

# Remixing and Reconsidering Rhetorical Velocity

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*In this essay, we will remix, revise, and reconsider the notion of rhetorical velocity, a concept Ridolfo first developed and which we wrote about in a 2009 piece. More specifically, we'll return to the original construction of rhetorical velocity and examine its relationship to remix, then trace the increasing ubiquity of "remix" across the eight years since we first published the rhetorical velocity article in Kairos. We'll address complexities of assessing authorship, investigating practices of composition, and interrogating recomposition and redistribution—in the context of what Hart-Davidson and Ridolfo describe as "the fog of digital rhetoric." We envision the manuscript as a mixture of reflection and analysis.*

**Keywords:** circulation, delivery, distribution, remix, rhetorical velocity

In 2004, Danger Mouse released the *Grey Album*—this post-Napster moment was just prior to Apple's GarageBand release, and before the 2005 launches of YouTube and Twitter. The *Grey Album* mixed an a capella release of Jay-Z's eighth and supposedly final album, the *Black Album*, with the Beatles' *White Album*.

Both "original" works are protected under copyright. It's fairly typical of rappers to release vocals-only versions of their work, specifically to inspire remixing, mashing, and sampling. And, of course, the Beatles full library exists across multiple digital and physical venues and are technically available for use (although legally, copyright for Beatles' work is primarily owned by recording companies and the estate of Michael Jackson).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Zack O'Malley Greenburg, *Michael Jackson, Inc.: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of a Billion-Dollar Empire* (New York: Atria Books, 2014); Valentina Zarya, "Paul McCartney is Trying to Get Back the Rights to His Beatles Songs," *Fortune*, March 21, 2016, <http://fortune.com/2016/03/21/paul-mccartney-beatles-songs/> (accessed January 31, 2017).

This example is a rich one for discussion, as it raises myriad questions about music in a digital era, copyright and intellectual property across digital spaces, issues of ownership and control over cultural objects, and much more. What we're most interested in here, however, are issues of rhetorical velocity.

Only 3,000 copies of the *Grey Album* were initially released, and Danger Mouse referred to the entire project as an "art experiment."<sup>2</sup> However, the album quickly gained popularity, especially as tracks were digitized and began to spread across the many post-Napster file- and music-sharing sites. With this attention came EMI's cease-and-desist demand; EMI holds the copyright for the Beatles' *White Album*, and sent its halt-distribution demands to retailers and to Danger Mouse.

Downhill Battle, a music activist group, got involved in the issue, and coordinated Grey Tuesday, a digital civil disobedience event, held February 24, 2004. On this day, web sites that supported remixing practices, music-sharing technologies, and a variety of other post-Napster political and copyleft-related practices changed the background color of their web sites to gray, and many of the sites offered Grey Album tracks for download.

Blogger Dave Simmer II was a participant, changing the background of his blog to gray and posting commentary on the situation:

What totally blows about all this is that up-and-coming DJs wanting to break into the business have historically done exactly this type of thing in order to hone their mixing talents and work on their DJ skills. What's the harm in it? Does EMI honestly think that an album that has sampled tracks from The Beatles will cut into Beatles' album sales? I mean, money is all they care about (anybody believing that EMI is somehow trying to "preserve the integrity" of The Beatles' music is deluding themselves), and it's kind of stupid to think that sales of The White Album are going to plummet because of this. Hell, they may very well rack up new sales from an audience that has never even heard it before!

Being an artist is an exercise in creativity that requires drawing inspiration from the world around you. Forbidding an artist to explore that creativity will not only hurt the future of the music, but ultimately the consumers who want to listen to it as well.<sup>3</sup>

There were a variety of ways in which Downhill Battle shaped Grey Tuesday with rhetorical velocity in mind:

1. Downhill Battle produced and distributed a media/press release meant to announce, but also developed for distribution and re-use.
2. Downhill Battle served as a hub and network-organizing space for those participating in the day of digital unrest.
3. Downhill Battle provided graphics to post and web-safe color codes for changing background colors to people who wanted to participate on Grey Tuesday.
4. On February 24, Downhill Battle posted updated coverage of Grey Tuesday throughout the day.

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<sup>2</sup> J-23, "The Jay-Z Remixes Continue," *HipHopDX*, January 15, 2004, <http://hiphopdx.com/news/id.2224/title.the-jay-z-remixes-continue> (accessed January 31, 2017).

<sup>3</sup> Dave Simmer II, "Grey Tuesday," *Blogography*, February 24, 2004, [http://blogography.com/archives/category/music/music\\_2004](http://blogography.com/archives/category/music/music_2004).

5. Downhill Battle created bannedmusic.org to host the full *Grey Album* and call attention to Grey Tuesday

In 2011, a sound engineer named John Stewart remastered the 2004 *Grey Album*.<sup>4</sup> He said: “I think that the world and how music is perceived and received is very different in 2012 than it was in 2004.”<sup>5</sup> The world was, indeed, very different in 2012 compared to 2004. Likewise, the world—in terms of scholarship on remix, mashing, and more—is very different today compared to 2009, when we published “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery” in *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy*.

In this piece, we explore the current remix context from four perspectives: technological, cultural, legal, and in research and scholarship. We then touch on these four perspectives with an orientation toward rhetorical velocity. We conclude by charting some potential future directions for remix—as act, as object, as methodology, as disruptor, and as vehicle for rhetorical velocity.

### Remix: Technologically

In March 2009, there were approximately 25,000 apps available in the Apple app store. As of June 2016, there were more than 2 million.<sup>6</sup> In the Google Play store (formerly known as the Android Market), there were 16,000 apps in December 2009,<sup>7</sup> and more than 2.6 million in December 2016. Some of these apps are designed for composition and recomposition. For instance, apps like Ninja Jamm, iMashup, and Mix:DJ allow users to mix and mash music, and most offer mobile DJing abilities—to not only mix and mash, but to connect to speakers, broadcast to a crowd, and DJ on the fly.

To turn to laptops and desktops, incredibly robust, cross-platform multimedia-creating software is now relatively available and accessible on most computers. Windows computers come with Movie Maker loaded, and Apple machines come with iMovie; both allow users to create video projects and allow for easy output and immediate upload to movie-sharing sites (like Vimeo and YouTube). Importantly, too, both wired connections and wireless networks offer incredibly fast connections and upload/download times, making it easier to share media faster. Sites like YouTube and Snapchat allow for streaming, instant content production and sharing.<sup>8</sup> That said, the technology itself isn’t revolutionary. An argument made by the WIDE Digital Research Collective transcends time, and is just as relevant in 2017 as it was when initially articulated in 2008: “The revolution of connectivity is not just a network or machine revolution. It is primarily a social and cultural revolution.”<sup>9</sup>

<sup>4</sup> “Grey Album Remastered by Golden-eared Engineer,” *Boing Boing*, November 29, 2012, <http://boingboing.net/2012/11/29/grey-album-remastered-by-golde.html> (accessed January 30, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Leor Galil, “The Story Behind the Newly Remastered Version of ‘The Grey Album,’” *Forbes*, November 29, 2012, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/leorgalil/2012/11/28/the-story-behind-the-newly-remastered-version-of-the-grey-album/#6ab1a31c7be2> (accessed January 30, 2017).

<sup>6</sup> Sam Costello, “How Many Apps Are in the App Store?” *Lifewire*, October 27, 2016, <https://www.lifewire.com/how-many-apps-in-app-store-2000252> (accessed January 31, 2017).

<sup>7</sup> Robin Wauters, “Google: Android Market Now Serving 30,000 Apps,” *Techcrunch*, March 16, 2010, <https://techcrunch.com/2010/03/16/google-android-market-now-serving-30000-apps/> (accessed January 31, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> We recognize that this conversation may seem fairly utopic. Not all users have access to stable, fast connections; certainly, many people in the world don’t have regular Internet access at all.

<sup>9</sup> WIDE Digital Research Collective, “Why Teach Digital Writing,” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 10.1 (2005): <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/10.1/coverweb/wide/kairos2.html> (accessed January 10, 2017).

## Remix: Culturally

With the technological affordances of remix described above, what many call “remix culture” has taken hold across digital spaces. Remix culture, or read-write culture, is perhaps best explored by Larry Lessig in his 2008 *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy*.<sup>10</sup> This is a culture in which all objects and items are (theoretically) untethered and up for grabs—for mashing, mixing, modifying, redistributing, and other acts.

Today, writing fanfiction, creating memes, vidding, and more are all prevalent composing activities in digital spaces.<sup>11</sup> Moreover and perhaps more importantly, we have evolved to a culture of remix *expectations*. Users expect engagement with and abilities to use media in ways perhaps not previously imagined in a read-only culture. Users have become, in many respects and much media, *prosumers*, which Daniel Anderson describes as users who toggle between production and consumption roles in/with digital media.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, however, a slow composition culture is emerging, with scholars arguing for more careful use of others’ materials. Kristin Arola, for instance, writes specifically of the ways in which fast composition and accessible, open culture approaches potentially harm creators and authors—and, indeed, the works they gather to remix.<sup>13</sup>

## Remix: Legally

The legal landscape has shifted significantly since 2004, with many changes anchored to digital spaces and remix possibilities. To go back only a few years, for instance, in 2009, the U.S. courts were deciding how to handle Internet radio services, deciding whether or not streaming music (especially on sites like Spotify and Last.FM, which allowed users to tag music and customize playlists) were “interactive services.” This label would have made it possible for the copyright holders of the music to receive licensing fees (*Arista Records, LLC v. Launch Media, Inc.*).

Other significant changes trail back mainly to the implementation of 1998’s Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA). These cases include those related to Google Books, and Google’s admirable, initial goal of archiving all human knowledge; the many lawsuits brought by Authors’ Guild and others resulted in Google slightly altering that stance to “work with publishers and libraries to create a comprehensive, searchable, virtual card catalog of all books in all languages that helps users discover new books and publishers discover new readers.”<sup>14</sup>

*Golan v. Holder* (2012) transformed the ways in which “orphan works” existed in the cultural commons, and has the possibility of continued impact of work initially assumed to be public domain and available for all. Other landmark legal instances of the past ten years or so include

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<sup>10</sup> Lawrence Lessig, *Remix: Making Art and Commerce Thrive in the Hybrid Economy* (New York: Penguin, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> For more on the relationship of digital media to fanfiction and its role as an embodied digital literacy practice, see Tekla Hawkins, “The One Where: Fan Fiction as Playable Media” (Ph.D. diss., The University of Texas at Austin, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Anderson, “Prosumer Approaches to New Media Composition: Consumption in Continuum,” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 8 (2003): <http://technorhetoric.net/8.1/coverweb/anderson/> (accessed January 10, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Kristin L Arola, “Slow Composition: An Indigenous Approach to Multimodal Composition,” (Manuscript in process, 2017).

<sup>14</sup> “Google Books,” *Google*, 2011, [https://books.google.com/intl/en\\_au/googlebooks/author.html](https://books.google.com/intl/en_au/googlebooks/author.html) (accessed January 10, 2017).

the ways in which the Teach Act (signed into law in 2002) is interpreted and put to use by educators, and understood and navigated by copyright holders. The Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Protect IP Act (PIPA) inspired some of perhaps the most significant online protests to date. Sites including Google, Reddit, Flickr, and others actively protested the proposed legislation, with Fight for the Future claiming that over 115,000 web sites joined the digital protest, which, unlike Grey Tuesday, spanned weeks. Regarding velocity of the protests, as Wortham reported, during one of the most active weeks of the protest, “There were nearly 200,000 Twitter posts mentioning SOPA on Monday, more than 450,000 on Tuesday and about 3.9 million on Wednesday.”<sup>15</sup>

## Research and Scholarship

Within this technological, cultural, and legal context, and, indeed before it, in the last three decades, scholars of rhetorical delivery have considered the fifth canon beyond Aristotelian orality.<sup>16</sup> This scholarship primarily addressed academics in rhetoric and composition studies interested in expanding aspects and affordances of delivery to print productions, digital compositions, the gendered/material body, and to legal issues (especially in networked spaces). Given the technological, cultural, and legal context, especially in the last 10 years, accounting for the sequence of events and individual acts of remix, delivery, and circulation that cascade into instances of rhetorical velocity strike us as a more pressing research problem of delivery and remix: that is, studying how a message moves (or doesn’t) at people’s hands, mouths, keys, and to what ends.

Since our 2009 rhetorical velocity article, the turn to social media has expanded the speed and velocity of how acts of delivery cascade and ripple across digital space. This has also brought about an increased need to quickly understand the contexts for specific pieces of re-

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<sup>15</sup> Jenna Wortham, “Public Outcry Over Antipiracy Bills Began as Grassroots Grumbling,” *New York Times*, January 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/20/technology/public-outcry-over-antipiracy-bills-began-as-grassroots-grumbling.html?pagewanted=1&ref=technology> (accessed January 31, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> See Robert J. Connors, “Actio: A Rhetoric of Manuscripts,” *Rhetoric Review* 2 (1983): 64-73; Dànielle Nicole DeVoss and James E. Porter, “Why Napster Matters to Writing: Filesharing as a New Ethic of Digital Delivery,” *Computers and Composition* 23, no. 2 (2006): 178-210; Sam Dragga, “The Ethics of Delivery,” in *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery: Classical Concepts for Contemporary Composition and Communication*, edited by John Frederick Reynolds, 79-95 (New York: Routledge, 1999); Laurie Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2015); Sheri L. Helsley, “A Special Afterword to Graduate Students in Rhetoric,” in *Rhetorical Memory and Delivery: Classical Concepts for Contemporary Composition and Communication*, edited by John Frederick Reynolds, 157-59 (New York: Routledge, 1993); Ben McCorkle, *Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse: A Cross-historical Study* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2012); Roxanne Mountford, *The Gendered Pulpit* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2003); James E. Porter, “Recovering Delivery for Digital Rhetoric,” *Computers and Composition* 26 (2009): 207-24; Jim Ridolfo and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery,” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 13 (2009): [http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo\\_devoss/](http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo_devoss/) (Accessed January 17, 2017); Jim Ridolfo and Martine Courant Rife, “Rhetorical Velocity and Copyright: A Case Study on Strategies of Rhetorical Delivery,” in *Copy(write): Intellectual Property in the Composition Classroom*, edited by Martine Courant Rife, Shaun Slattery, and Dànielle Nicole DeVoss, 223-243 (Anderson, SC: Parlor Press, 2011); Carolyn D. Rude, “Toward an Expanded Concept of Rhetorical Delivery: The Uses of Reports in Public Policy Debates,” *Technical Communication Quarterly* 13 (2004): 271-88; Virginia Skinner-Linnenberg, *Dramatizing Writing: Reincorporating Delivery in the Classroom* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997); John Trimbur, “Composition and the Circulation of Writing,” *College Composition and Communication* 52 (2000): 188-219; Kathleen E. Welch, *Electric Rhetoric: Classic Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Nancy Welch, *Living Room: Teaching Public Writing in a Privatized World* (Boynton/Cook Publishers, 2008).

mixed, redistributed, recomposed writing and images in online spaces. In rhetorical studies, Ryan Omizo has used computational methods to measure the “rhetorical velocity of ePortfolio textual content, visualizing findings, and using these findings to assist reflection and refinement of ePortfolio composing.”<sup>17</sup> Omizo leverages the RePort\_Bot he coded to understand two critical questions for ePortfolios: “how does the digital nature of ePortfolios affect composing and reflection practices and how can we leverage the digital affordances of ePortfolios in the service of better writing and design?” Omizo’s work here points to the computational potential to research the past rhetorical velocity of texts within a corpus of texts, a growing area of work that we view as one significant future for study of rhetorical velocity. Related to this trend as well, Laurie Gries is working to develop a “digital research method for tracing the rhetorical transformation that images undergo as they circulate and become embroiled in various collective activities.”<sup>18</sup> In her 2017 *Kairos* article “Mapping Obama Hope” Gries describes iconographic tracking as “a recursive (and messy) process that entails the following research phases:

data hoarding (collecting as much data as possible),  
 data mining (sorting through data and finding patterns, trends, relationships, etc),  
 assembling a collection (organizing data), and  
 data analysis (zooming in on an image’s composition, production, transformation, distribution, circulation, collectivity, and consequentiality).<sup>19</sup>

What we see in both Omizo and Gries’s work are two approaches to studying the rhetorical transformation of work across differently defined corpora of texts and images.

Outside of rhetorical studies, we want to draw attention to two non-mutually exclusive ways to approach the study of delivery for rhetoric and for the digital humanities. The first is through large data sets (sometimes referred to as “big data”), which IBM characterizes as a large volume of data that’s often time sensitive and “extends beyond structured data, including unstructured data of all varieties: text, audio, video, click streams, log files and more.”<sup>20</sup> One example of a large data set that’s useful to examine in terms of circulation is the HyperCities project (<http://www.hypercities.org>), “a digital research and educational platform for exploring, learning about, and interacting with the layered histories of city and global spaces.”<sup>21</sup> In early 2011, the HyperCities team began to collect tweets with hashtags related to the ongoing events in Egypt. In addition to allowing viewers to live stream GeoLocated tweets via the Google Maps API, the project archives all tweets and allows playback of specific days. While this project provides a powerful dataset and visualization tool for researching the location, frequency, content, and circulation of messages, missing still are the meta-perspectives of practitioners. We can see the messages and track them through time, but we’re only seeing part of the story—reading the tweets in this way is much like looking through a straw.

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<sup>17</sup>Ryan Omizo, “RePort\_Bot: A Computational Approach to ePortfolios and Reflection,” *The Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy* 10 (2016): [https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/report\\_bot](https://jitp.commons.gc.cuny.edu/report_bot) (accessed January 17, 2017).

<sup>18</sup>Laurie Gries, “Mapping Obama Hope: A Data Visualization Project for Visual Rhetorics,” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 21 (2017): <http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/21.2/topoi/gries/index.html> (accessed January 17, 2017).

<sup>19</sup>Laurie Gries, “Mapping Obama Hope.”

<sup>20</sup>“IBM Big Data,” *One Point Solutions*, 2016, <http://www.one-point.com/products/ibm-big-data> (accessed July 28, 2017).

<sup>21</sup>Todd Presner, David Shepard, and Yoh Kawano, “HyperCities: Thick Mapping in the Digital Humanities,” <http://www.hypercities.org/about> (accessed January 17, 2017).

In the second big data example, Ryan Cordell studies the viral reprinting of poems in 19th century newspapers. For Cordell, studying the reprinting of texts in 19th century newspapers highlights “the ways texts create, sustain, or sometimes sever network connections.”<sup>22</sup> This has prompted Cordell and his *viraltexts.org* project to develop a reprint detection algorithm to study “What texts were reprinted and why? How did ideas—literary, political, scientific, economic, religious—circulate in the public sphere and achieve critical force among audiences.”<sup>23</sup> Similar to how many memes circulate today, Cordell explains that texts published in 19th century North American newspapers and magazines “were not typically protected as intellectual property, and so literary texts as well as other non-fiction prose texts circulated promiscuously among newspapers as editors freely reprinted materials borrowed from other venues.”<sup>24</sup> By utilizing their reprint detection algorithm to study the big data corpus of digitized 19th century magazines and newspapers, Cordell and his team are able “to frame their spread in terms of ‘rhetorical velocity,’... to describe online composition practices in which writers take reuse and remixing as a given and compose with an eye toward facilitating such reinterpreted acts.”<sup>25</sup>

While big data projects are highly useful platforms for collecting and visualizing data, contemporary approaches to studying rhetorical velocity may be complemented by research into practitioner knowledge about rhetorical delivery in specific campaign contents.<sup>26</sup> As the events of 2011 and 2012 have shown, the confusing (to the immediate outside eye) matrices of messages from dynamic social events are prime for speculation, such as “Did Twitter or Facebook cause the Tunisian or Egyptian revolution?” or “Exactly what role did social media play in the Egyptian revolution?” or “Exactly what role did social media play in the Egyptian revolution?” These questions call to rhetorical studies for a kind of qualitative practitioner research that contextualizes the role specific social media events have in relationship to the rhetors, their objectives, subsequent instances of remix/recomposition, and how the media ripples into other topics and is appropriated for different purposes.<sup>27</sup> For example, in Megan Dodd Little’s 2017 *Written Communication* article “Anticipating Delivery A Case Study of Domestic Partner Benefit (DPB) Advocacy,” she makes a compelling case for studying how practitioners anticipate delivery when she analyzes how “a group of writers who are relatively inexperienced in policy and legal discourse and a seasoned administrative lawyer *both* do the work of anticipating delivery to inform their writing.”<sup>28</sup> Additionally, as we learn from the work of Gries and Omizo, there’s a need to turn everyday matrices of social network data into stories of delivery that may be tracked and understood by the public as meaningful extrapolations of context. In doing so, scholars will be able to share their research in conversations where there’s debate about the relative impact of a particular piece of remixed social media on a particular campaign situation.

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<sup>22</sup> Ryan Cordell, “Viral Textuality in Nineteenth-Century US Newspaper Exchanges,” in *Virtual Victorians: Networks, Connections, Technologies*, edited by Veronica Alfano and Andrew Stauffer, 29-56 (New York: Palgrave MacMillan: 2015), 32.

<sup>23</sup> Ryan Cordell, “Viraltexts,” *Viraltexts.org*, <http://www.viraltexts.org> (accessed January 30, 2017).

<sup>24</sup> Cordell, “Viraltexts.”

<sup>25</sup> Ryan Cordell, “Viral Textuality in Nineteenth-Century US Newspaper Exchanges,” 38.

<sup>26</sup> Megan Dodd Little, “Anticipating Delivery: A Case Study of Domestic Partner Benefit (DPB) Advocacy,” *Written Communication* 34, no. 1 (2017): 75-99; Jim Ridolfo “Rhetorical Delivery as Strategy: Rebuilding the Fifth Canon from Practitioner Stories,” *Rhetoric Review* 31 (2012): 117-29; Kathleen Welch, *Electric Rhetoric*.

<sup>27</sup> We note that Gries’s exploration of the Obama Hope poster is an excellent example of one form of what this research might do.

<sup>28</sup> Little, “Anticipating Delivery,” 77.

## Remix and Rhetorical Velocity

At the end of the original 2009 *Kairos* article on rhetorical velocity, we theorized that one way students might study rhetorical velocity in the classroom is to examine how a press release is turned into a new story and disseminated via targeted searches on sites such as prnewswire.com and Google News. Almost ten years later, conversations around “fake news” have dominated the headlines of the last presidential election cycle. In our 2009 piece, we saw a pedagogical challenge “to provide teaching materials that help foster these emerging conversations in our first-year classes, undergraduate courses, and graduate seminars.”<sup>29</sup> Today, we see a similar although increasingly more complex pedagogical challenge to teach students not only the content of argumentation, but to provide them with the ability to trace how conversations emerge, traverse across media, and are amplified by state and non-state actors.

For example, in the need for more knowledge about remix and social media, we want to advance another argument for delivery and the need for practitioner knowledge. In this case, we are interested in a hypothetical example where people are logged into Twitter, Facebook, and email during the proliferation of a meme. During one short block of time, a message or a meme is shared on Facebook, re-tweeted, texted, or e-mailed. By analyzing streams of data and timestamps, what can individuals discern about the trajectory, velocity, origin, and distribution of messages?<sup>30</sup> What are they able to individually surmise about the rhetorical situation? And, equally relevant, how much time and what sort of research activities are required? The approach to answer any of these questions will be different for either onlookers or practitioners because they’re starting from a different research location.

## Remixing the Future

In our 2009 piece, we argued that one may understand and analyze the rhetorical velocity of a piece of digital rhetoric based on its short- and long-term positive, negative, and neutral rhetorical consequences in relationship to the originating author(s) and their intentions. Back in 2009 when we wrote the rhetorical velocity article, social media was still only a few years old. As we begin to see platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter mature and what was once new content-creation spaces become old, the burden of reconstructing context for much of this past material may in some cases outweigh its negative potential if actualized by other actors. Recently, Zeynep Tufekci argued that “Someone should build Snapwitter: many-to-many AND ephemeral public conversation. Out-of-context, out-of-thread old tweets are... useless.”<sup>31</sup> We would argue that old tweets are not useless, but they have a dormant rhetorical potential to be resurfaced, recontextualized, and remixed in ways that may or not be advantageous to the original rhetor or rhetors. This rhetorical potential is being wrestled with by the U.S. Library of Congress (LOC), which began archiving all public tweets in 2010. The archiving has now gone on for more than

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<sup>29</sup> Jim Ridolfo and Dànuelle Nicole DeVoss, “Composing for Recomposition: Rhetorical Velocity and Delivery,” *Kairos: A Journal of Rhetoric, Technology, and Pedagogy* 13 (2009): [http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo\\_devoss/](http://kairos.technorhetoric.net/13.2/topoi/ridolfo_devoss/) (accessed January 17, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> See Ridolfo & DeVoss, “Composing for Recomposition,” for a definition of full definition of rhetorical velocity. The relevant portion for velocity is considering “how the speed at which information composed to be recomposed travels—that is, it refers to the understanding and rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces” (velocity.html).

<sup>31</sup> Zeynep Tufekci (zeynep), Twitter post, December 16, 2016, 03:15 UTC. <https://twitter.com/zeynep/status/809597688824164352>.



seven years, but the larger project has stalled.<sup>32</sup> A 2013 white paper with an update on the project, now near-impossible to dig up online, argued that “Archiving and preserving outlets such as Twitter will enable future researchers access to a fuller picture of today’s cultural norms, dialogue, trends and events to inform scholarship, the legislative process, new works of authorship, education and other purposes.”<sup>33</sup> However, the LOC has yet to adopt a means for making this vast archive of billions of tweets accessible, useful, and rhetorically meaningful.

On January 30, 2017, the *New York Times* reported that the Trump Hotels’ Twitter account was being mined for old tweets to re-engage with: “Amid the uproar against President Trump’s executive order on refugees and immigrants over the weekend, one of his companies, Trump Hotels, learned a valuable social media lesson: All’s fair in political warfare, including old tweets.”<sup>34</sup> In October 2011, Trump Hotels tweeted “Tell us your favorite travel memory - was it a picture, a souvenir, a sunset? We’d love to hear it!”<sup>35</sup> Six years later, the tweet was mined by digital activists and became a resurgent touchstone for people responding to President Trump’s immigration policy. In a matter of days, thousands of people had engaged with the old tweet, bringing up hundreds of examples of wartime refugees escaping to the USA.

In the 2009 piece, we argued that rhetoricians may need to consider the future negative appropriation of their work, but the rhetorician must also consider the potential of what it may mean for their texts to be wholly severed from their original digital contexts and what sort of rhetorical recovery work may be necessary to counter false or misleading interpretations of past context. Indeed, the magnificent task the Library of Congress faces is to do both: Archive, protect, and keep tweets alive for access, discovery, and remix, *while at the same time* attending to context preservation.

In our 2009 piece, we also intended to call attention to the need for mixed methods research that includes qualitative work to understand the origins and rhetorical intentions of authors, as well as the individuals and systems of distribution and recomposition that make up the networks of amplification and rhetorical velocity. Today, we argue that there’s a pressing need to understand the plurality of paths and contexts that text might take, with an eye to what Jim Ridolfo and Bill Hart-Davidson have called “the fog of digital rhetoric”<sup>36</sup> or the confusion that may result from readers momentarily witnessing, encountering, or engaging with via social media only a very small segment of an ecosystem of texts and their delivery, distribution, and circulation. We wonder, in fact, what the velocity of the Grey Album may have been in today’s digital context, which is a much different space from the digital ecosystem of 2004. The fog of digital rhetoric may lead some to believe one narrative about the origin and rhetorical velocity of a text over another, or due to their distributive obscurity, doubt the origin of a text entirely.

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<sup>32</sup> Nancy Scola, “Library of Congress’ Twitter Archive is a Huge #FAIL,” *Politico*, July 11, 2015, <http://www.politico.com/story/2015/07/library-of-congress-twitter-archive-119698.html> (accessed January 31, 2017).

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Adam Doster, “Saving Digital Ephemera: Who’s Collecting and Archiving Podcasts, Tweets, Emails, and Other Fleeting Content?” *American Libraries*, January 4, 2016, <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2016/01/04/saving-digital-ephemera/> (accessed July 28, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> Joe Coscarelli, “Trump Hotels’ Tweet Draws Backlash After Immigration Order,” *New York Times*, January 30, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/01/30/us/trump-hotels-tweet-refugees.html> (accessed January 30, 2017).

<sup>35</sup> Coscarelli, “Trump Hotels’ Tweet Draws Backlash After Immigration Order.”

<sup>36</sup> Jim Ridolfo and William Hart-Davidson, “#rhetops,” *Rhetops*, May 2016, <http://www.rhetops.org/> (accessed January 30, 2017).