

LiCS

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LiCS MISSION STATEMENT

Literacy in Composition Studies is a refereed open access online journal that sponsors scholarly activity at the nexus of Literacy and Composition Studies. We foreground *literacy* and *composition* as our keywords because they do particular kinds of work. We want to retain Composition's complicated history as well as FYC's institutional location and articulation to secondary education. Through literacy, we denote practices that are both deeply context-bound and always ideological. Literacy and Composition are therefore contested terms that often mark where the struggles to define literate subjects and confer literacy's value are enacted. We are committed to publishing scholarship that explores literacy at its intersection with Composition's history, pedagogies, and interdisciplinary methods of inquiry.

Literacy is a fluid and contextual term. It can name a range of activities from fundamental knowledge about how to decode text to interpretive and communicative acts. Literacies are linked to know-how, to insider knowledge, and literacy is often a metaphor for the ability to navigate systems, cultures, and situations. At its heart, literacy is linked to interpretation—to reading the social environment and engaging and remaking that environment through communication. Orienting a Composition Studies journal around literacy prompts us to investigate the ways that writing is interpretive as well as persuasive; to analyze the connections and disconnections between writing and reading; and to examine the ways in which literacy acts on or constitutes the writer even as the writer seeks to act on or with others.

LiCS seeks submissions that interpret literacy at a time of radical transformation in its contexts and circulation. We are open to a wide range of research that takes up these issues, and we are especially interested in work that:

- provides provisional frameworks for theorizing literacy activities
- analyzes how literacy practices construct student, community, and other identities
- investigates the ways in which social, political, economic, and technological transformations produce, eliminate, or mediate literacy opportunities
- analyzes the processes whereby literacies are valued or legitimated
- examines the literacies sponsored through college writing courses and curricula, including the range of literate activities, practices, and pedagogies that shape and inform, enable and constrain writing
- considers the implications of institutional, state, or national policies on literacy learning and teaching, including the articulation of high schools and higher education
- proposes or creates opportunities for new interactions between Literacy and Composition Studies, especially those drawing on transnational and cross-cultural literacy research

Editors' Introduction to Issue 5.2

The impetus for this special issue, entitled “Literacy, Democracy, and Fake News,” was the outsized influence misinformation played in the 2016 US presidential election. As teachers and scholars of literacies, the editorial team—like many in the US and around the world—wondered how obvious lies, such as the “Pizzagate” conspiracy theory that Hillary Clinton was running a pedophilia ring out of a pizza parlor, could be believed, and acted on, by so many people. Of course, the term used to describe these lies, propaganda, misinformation, and disinformation in November 2016—“fake news”—was quickly co-opted by Donald Trump and used indiscriminately by his administration to describe any news or reporting that they deemed unfavorable. One year later, we know even more clearly that Americans are divided by their literacy habits and activities—that the spaces we go to find information, the ways we consume information, and our vulnerabilities to manipulative amplification of disinformation map onto our existing epistemologies and ideological affiliations. In recognizing this, we are once again reminded that literacies are always ideological: literacy practices and activities are conduits for the reproduction of cultural values and conventions.

By way of introducing and framing the four essays that follow, Tom Miller and Adele Leon note that the institutional locations, engagements, and collaborations of rhetoricians and compositionists make us well-positioned to intervene in the “populist authoritarianism of our times” (11). They argue that research in social psychology promises to illuminate networked literacies in ways that not only help us motivate our students to slow down but are also paradigmatic; in this moment they see an analog to the eighteenth century, when “works such as Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* instituted an epistemological framework that shifted our discipline’s standpoint from the speaker at the podium to the reader before the page. We are experiencing a comparable historical transition” (21). Finally, Miller and Leon suggest, our ability to listen to those with whom we disagree may be a vital practice in shaping and re-shaping our collective future.

Exploring both college students’ information literacy and the sophisticated literate practices of Macedonian teenagers engaged in circulating fake news before the 2016 US presidential election, Jacob W. Craig opens this issue by arguing that technological discourse must shift to networked understandings if we are to effectively understand and engage both academic contributions and democratic participation. “Navigating a Varied Landscape: Literacy and the Credibility of Networked Information” suggests what such an approach would look like via a case study method of understanding networks. By investigating how economic, critical, and technological forces intersect, Craig details the Macedonian writers’ use of network affordances for profit, resulting in the production and circulation of misinformation, and compares this to the literacies employed by college level writers. The article concludes with pedagogical applications of a networked approach to research and writing.

Timothy Laquintano and Annette Vee’s “How Automated Writing Systems Affect the Circulation of Political Information Online” pulls back the curtain on how the ubiquitous activities of robot writers, or bots, in online spaces drive the circulation of certain political messages and distort readers’ sense of how many other humans are authentically engaging in political advocacy. Laquintano and

Vee argue that literacy educators need to grapple with a shift from “an editorial model of information consumption and production” to an “algorithmic model” (47) in which automated software and bots amplify certain messages and even “mimic human profiles in an attempt to convince humans the bots are just more users among many” (52). Laquintano and Vee demonstrate how this “calculated online writing ecology” amplified misinformation during the 2016 presidential election (53). The authors call on teachers and scholars in writing studies to face the challenge of teaching and researching the literacies emerging in this evolving ecosystem.

In “Globalist Scumbags’: Composition’s Global Turn in a Time of Fake News, Globalist Conspiracy, and Nationalist Literacy,” Christopher Minnix maps out how conservative policy organizations and the populist rhetorical strategy of simplification reduce a diverse array of “global turn” programs to an anti-intellectual and anti-American enemy opposed to the traditional goals of higher education. Tracing the history of “global turn” initiatives from international efforts to protect national interests to contemporary service learning and civic engagement efforts, Minnix demonstrates the complexity of what constitutes the “global turn,” a complexity that itself provides fodder for conspiracy theory on the right. Minnix concludes this analysis by proposing how those working at the global turn can strategize a response.

David Riche’s “Toward a Theory and Pedagogy of Rhetorical Vulnerability” draws on research from rhetorical theory, political theory, legal studies, and philosophy to theorize a pedagogy of rhetorical vulnerability. Such a pedagogy, according to Riche, means “acknowledg[ing] the fundamental role that vulnerability plays in all of our rhetorical interactions” since “writing means attempting to affect others in some way” and “involves taking risks” (91). Focusing on examples of public trolling on Twitter and fake news stories, including the Pizzagate controversy, Riche examines how discussing fake news and trolling rhetoric with students can help them understand “something fundamental about how we experience rhetoric” (93). According to Riche, it’s no longer sufficient to teach students how to critically evaluate sources; instead, “we must also help our students come into a fuller awareness of what trolling rhetors have long recognized: that we are rhetorically vulnerable beings, that we can never not be rhetorically vulnerable and responsive, and that our rhetorical vulnerability can be managed and exploited for better and, unfortunately, for worse” (96).

In his symposium piece, Ben Wetherbee responds to Brenda Glascott’s “Constricting Keywords: Rhetoric and Literacy in our History Writing,” published in our 2013 inaugural issue. Wetherbee questions Glascott’s positioning of rhetoric and literacy as opposing terms, arguing instead that rhetoric and literacy are “two fields within a continuum” that complement one another (107). Tracing what he calls the “‘greatest hits list’ of rhetorical theory,” from Cicero to Burke to Michael Billig, Wetherbee shows how rhetoric, similar to literacy studies, engages with questions “about how identity and competence form through literate practice” (107). He suggests that more scholarship might cite work in both literacy studies and rhetoric, an invitation taken up by the authors included in this special issue.

Finally, Tabettha Adkins provides a timely review of Katrina M. Powell’s 2015 monograph *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement*, which uses five separate case studies—“those displaced for ‘public use’ space, survivors of Hurricane Katrina, Sudanese Refugees, displaced peoples of Sri

Lanka, and residents of Virginia’s care centers for patients with intellectual disabilities”—to identify, describe, and ultimately problematize how “narratives of identity serve both to create displaced people and to justify their displacement to the general public” (113).

Taken together, these contributions press us to confront how anti-democratic literacies manipulate how we are thinking of ourselves as members of a democracy and nation. Our authors emphasize the importance of understanding literacy as networked—at least as well as those who exploit vulnerabilities in the network for profit or cyberwar—yet the border crossings of those networks create, at this point, unresolvable tensions.

The fundamental ideological nature of literacy explored in this issue undergirds both New Literacy Studies and the theories that shape the mission of this journal. In this special issue about literacies and democracy, we acknowledge our debt to the pioneer Brian V. Street, who died in June 2017. We are grateful for Professor Street’s scholarship, which so influentially shaped our field, as well as thankful for his service and sage advice on the *LiCS* editorial board. This issue is dedicated to the memory of Brian V. Street.

Brenda Glascott, *Portland State University*
Justin Lewis, *Virginia Tech*
Tara Lockhart, *San Francisco State University*
Holly Middleton, *High Point University*
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Introduction to Special Issue on Literacy, Democracy, and Fake News: Making it Right in the Era of Fast and Slow Literacies

Thomas P. Miller—University of Arizona
Adele Leon—University of Arizona

Fake news is an insidious form of post-truth rhetoric, and social media exponentially increases the problems of misinformation and narrow-mindedness. For an ever-growing number of people who get their information online, social media platforms both feed content that viewers already agree with and encourage social grouping, limiting encounters with different ideas that may challenge settled beliefs.

—Bruce McComiskey, *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition* (19)

Fake news is not new. Since ancient times, racist and nativist stories have been used to justify attacks on minorities and immigrants. Rumor mongers and then pamphleteers justified dispossessions, tortures, and massacres by circulating inflammatory accounts of how marginalized groups such as Jews preyed on children and the weak. American journalism's founding father Benjamin Franklin fired up the passions of his colonial readers by faking accounts of Indian massacres ordered by King George (Soll). To check the influence of mass propaganda in the twentieth century, rhetoric and composition courses turned to criticizing logical fallacies and emotional appeals. We have continued to rely on critiquing appeals to public prejudices even as we have come to see facts and truths as socially constructed and politically motivated. If we look past the modern idealization of the rule of reason over emotion, we may be able to develop a more broadly engaging response from rhetoric's distinctive attention to the dynamics of pathos and ethos in the collaborative process of composing shared knowledge.

What is new about fake news is how quickly it goes viral. Following lines of analysis set out in the headnote from McComiskey's *Post-Truth Rhetoric and Composition*, this special issue examines how "click bait" stories are calculatedly composed to inflame prejudices in much the way rumor mongers and propagandists did. Fake news circulates through botnet networks that use algorithms to profile users and feed them stories that fit their individual biases. The mass media could only track users' preferences through crude measures such as subscription lists, but as Timothy Laquintano and Annette Vee note, interactive media customize information feeds to fit the prejudices of individual readers, as becomes annoyingly apparent any time one searches for a product or topic and then finds related ads

and stories suggested in sidebars.

Networked literacies call for interactive pedagogies that are attuned to the socio-cognitive networks that shape how we process information. *Information literacy* tends to be defined in terms of finding and assessing information. As discussed in this issue, this information-processing model does not adequately attend to the distinctive dynamics of networked literacies. In our introduction, we frame the studies that follow by reviewing research on how resistant we are to information that challenges our political assumptions. The populist revolt against reasoned argument has shaken our country's faith in expertise, education, and informed debate in ways that rhetoricians are distinctly prepared to address. Rhetoricians have traditionally been less concerned with being reasonable and more interested in the pragmatics of how the passions motivate action and how our identifications with others guide our responses. We can renew these concerns by taking note of the research on social psychology that we will use to frame the lines of inquiry that thread through this issue.

Studies of social psychology can help us consider how we can best respond to the populist authoritarianism of our times. These anti-intellectual trends pose a direct threat to the rising attention to civic engagement that is having such a vital impact in our institutions and on literacy studies. As Christopher Minnix's essay suggests, conservative propagandists are attacking the critical junctures where interactive pedagogies come together with global partnerships, service learning, and community literacy initiatives. Populist attacks on the "new civics" and other progressive reforms are pivotal to the successes that conservatives have had in turning a rising portion of the public against higher education (Randall). For the first time, a majority of Republicans now perceive higher education as a negative influence on society (Graham; Pew Research Center).

Conservative attacks on liberal education are part of the populist repudiation of expertise and informed deliberation that make fake news more than just the latest form of political propaganda. Studies of the partisan brain can help us reflect upon how we are to engage with these challenges in our classrooms and in our research. The research of John Haidt and other social psychologists provides opportunities to renew the relations with the ethical and political concerns of moral philosophy that have been vital to the history of rhetoric. As at other critical junctures in our history, studies of social psychology can help us understand how morals and mores are evolving in tandem with broader changes in literate technologies, epistemologies, and political economies. Research on how we think about values has transformative possibilities for rhetorical studies of the networks through which fake news circulates, as we will sketch out to provide a broader context for the articles that follow.

Fake news is a challenging case in point for considering the historical trends we face because we tended to envision connected thinking and communication ecologies in idealistic terms before we came to realize just how efficiently social networks spread toxic messages that poison environments. To inoculate students against fake news stories that have gone viral, it is only natural for proponents of liberal education to try to uphold the sort of "well-reasoned, well-researched argument" that David Riche cites (84). As Jacob Craig discusses, such print-based models of deliberative argument do not readily transfer to click-and-go literacies. Broader questions about the rhetorical efficacy of critical analysis arise in several of the articles in this issue. The historic changes in literacy that are examined in this issue challenge us to reflect upon how we can bridge the expanding gap between the literacies

we teach and the ones our students enact. In our concluding piece, David Riche argues for building on socio-transactional models of communication to engage with the interactive dynamics of rhetorical agency and rhetorical responsiveness. Following through on the work on rhetorical listening of Krista Ratcliffe and others, Riche configures the interface between agency and responsiveness as a matter of recognizing how vulnerable we become when we openly listen to others.

To strengthen the continuities among the four articles in this issue, we begin by considering the challenges of subjecting fake news to rational analysis by contrasting fast media with slow thinking using Daniel Kahneman's influential *Thinking Fast and Slow*. The quick intuitive associations that guide us as we surf the net can be overruled by deliberative reasoning in the ways that Craig envisions in his essay on assessing the credibility of news reports. However, our everyday thinking about controversial issues is often guided less by a reasonable concern to be right than by our desire to be on the right side. We will draw on studies of the partisan brain to connect Timothy Laquintano and Annette Vee's examination of the circulation networks of fake news with the cognitive networks through which we process politically-loaded information. Research on how we think through our relationships to others can help us connect rhetorical analyses of fake news with broader concerns about science deniers and other populist trends that have laid the groundwork for the libertarian assault on public education. To engage effectively with such social movements, we need to listen harder than we have to the anxieties and aspirations of less-educated Americans. We need to move past the dismayed responses of liberals to the last election and advance the grassroots collaborations that are vital to our institutions. Riche's discussion of the vulnerabilities of engaging in reciprocal rhetorics can help us reflect on these needs.

Our discipline is well positioned to respond to how libertarian sentiments have gone viral because our engagements with service learning and community literacies provide us with an expansive articulation apparatus to address the nativist and globalist conspiracies that Minnix discusses. Engagement is a pivotal concern in the last two articles in this issue because it is vital to understanding our institutional and interpersonal possibilities. Riche's assessment of the vulnerabilities that arise out of our need to connect with others draws on Diane Davis's *Inessential Solidarity*, which provides a theoretical assessment of how our social affinities constitute our identities in nonessentialist ways. Such theoretical frames can help us move beyond the liberal tendency to assume that well-informed people essentially think as we do. The renewal of liberal education, and liberalism more generally, depends on engaging in more broadly-based collaborative inquiries. Rhetoric and composition specialists are well positioned to advance such collaborations, as is evident in how pointedly compositionists have been attacked by the National Association of Scholars' condemnations of the "new civics" (Randall). Such notoriety can make individuals and programs feel targeted, but it can also serve to validate what we are doing because it shows that even our harshest critics recognize the historic impact of our work with civic engagement. In the rest of our introduction, we use research in social psychology to examine how rhetoric's traditional concern for the composition and mediation of shared knowledge can help us defend and renew the work of public institutions of learning.

Slow Thinking and Fast Media

The first articles in this issue complicate the presumption that the best way to counteract the impact of fake news is simply to teach students to be more critical about what they read. Craig takes note of the rhetorical skills of the Macedonian teenagers who compose fake news stories to profit from click-bait ads. Those students are a powerful example of how students who can be so adept at finding information can be so “easily duped” by what they find. This problem has been surveyed by the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), which provided a “bleak” assessment of the critical depth of click-and-flow literacies. The group’s argument is set out in the title of their widely influential report “Evaluating Information: Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning.” SHEG has proposed curricula that reach from middle schools to general education. As Craig discusses, such efforts to teach civic reasoning can be enhanced by attending to how the rhetorical dynamics of network literacies complicate print-centric assumptions that close reading teaches students to be reasonable. As Craig’s article notes, such conceptions of information literacy do not attend to the rhetorical complexities involved in surfing across diverse platforms, media, and genres. Networked reading has been examined in Daniel Keller’s *Chasing Literacy: Reading and Writing in an Age of Acceleration* and in pieces such as Lester Faigley’s “Rhetorics Fast and Slow.” We will connect these broader discussions to Craig’s essay by using Kahneman’s *Fast and Slow Thinking* to distinguish the associational modes of thinking from the deliberative modes of reasoning that we teach through close reading and critical analysis.

The curricula proposed by SHEG teach historical thinking through strategies such as close reading, contextualizing, corroborating, and “sourcing” that are extremely useful for those seeking to teach students information literacy. Craig’s essay adds to this repertoire of critical thinking strategies by considering the rhetorical strategies that Macedonian newsies use to hawk their stories on the web. Such efforts to manipulate others may be difficult for us to look to as models because we have generally critiqued propagandists and upheld literary works as models to be emulated. The deference that we have paid to liberal education has come under attack with populist assaults on informed debates and expertise as elitist. These attacks on the sensibility of the liberally educated call upon us to expand our attention to the experiences and motivations that students bring to our classes and the collaborative modes of experiential learning that can help them understand what reflection feels like. Such learning begins and ends with engagement because students have to care enough to want to develop the sort of rhetorical awareness that Craig discusses, including “both a critical understanding of the nature of networks and the rhetorical possibilities of researching, writing, and distributing information online.” Those possibilities need to matter to students (37).

And therein lies the challenge of helping students transfer what we teach to how they read. When we consider transfer, we often presume a rational model akin to metacognition, thinking about thinking, but if we understand thinking to be about imagination and empathy as well as generalization and recontextualization, we may be better able to help students care enough about what we teach to remember it when they leave our classrooms. The differences between intuitive thinking and deliberative analysis are examined in Kahneman’s *Thinking Fast and Slow*. According

to Kahneman, we generally rely on effortless holistic intuitions in routine situations—when we walk, pause to locate a sound or sight at a distance, or read anger in a face we encounter. When situations defy our presuppositions and we have to give them a second thought, we shift into a more deliberate mindset, for example when we walk on uneven ground, pause to consider whether that noise was a shot, or try to figure out why someone is mad at us. Problems arise when we rely on our initial impressions to interpret more complex concerns. Kahneman and other social psychologists often use interactive experiments aimed at surfacing expectations, sometimes involving presuppositions about character types. For example, in the famous “Linda Problem,” Kahneman asked subjects about whether a young “outspoken” woman who had majored in philosophy and is concerned with “discrimination and social justice” is more likely to be a bank teller or a feminist bank teller. People tend to follow the intuitive associations to identify her as a feminist because they do not pause to consider that logically it is far less likely that she is a feminist bank teller than simply a bank teller.

Kahneman uses Systems 1 and 2 thinking as an analogy for explaining how we rely on stereotypical presuppositions until we are pressed to stop and reflect upon our responses. For example, most people think the answer to this brainteaser is quite straightforward: a bat and a ball cost \$1.10, with the bat costing a dollar more than the ball. How much does the ball cost? To recalibrate and realize it cannot cost ten cents, most of us have to switch into a more analytical mindset—though more analytical thinkers may get it right at the first pass. If you are less adept at math and had to recalibrate (and felt pleasure in doing so), then you are more of a fluid thinker who enjoys shifting interpretive frames. Many of us, and our students, generally follow predictable cognitive “biases” in thinking through experience—such as the tendency to look to confirm presuppositions or the tendency to follow the herd (which was termed the *bandwagon fallacy* by those seeking to correct the irrationality of everyday reasoning). With System 1 thinking, we often over-estimate our intuitive reasoning skills and hesitate to make the effort to question commonsensical assumptions, especially those that are familiar to us. When experts are challenged to transfer their skills to a novel task, they often do not slip into a deliberate mindset to solve the problem at hand, but instead rely on their “expert intuition” to holistically recognize and interpret patterns in an unconscious, almost effortless manner, whether they are experts at dancing or criticizing fake news stories.

System 2 thinking requires focused deliberative effort—the sort of effort involved in slowing down to systematically examine the credibility of sources, the reliability of a writer, and the verifiability of a claim. Taking the time to care about such things is hard, especially for students who feel constantly pressured to get up to speed on their studies and then turn to the internet to relax and connect with friends. Our efforts to teach students to analyze the credibility of sources face the same “bleak” prospects as fact checkers trying to keep up with post-truth politicians. Our Twitter-in-Chief built his base by claiming that Barak Obama was not born in America, and that one of his primary opponent’s father was involved in the assassination of JFK. Such lies fly so quickly around the internet that they morph from outlandish to commonplace within an hourly news cycle. Within hours, a group such as FactCheck.org weighs in to debunk the story, but as Lombardo discusses, once the report has “echoed” around the country, “those who already heard it are unlikely to revise their initial impressions” (qtd. in McComiskey 18). Months or even years later, we are faced with the

work of getting students to trace a fake news story back through circulation networks to question its reliability. By that time, students are challenged to rethink a story that they may have “shared” so many times that it has gained the standing of an article of faith. Given these dynamics, it is no wonder that when we press students to do the hard work of engaging System 2 thinking to critique their unexamined shared knowledge, they may respond with an exasperated “whatever” and take a frustrated glance at their phone.

This is Your Brain on Fake News

We generally do not scramble to rethink ideas that are “shared” with our social networks because our biases against topics are often shaped by our biases toward the groups with whom we identify. This tribal instinct is powerfully documented in the research of Jonathan Haidt and other social psychologists who have documented how test subjects resolutely refuse to change their minds even when presented with incontrovertible evidence that a figure they identify with has lied on a topic. The studies that Haidt draws upon amply demonstrate that evidence often does not change minds when it requires people to change sides—even if the sides are simply opposing red and blue teams that have been set up as part of the experiment. This is not just true of the less educated or closed minded; it is true of you and us. After all, when was the last time you changed your position on a major political or ethical issue that you care about simply because you were presented with a thorough-going analysis? Generally when we change our minds on something we feel strongly about, for example to switch parties, we do so after long reflections that are often triggered by experiences and felt needs more than by a reasoned decision based on careful analysis. Such a change often entails not a shift in position but experiential learning and personal reflections that arouse and fulfill feelings and affiliations that we have come to value. In these partisan times, our irrational nature is hardly news, but taking account of thinking along the bias is essential if we are to make realistic assessments of the efficacy of our research and teaching about fake news. In the end, what changes do we imagine will follow from our explications, and how do we imagine that change will come about?

Thinking along the bias (which psychologists term “motivated cognition”) is the cognitive interface for the social networks that are examined in the second article in this issue (Hughes and Zaki). Following the criticisms of “partisan hackery” (24) in Jacob Craig’s article, Timothy Laquintano and Annette Vee begin by setting out a belief in “evidence-based inquiry and argument” and then call for literacy studies to consider both “how people encounter texts on an everyday basis” and how texts circulate through “computational and automated writing systems” that “amplify” the distribution of fake news (43). Laquintano and Vee map out an incredible “ecosystem” in which “robot writers” package Tweets and other messages to fool a gatekeeper bot into thinking they’re human so that texts will be forwarded to the botnets that form flash-mob publics around click-bait stories that create enough buzz to fire people up to click and retweet. “The robots among us” (59) create social profiles and mimic human interactions to generate hashtags and texts that fool the bots that police networks. These bot nets circulated fake news stories that reached more than a hundred million Americans during the last election. As Laquintano and Vee note, it is estimated that 20% of all election-related tweets were generated by bots, and some sources project that half of Trump’s 30 million followers

were bots. These bots mimicked grassroots groups to engage in “astroturfing” that channeled the collective energies of opposing constituencies into dead-end nonevents.

The robotized publics that Laquintano and Vee describe have the feel of a sci-fi film such as the *Matrix* series. That series began when the main character is shown that he lives in a technologically manufactured reality and offered the choice of taking two pills: one that will put him back asleep to go on believing the comforting fictions he has lived with, and another that will wake him up to “stay in Wonderland” and see “how deep the rabbit hole goes.” Do we imagine our students will choose the red or blue pill—the one that leaves them comfortably snuggling up to fellow believers or the one that leaves them wide eyed and alienated from their social networks? If we are to avoid being patronizing in answering that question, we need to acknowledge that we all tend to be more comfortably snuggled into our social networks than we might like to acknowledge. When we are presented with information that threatens the values that are central to our cognitive schema and social relationships, the threat centers of our brains fire up in ways that are detailed in Haidt’s *The Righteous Mind*. Such information lights up the same emotional areas of the brain that we use to respond to other sorts of threats—not the cognitive centers that are identified with “cool reasoning tasks” (102). One of Haidt’s guiding principles is that “feelings come first.” We need to keep that principle in mind as we consider how we can get students to rethink the easy-going prejudices and presuppositions that we all rely upon to get through the day.

At a cognitive level, such critical interventions often attempt to get students to apply System 2 thinking to the associational and intuitive patterns of thought that they share with their social networks. Laquintano and Vee’s article deepens our sense of the challenges involved in such critical interventions by exploring how fake-news networks process stories at a speed that engages the System 1 thinking involved in motivated reasoning. As we scan the web, we all tend to look for information that confirms our presuppositions, and we ignore or minimize information that contradicts our basic assumptions. The immediacy of this type of thinking challenges us to consider whether we can expect our research and teaching to have any more impact on our students than the fact checkers who chase after yesterday’s fake news story. That is a depressing prospect to consider because research on the cognitive impact of debunking is not encouraging (Chan et al.; Ecker et al.). Laquintano and Vee provide a compelling account of the automated practices that shape people’s interactions with fake news. It is on us to decide how to translate this awareness into scholarly and pedagogical modes of intervention that can be used to confront the psychological and political forces at work in the flash-mob publics that form around how we think along the bias. Haidt’s work provides broadly accessible accounts of moral psychology that can help us talk with students about the emotional and imaginative dynamics of how we think about values (see, for example, Haidt, “Moral Psychology for the Twenty First Century”).

Social theorist Nicholas Gane examines the critical challenges presented by the penetration “of ever-faster technologies into all spheres of ‘human’ life” (21). Fake news is only the most grievous example of the dimming prospects for critical reflection in our accelerating networked society. As Lester Faigley discusses, we need to work with students to *slow down* our thinking and reflect on our (re)actions. To engage students, we are going to have to provide the sort of compelling narratives and

expansive visions that Faigley briefly sets out in “Rhetorics Fast and Slow.” As Faigley’s piece makes clear, a good story and a strong sense of place are needed to combat the debilitating feeling “that nothing can be done,” the overwhelming feeling of “inevitability” that

pervades our culture. Fast rhetorics are manifestation of a culture that suffers from attention deficit disorder, a culture where things are quickly used and discarded. . . . We need pedagogies that encourage students to develop a sense of place, a sense of stewardship, a sense of equity, and a sense of connectedness to the world around them. (9)

The incapacitating inevitabilities of our times call upon us to develop emotionally and socially engaged modes of scholarly and pedagogical intervention. As Gane discusses, the pace of information technologies imposes the prevailing sociocognitive order upon our thinking. If we are to contend with the speed of digital technologies in ways that can help us bolster our reflective capacities, we need to start by acknowledging that “with the accelerated implosion of time-space it is becoming increasingly difficult to position critique outside that which it seeks to attack: the information order” (Gane 22). Laquintano and Vee give us a powerful sense of the algorithmic logic that drives that order to help us understand the “current media ecology” (51). Fast media and System 1 thinking overwhelm us with fleeting experiences that rush over us in ways that can overpower our reflective capacities. This fleeting immediacy crowds out the spaces where we and our students carve out time to learn together. Fast thinking and social networks transfix us with their speed, and our best hope of fixing them is to engage with our place in time. To draw upon local knowledge and situated modes of action, we need to deepen and expand our collaborations with our broader communities, including the alienated constituencies whom progressive commentators, educators, and activists failed to engage in the last election. This need is being addressed by our discipline’s increasing attention to civic engagement, as is discussed in Christopher Minnix’s article on how conservatives are using fake news accounts of “the new civics” to undermine the standing of public institutions of learning.

Terms of Engagement

As Minnix discusses, a national survey in 2017 found that only 36% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents see colleges and universities as having a positive effect (Pew Research Center). These negative attitudes have followed upon the assaults on higher education that science-deniers and cultural conservatives launched in the “culture wars” of the 1980s. Those wars have widened as libertarians and authoritarian populists have made common cause with social conservatives. These attacks are not skirmishes around the borders of the educated public and public education. Populist anti-intellectualism is a central dynamic of the postmodern public itself according to Frederic Jameson’s “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.” Jameson characterized the surging Reagan-Thatcher neoliberalism of the 1980s as a rising “populist rhetoric” aimed at arousing the resentments of alienated consumers with anti-intellectual attacks on the rationalism and formalism of the educated public (14-15). Jameson called upon academics to give up the pretense of maintaining a “critical distance” from these social movements because we are all “immersed in postmodernist space,” and the public is indifferent to “old fashioned ideological

critique” (86; see also Latour). Given this state of affairs, the critical imperative is to think with and not just against. In his retrospective “Revisiting Postmodernism,” Jameson noted that such dialectical engagements require us to remember that “pedagogy is not inflicting discipline but awakening interest” (Baumbach 127). To awaken students to the need to rethink their assumptions, we should move past the all-too-common liberal tendency to assume that all well-informed people think as we do and acknowledge that liberals and conservatives often have different moral compasses.

While conservatives and liberals both engage in motivated cognition, they are motivated by different concerns. Haidt and other social psychologists have found that you can predict people’s politics by simple observational examinations of whether their eyes linger longer over a negative image such as a car accident or a person eating worms (Dodd et al.; Smith et al.). In fact, such observations can predict people’s political orientation with more certainty than knowing their parents’ political orientation (Laber-Warren). A rich and varied array of experiments has documented that liberals and conservatives literally look at the world differently: conservatives tend to be more anxious, risk adverse, and orderly, while liberals are more open to experience and generally more optimistic (Jost et al.). Haidt’s *Righteous Mind* maps out the systematic differences in how liberals and conservatives think about values by reviewing experiments in which people were presented with moral quandaries and then asked why it would be right or wrong to respond in a particular way (see also Haidt’s “New Synthesis in Moral Psychology”). For example, after a couple’s pet dog has been killed by a car, they decide that it could be good to eat it (as they have heard is done in other cultures). The test subjects are asked whether that would be wrong, and if so why. Respondents were also asked to make the same assessment of other hypotheticals, for example whether it would be wrong for grown siblings to have sex (using appropriate birth control). From the justifications that people offered, Haidt concluded that liberals tend to be more motivated by a concern for harm and violations of rights, while conservatives are less narrow-minded and consider a wider range of considerations, most notably sanctity, duty, and authority.

If we consider the differing motivations of conservatives and liberals, we may be better able to respond to the motivations that guide the assaults on higher education. According to Minnix, groups such as the National Association of Scholars (NAS) have positioned “global higher education as . . . disloyal” (65) and un-American. Following in the fake news tradition of science deniers, such attacks appeal to conservative anxieties by depicting higher education as a threat to traditional authorities. These nativist attacks have come to focus on civic engagement because it is seen to be vital to progressive efforts to teach critical thinking and multiculturalism. To defend those efforts, Minnix argues for the sort of dialectical response that Jameson envisioned. Quoting from Chantal Mouffe’s *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically*, Minnix calls for a “dual movement” that combines critical interventions and “re-articulations,” with the latter including both developing student-engagement programs and getting involved in “agonistic” public debates. As Minnix discusses, the “global turn” is an outgrowth of universities’ broader efforts to expand their community partnerships, for example in programs dedicated to service learning, educational outreach, and transnational research. Universities have expanded such articulation programs to build public support in response to lost state funding and declining federal grant revenues. Conservative attacks on these sorts of programs

hit universities at a strategic juncture where vital social movements, interdisciplinary collaborations, and institutional needs are converging in ways that open up transformative potentials as well as critical vulnerabilities.

The potentials of the “engaged university” are emerging as an historical alternative to the traditional research university that relied upon steady state funding and research rankings and revenues in ways that have disoriented our intellectual inquiries from our institutional work (Watson). Few disciplines are more pivotal to this historical transition than rhetoric and composition. Many college composition programs have broader outreach and bridge programs than any other unit except math, which has been able to underwrite such programs with funding from NSF and other sources. Our gateway role in general education also locates our field at a strategic position amidst these broader socio-institutional changes. Our strategic location is precisely why leading compositionists such as Veronica House are being targeted by NAS for having developed innovative programs such as the Writing Initiative for Service and Engagement at the University of Colorado at Boulder. As Minnix discusses, such “articulations” have transformative possibilities because writing program administrators have the expertise and engagements to build interdisciplinary collaborations with social justice and human rights programs in ways that have the potential to reorient writing program toward the “ecological” models of networked literacy that House has presented as a successor to textualist models of writing (House).

Minnix’s article expands upon the analyses of Craig and Laquintano and Vee by helping us understand the broader postmodern challenge of moving beyond critiques of information literacy to think not just against but with the flow of networked literacies. Research on motivated cognition and social psychology has the same sort of historic potential that moral psychologists such as David Hume had in the eighteenth century, when related works such as Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* instituted an epistemological framework that shifted our discipline’s standpoint from the speaker at the podium to the reader before the page. We are experiencing a comparable historical transition. While we have worked through the implications of the “death of the author,” we are still grieving the death of the reader. Cultural studies has helped us expand our field of study to include social as well as print texts, but print literacies continue to haunt our field of study in the ways that Laquintano and Vee note. The articles in this issue expand our field of vision by looking to fake news and robotized publics for models of authorship akin to other hacker forms of network literacy. Rather than continuing to assume a modern rationalist standpoint on such models of knowledge in the making, we should expand our attention to the symbolic dynamics of motivated cognition to consider how we can motivate students to slow down and care enough to engage with others. This line of approach can help us revitalize the relationships between rhetoric and moral philosophy that have been critical at generative points in the history of our discipline, as evident in the psychological focus of formative works such as Kenneth Burke’s *Rhetoric of Motives*.

Caring Enough to Listen

You persuade [people] only insofar as you can talk [their] language by speech, gesture, tonality,

order, image, attitude, identifying your ways with [theirs] (Burke, *Rhetoric of Motives* 55).

Riche's examination of the "rhetorical vulnerability" that arises when we listen to others provides a timely conclusion for this issue because higher education has never been more vulnerable, and liberals' failure to listen to alienated voters has contributed to the rise of authoritarian populism. Given the racist, sexist, and nativist tendencies of that social movement, we are likely to want to respond in the way that Riche initially considers. Riche opens his essay by noting that he was tempted to respond to campus preachers of prejudice "with a well-reasoned, well-researched argument" of "the kind I push my students to prefer in my writing courses" (84). Riche's piece invites us to think past our disciplinary bias toward "rhetorical agency" to consider the "rhetorical vulnerability" we open ourselves up to when we listen to others. This distinction parallels Burke's contrast between persuasion and identifications with others' "conditions, states of mind," and social affinities (56). Burke's *Rhetoric of Motives* examines how we come to identify with others as we work our way through the "human barnyard" to translate our values into action in contested situations. While conservatives and liberals may be motivated by differing presuppositions, the process of haggling through our differences can open up shared possibilities. As Riche discusses, composition classes provide a vital opportunity to build spaces where people take the time to listen to each other.

Riche argues for following through on rhetoric's traditional attention to audiences to build on the attention to "rhetorical listening" that Krista Ratcliff and others have established. This shift in perspective acknowledges that it is not the speaker but the listeners who are essential in a dialogue. In their absence, there is only monologue. To develop "reciprocal rhetorics" that center on becoming responsive rather than simply being persuasive, Riche draws on Diane Davis's *Inessential Solidarity* to consider the existential challenges of forging strategic alliances across political and cultural differences. Davis looks to Emanuel Levinas's philosophy of ethics to argue for a rhetoric of "response-ability" that is attuned to our transactions with others. Amidst such interactions, according to Riche, we find ourselves embedded in "a larger web of social relations, contingencies, and interdependencies" (85). Riche challenges us to accept our precarious positions amidst networks in which "interlocutors, audiences, and even bystanders" become "vulnerable to both verbal and nonverbal forces and influences" (90). Instead of trying to critique such forces and ideologies from a distance in the way that Jameson noted was no longer possible for postmoderns, Riche argues for thinking not against but with diverse viewpoints by accepting the vulnerabilities of opening ourselves up to listening to others.

Riche outlines a pedagogy of listening that is attuned to the give and take of the human barnyard. That pedagogy is exemplified by the simple act of listening that Riche practices by having students read their papers aloud and observe how others respond to them. Many of us have observed the power of such moments. As we were drafting this essay, Adele was reminded of how a student in one of her first classes at the University of Arizona became so engaged with workshopping drafts and sharing ideas with classmates that for years afterwards she kept coming back to engage in such discussions over coffee to brainstorm and get feedback. In a recent discussion, Adele asked the student what aspects of her class had the most lasting impact. The student observed that she had begun the semester just listening enough to think of a comeback but had learned to listen to

understand why someone believes as they do, and to see if their thoughts align with her own. The student remembered that reading drafts of classmates' papers had helped her to stop and listen rather than jumping to take sides. Such moments are so familiar in our classrooms that we need to remind ourselves how rare they are in our society, and how vital they are to helping people slow down, reflect and actually listen to others.

Riche's essay serves as a reminder to that. His piece also highlights a more positive dimension of motivated cognition: while we all seek to confirm the prejudices of the groups with whom we identify, that tendency can make us responsive to communities of practice that take the time to work on the craft of listening. Overviews of social psychology such as Elizabeth Kolbert's "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds" document that we are depressingly indifferent to informed deliberations that challenge our presuppositions. This fact should not really be all that surprising to us, because rhetoricians have always had a three-dimensional understanding of public discourse. Since ancient times, we have understood that logical appeals depend upon our identification with the ethos of speakers and our feelings for the morals and mores of our communities. Moral psychologists such as Haidt renew our understanding of the rhetorical dimensions of human reasoning by reviewing the evolutionary origins of how our thinking is shaped by our identifications with our lived communities (see also Mercier and Sperber). While irrationally adhering to false news can appear to be a maladaptive response that could endanger the health and wellbeing of individuals in threatening situations, that same tendency can be seen to have powerful collective benefits by building the sort of "inessential solidarity" that Davis and Riche discuss. Evolutionary psychologists provide us with interactional models of human reasoning that highlight how our brains function, not in the individualistic manner of rational decision making that was assumed by modern philosophers, but in the social transactional manner that rhetoricians have long recognized, and which is powerfully apparent in the collaborative work of composition classrooms.

The articles that follow document how powerfully positioned we are to respond to the populist authoritarianism that has made fake news such a threat to informed deliberations on the challenges of our times. The partisan conflicts between liberals and conservatives challenge us to confront the disconnects between fast media and slow thinking to reflect upon how our thinking is motivated by our need to confirm our social identifications. Whether we are motivated by a concern for human rights or traditional authorities, we need to recognize that we are not as reasonable as we tend to presume when we look to critical analysis and close reading to change our students' minds. Our studies of rhetoric and our work with knowledge in the making provide us more personally and institutionally engaging ways to respond to libertarian assaults on institutions of public learning. As the essays in this issue discuss, such responses depend upon how willing we are to listen to how our students and our constituencies think. In the "human barnyard," the liberal appreciation for the diversity of the lived experience and human rights can be brought into conversation with the conservative values of sanctity, adherence to tradition, and deference to group norms. As the essays in this issue amply document, the challenge of our time is to practice listening and learning from each other so that we can discover our shared potentials and resist the authoritarian forces that seek to divide us.

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Navigating a Varied Landscape: Literacy and the Credibility of Networked Information

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KEYWORDS

digital networks, Googlization, information literacy, digital literacy,
technological discourse, digital democracy

Jon Stewart was booked to appear on CNN's *Crossfire* on October 15, 2004 to promote his recently-released book, *America*. Leading up to Stewart's segment, co-hosts Paul Begala (sitting on the left, punditing for the left) and Tucker Carlson (sitting on the right, punditing for the right) both referred to Stewart as "the most trusted man in fake news." Rather than promote his book, Stewart used the opportunity to confront the co-hosts, accusing them of failing to promote informed public discourse through journalism, creating instead a "theater" of "partisan hackery." As Stewart said during the segment, "I made a special effort to come on the show today, because I have privately, amongst my friends and also in occasional newspapers and television shows, mentioned this show as being bad," because "it's hurting America" (Felker). In defense, Carlson confronted Stewart about a recent *Daily Show* interview with then-presidential candidate John Kerry and accused Stewart of failing to ask Kerry a question of substance: "You got the chance to interview the guy. Why not ask him a real question, instead of just suck up to him?" Stewart responded, "You're on CNN. The show that leads into me is puppets making crank phone calls." The audience of the episode outpaced the normal viewership by about 200,000 and increased after a transcript was published to CNN's website and clips of the segment were posted to YouTube ("Crossfire (TV Series)").

My purpose in discussing this moment in television history is to emphasize the importance of understanding the networks that enable the production and delivery of fake news. Although Stewart's appearance involved networks of a different kind than those used to circulate the fake news stories that are the focus of this special issue, his appearance indicates that knowledge of networks is vital for assessing information in its appropriate context (Gosnick, Braunstein, and Tobery). The importance of understanding the role of the network is reflected in the recently released Association of College & Research Libraries' (ACRL) "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education," a document that has prompted a growing body of scholarship within writing studies keyed to helping students further develop information literacy (D'Angelo et al.). Key to the ACRL's framework is the understanding of digital networks as a diverse "information ecosystem" within which students have a participatory role. The framework notes that

the rapidly changing higher education environment, along with the dynamic and often uncertain information ecosystem in which all of us work and live, require[s] new attention to be focused on foundational ideas about that ecosystem. Students have a greater role and

responsibility in creating new knowledge, in understanding the contours and the changing dynamics of the world of information, and in using information, data, and scholarship ethically.

The ecosystem metaphor proves useful here not only to emphasize the variety of information that circulates through networks but also to account for the interdependencies between humans—subjects, researchers, sponsors—and non-human-entities—data, information, algorithms, systems—within research networks. While the ACRL emphasizes how humans understand and use information, Kathleen Blake Yancey emphasizes how researchers contribute to the information ecosystem. She observes that research is conducted and reported within a research ecology of sites, activities, and texts that “have always existed, but are now, with the affordances of the Internet, more visible,

“Networked information is dynamic and uncertain to be sure, but too often, these realities are not reflected in what students are taught about discerning between credible and incredible information.”

inclusive, and interactive” (“Creating” 83). A Google search, for example, might yield published research typically housed in a library’s stacks or hosted in a library’s database, alongside raw data and early findings that researchers have made available in “multiple venues ranging from

scholarly websites to personal or professional blogs, personally hosted websites, and other social media outlets” (Yancey 83). Thus, beyond the use of networks, Yancey notes that research is published in a variety of outlets depending on the goals and incentives of sharing that research, be it for professional advancement or social capital. Further, by way of search engine algorithms like Google’s PageRank, credible and valuable information and “incredible—facts, data, personal narrative, rumors, information, and misinformation” are both likely to float to the top of a Google search result because of a shared link, key term, domain name, or platform (Yancey 90).

Networked information is dynamic and uncertain to be sure, but too often, these realities are not reflected in what students are taught about discerning between credible and incredible information. At my own institutional home, materials created for student-researchers by the library flatten much of this complexity by discussing only two

criteria for source evaluation: whether peer reviewed or not, whether primary or secondary. Given the intricacies of networks, these commonly used criteria and the model of research that undergirds them are not sufficient to help students

“Given the intricacies of networks, these commonly used criteria and the model of research that undergirds them are not sufficient to help students develop effective information literacies or research practices.”

develop effective information literacies or research practices. As the ACRL framework suggests, attention to the varied nature of networked information is integral to preparing students to assume ethical and participatory roles in the information ecosystem.

In what follows, I provide two accounts of two very different kinds of researchers and writers, each representative of a specific technological discourse about the nature and function of digital networks. In the first account, I discuss the experiences of novice researchers—primarily college students—in

the process of developing necessary literacies to discern the credibility of information found online. In the second account, I discuss the Macedonian teenagers who turned the sharing of misinformation into a cottage industry during the 2016 presidential election. Like the account of fake news that opened this discussion, these 21st century fake news reporters offer two important insights about the nature of networks that students access when conducting their own research. First, these fake news makers' efforts emphasize the importance of developing a network-specific information literacy—one that emphasizes the diverse constellation “of media, technologies, rhetorical venues, discourse genres, and distribution mechanisms” employed to share information (Porter 208). Second, as part of a network-specific information literacy, the practices these fake news makers employed to profit from misinformation emphasize the need to develop a more complete narrative about the nature of the networked information. Narratives about technology or “technological discourse” foster the ways in which technologies are received and understood in the “cultural sphere” (McCorkle 25).

As I will show, technological discourse about networks in research-focused writing classrooms has too often emphasized sameness between networked information and print sources, thus underpreparing students to evaluate networked information. While emphasizing similarities between print and digital sources encourages students to develop a modular and coherent set of strategies for evaluating sources, it has also had the effect of creating misunderstanding among students about the relationships among networks, researchers, and information. Inversely, because the community of teenaged fake news makers in Veles, Macedonia developed a network-specific

“While emphasizing similarities between print and digital sources encourages students to develop a modular and coherent set of strategies for evaluating sources, it has also had the effect of creating misunderstanding among students about the relationships among networks, researchers, and information.”

information literacy undergirded by a technological discourse that reflected the realities of networks, they were able to enact skillfully a kind of information literacy that made them effective researchers and “rhetorically smart distributors as much as producers of discourse” (Porter 215). By developing an account of the Velesian teenagers'

information literacies alongside the experiences of novice researchers, my goal is to highlight the importance of developing and sharing with students a technological discourse that provides a more complete account of how information is structured, promoted, and commodified within networks. As a start to developing technological discourse for students that is reflective of the way information circulates within networks, I conclude with a pedagogical recommendation for helping students develop a network-specific information literacy.

Scene One: Students in the U.S.

On November 22, 2016, the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) released an executive summary of its 18-month study of students' ability to judge the credibility of information published online, “Evaluating Information: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning.” The report was timely

and resonant, released at the beginning of a cascade of reports on the effects and origins of the fake news stories that circulated virally during the 2016 presidential election.¹ Although SHEG's study did not address profit-driven fake news explicitly (or intentionally deceptive information exclusively), their report shows that evaluating information online involves more than discerning the real from fake. In the current moment, readers also must be able to tell the difference between sponsored content and news as well as between advocacy and research. The report detailed findings from an 18-month study of 7804 responses from middle school, high school, and college students across 12 states.



Figure 1. Tweet used in the SHEG study to evaluate students' ability to identify the difference between advocacy and research.

The executive summary focuses on three tasks completed by three different student populations. First, middle school students were asked to discern the difference between an advertisement; a native advertisement (an ad matching the platform where it appears, for example, Melanie Deziel's ad for *Orange is the New Black* available here: <https://nyti.ms/2kXf4AT>); and an article on a homepage. High school students were asked to evaluate a claim made through an image shared on Imgur about the Fukushima fallout (see fig. 2), and finally, college students were asked to consider the credibility and usefulness of polling data about the NRA shared by MoveOn.org through Twitter (see fig. 1). Through this study, the SHEG concluded that students' ability to evaluate content online is "bleak" because although students "may be able to flit between Facebook and Twitter while simultaneously uploading a selfie to Instagram and texting a friend," they are "easily duped" by "information that

flows through social media channels” (4).

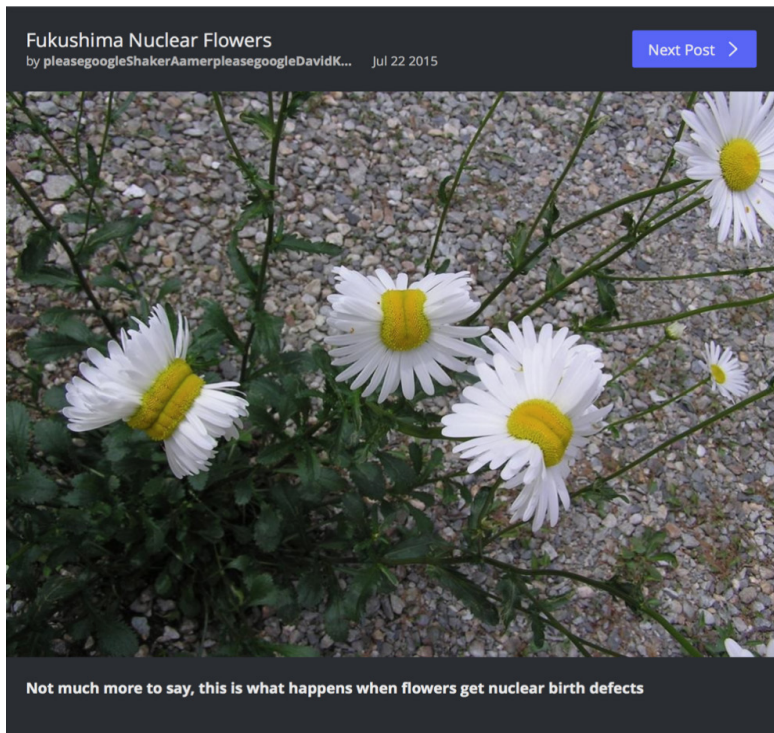


Figure 2: Fukushima flower Imgur post used by the SHEG study to evaluate students' ability to evaluate images.

Although the Stanford group makes some troubled assumptions about students as digital natives by assuming that students born in the digital age are naturally savvy users of technology, their distinction between use and critique is valid. Even though a student might have developed the technological skills needed to write in the digital age (what Stuart Selber refers to as a “functional literacy”), evaluating information online involves a different set of literacies that the SHEG’s informants have not yet developed (Selber 44). To start, given the multimodal nature of the texts that circulate online, students needed a more fully-developed visual literacy to read the images like the Fukushima flower post as a symbol: neither necessarily a realistic representation of reality nor dependent on the caption for its meaning (Kress and van Leeuwen 21). In addition to visual literacy, the Stanford Group’s study also shows that students had not yet fully developed an information literacy needed to evaluate sources accurately. Further, the information literacy that some of the informants had developed was not helpful, leading some of the study’s informants to “accept a .org top-level domain name” as credible despite its one-sidedness (Wineburg and McGrew). Reporting a similar finding, Karen Gosnick, Laura Braunstein, and Cynthia Tobery found in their study of novice

researchers' literacy practices that while their study's informants were "adept at finding information," they struggled to evaluate that information for credibility (169). Like the informants in the Stanford study, Gosnick, Braunstein, and Tobery found that there is a tendency among novice researchers to choose sources that seem credible based on information like the ending of the URL.

First, students from several different classes cited a page from Stanford University's archive of the papers of Martin Luther King, Jr. The item turns out to be a class paper on the Great Awakening that King wrote as a seminarian. When questioned regarding this choice during our debriefing discussion, students replied that they thought any ".edu" website was authoritative, since, to them, it appeared to have been written by a professor. They were unfamiliar with the concept of digital archives and other materials being hosted by an academic institution—or that ".edu" sites could just as likely be authored by students like themselves. (169)

Although their unfamiliarity with digital archives and realities of hosting presents its own set of problems, the tendency of Gosnick, Braunstein, and Tobery to attribute credibility to domain names is resonant in a moment where there is a history of recirculating information found on sites whose names are intentionally deceptive: like ABCnews.com.co and beforeitsnews.com.

Discussing another source commonly used among their informants, Gosnick, Braunstein, and Tobery describe the "persistent (yearly) appearance of a page from *Theopedia*," an encyclopedia run by evangelical Christians for evangelical Christians to reaffirm the Christian faith. The researchers found that students "had not investigated this information" in part because *Theopedia* looks like *Wikipedia*; both use the MediaWiki web application to run their sites (170). Additionally, many of the study's informants did not know that sites often include an "About" page that helps researchers "place this information in its proper context—to understand how it was produced, by whom, and for what purpose" (171). As Elizabeth Flietz has recently discussed in the Digital Rhetoric Collaborative's post-election Blog Carnival, novice researchers tend to only "read vertically on a site, reading it as if it were a printed text" rather than reading information found online as networked.

This gap between the nature of information and the ways in which students perceive information is created—in part—by the ways that media are discussed in relation to research. Put differently, the information literacies that students cultivate are reflective of the discourse used to describe the technologies traditionally used to share and access information. As Ben McCorkle argues, two different kinds of technological discourses emerge alongside new technologies, each forwarding a different narrative about the relationships between old and new media. McCorkle writes

Generally speaking, contemporary rhetoric utilizes two logics or strategies in its efforts to incorporate digital writing more easily into our environment. One strategy involves creating connections between nascent and long-established forms of communication in order to foster a sense of familiarity and naturalness in the new class of technology— in short, a strategy of immediacy. The other, hypermediacy, works by emphasizing the benefits or affordances of the new technology over older ones, creating a sense of added value that makes a society more prone to accept it (for example, digital writing extends our ability to communicate more effectively than earlier types of writing because of the inherent

efficiency of cutting and pasting preexisting text, or similar claims). (153)

Although McCorkle’s discussion of technological discourse is focused on the rhetorical tradition, his identification of two discursive strategies of technological inclusion, a strategy of immediacy and a strategy of hypermediacy, proves useful for naming different approaches to fostering students’ information literacies. The practices that Gosnick, Braunstein, and Tobery’s informants employed—like only reading vertically—are reflective of discourse that emphasizes what print and digital media have in common: a strategy of immediacy. In contrast and exemplifying a strategy of hypermediacy, recent efforts like Mike Caulfield’s self-published textbook, *Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers*, discusses source evaluation with an emphasis on the differences between media: a strategy of hypermediacy. However, hypermedia strategies like those in Caulfield’s book have been slow to supplant traditional approaches that rely on strategies of immediacy like, for example, the list of guidelines for evaluating sources published by Columbia University’s Millstein Undergraduate Library (see fig. 3).²

EVALUATING ONLINE SOURCES

How do you determine if a source is credible? You can evaluate the reliability and scholarship of information you find both online and in print by using these **guidelines**:

- **Authorship**
If the author is not identified be wary. When an article or website is authored anonymously it has little credibility. It should be evident who created the content. What are the author’s credentials? Does he/she have expertise in this field? Is biographical information provided?
- **Publisher**
This can help you determine the origin of the document, for example whether it is produced by an established publisher, a government agency, a nonprofit organization, or a commercial website. Consider the publisher’s reputation and trustworthiness.
- **Accuracy and objectivity**
Can the facts presented on a website be substantiated elsewhere? Beware of information that can’t be confirmed or that presents a biased view. Always check multiple sources to determine credibility.
- **Timeliness**
Be aware of when the web page was created and how recently it’s been updated. Is the information current? Outdated information and broken links indicate the page is not being maintained.
- **Footnotes and bibliographies**
Legitimate references and links to other sources can add to a document’s credibility and depth of scholarship.
- **Sponsorship**
Some sites are officially approved by the parent organization to which they’re linked. Others can be on a parent site but not officially sponsored by the organization. A personal homepage on a university’s server does not automatically confer credibility.

Figure 3: The Millstone Library’s published guidelines for evaluating online sources.

Like many others of its kind, the Millstone Library’s guidelines for evaluating sources includes both print and digital sources, and in the case of three criteria—accuracy and objectivity, timeliness, and sponsorship—there is a specific focus on digital sources. Further, their guidelines for accuracy and objectivity resemble Michael Caulfield’s recommendations to “check previous work,” “go upstream to the source,” and “read laterally.” Despite the strengths of the Millstein Library’s guidelines, the list reads like a revision: originally developed for print sources and adapted later to include sources found online. The guidelines for sponsorship, for instance, are not reflective of the sometimes-complicated relationships between content producers and hosting sites. In the case of sponsored

content, advertorial articles are hosted by one organization and sponsored by another, or in the case of sharecropped articles, non-staffed writers' posts are reposted to well-known outlets like HuffPost with little editorial oversight.

More telling of the Millstone Library's emphasis on what print and digital media have in common are the guidelines for discerning the authorship of articles because they are reflective of a print-centric view of authorship. Beyond guidelines referring to the anonymity and credentialing of authors, the Millstein Library's guidelines do not reflect how authorship has been transformed by cloud-based office suites like Google Drive and database-driven content management systems like wikis. In his landmark work on hypertext, George Landow argues that maintaining a focus on the author is a limited approach, reflective of book-centric understandings of authorship that obscure the collaborative and intertextual nature of research (40). As opposed to the book-centric emphasis on individual texts created and owned by individual authors, hypertext emphasizes interdependent relationships among writers and texts (Landow 137). Thus, by discussing authorship in terms of naming and credentialing without attention to models of authorship like Wikipedia's—anonymous, edited, and version-based collaboration—the Millstein Library's guidelines and others like it that do not attend to the differences among media do not adequately prepare students to understand and ethically use source materials they find through research.

In the next section of this discussion, I focus on the second strategy of technological discourse that emphasizes the benefits of—and thus the differences between—print and digital media. However, as Kathleen Blake Yancey notes in her 2004 CCCC address, discourse about what a technology can do is multifaceted, depending on who produces that discourse and for what reason. In her discussion of the changing nature of technology through use or the “deicity of technology,” she notes that as new technologies take hold and new literacies emerge, people find new uses for those technologies that “may be at odds with its design” (“Made” 319). The Macedonian fake news moguls discussed in the next section found ways to profit personally from a range of new uses for a constellation of technologies. Like Jon Stewart, the pre-eminent fake news reporter, this new generation of fake news reporters highlight the influence of networks on discourse, particularly the ways in which companies like Google and Facebook have undermined the initial promise of the internet as a means of empowering ordinary citizens to compete with media companies for political influence.

Scene Two: Teenagers in Macedonia

In the weeks following the 2016 election, journalists began tracing the origins of fake news stories: focusing on what stories were fake, who wrote them, how they went viral, and what motivated their production. Some stories were discrete instances—like, for example, the paid protestor story that originated with a tweet sent by Eric Tucker. That tweet went viral in 24 hours, eventually being endorsed by then-President-elect Trump (see fig. 4).

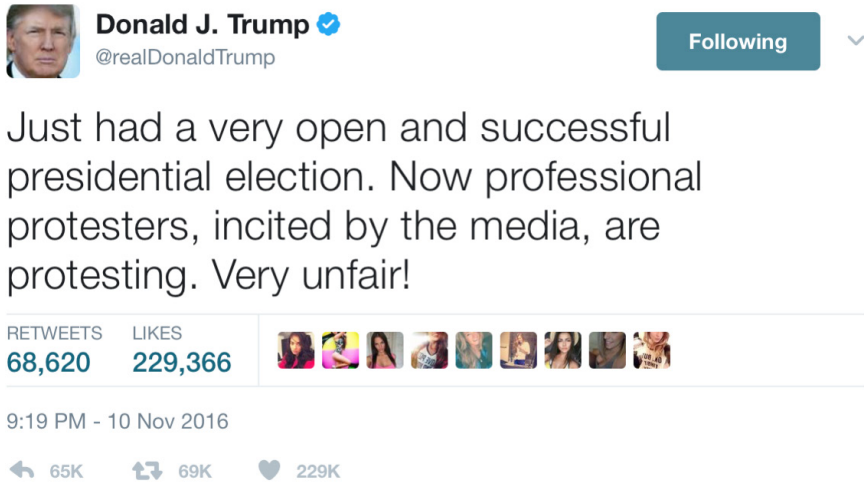


Figure 4: Trump’s endorsement of Eric Tucker’s paid protestor tweet.

Other stories revealed more intentional and systematic instances of the production and distribution of fake news through websites mimicking credible news outlets. Although some of this body of disinformation originated domestically through sites like *ChristianTimesNewspaper.com* (the site that circulated the bogus story about the discovery of fraudulent Clinton votes in a warehouse in Ohio), a group of Macedonian teenagers were responsible for a lion’s share of bogus stories that went viral during the 2016 election. *BuzzFeed* was one of the first to discover that the town of Veles, Macedonia—with a population of 55,000—was the registered home of more than 100 then-active pro-Trump websites and 40 inactive web domains referring to US politics (Silverman and Alexander). Upon closer examination, reporters discovered a cottage industry built on an existing digital infrastructure of social and advertising networks that a group of Macedonians repurposed to earn money “by gaming Facebook, Google, and Americans” (Silverman and Alexander). In principle, this group of savvy Macedonian teenagers were not doing anything new by publishing bogus stories for personal profit. For example, in 1835, Benjamin Day, publisher of the New York-based paper *The Sun*, ran a series of six bogus articles to boost the circulation of his paper. The six article series—now called the Great Moon Hoax of 1835—provided a detailed account of a vibrant ecology of living organisms on the surface of the moon that included descriptions of a variety of flora, fauna, and bat-men “covered, except on the face, with short and glossy copper-colored hair, and had wings composed of a thin membrane, without hair, lying snugly upon their backs.”

Although their goals are not new, what is noteworthy about this new generation of fake news makers are the literacies they developed and employed to meet their goal of making money through a digital economy of texts. Like the American students discussed in the previous section, these young entrepreneurs had developed a functional literacy needed to write and publish online, but these fake news makers’ functional digital literacies were more fully realized, allowing them to “distribute and

access a wide variety of information (text, graphics, audio, video) globally, quickly, and relatively easily” from their phones and laptops (DeVoss and Porter 195). But more significantly, these writers had developed a set of critical, rhetorical, and information literacies that enabled them to use existing network infrastructures for their own monetary gain. Taken together, these three literacies enabled a group of teenagers in Macedonia to understand the socio-economic forces that shape networked information and to develop a reflective practice of circulating information online.

One of the Macedonian newsmakers was a teenager named Boris—a pseudonym—who was a focus of Samanth Subramanian’s *Wired* article on the Macedonian teenagers who momentarily turned fake news into a profitable industry. Utilizing a combination of Google’s AdSense program, Wordpress, and Facebook, Boris and his peers found new uses for these widely used and freely available platforms. Using Google’s AdSense program to monetize their Wordpress installations, Boris and his peers posted content only to circulate their ads—a strategy of earning income in the digital economy that they referred to as “AdSense work” (Subramanian). Boris, who Subramanian features in his article, was an 18-year-old who dropped out of high school after seeing the money-making potential of AdSense work, and in many ways his motivation bears resemblance to the students whom I’ve taught in first-year writing classes; Boris wants a BMW 4 Series, plays video games, likes rap music, wants a better cell phone, and wants more bar money. Seeing more potential in doing AdSense work than in working in a factory or a restaurant in Veles, Boris pursued AdSense work full-time. In terms of the payout for his efforts, Boris did well, outearning the average monthly salary in Veles of \$371 by making nearly \$16,000 from his two bogus pro-Trump websites between August and November of 2016. What makes Boris distinct from the novice-researchers discussed in the previous section are the medium-specific information literacies he cultivated to meet his goals. Specifically, Boris and the other AdSense workers intimately understood the relationships among platforms, information, and economics—a “critical literacy” that allowed them to undermine the original design of the AdSense program by prioritizing monetization over content creation—by treating content as the medium for the delivery of advertisements (Selber 81). Likewise, the AdSense workers also developed a “rhetorical literacy” that was essential to profiting from Google’s AdSense program: an understanding of the kind of content that would go viral and the kinds of audiences who would assist their articles in going viral (Selber 147).

Although Boris and the other Velesian teenagers made the news for their most recent efforts at AdSense work, Subramanian described a history of gaming the digital economy by crafting monetized, made-to-go-viral content for American audiences. He features, for instance, an account of Mirko Ceselkoski, who began building websites about celebrities, cars, and yachts for American audiences in the early 2000s. Subramanian notes that Ceselkoski was fairly successful, earning about \$1000 a month through his AdSense work, but his bigger success happened in 2011, when Ceselkoski began teaching students to build and promote their own monetized websites. Two of Ceselkoski’s students, Aleksandar and Borce Velkovski, are well-known in Veles as the Healthy Brothers for their popular health food website, HealthyFoodHouse.com. Subramanian writes that

HealthyFoodHouse.com is a jumble of diet and beauty advice, natural remedies, and other nostrums. It gorges on advertising as it counsels readers to put a bar of soap under their

bedsheets to relieve nightly leg cramps or to improve their red-blood-cell count with homemade beet syrup. Somehow the website's Facebook page has drawn 2 million followers; more than 10 million unique visitors come to HealthyFoodHouse.com every month.

Not surprisingly, some of the Velesian teenagers who were key players in the Macedonian fake news fabrication business also studied with Celeskoski in 2016.

Following the model developed by Ceselkoski and perfected by his students, Boris initially began doing his AdSense work with two Wordpress-based sites called GossipKnowledge.com and DailyInterestingThings.com where he posted articles filled with sports, celebrity, health, and political news that he copied and pasted from websites across the internet. After he published a bogus story about Trump slapping a man that nearly went viral, Boris devoted all of his energy to circulating fake political news on his two newly-minted pro-Trump websites called PoliticsHall.com and USAPolitics.co. During this time, he worked on perfecting a strategy for making his story go viral by first publishing his fake news stories on one of his two websites and then sharing the link on Facebook either through his own profile or one of his 200 fake Facebook profiles. Additionally, to maximize his AdSense profits, Boris learned that more people would click on his ads if he embedded them between paragraphs, insuring that "one in five visitors" would click on an ad, which meant more income for Boris. In recounting this period of fake news making, Boris said his life revolved around trying to produce as many viral stories as possible:³

At night I would make four or five posts to share the next day. When I woke up, I shared them. I went to drink coffee, came back home, found new articles, posted those articles on the website, and shared them. Then I went out with friends, came back home, found articles, and shared them to Facebook. (Subramanian)

Boris and his friends' efforts emphasize the power of technological discourse to normalize the possibilities of new technologies and imagine new practices. In Veles, where personal gain is emphasized over cultural benefits like the overthrow of the publishing regime (DeVoss and Porter) and the creation of participatory publics (Jenkins, Ford, and Greene), technologies are understood less as a means for facilitating democratic participation and more as a means of profiting from users. Put differently, Boris recognized that freely available technologies were created by companies to collect and profit from user data, and having recognized that reality, Boris employed a set of practices that enabled him to profit personally from an already-created network of hierarchical and monetized information (Selber 75). As Boris indicated, he utilized three platforms to profit from others: Google to find bogus articles, Wordpress to post his bogus articles, and Facebook to share his bogus articles. In each case, Boris used these platforms in ways that undermined the purposes of their design: in the case of Google, providing legitimate businesses with another revenue stream and in the case of Facebook, facilitating community-building. Through his deictic uses of Google and Facebook, Boris appropriated freely available tools designed to promote American values of entrepreneurship and democracy into a means of luring AdSense customers to sites with content posing as journalistic reporting.

Matthew Hindman, in his study of the relationships between infrastructures and democracy, concludes that search engine algorithms like Google's PageRank have undermined the democratizing

potential of the web. As Hindman has found, Google's PageRank program and search engine algorithms like it have created a self-perpetuating hierarchy of internet traffic by rewarding the already-most visible sites with still more visibility: "Heavily linked sites should continue to attract more links, more eyeballs, and more resources with which to improve the site content, while sites with few links remain ignored" (Hindman 55). In tandem with an overwhelming concentration of the market between Google and Microsoft ("Latest Rankings"), search engines have ensured that while anyone can have a platform to speak online, very few are actually heard. In the realm of political discourse, this has created what Hindman refers to as "a new media elite" of familiar sites that receive the bulk of user traffic regardless of whether users get to the site by searching for a specific outlet or specific content (132). Such hierarchies are not created by search engines alone; Tarleton Gillespie has identified that Facebook's algorithms also manipulate information that distort the "public discourse they host" (2):

Social media platforms don't just guide, distort, and facilitate social activity—they also delete some of it. They don't just link users together; they also suspend them. They don't just circulate our images and posts, they also algorithmically promote some over others. Platforms pick and choose. (1)

Although the algorithms that drive Facebook's feed are less known than Google's search algorithms, what is known is that despite recent tweaks to the feed algorithms, Facebook posts with a higher engagement metric—a calculation of aggregate likes and time spent reading—tend to show up on more feeds (Oremus). In the same way that Google links are the metric for organizing information, desirability is the metric in a Facebook feed, so it is no surprise that posts are often designed to go viral by use of clickbait titles and hyperbolic claims. While Facebook's hierarchy is created differently, it's still a hierarchy with a similar effect: the prioritization of desirable information over accurate information.

As Kevin Brock and Dawn Shepherd have recently argued, this algorithm-created stratification of information is a strategy of persuasion employed by software companies to persuade their users while hiding from users that they have been persuaded: "we allow ourselves to be persuaded that we are the only agents involved in a particular situation when, in reality, there are networks of visible and invisible actors working to persuade us to specific ends" (21). The means of persuasion used by companies through their algorithms provides users with an expected event—like the discovery of information—to facilitate a second event that the user does not expect: the transformation of the user into a consumer through the monetization of their interests and browsing history (Brock and Shepherd 23). Put differently, Google's system was created to turn their users into their consumers by way of their PageRank and AdSense algorithms. Facebook makes a similar rhetorical move by inviting users to provide data under the guise of forming a network—the expected event—in order to achieve their end of targeting advertisements to users—the unexpected event.

Boris's use of these platforms suggests that he intimately understood the persuasive means and rhetorical ends of Google and Facebook in ways that technological discourse emphasizing the cultural benefits of these systems often do not. Like Google and Facebook, Boris turned his users into consumers while hiding that reality for his own financial gain, and he accomplished this goal

through an effective set of practices reflective of network-specific critical and rhetorical literacies. First, he understood the economic realities of networks: how companies have monetized and created opportunities for consumers to monetize their information. Second, he learned more intimately who his audience is and what kind of content they want to read. Third, he learned where to post his articles on Facebook—in spaces where audiences distrust both the old mainstream media and the new, Googlized media elite. Fourth, he learned how to arrange the ads and content in his articles to

“Boris’ use of these platforms suggests that he intimately understood the persuasive means and rhetorical ends of Google and Facebook in ways that technological discourse emphasizing the cultural benefits of these systems often do not.”

maximize the number of ad clicks he could get on any one article through an intentional arrangement of his borrowed content and his AdSense ads. Put differently, Boris was a proficient remixer, skilled at employing the practices of assemblage and redistribution to achieve

his goals. As Dustin Edwards has noted in his historical and typological account of remix, the re-use and transformation of existing works is intimately tied to the practice of imitation as a practice of invention (43). By imitating the look of news sites on his own domains and the discourse of hyper-partisan groups on Facebook, Boris persuaded people that he was both a reliable news outlet and a concerned citizen sharing information that the mainstream media would not. In so doing, Boris imitated the persuasive strategy of Facebook and Google by cultivating a consumer base without their knowledge of becoming consumers.⁴

Conclusion: Developing Information Literacy for a Corporatized Network

Although Boris’s use of free technologies raises ethical, legal, economic, and political questions about the nature of information, networks, and platforms, this account of Boris’s AdSense work suggests that a more intimate understanding of the nature of networks and their corporatization is vital to information literacy. Within the context of a network that incentivizes desirable content over truthfulness, Boris and others doing AdSense work were skilled producers and distributors of discourse. Specifically, they were skilled at imitating the rhetorical strategy of the programmers who make free tools available to the public in order to profit from the public’s data. Although Boris and his peers were not making tools, they developed and enacted literacies that enabled them to find new uses for existing tools that were—to Boris’s credit—at odds with their original design. Wordpress was not designed to host Google ads, and Facebook was not designed to function as a space for the circulation of misinformation. Likewise, programs like AdSense and PageRank as well as Facebook’s feed algorithms were not designed to incentivize clickbait. And more significantly, Google’s and Facebook’s algorithms were not designed to provide an opportunity for users to personally profit from their use. However, Celeskoski, the Nature Brothers, and Boris—among others—envisioned and successfully enacted new uses for these technologies to meet their own purposes. Boris was successful in meeting his own purposes precisely because he understood the economics underlying networked information, and this more complete understanding of the nature of networks allowed Boris to realize his goal, albeit through questionable means. While the practices

these AdSense workers employed were disingenuous, the efficacy of their practices suggests the value of a technological discourse that includes the social and economic realities of networked information along with the possibilities entailed in the ability to write and publish for a global public.

Before closing, I outline an assignment designed to help students develop an information literacy that encompasses both a critical understanding of the nature of networks and the rhetorical possibilities of researching, writing, and distributing information online. While the following recommendation is informed by Boris's AdSense work and the literacies entailed in that work, it deviates from Boris's questionable ethics. Instead, these recommendations have at their center the mission of rhetoric to promote democracy and citizenship, or as Nancy Welch articulates, "understanding and teaching rhetoric as a *mass, popular art*—the practice of ordinary people who make up our country's multiethnic, working-class majority, in their press for relief, reform, and radical change" (474, emphasis hers). To

that end, the recommendation that follows is largely focused on the kinds of non-scholarly texts that Boris assembled, published, and redistributed. The reason for this focus on non-academic writing is twofold: first, as the Stanford History Education Group report shows, students are underprepared to evaluate texts not traditionally housed in library holdings,

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which are the overwhelming majority of texts that circulate online. Second, in keeping with the commitment to teach rhetoric as the practice of ordinary people, these recommendations also gesture to everyday instances of research—what David Barton and Mary Hamilton refer to as “sense making” (231)—that people practice to solve practical problems and promote personal change. Because such research most often involves non-academic texts and often occurs informally where the mechanisms for reflecting upon and evaluating knowledge are also informal, the development of a useful information literacy must include sense making with nonacademic texts.

There are a wealth of strategies, practices, heuristics, and checklists available online and in writing handbooks designed to help students assess the credibility of information during research. As noted previously, Mike Caulfield's textbook, *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers*, stands out among an already-staggering body of materials because unlike other materials, Caulfield's book provides a set of strategies for finding what's true online in a manner reflective of the nature of networked information:

We will show you how to use date filters to find the source of viral content, how to assess the reputation of a scientific journal in less than five seconds, and how to see if a tweet is really from the famous person you think it is or from an impostor. We'll show you how to find pages that have been deleted, figure out who paid for the web site you're looking at, and whether the weather portrayed in that viral video actual matches the weather in that location on that day. We'll show you how to check a Wikipedia page for recent vandalism,

and how to search the text of almost any printed book to verify a quote. We'll teach you to parse URLs and scan search result blurbs so that you are more likely to get to the right result on the first click. And we'll show you how to avoid baking confirmation bias into your search terms.

By acknowledging the variety of purposes and texts that circulate online, Caulfield's book helps students develop an information literacy that resembles the literacies Boris employed to deceive readers for his personal gain. In other words, the goal of Caulfield's book is to help students understand—like Boris—the economic and political realities of networked information. Using Caulfield's book as a guide for understanding the variety of information online and how to assess that information for credibility, this assignment asks students to apply Caulfield's strategies through the use of a social annotation platform to collaboratively annotate a set of texts to determine their credibility.

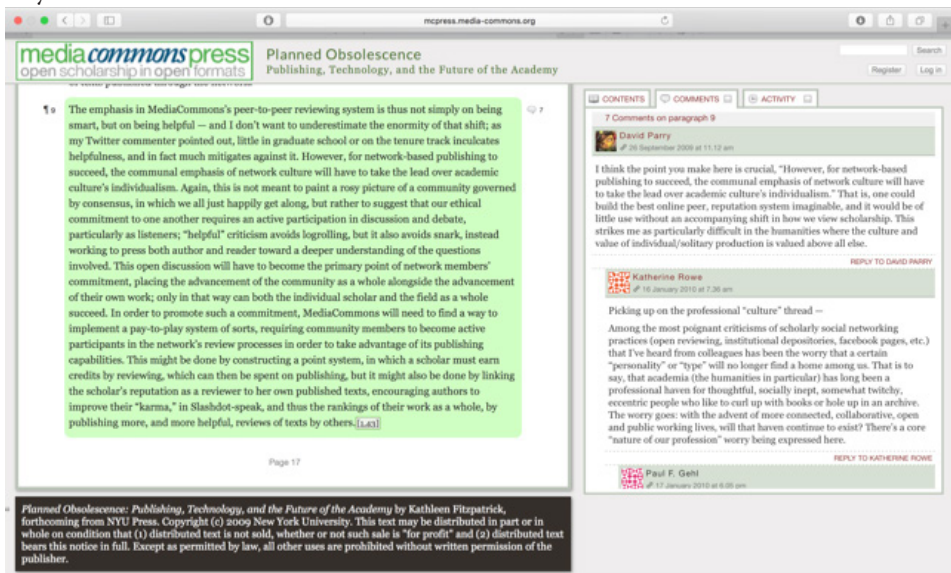


Figure 5: Screenshot of a selection from Kathleen Fitzpatrick's *Planned Obsolescence* pre-published through the MediaCommons Press.

In digital humanities circles, social annotation has taken hold as a method of evaluating, commenting, and providing feedback on texts in process in order to explore and enact new models of scholarly publishing through a peer-to-peer and consensus-driven approach to peer review. Venues like MediaCommons Press (<http://mcpres.media-commons.org>) and MLA Commons (<https://mla.hcommons.org>) reimagine scholarly publishing as a network where readers can provide writers feedback and critique on unfinalized manuscripts. Elsewhere, web designers have used Genius, a web-based social annotation platform, to annotate texts through a Chrome extension or through the Genius.com website where readers annotate literature, news stories, and lyrics. In my own classes, I have asked students to use social annotation platforms to call their attention to the social dimensions of reading, the relationship between technologies and meaning making, and the

role of past-experience in meaning making. Using a platform like the Hypothes.is (<http://hypothes.is>) browser extension, students form collaborative groups and comment on a reading in a shared web environment. Although the students' takeaway from this activity varies according to the nature of the class and the nature of the assignment, social annotation provides students an opportunity to put into practice theories of meaning making by defamiliarizing routine behaviors involved in reading for class. For this assignment, the social annotation tool has two purposes. First, given the sometimes-complex nature of information that circulates online, the collaborative assessment of information provides opportunities for students to learn from their peers the many forms that both incredible and credible information can take and the potential indicators of incredible information. Second, because the texts most likely to misinform or deceive students come in genres that students encounter every day, a social annotation platform helps make the familiar unfamiliar. By helping to defamiliarize everyday genres like social media posts, social annotation complements the goal of helping students more carefully examine the texts that appear in their research projects and shape their everyday lives.

Insofar as networks have impacted scholarly research by making previously-hidden texts and sites publically available, so too have networks impacted—and continue to impact in new ways—the literacies needed for civic participation. In an age where the President of the United States tweets policies at 3AM and teenagers in Macedonia who were trying to supplement their income undermined

“In an age where the President of the United States tweets policies at 3AM and teenagers in Macedonia who were trying to supplement their income undermined the Fourth Estate, technological discourse that is agnostic to differences among media no longer suffices.”

the Fourth Estate, technological discourse that is agnostic to differences among media no longer suffices. Likewise, given the still-evolving and deictic nature of technology, observing the nature of information in a current moment is key to students' development of information literacies. The approach I have outlined above—analysis

of texts that students find, use, and value when conducting research—helps them come together to observe and analyze “the contours and the changing dynamics of the world of information” that informs our research and our democracy (ACRL). As information continues to change as a result of new goals, new technologies, and new uses for existing technologies, students' developing literacies and technological discourses should reflect the changing nature of the technologies that have become integral to academic contribution and democratic participation.

NOTES

¹ Hunt Allcott and Matthew Gentzkow have recently released findings from a study, “Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election,” in which they argue that fake news was not a determining factor in the outcome of the 2016 presidential election.

² Caulfield’s book was featured recently as the Digital Rhetoric Collaborative’s Webtext of the Month for April, 2017. As part of the feature, Kristin Ravel interviewed Caulfield about the project.

³ After the election and with the emergence of new systems for flagging misinformation shared online, Boris abandoned his two existing sites and has not yet developed a plan for a topic of focus for his future AdSense work.

⁴ It is also worth noting that the news Boris shared was not originally his: it was always a compilation of existing information redistributed through one of his websites and Facebook profiles.

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How Automated Writing Systems Affect the Circulation of Political Information Online

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In the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, the circulation of fake news and its role in shaping popular opinion became an immediate concern to those who believed evidence-based inquiry and argument should be important components of public discourse. Popular news stories from November 2016 suggested that so-called “fake news” may have swayed the election in favor of Trump (Dewey; Parkinson), although more recent research suggests that the effects of fake news are unlikely to have tipped the balance (Allcott and Gentzkow). It will take researchers a long time to determine how much influence the consumption of fake news had on the US presidential election result. And in part because now-President Trump wields the term “fake news” as a slur against established news outlets such as CNN, NBC, and the *New York Times* (@realDonaldTrump), what kind of news qualifies as “fake” is a subject for heated debate. Rather than engage with the specific and current politics of fake news in this article, we instead look at the online ecosystem from which it has emerged. We argue that “fake news” is only one instantiation of a shift that literacy studies will need to reckon with to understand how people encounter texts on an everyday basis: a shift to the reliance on computational and automated writing systems to circulate texts and amplify their distribution.

Writers adapt to communities and orient their literacy practices to them as they share work, obtain feedback, collaborate, and filter information. In online writing environments, some of that work is now being shifted to, or mediated by, algorithms and “bots” (both of which are defined below). When we write online or even in our word processors, our writing wrestles with, activates, and is at times subject to this automated ecosystem. On a routine level, we encounter these systems when we search for information through Google, use spellcheck, share stories we like on Facebook, or accept Netflix and Amazon recommendations for media to consume. Our writing vies for attention in conference hashtags on Twitter that get overrun with marketers. We write with filtering algorithms on social networks that prioritize some posts over others and alongside “fake news” generated or distributed by automatic writing systems such as “bots,” which can spit out and circulate links, text, and images according to their programs. Roughly half of internet traffic now is automated, mostly by bots (Zeifman). In other words, our writing and reading online—that is to say, in general—is inexorably molded by automated systems enacted in software.

Of course, literary, academic and workaday writers have been using writing systems such as word processors to automate particular literacy tasks for a while (Leblanc; Baron; Kirschenbaum). And writing environments and practices have always been mediated by both human systems and

objects: the material barrier of access to writing instruments, printers' licenses, literacy education, publishers, publicity and distribution channels, and so on. The same holds true for web environments. Despite the romantic 1990s idea—one that still persists—that writing on the web circumvented “gatekeepers” to access and distribution, online publishing can be as heavily mediated by gatekeepers as the print market, although the online market can have different players and pressures: corporate giants like Amazon, algorithms that determine bestseller lists, and automated reputation measures (Laquintano). Taken further: when we write on digital platforms, it is now impossible to untangle textual writing from code writing (Vee; Rieder). And parts of that code work to mimic or automate human activity to influence the kinds of texts we encounter.

With the reminder that writing contexts are always mediated, we begin with the uncontroversial assertion that literacy is not simply about producing or decoding alphabetic text; it is also about processing written and multimodal information, judging it, assimilating it and making sense of it in relation to other texts and worlds. It follows, then, that the shift from human to algorithmic production and evaluation of texts represents an important shift in literacy practices. Working with this special issue's theme of “fake news,” this article explores the question of why many people encountered it to begin with: what's the information environment in which this “news” is able to circulate with such vigor? To be sure, fake news has an extensive history (Soll). In the supermarket checkout line, the *Weekly World News* has long provided us with updates about Sasquatch and vampires, but there has never been much conversation in professional composition literature about whether fake news sources like *The Onion* threaten the foundations of democracy. Instead, we argue here, the current iteration and debate around fake news is indicative of a larger change in our contemporary writing ecosystem, now driven by the growing importance of algorithmic systems of text production, distribution, circulation, and curation. These systems penetrate much deeper into our literate lives than tabloid stands have, and the phenomenon behind the current uptick in fake news is how we now write with and among code-based systems such as bots, algorithms, and social media platforms.

Below, we outline how code-based technologies create the ecosystem in which fake news spreads, with particular attention to how automated writing activity (i.e., bots) and algorithms on social media platforms can influence this ecosystem. These software-based systems often replace or mimic human editorial and writing practices, and so we sometimes refer to them collectively as “robot writers,” following Bill Hart-Davidson. The idea of writing “robots” also highlights the fact that information processing can be automated just as easily as the processing of physical materials. We approach our questions about these automated writing systems through a critical synthesis of a rapidly emerging body of literature that attempts to determine how bots, networks of bots, and algorithmic editorial systems influence public discourse by intervening in text distribution and circulation practices. Qualitative, quantitative, and theoretical research is now being produced in fields like media and information studies, sociology, political science, and computer science. Here, we concentrate on the issues most salient to the literacy practices of everyday people and the ways their activity might overlap with, or be influenced by, digital environments rife with robot writers as robot and human writers mingle on social media platforms.

Our exploration builds on previous work in composition studies that points to automated

reading and writing practices, including computer software and scripts that attempt to grade writing (Perelman), read writing in ways that provide feedback to writers (Omizo et al.), determine rhetorical moves (Omizo and Hart-Davidson), edit writing (Kennedy), and produce writing (Brown, *Ethical Programs*). In the coming years, software to automate particular writing tasks will grow more sophisticated and widespread, perhaps continuing to displace human editors and writers. Noting that we are already writing in the age of robots and algorithms, we show how and why those automated writing systems helped to heat the fake news flashpoint and what implications these systems have for literacy in the twenty-first century. Anxieties as well as real changes in writing and reading practices have always accompanied changing technologies of writing, and automated writing systems of bots and algorithms offer a new slate of changes on an accelerated scale. Specifically, we examine the shift from human editorial processes to algorithmic ones and the operations of bots in social network ecosystems, two critical phenomena in the circulation of fake news online. We argue that knowing the robots are with us is critical for understanding writing and reading in our current landscape and then raise some questions that literacy educators will need to consider when they think about how they prepare writers and readers to access and interact with information online.

From Editors to Algorithms

The anxiety over so-called “fake news” is a recent installment in a longer history of reactions to changes in writing and publishing technologies and the ways that they influence how information circulates to the public. In an example made popular in Jay David Bolter’s foundational *Writing Space*, a monk in Victor Hugo’s novel *Notre-Dame de Paris* worried that the rise of the print book would destroy the church’s authority (Bolter 1). When cheap printing became available in the 18th century and allowed more people to publish material such as political pamphlets, Alexander Pope wrote in *The Dunciad* of a kingdom of Dulness and Dunces overrunning Great Britain. More recently, when it became clear that the web was going to offer an unsurpassed level of cheap access to publishing, some commentators celebrated freedom from “gatekeeping” editors, while others lamented the low quality of information that was likely to circulate without vetting from publishers.

When it comes to threats to the integrity of public discourse, there are a number of differences in our present case compared with anxieties of the past. Although social networks and online forums, where much of public discourse now takes place, enable greater access to participation for everyday writers in ways not dissimilar from those of cheap presses, the current scene includes more aggressive intervention by nonhuman actors, such as bots, that generate writing. Humans are, of course, usually responsible for authoring the computational processes that generate writing such as we address here (see Brown, “The Machine”), but by making certain aspects of online writing computational, human authors can typically operate with greater speed, scale, and autonomy. Thus, automated writing systems are potentially more disruptive than the previous threats to print economy institutions that adjudicated information.

As the term “algorithm” has grown in importance in contemporary culture, it has moved away from the more specific definition that may be used by a software engineer to designate simply a

“series of steps for organizing and acting on a body of data to quickly achieve a desired outcome” to include the socio-technical constellations that surround their production and deployment (Gillespie, “Algorithm” 19). As Tarleton Gillespie argues, scholars interested in the impact of computation on culture now use “algorithm” and “algorithmic” to include “not just algorithms themselves, but also the computational networks in which they function, the people who design and operate them, the data and users on which they act, and the institutions that provide these services” (25). Like these scholars, what we are most concerned about is not the precise algorithm itself but the influence of computational “procedure into human knowledge and social experience” (25). While the term “algorithmic” tends to encompass a broad sociotechnical constellation, the definition of a bot tends

“Software-based algorithms and bots play incredibly important roles in determining what kinds of information are circulated online, and to what degree.”

to be deployed more precisely: computer code designed and used to automate a variety of tasks. Social bots specifically automate tasks on social media, and they are designed to mimic humans and interact with them in order to alter human

behavior. Malicious social bots are a subcategory of bots that “mislead, exploit, and manipulate social media discourse with rumors, spam, malware, misinformation, slander, or even just noise” (Ferrara et al.).

Software-based algorithms and bots play incredibly important roles in determining what kinds of information are circulated online, and to what degree. These algorithms are influenced by a mix of human and nonhuman actors: the choices of engineers and editors, readers’ preferences as measured by clicks, scrolls, and shares, and groups of professionals and amateurs who try to exploit vulnerabilities in the information ecosystem for political or economic profit. When we shift to software that arbitrates, circulates, and amplifies information of any sort—including fake news—singular human writers and readers, regardless of what they have to say or want to know, are forced to play a new game, one that includes encounters with automated writing systems.

Algorithmically aided filtering affects readers as much as writers. In the month before the US presidential election, Facebook—a major site using personalized algorithmic filtering to determine what readers see—saw more engagement with fake news than with mainstream news, including a headline that the Pope had endorsed Trump (Silverman). One challenge for potential readers in this new system is that malicious actors have learned how to exploit many of the tenuous ways we’ve learned to discern what’s true online. Even if a story has been shared a million times on social media, and if it is found on a website that looks and sounds newsy, and if it is repeatedly linked from a popular hashtag, there’s no guarantee that it’s a credible story. Fake news sites often emulate the look and titles of professional news sources, e.g. the “Denver Guardian,” which falsely reported that an FBI agent in the Hillary Clinton email investigation was found dead in a murder-suicide (Silverman). Bearing the trappings of news allows stories to circulate with the veneer of credibility, aided by confirmation biases and easy mechanisms for sharing, and then magnified by popularity algorithms that push them into the purview of more readers. Some enterprising young Macedonians noticed during the 2016 presidential election that their distance from the US didn’t matter when they

launched popular and lucrative fake news sites to collect American clicks and advertising dollars (Silverman and Alexander). The global nature of the Web means that a writer's physical location is almost irrelevant to the circulation of information (real or fake) online. Americans circulate junk or fake news at a much higher rate, but people in France, the UK, and Germany were also circulating fake or junk news prior to their recent elections (Howard et al.).

“One challenge for potential readers in this new system is that malicious actors have learned how to exploit many of the tenuous ways we’ve learned to discern what’s true online.”

There were humans writing the major fake stories that circulated prior to these political events, and their motivation was, unsurprisingly, money. In the wake of the US presidential election upset, reporters for both National Public Radio and the *Washington Post* tracked down fake news

writers, who admitted that money was at least part of what motivated their work. Jestin Coler, whose fake news story about people using food stamps to buy pot resulted in proposed legislation in the Colorado House, claims to write to “infiltrate the echo chambers of the alt-right” by posting stories that confirm biases present in that community. He and his team of writers and sites found it easy to make a story go viral: “It was just anybody with a blog can get on there and find a big, huge Facebook group of kind of rabid Trump supporters just waiting to eat up this red meat that they’re about to get served” (Sydell). Paul Horner worried that he helped Trump win the election because of stories he planted about paid protesters, the Amish voting for Trump, and “crazy anti-Muslim stuff,” although he contended his writing should be likened to *The Onion’s* (Dewey). Both Horner and Coler claim that the tendency to avoid fact-checking helped stories bolstering Trump to spread rapidly on social media sites.

These stories also found their way into our news feeds not because a *human* editor thought they were relevant or important; in most cases, they began circulation with human writers sending a story out to an automated network like a botnet (a group of bots working in concert and controlled by the same owner) and then, if they were lucky, triggering a platform’s algorithm to feature the story more prominently in people’s feeds. We might think of some fake news as a symptom of an automatic system much like flash crashes on Wall Street, the rapid market fluctuations now symptomatic of high-volume algorithmic trading practices. Numbers drive social media sites in the same way that they drive finance, and in these environments, computational systems have an edge—although they are still influenced by the usual human motivations.

The media scholar Tarleton Gillespie has called the umbrella shift in which these examples happen a shift from an *editorial* model of information consumption and production to an *algorithmic* model. The availability and increased material accessibility of computation has encouraged this shift, but much of it has happened in response to the increased volume of writing online that has demanded it. Too much writing and information circulates online for humans alone to filter it; estimates place the current number of web pages in the billions. From the perspective of literacy studies, this shift means that algorithms now play a critical role in the kinds of texts we encounter in everyday life, and in certain domains perhaps even a more critical role than other humans (though these algorithms are

being influenced by human activity). As with earlier shifts in editorial and distributive mechanisms, some may argue that the quality of information has decreased as algorithms compete with editors in importance and as the volume of writing has become too much for humans to read, much less filter. The circulation and discussion over “fake” or “junk” news is one indication of this decreased quality.

This space where clicks and recommendations and trending topics are determined algorithmically is a space of “calculated publics,” according to Gillespie, by which he means that computational processes don’t simply record audiences but actively produce them as well. When algorithmic logic overtakes editorial logic, we move from questions of ineffable human taste to what kinds of information can be quantified and returned to information seekers. Gillespie notes that professional editors curated, and thus directed us to, much of the reading material we encountered across the twentieth century, but as literates and information seekers reading and writing online, we are increasingly assigning that function to computer algorithms—that is, search engines, newsfeeds and recommended links—which register human activity and then return information to us based on a slew of different calculations. For example, the kinds of participatory activity common on social networks provide us with information partially based on whether those in our network find a text worthy of attention (an indicator of value), and search engines provide us with information partially based on calculating the attention a texts has received (whether other websites have linked to that content or re-posted it, etc.).

The shift from the editorial model to the algorithmic model is not complete; algorithms still index an incredible amount of information produced via editorial intervention, like newspapers, and human editors often still make decisions about when automated systems such as bots are allowed intervene in writing (e.g., to protect entries or add signatures on Wikipedia, according to R. Stuart Geiger). However, even in this incomplete state, algorithmic logic and its various implementations affect the content of what we read, even among institutions that have heavily relied on editors. Note the difference, for instance, between an online newspaper that can track clicks and time spent on each story and a paper newspaper that measures customer consumption only by subscription and letters to the editor. The online newspaper has the opportunity to employ usage data and analytics to shape future content strategies to have greater appeal to their audiences. And, at least in other domains, there is evidence that content providers are doing exactly that. Blake Hallinan and Ted Striphas, for example, document the way in which Netflix has begun to plan content and programming based on analysis they have done on audiences and usage patterns. Gillespie makes a bold assertion about the consequences of this shift to algorithmic intervention in information-seeking practices: “that we are now turning to algorithms to identify what we need to know is as momentous as having relied on credentialed experts, the scientific method, common sense, or the word of God” (168). Our information filtering processes as readers, and thus the ways we hope to reach readers, as writers, have fundamentally changed.

In the same way that human editorial processes have been traditionally hidden from ordinary readers, so too are many of the same calculations that influence the circulation of content. The online distribution systems that circulate and amplify our news stories most are often social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, which use closed algorithms that influence what

users see and in what order. The Pew Research Center reported that about 62% of US adults got news on social media in early 2016, with about 44% using Facebook. Pew noted that 18% got their news from social media often, and a more recent study in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* indicated that 14% of respondents found social media their “most important source” of news (Allcott and Gentzkow). Yet, in one study, 62.5% of Facebook users were unaware that their content was filtered via computational algorithms (Eslami et al.). There are some immediate risks here, not least of which is the highly tailored information customization that can insulate readers and writers from diverse viewpoints and lead to polarization. One of the starkest examples of this polarization is the “Red Feed, Blue Feed” graphic created by the Wall Street Journal (Keegan). This is an interactive web installation that allows users to view a conservative and liberal Facebook feed side by side on a variety of issues such as immigration and gun control. Eli Pariser warned of the problems of such “filter bubbles,” arguing that social networks invisibly curated our feeds to tell us what we wanted to hear and what we already believed.

Companies blackbox (deliberately hide) their algorithms for competitive advantage, but also because gaming their proprietary algorithms would be easier if they were transparent. An entire industry is built around helping people or companies to increase their visibility on Facebook and other algorithmically-governed platforms; search engine optimization (SEO) companies attempt to reverse-engineer the algorithms, guessing at what works. Their strategies last until Facebook and other social networking sites (SNSs) change their algorithms again—and what we have then is a Red Queen’s race, where both sides move fast but essentially stay in the same place. For instance, although Facebook says their algorithmic techniques have improved at removing recidivist accounts that promote terrorism, they note that “[t]his work is never finished because it is adversarial, and the terrorists are continuously evolving their methods too” (Bickert and Fishman). While algorithms change often, Nick Seaver points out that we cannot think of a platform’s algorithm as being unitary even at a given point of time. Platforms often employ multiple algorithms at once—different ones for different groups of users, or through A/B testing, where trial algorithms essentially undergo live beta testing. “Personalization” of search engines such as Google mean that different results are returned to people based on their browsing history, which likely has more to do with targeted advertising than enhanced user experience (Feuz, Fuller, and Stalder). Moreover, even if we had full access to the algorithms governing social media sites, the use of complex machine learning in the development of these algorithms means that even their engineers cannot fully explain their behavior (Seaver). Understanding the workings behind the distribution systems of social media platforms is further complicated by the fact that they are not fully automated systems. They are instead hybrid, as the platforms enlist human labor to filter, report on, and censor content such as graphic videos or incendiary speech (Roberts). Google, Facebook, and Twitter have all considered or deployed methods to crowdsource the review of the huge volume of user-generated content they deliver in order to combat false information (Dwoskin).

Thus, in the current literacy scape, editorial logic and algorithmic logic converge in foggy ways—which are difficult for individual users to know—and then together condition the information we encounter online. This includes the editorial decision-making processes of corporate media giants,

the technological implementations of Silicon Valley behemoths, the widely distributed activity of humans processing information, and the history and activity of the individual user. With the deep integration of algorithms into major sites where we write and receive news, we are experiencing a significant shift in how we are exposed to information and how we circulate the texts that are important to us. But it is seemingly a messy time where models of information publishing and delivery overlap and compete, where values of public discourse compete and conflict with values of individual users and the corporations who create platforms for participation. For this reason, Gillespie notes that “we cannot simply study algorithms and their effects; rather, we must study the interactions between providers of information and algorithmic assessors of information, sometimes a confluence of interests and sometimes a contest, and the results that these interacting forces generate” (“Santorum” 75).

This complex intersection between algorithms, effects, and contested interests is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the ways that minority groups are represented and discussed online. As Safiya Umoja Noble argues, human decision, shaped as it is by racial stereotypes and cultural assumptions, gets embedded in search algorithms through feedback for ranked results, and is then delivered in a naturalized, seemingly objective package—and thus can be even more damaging than if it were presented in an obviously racist way. For example, Kabir Alli’s YouTube video of his Google search for “three black teenagers,” which resulted in mugshots, and “three white teenagers,” which resulted in stock photos of happy teens, went viral in 2016, and many accused Google of racism. Google’s algorithms reflect a racist society, and Noble contends that Silicon Valley’s lack of diversity is one reason algorithms like Google’s fail to recognize and counteract such racist results. People depend on search results to be accurate, and Noble says “they are when you are looking for the hours for the local Starbucks. But when you are looking for information, ideas or concepts, the algorithm often fails us deeply and yet society does not really see that the algorithm as a failure except when these kinds of egregious moments happen” (Guynn, sic). Human review has problems, too, especially in the context of SNSs that serve international communities with widely differing cultures and norms. A recent report from ProPublica noted from Facebook’s internal training documents that human adjudication of account banning and post censorship was governed by rules that protected large groups such as white men, but not what Facebook considers “subgroups” such as black children or female drivers, demonstrating the strange and sometimes disturbing balance human and algorithms make in filtering information in online and by default international spaces (Angwin).

To be sure, there are small-scale user attempts to control the quality of information that flows through the web, much of which employs algorithmic logic even as it is subjected to it. To maintain their integrity and userbase, online communities must grapple with increased volume of writing, some of it by bots or human spammers taking advantage of the ways that an algorithmic logic filters information. Online writers develop conventions of “micro-celebrity” to help minimize their exposure to low value content (boyd and Marwick), and self-publishing book communities—in concert with website owners—develop numerous conventions to help circulate valuable content and suppress chaff (Laquintano). With help from website owners, these conventions can be enforced in the code of the community’s online forum and also with social norms and crowdsourced filtering.

Additionally, community responses to automated writing often utilize automated methods similar to the ones that threaten them: they fight bots with bots. Wikipedians have developed a number of tactics to control the quality of information on the site. The site keeps revision histories they can reference when examining factual disputes, bots patrol the site for signs of vandalism, and pages for controversial topics are locked and can only be modified by trusted editors. Thus, human writing and code writing can be united in a mission to preserve a community's discourse and identity.

What the fake news epidemic of the 2016 US presidential election showed was that these distributed and hybrid gatekeeping mechanisms are currently quite vulnerable to exploitation, especially if communities of ill-informed readers are actively circulating content that will confirm their bias. This is how the exploitability of these systems and the openness of web and social media publishing led to a bunch of Macedonian teenagers generating clickbait fake news for Americans for cash (Silverman and Alexander). Alice Marwick and Rebecca Lewis have recently reported in a white

paper on a number of tactics used for media manipulation, and some groups have been extremely deft in creating strategies to exploit vulnerabilities that exist in the algorithmic model (34-40). They document a number of network effects that allow media manipulators to channel the attention of traditional media outlets. Manipulators will create a hoax or

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float a conspiracy with the hopes it makes its way through the media chain, from blogs to local media outlets to, perhaps, national media (39). For the manipulators who can exploit attention in a number of ways, how the media frames the event matters less than whether it receives attention at all (39). With the incredible time and attention paid to conspiracy theories before and after the election, the fringe element of media manipulators, who likely had disproportionate influence on public debate, showed us exactly why contemporary writers need to be aware of the strengths and vulnerabilities of the tools in the current media ecology. Moreover, the emergence of media manipulation and its highly distributed nature evaded the same kind of derision in the press that the established media attracted, even if some of the platforms like Facebook were mildly criticized for their complicity.

In the next section, we look more specifically at one automated writing tactic that manipulators use to get media attention: bots. Bots are small software applications programmed to run scripts to perform automated tasks on the Internet. They represent one way to take advantage of our current shift in information-filtering practices and provide an excellent example of how technologically aware writers must be as they orient themselves to the new online writing ecosystem.

Bots in the New Ecosystem of Online Writing

Bots engage in a spectrum of behaviors online, ranging from policing Wikipedia, as mentioned above (see Krista Kennedy for a writing and rhetoric perspective on these bots), to autoresponding to

customer queries, to trading stocks, or to automating shopping for items that are in extraordinarily high demand. We hone in here on the role of bots in the spread and circulation of writing, especially on social networking sites, or SNSs. On SNSs populated by hundreds of millions of people, bots can participate in what one research group called “engineered social tampering” that serve the economic and political interests of their creators (Ferrara, Varol, Davis, Menczer, and Flammini 2). Much of this manipulation comes in the form of advertising, which serves the economic interests of bot creators, but in ways no more insidious than traditional print or video ads. As long as they comply with automation policies on SNSs (e.g., Twitter’s Automation rules <https://support.twitter.com/articles/76915>), bots such as Patron Tequila’s Bot-tender, which suggests drink recipes over Direct Message, can boost brand loyalty and engagement, especially among the tantalizing commercial demographic of Millennials (Lull). While Twitter does suspend abusive bots (e.g., those that tweet too frequently, duplicate purposes, target trending topics, or direct message without permission, according to their Automation rules), the increasingly important role of bots in marketing through Twitter and Facebook messaging means that the role of bots in SNS discourse is essentially protected by commercial interests. This openness to commercial advantage comes with vulnerabilities, as James J. Brown, Jr. has argued: once a network opens itself to the outside, it can be used—and abused—by friend and foe alike (*Ethical Programs*). In arenas of political discourse, the influence of bots can be subtle, and even more so because they often operate in a distributed fashion that doesn’t trigger banning from the SNS. Bots have been deployed as fake populations to make certain viewpoints seem far more popular than they are, and to manipulate the emotional tenor of a discussion on social media in an effort to influence users’ perception of reality (Ferrara, Varol, Davis, Menczer, and Flammini 3). Often, it is socialbots that do this kind of work, and there is a burgeoning and powerful body of research on socialbots that raise crucial questions about their role in the shaping of public discourse.

Unlike the bots that crawl the web to help search engines function or monitor Wikipedia pages, socialbots are computer programs that exist on social media networks and mimic human profiles in an attempt to convince humans the bots are just more users among many. In other words, socialbots are either designed to pass the Turing Test in social media spaces—or, alternatively, they rely on social media users to not inspect their activity closely enough to tell. After establishing a presence, socialbots can engage in a variety of scripted behaviors in an attempt to manipulate public opinion. They can follow a politician en masse to make it appear as if that politician is much more popular than s/he actually is. They can attract followers and friends, use hashtags, and re-circulate or re-tweet content such as fake news to popularize it. They can repeat information such as fake news, but they can also carry on conversations with human users by mining the Web for relevant text or cloning particular social profiles to simulate legitimacy (Ferrara, Varol, Davis, Menczer, and Flammini). These socialbots introduce more complexity to information circulation and the way we are exposed to information; they are layered on the surface of social networks and through their activity attempt to influence the algorithms that determine a user’s information consumption.

Socialbots have thrived on SNSs designed in ways that accommodate bot behavior. As Douglas Guilbeault explains, the vast amount of writing and images online provide the raw material for

socialbot creators to generate plausible stock social media profiles and text for socialbots. Short textual exchanges, often with novel abbreviations and typos when humans write them, tend to provide cover for socialbots' infelicities with natural language. Emoticons give them seemingly complex speech with wide latitude for sensemaking. And the removal of humans from much of the editorial process means that socialbots often need to pass muster only with human-decision-simulating algorithms, such as they are themselves. Networks of socialbots following each other in social media platforms can effectively bolster their social media currency and help them pass through both human and algorithmic filters. Because of the ways they can effectively draw on resources and operate in constrained systems, these bots can be difficult to detect. But even if human or nonhuman users do detect them, the design of social networks and their emphasis on popularity incentivizes users to friend and follow bots (Guilbeault). They operate within social network systems and are well-tailored to do just that. Because socialbots thrive under these particular conditions, Guilbeault argues that we must understand them ecologically. He introduces the idea of "platform persuasion," that is, the ability of socialbots to use the automated conversation tools SNSs provide—such as sharing messages verbatim and emoticons—in order to convince users to follow them or read their messages. Their success in these systems means that it's irrelevant whether they might succeed in passing a Turing Test elsewhere. Their ability to persuade is fully enmeshed in the platform in which they operate.

We can understand Guilbeault's model in a longer tradition of rhetorical ecologies. Over the past few decades, rhetorical theory has moved away from models of persuasion that consider how a rhetor with a single text might persuade an audience and toward models of rhetorical ecologies that seek to understand how networked people experience multiple encounters with a variety of other people, texts, and objects over time (e.g., Cooper; Edbauer). And whether we conceptualize literacy practices as happening in rhetorical ecologies, communities of practice, or activity systems—to name a few influential models in literacy studies of past decades—thinking about texts as plural, interconnected, and embedded in complex systems has been a dominant trend. Rhetoric as a field has also considered how the delivery and circulation patterns of online writing shape the production practices of writers as they anticipate reaching their audiences (Ridolfo and DeVoss; Brooke; Eyman). If we think about web content through these kinds of ecological frameworks that have been part of rhetorical thinking in composition, we see how the presence of bots designed to operate in SNSs shifts the situation not only for those who wish to deploy them but also for human writers who want their words to contend for attention in this space.

How Bots Interfere with Human Political Discourse

At least since Claude Shannon's work in communication and noise, we have known that message delivery can be plagued by transmission errors and false or irrelevant information. James Gleick discusses the perpetual challenges of filtering good information from mixed channels of good, bad and irrelevant information, a process that changes but never seems to be obviated by new technologies of communication. In the calculated online writing ecology that we focus on here, we see new kinds of interference that degrades information quality—automated amplification, spoofing

followers of accounts, and the burying of genuine human political discourse. And when we consider the influence of bots, we need to consider how they both amplify certain kinds of information and, at times, actively work to suppress other kinds. To echo our opening to this article, human political discourse has always been shaped by material and nonhuman conditions of writing, including technologies that amplify or suppress. We can now consider how *automated* amplification and suppression practices work to shape online discourse, particularly in the case of bots.

Scholarly studies of Twitter after the US midterm elections of 2010 mark some of the first efforts to measure bot participation in the spread of (mis)information. Such studies were largely produced by specialists in computer science and networked systems research with the aim of identifying characteristics of bot “abuse” in social media for the purpose of developing digital tools that would help users identify bots (<http://botornot.co/> provides an example of one tool that has been since published). Bot identification can be tricky for a number of reasons, and as Guilbeault has argued, the design of social media platforms encourage kinds of discourse to which bots are well fit. The uniform templates of SNSs encourage a uniformity of composition, which means bots do not have the challenge of “creating novel forms of self-expression” (5009). In the SNS ecosystem, bots are excellent conduits for spreading (mis)information.

Indeed, some studies of the 2010 midterm elections voiced strong concern that bots were being used to spread fake news and misinformation. P. Takis Metaxas and Eni Mustafaraj tracked a 2010 instance where nine twitter accounts began messaging other users with a URL to a website that smeared one of the political candidates with fake news in a Massachusetts election (some time later the Republican group of “Swift Boat” fame outed themselves as the creators of the site). Metaxas and Mustafaraj found the bots pushing the URL were retweeted enough by humans that it reached more than 60,000 users while rising to the top of Google results in searches for the candidate’s name. This prompted the authors to worry about the future exploitation of automated writing tools if actors could reach tens of thousands of users with “a few minutes worth of work, using automated scripts, and exploiting the open architecture” of sites like Twitter (6). Since 2010, bots and their deployment have grown more sophisticated and arguably more influential in political discourse as candidates increasingly rely on Facebook and Twitter to communicate to their constituents. Yet, as Douglas Guilbeault and Samuel Woolley warned on the eve of the 2016 US presidential election, the outsized influence bots could have on political outcomes has gone completely unremarked on by the US Federal Election Commission, whose job it is to oversee financing of elections.

Alessandro Bessi and Emilio Ferrara have been involved in developing bot detection software and have published the most extensive account of how bots intervened in the political discourse of the 2016 election cycle in the US. Published in the internet studies journal *First Monday*, their findings are worth recounting here because they offer literacy studies a detailed glimpse of the extent to which online writers were writing with and among a very active social bot population during the election. Some of the important findings relevant to our discussion: 1) Roughly 15% percent of the Twitter population they sampled consisted of bots, and those bots sent roughly 20% of the total tweets related to the election. 2) The social bots had a number of different functionalities. The authors list at least eight, including searching Twitter and retweeting relevant content, adding users

tweeting about a topic to public lists, and automatically following relevant users. 3) Humans did retweet bots in a substantial number of instances, which suggested to the authors that “bots are being very effective at spreading information in the human population” (n. pag.). After an account of how bots became active participants in online election discourse, Bessi and Ferrara conclude that bots create three tangible issues for political speech: a skewed distribution of influence, further polarization of political speech, and the continued spread of misinformation. Presumably bots could also be leveraged to spread factual information too, but as we’ve seen of late, a hyper-polarized political climate makes it difficult to agree on what constitutes factual information.

Another concern about credibility that bots introduce to our current political climate is related to human users’ followers, which are often used as a shorthand to determine a person’s popularity with the public. The most high profile example is that of Donald Trump, who has cited his large Twitter following as an indicator of his popularity. Speaking at a tech conference in May 2017, Hillary Clinton charged that his follower numbers were being goosed up by fake accounts, although the claim that he had a recent surge in followers was debunked by Snopes, a prominent fact-checking website (“Did President Trump’s Twitter”). Still, some web tools routinely estimate that roughly half of Trump’s thirty million followers appeared to be fake, or bots—something that has been widely reported in the press (Bort). In a recent check conducted by the authors, the website Twitter Audit, which analyzes a user’s followers to determine which are fake or real, indicated that 45% of Trump’s are bots, 10% of Barack Obama’s followers are bots, and 37% of Hillary Clinton’s are bots (as of July 8, 2017). But these numbers may not be accurate: a Twitter spokesman said that the widely-cited Twitter Audit website’s methods for determining bots were flawed (Johnson and Gordon), and, as discussed above, it’s hard to determine just how many of the millions of followers of these politicians are fake.

Regardless of the percentage, bot followers now seem to be part of the structure of high profile accounts. It is usually unclear whether users themselves or their representatives are organizing or buying these bot followers to boost apparent popularity, or whether they are coordinated independently. There are many services that sell bot audiences to boost a user’s status on Twitter or other SNSs (e.g., MonsterSocial), and since bots themselves aren’t against the terms of service of SNSs such as Twitter, these services are relatively affordable and above board. The business of bots is not well-known by the public though, and so their role in boosting follower numbers can be misleading. For instance, Donald Trump has bragged about his millions of followers without noting that so many of them are suspected bots, perpetuating the impression that he has more human followers than he does (Bilton).

A study by Jacob Ratkiewicz et al. warned of the use of bots for “astroturfing,” a term used to indicate a highly coordinated and well-funded campaign designed to look as if it had instead emerged from grassroots efforts. The authors argue that social networks can be exploited so that an attacker “can easily orchestrate a distributed effort” to mimic the organic spread of information through social networks (297). As an example, work by the Digital Forensic Research Lab examined the followers of fringe French-language, Russian-allied political accounts on Twitter and discovered that their followers appear to be highly active retweeters and responders, in comparison to mainstream French

media accounts. These fringe followers tended to align with Russian interests or French nationalism and opposed the centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron in the 2017 French presidential election. They also appear to have been highly automated accounts (Nimmo and Czuperski).

A slightly different astroturfing example can be found preceding the US election. While he was a presidential candidate, Trump's tweets were highly visible, and an algorithm in Twitter's mobile app that prioritized the display of replies based on rapidity of response rather than popularity incentivized political actors to compose scripts that would autorespond to Trump's tweets. When the algorithm changed to (apparently) consider aspects of the accounts responding and popularity of the response, these bots disappeared or became irrelevant and thus invisible in Twitter replies (Matsakis). Guilbeault and Woolley claim that one-third of pro-Trump tweets and one-fifth of pro-Clinton tweets between the first two presidential debates originated from automated accounts, enough for either candidate's online perception to be influenced by bots. In the ways that bots interact with media outlet and human users, they can affect the tenor of political discourse through amplifying or lending credibility to fringe politics and high profile accounts. These effects shift rapidly with political events and changes in the implementations of the algorithms that bots attempt to game.

A high-profile example illustrates how bots can demonstrably influence politics. While serving time for his crimes of digital espionage, Andrés Sepúlveda spoke to *Bloomberg Businessweek* about how he used digital means to hack elections in Latin America for over a decade. In addition to hacking into candidates' communication channels, he took advantage of the fact that expressions of candidate support on social media were often read as more genuine than advertisements or overt propaganda. He wielded both high-end fake Twitter profiles, which had been maintained for over a year and seemed more believable, and sheer quantities of lower-end profiles—30,000 that he could deploy to shape conversations, for example, about the 2012 Mexican presidential candidate (and winner of the election) Enrique Peña Nieto's plan to end drug violence. This dual strategy of high- and low-quality bots is illustrative of how bots can be coordinated to spread news quickly and believably. The reporters write,

[Sepúlveda] knew that accounts could be faked and social media trends fabricated, all relatively cheaply. He wrote a software program, now called Social Media Predator, to manage and direct a virtual army of fake Twitter accounts. The software let him quickly change names, profile pictures, and biographies to fit any need. Eventually, he discovered, he could manipulate the public debate as easily as moving pieces on a chessboard—or, as he puts it, “When I realized that people believe what the Internet says more than reality, I discovered that I had the power to make people believe almost anything.” (Robertson, Wiley, and Willis)

The fact that many people perceive online discourse as more immediate and genuine than media reporting opens the door for political interventions such as Sepúlveda's, suggesting that the perception of online discourse is not fully accounting for the ability of bots to suppress, amplify and distort information.

As bots compose, tweet, and retweet according to whatever script they've been given, they influence the tenor of the discussion and the kind of information that reaches people not simply

by motivating information and encouraging it to go viral, but also by suppressing other kinds of information. If we understand literate people as moving in and across environments saturated by the texts and objects they use to create meaning, then information suppression matters as much as degradation: the texts that *don't* appear in an environment can be as notable for their absence as the texts that *do* appear. In the liberal-democratic model of public print discourse, historical examples of textual suppression are essentially censorship and are framed in largely negative terms. Text suppression is not new, and it certainly happens on more quotidian scales as well: collections decisions for libraries, prominent displays of books on endcaps, editorials in newspapers that may not reveal all of the writer's connections, and so on. Woolley has profiled the way bots have interfered in global politics, concluding that bots have been able to “suppress free expression,” suffocate democratic speech, and demobilize activist groups.

A study on the Syrian civil war shows additional ways in which this suppression happens: for example, misdirecting attention to trending world events by flooding a hashtag with irrelevant or inaccurate information. During a six-month period in April 2012, when the Syrian civil war was a globally discussed event, Norah Abokhodair, Daisy Yoo, and David W. McDonald tracked a networked group of 130 social bots that were tweeting and re-tweeting about the war. Active for thirty-five weeks, this botnet produced thousands of tweets per week the researchers collected and analyzed for content and purpose, which helped them classify bot behavior and the attempts bots make to intervene in public discourse. The botnet had “generator bots,” or core accounts that tweeted thousands of times per week, tweets that were then retweeted by less active bots in the network. The tweets largely consisted of news, opinions, and spam. One particular behavior of these bots indicates how botnets can misdirect. In a number of instances, one of the bots would tweet photos of Hurricane Sandy and its distance from New York, but the bot would include the hashtag Syria, thus anyone searching the hashtag in search of tweets about the Syrian war would have to wade through the irrelevant content. The news of Hurricane Sandy propagated by the bot works to divert the audience's attention away from tweets that criticized the Syrian regime. Abokhodair, Yoo, and McDonald refer to this as “calculated misdirection,” borrowing a term from magicians who attempt to divert the audience's attention while orchestrating a trick.

This kind of “misdirection” has long been a part of the political propaganda game—for example, in the Chinese government's online strategy, although in that case, the propaganda issues from people. The popularly called “50 cent party,” or *wumao*, post coordinated, pro-government statements on Chinese social media accounts, effectively censoring statements critical of the government by providing conflicting accounts. Gary King, Jennifer Pan, and Margaret Roberts estimate that these posters account for about 448 million comments a year on social media, or about 1 post per 178 on commercial Chinese social media sites like Sina Wibo, although the number spikes during sensitive time periods. The study reports that these individuals, mostly government bureaucrats, don't engage with critical statements so much as they attempt to flood networks with pro-government sentiments. In 2016, the Correct the Record PAC launched an online campaign to counter anti-Hillary Clinton posters and promote issues most favorable to her candidacy—ostensibly to “correct” the high volume of negative rhetoric directed at her, exemplified by hashtags such as #crookedhillary. Correct the

Record posters were, it appears, human, and mostly responded with positive statements about Hillary, but their open presence as paid propaganda may have undermined their efforts, especially since they were able to coordinate directly with the Clinton campaign due to a loophole in campaign finance law pertaining to online activity (Foran). Pro-government human labor is easily obtained in China and payment for pro-Hillary posters may have been a small expenditure for her well-financed campaign. But on a platform where numbers matter, bots can scale up propaganda and obfuscate political viewpoints in public discourse much more cheaply. Again, given these examples of human intervention, the difference that bots make in political discourse appears to be in terms of scale rather than strategy.

What Bots Mean for Literacy Studies

While work in digital rhetoric has long noted that writers compose with and among software programs and code that act on their writing in subtle and nuanced ways (e.g., Rieder; Leblanc), we must ask whether current automated writing systems such as bots are fundamentally different from other code-based influences. Code can define a template for a social media site that will circumscribe possible kinds of writing; scan for copyright violations in a text and automatically take it offline; or filter and flag texts based on keywords associated with, say, commercial entities or terrorism. Although we can think of the bot intervention recounted above as related to these other code-based influences on online writing, we argue that automated writing systems such as bots mean that code is making its way into the composing lives of online writers in a new way—compelling them to write alongside and contend with scripts that are engineered to attract or distract both human and algorithmic readers. Human writers must interact with a legion of programmed writers, sometimes controlled by shadowy actors manipulating the circulation patterns of text in the online writing ecology.

One of the foremost voices of sociological studies of algorithms, Gillespie is quite clear on the stakes of the dynamics profiled above: “If our participation in public life [...] is being determined, or at the very least adjudicated, by algorithmic systems, then we must know more about the assumptions upon which they are based, the information about us upon which they act, the priorities they serve, and the ways in which they shape, distort, or tip the process” (“Algorithmically Recognizable” 64). As Andrés Sepúlveda noted, the general public may perceive online discourse as more “genuine” than mass media while being largely unaware of the influences of automated writing systems in mimicking “genuine” human discourse. Mass media seems to reinforce this assumption when individual Twitter accounts are quoted in news stories, stories whose titles often begin with “The Internet is Reacting to...” or “The Internet Says....” These articles are a modern day emulation of “man-on-the-street” interviews—although it is much more difficult to verify whether the quoted writing was produced by humans. In part, we’ve written this article to help literacy and composition studies take a small step forward as it considers the question of what it means when the “we” of “we must know more” about algorithms represents ordinary writers and readers. Given these misperceptions, literacy and rhetoric educators may bear some responsibility to point to the algorithms driving the complicated

automated systems that mimic and shape writing online.

But the pressing question that will need to be answered is how people can engage in responsible discourse in the face of rapidly evolving technologies that can be exploited and can also offer a bullhorn to the most detestable of political positions. And the answers can be in the mundane ways we approach technology in the classroom. Teachers of digital writing and rhetoric have begun to wrestle with this question in different forms, as digital tools and the ecosystems in which they function have cracked open, and made accessible, a slew of affordances that were formerly blackboxed for writers—affordances writers might have had little call to consider in the age of print. Even a simple blog provides opportunities for writers to make decisions about design (typography, color combinations, headings, structure, and so on), accessibility (metadata and captioning), and audience experience. Although digital tools provide these options, it is also possible to ignore most of the issues, compose in a WYSIWYG interface, and click to publish. Given the difficulties of writers in learning to control their syntax, thought, and evidence well enough to express themselves, bedrock activities of composition's pedagogical project, how much of the complexity of online writing should teachers be expected to know and to impart? To what extent do we rely on experts to close the exploitable gaps in the contemporary media ecosystem? What do writers need to know, and what competencies do they need to have to maintain a critical disposition to their own work? What can they give themselves permission to not know? What processes can they blackbox or use WYSIWYG interfaces to handle? Our discussion here about automated writing systems reveals that the scene is even more complicated than previously thought. Compounding the longstanding questions of digital pedagogy are now the challenges of optimizing one's writing and publishing practices to reach intended audiences and dealing with the crushingly complicated social dynamics that are part of online writing ecosystems. To what degree should writers accommodate algorithmic filters when they plan for the future circulation of their texts? How should they account for the copresence of bots in their online writing ecosystems?

These may be largely contextual questions that writers can address as they happen, and some of them writers will learn through experience and intuition. But as teachers of writing, we must consider to what degree should we be embedding questions of automated writing systems in our pedagogy. As researchers of writing, how should we account for the bots and algorithms in our online environments? We do our best to equip students with competencies they can deploy, grow, and adapt with as much flexibility as possible, but with finite time and resources, the question of what dynamics students should prepare for in digital composing is complex. And research in writing seems to add complexities to our understanding of the process of written communication with each new study published. Many of the studies we cite above suggest that automated writing systems such as bots and algorithmic filters will play an increasingly important role in online writing. Bots and their relationship to fake news have been a convenient manifestation for our larger argument here: that questions related to algorithms and automation are already a core part of literacy and play a profoundly important role in how we encounter texts as readers and writers. Our approaches to this fact in our teaching and research may take different forms in writing studies, but regardless of approach, we will need to acknowledge the robots among us.

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‘Globalist Scumbags’: Composition’s Global Turn in a Time of Fake News, Globalist Conspiracy, and Nationalist Literacy

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KEYWORDS

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For those whose teaching and research take part in what has been termed the “global turn” (Hesford, “Global” 787) in rhetoric and composition studies, our current political moment is one characterized by a simultaneous sense of hope and fear. Work in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies has explored comparative perspectives on the teaching of writing and writing programs (Thaiss et al.), the “internationalization” of composition research (Donahue 213), research on transnational rhetoric (Hesford, *Spectacular*; Dingo), research in world Englishes, code-meshing, and translanguaging (Guerra, Emerging, “Language”; Canagarajah, Place, “*Translingual*”; Horner and Trimbur), research that draws on post-colonialism as a critical framework for composition studies (Lunsford and Ouzgane), and work that explores transnational perspectives on writing program administration (Martins). Such work responds not only to the pedagogical exigencies brought about by globalization but also to a significant increase in the number of global programs and efforts to bring global knowledge, experiences, and perspectives to the undergraduate curriculum. Brian Ray and Connie Kendall Theado note in the introduction to their recent special issue of *Composition Studies* that the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies reflects and responds to the broader globalization of the university as it also charts out new directions for research in the field (10). As scholars in our field chart out the global turn, they must do so in relationship to a wide range of national and institutional efforts to globalize or internationalize higher education.

Over the past twenty years, American higher education, as well as higher education in many other nations, has witnessed a sustained movement to develop undergraduate and graduate curricula that can enable students to respond to the globalization of economic, intellectual, and civic life. Higher education researcher Peter Stearns has recently summed up the scope of these initiatives, stating that “it would be hard to find an American community college, college, or university that has not devoted serious new thought, in recent years, to some aspect—often, to many aspects—of global education” (1). The influence Stearns notes can easily be observed in the copious references to global citizenship and global education in the mission statements of many colleges and universities. Rebecca Hovey and a range of other scholars have broadly referred to this phenomenon as a *global*

turn in higher education (241); and, perhaps more often, as “global higher education” (NAFSA “The Changing Landscape”). The global turn and global higher education are both grounded in what is often described as the process of “internationalization.”

In contrast to more traditional global education programs, such as study abroad and student exchange, contemporary global higher education programs encompass a more extensive project often referred to as “comprehensive internationalization”—“a commitment, confirmed through action, to infuse international and comparative perspectives throughout the teaching, research, and service missions of higher education” (Hudzik 6). This broader movement to globalize higher education has gained significant influence over the past twenty-five years. Organizations like Campus Compact and the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) have launched well-funded and significant initiatives to shape integrated university curricula for global education. Projects like the AAC&U’s *Shared Futures*—a global learning partnership with 32 colleges and universities—seek to develop commonly shared educational goals and frameworks for global higher education. Despite attempts to articulate such common frameworks, global higher education, as I will explore here, encompasses a wide variety of sometimes overlapping, sometimes conflicting pedagogical and institutional projects aimed at preparing students for disciplinary, vocational, ethical, and political participation in an era of globalization. The scope and influence of this movement provides scholars and teachers working in the global turn in rhetoric and composition with an immense amount of opportunities to contribute to the global, civic mission of US colleges and universities.

On the other hand, global higher education and its visions of global citizenship are increasingly taking place against a political backdrop that positions their projects against a resurgent, populist rhetoric of American exceptionalism.¹ Shortly before his inauguration as 45th President of the United States, President Elect Donald Trump told an audience in Cincinnati, Ohio, “[t]here is no global anthem, no global currency, no certificate of global citizenship. We pledge allegiance to one flag and that flag is the American flag” (Redden). A month before the speech in which President-Elect Trump made his views on global citizenship clear, the *New York Times* ran an article, “Globalism: A Far-Right Conspiracy Theory Buoyed by Trump,” that reported alarm by organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center over the use of the term “globalism” by alt-right media outlets like *Breitbart News* and *InfoWars* (Stack). Here, globalism becomes, in its more extreme versions, indicative of a leftist conspiracy to promote a one-world government and, in its more moderate versions, an attempt to sow disloyalty to American values and promote hatred of country. Such arguments are mobilized against both higher education and K-12 education. Looking back at hard-right news sites over the past several years, we see a range of arguments against Common Core as a globalist conspiracy and global higher education as fostering a new world order. In this media, the term globalist is used to signify a progressive plot to indoctrinate American students with anti-American beliefs. In a 2012 conversation with Colin Gunn, creator of the film *IndoctriNation* about the state of the public-school system, Alex Jones, host of the fake news online network *InfoWars*, put this point bluntly: “you’re handing your kids over to a bunch of globalist scumbags” (qtd. in Dickson).

Arguments in a nationalist vein against global citizenship and global education are, of course, not new, but the articulation of anti-global rhetoric from a president-elect cannot help but resonate

deeply with both global educators and their political adversaries.² Indeed, it did not take very long for threats against global higher education to become clear. In his December 5, 2016 public letter, “My Counsel to President-Elect Donald Trump on American Higher Education,” Peter Wood, president of the National Association of Scholars (NAS), made a case for defunding service-learning and global higher education programs. While the National Association of Scholars is not an alt-right or hard-right organization and does not endorse political platforms, Wood nevertheless argues that “[t]opics such as ‘civic engagement’ and ‘global learning,’ which operate essentially as devices to make students conform to progressive political views, should be examined skeptically. Federal money right now rewards such conformist ideology. That needs to be stopped” (Wood, “My Counsel”). Following Wood’s message, the NAS issued its 500-page report *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics* in January of 2017. The stark contrast between positive depictions of global learning that we see in the mission statements of our colleges and universities and the palpable sense of leftist conspiracy and the positioning of global education as anti-American is deeply troubling.

The global turn in rhetoric and composition studies has not fully engaged the broader global turn in American higher education; but, as I will show, work in our field is fully implicated in the anti-global education arguments of the right. In the same article where she pointed to the “global turn” in rhetoric and composition studies, Wendy Hesford also pointed to specific “cautions” (795) for global research in the field. In this article, I add another central caution for the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies: the populist rhetoric advanced by the right-wing organizations aligned against global education. I trace out how this rhetoric positions global higher education, including work in rhetoric and composition studies, as anti-American, anti-intellectual, and opposed to the aims of traditional higher education. This populist rhetoric not only poses political threats to the global turn but also obscures the range of conflicting political, economic, and vocational interests that have shaped global education in the American college and university system. As scholars continue to advance the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies, we must not only develop critical responses to the anti-global education rhetoric of the right but also critically interrogate and respond to material and political motivations that have animated the broader global turn in higher education.

Populism and the Production of Civic Education and Global Education as Empty Signifiers

Anti-globalism has recently been mobilized with exceptional force in hard right and alt-right discourse, but its specific connection to global education can be seen in arguments waged against global education over the past thirty years. These populist arguments have been mobilized against global education programs in both K-12 and higher education and are developed most often through conspiracy rhetoric. Though different versions of this argument are mobilized at different times and in different places, the argument generally follows these broad strokes: education, already a bastion of leftist radicalism, provides an opportunity for radical educators to indoctrinate students with a negative view of America’s greatness and legacy in the world and to promote students who are disloyal to America while loyal to global organizations and corporations. Such an education leads to

discrimination against conservative students and faculty on campus, radical group-think, and violent protest, all of which can play to the advantage of America's enemies.³ This thumbnail sketch does not hope to characterize each response on the right to global education; but, as the examples below will show, it does capture many of the recurring claims against global higher education. Literacy plays a central role in the articulation of these claims, especially in relationship to courses in writing and rhetoric, as functional and nationalist forms of literacy are often brought together in arguments that point to the role of global education in distracting students from learning to write.⁴

“Problematic representations of global education are not a rhetorical end in themselves but part of a populist rhetoric that seeks to unsettle the educational hegemony of global higher education and replace it with nationalist alternatives. While responding to the fake news accounts of global higher education is important, scholars in rhetoric and composition studies need to turn their attention to how populist political rhetoric on the right functions as a framework for conservative think tanks and policy organizations to portray global education as a distracting, anti-intellectual, and anti-American enterprise.”

It is tempting to simply point to these characterizations as false representations of global higher education and to position those who might accept those characterizations as members of an easily swayed and misguided political public. Global higher education has received its fair share of fake news, in this case a range of articles and other media circulated through alt-right news platforms such as *Breitbart* and *The College Fix* that misleadingly portray global education as a progressive conspiracy. I would like to suggest that there is more than false representation going on in this discourse and that this discourse travels further than the audiences of alt-right news

organizations. Problematic representations of global education are not a rhetorical end in themselves but part of a populist rhetoric that seeks to unsettle the educational hegemony of global higher education and replace it with nationalist alternatives. While responding to the fake news accounts of global higher education is important, scholars in rhetoric and composition studies need to turn their attention to how populist political rhetoric on the right functions as a framework for conservative think tanks and policy organizations to portray global education as a distracting, anti-intellectual, and anti-American enterprise. Such rhetoric, I argue, functions through a process of rhetorical simplification that constructs global education and its often-stated goal of producing global citizens around a set of political binaries—global citizen/American citizen, global learning/civic learning, radical/non-partisan, disloyalty/loyalty, activist/citizen, deception/transparency. By mobilizing these binaries against global higher education, both far-right groups like the John Birch Society and conservative educational organizations like the National Association of Scholars seek to create an aura of disloyalty and anti-American sentiment around global education initiatives. What we are encountering in our current moment is not simply, I would argue, a false framing of global education, but rather an outgrowth of populist rhetoric aimed at restoring American exceptionalism to the classroom.

Understanding populism as a discursive process of reducing complexity is particularly important for our discussion of global higher education, as it enables us to recognize how the complexities of global life and global citizenship can be juxtaposed against a simpler vision of national belonging and unity. Such processes of rhetorical simplification are central to populist rhetoric. Following the work of political scientist Cas Mudde, sociologist Bart Bonikowski recently defined populism in his “Three Lessons of Contemporary Populism in Europe and the United States”: “at its core, populism is a form of politics predicated on the juxtaposition of a corrupt elite with a morally virtuous people” (10). In addition to this juxtaposition, Bonikowski also points to “institutional suspicion” as another defining feature of populist politics (11). In order for populist rhetoric to gain traction, it needs to successfully reshape the ways a broad group of people in society conceives of their social identity and their trust in institutions. In her landmark article “Trust the People: Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy,” Margaret Canovan argues that “[p]opulists claim legitimacy on the grounds that they speak for the people: that is to say, they claim to represent the democratic sovereign, not a sectional interest such as an economic class” (4). Speaking for the people, in the sense Canovan defines it, requires a rhetoric of simplicity that resists more nuanced approaches to political problems. Populist rhetoric simplifies the complexities of politics by constituting its arguments in terms that construct a unified people from an intentionally simplified rhetorical and political situation. In fact, populism seizes upon simplification as a central political value. Canovan explains that populists combine “simple and direct” rhetorical descriptions of social and political problems with claims for simple solutions (6). In contrast to nuanced depictions of the complexities of political and social problems, populists argue that “complexity is a self-serving racket perpetuated by professional politicians, and that the solutions to the problems ordinary people care about are essentially simple” (6). Institutional suspicion and arguments against needless complexity are central to political populism but are also tailor-made for arguments against educational institutions and initiatives, which have been positioned by hard right and now alt-right discourse as disconnected from the beliefs, values, and needs of the American people.

As I will show in the analysis below of the National Association of Scholars’ *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, a central tactic of populist rhetoric is re-articulating the central terms of an opponent’s rhetoric in ways that position them against the values of a people or a unified vision of a public. We can easily see how this process can be turned against our own calls for global literacies. For example, NCTE’s *Framework for 21st Century Curriculum and Assessment* argues that in order to be “active, successful participants in this 21st century global society,” students need to be able to “[b]uild intentional cross-cultural connections and relationships with others so to pose and solve problems collaboratively and strengthen independent thought” (NCTE, emphasis in original). Compare this use of the term “cross-cultural” with the way the NAS defines the term in their report’s expansive glossary of progressive code-words used in civic and global education initiatives in US colleges and universities. The report defines “cross-cultural” as “progressive advocacy focused upon disaffecting Americans from Western civilization” (Randall 347). By seeking to rearticulate “cross-cultural” in this way, the report works to provide a framework for interpretation for its conservative audiences, one in which references to the terms “global” and “cross-cultural” can be read as signifiers

for processes of progressive indoctrination and, as I will show below, disloyalty to American values. While this example is used simply to illustrate how these populist rhetorical practices might be placed into action, we will see that such rhetoric has already been mobilized against existing programs. Here, the populist rhetoric of organizations like the NAS works to reduce the complexity of the relationship between globalization and the demands it places on higher education by mobilizing a conservative rhetoric of institutional suspicion against higher education.

Ernesto Laclau's work on populist practices of signification can help unpack how this rhetoric achieves its effects. In *On Populist Reason*, Ernesto Laclau argues for turning attention away from ethical condemnations of populist reason and rhetoric and towards an understanding of populism as "a constant dimension of political action which necessarily arises (in different degrees) in all political discourses" (18). Laclau argues that populism is not connected to any particular position or party but instead a form of reasoning through rhetorical discourse. Populist rhetoric operates through the production of what he terms "empty signifiers" (60). For Laclau, the function of empty signifiers—terms like "freedom," "order," "justice"—is not to "express *any* positive content but . . . to function as the names of a fullness which is constitutively absent" (96). What is important, for Laclau, is not that the terms are absent but how this absence is created and mobilized: "the empty character of the signifiers that give unity or coherence to a popular camp is not the result of any ideological or political underdevelopment; it simply expresses the fact that any populist unification takes place on a radically heterogeneous social terrain" (98). Empty signifiers, in this way, are not weak or vacuous discourse, but rather rhetorical strategies that reduce the heterogeneous elements and contexts of discourse in an attempt to present a unified populist identity. Joscha Wullweber provides a helpful description of the process: "This is the basic essence of an empty signifier: a signifier which becomes detached from its *particular meaning* in order to provide an empty space that can be filled with *universal meanings*" (81-82). Signifiers don't just become "empty." They are emptied through agonistic discursive contests over the production of meaning. In the discussion below, we will see examples of these agonistic discursive contests over the signifiers "civic education" and "citizenship."

Populism, Conspiracy, and Patriotism in Anti-Global Higher Education

Drawing on Laclau's discussion of empty signifiers in populist rhetoric, we might examine how signifiers like "global education," "global higher education," and "civic education" are contested and reframed by anti-globalist rhetoric on the right. Global higher education is often used as a shorthand for a variety of different initiatives that sometimes overlap and sometimes directly conflict. In this field of competing visions, we see forms of global education rooted in liberal education that promote a form of ethical global citizenship, but we also see significant initiatives to link global learning to American economic interests and national security. In addition, it is also vitally important to note that the rhetoric of global higher education can also be mobilized to serve the economic interests of colleges and universities. One example of this can be found in how rhetorics of global education are often used to support initiatives to recruit high numbers of international students in order to benefit

from their tuition dollars. It is important to recognize global higher education not simply as an educational good but as a field of overlapping interests and perspectives.⁵ Anti-global education discourse from the political right can sometimes lead us to forget this by constructing a conflict between global higher education and nationalist visions of civic education. Anti-global education rhetoric also empties out gradations in political positions within global higher education advocacy by framing seemingly all of global higher education as “radical.” If we take this rhetoric at face value, we risk missing the significant ethical and political problems that stem from a variety of global higher education programs. As scholars in rhetoric and composition studies work out the global turn in our field, it is important that we resist the oversimplified rhetorical framework imposed on global education through right-wing, populist rhetoric.

The history of global higher education and international education in the American university is far too expansive to address here, so I will focus instead on a few key examples of the complexity that anti-global higher education rhetoric seeks to simplify and obscure. The first of these is the relationship between higher education

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and national interests and defense. Claims against global higher education often portray global higher education as a singular movement of radical intellectuals working against American security. Reductions of global education like these seek to empty out the sustained presence of national security and its attendant discourses of economic security in global higher education. The roots of global higher education can be found in the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA). The passing of the NDEA in 1958 served as a watershed moment for contemporary global education programs, as it provided funding for research centers on international politics and international education programs. Arguments for the role of global higher education in promoting America’s international interests and foreign policy have remained a stable part of global higher education discourse since the early days of the NDEA. Following the 9/11 attacks, arguments for the role of global education in shoring up American national security and protecting American interests gained greater force.

Jeffrey R. Di Leo, Henry A. Giroux, Sophia A. McClennen, and Kenneth Saltman have argued in their 2015 collection *Neoliberalism, Education, and Terrorism* that since 9/11, global education has been subject to “the most invasive higher education legislation in US history” (27) through bills such as the International Studies in Higher Education Acts proposed in 2003 and 2005. These acts mapped out the need for additional resources for higher educational programs and bodies of disciplinary

study that could advance the interests of American national security. Di Leo et al. suggest that “even though these versions of the law did not pass, the debates over them reveal much about the political lobbying regarding the teaching of global studies since 9/11” (27). Key portions of the acts called for the training of US students in international studies so that they can serve in departments such as Homeland Security (27). In his chapter in the same collection, “Militarizing Higher Education,” Henry Giroux argues that “what is new today is that more research projects in higher education than ever before are being funded by various branches of the military, but either no one is paying attention or no one seems to care” (37). Populist rhetoric papers over both the continued presence of higher educational programs that promote American national interests, security, and militarization, and the tension between these programs and those that seek to bring the complicity of national security’s relationship with education into question.

This vision of international education as necessary to support the aims of American militarization and national security is also present in discourse on K-12 education. In a 2012 report sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations, entitled *US Education Reform and National Security*, a panel of experts in K-12 education chaired by Condoleezza Rice and Joel Klein characterize the “problems” of K-12 education as a “grave national security threat” (4). This report carries forward the focus on defense-focused education from the NDEA by noting the need for students in K-12 and higher education who will be educated so that they can contribute to intelligence agencies, defense industries, and the military in an effort to protect America’s “national interests” (9). In this way, the report shows that though the political contexts may differ, the rhetoric of national defense and education has remained strikingly similar to the era of the cold war. However, it is important to note that discourses of security also shape global higher education organizations and initiatives as well. A November 2003 report from NAFSA’s (the Association of International Educators) Strategic Task Force on Education Abroad captures the staying power of cold war logics of global education:

We are now in another Sputnik moment. We can remain as ignorant of the outside world as we were on September 11, or do the work necessary to overcome this handicap. That grim morning took us by surprise, in part, because we had closed our eyes and ears to the world around us. We could not hear or understand what our enemies were saying. We need to reverse this dangerous course by adequately preparing our youth to understand and deal with the problems of today’s world. (“Securing” 3)

Another example can be found in a recent article in the AAC&U’s magazine *Liberal Education*. Here, former Congressman David Skaggs sums up the implicit connection between education, security, and economy: “The ability of the United States to protect itself and its interests around the world—our national security, broadly defined—depends directly on the strength of our economy. And it is clear that economic strength in the era of global competition depends on a nation’s educational attainment. . . .” (Skaggs). What we see in examples like these is that the process of rhetorically framing global education involves a range of different, sometimes conflicting discourses. The danger here for global educators is not simply an external attack from the right, but rather that significant ideological, material, and national interests that already shape global education will be subsumed into a singular vision of global education as a radical or progressive project.

The second example of how the rhetoric of the anti-global education right seeks to simplify the complexities of global education involves reframing global educational programs as a radical conspiracy. The rhetoric of radical conspiracy infuses many of the major arguments from the right that circulate throughout alt-right and hard-right discourse in venues like *Breitbart* and *Info Wars*, but it can also be found in the reports from conservative educational organizations like the NAS. In his brief history of the backlashes to global education, Kenneth Tye shows how conspiracy rhetoric has been part of global education in both higher education and secondary education since the 1980s. Tye argues such conspiracy rhetorics are the strategies of “movement conservatives,” who “reject the notion that there is any kind of equivalence in the world; the United States is superior in all ways” (20). Such rhetoric positions any educational attempt to complicate students’ understanding of global politics or responsibilities as a conspiracy to sow disloyalty. David Horowitz’s *Discover the Networks* provides an example of a contemporary organization that links higher education to notions of liberal conspiracy”. Developed shortly after 9/11, at a time when the nightly news was filled with descriptions and images of networks of terror, Horowitz capitalized on this rhetoric to chart out networks of liberal academics alongside networks of those he claimed supported political terror. Despite claiming in the section “What This Site is About” that the site is not a “snitch file,” a term used against the site by Gail Schaettner, a former Lieutenant Governor of Colorado (Discover), the site nevertheless contextualizes its critique of the left in terms of the rhetoric of the communist or terror cell. For example, “the problem of deceptive public presentation is common enough to all sides but applies with special force to the left, which has a long and well-documented history of dissembling about its agendas. In the past, for example, the Communist party operated through ‘front’ groups that concealed the radical agenda of those who controlled them” (Discover). *Frontpage* magazine, a publication founded and edited by Horowitz, often features articles on higher education that advance the hidden network theory of left indoctrination in education. Such rhetoric creates a framework of interpretation where *keywords* used in global higher education literature and programmatic literature can be transformed into *code words* of a radical conspiracy.

Framing global higher education as radical obscures how global citizenship and global higher education are contested concepts on the left as well as the right, and completely obscures their critique by a number of left intellectuals. Indeed, a significant portion of global higher education initiatives are shaped by a more moderate cosmopolitan ethics than anything resembling radical politics.⁶ One of the most often-cited authors in the program literature of the global higher education movement is Martha Nussbaum, whose cosmopolitanism is grounded in political liberalism rather than radicalism. In her 1997 book *Cultivating Humanity*, Nussbaum describes cosmopolitan education as extending the Stoic project of cultivating recognition of “the dignity of humanity in each person” (*Cultivating* 61) by providing curricula that enable students to perceive the human similarity across difference, develop critical thinking skills for evaluating difference, and develop understandings of the economic, historical, and cultural forces that shape cultural difference. Nussbaum argues that this morally constrained but engaged vision of cosmopolitan politics provides a more hopeful paradigm for acting in a world shaped by political factionalism and conflict. In her discussion of the motivation for including the study of other cultures, Nussbaum argues that “[w]orld citizens will

therefore not argue for the inclusion of cross-cultural study in a curriculum primarily on the grounds that it is a way in which members of minority groups can affirm such an identity. . . . Only a human identity that transcends these divisions shows us why we should look at one another with respect across them” (*Cultivating* 67). Such a universalist ethic of global education and global citizenship proceeds from a logic of ethical consensus that has been critiqued by radical democratic theorists for ignoring political conflict (Mouffe) and for abstracting global education from material contexts and disciplinary complicity with state power (Harvey).

National global higher education projects like the AAC&U’s *Shared Futures* encompass a significant range of global education projects across a wide number of campuses, and these projects frame the goals of global higher education and global citizenship in different ways. Few of these programs, however, resemble the descriptions of radicalism advanced by the anti-global education right. Many of these programs reflect, instead, the politics and aspirations of liberal education and see their work as extending rather than replacing liberal learning. According to Kevin Hovland’s brief history in *Shared Futures: Global Learning and Liberal Education*, the work of the AAC&U on global curricula can be traced to *The Project on Engaging Cultural Legacies: Shaping Core Curricula in the Humanities*, which began in 1990, and “brought together sixty-three institutions eager to broaden notions of a ‘common cultural heritage’ as traditionally manifested in core Western civilization courses” (1). These efforts often define global citizenship and global education in the same cosmopolitan terms as Nussbaum, even as they attempted to develop measurable educational goals. Despite the fact that programs like those of the AAC&U often reflect moderate cosmopolitan values and seek to augment rather than overthrow the structure or values of liberal education, populist anti-global education rhetoric often works to recast global education as a univocal progressive conspiracy.

These brief examples illustrate how global education can be emptied of its heterogeneous perspectives, discourses, and conflicts through populist rhetoric. By reducing global higher education to a radical pedagogy that seeks to distance the affection of students from America and American values, the populist rhetoric of the anti-global education right seeks to advance the identification of a common enemy of academic elites and elite academic organizations who hide their motives behind statements about the complexity of global life and the need for global knowledge and capacities. Such rhetoric is much less about academic engagement and curricular reform and more about an attempt to generate enough political will to replace these programs with nationalist alternatives. I now turn to one of the most substantial recent efforts to mobilize populist rhetoric against global higher education, the National Association of Scholars’ report *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*.

Anti-Global Education in the National Association of Scholars’ *Making Citizens*

The National Association of Scholars’ *Making Citizens: How American Universities Teach Civics*, researched and prepared by Director of Communications David Randall, mobilizes many of the same arguments against global education that have circulated since the 1980s and uses a range of rhetorical tactics that are employed by groups such as Horowitz’s *Discover the Networks*. At the same

time, *Making Citizens* does introduce a new political signifier and target for this discourse: the New Civics. The term New Civics is used in a variety of ways throughout the contemporary literature on civic education and does not have its origins in the NAS report. In addition, like most scholarly terms, it has its close variants, such as “civic studies,” and encompasses a wide-range of projects, such as service-learning, action civics, and global civics.⁷ Many civic studies programs distinguish the New Civics from more traditional forms of civic education by synthesizing the civic knowledge of government and democracy found in earlier visions of civic education with opportunities for civic engagement through service-learning. While work in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies is most often not referenced in the literature of the broader global higher education movement, the NAS report clearly aligns work in rhetoric and composition studies with the New Civics and offers disturbing portrayals of global higher education that resonate with global research and pedagogy in our field.

The 500-page report makes claims to scholarly rigor through its analysis of educational policy documents and through its case studies of civic education programs at the University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado State University, the University of Northern Colorado, and the University of Wyoming.⁸ At the same time, however, the report describes itself as targeting a “general audience” (36), and the solutions that it offers are clearly targeted at public stakeholders and state and federal legislators. In addition, the title of the press release following the report makes the populist tone of the report exceptionally clear: “Radical Activists Hijack Civics Education, Study Finds” (NAS). This press release was circulated widely by NAS, and news of the report was covered not only by educational sites such as *The Chronicle of Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*, but also by *Breitbart* and *Frontpage Magazine*. News of the report was also picked up and circulated through right-wing student media such as *The College Fix*. Seizing on the kairos of Trump’s election, the NAS report suggests political and legal action against a range of contemporary civic programs labeled “New Civics.” Again, following populist logic and rhetoric, the problem is simple—civic education and global education inspire activism and disaffection from America—and the solution is equally simple: defund these programs at the federal and state level, or sue when this is not an option (35).

The report portrays “New Civics” through negative and politically suspect discussions of the national literature on service-learning, civic engagement, and global higher education, but it consistently deploys “civics” as an empty signifier that can be filled with specific political values of American patriotism and national interest and differentiated from the New Civics. Patriotism, in this context, becomes the binary of “disaffection,” which is aligned with New Civic pedagogy: “good civics instruction must also teach civic virtues. We teach civics to make students into competent, confident, and patriotic participants in our nation’s public life. Civics courses and programs should not aim to sow disaffection or foster resentment” (286). In the preface to the report, Peter Wood suggests that the term New Civics functions less as a term that signifies a heterogeneous body of study or group of programs than as a form of “anti-civics” (11) that is “grounded in broad antagonism towards America’s founding principles and its republican ethos” (13). In contrast, the old civics, or traditional civics instruction, “was supposed to provide basic information about the structure of government and the nature of society, and it was also supposed to form an active citizen capable

of taking part in that government” (54). In the recommendations section of the report, the NAS suggests that mandatory courses in the old civics be placed in the core curriculum of universities (290) and that remedial courses be developed for students who do not satisfactorily complete a civic literacy entrance exam (289). This ambitious list of courses (six courses total in the core curriculum) would focus on the history of Western Europe, the history of the United States, and the core political ideas and texts of American democracy (290-92). According to the report, the old civics teaches this knowledge in non-partisan ways, though the depiction of this non-partisan knowledge is interesting: “All of this can and should be taught without favoring any political party or cause, except the cause of fostering the integrity of our free and self-governing republic. Civics education should teach students how and why to love America, with both head and heart” (286). This statement points to more than just the nationalist tenor of NAS’s rhetoric. Instead, NAS constructs civic education out of a rhetoric of patriotism and a rhetoric of the intellectual tradition of American democracy that allows them to position global higher education as not only disloyal but intellectually vapid.

In making its case against global higher education, the NAS draws on the populist rhetorical playbook discussed above, positioning global higher education as a radical liberal conspiracy to promote disloyalty to America and as a threat to American exceptionalism. New Civics (including global education) is projected as a form of progressive activism designed to move students away from national feeling and towards feelings of antagonism against and shame for America. Further advancing the rhetoric of liberal conspiracy, the report provides a “Dictionary of Deception”—a compendium of “camouflage vocabulary” that the left uses to portray their programs (14). In this dictionary, we find global citizenship defined in the following way: “Global Citizenship’ is a way to combine civic engagement, study abroad, and disaffection from primary loyalty to and love of America. . . . A global citizen seeks to impose rule by an international bureaucratic elite upon the American government, and the beliefs of an international alliance of progressive non-governmental organizations upon the American people” (22). Two aspects of the rhetoric of this definition are important to note. The first is that it portrays global citizenship as a shared, unidimensional goal of global education rather than as a contested term. The second is that, while the NAS is a scholarly organization that is not affiliated with hard-right news sites or organizations, its rhetorical characterization of global education is similar, in this instance, to the globalist conspiracy rhetoric that we find in the pages of *Breitbart* and other hard-right news sites.

Framing global citizenship and global education in this way serves as a key rhetorical means for advancing NAS’s arguments against other elements of the “New Civics,” especially service learning and community literacy. While service-learning and community literacy do play a role in many global higher education programs, the rhetorical strategy of the report is to position global higher education as an outgrowth of service-learning that makes the end goals of liberal civic education clear. Two examples from the report illustrate this rhetorical move. The first argues that “the origins of ‘global citizenship’ practically lie in the impulse by service-learning advocates to spread their programs to suburban and rural campuses” because the faculty who developed these programs “found it easier to persuade students to go overseas for a semester than to drive 50 miles to an urban ghetto” (108) and supposedly needed a term that would enable them to extend their local programs.

This is, of course, simply false. Around one percent of US college and university students study abroad in any given year (NAFSA “Trends”). However, advancing this claim allows NAS to draw service-learning and global education together in its rhetoric and portray both as fostering anti-American values.

For NAS, global higher education, which is emptied of its differences, conflicts, and heterogeneous discourses and recast as global citizenship education, offers a form of citizenship hostile to American values. The populist logic developed in this report is worth quoting in full:

Global Citizenship actually directly subverts the purportedly civic goals of civic engagement, because it substitutes loyalty to the globe (defined around progressive policy goals) for loyalty to country. The campaign for Global Citizenship demonstrates most clearly that the transformation of *service-learning* into *civic engagement* results in an education that not only hollows out traditional civic literacy but also actively disaffects students from love of their country. Civic engagement is worse than service-learning precisely because it now encompasses and encourages such actively anti-civic movements. (94)

It is important to note here that no direct evidence is ever cited showing that global higher education, service-learning, or any of the other educational endeavors labeled “New Civics” actually inspires disloyalty to country or a lack of patriotism. Instead, the framework of liberal educators as part of an anti-American global elite is simply assumed and carried forward.

Another troubling rhetorical move also requires attention—the construction of a rhetorical relationship between New Civics and violence on campus. This a particularly disturbing rhetorical move, one that can be put to use to devastating effect against civic educators who teach principles of collective action and community engagement. In an editorial published on February 6, 2017 on the website *RealClearEducation*, Peter Wood develops this rhetorical framework in response to the February 1 protests at UC Berkeley over Milo Yiannopoulos’s speaking engagement: “New Civics, your time has come. We see you taking your selfies in the light of the arson-lit fires in Berkeley. President Trump. I’m glad you noticed. What we do next is indeed the question. But clearly, the status quo in higher education cannot stand” (“Berkeley Ablaze”). I pause here to consider this rhetorical move because it underscores the importance of recognizing how work in rhetoric and composition studies, work clearly linked to the New Civics in NAS’s report, is subject to being aligned with acts of campus violence in order to advance a hard-right educational agenda. Curiously, despite their daily presence in the national news, Woods’ article fails to mention the hate crimes carried out on college campuses following the election, nor the numerous, peaceful protestors at the Berkeley protests. The point, of course, is not to discuss campus violence or peaceful protest, but to further a rhetoric of suspicion against a range of programs that fall under the capacious category New Civics.

It is important that scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition studies recognize *Making Citizens* as a compendium of right-wing populist arguments that can be mobilized against our work, especially work in service-learning, community engagement, and the global turn. The report’s specific identification of rhetoric and composition programs and courses with the work of New Civics positions our field as part of a radical conspiracy to sow disloyalty to America among students. Unfortunately, the report also gives us a sense of how scholars in our field will be portrayed as

intellectuals through its exceptionally disturbing depiction of Veronica House, Associate Faculty Director for Service-Learning and Outreach in the Program for Writing and Rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder. In a style that resembles the rhetorical tactics of David Horowitz's *Discover the Networks*, the report places Professor House's faculty photo next to a bio that states, in bold, "her presence registers the New Civics' infiltration of introductory and remedial writing programs" (282). Such rhetoric lets us know that our work and our identities as faculty are not above being described in frightening terms. As a field with commitments to community engagement, global education, and civic literacy, rhetoric and composition studies should not take these claims lightly, but rather formulate our own agonistic responses.

Towards an Agonistic Response to Anti-Global Education

Formulating a critical response will require us to engage not only anti-global education discourse on the right but also visions of global higher education and international education that make up the global turn in the contemporary American university. Articulating the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies requires defending our work against the populist rhetoric of the right while also engaging the conflicts and discourses that shape the broader global turn in

“Articulating the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies requires defending our work against the populist rhetoric of the right while also engaging the conflicts and discourses that shape the broader global turn in higher education.”

higher education. This is, of course, an exceptionally difficult rhetorical situation. Political threats to our work from the anti-global education right make it necessary for the scholars in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies to forge alliances with programs and initiatives that

have significant support, both national support and support from our own institutions. At the same time, however, we must recognize that global higher education is also infused with discourses and motives that require critique. In other words, we need to reconceive our own global turn not simply as a “turn,” but also as hegemonic, agonistic work that critically responds to the visions and programs of global higher education nationally and on our own campuses, even as it responds to critiques, false characterizations, and conspiracy from beyond the walls of the university. Chantal Mouffe describes this type of agonistic politics in *Agonistics: Thinking the World Politically* as a “double moment,” one of “dis-articulation” and “re-articulation” (74). Agonistic politics requires not only the work of critique (dis-articulation), but also the work of “engagement’ with institutions, with the aim of bringing about a different hegemony” (71). Contrary to the picture of global higher education painted by NAS and others, global higher education encompasses a range of distinctive and overlapping perspectives and initiatives. By engaging national global higher education initiatives and programs on our own campuses, we can gain powerful allies for our work, but we will find that such engagements will require us to critically articulate our own visions of global education in ways that are sometimes agonistic with other visions. For now, I want to suggest that in order to engage the broader global higher education movement, scholars working in the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies

will need to develop outward facing arguments for the value of our work.

A key starting point for engaging this movement can be found in the more recent shift of global higher education programs towards capacities of global engagement. Recent reports and initiatives from programs like the AAC&U's *Shared Futures* have sought to develop concrete civic goals for global higher education based on performative capacities rather than civic knowledge, as well as strategies for assessing students' learning. Kevin Hovland, former director of *Shared Futures*, notes in a 2014 report for AAC&U and NAFSA, the Association for International Educators, "By focusing on students' capacities instead of the institution's programs, departments, courses, and trips, however, it is possible to begin a more inclusive and generative conversation about how better to match

"Advancing and defending the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies requires a dual response, one that critically disarticulates the knowledge of our courses from their characterization as intellectually vacuous by the right, and one that also critically unpacks the black box of 'global communication skills' that are often portrayed neutrally and pre-politically in the literature of the broader global turn in higher education."

the values expressed in the mission statement with the expectations of faculty, student affairs professionals, and students" ("Global Learning" 7). Later in the report, Hovland presents AAC&U's Global Learning Rubric, which envisions students as global learners who possess communication skills that enable them to engage in "meaningful interaction with people from other cultures in the context of a complex problem or opportunity" ("Global Learning" 6). Here, work in translingualism and cultural rhetorics might help unpack the rhetorical and linguistic capacities students need. Work on global literacies and translingualism could expand understandings of communication across borders by exploring how translingual practices are configured by and configure "translocal space" (Canagarajah, *Translingual* 160) and how rhetorical strategies of "transcultural repositioning" (Guerra, "Emerging" 8) can enable students to engage rhetorically with others across cultural difference and communities. Work in transnational rhetoric could expand students' understanding of how communication flows through transnational networks in which "rhetorics travel and are dispersed across the globe" (Dingo 14). Such work can also enable students to develop capacities for reading the cultural texts that travel through these networks "intercontextually" so that they can learn to be "reflexive about the social codes and habits of interpretation that shape the composition or a performance's meaning . . . and to comprehend how texts are formed by the institutions and material contexts that produce them and through which they circulate" (Hesford, *Spectacular* 11). These are only a few of many examples of work in our field that can be used to illustrate the importance of our discipline to the broader global turn in higher education.

This project is not simply one of engaging national programs but also one of engaging global higher education programs on our own campuses. For this, we need to examine how our institutions symbolically, materially, and spatially frame global higher education on our campuses in an effort to look for local allies. Such an approach will also require us to unpack assumptions and descriptions

about communication, literacy, and rhetoric in an effort to argue for the value of our work for specific programs. On my own campus, for example, global citizenship was a strand of a campus Quality Enhancement Program, and my university has developed a wide range of resources that are designed to promote global citizenship. In addition, the university has recently established a Human Rights Institute to support its already established programs in civic engagement and global education. Here, a key activity is seeking out opportunities for collaboration that speak to the value of literacy instruction and rhetorical education for the university's global programs. At the same time, small steps, such as collaborating with global education initiatives on our campuses to sponsor writing contests can be an achievable initial step. Through such collaborations, we will have ample opportunities to share our knowledge and research on literacy, rhetoric, and civic engagement with our colleagues and forge strong alliances on campus that can help not only advance but also protect our work.

Critical alignments such as these are particularly important during a time when a significant amount of antagonistic discourse is being aimed at work in global higher education and civic engagement. The repetition of globalist conspiracy theories and anti-global education arguments across various media and networks can also create resistances inside the classroom. The circulation of these ideas already comes at a time of growing polarization among students. The most recent publication of the UCLA Cooperative Institutional Research Program's well-known survey, *The American Freshman*, reported that "the contentious 2016 U.S. presidential election dominated the news cycle in 2016, and findings from the 51st administration of the Freshman Survey reveal one of the most politically polarized cohorts of entering first-year students in the history of the survey, with a larger proportion of students placing greater importance on life goals of influencing the political structure and social values" (Eagan et al. 3). Teaching during a time of polarized politics, one shaped by discourses of globalist conspiracy, makes us prone to risks not only outside of the classroom but inside the classroom.

Student resistance can, of course, be part of a productive, agonistic process of engaging understandings of national and global citizenship, but it can also manifest itself in terms that pose particular threats to global educators. Such risks will manifest themselves locally in different forms, but I would like to explore two central examples. First, if we are to truly extend the reach of transnational literacy and global higher education we must provide opportunities and options for a wide range of writing teachers, including adjuncts, non-tenure earning full-time faculty, and graduate students, to explore global rhetorics and questions of citizenship in their classes. Without recognizing this point, we risk developing an exclusive focus on classes, initiatives, and programs that advance the global turn in rhetoric and composition most fully for the minority of us who occupy privileged positions as professorial faculty and who enjoy more protections from our institutions. At the same time, arguments from the political right against global higher education are often grounded in arguments against diversity. *Making Citizens* argues, for example, that "civics that embraces the ideology of diversity" sees "the ideals of American unity and common experience as illusions" (30). With such a view of diversity, it is easy to see how perceptions of teachers' race, ethnicity, gender, and class might lead to antagonistic encounters inside and outside of the classroom.

Threats of vocal student resistance, negative student evaluations, and lawsuits could have a chilling effect on the desire to explore global issues and questions of global citizenship. A central part of the local work of developing a critical response to such resistance should be work that brings a wide range of writing faculty, writing program administrators, graduate students, and departmental and university administrators together to collaboratively to seek out structures of institutional support and protection.

Conclusion

As I hope I have illustrated, scholars and teachers contributing to the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies must seek out opportunities for engagement with the discourses, programs, and networks of power that shape the global higher education movement in the contemporary American university. Such work should not abandon the transnational focus of current work in the field, but it should take on the public role of articulating both the value of the knowledge of our field to this movement while also forging critical responses to the myth-making of the political right about both our field and global higher education. Such a project cannot be accomplished by singular actors or confined to one particular role in the field. As arguments against global education continue to be circulated, scholars working in the global turn in rhetoric and composition need to play a significant role in addressing both the global higher education movement and its hard-right critics. In particular, those in our field with significant ties to service-learning and community literacy need to develop public responses to reports such as the NAS's *Making Citizens*. At the same time, we need to provide students, parents, and the public with clear arguments about the value of rhetorical education in a world shaped deeply by globalization and take the time to listen to their responses. Ultimately, however, we need to recognize that advancing the work of the global turn in rhetoric and composition studies will require a continuous process of conflict, or the agonistic work of politics.

NOTES

¹ Major foundations like the Heritage Foundation and the John Birch Society have pursued their own anti-global education efforts. These efforts are also supported by several organizations of conservative academics, some of whom have connections to hard right news sources. One example is *Dissident Prof*, founded by Mary Grabar, a PhD in English who has written multiple articles for *Breitbart* on global education in colleges and universities and in the Common Core. However, arguments against global education can also be found on conservative higher education sites that features writing by more established academics, such as *Minding the Campus*.

² See Elizabeth Redden's January 10, 2017 *Inside Higher Ed* article, "No Certificate of Global Citizenship," for contemporary responses to this statement on the left and right.

³ Similar arguments can be found across a range of sources. See the discussion of the National Association of Scholars' *Making Citizens* below, but also see works such as David Gelernter's *America-Lite: How Imperial Academia Dismantled Our Culture (and Ushered in the Obamacrats)*.

⁴ An important strand of this argument that I have not addressed due to space limitations is the relationship between academic freedom and politics in the classroom. Stanley Fish's recent response to the NAS's *Making Citizens* in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, "Citizen Formation is Not Our Job," is a good example of this perspective.

⁵ I am indebted to Justin Lewis for this important insight regarding how this important financial motive often gets buried in the rhetoric of global higher education programs.

⁶ The cosmopolitan vision of education Nussbaum outlines in *Cultivating Humanity* and other works is often cited in the organizational literature and research of initiatives like the AAC&U's *Shared Futures*. A range of scholars has worked to define more critical theoretical and educational approaches to cosmopolitanism. See Walter Mignolo's "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis," Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins' *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, and Sharon Todd's *An Imperfect Education: Facing Humanity, Rethinking Cosmopolitanism* for three important and representative critical approaches.

⁷ For a clear overview of the aims of Civic Studies, see the often-cited "Summer Institute of Civic Studies-Framing Statement," composed in 2007 by Harry Boyte et al. For an example of New Civics initiatives and foundations, see the Spencer Foundation's New Civics Initiative, which is described on their website in "The New Civics Program Statement."

⁸ For more substantiated sociological research that challenges some of the reports' assumptions about radicalism and liberal conversion, see Neil Gross and Solon Simmons' collection, *Professors and Their Politics*, and Jon A. Shields and Joshua Dunn's study, *Passing on the Right: Conservative Professors in the Progressive University*.

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Toward a Theory and Pedagogy of Rhetorical Vulnerability

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KEYWORDS

rhetorical pedagogy, rhetorical vulnerability, fake news, trolling rhetoric, asignification

The question of what speech has made asks at least two things: what account can we give of language's capacity for effecting change, and at the same time, what account can we give of ourselves as manipulators of language's capacity for effecting change?

—Richard Marback, *Managing Vulnerability* (16)

On more than one occasion during my time as a graduate student, I had the experience of passing through a section of campus known as Free Speech Alley within earshot of a local church group as they publicly vilified the stereotypical sources of modern America's moral disintegration, including unwed mothers, godless liberals, Muslims, and homosexuals. As a self-identified gay man born and raised in southern Louisiana, I was not unaccustomed to hearing such rhetoric in public spaces, though these encounters always left me wondering what the most optimal manner of response would be. Once or twice, I considered joining the throng of students and civilians who inevitably gathered to hear about the perils of sin and the wrath of God, if for no other reason than to acknowledge their rhetorical address. I imagined myself more than once confronting these speakers face to face, refuting their self-righteous polemics with a well-reasoned, well-researched argument, the kind I push my students to prefer in my writing courses. Instead, I made a habit of changing my route whenever this group appeared on campus, drowning out their diatribes by humming to myself. Still, even while I did my best to avoid their direct address, I always felt a creeping anxiety as I passed them, imagining that one of them might see me, see through me, and shout, "Where're you going, faggot?"

I begin with this anecdote in order to foreground one of the key concepts underwriting my current theory of rhetoric and writing pedagogies. Ever since my first encounter with these demonstrators, I have been intrigued not only by their rhetorical strategies, but also by the ways in which their rhetorical practices make me feel *vulnerable*, acutely aware of how I am precariously exposed to the words and actions of those around me. From the moment I entered into the proximity of their protests, I was provoked (*pro-vocare*; literally, "called forth") into making a decision about how to respond to that address. Beyond that moment, even if I chose to ignore them, I could not avoid *responding* to them in one form or another. As rhetorician Diane Davis puts it, "You might whip out your Blackberry or plug into your iPod or feign sleep or complete absorption in your magazine, iPad, or Nintendo DS, but the active refusal to be responsive is a response and so no longer simple indifference" (*Inessential Solidarity* 11). In other words, my decision to ignore these demonstrators was already a response to their rhetoric, and an attempt to manage my vulnerability within that

scene of address. What's more, the provocation of that decision, the calling forth to respond even if that response turned out to be a diversion, was partly a reminder that my existence as a rhetorical being necessitates my existence as a vulnerable being, someone whose life is contingent, perpetually exposed, and always subject to the effects of language (among countless other factors).

By “rhetorical being,” I do not simply mean that I am able to affect others through language, a capacity that we might call *rhetorical agency*; I also mean that I am constantly exposed to the effects/affects of others, a capacity that I will tentatively call *rhetorical vulnerability*. As Richard Marback notes, the “question of what speech [or any other form of rhetoric] has made” demands a two-fold answer: one accounting for the ways in which we effect change through language, and one accounting for the conditions that allow language to affect us so deeply (*Managing Vulnerability* 16). The first account has been the subject of numerous commentaries concerning the nature of rhetorical agency (see, for example, Geisler; Turnbull, “Rhetorical”; Greene; Lundberg and Gunn; Campbell; Wallace and Alexander; and Cooper). The second account—of language’s capacity for creating change—cannot be fully addressed without provoking us, calling us forth, into further reflection on our own capacity to be moved by language, our rhetorical vulnerability.

Here, I attempt to respond to this aforementioned provocation by considering how a rhetorical theory and pedagogy more deeply grounded in a rethinking of vulnerability might help us as rhetoricians and writing scholars to address the proliferation of fake news and trolling in our public discourse. In the first part, I bring together a range of scholarly voices from within and outside of rhetoric and writing studies in order to move towards a fuller theory of rhetorical vulnerability. In the second part, I propose the use of trolling rhetoric as an object of analysis that may help students better understand how deceptive and disruptive genres of discourse (including, but not limited to, fake news) may, in the process of trying to exploit our rhetorical vulnerability, actually call attention to something fundamental about rhetoric.

Toward a Theory of Rhetorical Vulnerability

As both a term and a concept, vulnerability typically is not framed in a positive light. Rather, the term is more commonly used to describe an unfortunate exposure to the threat of subjugation and injury, which should be avoided or mitigated whenever possible. These typically negative connotations can be attributed to a wide range of factors, including culturally learned presumptions and linguistic associations. After all, vulnerability is derived from *vulnus*, the Latin word for “wound” (“Vulnerable”). However, in recent years, scholars from many different fields have begun to question this conventional wisdom by reimagining vulnerability not just as a position of precarious exposure, but also as a basic condition for social connection, political existence, ethical engagement, and even rhetorical responsiveness.

Outside of rhetorical studies, vulnerability has become a complex and ever-growing discourse of its own. Political theorists like Judith Butler, legal scholars like Martha Albertson Fineman, and ethical philosophers like Alasdair MacIntyre, William Connolly, and Erinn Gilson (among others) have composed a wide range of texts exploring vulnerability as an ethical relation, a political position,

a concept for critical theory, and so on. One recurring theme that has emerged from this scholarship is the notion that vulnerability is simultaneously (1) a *predisposition* to being affected by others that is mutually experienced by all, including humans and nonhumans, and (2) a precarious *position* that is uniquely experienced by each of us based on an ever-changing configuration of external forces, contingencies, and interdependencies. Judith Butler makes this distinction in her 2010 book *Frames of War* when she introduces the interrelated terms “precariousness” and “precarity”:

Lives are by definition *precarious*: they can be expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed. In some sense, this is a feature of all life, and there is no thinking of life that is not precarious.... *Precairity* designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death. (25; emphasis added)

In other words, while all lives are precarious by virtue of simply being alive and broadly dependent upon forces beyond one’s control, each life’s exposure to harm can be exacerbated by “failing networks of support,” leading to differentiated experiences of vulnerability. Ultimately, Butler’s terms help to highlight the fact that while all of us experience vulnerability, none of us experience it in *exactly* the same ways. Her distinction here is helpful; however, her terms also run the risk of implying an inevitable link between vulnerability and harm.

This negative yet persistent perception is one that scholars like Erinn Gilson have been working to challenge, most often by emphasizing vulnerability’s priority as a fundamental openness that foregrounds our ethical engagements with the world (42). To be sure, Gilson readily acknowledges the commonly perceived negatives that underscore vulnerability. She writes that the “experience of vulnerability presents us with the reality of fallibility, mutability, unpredictability and uncontrollability,” elaborating,

We are affected by forces outside our control, the effects of which we can neither fully know nor fully control. Thus, experiences of vulnerability can also prompt fear, defensiveness, avoidance, and disavowal. Where the ability to predict and control is valued, the inability to do so is perceived as a failing and thus to be avoided at all costs. Hence, we are often ill at ease with vulnerability because it is a form of exposure to that with which we are unfamiliar or uncomfortable. (3-4)

Importantly, Gilson does not reject the aforementioned link between vulnerability and harm, but she works to expand the concept by strongly emphasizing the idea that vulnerability entails far more than an inevitable exposure to injury. “Vulnerability is regarded as definitive of life,” she writes, “a condition that links humans to nonhuman animals, and an experience that roots us in the corporeality of our existence. [...] Thus, vulnerability is a topic of concern...because it is a fundamental part of the human condition...” (4).

Within rhetoric and writing studies more specifically, an increasingly explicit concern for vulnerability has been developing along similar lines. To be fair, this attentiveness to vulnerability is not a particularly recent development. After all, Socrates’s condemnation of rhetoric in Plato’s *Gorgias* stems at least in part from his suspicions about how easily people can be fooled into believing

false character and acting on untruths (455a-460e). Similarly, as Brooke Rollins has argued, one of the oldest texts in the rhetorical tradition, Gorgias's *Encomium of Helen*, simultaneously elaborates on and exploits vulnerability insofar as it treats persuasion as a kind of force, both in the body of the text, when Helen is characterized as being unable to resist the power of speech, and in the performance of the text, when Gorgias concludes the speech by calling attention to his own attempt at persuasion (8-21). Rhetoric is troublesome, then, not merely because it can be deceitful, but also because it can be compelling, exerting a kind of force on audiences that cannot be easily detected, avoided, or diverted.

In more contemporary commentaries, this link between rhetoric and force has often been coupled with arguments about the distinction (or lack thereof) between rhetoric and violence. On the one hand, some rhetoricians have argued that rhetoric provides a counterpoint to violence, a method for engaging people and enacting change that does not run the risk of injury for audiences. For example, George Kennedy links rhetoric to vulnerability by suggesting that rhetorical practices emerged from an instinct to survive and control, which could be done “by direct action—force, threats, bribes, for example” or “by the use of ‘signs’” (*A New History* 3). Similarly, Wayne Booth suggests that “the effort at genuine, deep listening [or listening-rhetoric] has fewest successes when violence and war are at stake,” thus implying that “good” rhetoric is most successful when separated from violence (150).

On the other hand, a number of rhetoricians, including feminist rhetoricians, have argued that rhetoric (in its traditional, masculine, agonistic form) enacts a kind of coercive violence upon others. Sally Miller Gearhart, for example, makes this case in her 1979 article “The Womanization of Rhetoric” when she asserts that “any intent to persuade is an act of violence” insofar as it attempts to coerce rather than communicate (195). She further describes students of modern rhetoric as “weapon specialists who are skilled in emotional maneuvers” and “expert in intellectual logistics” (197). Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin echo Gearhart's characterization, writing that any “act of changing others not only establishes the power of the rhetor over others but also devalues the lives and perspectives of those others” (3). They further suggest that the distinction between rhetorical and physical force is unsustainable: “Although these discursive strategies allow more choice to the audience than do the supposedly more heavy-handed strategies of physical coercion, they still infringe on others' rights to believe as they choose and to act in ways they believe are best for them” (3). Challenging this coercive power of persuasion, Foss and Griffin propose what they call “invitational rhetoric,” defined as “an invitation to understanding as a means to create a relationship rooted in equality, immanent value, and self-determination” (5). Implicit in both of these critiques of rhetoric is a concern for how vulnerability is managed by rhetors. As Rollins observes, Gearhart's “weapon specialists” are able to exert their persuasive force from a “safe distance,” thereby “encroaching on the space of the other without ever endangering the self” (542). Similarly, Foss and Griffin argue that persuasion “can constitute a kind of trespassing on the personal integrity of others” (3). Their critiques thus characterize rhetors as strategists who attack others from guarded positions, exploiting vulnerabilities and imposing themselves upon available audiences.

However, while debates about the deceptive, exploitative, and violent powers of rhetoric

continue (for very good reasons), recent scholarship has begun to expand what it means (or what it *could* mean) to be vulnerable to rhetoric. Richard Marback, for example, has noted that our “aversion to deception, to being led astray, to giving in, can and does motivate us to commit some of our energies to defending ourselves against empty words and deceitful representations” (“A Meditation” 2). Importantly, although our vulnerability to rhetorical effects is not something we are always conscious of, rhetorical training may help us to enhance our awareness of others’ appeals (2). This awareness, however, is not contiguous with becoming *invulnerable* to rhetorical effects. If it were possible to completely guard ourselves against the influence of others, we would become *a-rhetorical* beings, immune to the address of others.

This idea—that “none of us are so self-sufficient that rhetoric is without persuasive power”—describes what Marback calls “strong versions” of rhetoric, which presume that all rhetoric is underscored by vulnerability (3). “Recognizing our interdependence through our appeals to each other,” he writes, “compels us to accept that rhetoric leads us beyond ourselves to experiences, feelings, ideas, sensations, and thoughts we can embrace as our own and that we could never have had alone” (3). Rhetoric, in this view, always involves a prior exposure to appeals and constraints, a giving of ourselves to others, or a kind of dispossession. Marback explains:

Rhetoric is a given; people cannot have relationships or communicate with each other except through their aspirations to appeal to, influence, inspire, or persuade each other. The rhetor who appeals to and has influence over an audience by virtue of awareness and preparation and strategy is at the same time influenced by an audience’s awarenesses, expectations, preferences, and responses. The nature and extent of the rhetor’s influence does not blind an audience. Instead, both audience and rhetor are made aware of the contingencies of being and knowing through their participation together in rhetorical activity. (3)

However, while strong versions of rhetoric accept the reality of vulnerability, they do not necessarily see anything “good” in it. Marback explains that while “mere rhetoric is grounded in a blatant fear of the devious rhetor preying on an audience’s vulnerability, strong rhetoric responds to fear of audience susceptibility with the guarantee of a rhetor’s good intentions and an audience’s shared responsibility for meaningfulness and valuation” (“A Meditation” 4). Thus, vulnerability is rendered as an openness that is ironically unwelcome, a condition of exposure that prompts us to want some reassurance. This aversion subsequently inflects our concepts in the field, including our notions of agency and efficacy. Marback writes that both mere rhetoric and strong rhetoric “share a commitment to rhetorical efficacy as a kind of strength defined in terms of a capacity to avert the self-pity and self-loathing that come from being duped” (5). So, when we realize our rhetorical efficacy, we also minimize our rhetorical vulnerability, which is framed as primarily *negative* potential.

To counter this perception, Marback proposes a rethinking of vulnerability’s positive potential. This is not to say that he advocates gullibility; rather, he suggests that if vulnerability is central to rhetoric, then we as rhetoricians and writing scholars should consider how we might manage it otherwise. And we have good reason for doing so:

What we gain in acknowledging and accepting our vulnerability to the appeals of others is an awareness of ourselves in our responsiveness to others. If we are aware of our responsiveness

to others, we are aware of ourselves as being affected by them; we are aware at some level and in some sense of the irresistible power of their persuasiveness. Such awareness cannot but sensitize us to the subtleties and gradations of our vulnerabilities. (10-11)

Marback furthers this argument in his most recent book on post-apartheid rhetoric, in which he describes how the management of vulnerability is a basic condition for rhetorical processes of democratic deliberation. “If we are to take part in deliberations,” he writes, “we must at least accept the prospects of acquiescence, compromise, and defeat” (*Managing Vulnerability* 131). He goes on to argue that acknowledging our rhetorical vulnerability “involves more than resigning ourselves to the limits of our rhetorical capacities. While everyone at one time or another will experience disappointment with deliberation, we constrain our participation if we cynically conclude that disappointment is inevitable as the price to be paid for hope in a common good” (131). In other words, rhetorical deliberations demand something from us; they require us to risk ourselves and our ambitions in pursuit of a common good. Although these risks may result in disappointments, they are essential if we hope for deliberations to achieve anything other than perpetuating conflicts and complaints.

Marback’s vision of vulnerability as a fundamental condition for rhetoric intersects productively with the recent work of Diane Davis. In *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations*, Davis takes up the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas in order to propose a vision of rhetoric that begins with vulnerability rather than argumentation or communication. Davis challenges rhetoricians to consider how all of us are made available to rhetoric before means and meanings are made available to us. She explains:

If rhetorical practices work by managing to have an effect on others, then an always prior openness to the other’s affection is its first requirement: the “art” of rhetoric can be effective only among affectable existents, who are by definition something other than distinct individuals or self-determining agents, and whose relations necessarily precede and exceed symbolic intervention. (3)

Importantly, this concept of vulnerability is not just an abstraction for rhetorical theorists. In a more recent essay on “Creaturely Rhetorics” (2011), Davis applies this theory to rhetorical studies’ burgeoning interest in animals by responding to George Kennedy’s assertion that “rhetoric is a form of energy,” which is “prior in biological evolution and prior psychologically in any specific instance” (“A Hoot” 4). Davis contends that what Kennedy’s argument misses is “an always prior rhetoricity, and affectability or persuadability that is due not to any creature’s specific genetic makeup but to corporality more generally, to the *exposedness* of corporeal existence” (89, emphasis in original). She explains further:

Your material incarnation is the site of a passivity more ancient than the active/passive dichotomy. It’s the condition for your exposure, susceptibility, vulnerability, and therefore for your *responsivity*. Responsibility (response-ability) begins not with a subject who recognizes itself but with “proximity,” in Levinas’s terminology, immediate (as in nonmediated) contact and responsivity.... (90)

Rhetorical vulnerability, then, is not simply a matter of cognitive uptake. Rather, it is rooted in our

embodiment, our affective lives, and our material connections to the world around us, which closes in on us and at the same time keeps us open. “There is no representational power,” Davis writes, “that could catch up to this immediate ‘touch,’ this primordial persuasive appeal,” and so rhetoric arises not simply as a strategy for making and sharing meaning, but as “an underivable provocation [‘calling forth’], an imperative to respond,” even at a very physical level (90). Whatever capacity we have for effecting change in our environments through language is thus grounded in this fundamental rhetorical vulnerability that goes beyond active-passive, thinking-unthinking, and human-animal binaries.

It seems to me that this more expansive understanding of vulnerability as a basic condition of mutual, material, and managed exposure offers a great deal to the study of rhetoric, writing, and literacy. After all, what purpose would communication or persuasion serve in a world where we could fully inoculate ourselves against the effects of language? Similarly, what purpose would rhetorical awareness serve in a world where we are all vulnerable to the same appeals in exactly the same ways at all times? How can we study the uses and effects of rhetoric in our world without first presuming that others are (or can become more) affect-able? If, as Aristotle famously put it, rhetoric describes “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion,” then we should acknowledge from the beginning that rhetoric is premised upon an always prior *availability*, not only of means, but also of rhetors, audiences, and others (1.2.1). Furthermore, if our ability to function within rhetorical situations is dependent upon the availability of means, minds, and bodies, then how can we imagine the possibility of rhetorical agency without the prior necessity of rhetorical vulnerability?

Importantly, this concern for rhetorical vulnerability is not something that is implied or expressed only in the pages of rhetorical scholarship. Insofar as rhetoric is dependent upon an exposure to persuasive and communicative action, this concern is already deeply embedded within all rhetorical practices. To assess the opportunities and constraints of any given rhetorical situation is in part to gauge the ways in which all participants within that situation (including interlocutors, audiences, and even bystanders) are vulnerable to both verbal and nonverbal forces and influences. For example, a rhetor who is interested in persuading an audience or prompting social action must be attuned to that audience’s shared and diverse vulnerabilities, the ways in which they can be moved through language. At the same time, the rhetor must also be aware of her own vulnerabilities, including the basic risk of failing to achieve a desired goal given the uncertainties of the situation. A well-trained rhetor must therefore ask, “What actions or appeals will generate the responses that I am hoping for? How receptive would my audience be to such actions or appeals? How can I make them more receptive to persuasion? What risks would my actions entail, and are they worth it?” In this way, the concern for vulnerability is not just something that rhetoricians think about; it is also something that rhetors

“There is, in other words, a necessary concern for vulnerability at the heart of rhetorical studies; without this concern, the entire enterprise of rhetoric would become little more than a series of rote exercises in disengaged discourse.”

think through, something that readers and writers face whenever they compose or encounter texts, something that precedes all communicative action. There is, in other words, a necessary concern for vulnerability at the heart of rhetorical studies; without this concern, the entire enterprise of rhetoric would become little more than a series of rote exercises in disengaged discourse.

Toward a Pedagogy of Rhetorical Vulnerability

If we acknowledge the fundamental role that vulnerability plays in all of our rhetorical interactions, then it is not a far stretch to perceive how it already influences our writing and literacy pedagogies. Like all communicative actions, writing means attempting to affect others in some way, even if that effect is the expression of one's thoughts or emotions. What's more, writing, like any rhetorical move, involves taking risks; this mentality is one that our students are probably already familiar with, even if they do not realize it. As Alexander Reid notes, any student who stresses about an essay grade practices a form of risk-management, "a set of pre-established procedures that all students can follow to compose passable essays" and "minimize risk" (191-2). Reid goes on to suggest that these strategies of risk-management reflect rhetoric more broadly: "We employ rhetoric to maximize our chances of achieving some purpose and to minimize the likelihood of negative consequences. At the same time, we recognize an inescapable relationship between risk and reward" (192). What Reid describes as risk-management might also be framed in terms of what Richard Marback calls "rhetoric's functioning as a management of vulnerability," though the vulnerabilities that Marback describes go far beyond writing assessment (*Managing Vulnerability* 22). Still, when students present their writing to an audience, whether the instructor, a peer group, or a public, they are taking a kind of calculated risk, hoping to achieve a desired outcome. At the same time, they are exposing themselves to an encounter in which they have little (if any) control, whether or not their writing is deeply personal or strictly academic.

“[F]ake news stories do not simply work to deceive audiences; they also work to disturb audiences, subvert trust, and disrupt critical literacies before we are even aware of such rhetorical effects.”

What I mean to suggest here is that much of what we do as writing and literacy instructors *already* involves the management of rhetorical vulnerabilities. That being said, I would also contend that by bringing a fuller and more reflective awareness of rhetorical vulnerability into our classrooms, we might prompt

compelling discussions with our students about what it means to be affected by the communicative actions of others. These discussions are particularly opportune today given the ongoing proliferation of fake news stories in our public discourse, stories that frequently prey on audiences' vulnerabilities both through their outrageous rhetoric and through their subversion of trust in sources. To help our students engage more mindfully with fake news media today, I argue that we must teach them not only how to evaluate the integrity of sources, but also how to recognize "rhetoric's functioning as a management of vulnerability," including their own rhetorical vulnerability (*Managing Vulnerability*

22). Both of these outcomes are vital, in my opinion, because fake news stories do not simply work to deceive audiences; they also work to disturb audiences, subvert trust, and disrupt critical literacies before we are even aware of such rhetorical effects.

To help students develop a fuller understanding of rhetorical vulnerability as both a concept and a reality, I have begun using the rhetoric of trolling as a topic of discussion in my classes. Anyone who has ever read the comments section on a blog or YouTube video has probably encountered trolling rhetoric in some form. In modern parlance, the term “troll” typically refers to two very different but comparable activities: (1) the practice of fishing by dragging a baited lure behind a boat and waiting for a bite, and (2) the practice of posting distracting or inflammatory comments to an online community, such as a forum or blog, in order to provoke a response (Herring et al. 372). The origins of online trolling can be traced back to Usenet forums, where trolling played out as what Judith Donath calls “a game about identity deception” (43). Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, and Barab describe this game as such:

The troller tries to write something deceptive, but not blatantly so, in order to attract the maximum number of responses. [...] In the context of Usenet...a highly successful troll is one that is cross-posted to, and responded to on, many different newsgroups, thereby disrupting multiple groups with a minimum expenditure of effort. (372-3)

Herring, Job-Sluder, Scheckler, and Barab offer three valuable criteria for identifying trolling messages in online forums: (1) “Messages from a sender who appears outwardly sincere”; (2) “[m]essages designed to attract predictable responses or flames”; and (3) “[m]essages that waste a group’s time by provoking futile argument” (375). These messages are thus crafted as a kind of discursive bait, dropped strategically into the sea of information. For trolls, the rhetorical aim is to lure vulnerable media-users into exposing their naiveté or sensitivity, thereby disrupting the flow of communication, subverting trust among networked interlocutors, and sometimes going so far as to induce outrage or actual harm.

However, digital culture has evolved significantly since the early days of Usenet, and with that evolution, the term “trolling” has become more, not less, ambiguous. Take, for example, a small sampling of news articles published since Donald Trump’s election in November 2016: Andrew Marantz’s *New Yorker* article “Is Trump Trolling the White House Press Corps?”; Robinson Meyer’s *Atlantic* article “Trump’s Solar-Powered Border Wall is More Than a Troll”; John Cassidy’s *New Yorker* article “Donald Trump Will Go Down in History as the Troll-in-Chief.” I could go on, but there’s only so much time. As Libby C. Watson, writing for the tech news website *Select All* in 2015, humorously puts it, “you could be forgiven for thinking that *trolling* is a synonym for ‘doing something on the internet’” (para. 1). While trolling’s semantic ambiguity has not gotten any better over the last few years, Matt Sautman, writing for *The Artifice* in April 2017, has provided a more scholarly interpretation of trolling by arguing that “the history of trolling is a history of rhetoric” (para. 1). Sautman notes that trolling rhetoric is not limited to digital spaces; in fact, it may be as old as the rhetorical tradition itself. He suggests, for example:

Based on how Plato depicts Socrates within [the *Gorgias*], having him outwit and shut down both Gorgias and his pupils, what the reader encounters is not a discussion amongst

conversation partners contributing their thoughts equally and productively, but a fairly one-sided discussion where Socrates sets a series of verbal and logical traps to make his opposition incapable of responding in a reasonable fashion. (para. 10)

Whether or not Plato's Socrates practices a kind of trolling rhetoric is debatable, of course, but the link between trolling rhetoric and traditional rhetoric that Sautman teases out is an important one because, in my opinion, it raises the possibility that trolling exposes something fundamental about how we experience rhetoric, something that might make trolling not only a genre of rhetoric but also a method of exposing (while, sadly, exploiting) our rhetorical vulnerability.

To better explain what I mean, consider a recent case of public trolling with political consequences. On February 3, 2013, the same day that Super Bowl XLVII drew national media attention (along with millions of viewers), Todd Kincannon, former executive director of the Republican Party of South Carolina, posted the following comment to his personal Twitter account (@ToddKincannon): "This Super Bowl sucks more dick than adult Trayvon Martin would have for drug money." This inflammatory comment, with its explicitly racist and homophobic overtones, was not a hoax, as Kincannon himself admitted after the tweet went viral. More disturbingly, it was not an isolated incident but one of a series of tweets that Kincannon posted during and after the Super Bowl. Many of these tweets expressed similar sentiments. For example, in response to another Twitter user (@coreyking), Kincannon replied: "Hey what's the difference between Trayvon Martin and a dead baby? They're both dead, but Pepsi doesn't taste like Trayvon." Not all of Kincannon's tweets included references to Trayvon Martin, but several were racially charged. For example, in response to the power failure that blacked out half of the New Orleans Superdome shortly after the beginning of the game's second half, Kincannon tweeted: "It hasn't been this dark in the Superdome since all those poors occupied it after Hurricane Katrina."

As one might expect, public outrage and condemnation quickly followed on the heels of Kincannon's tweets, with numerous responses posted and circulated on social media networks. Given the controversial nature of the incident, responses ranged from whole-hearted support (Todd: "that's why I like you Todd, balls of pure steel") to shock (Caplan: "Did you really go after a murdered teenager? Why go there? Do you have kids, if so, then why would you hurt parents this way?") to criticism (XXX: "Right to free speech isn't a right to speak without criticism or being called out for racism") to retaliatory insult (Dawn: "Really? You're going to go after a 17yr old murder victim – have fun on that fast train to hell you destined for!"). Some even questioned the authenticity of Kincannon's account, with one respondent (XXX) replying, "I'm really hoping this is a troll account."

The day after the incident, news outlets picked up the story, and Kincannon was invited to respond to the backlash via phone on *HuffPost Live*. When asked to explain why he would post something so insensitive knowing that it would spark public outrage and political controversy, Kincannon replied:

One of the things I like to do on Twitter is, I'll tweet something that's inflammatory or borderline crazy sounding, just for fun. And I enjoy watching people go nuts. And one of the best things about it is that if you say something that's borderline offensive, or that is offensive, the people that attack you and say just the awfulest [sic] things about you, they

do the very thing that they accuse you of. [...] I guess you could call it kind of *high-profile trolling*, but it definitely worked. (“Todd Kincannon,” italics mine)

By describing his actions as a “kind of high-profile trolling,” Kincannon showed that the uses of trolling today extend beyond games of online deception and provocation. In contrast to what we normally perceive as the goals of civic rhetoric, Kincannon used his words to “get a rise” out of his audience and garner as much attention as he could. If this was indeed his rhetorical aim, then it seems rather obvious that he succeeded, at least within the increasingly small window of time afforded him by the nonstop news cycles.

It is tempting at this point to focus on the motives that inspire trolling rhetors to use these tactics. That desire is understandable; however, the reality is that there are as many motives behind trolling rhetoric as there are active trolling rhetors today, and the expanding usage of the term only complicates the search for a central motive. Therefore, in order to describe trolling rhetoric without focusing on characteristic motives, it may be helpful for us to focus instead on the characteristic effects of trolling. For my purposes here, I want to recognize two main effects of trolling rhetoric: (1) disrupting the flow of information and communication, and (2) garnering as much attention as possible for as long as possible. Securing the uptake of a trolling message can be done either by generating a temporary façade of integrity and credibility or by provoking audiences into reacting intensely and emotionally. Either tactic, when successful, leads to a disruption of discourse that distracts or incites audiences while also interfering with the application of reflective and critical literacies. Case in point: through his tweets, Kincannon worked to intensify his audience’s emotional reactions while also setting himself up as an easy target for destructive criticism. Furthermore, if the trolling rhetor is savvy, the trolling message can then perpetuate itself by exploiting economies of attention, such as Kincannon’s appearance on *HuffPost Live* (Lanham). Ultimately, what distinguishes trolling from other rhetorical genres is that it is not (or not primarily, at least) a *meaning making* activity. Instead of drawing audiences into a shared system of signification, identification, and deliberation, trolling rhetoric works primarily to provoke responses and claims attention for as long as it can. The quality of the response is generally less important (if at all) to the success of a trolling message than the gesture of response itself.

So what can we learn from trolling rhetoric if its goals do not necessarily align with the rhetorical goals that we generally *want* our students to prioritize, such as informed argument or democratic deliberation? I argue that what makes trolling rhetoric worth discussing with students is the way in which it provokes us, “calls us forth,” into an awareness of (1) our fundamental rhetorical vulnerability and (2) how that vulnerability can be managed or exploited. While trolling rhetoric may be more disruptive than productive, the fact that it is disruptive *by design* while still achieving a rhetorical effect suggests that rhetoric in general may have less to do with meaning making *per se* and more to do with understanding and managing our vulnerabilities to rhetorical forces. This is *not* to say that rhetoric plays no part in meaning making, but it does acknowledge the possibility that rhetoric is not limited to what John Muckelbauer calls the “apparatus of signification” (“Rhetoric, Asignification” 239). Muckelbauer explains this point by separating the “communicative” (or “signifying”) operation of language from what he calls its “persuasive” (or “asignifying”) operation:

An act of communication...endeavors to reproduce, as accurately as possible, the proposition in the mind of its audience. Hence, communication responds to the preexisting proposition as if that proposition were primarily a meaning, as if it were, above all, an identifiable content that can be reproduced. [...] An act of persuasion, on the other hand, is not primarily a signifying operation...Rather than attempting to identically reproduce the proposition as a meaning in the mind of its audience, persuasive rhetoric attempts to make the proposition compelling, to give it a certain force. (*The Future* 17)

Persuasion as an asignifying operation is thus “interested in provoking the proposition’s effects rather than facilitating its understanding” (18). Or, to put it another way, persuasion focuses on “what the proposition *does*” rather than “what the proposition *is*” (18, emphasis in original). Muckelbauer is careful to point out that communication and persuasion are not completely separate from one another; in fact, they often coincide. “But the fact that these two dimensions exist in close proximity,” he writes, “does not indicate that they are the same” (“Rhetoric, Asignification” 239). Thus, if we are to understand trolling as a rhetorical genre, it may require us to acknowledge that despite rhetoric’s “proximity” to meaning making activities, its foremost concern is with the application of forces and the production of effects (239). It may also require us to acknowledge that, insofar as rhetoric deals

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with such forces and effects, it must also deal with our vulnerability to those forces and effects. As Nathan Stormer observes in his study of language and violence, “The capacity to impose derives from the capacity to be affected” (188). So, even if trolling rhetors do not set out to facilitate

understanding, they nonetheless reveal, through their disruptions, how rhetoric is premised upon both an awareness of and a managing of rhetorical vulnerability.

But what does this have to do with the proliferation of fake news today? Quite a bit, I would argue. Although fake news is problematic partly because it is fake and dis-informative, I would contend that it is also problematic because it exploits our rhetorical vulnerability in much the same way as trolling rhetoric. Given the ever-expanding marketing powers of the Internet as well as the increasingly enclosed media bubbles we now find ourselves occupying, fake news outlets are capable of managing our rhetorical vulnerabilities in ways that turn the game of trolling rhetoric into the business of trolling rhetoric. Consider, for example, the case of the *Denver Guardian*. On November 5, 2016, a fake news website called the *Denver Guardian* published an article with the headline “FBI Agent Suspected in Hillary Email Leaks Found Dead in Apparent Murder-Suicide” (Lubbers). Although the website has since been deleted, screenshots and news reports have preserved elements of the original article, which delivers a fictional account of an FBI agent who shot his own wife, set his house on fire, and then shot himself after being implicated in the leak of emails from Hillary Clinton’s private email server (Mikkelson). Despite its claims, the *Denver Guardian* was neither “Denver’s oldest news source” nor a credible source of information; in fact, as revealed by the *Denver Post*, the address given for the website’s newsroom was actually a parking lot in Denver, and the image

attached to the story originated from a Flickr account (Lubbers).

Nonetheless, the article spread on Facebook like wildfire to the extent that, according to *NPR* and the *Denver Post*, it generated around half a million shares, or “100 shares per minute” at times (Sydell; Lubbers). Reporter Hannah Ritchie, writing for *CNBC.com*, even listed the story as one of the “biggest fake news stories of 2016,” along with the likes of the Pizzagate conspiracy. It is perhaps unsurprising why a story like this would have generated such a reaction. The article, which played into a longstanding narrative about Hillary Clinton’s supposed criminal activities and exploited the contentiousness of the 2016 presidential campaign, was a powerful combination of trolling rhetoric and disinformation, one specifically designed to provoke those already suspicious of Hillary Clinton into reacting with unblinking outrage. In fact, one screenshot of the story as it appeared on Facebook, which is still hosted by the *Denver Post*, includes a response post that describes Hillary Clinton as “that murdering witch!!” (Lubbers). To be sure, both the article and the *Denver Guardian* have been thoroughly discredited at this point; however, I would argue that efforts to discredit the story have addressed only its dis-informative (signifying) elements, not its trolling (asignifying) elements. In other words, what mattered was not the credibility of the story, since it needed only to exploit an existing right-wing narrative about the Clinton campaign. What mattered was the outraged reaction that the story generated and the attention it garnered, including the attention of mainstream news outlets who felt compelled to publicly refute the story.

Interestingly enough, the *Denver Guardian* was one of several fake news outlets that *NPR* linked to Justin Coler, a registered Democrat who claims that he started producing fake news in order to “infiltrate the echo chambers of the alt-right, publish blatantly or fictional stories and then be able to publicly denounce those stories and point out the fact that they were fiction...” (Sydell). In other words, Coler hoped to use fake news stories, including the story about the fictional FBI agent, as a means of educating his readers about their susceptibility to rhetoric. However, given the prominence of fake news today, it would seem that his plan backfired, though Coler has nonetheless made thousands of dollars each month in ad revenue through his combination of fake news and trolling rhetoric (Sydell).

To counter this dangerous combination, I contend that we cannot simply focus on teaching our students to distrust sources until proven trustworthy (though those lessons *are* still important); we must also help our students come into a fuller awareness of what trolling rhetors have long recognized: that we are rhetorically vulnerable beings, that we can never not be rhetorically vulnerable and responsive, and that our rhetorical vulnerability can be managed and exploited for better and, unfortunately, for worse.

Toward a Conclusion

For now, my approach to trolling rhetoric and fake news in the classroom has focused primarily on using the genres as topics of discussion and in-class analysis with students. While I am still experimenting with specific lessons, I have found it helpful to have students compare readings on traditional rhetorical theory with more recent readings on how to compose trolling messages.

Consider, for example, how one dated but useful web guide to trolling explains the “design issues” that a trolling rhetor must take into account:

The experienced troller spends time carefully choosing the right subject and delivering it to the right newsgroup. With trolls, delivery is just as important as the subject. Start the troll in a reasonable and erudite manner. You have to engage your readers’ interest and draw them in. Never give too much away at the start - although a brief abstract with hints of what’s to come can work wonders. Construct your troll in a manner to make it readable. Use short paragraphs and lots of white space. Keep line length below eighty characters. Use a liberal amount of emphasis and even the occasional illustration. A good rule of thumb is that as your troll becomes more and more ludicrous put extra effort into the presentation.... Let confusion and chaos be your goal. (Spumante)

Several parallels with the rhetorical tradition are already evident in these guidelines. The anonymous author’s emphasis on “choosing the right subject” and “delivering it to the right newsgroup” bridges two of the five classical canons of rhetoric: invention and delivery. Although the author is focusing here on online trolling, these bridges (and the trolls living beneath them) are noticeable in political trolling as well; if “delivery is just as important as the subject,” it is little wonder why the combination of Trayvon Martin, social media, and the Super Bowl would have proven so opportune for Todd Kincannon. Similarly, the anonymous author’s insistence that the trolling rhetor must choose the right subject (“right” being a relative term) echoes Aristotle’s system for selecting effective *topoi* to suit the rhetorical situation. Finally, mentions of “manner” (from “reasonable,” “erudite,” and “readable” to increasingly “ludicrous”) link trolling to the canons of arrangement and style, with the principle of decorum largely subverted. These parallels suggest that, as difficult as it may be to admit, modern-day trolling is built upon the same principles as the rhetorical tradition more broadly.

That being said, some of my students have pointed out that trolling rhetoric differs from civic rhetoric in terms of its exploitation of *ethos* and *pathos* (i.e., deception and provocation) as well as its subversion of *logos* (i.e., disinformation). In contrast to Aristotle, who stresses the importance of treating *ethos*, *pathos*, and *logos* in balanced measure, trolling rhetors express little interest in advancing deliberation through balanced appeals. If anything, trolling rhetors design their appeals to create imbalances, interfering with the critical literacies that make civic rhetoric possible. In doing so, they achieve their goals of gaining attention and disrupting communicative exchanges. Thus, although trolling rhetors exercise many of the same principles that form the core of the rhetorical tradition rehearsed by academics, they apply those principles to ends that would likely have Aristotle and Cicero turning in their graves. These comparisons have proven useful in my own writing courses as a way to complicate the concept of rhetoric for my students. On the one hand, rhetoric certainly carries the potential for harm and exploitation, as trolling rhetoric makes clear. But on the other hand, the vulnerability that trolling rhetoric relies upon is not unique to its purposes; instead, trolling rhetoric exposes vulnerability as a definitive and fundamental component of *all* rhetorical encounters.

Of course, a fuller pedagogy of rhetorical vulnerability cannot depend on discussions alone. To help students further expand their awareness of rhetorical vulnerability, I have also turned to

contemporary work on listening and attunement for inspiration, such as the work of Krista Ratcliffe and Lisbeth Lipari, which I believe offers teachers of rhetoric and writing a powerful and potentially transformative vision of what it means to think about and with vulnerability. Christian Smith, for example, has drawn upon the work of Arthur Zajonc and Christy I. Wenger to propose “contemplative listening,” an approach to rhetorical and literacy education that integrates mindfulness “by inviting students to sit in silence before reading aloud a mutual text together—going from student to student until the text is finished and, again, sitting in silence” (82). “Such practices,” Smith writes, “can work to expose cultural logics without an immediate identification with them. In that moment between, that aporetic pause, is an invitation to practice listening” (82).

Part of what strikes me about these listening-based approaches is that they also invite students to develop an awareness of rhetorical vulnerability. In fact, listening-based pedagogies are particularly well aligned to this task because through listening, we experience rhetoric not only cognitively but also materially. As Lipari has persuasively pointed out, the act of listening means that “our bodies vibrate with the sound waves pulsing toward and then through us. [...] Listening may or may not compel you to wiggle your hips or bounce your head, but the waves of sound are nevertheless moving you” (31). When we listen, we consequently open ourselves up to the world around us so that it may affect us intellectually, emotionally, and bodily. At the same time, we are reminded of our embeddedness in a larger web of social relations, contingencies, and interdependencies. As a pedagogical method, then, listening can be another way for us to help our students become more fully aware of how rhetorical vulnerabilities are exposed and managed, both in our classrooms and in our public discourse saturated with fake news.

Inspired by these listening-based approaches, I have shifted from providing purely written feedback on students’ projects to conferencing with each of my students individually on a regular basis. During each conference, I read, watch, and/or listen to the student’s work in real time while the student observes me. In doing so, I encourage the student to pay attention to my bodily cues, such as when I raise my eyebrows or nod affirmatively. Initially, I began doing this as a way to help students learn how to read body language; but over time, I have realized that this process also helps students better perceive how an audience might *experience*, or be *affected by*, their texts. More than once, I have had a student in my office ask me, “Why were you squinting your eyes when you read that paragraph?” or “What was that head-shaking about earlier?” When students ask me these questions, I take time to reflect on my encounter with their text and explain how I physically and mentally processed their work in the moment. This generally leads to a productive discussion about how I was affected by the student’s text more broadly and whether or not that effect aligned with the student’s stated intentions. In retrospect, I find that this method ironically but positively contrasts with my encounters with the church group during my grad school years. Whereas that group made me feel the need to guard myself and maintain a “safe distance” from their rhetorical address, my conference-based approach compels me to make myself more available to my students while actively reflecting on what my reactions mean. Currently, I am working to develop a method for integrating this approach into peer response, though that is still a work in progress.

I must note before finishing that as we move towards a fuller theory and pedagogy of rhetorical

vulnerability, we cannot deny the potential for exploitation and harm that comes with it. Fake news and trolling rhetoric are just two examples of how our openness to rhetorical effects can be tragically mismanaged, as the Pizzagate incident and the shooting at a Congressional baseball game have sadly demonstrated. However, as scholars have pointed out, this potential does not have to be what defines our discussions of vulnerability, especially not when so much of what we already do requires us to be affected by others. This brings me back once more to the protesters in Free Speech Alley I mentioned earlier. On the one hand, those protesters made me feel unwelcome on my own campus and exposed to their rhetoric in ways that still disturb me. However, those protesters also (inadvertently or otherwise) provoked me, called me forth, into an awareness of how my experience of rhetoric is also an experience of being vulnerable. Furthermore, they continue to remind me as both a rhetorician and a writing teacher that this abiding concern for vulnerability exposes something at the heart of what I do, something at the heart of the rhetorical tradition itself, whether I make a habit of acknowledging it or simply continue humming to myself .

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Literacy and Rhetoric as Complementary Keywords

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Brenda Glascott’s “Constricting Keywords: Rhetoric and Literacy in our History Writing,” one of six feature articles that headlined *Literacy in Composition Studies*’ inaugural 2013 issue, strikes me as an important essay—specifically, as one of those rare disciplinary metacommentaries that brings once unstated terminological tension into sharp relief. This sort of work matters now especially because, amid the growing push to integrate literacy studies further into the disciplinary fold of rhetoric and composition, scholars in the field will have to reckon with the opportunities and limitations that our evolving constellation of keywords entails. Glascott does this with candor. *Rhetoric*, for Glascott, constitutes a “constricting keyword” insofar as its predominance across composition histories “privileg[es] an audience-driven . . . approach” above any more “self-exploratory” approach that she associates with the keyword *literacy* (23). *Literacy*, by contrast, allows for Glascott the bidirectional analysis of language as both other-directed and self-directed.

Apart from remarks by symposium respondents to *LiCS*’ first issue (see Bizzell; Goldblatt; Kynard; Qualley; Salvatori), there has been little commentary on Glascott’s terminological distinction of rhetoric as other-directed and literacy as bidirectional but emphasizing the self. This distinction is provocative and potentially useful. It is also, I suspect, likely to grate against the convictions of many avowed rhetoricians (present company included). But I don’t say this dismissively. In this symposium essay, I take Glascott’s literacy-rhetoric division as a point of departure. I first address Glascott’s charges against rhetoric in order to revise the sense of the term her essay provides. I then specifically revisit Glascott’s commentary on Jaqueline Jones Royster’s *Traces of a Stream* and, finally, offer several ideas toward refiguring *literacy* and *rhetoric* as complementary keywords, perhaps to the detriment of *composition*. While I disagree with Glascott on several important points, my purpose is less to refute her position than to extend the conversation she introduces in a new direction. Above all, I appreciate that Glascott has broached the issue of rhetoric and literacy’s mutual relationship.

The modest defense of rhetoric I wish to mount here stresses the conceptual elasticity necessary for *rhetoric* and *literacy* to become mutually complementary rather than oppositional ideas. I pursue this goal by responding specifically to three of Glascott’s charges against rhetoric. Each of Glascott’s theses, in my view, entails some truth and some oversimplification.

1. *The discipline of rhetoric is “conserve-ative.”*

In distinguishing rhetoric and literacy, Glascott alleges,

As a discipline, rhetoric is inherently conserve-ative, actively conserving past practices, past knowledge, and insisting on the continuous application of these practices and knowledge in the present. In fact, this conservatism itself created the need for recovery efforts by rhetoric historians since the conservationist impulse creates a canon and builds a genealogy.

Feminist historians of rhetoric have been grafting discarded branches back on the family tree of the rhetorical tradition. (21)

I enjoy this description, particularly the arboreal metaphor. The image of the disciplinary tree suitably dramatizes the challenge of revisionary history, the tension that grows between maintaining one's conceptual-historical apparatus (the core hardwood of composition, rhetoric, or literacy studies itself) and respecting the individual case (here, the specific branch that one laboriously affixes to its disciplinary trunk). Sometimes, like bonsai artists, we must alter the shapes of our trees.

Easier said than done, Glascott might say. The “conservationist impulse” that she perceives implies a conceptual rigidity at rhetoric's disciplinary core. The argument might go like this: Classical rhetorical vocabulary—including, for example, Aristotle's *pisteis* (ethos, pathos, logos); his branches of speech (deliberative, forensic, epideictic); and the five canons of Greco-Roman oratory (invention, arrangement, style, memory, delivery)—overstay their historical welcome, conceptually shoehorning a wide range of latter-day discursive practice into prefab categories better suited to Demosthenes' philippics than, say, to the reading and writing practices of nineteenth-century African American women. Literacy studies is a younger discipline than rhetoric. It is, the argument might go, therefore less apt to retrofit linguistic practices into ancient molds and more likely to approach those same practices with hermeneutic openness, to see them on their own terms, as it were. “Literacy” beckons, perhaps, because it imposes no imperializing pre-categories.

We should take this negative image of rhetoric seriously. Disciplines make trouble, as Stephen Toulmin has argued, when their adherents don “professional blinders that direct their attention to certain narrowly defined considerations, and . . . prevent them from looking at their work in a broad human perspective” (140). Rhetoric is no exception, at least not completely. Rhetoricians are apt to interpret discursive practice in terms of appeals, tropes, *topoi*, and genres; they are therefore likely to pass over other considerations, such as the self-exploratory dimensions of language use that Glascott aligns with literacy. But the culturally and spatiotemporally contingent nature of persuasion has, I think, helped rhetoric see around its blinders better than most other disciplines—and certainly better than its epistemological cousins like logic, philosophy, and literary studies. The rhetorical tradition, moreover, transcends classical rhetoric alone. Patricia Bizzell has already objected that Glascott erases the reach of rhetorical traditions, which have extended to cover, for example, conversation, letter-writing, and literature (60). And Toulmin reminds us, further, that “interdisciplinarity” itself cannot shake its “debt” to the disciplines it moves among (140-41). By and large, I think rhetoric has admirably balanced core disciplinary coherence with a situational elasticity and interdisciplinary spirit; its conceptual vocabulary, even that from antiquity, has evolved to meet the conditions of modernity and postmodernity through interdisciplinary comingling with, for example, psychology, postmodernist critique of power structures, and, increasingly, ideological models of literacy. Rhetoric's twentieth- and twenty-first-century appropriation of figures ranging from Toulmin himself (a philosopher) to Mikhail Bakhtin (a sociolinguist and literary critic) to Bruno Latour (a sociologist of science) to postmodernist feminists like H  l  ne Cixous and Judith Butler has altered the shape of the rhetorical “tree” itself. More often than not, that is, I think rhetoricians really *are* disciplinary bonsai artists. The same goes for scholars of literacy studies—though theirs is a younger

tree.

2. *Rhetoric is a “prestige term.”*

Though rhetoric seems to provide “gravitas” through its connection to an ancient discipline, Glascott worries that self-avowed historians of rhetoric bolster their disciplinary “prestige term” by casting composition as rhetoric’s “degraded other” and strong-arming literacy out of the conversation completely (21). It is surely true that the appeal to ancient tradition lends rhetoric esteem. It is also true that these same ancient traditions, as mentioned above, can warp our understanding of modern discourse. Conversely, though, “composition” has arguably more pressing historical problems of its own—particularly those of institutional and cultural gatekeeping, cultural conservatism, and restrictive fixation on the first-year curriculum—which have been well documented and well analyzed (e.g. Miller; Ohmann 93-206; Crowley, especially 46-78, 215-65). Did rhetoric’s historical clout “rescue” composition from these unsavory connotations? Not exactly, I don’t think—but the disciplinary conjunction of rhetoric and composition, by applying the conceptual vocabulary of rhetoric to writing instruction, has certainly transformed the pedagogical and epistemological terrain of composition studies, arguably for the better. The yoking of *rhetoric* and *composition*, in other words, does more than tack historical esteem onto the latter. When Sharon Crowley, for instance, advocates a “vertical elective curriculum ... that examines composing both in general and as it takes place in specific rhetorical situations such as workplaces and community decision making” (262), she advocates a curriculum that demands rhetoric’s epistemological affordances, not just its highbrow cachet.

I contend below that rhetoric and literacy might similarly conjoin, perhaps to greater advantage even than rhetoric and composition. First, though, I want to append a passing note about the timeliness of prestige terms: If *rhetoric* once held more disciplinary prestige within English studies than *literacy*, I do not know to what degree its prominence will continue. Flagship journals, *College English* especially, publish increasingly more research on literacy, while young specialists in rhetorical theory and history notice fewer jobs in English studies seeking their expertise.¹ We should keep in mind that “prestige terms” are only prestigious in context. For emerging scholars in composition/rhetoric/writing studies, the term *literacy* certainly beckons; and *rhetoric* beckons with less confidence now than it may have fifteen, ten, or five years ago.

3. *Rhetoric privileges the “other-directed” at the expense of the self.*

This final charge of Glascott’s is the most conceptually rich and will occupy the remainder of my commentary. Here, it would be best to look directly at one of Glascott’s own brief case studies, which examines Jacqueline Jones Royster’s *Traces of a Stream: Literacy and Social Change Among African American Women*, as well as Nan Johnson’s commentary on Royster in her book *Gender and Rhetorical Space in American Life: 1866-1910*. Here is the excerpt from Johnson’s commentary on Royster that Glascott highlights:

In *Traces of a Stream*, Royster expresses an expansive insight into the diversity of rhetorical practices that efforts to remap the territory of the history of rhetoric can offer:

Ultimately, then, within a context of inhospitable circumstances, nineteenth-century African American women used language and literacy as a tool to authorize, entitle, and empower themselves; as an enabler for their own actions; and as a resource for influencing and inspiring others ... [N]ineteenth-century African American women “read” and rewrote the world. They succeeded in developing a critical consciousness by which they envisioned their context, shaped their realities, and charted courses of action. They redefined their sphere of operation, imagining intersections for themselves among private, social, and public domains, and inventing ways to effect change using whatever platform was available to them. (234-35)

Although designed to define the particular parameters of African American women’s rhetorical traditions, Royster’s description of the rhetorical inventiveness of African American women also illustrates the kind of qualitative gain in historical insight into the range of what we can call *rhetorical* that feminist revisions of the rhetorical tradition have generated. (Johnson 9, qtd. in Glascott 21-22)

It is the exclusive repetition of “rhetorical” to which Glascott objects:

Rhetoric is not a keyword for Royster in [the excerpt on which Johnson comments], yet Johnson insists—four times—that Royster is describing rhetoric. Perhaps Royster’s “language and literacy” may be understood as part of a “rhetorical tradition,” but Johnson’s willful blindness to Royster’s actual keywords distorts one of the most important points Royster makes in this passage. (22)

That point is, Glascott continues, that Royster seeks to emphasize the process of critical consciousness about how individuals are “constituted by culture” and how they “can actively reconstitute” themselves through literate practice. This is, for Glascott, a question of literacy, not of rhetoric.

But I want to ask the contrapuntal question here. That is: Does Glascott’s oppositional configuration of *literacy* and *rhetoric* undermine her own reading of Royster? I believe it does. There is no doubt that this matter of literate critical consciousness (the deep “attitude of awareness” Paulo Freire calls *conscientização*) does centrally concern Royster, who cites Freire to explain how African-American women have critically reenvisioned their “sphere of operation” (Freire 109; Royster 235). It is also true that Johnson’s brief commentary neglects this topic. But Glascott’s recurring insistence that rhetoric is *not* a significant keyword for Royster baffles me. Glascott, in her effort to rescue literacy from rhetoric’s imperializing reach, seems to erect a false barrier between the terms, one that occasions an oddly compartmentalized reading of Royster’s book—a book that, in my view, productively clusters the keywords of *rhetoric*, *history*, and *ideology* below the umbrella term of *literacy*. (*Literacy* is, no doubt, her *primary* keyword but not her *only* keyword.) Glascott neglects to mention, for example, that Royster deliberately theorizes the term *rhetorical competence* to denote “the base of sociocultural knowledge and language experience ... [used] in the process of making meaning and conveying that meaning to others in the satisfaction of specific purposes” (48). “[R]hetorical competence,” Royster later notes, “is enhanced by the ways language use over time becomes a continually generative learning experience” (53)—thus, in my view, clarifying the reflexive, mutually constitutive relationship *between* (outwardly directed) rhetorical communication and

(inwardly directed) literate self-development. I'll finally note that the paragraph to which Johnson and Glascott refer, though it foregoes the actual word "rhetoric," does appear within a chapter Royster subtitled "Formal Training in the Development of Rhetorical Prowess," one which examines rhetorical resources and particularly the cultivation of ethos (see especially 210-12). Rhetoric is an important idea in this chapter. Literacy is too.

Glascott has read *literacy* and *rhetoric* against each other in a manner that, I believe, has obfuscated the conceptual reach of Royster's book and, more troublingly, placed these keywords in false opposition. But as I note above, Glascott's essay strikes me as valuable regardless. Here is where I agree with Glascott, and where I think her terminological distinction might help us as a field: Despite the disciplinary strengths of rhetoric I name above, Glascott is right that unidirectional focus on some varieties of "rhetoric" can relegate the individual language-using subject to a place of abstraction, shrouding matters of identity and linguistic self-development. Relatedly, she is correct to imply that rhetorical history too often shoehorns latter-day discursive practice into molds derived from classical rhetoric, and particularly Aristotle. This isn't to deny the enduring "usefulness" of classical rhetoric, as Ed Corbett once termed it, but rather a plea to consider the more expansive reach of rhetorical traditions, and how those traditions might usefully intersect with the timely concerns of literacy scholars. Rather than oppositional terms, I would position *literacy* and *rhetoric* as two fields within a continuum, the vast, messy, and intellectually rich center of which circumscribes the individual's dialogic encounter with (and appropriation of, and resistance to) the rhetorical texts she navigates as a process of self-becoming and that influence her own rhetorical performances in the future.

In other words, we should recognize that rhetorical practice initiates literate practice, which begets rhetorical practice, and so on. The rhetorical, outwardly directed performances—via books, films, professorial lectures, Facebook posts, and so on—that, for example, a college student encounters in day-to-day life will converge in her notebook, on her computer screen, and in her mind. The same student's literate, inwardly directed practices of reflecting on and writing about these performances will significantly shape her personal identity, self-understanding, and her use of language. And the next time she sits down to compose a rhetorical text, her identity—negotiated as it is from the rhetorical words and images of others—will spill onto the page. The complex, recursive relationship between such inwardly and outwardly directed discourses is, of course, bigger and more interesting than any one example illustrates, but the point is that both rhetorical and literacy studies will have something to say about the process.

As a modest starter, then, here is what I'll call a "greatest hits list" of rhetorical theory that deals, in one sense or another, with Glascott and Royster's concern about how identity and competence form through literate practice:

- (1) Cicero: The patriarch of Roman rhetoric was more overtly concerned with literary self-constitution than his Athenian forebear Aristotle. In *De Oratore*, Cicero's Crassus continually and emphatically restates the point that the good, virtuous orator must first and foremost become a polymathic student of philosophy, literature, and culture—for rhetorical competence springs from intimate cultural literacy (see especially bk. 1, § 2-8).

- (2) Kenneth Burke: Burke's theory of rhetorical identification from *A Rhetoric of Motives* plants one foot in the traditionally rhetorical sphere of linguistic persuasion and the other in literacy studies' sphere of linguistic self-constitution (see 19-29, 55-59). Here is Royster summarizing Burke's theory and its application to the study of literacy in *Traces of a Stream*: "If we apply [Burkean identification] to acts of literacy, perceived as essentially rhetorical events, we recognize that writers create a consubstantial space" that both welcomes audiences and constitutes identities of speakers and audiences (55).
- (3) Maurice Charland: In his 1987 essay "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the *Peuple Québécois*," Charland integrates Burkean identification and Althusserian ideological interpellation to analyze how rhetorical texts not only persuade but first *constitute*, or hail, an audience and name its identity. This essay neatly parallels and supplements the literacy practices of individual self-constitution that Royster and Glascott each discuss.
- (4) Michael Billig: In his book *Arguing and Thinking: A Rhetorical Approach to Social Psychology*, Billig draws from the sophist Protagoras to examine how thought itself takes rhetorical shape, as a messy clashing of voices, authorities, and commonplaces. Billig's book reacts largely against the cognitivist preoccupation with the isolated brain, emphasizing instead the social sphere of linguistic practice that concerns scholars in literacy studies and rhetoric.
- (5) Mikhail Bakhtin: In his book-length essay "Discourse in the Novel," Bakhtin, a late but vital inductee into the Western rhetorical tradition, deals in great manifold detail with the question of how the individual assimilates the voices of others into her own inner heteroglossia, or field of voices. Of especial interest is the concept of "internally persuasive discourse," that which enters consciousness bound to a specific authoritative persona—the teacher, the clergyman, the novelist, etc. (342-49; see also Bialostosky 98-101, 152-59; Trimbur).

To be clear, my point is not that rhetoric has already solved the riddle of how literate practice constitutes identity and competence, thus obviating literacy studies. Quite conversely, my point is that, as Royster's book admirably demonstrates, the questions of inwardly and outwardly directed discourses remain irrevocably linked and mutually constitutive. Literacy and rhetoric forge a natural alliance, or ought to, on the broad, nebulous plane where these discourses meet; the thinkers above might join ranks with Freire, New Literacy Studies scholars, and others in helping us analyze the shared space of literacy and rhetoric. Kenneth Burke and Brian Street might occasionally rub elbows in the same bibliography.

I'll wrap up with this provocation: As core disciplinary keywords go, *literacy* and *rhetoric* together provide both a conceptual breadth and scholarly focus that, I would argue, outpace what *composition* offers. Bizzell, in her response to *LiCS*' inaugural issue, stresses the academic constraints that settle in once *composition* becomes a singular focus (60), and implies her own preference for *literacy* and *rhetoric* both. My own worry, which Crowley has also expressed in far greater detail (229-43), is that *composition* funnels our attention specifically into the first-year college writing classroom; *literacy* and *rhetoric* each gesture to larger fields of discursive practice. If the keyword *composition* flags behind *literacy* and *rhetoric* as a "degraded other," to borrow Glascott's phrasing, we should surely

question the reasons for degradation. But we should also accept they might be good ones.

NOTES

¹ A keyword search of *College English* (CE) articles dealing with “literacy” or adjacent terms (e.g. “digital literacy,” “information literacy”) yields 105 hits from 1996-2006 and 158 from 2007-2017—a 34% increase. Frequency of articles featuring the keywords “rhetoric” or “rhetorical” also rises, but more modestly, by about 12% (565 hits from the former decade and 644 from the latter). While the substantial rise in scholarship dealing with literacy reflects increasing disciplinary interest in literacy studies, my impression is that the subtle increase in “rhetoric” and “rhetorical” chiefly reflects not an increase in attention to rhetorical studies itself, but CE’s slow drift away from the discipline of literary studies and toward that which has historically adopted “rhetoric” as half its moniker. (A parallel search of “literature” and “literary” yields 1,135 hits from 1996-2006 and 801 since—a fairly steep 29% decline from what was once the journal’s primary disciplinary affiliation.)

I’ll add a less quantifiable point, which is that while rhetorical inquiry still heavily informs scholarship in journals like CE and *College Composition and Communication*, the projects of rhetorical theory, history, and criticism, when divorced from a pedagogical imperative (or another subspecialty, like translingualism or digital humanities), seem to be disappearing from these journals. My brief correspondence with the previous editor of CE suggests that the journal would today decline to publish, to pose two examples from two past decades, something like Jeffrey Walker’s “The Body of Persuasion: A Theory of the Enthymeme” (CE, 1994, a reconsideration of the rhetorical enthymeme via the examples of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Roland Barthes) or Jordynn Jack’s “Chronotopes: Forms of Time in Rhetorical Arguments” (CE, 2006, an examination of arguments about genetically modified foods that relies on Bakhtin’s notion of the chronotope). Authors of such work would instead be directed to journals like *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, *Rhetoric Review*, or *The Quarterly Journal of Speech*. Despite the continued proliferation of “rhetoric” as a keyword, I believe CE has made itself more available to scholarship in literacy studies and less so rhetorical theory, history, and criticism. To be clear, this is no indictment of CE; rather, I think CE’s choices reflect larger disciplinary priorities, which others in the field have begun to track and measure. On that front, see Detweiler for a detailed empirical examination of the increasing distance between “rhetoric” and “composition.”

Finally, I’ll clarify that my remark about the difficulty navigating the rhetoric and composition job market as a young specialist in rhetorical theory and history stems from personal experience. To echo a point above, I found most hiring committees to value knowledge of rhetoric as, at most, a secondary matter—something that supplements primary identification with WPA work, technical writing, digital humanities, etc. Knowledge of literacy studies headlined more job ads; it appeared a hotter commodity. This does not mean, of course, that literacy now carries greater clout overall than rhetoric (the CE numbers above, after all, still heavily favor rhetoric); but it does suggest that literacy studies represents a currently and increasingly lucrative academic specialty.

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Book Review—*Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* by Katrina M. Powell

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As I write this review, the news is filled with stories about refugees, immigration, and displaced people. Today Canada announced that it may not be able to offer asylum to refugees, mostly Haitian, leaving the United States after the election of President Trump. Debates rage in the American court systems over Trump's so-called travel ban, and earlier this year Trump announced the end of DACA. The Trump administration has reportedly approved a draft of the RAISE Act that would use a points system to deny the entry of applicants who do not possess strong English-speaking skills, are not STEM graduates, lack high investment potential, or are not winners of Nobel Prizes or Olympic medals. More than half of the state governors in the United States have publically stated that they oppose resettling Syrian refugees in their states. The treatment of refugees has been at the center of many of Pope Francis's public speeches and even the theme of the band U2's Joshua Tree 2017 tour. The question of what to do with displaced people has serious political, economic, and even religious implications.

As scholars of literacy, we recognize these debates as ones tied to issues of language, power, and context—or, in other words, to rhetoric and literacy. And as the authors in this special issue demonstrate, there is much to be learned about literacy from the ways activists and citizens alike engage literacy in order to affect policy, voting, and public opinion. Katrina M. Powell's book *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement*, part of the Routledge Series in Rhetoric and Communication, is therefore timely and serves as an example of how these uses of literacy predated social media and so-called "fake news." A follow-up to her first book, *The Anguish of Displacement: The Politics of Literacy in the Letters of Mountain Families in Shenandoah National Park* (Charlottesville: U of Virginia P, 2007), *Identity and Power* analyzes the ways in which narratives of identity are at work through five distinct case studies: those displaced for "public use" space, survivors of Hurricane Katrina, Sudanese refugees, displaced peoples of Sri Lanka, and residents of Virginia's care centers for patients with intellectual disabilities. While *The Anguish of Displacement* relies on archived letters and communications between park and government authorities and those displaced by the park project, the scope of *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement* is significantly broader. In order to examine narratives of identity for displaced peoples, Powell examines documentaries, newspapers, photographs, user comments on online stories, personal interviews, and social media posts. Powell's diverse source material serves as a model for literacy research.

Powell's focus is twofold: first, she examines the concept of what it means to be a displaced person, giving deep contextual information about each of the five studies of displacement covered in the book. She shows how narratives of identity serve both to create displaced people and to justify their displacement to the general public. Then she shows why it is important to disrupt these narratives:

“[w]hen extraordinary or exemplary narratives of overcoming great odds are privileged, we tend to overlook the very routine, cyclical, layered displacements that not only have occurred historically, but have also occurred (and continue to occur) within the same places, across the same cultures, and to the same people” (172). Powell makes a powerful argument for “considering...the ways that identity, narrative, public policy, and legislation intersect and interact” because displacement “is a recurrent trope” that is important for a deeper and more critical understanding of the current political and economic forces at work in society (189).

One of the features of this book scholars will want to emulate is the way Powell carefully unpacks the most important terms from the text. For example, she takes care to show that she uses the term “displacement” specifically because of its kairotic focus on *place* (12). Similarly, she returns throughout the book to the controversy surrounding the word “refugee” and the political and economic reasons some displaced people might seek or reject that term. Finally, she takes time to carefully contextualize the complex historical and political conditions surrounding each case study. This contextualization is respectful to informed readers—it assumes neither ignorance nor deep historical understanding.

In the opening chapter, Powell contextualizes her feminist, transdisciplinary, and transnational approach to understanding the function of rhetoric as a resource. Her framework combines “autobiography, genre, narrative, and displacement theories” to address the justifications for and the narratives constructed about those who are displaced (4). As a result, Powell “create[s] an integrative framework of interpreting human rights discourses and formulate[s] a new analytical paradigm for understanding the ways that human rights are configured rhetorically across a spread of historical and geographical locations” (5). The following five chapters treat different displacement scenarios as case studies. Because Powell utilizes disparate examples, the chapters could appear to be disjointed, but Powell takes time at the end of each chapter to explain the links and trends she sees in each case study.

Chapter Two, “Reservations, Interments, and a Little Pink House” examines eminent domain—another issue at the heart of debates about the possibility of building a wall between the United States and Mexico—and the historical contexts of these laws. In this chapter, Powell shows how narratives of identity help the government eliminate uncooperative residents in eminent domain cases, and especially how the eugenics movements of the 1920s assisted the removal, institutionalization, and even sterilization of women who resisted displacement. This chapter makes a strong case for disrupting narratives created by those in power about those displaced by eminent domain—especially narratives about who is worthy of assistance.

Powell carries the theme of narratives about worth into Chapter Three, “Surviving the (Un) Natural Disaster in New Orleans,” which examines the context surrounding the term “refugee” in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. Powell shows that the displacement of citizens of New Orleans is recursive—while the hurricane is often at the center of what she calls “the racialized displacement narrative,” the construction of Interstate 10 in the 1970s, which cut right through the historically black neighborhood of Tremé, led to the first displacement of many of the same people (63). Much like the white mountaineers addressed in chapter two and the mountain residents in *The Anguish*

of *Displacement*, residents of Tremé were portrayed as slum-dwellers. I see this chapter as the most impressive because here Powell masterfully interweaves the very complex contexts surrounding the narratives of identity for Hurricane Katrina's victims. These narratives include CNN's Wolf Blitzer's characterization of the victims as "so poor and [...] so black," the history of displacement within New Orleans, and the appeal from community leaders to the media to discontinue use of the racially problematic term "refugees." Powell teases out the ways in which the term "refugee" is usually reserved for those who abandon their country, and in this case, Hurricane Katrina victims were abandoned by their country, especially by the inconsistent policies and actions of FEMA following the storm (75).

In the following chapter, "Buying Refugee Narratives," Powell turns to displaced people who actively seek the term "refugee" and the rhetorical power of this term. In this case study, Powell focuses on "The Lost Boys" of Sudan and constructions of "good" or "ideal" refugee identities. Specifically, she shows how the United Nations and other NGOs train volunteers to collect the kinds of refugee narratives that are clearly tailored to emphasizing the victimization of refugees toward the goal of fundraising. These trends are epitomized by documentaries on The Lost Boys and other Sudanese refugees that often retell stories of "[t]he smiling, grateful, quiet refugee" because, frankly, sad stories help raise funds (116). But Powell points out that while the collection of refugee life narratives and the presentation of these narratives can have real material consequences on the sources refugees have available to them, these kinds of narratives also limit the "discursive identities available to individual people" (121).

The information about rhetorical and material effects of the term "refugee" is necessary context for fully understanding the damaging effects of the media's oversimplification of war and displacement in Sri Lanka in the next chapter, "Barriers and Boundaries." Powell opens with a discussion of how portrayals of people who participated in the war are skewed by bias, ideas about traditional gender roles, and a desire to bring meaning to seemingly needless deaths. She then introduces several literary responses that attempt to disrupt "'refugeeness' and how it is written, performed, and examined" (149). These efforts "ask audiences to reconsider what a displacement narrative is and how dominant discourses are troubled" (160). Powell highlights some literary efforts to disrupt dominant narratives about displaced people like the play "The Captain Has Come" by Jean Arasanayagam. She argues that these "interior" or individual stories resist "dominant narratives and creates a different narrative space in which to consider processes and consequences of displacement" (154). In other words, and in the case of Sri Lanka, that means recognizing that we must pay attention to individual stories that represent or were created by the people who experienced displacement over dominant narratives often created in efforts to make sense of a horrific situation.

In the final chapter, "Layers of Displacement," Powell addresses the problem of repeated displacement—the fact that many displaced people are actually experiencing what she calls layers of displacement because they are deemed to be displaceable. She makes a powerful call in this chapter to examine the assumptions readers have of displacement narratives and the often-paternalistic tone with which these narratives are delivered. She heeds readers to be wary of the tropes of "savages, victims, or saviors" in these narratives and instead look for evidence of resistance (174). The danger of these tropes is that they make "action less likely" (174) and instead can make a reader feel as

though their sentimentality or empathy is enough. To illustrate her point, Powell examines the case of residents with intellectual disabilities who live in care centers called Virginia Training Centers (VTC). She explains the historical contexts for these centers and the governmental decisions to close them. Powell focuses on how the VTC and families of the residents who live in the VTC rely on human rights discourse to argue for the continued support of the VTC, but she also shows how terms like “vulnerability” have become useless buzzwords for cases like this one, resulting in fewer strategies to resist displacement and narratives about displaced people.

Powell’s work is a lesson in why it is essential to disrupt dominant narratives about vulnerable subjects and also a model for how to do so—by drawing on a diverse bank of resources ranging from personal interviews to artistic expression. Powell’s previous work has made masterful use of archival materials, and in *Identity and Power in Narratives of Displacement*, she illustrates how to trace the rhetoric surrounding an issue for which no archive exists. This book is a tremendous contribution to scholars interested in rhetoric, narratives, refugee studies, and related fields.

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