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## Introduction

# CIRCULATION AS AN EMERGENT THRESHOLD CONCEPT

Laurie E. Gries

*Circulation*—conceived here in terms of spatiotemporal flow as well as a cultural-rhetorical process—has always been important to studies of rhetoric and writing. Throughout Euro-American rhetorical history, the concept of circulation has been less an explicit focus of study than an assumed phenomenon undergirding much rhetorical theory. *Endoxan*, for instance, refers to commonly held opinions or generally accredited beliefs. *Delivery* historically refers to how voice or gesture manipulates the flow of discourse for an intended audience. And *commonplaces* assume the spread of ideologies and discourse, so much so that they become reliable heuristics on which to build persuasive arguments. In all these cases, circulation is implied, but it is there, reverberating in a number of our most important rhetorical theories from antiquity through the twenty-first century.

In such implied senses, Thomas Rickert points to the Sophists, Plato, and Aristotle for ancient examples of how rhetorical theory has always been predicated on the circulation of ideas, feelings, and mores (see chapter 17). Mary Stuckey (2012) and Stephen Heidt (2012), on the other hand, point to rhetorical study in the rise of postmodernism. Heidt persuasively argues, for instance, that if we look to the scholarship of Michael McGee (1980), Maurice Charland (1987), and Raymie McKerrow (1989), concerns with circulation abound. McGee was concerned with how ideologies are constructed and perpetuated, keying us into the ways that fragmented messages and texts move through culture to achieve certain ideological goals. Charland's work with constitutive rhetoric emphasized how circulating texts constitute identity. And McKerrow, heavily influenced by Michel Foucault, zoomed in on discursive formations and the ways that language becomes normalized to maintain the status quo and uphold power relations, a process dependent on

the ubiquitous flow of information. Yet as Stuckey (2012) argues, even as circulation has long “imping[ed] on every aspect of rhetorical theory and criticism,” scholars have “not always place[d] their work within the context of those logics” (609). As such, one may not be surprised to find circulation missing as a key concept in our field’s grounding encyclopedias and sourcebooks,<sup>1</sup> much less receive a sustained focus in edited collections such as this.

In the last couple of decades, however, circulation has come to play a more explicit role in a wide range of studies coming out of both rhetoric and composition/writing studies (RC/WS) and communication. Within RC/WS, scholars such as Derek Mueller (2012), Maureen Daly Goggin (2000), and Brad Lucas and Drew Loewe have examined the (bibliometric) circulation of texts, citations, and ideas that contribute to the construction of disciplinarity itself (Lucas and Loewe 2011). RC/WS scholars such as John Trimbur (2000), James Porter (2009), Collin Brooke (2009), myself (Gries 2015), and many contributors to this collection have also written about circulation to inform their studies of rhetorical theory, pedagogy, digital writing, and transnational feminism. In communication, scholars such as Cara Finnegan (2010), Lester Olson (2009), and Robert Hariman and John Lucaites have foregrounded circulation to generate theories about visual rhetoric (Hariman and Lucaites 2007). And as evident in a recent *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* forum, more and more public address scholars are focusing their efforts on circulation, recognizing that, as Stuckey (2012) notes, circulation can serve as “a strong organizing principle” for rhetorical study (610). In such scholarship, circulation is neither implied nor considered to be a passive transmission of ideas, images, and information. Rather, whether focusing on how pictorial representations circulate in early America or how digital technologies contribute to the emergence of music subcultures, circulation is understood to be an important constitutive, cultural-rhetorical process. As Finnegan (2010) insists, from creating interpretive communities to constituting publics, “circulation does important work” (257).

Due to such prolific and explicit engagement with circulation, my coeditor, Collin, and I believe that this concept deserves more disciplinary due. This collection, in fact, can be considered as our attempt to solidify circulation’s significance in rhetoric and writing studies. In one sense, we believe that circulation is a “conceptual ‘building block’ that progresses understanding of a subject”—what Jan Meyer and Ray Land called a “core concept” (Meyer and Land 2003, 4). In rhetorical study, for instance, scholars often rely on Michael Warner’s (2002) work with circulation to interrogate what publics are and how they assemble. In

*Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner reminds us that a public is a social space created by the reflexive, material circulation of discourse (6). It is an “ongoing space of encounter” that is generated by strangers who are united, at least temporarily, through the punctual circulation of discourse (90). Such assemblage is dependent on circulation, Warner notes, not just because of circulating texts around which strangers gather and through which intertextuality occurs but also because of the recognition that discourse circulates. As Finnegan and Jiyeon Kang put it succinctly, “Warner’s point is that a public thinks of itself as a public because it recognizes and imagines the fact of circulation” (Finnegan and Kang 2004, 394).

In addition to functioning as a core concept, however, we think it useful and appropriate to recognize circulation as an emergent threshold concept. In *Naming What We Know*, Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle define *threshold concepts* as “concepts critical for continued learning and participation in an area or within a community practice” (Adler-Kassner and Wardle 2015, 2). What differentiates threshold concepts from core concepts, Meyer and Land (2003) argue, is their transformative power. Once understood, threshold concepts “lead to a qualitatively different view” of a subject matter (4)—a change in view that is not easily forgotten and affords integration of other interrelated ideas. This “once understood” is not to say that threshold concepts are static, even as they are deeply embedded within a discipline’s shared traditions of inquiry. In fact, the more scholars grapple with such concepts in light of new disciplinary and cultural developments, the more they prove to be complex and plural. As Adler-Kassner and Wardle explain, threshold concepts evolve as disciplinary knowledge evolves. They always signify “what we know for now” (5).

This collection can be understood as representing what the discipline of RC/WS knows for now about circulation. Our aim here is to not only advance circulation as an emergent threshold concept but to point in new directions for studying it across a wide range of research areas. We believe it is past time to highlight the important work that circulation enables, especially the important connections RC/WS scholars are making among circulation and public rhetorics, urban studies, feminist rhetorics, digital communication, new materialism, and the digital humanities. In this collection, readers will find that scholars adopt a wide range of theories to shed light on their various objects of study. However, in every chapter, the phenomenon of circulation is foregrounded, even as some authors lean heavily on other concepts to explicate the dynamic, ubiquitous flow of discourse, ideas, information, etc.

We welcome and encourage such a theoretical move, as our aim here is not to demand the uniform adoption of any singular definition for circulation. Threshold concepts, after all, are often portals or “conceptual gateways” that open up “previously inaccessible way[s] of thinking about something” (Meyer and Land 2003, 12). We argue, in fact, that one of the reasons as to why circulation has become an emergent threshold concept is its ability to point toward and help develop other concepts that can deepen our understanding of rhetoric and writing in motion.

Readers will notice that many such concepts come to light in this collection’s various chapters. Some of these concepts are unique to the scholarship at hand. For example, Tareq Samra Graban and Patricia Sullivan forward the notion of *betweenness* to describe how evidence of women’s historical scholarly activity is often located in the spaces between stable artifacts that typically grab our attention in archival studies. Sean Morey and John Tinnell, on the other hand, introduce us to the notion of *abduction* to better understand how production and circulation unfold in smart environments. More often, however, scholars will use circulation as a means to expand our understanding of concepts not so unfamiliar to us, such as publics, networks, distribution, and affect. For example, Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang draw our attention to assemblage and affect, concepts that help disclose how digital things such as hashtags take on activist roles in public life. Such interrelated concepts may seem to steal the limelight from circulation in some of these chapters, but only because understanding such concepts is integral to understanding circulation. In her chapter on the emergence of the religious right, for instance, Naomi Clark draws on Ronald S. Burt’s concept of structural holes to identify the unlikely actors that generated networks of organizers and served as important conduits for ideological flow. In focusing on structural holes, we may not develop an exact sense of how ideological discourse, in this case, flows, but we do learn how it is possible for ideologies to, for example, emerge, unfold, accelerate, and decelerate thanks to a distributed, and often invisible, actor-network. As a field of study, we need to keep pushing in such directions to better understand how it is that discourse and ideas come to play an important and long-lasting role in our cultures and communities. This need is especially why we are so excited about chapters such as Dale M. Smith and James J. Brown Jr.’s as well as Gerald Jackson’s, which help disclose how digital network infrastructures contribute to digital communication.

Circulation’s function as a conceptual gateway is just one of many reasons why we think circulation deserves to be considered an emerging threshold concept in RC/WS. Below we identify several other reasons.

This focus allows us to review some of the pioneering work that has catalyzed circulation studies. As I (Gries 2013, 2015) have articulated elsewhere, circulation studies can be understood, in the most general and simplest sense, as the study of writing and rhetoric in motion coming out of the disciplines of RC/WS and communication. With its focus on how bodies, artifacts, words, pictures, and other things flow within and across cultures to affect meaningful change, circulation studies can be considered part of a larger transdisciplinary effort called mobility studies. Mobility studies, as Mimi Sheller (2011) explains, addresses sociological concerns about collective formation, spatial-temporal concerns about scale and flow, new materialist concerns about matter and agency, and cultural concerns about images, representation and subjectivity. As will become obvious in this collection, circulation studies shares these concerns, but it also addresses rhetorical concerns with bodies, access, and power; ecological concerns with affect, publics, and writing; and digital concerns with infrastructure, distribution, and global economies. Due to such concerted efforts, we hope that scholars beyond RC/WS might find their way to this collection to see what RC/WS can contribute to mobility studies.

But this collection is most concerned with circulation studies' potential for writing and rhetoric research. Therefore, the remainder of this introduction discusses how circulation has been taken up in both RC/WS and Communication and synthesizes the participating authors' contributions to circulation studies in order to establish its standing as an emergent threshold concept in RC/WS. After contributing chapters, the latter part of this book includes a response section and afterward, both of which reflect back on the chapters to highlight the significance of this research and to broach future directions for circulation studies. In moving from "what we now know" to "where we might go," we hope that readers will walk away from this collection with creative and innovative ideas about taking up circulation to advance our understandings of rhetoric and writing.

### CIRCULATION'S TRANSFORMATIVE POTENTIAL

Threshold concepts, as we have thus far emphasized, are concepts that resonate deeply with scholars because of their ability to generate epistemological understandings critical to a discipline. Other concepts critical to rhetoric and writing may seem to be more obvious threshold concepts. Indeed, concepts such as *kairos*, *topoi*, and *agency* within rhetorical theory and concepts such as *epistemic*, *genre*, and *intertextuality*

within composition theory have been undeniably transformative. Yet because circulation has been instrumental in tuning us into rhetoric's dynamic, affective, and global dimensions, as well as developing new rhetorical models, methodologies, and theories, we believe circulation has also become an important threshold concept for rhetoric and writing studies.

Circulation has been especially crucial in developing new rhetorical models, pedagogies, and theories to account for rhetoric's ongoing movement, performativity, and affectivity. Such attunement is evident in Brooke's own work, which leans on circulation to help reconfigure the canon of delivery to account for the ongoing performativity of new media writing. As Brooke (2009) argues in *Lingua Fracta*, "seeing discourse as circulating rather than something that we circulate" is an attitudinal shift toward discourse that has important implications for new media practices (192; emphasis in original). It is also important for rhetorical theory in that, much like Brooke, Porter has leaned on circulation to advocate for retheorizing delivery for the digital age. In light of Internet-based communication, Porter (2009) argues, we must especially distinguish between distribution (an intent to present discourse online) and circulation (that discourse's potential to have a life of its own) (11). Such awareness, when it comes to composition pedagogy, is particularly important as we consider the ubiquity of remix as a multimodal composing practice (Edwards 2016) and the rhetorical velocity in which messages spread (Ridolfo and DeVoss 2009). Especially in the digital age, when intertextuality is perhaps more hypervisible than ever, our students need to understand how circulation comes into play throughout their entire writing process—from invention to revision to distribution.

In addition to helping us reimagine the canon of delivery—and, I would say, the writing process itself—circulation has helped cultivate new understandings about how rhetoric unfolds and acquires force in an increasingly digitally networked and globalized world. As both Catherine Chaput (2010) and Jenny Edbauer (2005) have noted, the notion of the rhetorical situation—with its discrete elements of context, audience, constraints, and situation—is simply too static and bound to account for the affectivity and fluidity of rhetoric, especially in a digitally networked global climate. While Edbauer offers an ecological rhetorical model to account for the ongoing circulation and distributed emergence of rhetoric, Chaput offers a rhetorical circulation model to account for rhetoric's transhistorical and transsituational characteristics. As Chaput explains: "Rhetorical circulation gives up the causal relationship between rhetoric and materiality, believing instead that rhetoric circulates through our

everyday, situated activities and does not exist in one place: it is always passing through, but it is never located" (20). This is especially the case if we pay more attention to affect and its rhetorical dimensions.

Such rhetorical models are in and of themselves transformative in that they challenge us to rethink some of our most foundational theories and to invent new research methods in light of such evolving theories. My own work (Gries 2015), for instance, takes up Edbauer's rhetorical ecology model, in conjunction with actor-network theory and new materialism, to introduce a digital research method called iconographic tracking that can empirically account for an image's widespread and unpredictable circulation, transformation, and consequentiality. When we take up such methods to trace the ongoing flow and distributed activities of images, we cannot help but tune into the dynamic dimensions of rhetoric—to see rhetoric as a distributed event that unfolds with time in and across networks of emergent relations. We also cannot help but tune into rhetoric's affective dimensions, to the ways in which rhetoric becomes contagious as it moves our individual and collective bodies in both conscious and unconscious ways. Even further—and especially if taking a new materialist approach—we cannot help but tune into rhetoric's ontological dimensions, to the ways that things become agentive and vital as they engage in various activities. Rhetorical models and research methods that foreground circulation help disclose all three of these dimensions.

Of course, not all scholars are convinced of circulation's methodological potential. Despite his acknowledgment of circulation's key role in forming publics in print culture, for instance, Warner (2002) expresses skepticism about circulation's relevance for contemporary studies of publics that are largely dependent on the Internet. Compared to the consistent punctual rhythms maintained by print texts, which allow for intertextuality, intergenerativity, and conversation, the temporal complexities brought on by the Internet create a public sphere marked by instantaneity. "Highly mediated and highly capitalized forms of circulation," Warner notes, "are increasingly organized as continuous ('24/7 instant access') rather than punctual." With the absence of punctual rhythms, reflexivity is made difficult, as is the ability to "connect localized acts of reading to the modes of agency in the social imaginary of modernity." Under such conditions, Warner speculates, we might have to abandon "circulation" as an analytic category altogether (421). Citing such work, Kevin DeLuca and Joe Wilferth have also expressed doubt about circulation's value for studies of visual rhetoric (DeLuca and Wilferth 2009). In their foreword to a special issue of *enculturation*, they argue that circulation is too indebted to print culture to be a useful analytic for attending to an

image's ontological and contingent dimensions in that it "call[s] for the studious gaze of the academic and reinstat[i]at[es] the print perspective."

In light of such skepticism, we certainly have to evolve our understanding of circulation as our technologies and cultural practices shift. Most often we think of circulation in terms of library science (as the circulation of books) and magazine publishing (as a metric for determining the number of copies published and distributed and their impact). With the advent of the Internet, as Warner is apt to note, circulation becomes complicated, as the flow of information and discourse seems to be "everywhere at once." Consider, for example, the way in which Donald Trump's tweets circulated before and during the 2016 presidential election season. In particular, consider his tweet first written in November 2012 but which experienced more intense circulation after the first presidential debate in September 2016: "The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make US manufacturing non-competitive." A quick Google search of this tweet brings up 63,000 results, and between the day of the debate (September 26) and October 1, Trump's tweet surfaces in almost every mainstream online news source—from *Mother Jones* to Politico to CNN—as well as various blogs, fact-checking sites, and social media sites. Such ubiquitous, and practically instantaneous, flow can hardly be understood in print-oriented understandings of circulation. We need to complicate our understanding of circulation by developing related terms such as *saturation* (Dobrin 2011), as discussed below, to make sense of such rhizomatic discursive flow. Yet, despite such need for complication, we do not have to abandon circulation altogether, especially if we develop new research methods and methodologies to better account for the dynamic and distributed dimensions of rhetoric and writing.

In addition, as Douglas Eyman (2007) and Byron Hawk (2012) model, rather than abandon circulation, we can create new frameworks for studying rhetoric and publics that can better account for the emergent and dynamic nature of digitally networked culture. In his much overlooked dissertation, Eyman turns to ecologies and economies as a two-part framework for understanding discursive flow in digital environments. As he argues, in order to develop a coherent theory of digital rhetoric, we need to develop methodologies that can account for both the distributed contexts of activity that discourse experiences as it circulates within and across digital networks and the value-exchanges that motivate and animate the circulation of objects (7). While Eyman is largely concerned with scholarly texts and cultural capital in disciplinary ecologies, Hawk is invested in understanding how social ecologies

assemble in public life. Hawk draws on Brooke, Bruno Latour, and others to turn our attention from public spheres to sphere publics. Responding to Warner's concern about publics and digital culture, he notes that "we can begin to theorize how spheres form through the digital networks and produce social ecologies that mix the digital and the physical and the various types of publics that Warner examines" (176). In his own work examining how musicians' writing circulates and helps to cultivate various social ecologies, Hawk demonstrates how embracing circulation can indeed help explicate how publics assemble, emerge, and transform in a digitally networked climate.

In addition to advancing new rhetorical models, inventing new research methods, and forwarding new theoretical frameworks, circulation is also transforming our understanding of writing as we shift from a culture dominated by orality and literacy to one supplemented by electricity. As Sidney I. Dobrin (2011) has argued, "the rapid development of digital and new media technologies used in the invention, production, circulation, remixing, and recirculating of writing have altered how composition studies can and must theorize writing" (6). In his scholarship with both postcomposition and writing ecologies, Dobrin has emphasized "the current hyper-circulatory condition of writing" (142) and worked to revamp our understanding of writing to account for this phenomenon. In one sense, he argues, ecological, complexity, and systems theories can help us better account for the hyper-circulation of writing. Yet, in *Postcomposition*, Dobrin suggests we also look to fluid dynamics and mechanics in order to understand *how* flow and saturation have come to characterize the way that writing circulates. By *flow*, Dobrin does not mean node-to-node direct transfer of information within a network but rather in a more rhizomatic and overflowing sense. As Dobrin suggests, "Writing fills; writing overflows. Like a river that carves its path over time while engulfing all within its path, flowing over, in, around, and through that which it encounters, reacting to every presence, even retreating and abandoning at times, writing overwhelms the network, saturating every part of the network" (183–84). Such fluid-dynamics-thinking about writing is especially important if we are to understand writing as a phenomenon driven by a technological code that bleeds into our everyday writing systems.

For this reason, we would argue that circulation has the ability to transform our understanding of how discourse flows and co-constitutes our subjectivities, identities, and daily activities in what Ted Striphas calls an "algorithmic culture." According to Striphas, an algorithmic culture is one in which "computers, running complex mathematical formulae,

engage in what's often considered to be the traditional work of culture: the sorting, classifying, and hierarchizing of people, places, objects, and ideas" (quoted in Granieri 2014). In this culture, says Striphas, "our lives are now being fitted with sensors that produce a whole range of mundane activities as information-bearing" (quoted in Granieri 2014). These sensors produce and analyze data that is fed back to us in what John Urry (2003) calls cultural feedback loops, loops that have become central to how we both consume and produce culture. The problem is that, while circulating data helps constitute what culture is, how it is organized, and how it is disseminated, we have very little understanding of how this cultural process happens (Beer 2013, 3). Circulation, as a threshold concept, can help us better understand this process. Circulation, after all, does not just refer to the movement of people, ideas, and commodities from one culture to another, as Benjamin Lee and Edward LiPuma insist. Circulation is a "cultural process with its own forms of abstraction, evaluation, and constraint, which are created by the interactions between specific types of circulating forms and the interpretative communities built around them" (Lee and LiPuma 2002, 192). It is, of course, also a rhetorical process in that people, ideas, images, and discourse become persuasive as they move through the world and enter into various associations. Following David Beer, we believe that interrogating this cultural-rhetorical process both in theory and practice can elucidate how objects, ideas, peoples, infrastructures, and assemblages intra-act to co-constitute our socio-material world.

In regard to cultural-rhetorical processes, circulation also elucidates how globalization unfolds in an ever-increasing networked environment and impacts various economies, communities, and subjectivities. As Arjun Appadurai (2010) notes, we are living in a "world of unprecedented levels and varieties of circulation," where global cultural flows are intensified by the high speed and spread of the Internet, global commodity markets and circuits, and the migration of media, bodies, and cultural forms. As such, Appadurai suggests, it would *not* be off the mark to "characterize the current moment of globalization . . . as new in the sense that it combines high connectivity with new levels, forms and types of circulation." Appadurai pushes us to study how both forms of circulation and circulation of forms—novels, nations, documentaries, rights, values—produce localities so that we can better understand how local subjectivities and practices are negotiated. Such a focus on circulation especially has potential to illuminate how neoliberalism functions in late capitalism, largely due to the circulation of values and affective energies that come to influence our habituated ways of thinking and acting. As Chaput

(2010) persuasively argues, “The function of neoliberalism within late capitalism . . . cannot be understood fully by comparing rational arguments about state deregulation, open trade, and privatized industries with the often devastating results of such policies” (18). Instead, we have to look to the economic and rhetorical circulation of values and the affective intensities to which they are attached. After all, as Chaput argues, “circulating material values, which form the backbone of capitalist production, are attached to the affective energies circulating through communicate exchanges” (14). If we want to understand how neoliberalism is driven and maintained in late capitalism, then, we have to account for how affective energies travel and come to submit rationale responses, individual interests, and governing ideologies in favor of economic interests. Again, both in terms of flow and cultural processes, circulation helps tune us into this complicated and distributed phenomenon.

In order to understand the relations between rhetoric and globalization, we also need to explore how discourse, ideologies, and representations move across transnational contexts, an exploration for which circulation is particularly well suited. In *Networking Arguments*, for example, Rebecca Dingo (2012) emphasizes that ephemerality and mobility are indicative of discourse that works to develop global and local policies that shape women’s lives (see also Queen 2008). Dingo specifically demonstrates how foregrounding circulation can help explain how gender mainstreaming rhetorics travel, shift, and are redefined across policies and geopolitical contexts. While gender mainstreaming efforts can be productive for addressing inequality in one situation, such as the Fourth World Conference on Women, Dingo explains that rhetorics of gender mainstreaming often circulate across national borders, transform, and attach themselves to acontextualized rhetorics such as self-determination, responsibility, family values, and tradition—an attachment that often ends up generating policies that reinforce gender and global inequalities (6–7). Tracing the circulation and rhetorical transformation of such gendered rhetorics can thus help uncover how globalization unevenly impacts women across the world.

In terms of feminist methodologies, circulation has not been limited to Dingo’s work, of course. Circulation has helped develop Vicki Tolar Collins’s (1999) work with rhetorical accretion, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch’s work with social circulation (Kirsch and Royster 2010; Royster and Kirsch 2012), and Tarez Graban’s (2014) work with digital archives. We note here, in fact, that so much valuable work has been done with circulation and feminist rhetoric that such scholarship alone underscores circulation’s value as a threshold concept. The same could

be said about visual rhetoric. As evident in the work of Finnegan (2010) and Hariman and Lucaites (2007), for instance, circulation has (alongside production, composition, preproduction, and reception) become an important mode of visual public address that helps to create a critical “*way of seeing* the role of images in public culture” (Finnegan 2010, 251; emphasis in original). The study of circulation, which entails attending to both the fluidity and specificity of images, is especially important, Finnegan argues, because it “cautions us against reifying any one interpretation of an image or its accompanying textual event” (258). Images, after all—especially in the age of the Internet—are constantly on the move, spreading and transforming in ways that are often unpredictable. If we want to understand how any given image contributes to and (re)assembles public life, we cannot help but trace the circulation of images transituationally to see what rhetorical functions they serve as they enter into various relations.

Circulation is important not only for doing visual rhetorical history but also for building theories of visual rhetoric. Lester Olson, for instance, has devoted much of his scholarly career to tracing the circulation and reception of early American pictorial representations, contributing perhaps, alongside Finnegan, the most to visual rhetorical history than any other scholar in the field. In “Pictorial Representations of British America Resisting Rape,” Olson (2009) makes a distinct difference between circulation and recirculation, suggesting that while circulation refers to the broader phenomenon in which “public compositions circulate to audiences,” “‘rhetorical re-circulation’ names a precise relationship among a body of remarkably similar compositions patterned deliberately after an earlier, almost identical composition” (3). He also usefully differentiates recirculation from appropriation, leaning on the work of Helene Shugart to suggest that, while appropriation makes propertyed claims about ownership and is often adversarial, recirculation foregrounds public distribution and concerns a wide variety of rhetorical functions, ranging from solidarity to partisan opposition (3). As he notes, recirculation also entails reproduction, reframing, and redistribution—all concepts that help to explain how images become consequential in political and civic life.

Thanks to this rich body of circulation studies research, which we have only sampled here, we can already see how circulation has helped to (a) draw attention to writing’s dynamic movement and fluidity; (b) develop new methodologies and research methods for studying the flow of representations, discourse, and images; and (c) reconfigure theories of writing, rhetoric, and publics to account for discourse’s networked,

distributed, and emergent aspects. Yet many questions remain to be explored, especially as public spaces become more and more saturated with circulating texts and images; as networked relations come to the center of rhetorical focus; and as digital technologies continue to influence how writing and rhetoric are composed, published, and distributed. How do algorithms, protocols, and ubiquitous computing influence the flow, reach, and impact of discourse? How does the circulation of images, information, affect, and other things reassemble, augment, and activate local landscapes? In addition, how can circulation help open up new research approaches for feminist and urban studies while at the same time bring disability studies to bear on our professional communication practices? These are just a few of the important questions this collection takes up to solidify circulation's status as an emergent threshold concept and to further advance "what we know for now" about circulation, rhetoric, and writing.

#### **"WHAT WE KNOW FOR NOW"**

In this collection, readers will find some of RC/WS's most vocal voices in circulation studies, including, among others, Jenny Rice, Dànielle DeVoss, Jim Ridolfo, Byron Hawk, and Sid Dobrin. Readers will also find scholars such as Rebecca Dingo, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Gesa Kirsch, and Tarez Graban building on their previous work with circulation to advance feminist rhetorical studies. This collection also introduces the innovative scholarship of newcomers to circulation studies—scholars who push disciplinary boundaries by attending to issues such as ubiquitous computing, augmented reality, the rhetorical ontology of things, and the algorithmic complexities of digital communication. In addition to writing about a variety of overlapping interests, contributing authors explore a wide variety of topics (smart environments, trending data, QR codes, hashtags, locative media, access, etc.) that belie easy organization. In the body of this collection, we thus arranged chapters so that the ideas from one chapter bleed into the next. In reading these chapters, however, we did notice certain themes emerge in relation to circulation and publics, feminism, materiality, digitality, and computational methods. As such, toward the end of the book, we offer a substantive response section in which five scholars with expertise in these themes respond to a handful of relevant chapters and broach productive conversations about circulation studies. The respondents have their own take on what we can learn about circulation; therefore, we encourage you to delve into their responses with as much sustained focus as you give to each

chapter. Yet we also invite you to engage with the afterward, which builds on both the chapters and responses to point toward future directions for circulation studies.

On the whole, this collection demonstrates how bringing circulation to the forefront of our studies is a productive avenue for RC/WS.<sup>2</sup> As evident in several chapters, circulation studies proves especially useful for exploring the ways that publics are activated through various digital practices. As Casey Boyle and Nathaniel Rivers argue in their chapter, circulation is an activation of publics. They draw on media studies and public rhetoric scholars to note that both augmentation and publics are too often framed in terms of adding—adding information, adding voices. Boyle and Rivers see things otherwise, and they turn to locative media such as Google Maps, Google Ingress, and Pokémon GO to show how digital technologies activate particular relationships and convene public activity and, thereby, how augmented publics are actually a consequence of circulation. In Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang’s chapter, circulation and activation also come into play as they work against disparaging notions of digital activism to disclose the hashtag’s potential to shape public life. Drawing heavily on new materialism, iconographic tracking, and the notions of thing-power, affect, and assemblage, Edwards and Lang make a convincing argument that hashtags such as #YesAllWomen are neither inconsequential nor immaterial things; as they circulate and activate collective action, they also “become more than a string of words and more than a communicative fad.” Hashtags, they insist, are “dynamic and agentic entit[ies] made possible by ongoing acts of circulation.” As such, they argue, we should take hashtags’ potential for public activism seriously and trace where these “curious rhetorical things” go and what they do.

In addition to disclosing how digital things come to matter, foregrounding circulation can help disclose how digital technologies are changing some of our most important cultural practices. In her chapter, for instance, Kathleen Yancey explores how QR codes, websites, and social media are changing the way that cemeteries function, how representations of the dead are circulated, and how we mourn and memorialize the dead. Historically, Yancey notes, we have traveled to the site of memory, the graveyard and the cemetery; now, with the advent of digital technologies and social media, the historical site of memory is “becoming increasingly untethered from its physical origin.” In exploring such changes, Yancey argues that, while different kinds of circulation have always been “at the heart of what and how we memorialize, make meaning, remember,” new kinds of circulation are transforming the way we

come to represent and honor the dead. In a unique way, I might add, such digital technologies are also (re)activating the dead with renewed life. Yancey demonstrates, after all, that QR-linked living memorials circulate the person whose representations are “repurposed to create a new narrative representation of life and loss.” As such (re)activation of our loved ones becomes more and more popular, circulation studies can help track this emergent phenomenon—just as it can track other cultural rituals and everyday practices that are being transformed by the advent of emergent technologies.

We are particularly impressed with the ways that circulation continues to be useful to feminist research in RC/WS. Feminists have long been invested in the recovery of previously unacknowledged women and their rhetorical practices. Feminist scholars in this collection demonstrate how foregrounding circulation can assist such work through digital archival research and digital mapping. In their chapter, for instance, Tarez Graban and Patricia Sullivan turn to digital archival research methods to recover women pedagogues who have previously escaped the purview of academic attention. Graban and Sullivan are particularly interested in cultivating new habits of practice and exploring what *paradata* and *circulatory looking* can do for feminist historiography. This kind of research, they explain, involves looking for “residual evidence as it emerges from the folds of books or the metadata of related publications and looking within archival finding aids rather than looking for stable information in conventional artifacts or traditionally circulating citation data.” Such habits of looking, they show us, are especially useful for noticing “the middle spaces that house the complex lives of the ordinary, the feminine, the other.”

In their chapter, Jacqueline Jones Royster and Gesa Kirsch also turn to digital research methods for feminist historiography. Royster and Kirsch specifically build on their previous work with social circulation, a methodology that attends to the “overlapping social circles in which women travel, live, and work [that] are carried on or modified from one generation to the next and give rise to changed rhetorical practices.” In light of digital mapping’s promises, Royster and Kirsch speculate about what a digital social history project of social circulation might look like. They are particularly interested in how complex maps, diagrams, and other visual tools can “permit an even more nuanced historical narrative” of how nineteenth-century women made access for themselves as professional women, gained voice and visibility, shifted terms and conditions for excellence and achievements, and created legacies of action. Royster and Kirsch thus model, alongside Graban and Sullivan,

how computational approaches to circulation studies can enhance our already productive feminist research methodologies.

Circulation also proves useful for feminist research when coupled with network studies. Naomi Clark, for instance, turns to actor-network theory—and more precisely, reverse black boxing (tracing incremental stages of networked change)—to disclose how morally inflected arguments of the religious right circulated in the 1970s and acquired significant rhetorical force. Such tracing is especially important, she argues, for disclosing how social networks gain traction by shaping public discourse and influencing conservative social policies that negatively impact women and their families. Latour teaches us that such tracing is crucial to learning how such collective activities actually unfold. We can't begin to claim to understand how rhetoric circulates and functions without diving into the previously invisible—to recover, in other words, those previously unrecognized actors, places, and things that contribute to the networked activity that constitutes collective life. For feminists invested in how policies emerge and gain widespread appeal, Clark models how oftentimes this research entails tracing previously unrecognized actors who are instrumental to network formation and the broad circulation of discourse and ideologies across diverse and unlikely audiences. Forging circulation studies with actor-network theory proves to be especially productive in such regard.

When coupled with affect studies, circulation studies also continues to prove useful for transnational feminist research, as evident in Rebecca Dingo's chapter. Here Dingo is concerned with how narratives of empowered third world girls circulate in NGO documents and are received by everyday citizens with access to the Internet and social media. The problem, Dingo argues, is that "neoliberal capital is shored up through circulation." To explain, Dingo notes that as people read, believe, and recirculate narratives in which third world girls are articulated as moral subjects, audiences form affective identifications and values that come to justify neoliberal development policies that contribute to unequal global economic systems. Tracing such narratives, she argues, is key to unlocking how rhetorical processes proliferate and gain neoliberal uptake. Such research, she notes, can also help generate "a transnational feminist literacy" in which people come to understand how they are being moved by neoliberal values and how these value affects are complicit in sustaining problematic geopolitical relationships and policies.

While circulation studies can operate at national and transnational scales in such ways, it can also shed light on how specific urban locales are constantly being (re)assembled through writing and rhetoric in

motion. In their chapter, for instance, Donnie Sackey, Jim Ridolfo, and Dànielle DeVoss explore the ways in which graffiti emerged, circulated, and helped to reconfigure the town of Lansing, Michigan. They specifically zoom in on how the graffiti of Sam de Bourbon (aka Samskee) transformed a historical building into a space for community art. Before this building was to be burned down, townsfolk came and salvaged panels from the building; some were displayed in gallery events while others reappeared as planters in specific parts of town. In tracing such continued circulation, the authors demonstrate how graffiti became part of the artistic, aesthetic, and historical space of Lansing; as such, it not only became a cultural and geographic marking but also a mediator in changing the landscape of the entire community.

In her chapter, Michelle Simmons also illustrates how circulating images function to revitalize urban space. Rather than focus on graffiti, however, Simmons turns to circulating images of nostalgia and digital media strategies in the town of Hamilton, Ohio, as well as the dynamic networked relations that have assembled in relation to them. As Simmons acknowledges, studying long-term civic engagement in urban renewal demands attending to how various actors interact, transform, and generate networked relations that (re)assemble across time and space to influence perceptions, local policies, and ultimately the material reality of the city itself. Influenced by new materialism and actor-network theory, Simmons models how foregrounding circulation and material networks might indeed be messy research but can also be productive for disclosing the material realities of civic engagement and intervening in urban revitalization efforts.

In relation to local environments, circulation also proves useful in generating insights about how ubiquitous computing is transforming our urban infrastructure. Sean Morey and John Tinnell analyze digital circulation across urban media installations to shed light on how abduction and production come into play in smart environments. Circulation is central to smart environments, they explain, in that smart environments “recompose themselves” “in response to proximate, autonomous material flows.” In order to fully understand how smart environments function, then, one has to consider how flows of materials, gesture-inputs, and information are gathered, collected, and even abducted. Rather than think solely in terms of production and circulation, then, they challenge us to consider how abduction operates in smart environments. Contemporary urban locales, they note, are increasingly infiltrated with ubiquitous computing; therefore, if we really want to understand their rhetoricity, we must tune into these sensory-material-social processes.

In addition to exploring the impact of ubiquitous computing on urban spaces, circulation also offers a path into the (often black-boxed) way that information flows via the Internet and shapes communication. As noted earlier, we are living in an algorithmic culture, with little understanding of how algorithms, protocols, and other Internet structures are influencing our daily lives. Several authors in this collection address this dilemma by disclosing the technological infrastructure of networked society that so often escapes us. In their chapter, for instance, Dale M. Smith and James J. Brown Jr. inquire into networked civil society—how it assembles and how it functions. To get at this inquiry, they encourage us to think more deeply about distribution, arguing that in a highly networked society, “content is no longer circulated via centralized or even decentralized networks. It is *distributed* instead through networks in which each node is both sender and receiver.” They thus turn to network protocols in a case study involving Eric Schmidt and Julian Assange to show how Internet protocols reorient the civil process of communication. Such protocol analysis of networks, as Gerald Jackson argues in his chapter, can help us better understand the “logics of online circulation.” By performing a protocol analysis of networks such as Bitcoin, for instance, Jackson shows “the performative play of structure and logic in which the actual rhetorical work of circulation takes place”—play that goes on behind the code, behind the procedures. For those who lack access to behind-the-scenes logics of online circulation, circulation studies, then, can provide some sense of how computational control and order are coming to govern our everyday lives.

As we address such infrastructural concerns with how information flows via the Internet, we must pay attention to the institutions, systems, and structures that make data circulation possible. Such a focus requires that we think deeply about access not only in terms of how to acquire, process, and analyze data for our own research needs but also how to make our research accessible so that our own discourse can flow equitably to as wide a population as possible. In his chapter, Aaron Beveridge addresses the first concern with access, insisting that we need to invest in digital technologies that can provide more access to digital data if we want to advance circulation studies. Alongside Nicholas Van Horn, Beveridge has spent the last few years cocreating software called MassMine, an open source research tool to help scholars collect and analyze social network data, thus far from Twitter and Wikipedia. In his chapter, Beveridge argues that circulation studies is dependent on our willingness to confront not only such difficulties but also “the methodological barriers to embracing procedural/operational data-intensive

analysis in circulation studies.” Integrating data analysis into circulation research has much promise, he notes, but in order to harness such promise, we are likely going to have to build new tools and software that can increase our access to social network data.

In thinking about access, Jay Dolmage might agree, but he reminds us in his chapter that we must think about accessibility as well as access. Rhetoric is about “*circulation of discourse through the body*,” he explains, and, as such, we must constantly consider how it is that bodies are being shaped by new technological structures of a networked society. Dolmage challenges us to interrogate what we mean by open access and work harder to “compose in a manner more cognizant of the ongoing circulation of texts not just through a diverse range of technologies but through a diverse range of bodies.” The web, Dolmage notes, is “not at all accessible, and that includes a lot of what we call open access.” As scholars, he argues, we need to think more carefully about how we put our own discourse into motion so that it reaches and has the potential to impact nonnormative bodies. We end the chapter section of the collection on this important note because we cannot agree more.

#### CONCLUDING NOTE

In bringing this introduction to a close, we would be remiss to not mention the five responses authored by Jenny Rice, Jessica Enoch, Thomas Rickert, Byron Hawk, and Sid Dobrin. As readers will notice, each of these authors takes a unique approach to their response. While some scholars reflect on the potential of their assigned chapters for a narrow body of research such as feminist historiography,<sup>3</sup> others reflect on their assigned chapters’ value for the discipline of RC/WS on the whole. Each respondent, however, highlights circulation’s future potential—whether such productivity entails tuning into rhetoric’s ontological dimensions, developing new ecological perspectives, or taking up different yet equally important inquiries into rhetoric, publics, and affect. In my afterward, I synthesize such suggestions in order to identify specific paths we might take as we continue to take up circulation for studies of rhetoric and writing at large. These paths are just a few of many that could be followed. As we embrace circulation as a threshold concept, I am especially excited to see what paths open up that we have yet to fully imagine. If nothing else, this collection should be conceived as a catalyst to continue with the important work of circulation studies.

## Notes

1. See James Jasinski's (2001) *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, Thomas O. Sloane's (2001) *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric*, Theresa Enos's (1996) *Encyclopedia of Rhetoric and Composition*, and Richard Lanham's (1991) *A Handlist of Rhetorical Terms* (2nd ed.).
2. In this section, we do not introduce chapters in the order as they appear in the collection. Instead, we discuss chapters in groups by what we learn from them.
3. Each respondent was assigned three to four chapters based on the respondents' experience with themes that emerged across the chosen chapters.

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