancière at a 2010 talk at Johns Hopkins if it was possible to speak of a politics of nonhumans (110). He replied with a simple “No.” As I described in the previous section, Rancière examines how virtually or potentially disruptive human forces (the demos) are not recognized by but nevertheless exist within the sphere of the police order (the public). The goal of appropriate indecorous speech is to expose of the arbitrariness of these divisions. Politics is neither about decorous conservation of the status quo nor about dialectical response to a previously articulated set of problems. Politics is only “the name of a singular disruption of this order of distribution of bodies” (Rancière qtd in. Bennett
What the police order holds to be animal noise—phone—converts, in Rancière’s words, to “argumentative utterances” which signify “equality of speaking beings” (qtd. in Bennett 105). The “mise en scenes that reconfigure the relations of the visible and the sayable” reveal “the ultimate secret of any social order” which is that “there is no natural principle of domination by one person over another” (qtd. in Bennett 105). Consequently, Bennett suggests that for Rancière nonhumans cannot count as part of the demos as any dissensual act must be accompanied by, in Rancière’s words, a “desire to engage in reasoned discourse” (qtd. in Bennett 104).

Given this stance, Bennett argues that Rancière ultimately undertheorizes the extent to which dissonances do indeed emerge from nonhuman actors that disrupt the police order of bodies and nonhuman actors. First, she complains that Rancière’s “description of the [political] act increasingly takes on a linguistic cast. . . . It is an ‘objection to a wrong,’ where a wrong is defined as the unequal treatment of beings who are equally endowed with a capacity for human speech” (106, emphasis original).

Secondly, she argues that Rancière’s philosophy is already predicated on a limited notion of a universal public that is grounded in Latour’s modern Constitution. She suggests “Rancière would be helped here, I think, were he to adopt Dewey’s insight about multiple, coexisting publics, rather than speak of a single demos with an overt and a latent set of members” (106). Bennett positions Darwin, Dewey, and Latour alongside and against Rancière, linking Darwin and Latour through their allegories of worms. For Darwin, worms fertilize the soil and bury human objects for archaeologists to discover. Latour’s
famous case from *Pandora’s Hope*, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, demonstrates how
worms were responsible to moving trees in the Amazon.

In another related example, Dewey’s *Art as Experience* helps explain a
nonmodern notion performative entanglement because our bodies are host to foreign
actors (drugs, bacteria), and yet objects outside of us (friends, family, nation-states) feel
quite intimate. Bennett’s claim is not that objects need to be granted equal rights as
humans. Nor is her argument Harman’s polypychipist speculation that all actors—
animate and inanimate—might possess intentionality. Rather, it is that what we conceive
of as a political public is composed by the presence and activity of nonhuman actors who
must be considered not in their reduced descriptions in the calculative technoscientific
order, but through their very real, emergent, and actual points of intersection with the
sphere of culture. This transportation with minimal translation and reduction is what
constitutes a “politics” for nonhumans in Bennett’s Rancièrian extension. The revelation
or appearance of objects in this fashion will inevitably disrupt the common ways in which
we are used to relating to the objects that surround us in the world.

Bennett makes a novel attempt to reorganize these two thinkers—Latour and
Rancière —into a hybrid that can get at a presupposition of political equality *and*
ontological equality. She suggests, “Compared to Dewey and Latour, Rancière is less
concerned with how a public emerges than with the means by which its (apparent)
coherence can be interrupted” (104). In my own reading of Rancière and Latour, I believe
that this division is fairly accurate. Rancière’s politics exists in action, and Latour’s exists
to the extent that it seeks—I would hope—to inform political action. Bennett argues that
Rancière’s model does actually contain sends for a vital materialist theory in two ways. The first, she writes, “Consider, for example, the way it imagines the being of the *demos*: not as a formed thing or fixed entity, but as an unruly activity or indeterminate wave of energy. The *demos* is, we read, ‘neither the sum of the population nor the disfavored element within,’ but an ‘excess’ irreducible to the particular *bodies* involved; Rancière implicitly raises this question: Is the power to disrupt really limited to human speakers?” (106). As I read her conclusion, Rancière’s politics is in fact an emergent property that exceeds the sum total of discrete actors and hierarchies that any given police order sustains. The second occurs when Rancière chooses to define what counts as political by what *effect* is generated: a political act not only disrupts, it disrupts in such a way as to change radically what people can “see”: it repartitions the sensible; it overthrows the regime of the perceptible. Here again the political gate is opened enough for nonhumans (dead rats, bottle caps, gadgets, tire, electricity, berries, metal) to slip through, for they also have the power to startle and provoke a gestalt shift in perception: what was trash becomes things, what was an instrument becomes a participant. What was foodstuff becomes agent, what was adamantine becomes intensity. (106-107)

Bennett refers not only to ecosystem or life-threatening objects themselves such as when a meteor in Lars Vans Trier’s film *Melancholia* (2011) is speeding toward the earth. After all, nature itself is not separate from culture. As is the case with the worms in the Amazon, any actor can “sometimes catalyze a public” from Rosa Parks to hyperobjects or
Terri Schiavo (107). She offers a series of propositions that follow from these two extension: “If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies,” and “if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans,” then, Bennett concludes, “the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogeneous) ‘public’ coalescing around a problem” (108).

Consequently, Bennett suggests via Latour that it is our ethical and political obligation to “to see how to devise more effective (experimental) tactics for enhancing or weakening that public” (107). From the previous framework, Bennett requires us to revise Rancière’s focus on the human. She argues “to imagine politics as a realm of human activity alone may also be a kind of prejudice: a prejudice against a (nonhuman) multitude misrecognized as context, constraint, or tool” (108). Bennett urges political theorists “to transform the divide between speaking subjects and mute objects into a set of differential tendencies and variable capacities” (108). Given that no human lives above and beyond material relations, and that all social identities will necessarily share consequences for distribution and access to resources, Bennett argues,

there is no way to call attention to the partition without invoking some relationship to the material world; “I speak, I’m invisible” only occurs in the context of economics, ideologies, access to resources, ways that bodies are positioned and distributed, that enjoy surveillance invisibility, and so on. We need not only to invent or reinvoke concepts like conatus, actant, assemblage, small agency, operator, disruption, and the like but also to
devise new procedures, technologies, and regimes of perception that
enable us to consult nonhumans more closely, or to listen and respond
more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies, and propositions.

(108)

**Latourian Political Morality: When Means Become Ends**

Bennett’s claim that the self-organization of matter can function as a political
attractor to create an emergent public is well taken and, in my opinion, correct. At the
same time, her “extension” of Rancière is not really an extension. It is more what Burke
calls “casuistic stretching”: repurposing an existing set of terminology into a different
context. No matter how she might want to extend him, there is not avoiding the fact that
Rancière’s politics is presupposed on a human model of self-recognition and humanist
solidarity. Again, my perspective is that his project should be complementary or
supplementary with an ecological politics. With respect to Bennett’s arguments, the
interesting argument for me is less whether we can retrofit Rancière for a world of
nonhuman actors, and more how we can use his pairing of action, politics, and aesthetics
as a form of indecorous speech to better situate the political project of delivery in
emergent publics.

While Bennett has offered several arguments for *why* we might want to recast
Rancièrean indecorous speech as a materializable event, I want to increasingly turn to
the *how* this goal might be achieved. In the end, Latour—like Rancière—is interested in
the production of aesthetic effects and conceptual instruments for disrupting police orders
of, respectively, ecologies and human communities. Simply stated, how might indecorous
speech from humans on behalf of objects take form? It is far easier to make these suggestions in the abstract than it is to realize them in a set of specific technê or an awareness of the affectivity of post-technê. The crucial question for rhetorical theorists is the kairotic discovery of the aesthetic means that might enable audiences to recognize these aleatory eruptions or to become more aware of our material and ecological imbrication with nonhumans. Following from Bennett’s point of view, I believe that we could reclassify indecorous speech and delivery as action born not out of a presupposition of political equality, but action borne out of what I will call a presupposition of ontological equality guided by a Latourian pragmatism and morality. This proposal would retain specific features of Rancière’s aesthetics and political action, but it cannot retain the political equality component for the reasons that I have suggested above. By contrast, I will suggest that Latour via Dewey not only authorizes a view of politics as an emergent public of humans and nonhumans, but also productively reframes—in part—an ethical-aesthetic project of political action bourn of the presupposition of ontological equality.

In Politics of Nature, Latour productively distinguishes politics from morality/ethics while Bennett seems to be collapsing politics and ethics into a carefully qualified variant of the thesis “objects are political actors.” However, Latour ultimately urges us to resist the argument that all objects are political actors or, more accurately, to see this as a claim that we do not need to make. As he notes in “Turning Politics Around,” if anti-realist constructivism resulted in the claim that “everything is political” because all language is necessarily contingent, then we must be equally as cautious of the
implication that all objects are political—an inversion of the modernist Constitution.

Thinking back to Cheah’s quotation above, the point of the nonhuman is actually to call into question normative assumptions about political action. For Latour, objects participate in the shaping of Deweyian publics, but politics remains a human profession with a very nuanced relationship to ecological police orders. Morality has a special relationship to aesthetics that I will suggest offers a highly productive way to re-think Rancière vis-à-vis Latour.

One of Latour’s highly original contributions lies in how he actually wants to retain Deweyian publics while carefully reserving a space for ethical and moral conduct through which aesthetics and rhetoric can play a key role. In turn, as I will suggest below, aesthetics comes to play a key role in the ethical project of Latour’s pragmatism. In Politics of Nature, Latour re-defines the polis as the human-nonhuman collective—our oikos and dwelling space. In so doing, he identifies four skills or professions (science, politics, economics, morality) that are necessary for the collective to “carry out the search for the common world” (162). These do not correspond to any precise profession and it is definitely possible for any one actor to occupy more than one profession. The professions are more like functions that a variety of different social actors will occupy within different assemblages. Scientists should create “instruments” and “laboratories” in order to detect and make visible objects’ complex unfolding; politicians are those who accept that action within the collective is necessarily hierarchical and that some actors—human and nonhuman—will be invariable excluded by any given political settlement manufactured in order to weaken or strengthen certain social-material arrangements;
economics “reflexively represents the collective to itself” in that economists are especially skilled at reducing both human and nonhuman actors to equations that describe their various inter- and intra-active capacities (150); and, morality, a term that I want to unpack in greater detail.

If politicians draw on scientists’s representations and economists’s calculability of what has been made visible in order to legislate action, then moralists possess “scruples that make it necessary to go looking for invisible entities and appellants” (162). In Politics of Nature, Latour turns to Immanuel Kant as a point of contrast through which to clarify what he means by the profession of morality. Kant’s categorical imperative consisted of the obligation “not to treat human beings simply as means but always also as ends” (qtd. in Latour 155). Latour claims that a nonmodern world requires a categorical imperative where nonhumans as well as humans are treated as ends as well. In an earlier essay, “Morality and Technology: The End of the Means,” Latour offers a more detailed rationale for this choice. Latour poses a question that science can uncover, economics can calculate, and politicians need to act on: “Must we dispose of the waste from the nuclear industry in deep or surface silos?” (30). In Latour’s reading, Kant’s answer would be to turn to our own mental a priori faculty for judgments with the human means/ends restriction. In a sense, Kant wants morality to proceed from a divestment of practical and material confines that would likely involve one’s self-interest. Technologies and all objects in the world, thus, necessarily become means to ends.

We might concede that Latour may be overstating Kant’s rejection of the material. However, his overstatement is in the service of making a larger point about
morality. Latour points toward a need to reclassify technology from a passive intermediary to an active enfolding (ontological hypokrisis). He writes:

What is folded in technical action? Time, space and the type of actants.
The hammer that I find on my workbench is not contemporary to my action today: it keeps folded heterogenous temporalities, one of which has the antiquity of the planet, because of the mineral from which it has been molded, while another has that of the age of the oak which provided the handle, while still another has the age of the 10 years since it came out of the German factory which produced it for the market. When I grab the handle, I insert my gesture in a “garland of time” as Michel Serres (1995) has put it, which allows me to insert myself in a variety of temporalities or time differentials, which account for (or rather imply) the relative solidity which is often associated with technical action. (249)

Latour’s reading of agency accords well with that of the anthropologist Ambros Malafouris who suggests that humans are not merely defined by symbolic logic and the invention of the negative, but by our unique ability to attribute ourselves as the origin of an action. Simply put, in keeping with Latour’s desire to see politics as something that emerges from our agentive relationships with nonhuman actors, “It is impossible here to proceed as if the hammer ‘fulfilled a function’, for it overflows the strict limits of this container on all sides” (250). We view things as intermediates when they are instrumentalized and as mediators when they “overflow” their containers. Thus, Latour concludes that technologies never fully emerge as “means.” In his reading, Kant
necessarily converts objects to means them to in his recourse to *a priori* reason.

Every technological initiation pays for the multiplication of mediators in the creation of intermediaries. The growth of the oak from the Ardennes was directed to quite other ends than the production of my hammer, even if it had been planted with this end vaguely in mind. Of the oak, the tool has kept but a minute part of its properties of solidity, of warmth, of the alignment of the lines of lignite. Where was the oak going by itself and for itself? In what world did it prolong its existence? Technology is not interested in such a question, compelled as it is to dislodge all the entities through which it passes in order to engender possible worlds and allow new dispositions. A very different anxiety runs through morality: how many mediators do the other forms of existence maintain in their wake? Do we not run the risk of treating the oak as a simple means for the hammer? (255)

Simply stated, the moralist is thus the one who helps to maintain objects—things—as intermediaries.

**Aesthetics and Morality**

Given the pairing of aesthetics and morality, some may certainly have wondered what role rhetoric has in the human-nonhuman collective. Latour is critical of rhetoric in *Pandora’s Hope* given the Socrates and Callicles exclusion of the *demos*, and yet more sympathetic in “Democracy of Objects.” My own position is that rhetoric is not a profession in Latour’s expanded sense. It remains both an architectonic discourse and a
post-technê, and it is more accurate to say that all professions will invariably rely on enthymemes, rhetorical and materiality affectivity, and systems of inferential reasoning that are unique to their strengths and contributions to the collective of humans and nonhumans. Morality offers a key to how rhetoric might fit in as a skill or profession. Obviously, even politicians—both in Latour’s sense and in our commonsense notion of elected public officials, scientists, economists, and moralists will rely on persuasion and have to work within social and material conditions in order to induce cooperation. Yet, where closure in politics must occur, Latour writes that the moralist “offers a right of appeal to excluded parties” (Politics of Nature 162). Thus, I believe it is better to say that we are engaged in the project of analyzing rhetorical strategies that are specific to the professions, with morality occupying a central point of concern. Following from Latour’s arguments, we need better aesthetic tools to recognize the phone (the white noise) of objects (or of marginalized human groups within assemblages who are affected by those objects) before they commit indecorous acts that are harmful to the various good and bad mixtures of emergent publics that we try to articulate—the hyperobject of global warming and the Anthropocene being perhaps one of the most pressing issues facing our time.96 Yet, the catch is that we cannot reduce objects to means (mediators) in our identification of them should we wish to engage in the profession of morality.

Latour offers additional insights into what specific technê might be involved in the representation of objects as things. Far from only being concerned with scientific and empirical description, few commentators have noted where Latour connects the moral function of the speech of objects with specific artistic practices.97 In “Why Has Critique
Run Out of Steam?” Latour specifically considers the types of aesthetic forms that allow objects to become Things. Latour turns (ever) again to Heidegger for the latter’s differentiation between an object—calculated and scientifically enframed—and a thing—a gathering. The object is produced under the modernist Constitution and the thing is the reality of the object in the nonmodern (rhetorical realist) constitution. In Heidegger’s example of the jug, Latour radically alters Heidegger’s distinction between pre-modern and modern to differentiate between how an object is described and a thing. For Heidegger, the handmade jug is a thing while a can of coke—industrially fabricated—cannot be a thing. Latour suggests “While the latter is abandoned to the empty mastery of science and technology, only the former, cradled in the respectful idiom of art, craftsmanship, and poetry, could deploy and gather its rich set of connections” (233). Heidegger’s bizarre hostility to modern technology aside, Latour is more interested in this general aesthetic phenomenon whereby objects become things. Latour proposes reversing the direction, talking about the objects of science as if they were things fabricated not by human hands alone—technê—but (in)directly fabricated by a variety of uneven post-technês. Ethical and moral awareness occurs at the point when the object becomes a thing, and when we see “a unique window into the number of things that have to participate in the gathering of an object” (234). This conversation directly relates back to Christina Haas and Richard Lanham’s desire to reduce transparency of technology that I cited in previous chapters. Humanists like their technologies to be visible, calculable, and able to be manipulated.

Latour provides several models for artistic practices that present objects as things,
including Damien Ortega’s *Cosmic Things* where Ortega deconstructs Volkswagen Bug to its constituent individually manufactured parts. Ortega then hangs these parts by a string, dangling in the installation space, collapsing the space of art—which deals with things—and industrialization—which likes to present us with seamless technological objects. By challenging this dichotomy, Ortega emphasizes all of the individual contributions of all the parts that must contribute to a gathering of a thing. Latour makes this point about morality and aesthetics again in his analysis of the artist Manuel Franquelo’s *The Language of Things* (Latour, “The Language of Things”). Franquelo’s work involves photographs on printed chine colle. After applying this printing technique, Fanquelo created digital versions by scanning the photographs. He finally creates a unique texture by allowing Hugh Stoneman and Carmen Coral to etch the layered images in copper plates. In his brief comments that accompany the collection, Latour notes that each portrait seems almost haphazard or Dada-like. The objects that Fanquelo photographed were objects of everyday life like old-fashioned rotary telephones. In his arrangements, the objects appeared *as if* they had not been intentionally posed and arranged by the author, allowing the thing to “do the talking” (para. 5). Latour argues, “They have become necessary because, whatever the odd reasons that have brought them together in the studio, they are offering something else than their shape, a substance so rare in art that the viewer does not know what to call it: texture might be a word” (para. 2). To put the matter very simply, Latour is tracing an aesthetic strategy that makes the Thing and not the Object appear. He writes, “Shape is the obvious; texture is the invisible. A shape is either sharp or fuzzy, crisp or blurred, revealed or hidden. Not a
texture” (para. 2). Further, he concludes

Shape is a word for focus and out of focus, but none for texture and out of texture. Shape is vertical, texture, so to speak, is internal. A whole new pictorial and material vocabulary is at work here to translate the language of shape into that of texture. For instance the seven larger prints are stained by the explicit marks used to reframe the seven smaller ones. How could you better show that shape is not the goal but that another node of expression is at work here—to demonstrate the ways things reach at us?

As if shape was only a slice, a vertical cut, in the lateral, transversal deployment of things. What Einstein might have called “the mollusk of reference . . . Showing not a shape with edges but rather the deployment of matters being transformed. Yes, for sure, another way to make things speak. (para. 4)

In consideration of the path from object to Thing, which I am suggesting is one form of indecorous speech appropriate to undertake on behalf of nonhuman actors, we must remember that Latour is not asking us to represent the reality of things-in-themselves (the *noumena*). The last two sections of the large quoted block of text clearly indicate that 1. Latour does not intend scientists alone to be the final court of appeal for politics, and 2. empirical accounts *must be supplemented* by general aesthetic strategies that help audiences see objects as Things that gather and shape emergent publics. One way to begin to think of political action and dissensus through the ontological equality of nonhumans may simply lie in aesthetic strategies that call our attention to the complex
material properties and aspects of objects that our conventional hermeneutic methods or commonsense ways of perceiving objects prohibit. Such presentations would confirm the nonhuman turn’s anti-humanist aims of communicating to the human our ecological situatedness and the invisible constellation of actors that sustain the symbolic and the cultural.

**OOO and Metaphor**

If Rancière wants action borne out of a presupposition of political equality, Latour’s presupposition of ontological equality will seek to present objects in a way that traces the emergent and self-organizing capacities of the material actors and ecologies through which Rancierian politics necessarily occur. I firmly agree with Bennett’s reading on this point. Latour, in my opinion, seems to be gesturing toward a renewal of an aesthetic formalism which I will simply call “nonmodern indecorous speech” designed to *metaphorically simulate* the complex character and existence of objects or nonhuman actors—a claim I will unpack in this final section. Thus, indecorous speech would necessarily involve adding these sorts of textures that convert objects into things, enabling objects to maintained as “things”—ontologically equivalent actors.

Of all those who have been interested in the nonhuman, the OOO wing of the speculative realist movement has expressed a great degree of interest in aesthetics. In Heideggerian fashion, OOO suggests that we must maintain not just human *Dasein* but the Dasein all beings in their withdrawnness. Thus, the sublime tends to be the rhetorical figure that makes the most sense in this context. Much like in the earlier writings of Heidegger, poetic formalism and rhetorical figures have made an unsurprising rise to
prominence within the speculative realist ranks as is evidenced by Morton’s recourse to the sublime in “Sublime Objects.” For example, many OOO theorists employ the rhetorical figure *Anthimeria* in which a part of speech such as a noun is used as a verb to create an uncanny metaphoric juxtaposition. If our syntactic habit is to declare that an active subject acts on a passive object in such phrases as “a man walks into a bar,” the speculative realists often employ syntactical reversals such as Harman’s claim that the “the object styles.” The philosopher Levi Bryant as well writes, “the mug blues” to describe the virtual proper being of his coffee cup as it forms relations of force over time with various human and nonhuman actors within its phase space. In this figuration of *Anthimeria*, the idea is not that *verbing* the noun captures the reality of the object, but that it metaphorically defamiliarizes a common syntactical way that we have of attributing agency to humans alone.

Intriguingly, even Bennett’s confident declaration of the agency of nonhumans nevertheless gestures toward figural strategies that convince the human of the human’s lack of access to the object’s reality. She writes, “Maybe it’s worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divinization of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman ‘environment’” (17).

Another popular stylistic trope among these commentators has been *systrophe*, or, as Harman calls it, “ontography”: the semi-random listing of parts or qualities that make up an object through description without naming the whole object or allowing an overall essence or linear narrative to dominate the interpretation. We can see
clear shades of *systrophe* in Matthew Fuller’s dada-ist media ecology and throughout Latour’s writing. Latour’s continual efforts to list random combinations of nonhuman actors within any social phenomenon has been dubbed a “Latourian Litany” by Bogost (“Latourian Litanies” para. 2). Indeed, Michel Serres’ *The Five Senses* also mobilizes the trope of listing.

Metaphor in particular has taken on renewed importance for object-oriented thinking. As aesthetic strategies, metaphors pretend no essential correspondence between the objects that are compared. There is no suggestion in Shakespeare metaphorical claim that “desire is death” the two objects employed the comparison share literal or essential equivalence. Rather, the metaphorical comparison between desire and death preserves each element’s conceptual irreducibility while nevertheless prompting a comparison and translation of their concrete appearances or other visible qualities. As one of Burke’s four master tropes, metaphor, or “*perspective*,” “brings out the thisness of a that, or the thatness of a this . . . tells us about one character as considered from the point of view of another character” (*Grammar of Motives* 503-04). Burke also argues that metaphor is crucial to any discussion on an object’s reality: “It is customary to think that objective reality is dissolved by such relativity of terms as we get through the shifting of perspectives. . . . But on the contrary, it is by the approach through a variety of perspectives that we establish a character’s reality” (504). Such a view is not unlike Karen Barad’s Heisenbergian agential realism where the observer and the observed co-create reality, although Burke, as I argued in Chapter 2, is less interested in the nonhuman’s role in such cases. Sounding very much like Alfred North Whitehead, Burke
writes, “If we are in doubt as to what an object is, for instance, we deliberately try to consider it is an many different terms as its nature permits: lifting, smelling, tasting, tapping, holding in different lights, subject to different pressures, dividing, matching, contrasting, etc.” (504). Metaphor enables the Latourian relationship between shape and texture, and between object and thing. No object loses its “withdrawn” reality in the comparison. Both objects are maintained as unique and distinct entities. Metaphor simulates the ontological space of translation by which entities reduce one another’s reality.

The OOO theorists consequently shift metaphor from a mere formalism to a representative anecdote for the object’s concealment as a thing. In Guerilla Metaphysics, Harman directly challenges Aristotle’s claim that metaphor was an unteachable gift that belonged to humans alone, arguing that all relations between objects take place not just like metaphors, but as metaphors. In an April, 2012 Atlantic Monthly article, Ian Bogost echoes Harman: “Being withdraws from access. There is always something left in reserve, in a thing. The best we can do as humans is to respect the hidden mystery of the experience of things, and speculate metaphorically about how an object like a computer or a pound cake encounters the world” (16). Later in Alien Phenomenology, Bogost gives a more detailed description of metaphor worth quoting at length,

When one object caricatures another, the first grasps the second in the abstract, enough for the one to make some sense of the other given its own internal properties. A caricature is a rendering that captures some aspects of something else at the cost of other aspects. It is not the objects’
perceptions that we characterize metaphoristically, but the perception itself, which recedes just as any other object does. In so doing, we release the relation from a reduction between other objects, flattening it down onto the same ontological plane as other actors. (82)

OOO is not just interested in any and all forms of metaphor. Rather, OOO is interested in specific kinds of figurations that work against representation, the will-to-truth, or logical clarity and toward affective obscurity. Elsewhere in “Sublime Objects,” Morton writes, “What metaphor does, then, is not unlike any other trope, which the old manuals call obscurum per obscurum, describe something obscure by making it seem even more obscure. Percy Shelly was very fond of this trope—his images endarken rather than enlighten” (15). All of these various references to metaphor and writing about figural defamiliarization are informed directly by Harman’s previous writings on metaphor.

According to Harman’s discussion of Ortega Y Gasset’s theory of metaphor in Guerilla Metaphysics, the metaphor “a cypress is like a juniper” is too close to the actual manner in which humans group trees together. He writes, “it fails as a metaphor precisely because the names can be fused together—of our common genus-species taxonomy of trees” (106). By contrast, Ortega Y Gasset’s claim “the cypress is a flame,” however, “succeeds only because they cannot be fused together.” Metaphor, “presents the inner execution of the things in simulated form. Poets cannot really crossbreed trees with flames: perhaps only wizards could do this, and their race has vanished from the earth.” (107).

When we read Harman’s and other object-oriented philosophers’ passages both
about metaphor and elsewhere, we find not the quasi-empirical recounting of the assemblages within which objects and actors move, but the aesthetic formalism of the sort that Heidegger was famous for. A typical early Heideggerian description of reality is as follows: “When we analyze [color] in rational terms by measuring its wavelengths, it is gone. It shows itself only when it remains undisclosed and unexplained. Earth thus shatters every attempt to penetrate it. It causes every merely calculating importunity upon it to turn into a destruction. . . . The earth appears openly-cleared as itself only when it is perceived and preserved as that which is essentially undisclosable” (qtd. in Braver 25).

Harman would add to Heidegger that all entities encounter each other this way, but Harman’s understanding of the function of metaphor is identical to the outcome of the early Heidegger’s formalism. The problem with preserving objects or any actor in their essential unknowability is that this declaration of the ontological uncertainty is generally where the OOO thinkers stop in our consideration of objects. In Heidegger’s point of view, our attempts to represent and enframe destroy that which we try to understand, “the way the Kantian a priori cogito attempts to perceive how a noumenon eradicates its noumenality” (Braver 59). Thus, we can find an anthimeria-like strategy within Heidegger, as Lee Braver argues, “who forges new terminology drawn from careful, open-minded descriptions of the things themselves in order to prevent ideas derived from other phenomena from contaminating the thing being studied. The purest way to respect beings’ uniqueness is to import no external terminology at all which, taken to its logical conclusion, restricts one to tautological statements such as ‘the world worlds,’ ‘speech speaks,’ or ‘propriation propriates’ ” (59).
Figures of the Post-Technê: Material Metaphors as Nonmodern Indecorous Speech

In an ironic move given his status as a “modern,” we can easily employ Burke’s rhetorical theory to read the aesthetic effects that OOO is after in their turn to metaphors of the uncanny and the sublime. In *Permanence and Change*, Burke defines the metaphoric operation of “perspective by incongruity” or “planned incongruity”:

The gargoyles of the Middle Ages were typical instances of planned incongruity. The make of the gargoyles who put man’s-head on bird-body was offering combinations which were completely rational as judged by his logic of essences. In violating one order of classification, he was stressing another. . . . Were we to summarize the totality of its effects, advocating as an *exhortation* what has already spontaneously occurred, we might say that planned incongruity should be deliberately cultivated for the purpose of experimentally wrenching apart all those molecular combinations of adjective and noun, substantive and verb, which still remain with us. It should subject language to the same ‘cracking’ process that chemists now use in their refining of oil. (112, 119)

Intriguingly, Burke believed that perspective by incongruity was a strategy that can be applied to all disciplines, utilized by both the scientist (“if science would be truly atheistic or impious to the last degree, it should try systematically to eradicate every last linkage that remains with us merely as the result of piety or innate propriety, and not because of its rationally established justification”) and the poet (“where the accepted linkages have been of an imposing sort, one should establish perspective by looking
through the reverse end of his glass, converting mastodons into microbes, or human beings into vermin upon the face of the earth”) alike (120). In fact, Burke even anticipates the aesthetic project of the sublime that Morton, Heidegger, and Latour are gesturing toward. Burke writes, “Or let us ever deliberately deprive ourselves of available knowledge in the search for knowledge. Attempting to understand motives and purposes by avoiding as much as possible the clues handed you ready-made in the texture of language itself. In this you will have deliberately discarded available data in the interests of a fresh point of view, the heuristic or perspective value of planned incongruity” (120).

Thus, while OOO’s metaphorical descriptions of how objects conceal as a way to re-think delivery as ontological hypokrisis are certainly valuable, I believe that there are modifications to metaphors that are more conducive to the way in which objects can become things in an act of indecorous speech. Specifically, planned incongruity cannot just work at the level of symbolic action. It must actually foreground the material actors involved in communication. We must engage all mediums and modes of communication to the “cracking” process that Burke identifies for language. In Writing Machines, Katherine Hayles offers a way to conceive of the layering of objects through a specific production strategy that could be mobilized for augmented reality. In a technotext, a term by which “text” could just as easily mean “object”

the physical attributes constituting any artifact are potentially infinite; in a digital computer, for example, they include the polymers used to fabricate the case, the rare earth elements used to make the phosphors in the CRT screen, the palladium used to the power cord prongs, and so forth. From
this infinite array a technotext will select a few to foreground and work into its thematic concerns. (33)

For Hayles, all texts—both print and digital—are technotexts by varying degrees or intensities of self-reflexivity about their materiality. While certainly related to Latour or Bennett’s areas of concern, the technotext in particular takes a familiar object such as W. H. Mallock’s Victorian novel *A Human Document*, which we would conventionally understand through its symbolic representations, ignoring the book binding, the paper texture, the visual elements of typography that we moderns try to conceal through a homogenous parenthetical indexing system and black font and white paper—and, as Tom Phillips does in *The Humument*, create an uncanny palimpsest that foregrounds the materiality of the medium and visual materiality of production.

Examples of technotexts abound. Hangjun Lee and Chulki Hong’s video, *The Cracked Share*, foregrounds the invisible layer of actants that participate in our enjoyment of the symbolic or representational means of a film by representing the visual “noise” of the space in between all of the still frames that we never see when we watch an analogue movie. An outgrowth of the technotext is what Hayles calls a “material metaphor” (32). By this term, she means, when the materiality of the text is integral to its project of connecting world with word. It is a work when “medium and work were entwined in a complex relation that functioned as a multilayered metaphor for the relation of the world’s materiality to the space of simulation” (32). In a material metaphor, no utterance or form is ever instantiated by the human mind alone. For Hayles, all communication acts are formed within objects within objects within objects all the way
down *a la* Arthur Schopenhauer’s turtles. A material metaphor thus tarries with the sublime (allowing the object to become a thing) while nevertheless calling attention to the material instantiation of delivery.

However, Hayles is primarily interested in the human-computer or human-text relationship; furthermore, if objects are discrete and real, they already have forms and humans are merely able to makes allies with certain qualities of certain objects from within specific assemblages. How can we simulate the process of withdrawal that ultimately marks the speculative realist’s employment of metaphor? If we were to pursue material metaphors as a form of what Bogost calls “carpentry” in *Alien Phenomenology*, we would need to think of them through all objects and through dimensions of experience that did not just relate to humans. Carpentry is Bogost’s term for the mode of composition that acknowledges the materiality of any act of communication. In *Alien Phenomenology*, Bogost suggests a form of aesthetic experience in which invisible operations and relations are made visible against human interpretive and relational autonomy. Bogost describes the *Tableau Machine*, “a non-human social actor” designed by Mario Romero, Zachary Pousman, and Michael Mateas. It is a “smart” home that is aware of its inhabitants locations and activities. Yet, Bogost describes how “the house does not merely record and respond, but interprets the state of the environment in the experience of abstract art” (114). Bogost notes, “Its creators surmise that the home can perceive, but they add an additional presumption: a home’s perception is unfathomable by its human occupants. Instead of understanding it, the best we can do is trace the edges
of its dark noise, producing a caricature of its experience in a form we can recognize” (137).

Thus, Bogost recommends employing computer algorithms with randomized scripts in the process of participating in the carpentry that simulates relationality and withdrawal. Let us see how this might play out in the work of two additional digital artists who have been specifically interested in the algorithmic materiality of new media objects. Working through a Nintendo Entertainment System emulator, Ben Frye’s *Deconstructulator* allows a game such as *Super Mario Bros* to be played while the computer’s processing of the binary code is visualized alongside the screen in real time. Whatever activities the player makes within the system cause the revelation of corresponding changes through the otherwise invisible relations of material affect that the player does not directly encounter but that nevertheless intimately construct the assemblages of the game.

At the same time, we can compare Frye’s revelation of the hidden materiality of operation of the code to the artist Jodi’s revelations in her older installment *Ctrl-Space*. The difference between the two can help us to establish where a break in the portioning of the sensible emerges, giving rise to an object politics. Like Frye, Jodi’s technotext takes on a critique of hermeneutics that would often restrict its gaze to the contents of the screen. While Frye allows the game operator to keep moving, alerting him or her to hidden relations that change in space with each step—as does *Tableau House*—Jodie invokes a *technê* of “noncorrespondance” (Galloway, *Essays*). In video game lingo, noncorrespondance occurs when a player pushes the button for “jump” and the character
will not jump. In the simulated sense of a material metaphor, the object has become a thing. On entering the website installation of *Crtl-Space*, the system’s code reveals itself through the mediation of visualization while directly simulating a system crash, but the user is no longer able to test the effects of his or her own influence within the system. In this way, Jodi’s system has taken on its own impenetrable materiality where Frye, by contrast, allows players to work and test relations within it. Here, a potential continuum of difference is paved for a reconsideration of how nonhuman actants or various material layers are represented vis-à-vis technology that could be used to generate *topoi* for any sort of compositional medium. Procedural rhetorics, thus, are instrumentalized in the service of bearing witness to new material idioms to borrow Jean-Francois Lyotard’s phrase.

This continuum of differences can also serve to create new compositional forms that combine algorithm-driven planned incongruity with the object-oriented goal of simulating the decentering the human agent. I recently came across a game called *Plague, Inc.* (2012) designed for the iPhone. *Plague, Inc.* is what is known among gaming scholars as a “pandemic simulator.” The player takes on the role of a virus with the goal of increasing the virus’s conative or entelechial drive in order to extinguish the human race. In a pandemic simulator, there are no human agents like doctors, FEMA officials, or health practitioners that the player can summon to intervene. In contrast to Sid Meier’s strategy game simulation in *Civilization*, *Plague, Inc.* refuses to allow the player to access or relate to any human agents in an agentive capacity. Where Meier wants to show how human instrumental actions like military interventions and creating colonies can create
emergent and unpredictable affects, *Plague, Inc.* offers no anthropomorphic narrative about who the player is or why the virus might want to wreak havoc on human civilizations. Unlike the popular *Resident Evil* series where the Umbrella Corporation’s genetic manipulation inadvertently creates a zombie apocalypse, *Plague, Inc.* offers no common tropes or mythologies of rogue scientists or insidious multinational pharmaceutical companies who have created this virus for profit or world domination. The gamespace is entirely composed of the virus as the only agentive actor.

The game designers also reinforced the absence of the human agent in its visual presentation. The graphic elements—“skins”—allow the game to be rendered in a sensible and perceptible manner. Yet, *Plague, Inc.* deliberately employs a minimalist style to the effect that there is no visual avatar for either the player or the disease. The game designers write,

> The entire game takes place on a rudimentary Mercator map of the globe, where you select your country of origin and watch the days tick by. Tiny boats stream from seaports to their docking places in other countries, and tiny airplanes emerge in wave upon wave, shooting across continents. The player mostly watches, accumulating points at certain milestones in the progression of the infection, and cashing in those points through menu screens that allow the player to mutate the pathogen at will, exercising some control over the symptoms and vectors of infection” (para. 3).

With the absence of any narrative, the player can only progress in the game by making the virus a major affective agent within the various different actors and networks around
the globe. The entire focus of the game is on the virus’s expansion and success at a very concrete and empirical level. Although they cannot present the virus “in itself,” the designers have strived to maintain it as an active mediator rather than a passive intermediary. Humans and other actors have become the intermediaries.

As a result of these design decisions, the figuration of human agency—not the player’s agency—has been recast from individual or local to global and epic scales. Visually, the game employs what Burke calls planned incongruity: an uncanny inversion of the current graphics-heavy commercial approaches to game design designed to please and supplement human sensory experience. The designers argue, “[the graphic design] also perfectly fits the pathological perspective it asks gamers to adopt. To a hammer, everything looks like a nail, and to a pathogen, everything looks like a Petri dish. This clever and dizzying experiment in proportion undermines our typical approach to ourselves and to the globe, and it does so in a way that seems uniquely suited to the mobile gaming format” (para. 3). As morbid as the outcome might be for humans, the designers are successfully performing what Bogost calls for in terms of imagining what the world might appear as to a pound cake or a virus. Procedural rhetoric has been mobilized in the serve of arguing that “the puzzles that structure strategy games may appear innocuous and intellectual, but in fact they are characterized by a total lack of perspective. They work by inciting people to engage in endless rounds of asocial, problem-solving logic that exists apart from any kind of human connection” (para. 3). In combination with the idea of a material metaphor or Bogostian carpentry, I believe that it might be possible to suggest a form of object-oriented simulation gaming. Viruses may
create a greater sense of fear and *pathos* in the collective mythology of human civilizations. However, we could just as easily create ecologically-themed games featuring Alaimo’s mercury, Bennett’s Omega-3 fatty acids, pirate radio, pound cakes, or virtually any of the other examples that I have mentioned in this dissertation to feature.

**Materialist Pedagogy**

Algorithms need not only be related to the revelation of computer systems, but to materiality more broadly speaking as we can find in Jodi Shipka’s book, *Toward a Composition Made Whole*. In theorizing to digital literacies, Shipka argues that compositionists restrict what counts as technology to computers and digital production. If, however, technology is not merely an instrument, and all literacies are technological and the point of composing is not just to have students learn rigid genre rules, but to inculcate critical thinking and rhetorical awareness, then Shipka asks us to explore the compositional potential of *all* things—digital and physical. Composing is about negotiating material forms and human nonhuman assemblages and looking at how each offers unique possibilities and constraints in terms of trying to communicate an idea to a different audience. In a very real sense, Shipka illustrates why I have preferred the term “materiality” (e.g., material realism) at many places in this dissertation in comparison to “technology.” Her claim is that students should compose as a way of being in the world and engaging with human and nonhuman forms than just writing with the mastery of academic genres in mind. We could readily infer a form of indecorous speech as a pedagogical outlet for rhetoric and writing teachers with the explicit goal of revealing the
Thing-ness of the various actors involved in delivery as an ethical and, perhaps, political mode of dwelling and practicing rhetoric in a world of nonhuman actors.

Material metaphors and Shipka’s points of review relate to what Jenny Rice has recently called a “publics approach to place” (14). She writes, “Rather than seeing place merely as a composition (which of course it is), and rather than seeing place in terms of its ecological character (which, of course, it has), I prefer to examine the habits and practices of publics who can and do affect that location” (14). Rice wants to investigate the process by which “publics are imagined by those who compose them, but these imaginations are always materializable in publics that popular, change, and undergo the effects of material places. It is in publics, not places, that rhetoricians can make the strongest intervention into imperiled places” (14). In addition to Rice, nonmodern rhetorical realism and political aesthetics offer a crucial materialist correlative to those involved in the rhetorical methodology of institutional critique (Sullivan; Porter; Blythe; Grabill; Miles). In Blythe’s case, agency within institutions (both technological and ecological) means “Students (and we) should recognize how organizations operate, critique that operation, find points where the working of an organization may be altered (points that are often discursive, as explained later), and recognize their role (perhaps even their complicity at times) in maintaining organizations” (168). Thus, it is the mundane and the material that allow not only for a better understanding of better or worse “a given local institution as a series of interrelated systems” (174) demonstrates how “changes in one system brings changes in others” (174). Although Stoneman only ties indecorum to speech, the idea of spatial contestation—the materialization of
rhetoric—has been extensively written on by rhetorical scholars in ways that have clear
ties to indecorum. Nedra Reynolds’ work on cultural geography attempts to understand
the spaces of daily-lived existence as sites of cultural production as a form of emergent
publics.

Christian Weisser’s well-known scholarship on forms of public writing argues
that it not liberal consensus but contestation that is necessary for vibrant democratic
public sphere. Technological and material literacies are becoming a crucial part of
learning to write for multimodal publics. As Weisser suggests in the context of technical
writing, “Many of our students will go on to careers in which they will use or perhaps
create apps for portable devices, and we are obligated to prepare them for those careers”
(“Mobile Apps”). Yet, given my dissertation’s focus on nonmodern ontologies, I
necessarily interpret Weisser’s claim in a different sense. I think we are not obligated to
prepare students to seamlessly enter the work space to manipulate objects and to
perpetuate the calculative devices of the neoliberal order. Rather, as teachers of writing
and rhetoric, I argues that we are obligated to encourage our students to view
technologies as Things that participate in the composition—in Latour’s sense—of social
reality.

Conclusion

This awareness of the specific technē and post-technē constitutes an extremely
crucial form of indecorous appropriate speech proper to a world of ontological hypokrisis.
Can we actually act borne out of a presupposition of political equality on behalf of
objects? We cannot, as Rancière’s solidarity model demonstrates. However, I have
argued that imposing this requirement—either we have humanist solidarity or there is no politics—fundamentally mistakes the task of rhetoric in a world of nonhuman actors. The task that we must engage in is what Latour calls the moralist’s relationship to the profession of politics: negotiating hierarchies and police orders of subjects and objects while lobbying for aesthetic means of the re-inclusion of excluded humans, actants, assemblages, and Things. Thus, for me, while aesthetic acts and indecorous speech on behalf of objects is one interesting route to employ, rhetoric in the era of the Anthropocene definitely needs to attend to forms of politics specific to environmental activism: actions borne up in presuppositions of ontological equality and ecological awareness. In the context of Marshall McLuhan’s observation that it is the artist who diagnoses where our naturalization functions with the technological (or social) actors that are at play, aesthetics, decorum, and objects can play a role in allowing things to gather (deliver) human communication acts. These elements of Dewey and Rancière’s thinking are vital for the realization of politics in a nonmodern cosmos.

The process of maintaining objects as things takes on the Ranciérien character not of politics, but of morality. The relationship between politics in Rancière’s sense and Latour’s aesthetic pragmatism can be seen in that Latour’s goal for morality is not to create new partitions of the sensible or to affirm a police order. The moralist will leave the creation of partitions of the sensible to the politicians for the sake of hierarchical action, while constantly devising aesthetic means to disrupt the ordinary ways in which modernity tempts us to relate to objects. This aesthetic act is specific to the profession of morality and how rhetoric functions within this particular assemblage. In no way, shape,
or form would it serve to replace a Rancièran form of politics as an adequate political resource for symbolic action and human community formation. However, as I hope that this dissertation has argued, symbolic action is something that will always be an emergent product of the world of motion and the ways in which language and communication materialize within various assemblages.

Delivery as ontological hypokrisis serves to highlight the need to more concretely analyze the complex range of material actors involved in instrumental acts of persuasion. At the same time, actor-network theory, hardware and software studies, and assemblage theory simultaneously function as an ecological resource to undermine modernity’s presuppositions of the human’s rational, social, and cognitive autonomy apart from our entanglement with nonhuman actors in technology and nature. Technologies—technotexts—will take on emergent products and establish conditions for our rhetorical agency that both reflect and yet will be exceeded by an instrumentalist conception of delivery. Will these neo-formalisms automatically form an ethical response in every use? Absolutely not. As I noted via Carolyn Miller’s *rhetorica utens* and *rhetorica docens* in Chapter 5, there is no way to avoid Cicero’s weapons in the hands of madmen debate when we turn from unveiling the hidden premises in enthymemes to the hidden algorithms in computational devices. In *Persons and Things*, Barbara Johnson notes that capitalists have become especially skilled at anthropomorphism to sell products to consumers. The toilet scrubber brush speaks to us to create a feeling of pathos to help us forget that we are purchasing a passive instrumental object and perpetuating the cycle of consumer capitalism itself. Simply put, anthropomorphism—formalism—is never
sufficient in itself to make objects into things. Anthropomorphism in the capitalist assemblage is not the same as anthropomorphism in the Jane Bennett-Vibrant Materialism assemblage or the Steve Holmes-dissertation assemblage. Delivery is what helps identify the specific materialization of any act of formalism or communication, and its emergent affects.

These conclusions, for me, are what the canon of delivery means in a world of nonhuman actors. Fundamentally, as I have argued in this dissertation, the canon of delivery in new media must at once encompass instrumental decisions like creating algorithms for persuasive purposes, and at the same time look to account for non-instrumental nodes of material attractors as they condition the space for susceptibility to symbolic representation. Such a conception of delivery for me has the power to really produce some interesting forms of research, especially if rhetorical theorists can bring themselves to move beyond representation and to trace the concrete networks of actors that give rise to persuasion. For example, Burke also defines rhetoric as “identification.” Identification is the a priori common ground the rhetor would use when seeking to induce cooperative social action in others, that is, to persuade. Identification is President Obama on the campaign trail sitting at the bar drinking Budweiser with a group of ordinary Americans saying, “I’m just a common Joe, like you.” For Burke, identification is both a precondition and an outcome of persuasion. Yet, thinking about persuasion as a complex activity of delivery through assemblages, we could radically extend and complicate the idea of identification though the network theorist Duncan Watts. In his book Six Degrees: The Science of a Connected Age, Watts switches from identification to
susceptibility. Our susceptibility to social and— I would add—material affect and influence are due more to the systematic conditions of the networks in which we live than with any compelling logical or enthymematic argument from a rhetor. If a person’s internal threshold for decision-making is 80%, with a social network of ten people that she looks to for guidance in decision-making, then eight of the ten people she knows must hold an idea for her to be most likely to change her mind. In a 2012 Presidential election where statistician Nate Silver accurately predicted the elections’ outcome by rendering almost negligible any individual symbolic act by a politician, Watts’ thinking has relevance for nonsymbolic assessments of affect and delivery. Thus, we could study similar processes like this through the material circulation of activist newsgames, determining, to offer an illustrative and hypothetical example, how many friend “likes” on a Facebook posting of a progressive game like September 12 actually might relate to a conservative user’s desire to repost it. We could draw on digital humanities and social media data visualization programs like Gelphi to map and trace the networks of affective susceptibility. As I noted in Chapter 4, where modern circulation theorists look at rhetorical velocity, nonmodern rhetorical theorists examine rhetorical viscosity.

In the Rhetoric, Aristotle declares, “Homer often, by making use of metaphor, speaks of inanimate things as if they were animate; and it is due to creating actuality in all such cases that his popularity is due . . . for he gives movement and life to all, and actuality is movement (1412a 304).” Homer’s descriptions such as “the shameless stone” or “the eager spear-point” confirmed that a world of superhuman forces—the gods—could activate inanimate objects to aid ancient heroes in their quests. Over 2000 years
after Homer, many of the nonmodern theorists that I have discussed seem to be interested in renewing a similar project but from a nonmetaphorical perspective. Seen from the standpoint of nonhuman agency, Latour suggests that each discipline can be defined “as a complex mechanism for giving worlds the capacity to write or to speak, as a general way of making mute entities literate” (Politics 66, emphasis original). Not unlike Homer, the discipline of rhetoric currently faces the need to revise its own troubled relationship to materiality, ecology, and delivery by determining which entities we wish to recognize and to animate as agents within the various assemblages that we write in. Therefore, it is my firm belief that even if conversations about nonhuman agency turn out to be just another passing intellectual paradigm or a mere Homeric metaphor, I do firmly believe that the nonhuman turn offers digital and visual rhetoric, and especially delivery scholarship, a long overdue invitation to examine how and in what ways material forces like algorithms are allowed to matter within rhetoric’s past and present disciplinary trajectories.
It is only in the rhetoric of science subfield that one really encounters continual conversations between rhetoric and realism. The prominent rhetoric of science scholar Alan G. Gross acknowledged that a rhetorical scholar must at the very least hold to Arthur Fine’s conception of “common sense reality,” that is, many rhetorical scholars are perfectly willing to be the Dr. Samuel Johnson who will kick a rock to refute George Berkeley’s idealism. However, the work of rhetoric is generally taken as the need to interpret human signs about objects rather than to interpret the nature of the objects themselves. Despite occasional flare-ups in the “culture wars” across the humanities and episodes such as Dilip Gaonkar’s polemical—yet necessary in many ways—attack on Big Rhetoric’s relativist implications, rhetorical realists are a small minority within larger fields of rhetoric, composition, and communication studies. The dominant paradigm remains anti-realism wherein linguistic mediation is an a priori given.

Another common variant of anti-realism is the sort of anti-foundationalism located in the thinking of Richard Rorty.

I want to acknowledge that linguistic constructivism writ large does not necessarily foreclose the idea that language cannot have a material dimension. However, given rhetoric’s historic hostility to matter-casuality-science, rhetorical theorists generally interpret linguistic constructivism’s rhetorical nature as a purely symbolic phenomenon.

I refer to scholars such as John Trimbur, Licona and Herndl, and Bruce Horner.

Cloud’s subsequent attempts in “The Matrix and Critical Theory’s Disappearance of the Real” to negotiate historical materialism, realism, and social constructivism lapse into anti-realism. She argues that rhetorical realism’s subject matter is properly about two competing versions of the real. One is that of experience “in which knowledge of the material base of oppression contra mystification generates critical insight and the capacity for action” and a Lacanian Real, “in which the psychic residue of the lack of wholeness in the Symbolic and the experience of trauma leave persons/subjects uneasy” (248). Thus, as seeing both Lacan and “Marx” as a space of a libidinal materialism, Cloud favors a materialist definition inflected with Marx’s human materialism.

Cloud is not alone among rhetorical theorists who have invoked Mouffe and Laclau’s writing in the context of social constructivist or social epistemic accounts of reality. James F. Klumpp and Thomas Hollihan affirm for rhetorical activists, critical objectivity is often “an ideological ruse for complicity in maintaining the existing social order” (84). A quick database search for articles citing Mouffe and LaClau’s Hegemony and Socialist Strategy—an anti-realist text par excellence—and the word “rhetoric” lists over 2000 articles on GoogleScholar’s search feature. Notable theorists include Richard McKerrow’s “Critical Rhetoric”; Green; Cloud; Crowley, Toward a Civic Discourse; Celeste Condit, “In Praise of Eloquent Diversity”; and, JP Zompetti “Toward a Gramscian Critical Rhetoric.”

Under anti-realism, rhetorical materialism thus becomes, Cloud concludes about “advancing a political/economic identity to speak in the interest of the working class” (153). The Scylla and the Charybdis that Cloud claims to be negotiating are not merely idealism and orthodox Marxism, but a deeper conversation related to realism and anti-realism. One could consider Cloud’s rhetorical materialism to be an exception; however, as I will describe in the forthcoming chapters, this anti-realist problem with materiality conceived of strictly as discourse will plague many ecological (Cooper; Trimbur; Porter) and feminist (Davis; Ballif) accounts that attempt to factor in the body or nature to the scene of rhetoric. Lest I be accused of stacking the deck, allow me offer a final example from a non-Marxist history of rhetorical materiality. Cloud’s view can be located in Bruce Horner’s Terms of Work, a “cultural materialist approach” or “social material” approach to rhetoric and composition study. Horner’s Terms of Work for Composition:
A Materialist Critique is marked by such a paradigm shift wherein he argues for a “material cultural studies approach.” Horner’s argument furthermore realizes the stakes of discussing rhetoric vis-à-vis materiality, because it allows us to understand how subjectivities are produced and maintained, how unjust power relations are established through material relations of writing communications:

that materiality may be understood in terms of writing technologies, an attribute of writing now being given renewed attention because of the recent shift from the technologies of paper and pen to computer software and hardware. Or it might be understood more broadly to refer to a host of socioeconomic conditions contributing to writing production, such as the availability of certain kinds of schooling . . . yet more broadly, the materiality of writing might be understood to refer to networks for the distribution of writing. (xvii)

The revelation of material is offered to challenge a simple model of production and consumption as a linear process that conceals the material instantiation of texts: “[this simple model] occludes the full material social process of production” (180). Such a view actually does acknowledge an imbrication between rhetoric and its material conditions of production and circulation; however, it is not these material entities in their own right that is of interest. They have material valence only in so far as they shed light on human constructed realities. The limits of Horner’s model is revealed in Wysocki’s comment that, “for Horner we have agency, that is, in so far as we recognize how we are positioned by and can work with and within our particular historically situated and contingent material structures” (4). Furthermore, it presumes that the only agency that can occur within a consideration of rhetorical materiality is that which is “fixed and static”—a Newtonian-Cartesian view of matter—allowing for discovery of the proper work of thinking, thereby preserving an abyss between Culture and Nature (*nomos* and *physis*). Horner’s materialism is predicated on a neo-Kantian world of mental constructivism and a Newtonian world of static objects awaiting human agentic manipulation.

8 “Incipient action” and “attitude” are two areas where Burke referenced the mediating role of the body in persuasion. Opinions among Burke scholars differ widely. Deborah Hawhee suggests that Burke anticipates the nonmodern view of the body and ecology. Others suggest that Hawhee too easily describes the world of motion in the terms of action.

9 Let me offer two extremely recent articulations of anti-realism. In *Locating Visual-Material Rhetorics* (2012), Amy Proben has extended Carole Blair’s rhetorical materialism for use in GPS tracking and visual rhetoric, but reconnecting Blair’s—at times—more radical views of materiality back into a Foucaultian view of matter as discourse. In Jordynn Jack’s recent (2011) articulation of “neurorhetoric,” it is the “discourse” about neurology and not the neurons themselves that is of interest to rhetorical theorists.

10 Sayers further explains Kant’s metaphysical position: “For Kant, it must be emphasized, is a dualist. He recognizes the separate and independent existence both of objective things-in-themselves and also of subjective appearances, representation, phenomena. . . . For Kant’s philosophy, like Locke’s, also involves an unbridgeable division—an absolute gulf between appearances and things-in-themselves; with things-in-themselves placed irretrievably beyond the grasp of our knowledge” (22).

11 We encounter a similar move from world to mind in Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*. As Kant observes, in experience, to be sure, perceptions come together only contingently, so that no necessity of their connection is or can become evident in the perceptions themselves, since apprehension is only a juxtaposition of the manifold of empirical intuition, but no representation of the necessity of the combined existence of the appearances that it juxtaposes in space and time is to be encountered in it. But since experience is a cognition of objects through perception, consequently the relation in the existence of the manifold is to be represented in it not as it is juxtaposed in time but as its objectively in time, yet since time itself cannot be perceived, the determination of the existence of
objects in time can only come about through their combination in time in general, hence only through a priori connecting concepts. Now since these always carry necessity along with them, experience is thus possible only through a representation of the necessary connection of the perceptions. (68)

12 Unlike Locke, Kant does claim that things-in-themselves exist and that we can provide intellection about them; however, Bryant claims that Kant sided with the mind:

. . . [Kant] maintains that we have no access to these objects and therefore no means of determining whether, like the objects of our experience, things-in-themselves are autonomous, individual unities, or whether the things-in-themselves are, in reality, really a thing-in-itself, a primordial unity or One, that is then subsequently formatted or “cut up” by our minds. Since the substantiality of substance must issue from somewhere, and since we cannot appeal to being itself to ground substance, Kant contends that substance is instead an a priori category of mind that is imposed on the chaotic manifold of intuition giving it structure or formatting it. (81)

13 By humanism, I simply mean the view of the human as an autonomous subject who is able to consciously think and write with absolute intentionality and agency. As Bradford Vivian reminds us, “The rhetorical tradition has always valued the ontological status of the speaking subject” (22).

14 Even psychoanalytic or libidinal accounts can still be incorporated into a subject-(de)centered rhetoric. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur called Friedrich Nietzsche, Marx, and Sigmund Freud the “three great hermeneuts” of suspicion. Each identified forces in operation beneath the conscious subject—will, labor, and the unconscious respectively—but none obliged rhetorical theorists to consider nonhuman forces or matter in itself.

15 At the outset, it is fair to acknowledge DeLanda’s claim above about the “devil term” status of realism. Some, for this reason, prefer to retain the term materialism over realism. Elizabeth Gross, for example, claims that realism—even when the question of the nonhuman is raised—is invariably tied to epistemology and not ontology. She retains the term “materialism” as have new feminist materialists whereas the “real” is what is produced through the dynamic interplay of human-nonhuman action. Grosz comments, “I am much more interested in the dynamic force of the real itself and how the real enables representation and what of the real is captured by representation.” (Grosz qtd in Kontturi and Tiainen 247). Yet, I like the term realism because of its “metaphysical” resonances, always reminding us of a constant interplay between what appears to us and what lies beyond.

16 Kevin J. Porter’s theory of consequentialist discourse also shares strong points of congruity with Blair’s materialism.

17 While I will explore several examples of this trend throughout my dissertation, I want to offer one recent (2010) essay in rhetoric that has attempted such a nonmodern revision that I simply do not have the space to go into in detail: Nathan Stormer’s, “Encomium of Helen’s Body.” Stormer invokes Spinoza to develop what I am calling a nonmodern rhetorical materialism. If conatus means “an effort, endeavor, striving” or “a force, impulse, or tendency simulating human effort,” then Spinoza’s comment in III Proposition 6 of the Ethics, “each thing, as far as it can by its own power, strives to persevere in its being” serves as a way to dramatically re-oriented our theories of materiality. Stormer contrasts Spinoza to Hobbes’ “survivalism.” For Hobbes, instinct will inevitably overcome reason, making for an antagonistic social struggle of all against all. In contrast to Hobbes’ dualism of mind and body, two distinct substances where body (Nature) overdetermines mind (culture), Spinoza sees not two distinct entities but one and the same thing. Self-awareness (“I think”), Stormer argues, is both distinct from the body, yet part of the same reality, resulting
in what seems like a logical paradox: “to say that the mind is the idea of the body is to say that ‘idea’ is awareness, not a facsimile or a representation, of the body. Mind and body are two distinct, interdependent expressions of the same reality, but neither is a copy of the other” (221).

Matter is not static and fixed, but engaged in an active state of “mattering.” “Mattering” is what Stormer calls a generalized “will-to-matter” that is irreducible to the (Nietzschean) will-to-knowledge (recognition, identification). The will-to-matter is a species of a larger conative Genus that applies to all material entities. Basically, this amounts to the fact that the mechanism of Nature by which the self is differentiated and alienated in language is of the same substance but not the same kind of all forms of embodiment. The general desire for self-preservation, for conatus is at once, “A will to matter is a desire to continue to be embodied in the world. It speaks to the performative impulse for iteration in that to persist, a thing must become itself again and it is never the same for the effort. As the body changes, so does the idea of the body” (224). Stormer concludes by drawing a parallel to Judith Butler’s thinking of performativity. Butler’s articulation of performativity in Gender Trouble was resoundingly criticized because it focused primarily on how the body is produced in discourse, but not how it exists as a material force in the world. Stormer stretches performativity from being a quality of the subject to a conative quality of all beings in a passage worth quoting at length:

Materiality is the solvent that dilutes the essential ‘humanity’ of rhetorical action. The human quality presumably revealed by rhetorical action is dependent on the very matter that is imagined as exterior to whom or to what is doing the acting . . . if will is part of the same substance as matter, not external to it, then rhetorical performativity is immanent to material interconnection, not a force that enters the world of things as strikes its fancy. That the subject and object of rhetoric are sexed masks the not-so-human materiality of rhetoric. It anthropomorphizes materiality. Tinkering with Butler’s wording, it is not about the human “materiality of sex,” but the sex of materiality. . . . Here, the importance is not that masculine/feminine are constructs, but that an externalization of matter from rhetoric is achieved through feminization. By contrast, the responsibility and vulnerability of matter to itself is not a human trait, even as being human depends on vulnerability to material influence. To be rhetorical, a thing must be materially vulnerable; to be materially vulnerable is not uniquely human. (225)

Such a flat ontological view does not mean replacing the anti-realist rejection of the object’s reality with an assumption that all entities have the same qualities. Here, Stormer makes a productive distinction: “that is not to say that there is no difference between a film and the communication between RNA molecules and proteins. Both perform a will to matter. The question then becomes what is rhetorical about material vulnerability without resorting to circular reasoning: to be rhetorical is to be human; to be human is to be capable of rhetoric” (226). Finally, he concludes, “A will to matter betrays the inessentially human side of rhetoric by exposing the immanence of rhetoric to material vulnerability. To be human, we need rhetoric and we cultivate it, but the capacity to act rhetorically is not ours because we are human. It is because we are material” (226). Stormer’s “will-to-matter,” and his rhetorical materialism constitutes a death knell for Cartesian-Newtonian ontologies by reorganizing rhetorical materialism around both the inscriptive actions of human beings and the conative stirrings, strivings, murmurations, and subterranean essences of nonhuman actors. The only question that remains is whether rhetorical theorists wish to confess in Latour’s sense that we have never been modern or postmodern (e.g., anti-realist). If we were never modern, then the subject and object were never split at an ontological level of substantiality. Further, such a nonmodern view requires us to theorize rhetoric out of a dialectic of vulnerability to nonhuman actors while searching out ethics of care and nonrepresentational rhetorics to bear witness to what modernity would expunge.

Blair’s essay, in no small coincidence, was published in Selzer’s Rhetorical Bodies collection. She identifies the “the lack of a materialist language about discourse.” With an eye toward developing such a heuristic, she poses five questions: “1. What is the significance of the text’s material existence? 2. What are the apparatuses and degrees of durability displayed by the text? 3. What are the text’s modes of possibilities of reproduction or preservation? 4. What does the text do to (or with, or against) other texts? 5. How does
the text act on people?” She then adds several sub-questions, such as a text’s potential for “enabling, appropriating, contextualizing, supplementing, correcting, challenging, competing or silencing” (39). Here, Blair has moved beyond the view of rhetoric as symbolic (concerned primarily with meaning) and immaterial, writing “No text is a text, nor does it having meaning, influence, political stance, or legibility, in the absence of material form. Rhetoric is not rhetoric until it is uttered, written, or otherwise manifested and given presence. Thus, we might hypothesize as a starting point for theorizing rhetoric that at least one of its basic characteristics (if not the most basic) is its materiality” (43). Symbols, she argues, are material entities. Rather than, as most rhetorical theorists desire, ask “what a text means,” she says, “if rhetoric’s materiality is not a function of its symbolic constructions of meaning, then we must look elsewhere: we must ask not just what a text means but, more generally, what it does; and we must not understand what it does as strictly adhering to what it was supposed to do” (23). Furthermore, while “everyone seems to know that rhetoric is not exclusively about production, and more specifically, that it has consequences that exceed goal fulfillment . . . hardly anyone seems willing to address it as anything else” (44). This “anything else” would be a view of materialism radically different from anything that rhetorical theorists are used to examining.

19 Greene, like Cloud, is concerned with the actual and real conditions under which language circulates. “By contrast,” Greene claims, “we need to be more sensitive to how communication and, more specifically, the rhetorical subject operate alongside an apparatus of subjectivity associated with changes in capitalism that understands that commodity production is not the only site for generating class antagonisms” (38). This comment regards how changes in modes of labor create a rhetorical subject, making rhetoric not a source of creativity but, at best, a lens of demystifying labor relations. According to Greene, materialist rhetorics often try to account for the representational politics of symbolic communication, and in doing so he sees two distinct types of materialist rhetorics. The first follows what he calls “the logic of influence model,” meaning these materialists “focus on how the interests, often understood as a will to power, of a speaker are hidden, distorted or revealed by that speaker’s rhetorical choices” and emphasize “rhetoric’s role as a form of persuasion” (38). The second follows the “constitutive model of rhetorical effectivity,” where scholars focus “on how the text functions to politically and aesthetically figure the process of subjectivity” in order to define “rhetoric as a form of identification” (38). Green’s version of materialist rhetoric eschews this binary by offering up a logic of articulation as “a way to map the multidimensional effectivity of rhetoric as a technology of deliberation” (39). The advantage of this logic of articulation over a logic of representation is a materialist rhetoric . . . that . . . replaces a hermeneutics of suspicion with a form of cartography that does not reduce the materiality of rhetorical practices to the interests of a “ruling class” at the same time as it maintains the irreducible difference between rhetoric and other material elements (technologies of power, production and the self in the creation of a governing apparatus). A materialist rhetoric built on the logics of articulation avoids positioning the historical forces of capitalism, white supremacy and/or patriarchy as the deep structure(s) of a governing apparatus but instead maps how they are transformed, displaced, deployed and/or challenged by a particular governing apparatus. In other words, the “macro-structures of power” exist less as hidden interests to be uncovered than as technologies distributed, activated and programmed by rhetorical practices for the purpose of policing a population. (39)

Again, rhetorical materialism is thus reducible entirely to “critique” in the sense of demystifying the symbolic statements that sustain the capitalist order by calling attention to actual labor relations. Materialism is once again synonymous with criticism, leaving us to limit rhetorical considerations to linguistically mediated and human sustained realities.

20 Latour, Isabelle Stengers, Haraway, Merleau-Ponty, Lingis, Deleuze and Guattari, and others have make similar arguments.
21 Also largely missing in rhetorical theory are the contributions of other such as Elizabeth A. Wilson, Grosz, Friedrich Kittler, software and hardware studies, Stacy Alaimo, Kevin Sharpe, Jennifer Andersen et al., Andrew Pickering, Tim Ingold, Lambros Malafouris, and, more recently, neurologists such as Catherine Malamou, Andy Clark, and Cathy Davidson who have made similar arguments about how objects work on subjects.

22 I understand that many would likely raise the claim that Burke grounded language in the body (see Wess, “Representative Anecdotes”; Hawhee, Moving Bodies). As Burke notes in the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, there is “motion without action,” and, further, “action is not reducible to terms of motion. For instance, the ‘essence’ or ‘meaning’ of a sentence is not reducible to its sheer physical existence as sounds in the air or marks on the page, although material motions of sort are necessary for the production, transmission, and reception of the sentence” (159). Agency was the element of the pentad that such material motions belonged to as they relate to rhetoric. He also writes, “Presumably the realm of nonsymbolic motion was all that prevailed on this earth before our kind of symbol-using organism evolved, and will go on sloshing about after we have gone” (160). I also understand that Burke theorized areas such as attitude and incipient action as pre-symbolic sources of affect. My claim is not at all that Burke was not attuned to issues of embodiment or performativity. I will readily concede that Burke’s division between action and motion is actually much more nuanced than an absolute divide between nature and culture that many (especially Berlin) attribute to him. Elsewhere, Burke incorporates attitude—a realm where the lines between action and motion become porous. It is even possible than an object for Burke can carry an attitude, a kind of incipient action, which could be the connection to act/action that would create the link to the object or the nonhuman. Furthermore, rhetorical “situations” are a locus of motives that are replete with objects. As I will argue through Latour, the case is more that Burke undertheorizes the role played by nonhuman actors in constituting even realities that are symbolically and that in terms of how he theorizes reality, he, unlike Latour or Bennett, is unwilling to grant science any specialized relationship to reality.

23 Of Burke’s rhetorical realism, Wess suggests that language as action structures our lived experience to the real. . . . The real is gauged in the act, the prioritizing of this rather than that. The necessity of prioritizing is the constraint that rhetoric realism recognizes. Burke’s premise that language is action posits the act as the form in which language registers this constraint. As action, language inscribes rhetorical sayability rather than either enlightenment certainty or romantic authenticity. Charting that inscription is what Burke’s dramatism is all about. (Postmodernism 12; Coupe 12, 54; Rueckert)

24 See Cherwitz’s (ed) Rhetoric and Philosophy for a full account of this debate.

25 While I do not have the space to adequately address all of the realism and epistemic rhetoric debates that overlap with Burke, I would point the reader toward Daniel Royer’s seldom-cited essay, “New Challenges to Epistemic Rhetoric.” Royer not only provides an excellent literature review of the major articles involved in these debates, but he recasts the debates’ source of disagreement through the lens of a larger Kantian paradigm of anti-realism.

26 In fact, Whitehead is seldom mentioned in rhetorical theory as a whole. One lone exception would be “Whitehead's Concept of Concrescence and the Rhetorical Situation” by Gerald D. Baxter and Bart F. Kennedy.

27 Greaves is one of the last ones to weigh in on this debate and his settles in favor of human constructed reality:

If rhetoric is integral to human thought, then writing becomes a central element of thinking and generating knowledge in all areas of human inquiry (at least in Western,
literate cultures). Teachers of writing, then, care as deeply as philosophers and theoretical physicists about the relationship between rhetoric and reality. One way to continue the discussion but avoid the impasse is to sidestep the philosophical questions about final outcomes and explore the kinds of roles that rhetoric plays in the research practices of human inquiry. If we can continue to ground this debate within specific scientific settings, listening in to the actual conversations among men and women who construct not only experiments but theories and models, and reading the documents and reports that position the researcher within the dominant discourses of her discipline, we can more accurately describe and extrapolate relations between reality and language. (245)

28 Bryan Crable’s arguments in “Distance as Ultimate Motive,” would support Davis’s point of view in that “identification,” the outcome of rhetoricity, follows from conditions of “pure persuasion”—persuasion without symbolic activity—which is (im)possible to realize except as a nonrepresentational source of affect.

29 In “Unframing Models of Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies,” Jenny Edbauer makes a similar criticism of Lloyd Bitzer’s rhetorical situation. According to Edbauer, Bitzer’s audience/exigence/rhetor model is a “container” model that cannot encompass diverse and enduring sources of affect and interaction that proceed from an abstract reading of a rhetorical situation.

30 For Latour, neither epistemic realists nor constructivists are completely right: “Instead of moving on to empirical studies of the networks that give meaning to the work of purification [e.g. producing a pure subject and a pure nature] it denounces, postmodernism rejects all empirical work as illusory and deceptively scientistic” (46).

31 I am grateful to David Blakesley for calling my attention to this aspect of Burke’s thinking in relationship to Latour.

32 As Karen Bassi notes via Butler, “theater is precisely the place where the political regulations and disciplinary practices that produce an ostensibly coherent gender are effectively placed in view” (10).

33 The philosopher Sarah Kofman argues that Plato accused Heraclitus—like Ion—in the Theatetus of concealing the logic workings of his mind in poetry and for not noticing whether or not the people were following with each step of his logical unfolding. She writes:

Plato does not hold Hercalitus’s psychology responsible for this dissimulation, but rather attributes it to the very style of his mythical discourse, which is “irresponsible” for the truth or non-truth of the content of it carries: irresponsible, because the father of a mythical discourse is not present to answer for it, nor to give an account of the words he uses . . . it cannot submit to questioning, to dialectical examination, in other words to confrontation with the thought of another. (41)

34 I do not have the space to spend on Diogenes of Sinope because he does not specifically theorize “delivery” as a specific term in the way the Demosthenes, Cicero, and Quintilian do. However, he does in fact anticipate Cicero’s notion of the “body in language” centuries earlier. He was famous for excreting in pubic as a form of argument as well as employing visual aids to make his point. He often carried about lamp during the daytime, claiming to be looking for an honest man.

35 This claim, however, is also difficult to sustain, as it is impossible to actually determine or fix the original meaning of Plato’s dialogues (Vitanza, Negation). At times, he employed dramatic modes. At other moments, he mobilizes ironic modes, reducing any totalizing statements about his work to the realm of mere probability.
I want to mention in passing that the major texts on rhetoric follow the Greeks and Romans in largely ignoring delivery or allowing it the most superficial treatments. As Jacobi describes, Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine* compliments the importance of delivery but offers no Ciceronian list of specific techniques. Boethius seldom references delivery, and Ramus simply kneecaps Quintilian and rhetoric without resituating delivery. Ramus’s rejection of delivery is truly a strange phenomenon in rhetorical history given his own interest in spatial and visual organizations of knowledge. In the late nineteenth century, Thomas Sheridin’s *Course Lectures on Elocution* argues that rhetors should strive to achieve a natural delivery style—to avoid the appearance of artifice—and Gilbert Austin recommended stylistic excess.

Yancey offer a quick history of delivery in her introductory essay, “Delivering College Composition” to her edited collection, *Delivering Composition* although, with the exception of Jacobi’s essay, there is little reference to the rhetorical history of delivery or rhetorical theory in the collection. She links the concern with delivery over the spatial concern about the classroom space, “From the 1960s to the 1980s three other sites of curricular space appeared—communications programs; computer teaching classrooms; and writing centers—each of which brought with it a demand that the physical space for delivery be congruent with the activity” (9). Here, delivery is equivalent to the tools and technology of composition. Delivery is a process that occurs in part in processes that exist outside of the rhetor. Yancey’s concern is less for students delivering or the technologies themselves delivering, and more for how teachers might “deliver” composition in an era of multimodal production, concluding “whether or not we need a new paradigm for the delivery of college composition or something less radical isn’t clear; what is clear is that an articulation of this issue in these historical and epistemological terms helps us see that we are indeed at a critical moment in time, one that allows – perhaps even requires – that we take up a closer examination of composition and its delivery” (13).

One other figure worth mentioning is Peter Ramus. Ramus’s division of invention and delivery was itself a Platonic conception of rhetoric and delivery informed by Plato’s geometric cosmological worldview. Gutenberg’s printing press helped spatialize our understanding of arrangement and delivery. Ironically, for Ramus, this invention only served to confirm in his mind the reduction of rhetoric to stylistic adornment and to solidify the work of dialectic and logic. Rhetoric, including delivery, was reduced to a sort of figurative art and left to eventually become the lamentable *belle lettrism* of Hugh Blair and the study of poetic and rhetorical figures. These were the beginnings so-called current-traditional rhetoric period that focused on arrangement, style, and invention.

No mere humanist sentiment, Lanham’s arguments are empirically verifiable. As I will describe in detail in Chapter 4, the scientific journal *Cognition* demonstrated that having students read in non-standard fonts actually increased retention: “making material harder to learn can improve long-term learning and retention. More cognitive engagement leads to deeper processing, which facilitates encoding and subsequently better retrieval” (qtd. in Lang n. pag, “The Benefits of Making it Harder to Learn”). They conclude that we are actually wired to learn and retain information better in “disfluent” conditions. I will cover this situation in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Tanner’s work coincides with poststructuralist experiments with the aesthetics of print such as Derrida’s *Glas*, and anticipates performative experiments by rhetorical theorists such as D. Diane Davis’ (2000) *Breaking Up at Totality* where the visuality of font and figurality of language become what Vitanza has called (via Lyotard) “parastategies” to break up *logocentrism* which would otherwise privilege the phenomenological immediacy of speech.

Although concerned with invention and not explicitly delivery, Gregory Ulmer’s theory of electracy—image ontology—even goes so far as to suggest the pervasiveness of visual and networked rhetorics has fundamentally altered print and oral modes of reasoning and deliberation so as to require the theorization of
a unique electrate mode of reasoning that he calls “conduction.” Unlike the pre-planned topoi of Aristotle, linear cause-effect reasoning, or the rehearsed modes of argumentation that characterize the classical tradition, conduction refers to a free-floating space of emergence—chora in Plato’s terms. The Ulmerian rhetor’s invention process becomes a mode of opening oneself so that all institutions, objects, myths, symbols, and other aspects deliver meanings to the rhetor without the intent or with respect to the context of meaning of the original author. The rhetor, in an analogy taken from Plato’s chora, becomes a conduit or a channel instead for rhetoric of the originating impulse. Few, as we shall see below, go as far as Ulmer in making this claim for the canon.

Connors also focuses on the formalized rules of paper type, typeface, and argues that an “ethos” is presented “for the realm of actio is the realm of ethos must more than logos or pathos” (66). How we manufacture the “self” or, to invoke Aristotle’s phrase, “incarnate” the soul into the audience is intimately related to material and medial confines. Horner made a similar argument in a later essay, “Reinventing Memory and Delivery,” that writing is more than a holistic impression—more than the sum total of graphics and fonts—of the ethos of the composer that the viewer constructs.

An additional signal that we are in epistemic realism/anti-realist relativism lies in the “encoder,” “decoder” language seen throughout many efforts to rethink delivery. While decoding, productively, can refer to having the theorization and practice of rhetoric through different mediums, it nevertheless is only articulated within the confines of logic, epistemology, and Platonic invention. If we do not study the medium, writes Welch, “the decoders are going to be less sophisticated in dealing with the powerful forms of newly powerful delivery systems of electric rhetoric.” She is quite correct at a purely descriptive level as is Bolter above in the sense of describing the mediality delivery from the user’s/receiver’s point of view (and we will see this pattern repeated in Mark Hansen’s point of view in Chapter 5); however, her language of decoding is the language of Enlightenment critique and the modern Constitution. Despite the conflation of medium and delivery, delivery remains harnessed to invention—in particular, a social-epistemic and critique-based invention where delivery is just an analytical (or productive) tool and, in terms of creating with technology, an afterthought. It is not too far to claim that this is, in a sense, a remediated Platonism by another name that desires to embody and materialize delivery, while disembodying and dematerializing the rhetorical practices and the complex ways in which it makes more visible what was already an untenable separation between human and nonhuman, nature and culture. As I noted in my analysis of Burke’s recalcitrance in Chapter 2, the anti-realist or naïve realist approach representing and meaning is an decoder model wherein delivering means determining the ideological content or truth or falsity of representational reality. Welch is not looking at delivery to see texts as complex nodal points of circulation and disclosure through vast human and nonhuman ecologies. Rather, the occasion of delivery is enough to extend the work of epistemic rhetoric by applying constructivist and cognitivist paradigms as usual while failing to heed the phenomenological or ontological distinctions inherent in such a project. As Barad will help us to realize below, it is not that seeing delivery as a complex performance excludes truth/falsity from consideration; rather, it is to recognize that appeals to truth/falsity are always already bound up in complex cycles of circulation, and in need of constant rearticulation.

In The Laws of Media, we find the “tetrad” as a method of McLuhan trying to provide a more specific organizational analysis—a fourfold composed of enhancement, obsolescence, retrieval, and reversal.

Harman’s own claims, however, that Aristotle argued that rhetoric was the art of concealment are simply mistaken for a variety of reasons. However, I will readily concede that it would be amazing and incredible if Aristotle would actually lend himself to such a reading.

For Giorgio Agamben as well, potentialities do not merely refer to acts of human existence (Potentialities).
I write “pseudo-Cicero” here because although it cannot be verified that Cicero wrote the RAH, it is heavily suspected that he was the author.

However, with respect to Plato and Aristotle, a nonsymbolic account of delivery is nevertheless intimately connected to the Q Question that Richard Lanham asks (Chapter 1): how do we know if the good man speaking is a good man? Cicero, pseudo-Cicero, and Quintilian largely avoid the moral questions in the service of a sophistic position of seeking the available means of persuasion for a given case. Delivery seems to be precisely what Plato and Aristotle feared: an “anything goes, no holds barred” persuasion of the completion of the rhetor’s aim when Quintilian speaks of the importance of being able “to exhibit an emotion that cannot be distinguished from the truth” (X.75). In essence, the Romans rhetoricians tip hypokrisis toward acting and performance as the only goal of effective rhetorical delivery, leaving open the possibility that the orator who speaks the truth might fail to convince where the rhetor who seeks self-interested falsehoods may succeed by virtue of skill in delivery. Morality, thus, would have to be supplied by the common or by studying virtuous texts. Isocrates, for example, in Antidosis, claims that while he cannot promise happiness or virtue for those who study rhetoric, “those who follow the precepts he lays out will be helped more speedily toward honesty of character” (58). In an early formulation of Matthew Arnold’s “sweetness and light” doctrine, Isocrates claims that if one’s subject matter is praiseworthy, and the more one contemplates what is praiseworthy, the more one’s soul is directed down this path. Isocrates writers, “Furthermore, the more one studies what constitutes good character for the community and the more one works to present a good character in one’s rhetoric activities, the more one habituates oneself to being a good character” (23). We will return to this point again in Chapter 6 as it has profound implications for who (women, slaves) and what (nonhuman actors) are allowed to be present in the rhetorical situation by considering Latour’s re-reading of the Gorgias and Rancière’s understanding of indecorous delivery as a form of egalitarian speech.

Polyspsychism holds that all entities are intentional and conscious actors at some level.

This example was intended for illustrative purposes. I will readily concede that Hussurl would not include semiotics and signifiers in his account. That is, he would not include the Chinese characters as part of the sensory unity of the coffee cup.

I want to offer a point of clarification about agency. Latour collapses the distinctions between human agents and nonhuman agents in order to propose a new analytical model for social science. However, it is impossible to actually attribute “agency” to all actors. I side with Levi Bryant’s understanding of agency as he proposes it in his forthcoming book Onto-Cartography. He conceives of agency in terms of differential gradients with what he calls a criteria of “a minimal degree of self-directness.” A virus possesses a very low degree of self-directness whereas dogs and humans possess greater degrees. Thus, a small stone being tumbled through a small stream, he suggests, will have no agency. By contrast, Latour would claim that the pebble’s “agency” does not refer to an entity’s capacities for self-directness. Rather, its “agency” obtains in relationship to how its position in a given actor-network complex constrains or enables the agency of other actors around it. Simply put, Latour, again, does not offer an ontological theory of materiality agency.

Michelle Ballif’s Seduction and Diane Davis’s Breaking Up At Totality are examples of work within rhetorical theory where Butler’s theorization of feminist materiality is accepted without much modification. Nevertheless, I do want to concede that this criticism of Butler’s work as a whole is unwarranted. Bodies That Matter does in fact make a shift to discuss the biological body and her more recent work on life certain discusses the role of nonhuman actors.

Compactants is Latour’s recently employed extension of “actant” to describe computer and technological actants (Garber).
See Miguel de Beistegui’s *Truth and Genesis: Philosophy as Differential Ontology* for a comparison between Heidegger and Deleuze. The two figures do in fact overlap in some important ways; however, their points of departure would require too much commentary than I have space here.

Fuller writes, “What abstract poetry tried to achieve is achieved in a similar fashion, though more consistently, by Dadaistic painters, who played off actual real objects by nailing them or gluing them next to each other in a painting. Concepts can be played off against each other much more clearly than when their meanings have been translated into words. (1)

I would take issue with the fact that Cooper does actually deny that nonhuman actors have agency at all. However, I am in general agreement with the rest of her conclusions in this article.

Indeed, it is the argument of my dissertation that these concerns are not far removed from the pragmatic concerns of writing teachers. My argument here echoes that of Jeff Rice in “Networked Assessment” when he considers how actor-network theory, a form of assemblage theory, causes us to re-think how we view the process of assessment for writing program administration. Rice argues,

> Traditionally, assessment at the programmatic or individual levels depends on the circulation of [value-laden] *topoi* in order to make meaning. These *topoi* include the circulated points that writers write for, multiple media, multiple audiences, multiple genres, and over time. A networked assessment, on the other hand, takes up Latour’s notion of the trace and its account. By focusing on the tracing of a given program’s network, for instance, the role of assessment shifts toward an understanding of activity relationships as opposed to generic outcomes. In turn, assessment follows a new media logic in order to understand how a given grouping of activities and agents reveals a program’s work. (1)

I describe the modern Constitution as Latour defines it in *We Have Never Been Modern* in detail in Chapter 2.

The view of code as static is yet another tacitly held claim by many affiliated with composition studies and digital rhetoric. In the 1999 special issue of *Computers and Composition* on the rhetoric of code, commentators spent more time arguing for the creative agency of the writer over a monolithic and inflexible view of coding than actually considering complex points of rhetorical interconnectivity between computer technology and cultural meaning. To cite one example, Joel Haefner translated Hamlet’s “To be or not to be” statement into a Boolean function in the C programming language as a way to argue that code does not have the same contemplative reflective creativity as poetry. Here, we see shades of Helmers and Hill’s desire for reflection within visual rhetoric: “The simultaneous dichotomy of Shakespeare demands-to consider being and nonbeing-cannot exist in the text of code” (329). Computers are mechanistic. Ian Bogost counters, “We think of computers as frustrating, limiting and simplistic not because they execute processes, but because they are frequently programmed to execute simplistic processes” (7).

Although, as Kathy Davidson has recently (2012) articulated, a rudimentary understanding of HTML5 would undeniably be helpful given the post-2011 rise in networked-based communication and the digital humanities in order to theorize and practice communication.

For further evidence of this claim, I would point the reader toward Matthew Fuller’s essay on Microsoft Word in *Beyond The Blip*. To loosely borrow Althusser’s language, Fuller painstakingly details how all of the different menu options in the Word interface “hail” and “interpellate” the writer in ways that do end up impacting the activity of writing.

Along with Bogost, McGonigal, and Anna Anthropy, I agree that video games as a form of new media because of the increasing accessibility of “do-it-your” “prosumer” technology. Point-and-click and drag-
and-drop interfaces such as GameSalad have made videogame production as simple as video-editing in
Apple’s iMovie.

According to Christina Haas, the “myth” that technology is transparent holds that
writing is not changed in any substantive way by the transparent medium through which it passes.
In this view, writing is writing, unchanged and unaffected by the mode of production and presentation. . . . But believing that technology is transparent does not in fact make it so, and
does not preclude technology having powerful effects on literacy, effects that we are not prepared
to examine or understand if we are operating with a belief that technology does not matter. (34)

Indeed, while Bogost and media studies scholars enjoyed little citation in the 2008 Computers and
Composition special issue, Gee was frequently cited. Although Gee is interested in the uniqueness of the
videogame mediums expressive capacities, his model of analysis in his seminal book, What Video games
Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy, is that of discourse communities. Just as we learn to
become linguistic code-switchers as teenagers when shifting in between peer or adult discourse
communities, gaming literacies, he argues, are analogous. Gee, like delivery theorists, wants to add an
“always already there” medially to dominant and privileged literacy classes of print reading and writing.
“After all,” he states, “we never just read or write; rather, we always read or write something in some way”
(14). The “rules” of a text require that it be read in some way (15). Richard Lanham’s famous “at/through”
division in The Electronic Word makes a similar point about the extra-text features of objects, whereby
homogenous formal elements (uniform typeface) encourage us to look through the text, ignoring the
material and visual instantiations that we can only see by looking “at” it. In a similar sense, Gee argues that
since new literacies (visual, digital, gaming) are multiple, learning occurs through the exposure to new
forms of literacy. Along the same lines, literacy means learning about the semiotic domain of video games
where the individual can “produce meanings.” A digital literacy theorist thus would analyze commonplace
phrases from The World of Warcraft such as “LFD” comments that pop up from random players in the
global chat screen. The phrase means “looking for dungeon” and functions as a request from a player to see
if any other players want to join for a raid. In the sense of participating within the literacy community of a
game, a player is unable to join, respond, or form her own group without being literate in the discursive
norms of the community. Gee concludes that literacies are thus always embedded in discourses and
activated through “lived, talked, enacted, value-and-belief-laden practices . . . carried out in specific places
and at specific times” (3).

In Gee’s thinking, multimodal literacy in particular is connected to the de-encoding of symbols.
Constance Steinkuehler suggests via Gee, “literacy, within the context of video games, is not defined as a
‘coding’ or ‘skill-based’ process but rather ‘the ability to make sense out of semiotic systems that include a
diversity of communicative modes’ ” (Gee qtd. in Steinkuehler 100). Following from this view, Gee
ultimately concludes that video games are thus “semiotic domains”: “To understand or produce any word,
symbol, image, or artifact in a given semiotic domain, a person must be able to situate the meaning of that
word, symbol, image, or artifact within embodied experiences of action, interaction, or dialogue about that
domain” (24). He breaks semiotic domains into two levels—internal and external—of “design grammars.”
Design grammars are the symbolic and social contexts that govern the appropriateness of content for a
given semiotic domain and the internal design grammar. The internal reflects the symbolic content intended
by the designers and the external refers to the real world gaming and social behaviors—an “affinity
group”—that establishes these behaviors. Thus, Gee concludes that gaming literacies involve both a
mastery of symbolic content and norms of the community of players to which one associates with. Despite
this attention to mediality and the specificity of video games, Gee’s semiotic focus inevitably reduces
medium to semiotic context. Gee is primarily interested in how the user interacts with the content than with
the concrete specificity of the technologies that produce these representations and symbols themselves. As
Friedrich Kittler argues in a confirmation of the necessity of considering technological literacies from
Bogost’s point of view, “Given that tools are always defined from the point of view of their user, there is
no need to question the old approach that defines machines from the point of view of humans; and
subsequently there is no need to consider the possibility that, conversely, humans are defined by machines” (40).

65 Again, to point back to my arguments in Chapter 2, this realization goes far beyond the likely Burkean critique that Bennett (or Latour) describes action in the terms of motion. For Latour, this would be an artificial separation: action is inseparable from motion in reality and we can realize this inseparability without resorting to the terms of causal determinism or mechanistic description that Burke complains of in his rejection of positivist scientism. In direct contrast, the refusal to engage with how empirical descriptions of the forces of nonhumans condition the scene of action is another way by which Cartesian dualism remains at play—a hierarchy that induces cooperation efforts against ecological realism and the inclusion of nonhuman actors in the shaping of rhetorical forces in the world. If we were to consider two additional Burkean terms, agency (equipment used for action) and act (action itself), Latour would likely claim that neither designates a separable element for the rhetorician to extract in her reading of a rhetorical situation; rather they co-produce one another to the point where act cannot be discussed apart from agency and scene composed by nonhumans.

66 One of the reasons that I am so insistent at the outset of this chapter on arguing more generally for the problems that rhetorical theory has with technological materiality is that this fundamental divide between symbols and medium is so profound that realizing the claim that delivery theorists desire—that “delivery is the medium”—will require considerable revisions against the most entrenched anti-realist, social constructivist, subject-centered (or de-centered), and epistemic tenets of rhetoric. In fact, this Cognition study will come up again in the next chapter via my exploration of Katherine Hayles term “technotext,” a term for compositional practices that foreground the medium of composition as a form of composition. In other words, we can take the Cognition experiment as a technē for having students learn about and compose with the materiality or mediality of composition as a pragmatic gesture that can raise students’ critical awareness of technological mediation (Shipka, Toward a Composition Made Whole). Similarly, I would argue that we should take examples such post-cinematic affect and begin to illustrate to our students how companies such as Dow Chemical in their award-winning The Human Element advertising campaign utilize nonsymbolic forms of persuasion in their high speed video montages that produce a dizzying effect that Dominic Pettman dubbed, the “corporate sublime” (5).

67 Examples include Jeff Rice’s edited collection From A to <a> on html and rhetoric, Annette Vee’s unpublished doctoral dissertation on the rhetoric of code, Byron Hawk’s edited collection Small Tech, and Bay and Rickert’s essay, “The New Media Fourfold.” Eyman’s unpublished dissertation also offers promising inroads for this issue. A 1997 Computers and Composition special issue on programming as writing also merits citation.

68 I do not have the space to discuss the debate in detail, but I must observe that what games scholars now as the “luddology/narratology,” debate turns on a similar argument between scholars who want to focus on the representational content and those who want to focus on procedures, software, and technical processes.

69 In addition, Bogost has recently admitted the failure of representations and video games when weighed against the unstable circulation of flows. At a recent talk at the Nonhuman Turn in Twenty-First Century Studies, Bogost noted that his social media game Cow Clicker, intended as a critical satire, actually spawned beyond his authorial control. The game was popular enough to even merit “cow clicktivism,” the ironic use of the player’s nonsymbolic enjoyment of the community of the game to send cows to the “third world” for clicking on cows. This example once again demonstrates not the procedures are unimportant—far from it. It is does emphasize that players respond to move than just an alignment of procedure and representation.
Logocentrism was best articulated by Jacques Derrida. In a very general understanding, “(phal)logocentrism” (as he frequently corrected us) is the assumption that writing reflects thinking, and that thinking itself is an immanent (self-contained) process of a transcendental (divorced from material conditions of embodiment) mind. Derrida counters that thinking is bound up with the technical and material processes of writing—a dual of presence and absence that has lurked as a dangerous threat to presumptions of rationality at least since Phaedrus was caught with a transcript of a speech in the rhetoric.

I am unsure of how to differentiate protocol from procedure except at this level the stance vis-a-vis representation and coded-rule. Bogost, for whatever reason, does not acknowledge or discuss protocol in his literature review on gaming and procedurality in Procedural Rhetoric.

See Richard Young’s “Arts, Crafts, Gifts, and Knacks” for a full discussion of the techné as technical knowledge or divine inspiration dichotomy. Hawk also fully explores this issue in A Counter-History of Composition.

I discussed McCorkle’s work in detail in Chapter 3.

I am grateful to Scot Barnett for this specific suggestion about applying Miller’s work in this context.

Assemblage is a term that DeLanda extends from Deleuze’s philosophy with the explicit purpose of describing social phenomena. See Alex Reid’s The Two Virtuals for a general introduction to Deleuze’s theory in the context of rhetorical theory and composition studies.

Although these figures are not widely cited among composition scholars, they are certainly not unprecedented. Alex Reid’s The Two Virtuals and Byron Hawks’ A Counter-History of Composition have made specific connections between Deleuze and Guattari and new media theory and composition pedagogy.

I defined “phase space” in the previous chapter and I define it again below. It is term from complexity theory that describes material entities not in terms of their fixed Newtonian points in space but in terms of a non-linear space of change over time.

Thus, given the lack of authorial or agentic “I,” we should not only study a rhetorical problem such as environmental pollution through the appropriate selection of imagery such as the pastoral figuration of a pathos-laden Mother Earth that we wound and hurt in order to create sympathy or identification in an audience for our cause. Rather, a rhetorical analysis might start within a detailed tracing of the presence of pollution with the assemblages of the home and within workplaces. Here, it is important to trace not just points of symbolic circulation in relationship to emergent publics and political discourse, but material points of circulation as well—the ways in which actors such as chips materialize in different configurations of bodies and assemblages. Bennett offers an example of mercury poisoning:

These movements [of mercury] reveal that lower-class peoples, indigenous peoples, and non-white peoples carry a disproportionate toxic load. Tracing the traffic in toxins involves scientific/economic/political/ethical analysis of realms and interest groups heretofore imagined separately, for example, those of health, medicine occupation safety, disability rights, and environmental justice, as well as “traditional” environmentalism devoted to the welfare of wild creatures. (80)

She concludes, “The same material substance, in this case, a particular toxin such as mercury or dioxin, may affect the workers who produce it, the neighborhood in which it is produced, the domesticated and wild animals that ingest it, and the humans who ingest the animals who have ingested it” (80).
It should be noted that Bennett’s claim about cultural studies’ lack of attention to materiality is not entirely accurate. There are several scholars (Grosz; Wilson; Alaimo) aligned with cultural studies who definitely have addressed the materiality of cultural artifacts.

The use of the term assemblage became en vogue in the writing of Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari. DeLanda is heavily influenced by both thinkers, but it is not important for the purposes of this essay to spend much space in parsing their similarities and differences. In general, DeLanda is a Deleuzian thinker, but he places emphasis on different points within Deleuze’s thinking that other Deleuzians have ignored.

Jennifer Whitson’s use of Latour’s actor-network theory—a variation of assemblage theory—in order to explain “counter-play”—another variation of “playing the procedure”—best illustrates the need for games studies scholars to utilize such an approach to video game studies. “Counter-play” occurs when players resist the constraints of the coded procedures. It is not that algorithms are not persuasive; rather, Whitson suggests, “it in the very nature of play to find the movement between the rule, and for many players the ‘fun’ in play is the inherent challenge of attempting to master, defeat, or remake games’ formal structures” (1). In order to conceptualize control, Latour’s actor-network theory focuses not only on the representations or the game, but the material structures and relations that give rise to the game, from the movement from the designer’s studios, the technical documents that describe gameplay, to the production facility, to retail stores, and eventually to the player’s home. Whitson suggests that digital rhetoric scholars must study the parts and not the “finished” whole (e.g., the finished newsgame), considering both human and nonhuman actors as equal participants, such as “developers, producers, programmers, graphic artists, playtesters, PR personnel, critics, lobbyists alongside discs and cartridges, consoles, handhelds, game engines, graphic software and hardware” (6). The “empirical” presence of nonhuman actors works to constrain and confine the limitations of what a game can and cannot perform. In a way similar to my observations about post-cinematic affect above, actors have multiple goals: publishers want a profitable game while developers may seek critical acclaim and graphic awards over playability. Hardcore players demand time-intensive and complex games with intricate boss sequences while casual gamers want simple and finite games interactions. If needs are not met, then some actors drop out of the network: “Simply put, the more actors there are working in some semblance of unison, the strong the game network” (7). Thus, there is no underlying structure of games or discernable individual design, but, as Whitson concludes in a direct nod toward circulation scholarship, “there are circulating structuring templates that can lead to similarities between networks” such as surveillance and monitoring (8). In Chapter 2, I referred these structuring templates via Latour’s term “circulating reference” (Pandora’s Hope). In DeLanda’s terms, structuring templates mean that video games are bound up within micro-level assemblages (players and designers’ self-interested motivations) and macro-level assemblages (company profit) (7).

I thank Levi Bryant for calling my attention to this marble-bowl example as a teaching heuristic.

I am grateful to Todd May for calling my attention to this aspect of Protevi’s work in his lecture, “Humanism and Solidarity.”

Alaimo’s claim is not that scientists must function as a new intellectual elite who necessarily serves as an intermediary for any social issue. She is not referring to scientists in the sense of those who serve multinational science companies, but, in Latour’s sense, science writ large as a knowledge-producing entity. Her point is more that the points of interconnection between bodies and man-made harmful chemicals has reached a level of sophistication and imbrication within daily life, that scientific evidence is necessary simply to offer instruments of detection that can then inform political action.

Despite the points of congruence between Alexander Galloway’s thinking and some of nonmodern ontologies that I have previous discussed, Galloway has recently (2012) claimed that progressive politics and flat ontologies are irreconcilable (“Criticism”). More prominently, the critical media theorist Andrew
Feenberg has argued that in Latour’s nonmodern ontology, “the loser’s perspective in any struggle disappears from view” similar to how Enron’s corporate malfeasance is placed alongside electricity in Bennett’s account of the electrical grid in Chapter 4 as just one more actant among actants. If, Feenberg writes, “morality in this new theory is now confined to holding the collective open to new claimants,” so that “morality is no longer based on principles but on these operational rules”; the usual elements—“freedom of choice, understanding, self-reflection”—cannot be universally ascribed to all actants.” Indeed, Feenberg is pointing precisely to the need to move from ontology and analytical description to the need to establish ethical and politics forms of normativity.

86 Tim Morton’s latest book, Realist Magic, takes Harman’s claim that objects interact in a sensual ether to suggest that all forms of causality are aesthetic in nature.

87 Isocrates offers another illustrative example of this trend. Isocrates, for example, claims in Antidosis that while he cannot promise happiness or virtue for those who study the great speeches, “those who follow the precepts he lays out will be helped more speedily toward honesty of character” (22). In an early formulation of Matthew Arnold’s “sweetness and light” doctrine, Isocrates claims that if one’s subject matter is praiseworthy, and the more one contemplates what is praiseworthy, the more one’s soul is directed down this path. He writes, “Furthermore, the more one studies what constitutes good character for the community and the more one works to present a good character in one’s rhetoric activities, the more one habituates oneself to being a good character” (23). Undoubtedly, similar assumptions in the present moment inform the National Basketball Association’s racial logic behind the dress code policy that bans African-American players from wearing “doo” rags and other “urban” paraphernalia. Thinking back to Plato and acting, the clothes “make the man” as the body and soul must be in alignment, and African-Americans are viewed as incapable of “acting” in the same way as an intelligent white philosopher who can don blackface and know that he is still a white male at the end of the day.

88 Names include Fantham; Leff; Rosteck and Leff; Smith; and Deem.

89 He lists the following scholars: Farrell; Whitson and Poulakos; Vitanza, Negation; and, Greene. As an aside, I agree with this point in the sense that no one specifically referenced the term decorum. I would only add that a critique of decorum is presupposed by Victor J. Vitanza’s performative—“non-positive affirmative”—aesthetic. Vitanza’s non-linear, affected, and paralogical writing style was so successful in disrupting the “police order” that characterizes academic norms of style that the prominent rhetorical scholars George A. Kennedy accused “Vitanzan Vitalism” of suffering from a “bizarre form of linguistic herpes” (14). The immunological metaphor is appropriate. As Robert Esposito has noted, “community” (the polis of those with something in common) is established by symbolic movements of immunity that seek that exclude what cannot fit comfortably into norms. Vitanza, noticeably, calls his own project “anti-body rhetorics,” in possible tacit recognition of this immunizing function. It is not politics in ’s sense, but neither is it a form that can be recuperated within a dominant academic writing style. Indeed, we can even include D. Diane Davis’s Breaking Up At Totality that manages to circumvent and interrupt the “decorous” modes of academic writing through performative stylistic experiments.

90 For example, Leff directly claims that Cicero’s technical understanding of delivery was explicitly related to style (and also delivery) to the extent that it was “canonized along with purity, clarity, and ornamentation” (112).

91 Although I do not have the space to pursue them, there are clear overtones here between performance in Butler’s Foucaultian sense and decorum’s disciplining of the body.

92 I am grateful to Jared Colton for helping me understand how Rancière’s philosophy functions in relationship to community.
This claim is not an endorsement of Donna Haraway’s early work on cyborgs. Haraway was widely criticized for implying that only cyborgs—human-technology subject positions—could form viable positions of resistance in the current technological disorder. Simply put, she undertheorized forms of resistance that might be necessary for those disenfranchised by the digital divide. In making this point, I simply seek to highlight the fact that the current technological order has increasingly played a role in forming subjectivity to the extent that its role must be addressed.

Bennett extends Spinoza’s conatus to include inanimate actors. The view shifts from degrees of intentionality that, say, a bacteria will possess to lesser degrees than a human, to non-linear forms of emergence that inanimate actors can participate in.

In a subsequent essay, “Democracy of Objects,” Latour offers a more complimentary role of rhetoric, listing its production of “tricks” and “tropes” as essential for composing the common world (xi). Given that rhetoric, for Dewey, is something that should be invested in minoritarian representation—action borne out of a political presupposition of ontological equality respective to a given formation of the human-nonhuman collective, rhetoric’s ethical obligation corresponds to the opposite point of emphasis for Levinas. It does not merely work on the Other’s (the Object’s) infinite withdrawal, but on Vollzug: what is disclosed and what emerges in ontological hypokrisis. Rhetorical scholars will understandably be wary of the possibility that Latour has reinscribed rhetoric yet again to style. Yet, my view is that “style” and aesthetics could be a reductive role that rhetorical theorists embrace in a world of nonhuman agency. Gravity is not rhetorical, but it nevertheless produces emergent ratios of agency through which symbolic action occurs. Others may well wonder if rhetoric should not be listed as a profession alongside politics and morality. I believe that this role for rhetoric is still crucial as even economists and scientists still employ metaphor and figural language to organized raw data in examples such as quantum string theory.

This is discussed in his differentiation between matters of “fact” and matters of “concern” in “Why Has Critique Run Out of Steam.” Matters of fact are aesthetic expressions that obtain through Latour’s notion of the modern Constitution—an ontological division of culture, politics, and human rhetorical creativity on one side and nature and scientific representation of an eternally invariably nature on the other. The insistence on “fact” as a correlate of realism and representation is impossible as even neoconversatives such as Texas Government Rick Parry are “postmodern” enough to invoke “social construction” when it comes to rejecting declarations of scientific fact in the case of global warming. Given a communicative and epistemological paradigm when third wave feminists, neo-Marxists, and Government Perry are all in basic agreement that reality is socially constructed, Latour asks all critique-minded humanists to do some soul-searching in order to resolve this problem: “what is it that we were after when we were so intent on showing the social construction of scientific facts?” (“Why Has Critique” 227). To paraphrase Latour loosely, the original problem that critique rose to respond to in idealism and enlightenment was not to say that facts cannot be established and to move away from empiricism entirely, but to move us closer to the facts through a renewal of empiricism. Latour argues, “The mistake we made, the mistake I made, was to believe that there was no efficient way to criticize matters of fact except by moving away from them and directing one’s attention toward the conditions that made them possible” (231). But already, Latour complains that this accepted “too uncritically what matters of fact were” (231). Matters of fact—what the mind could logically or could not logically derive from immanent rational processes and what invariable truth of nature science could empirically describe—were useful for debunking pre-enlightenment mythologies; however, Latour concludes that by the same token, matters of fact “became eaten up by the same debunking apparatus” (231).
Along these lines, we should be wary of anthropomorphism simply because corporate entities are often skilled at anthropomorphism in order to personalize their products as Barbara Johnson has noted in *Persons and Things*. At the same time, the rejoinder to Johnson’s arguments is that anthropomorphism with the capitalist assemblage differs greatly from anthropomorphism in the activist assemblage. Simply stated, this is the old problem with rhetoric: do we use it for good or for evil?

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