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#NODAPL: Distributed Rhetorical Praxis at Standing Rock

Michael Schandorf, *Massachusetts Institute of Technology*
Athina Karatzogianni, *University of Leicester*

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> ...when we put the call out to our people, it's like all the nations on Earth responded.
> (Faith Spotted Eagle; Chariton, 2016)

> [W]e are all surrounded by great clouds of witnesses, and it is to our great disadvantage to ignore them and a prime example of hubris and ignorance to believe that they ultimately can be ignored.
> (Ealy, 2014, p. 40)

Introduction: Digital Activism as Rhetorical Practice

Owen Flanagan (2007) argues that if the fact of consciousness is "the hard problem" of the cognitive sciences (Chalmers, 1995, 1996), then "the really hard problem" is the problem of meaning in a material world. In both the practice and the study of contemporary political activism, the hard problem is also a problem of consciousness: the raising of awareness and "social consciousness", often in terms of social justice issues that foreground the necessarily relational nature of the world. Analogously, the really hard problem of activism is the mobilization of social consciousness in embodied and symbolic action to affect meaningful issues by generating social and political effects. This really hard problem is fundamentally a problem of rhetoric conceived not merely as instrumental production mediated by specific technologies and analyzed as such, but as embodied and distributed action that is both instrumental (as *techne*) and constitutive (as *ethos*). In this chapter, we articulate some inherent problems with current accounts of "digital activism" and "digital rhetoric" and examine one particular action by Native American Water Protectors and US military veterans during the 2016 protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL), in order to better understand the conceptualization of "writing" as both practice and as digital object of analysis.

In the autumn of 2016, one of the largest gatherings of indigenous people in history coalesced in Standing Rock, North Dakota to protest the construction of an oil pipeline through a critical water basin in Native territories (Gunderson, 2016; Solnit, 2016). While the corporate US news media eventually mentioned that the action was taking place, by late summer millions of people were reposting and retweeting alternative news sources and reports from the scene. As a heavily militarized police force confronted unarmed, peaceful, indigenous protesters on a Native American Indian Reservation with batons, tear gas, concussion grenades, rubber bullets, and LRAD sound cannons, millions of Facebook users around the world checked in at Standing Rock, North Dakota to express solidarity with and support for the protesters. The check-ins were not called for by the Sacred Stone Camp, which responded with statements to the effect that such actions were unlikely to cause any meaningful disruption. (The check-ins were initially promoted as a means of disrupting the surveillance by the authorities of protesters through their social media use.) Nevertheless, the millions of Facebook check-ins at Standing Rock offered symbolic co-presence in solidarity, despite the fact that such symbolic action was functionally ineffective.

Like other contemporary practices of digital activism such as those of the "Arab Spring" uprisings and of anti-austerity movements and parties (e.g., Podemos, Occupy, Syriza), the digitally networked activist practices of Standing Rock Water Protectors and their supporters are overtly and explicitly rhetorical practices, but, in their fluidity and dynamism, they can trouble the traditional understandings and categorizations of rhetorical and textual analysis, such as genre and discourse community, as much as they flout conventional notions of effective action in social and political resistance. What is the genre of a tweet or a Facebook post? Is a network of Twitter followers a discourse community given the flimsy notion and unaccountability of a "follower"? Are the conventional concepts of materiality and multimodality, or even the conventional understanding of rhetoric as *techne*, up to the challenge of accounting for the extreme fluidity of production and consumption in digital text and writing practices? Not far removed from these theoretical and methodological questions are empirical questions about what big data phenomena, such as blockchain, smart contracts, and 'the Internet of Things', as well as refugee hackathons, and worker platform cooperatives, might do to our very understanding of what language (as 'symbolic action') *is*, as well as of how different languages (including computer codes) interact and intermingle in globally distributed territories of meaning.

Scholarship on digital activism has included extensive work on: surveillance and censorship (Morozov 2011; Fuchs et al. 2012; Bauman and Lyon 2013); the impact of ICTs on the ideology, organization, mobilization, and new socio-political formations (McCaughey and Ayers 2003; Van de Donk et al. 2004); the role of digitally networked media in supporting social movements and protest groups around the globe (Dahlberg and Siapera 2007; Castells 2012); and the influence in the digital public sphere of non-state actors in the deliberation of issues of ethics and rights at all levels of governance, which connect with issues surrounding migration, the environment, and the rights of cultural and other minorities (Zuckerman 2013; Karatzogianni et al. 2013; Gerbaudo 2016).

The attempt of one of the authors (Karatzogianni 2006) to propose *cyberconflict* as a theoretical framework aimed to integrate social movement and digital media network theory with international conflict analysis to examine more broadly elements of conflict among groups, organizations, and collective actors in digital networks and included tracing:

- The historical, socio-political, economic, and digital environment;
- The impact of ICTs on mobilizing the structures, the framing processes, and the political opportunity structures within a given country or countries;
- The ethnoreligious and cultural elements produced and reproduced in digital networks;
- The control of information, surveillance, censorship, political discourse dominance, and digital effects on policy; and
- The levels of mobilization of dissent in a given country within particular ideological orders set against
    - which socio-political code,
    - within which labor process,
    - with which type of agency and social logic (Karatzogianni & Schandorf, 2016).

Despite the possibility of accounting for the social and political effects of digital media far more broadly than any one of these particular foci, even the *cyberconflict* framework falls too short. While we can partly trace and sketch the historical and theoretical development of

digital activism in the last two decades (Karatzogianni 2015), even such an integrative analysis does not delve in depth into the transformation that the digital brings to the rhetoric of a specific movement, organization, or protest, nor account for the evolution of digital activist rhetoric over time.

There are two primary reasons for this. The first is how digital activism literature developed primarily by focusing on either the medium, the movement, or the specific issue at hand while drawing from disciplinary perspectives and research methodologies including semiotics, discourse analysis, variously named digital ethnographies, social network analysis, and eventually big data and text mining. The focus on *in depth* rhetorical analysis, however, has been rarely attempted in studies of digital activist rhetoric—the "digital" typically being privileged over the "rhetoric" or even the "activism". The second reason is the problem of digital writing and rhetoric and how scholars of rhetoric have similarly approached "the digital". One particular event during the Standing Rock protest serves as an example of the limitations of focusing on movement, medium, or text, even as it would seem ripe for conventional analysis.

Mediatized Apology as *Apologia*

On 4 December 2016 Wesley Clark, Jr., a writer, media presenter, activist, and Army veteran (and son of former NATO Supreme Commander of Europe, General Wesley Clark Sr.), led a group of approximately 2,000 US military veterans to Standing Rock, North Dakota in support of the Native American Water Protectors led by the local Lakota Sioux. Beginning in the spring of 2016, protests against the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline had drawn hundreds of indigenous protesters from across the US, including many from tribes that have historically been enemies. The protest was prompted by the flouting of tribal sovereignty by federal and state government officials in collusion with the oil industry, and the fact that the pipeline was to be placed 6 feet below the Missouri River, a critical water source for the region that continues past the Standing Rock Reservation for 1000 miles through four states before merging with the Mississippi River in St. Louis, Missouri. Wesley Clark was moved to support the Standing Rock protesters as an environmental activist, but also because Native Americans have historically served in the US military in very high numbers, and because the flouting of tribal sovereignty and the clear violations of the protesters' civil rights by the heavily militarized local police and corporate security forces blatantly replayed the US government's history of atrocities against Native Americans.

The veterans' arrival was marked by a welcoming and reconciliation ceremony in which Clark delivered an apology for the US military's historical mistreatment of Native Americans to the Lakota's Chief, tribal activist Leonard Crow Dog. Clark's apology capped a day of speeches and activities in the Pavilion (an auditorium space resembling a gymnasium with a stage set up at one end) of the Grand River Casino and Resort on the Standing Rock Indian Reservation. Chief Leonard Crow Dog sat in a wheelchair in front of the stage facing the audience. To his right were Faith Spotted Eagle, Ivan Looking Horse, and other tribal elders, with younger tribal members to the Chief's left. Other Lakota stood on the stage behind and above the Chief, many with cameras. An audience of several hundred that included both Water Protectors and veterans surrounded a wide, square, open space before the Chief; those in the first rows were seated or kneeling. Dozens of cameras and camera-phones were interspersed throughout the audience, particularly around the perimeter of the open space. The last of several previous speakers, Faith Spotted Eagle ended her comments by declaring a

"safe space" for open dialogue, which cued the approach of Wesley Clark, wearing a 19th century uniform of the US 7th Cavalry, the Army unit with which Clark had served—a unit which shares with the Lakota Sioux a bloody history. Clark had been standing just outside of the open space, directly across from the Chief, with a group of a dozen diverse veterans behind him in loose formation. As he came forward, Faith Spotted Eagle gave Clark the microphone and moved to the Chief's right. As he took the microphone and began speaking, Clark turned to cue the dozen veterans to fall in behind him in (roughly) four rows of three. The audience applauded as the veterans came forward, and Clark began his apology:

> We came here to be the conscience of the nation. And within that conscience we must first confess our sins to you because many of us, me particularly, are from the units that have hurt you over the many years. We came, we fought you, we took your land. We signed treaties that we broke. We stole minerals from your sacred hills. We blasted the faces of our presidents onto your sacred mountain. Then we took still more land, and then we took your children. And then we tried to take *your* language and we tried to eliminate *your* language that God gave *you*, and that the Creator gave *you*. We didn't respect you. We polluted your Earth. We've hurt you in so many ways. But we've come to say that we are sorry. We are at your service, and we beg for your forgiveness.

Concluding this speech (his voice cracking with emotion at the last word), Clark knelt before the Chief, and the dozen vets also knelt behind him bowing their heads. Clark (who had to slide up a couple feet) removed his cavalry hat and bowed his head before Chief Crow Dog. The seated Chief placed his hand on the back of Clark's bowed head, and audience members began ululating. After 10 seconds, the Chief removed his hand with a small flourish. Clark slid back, still on one knee, and he and Chief Crow Dog nodded to each other. Clark began to rise, but Faith Spotted Eagle motioned for him to stay down. Clark bowed his head again. After 30 seconds of silence (except for the clicking of dozens of cameras) Ivan Looking Horse approached Clark and touched him on the hand. Clark remained on one knee, head bowed, as Ivan Looking Horse asked the audience to rise and began to chant and beat a handheld drum. Some Lakota in the audience joined the song. At the conclusion of the song, Ivan Looking Horse passed the microphone (which had been held for him by another male elder) to Chief Crow Dog. Clark faced the Chief, remaining on one knee, while the rest of the veterans remained kneeling with heads bowed. After a brief pause, the Chief made his response:

> The ways of life. Today, the Seventh Cavalry. In the beginning of the world, at the beginning of the east star, let me say a few words. I will accept thee in forgiveness. World peace. World peace. We will take a step. We are Lakota Sovereign Nation. We were the nation, and we're still a nation. We have a language to speak. We have preserved the caretaker position. We do not own the land. The land owns us. Our land, we kept. We didn't do what they did [...]. But we'll take this step [...]. The United States [has its] supreme law. But we have a supreme law, too, and we're going to take it this way: to the United Nations—to the United Nations. One of these countries will have to tell the truth: that we are human beings. We are going to take it to the Foreign Relations Committee—that we must be honoured. 1868 Treaty. 1851 Treaty. 1889 Treaty. June 24, 1924: that we are come to be citizens of the United States. That's where it happened. That's where they thieved. That's why they have to lie. They make us live the lie, [make us] accept something that was not our dream, our vision. [...] We are a nation. We are a nation. We are going to take some steps, legally. All you tax

> payers, [...] as long as you can honour the Lakota Nation, among all tribal nations, 564 tribes, honour them. If you don't honour them, we ain't gonna pay no taxes anymore.

Until the eruption of applause at the rousing end of Chief Crow Dog's speech, and apart from a positive response to the Chief's call for "world peace," the audience had remained solemnly quiet, excepting the incessant clicking of cameras. Finishing, the Chief handed the microphone back to Ivan Looking Horse and took Clark's hand. Clark moved forward, remaining on one knee, and spoke into the Chief's ear.

While this ceremony was explicitly a welcoming of the veterans and reconciliation of US soldiers with the Lakota Nation, it was also a media event: an apology from US soldiers serving as *apologia* for the Lakota's ongoing dissent. Several professional photographers and journalists were apparent in the crowd, and a large portion of the audience recorded the event with smartphones or other devices. As we can assume was planned or expected, several versions of this event made their way online in the days following. Five prominent video versions of the ceremony posted to YouTube and Facebook received more than 22 million combined views in the two weeks following the event, in spite of what was described by activists and their supporters as an ongoing mainstream "media blackout" of the Standing Rock encampment (abetted by the active obstruction of journalists by local authorities, which included arrests, confiscation of equipment, and no-fly zones that banned the use of drones, as well as the suspicion of active interference with telecommunications on the reservation; see Eidelman, 2016; Lacambra 2016).

Digital Activist Rhetoric: The Limitations of Movement, Mode, and Medium

The spectacle of Clark's apology can be accounted for in a number of ways. A conventional rhetorical analysis might contextualize the situation in terms of the genre of *apologia* and the historical relations among the Lakota Sioux and the US government and military, shaped by various Native American cultural and narrative tropes. Such an account would focus on the speeches themselves and the intended function that the reconciliation ceremony served to defend the protesters' ongoing actions. An analysis that focused on the technologies of camera and screen, such as a semiotic, cultural, or visual rhetorical analysis, would focus on a particular (or particular set of) media texts shaped by, e.g., point of view. One of the most popular versions of the event, for example, was posted on Facebook by Salon and received 3.2 million views in the two weeks following (We Beg..., 2016). This video used footage shot from the stage, behind and above Chief Crow Dog, looking down upon Clark and the dozen kneeling veterans with the audience in the background. The single, fixed viewing position is not a 'privileged' one. The viewer does not get an especially good view of proceedings, but sees a minimally composed image from the position of the authentic witness. The relatively wide, undiscriminating lens of a mobile camera has the fuzzy halo characteristic of an iPhone. The viewer hears an amplified voice reverberating in a public space. A utilitarian, consumer-freeware effect of post-production subtitles has been added for clarity. While most viewers would have seen this video as 'content' alongside professional news tagged, posted, and embedded on Facebook (and, in fact, this version was branded by Salon), the production re-presents the authenticity of the witness and avoids the distancing, standing-outside-looking-in rhetoric of the news report.

This particular video, for example, evokes the atmosphere of a town hall and positions the viewer as receiver of the apology, and thus in empathic identification with the Native American receiver of the apology. The focus is on Clark as protagonist. Protagonist/apologist and receiver/forgiver represent the White and the Other, respectively, who face each other theatrically (supplicant on bended knee) while witnessed by a larger audience. We see the "White" who stole the lands but not the faces of the people whom he is apologising to, nor how this is received—the viewer is positioned to react to the apology itself, in empathic identification with the wronged party. With its limited context, the tone and text of Clark's speech (e.g., short, direct phrasing: "We came, we stole, we took your land") can be read as a mimetic representation of the stereotypical speech of the noble savage, evoking the magic ecological link of native people to sacred nature in which the native people teach 'us' how to live as part of nature. This lexical register, mobilised within the rhetorical genre of *apologia*, generates identification with the Other, and thus acceptance and reconciliation—effecting the affective rhetorical intentions of the event itself as ceremony and spectacle.

But such a conventional rhetorical, cultural, or semiotic analysis faces several confounding factors. Most importantly, perhaps, is this particular, highly edited version of the event capable of—does it carry the authority, the *ethos*, to—document the act? Given that this mediated event has been recorded, posted, and reposted in several different versions, taken from different angles and/or variously edited, with varying qualities of sound and graphic enhancements, which of these "texts" is authoritative? The transcriptions above were made by comparing several different versions varying in length from 1:13 to 8:03 (the Salon version is 1:51). The claim that any one of these constitutes "the text," in fact, misses the point of the ceremony as mediated rhetorical spectacle.

The problem is not simply a matter of intertextuality because it is not a matter of "texts": an event, no less than a movement, is neither a text nor a collection of texts, despite the requirements of analysis. The ongoing Standing Rock action is not an advertising or publicity campaign, though at times certain events—orchestrated, dynamic, or spontaneous—can serve to coalesce the motivations and intentions of an ongoing action. But such a coalescence is not merely a collection of "texts" any more than it is merely a collection of "individuals." We cannot understand the rhetoric of activism merely in terms of texts produced and consumed. Critically, the focus on a specific text can, for example, elide rhetorical implications of such mediated symbolic acts embedded in the broader political and cultural economy, such as the corporate profit-making also served by the gestural sharing or retweeting of activist videos edited and branded by media outlets, including Salon or AJ+ (Al Jazeera's digital media unit based in San Francisco; "We Came," 2016).

Accounting for Distributed Rhetorical Praxis

Contemporary forms of activist rhetoric reflect and intertwine contemporary quotidian discursive practices and have significant implications for our understanding of immediacy or presence, transmedia storytelling, and the political economy of the "immaterial" and affective labor of social media sharing—and thus the production and consumption of digital rhetoric and writing. The advantage that activist practices present is, in fact, their explicitly rhetorical character. Where the minimal effort and fluttering affect of the "like" or retweet can dilute or veil the rhetorical and ideological implications of the mediated gesture, the explicitly rhetorical motivations of symbolic action coalesce in the promulgation of activist discourse.

However, the adherence to disciplinary *topoi* of digital activism, internet studies, or rhetorical studies alone is inadequate to understanding these practices, which encompass them all.

In response to the complexity, dynamicism, and variety of contemporary activist rhetorical practices – both in terms of rhetorical genres and media-technology forms – a superficial share/retweet fetishism has evolved that analytically reduces activist rhetoric to, say, Facebook posts (specific technology/platform) or hashtags (specific rhetorical form/genre), that is of little independent value beyond the merely descriptive. The capture and analysis of "data" in the form of text strips the affective force from rhetorical practices, which is precisely from where the 'action' of activism emanates: "Practices of audiencehood— quoting, favoriting, commenting, responding, sharing, and viewing—all leave traces, and therefore have effects on common culture" (Burgess & Green 2009, p. 57)—*effects that affect*. There is more to digital activism than data, just as there is more to symbolic action than text. Nevertheless, digital media studies historically has been enthralled by the "data" available to be analyzed as text. So much of this data is being generated so quickly that richness of quantity can masquerade as richness of quality, and problems of validity (and, hence, *ethos*) can be treated as problems of, for example, access to the appropriate APIs and the appropriate tweaking of machine-learning algorithms. Such assumptions elide the tenuousness of the equation of "text" (as word, as contextually fluid and mutable signifier) with "datum" (as precise point of determinate, relational value) (Schandorf, 2016).

Digital media studies' reliance on a reductive equation of language as text with data as information derives directly from modernist literary studies' emphasis on the text as object (Mowitt, 1992). For example, nearly all who have investigated the relationships among technology and rhetoric have been limited by basic assumptions about the production and consumption of discrete texts as found in "hypertext." Originally formulated by Ted Nelson ([1974]1987) as "nonsequential writing," hypertext was posited explicitly as a form of production that more closely aligned with the mind's natural thought processes jumping haphazardly along a chain of allusions and metaphors. The real challenge of hypertext was, thus, a challenge to the authority of the unified text – which is precisely what aligned hypertext theory with postmodern literary and critical theory (Landow 1994), where, following originary moves by Barthes, etc., "text" in the literary sense is conflated with—or inflated to—"text" in the semiotic sense. Hypertext theorists understood that the ability to "link" texts fundamentally changed the notion of what constituted a single, coherent text: "a text" became a conglomeration of "chunks" or "blocks" or "lexias."

However, in the freedom of 'nonlinearity', a mass of discrete blocks can quickly lose all semblance of coherence (Delany, 1991): the coherence of hypertext can only be understood as spatial. While such a two-dimensional "writing space" (Bolter, 1991) offered novel aesthetic possibilities, it had little to offer the investigation and understanding of communication more broadly, and did little for understanding the mediation of natural conversation or the production of knowledge (Burbules, 1998). The metaphor of text as space (and hypertext as information space) privileges the production of a two-dimensional territory through which a reader-writer moves rather than a four-dimensional social spacetime that persons enact, despite the promotion of the active and interactive reader. The blocks or chunks of text remain static – if they did not both the purpose and the function of the link itself would be undermined. Pointing to potential counterexamples like wikis simply reinforces the point: there is a reason we don't like our students citing Wikipedia.

In part, the naive claims to "text liberation" were a consequence of the original formulation of hypertext as, first, a form of production, and only secondarily as a form of consumption, which bound the idea of hypertext to postmodern literary and literacy studies (Landow 1994, Haas 1996, Snyder 1998). On the one hand, hypertext represented a rejection of "'logocentric' hierarchies of language, whose modes of operation are linear and deductive," and which "admit a plurality of meanings" (Moulthrop 1989). On the other hand, the consumption of the text, the reading, the path taken through the hypertext space remains necessarily linear, and the texts ("lexias") themselves remain necessarily authoritative units of information or meaning – an assumption consistent with the reductive inheritance of the intertwingling of information theory and semiotics which gives us the equation of text and data as information as *signs* (Schandorf, 2016).

The consumption and the interpretation of information, therefore, sit together very uneasily – as they always have – between the objectivity of "data" constituted and structured by a set of formalized relations and the subjectivity of the situated meaning and contextual significance of information that we call knowledge. The text is composed, and information is extracted through interpretation. But the composition (i.e., production or articulation) and the interpretation (i.e., consumption or reproduction) of texts (whether "authoritative," "suspect," or "hyper-") has little to offer the understanding of the contemporary conversational text of social media in its various forms ("with their fluid exchanges of textual *praxis*," as Aarseth 1994 described interaction in early text-only, temporally synchronous, digitally mediated environments). Contemporary digital interaction often has more in common with living, face to face conversation, and far more in the way of paralinguistic components and phatic functions, than traditional literary notions of text production (Schandorf, 2013).

The early recognition that digital, conversational text was replicating or remediating forms of embodied interaction bolstered claims that a "secondary orality" was expanding literate cultures in a manner analogous to the way literacy had expanded oral cultures (Ong, 1980; Welch, 1999). This construct may have been useful to critically foreground and contrast novel forms of discursive practice among new forms of analogue electronic and broadcast media and in the early days of digital media generally limited to text. However, the thorough embeddedness and "multimodality" of digital communications technologies in 21st century life makes such a distinction irrelevant, as exemplified by "predominantly oral/aural" cultures of the developing world that now commonly trade in cell phone network minutes and SIM cards. Nevertheless, the investigation and theorization of digital rhetoric remains bound to the linear "exchange" of text production and consumption. For example, Greg Ulmer's "electracy" is a more robust version of Ong's "secondary orality" that emphasizes the broad rhetorical, cultural, and cognitive implications of a digitally mediated world. In doing so, however, the theorization and practices of "electracy" continue to explicitly privilege the production of "texts," though often in nontextual or "multimodal" forms: "In electracy, critique moves from 'what does it mean?' to 'how does it work?' By asking how something works, we can never know (nor would we desire to know) for sure what something represents, or means for certain, but we will always experience its force, intensity, and production" (Arroyo, 2013, p. 46). The problem here can be traced back to Derrida's theoretical equation of writing with communication, which Ulmer (1985) applies as *grammatology*, "understood not only in the special sense of textualist *écriture*, but also in the sense of a compositional practice […] Writing is privileged" (Ulmer, 1985, p. x). This is perfectly consistent with the ways our basic concepts of reading and writing have been disciplinarily reified and fetishized as a relation of consumption to production (e.g., of "text as discourse" in Eyman 2015). But the disciplinary emphasis on (and restriction to) the

production (or "writing") of "text" has made communication as active interaction difficult to "read." Media technologies, as *techne* of production, have been bound to forms of consumption (as machines for "information processing" and "information viewing," see e.g., Trimbur, 2000), making multimedia digestible only in terms of multiple "literacies."

The emphasis on literacies, however, challenges our ability to connect the production and consumption of information as text with the *act*ual embodied inter*act*ion of the rhetorical as the effecting of affect in globally distributed media ecologies. Nevertheless, digital rhetoric scholarship often attempts to embrace the performative character of digital rhetorical practices. Arroy (2013, p. 71) further argues that "electrate reasoning is movement, or, more specifically, the performance of meaning through the touching of external relations that map space in movement." However, this performance is articulated by the determined data points and network edges of linear textual "performance," broadly conceived as textual production—the legacy of hypertext. Similarly, digital media scholars, trapped in their infinite nutshells of information, mine the data of posts, tweets, and hashtags but must generally set images to the side for lack of tools with which to adequately analyze them. Those who focus on images, ignore text and ironically tend to repudiate meaning, e.g., Manovich (2001) from whom work in digital media and digital rhetoric often draws. Digital rhetoric scholars, trapped in the constraints of "literacies" similarly confine themselves to specific forms of textual production and imagine this as a liberation of rhetorical practice from the situational confines of speech and the printed page. "Unfortunately," notes Collin Brooke, "literacy ultimately makes for a questionable choice if our commitment is to multiplicity, to media in general, or to fluidity" (Brooke, 2009, p. 130). Multimedia, hypermedia, or multimodal production of "texts" has thus been confined to more or less expressivist forms of rhetorical invention that ignore, resist, or downplay the fact that people communicate – in whatever forms and combinations – for reasons that motivate a multitude of tangible purposes and actual social/relational goals beyond 'expression'.

These approaches, of course, are typically embedded in disciplinary priorities of teaching production, even if that production is understood to require attention to assumptions, expectations, and patterns of consumption, which are typically addressed in terms of a critical stance: the production of effective rhetoric requires the conscious and critical consumption of rhetoric, as "writing" (broadly conceived) requires "reading" (broadly conceived). Rhetorics of embodiment have attempted to contest these distinctions, but have typically remained trapped in the production/consumption binary, as well as in the visual bias that undermines attempts to conceive *act*ual inter*act*ion. This distinction between production and consumption (or reproduction) is embedded within a broader set of binaries, including expression/representation and interaction (performance, exhibition)/documentation (archive). And yet, all such binaries break down in a world where the mediated character of all forms of communication is inescapable, whether as "reading" a "text" "(re)produced" long ago or interacting with another(s) in a temporally immediate (i.e., synchronous) "collaborative performance." In social media everyone is writer, everyone is reader. This "prosumerism" makes the distinction between production and consumption, and reading and writing, radically unhelpful, particularly in cases such as the Standing Rock *apologia* where 'authorship' and 'authority' are as multiple and complex as the multimodalities of production and consumption.

'The Really Hard Problem' of Distributed Rhetoric

Practices of digital activism demonstrate why contemporary rhetorical studies, and studies of digital rhetoric in particular, must move beyond the text and intertextuality (as much as hypertextuality), as well as beyond the individual actor, to understand distributed rhetorical processes of symbolic (inter-/co-)action. Focusing on the rhetoric of an individual, a text, or the rhetorical affordances of a medium (built upon and intertwined with uncritical assumptions about the constitution of information) misses entirely the distributed character of rhetorical praxis—which has always already been the case but is inescapable in a hypermediated and digitally networked (if not integrated) world. The investigation of rhetoric and rhetorical processes – of what people in assemblages of actors and agents are doing and trying to accomplish in communication and/as interaction across places and media, and within or against the algorithmic rhythms of a political economy of corporate manipulation and state regulation – cannot be confined to the limitations of textual production and consumption if we hope to generate actionable understanding of those processes. Structural, organizational, and situational factors directly effect and affect the intertwingling of modalities of production and consumption, just as they shape individual rhetorical motives. The rhetoric of digital activism is emblematic of the contemporary complex movements and intricate laceworks of multimedia production and multimodal hermeneutics that present the 21st century Heraclitus with a digital stream of social consciousness in which passive audience can shift to active witness with the click of a mouse or the swipe of a screen. While millions of Facebook check-ins, for example, can be derided as ineffective 'slacktivism', those gestures of globally mediated co-presence and solidarity in which "it's like all the nations on earth responded" reveal "clouds of witnesses." With the rhetorical positioning of those same witnesses a short while later as ceremonial participants in the mediated *apologia* of Wesley Clark's supplication and US military veterans response to his call to service, we see the mobilization of social consciousness – both in the thousands of veterans who were drawn to Standing Rock through social media and in the millions of supporters continuing to share information unavailable in the news media until it generates enough momentum among these audiences and witnesses. It is worth noting that the day after the veterans arrived, the US Army Corp of Engineers formally denied Energy Transfer Partners the required permit to drill under the Missouri River (Wong, 2016). A rhetorical studies that is forever fixated on downstream swirlings will always miss the action.

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