

FACEBOOK AND THE TRANSITION FROM RHETORICAL SITUATION TO
RHETORICAL ECOLOGIES

by

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DEDICATION

This is dedicated to my family. Bruce, Catherine, Sean, Terence, Jodie, and Claire. And to Ben.

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ABSTRACT

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Facebook is a site rich with public discourse among its 410 million users and it is changing the way we fundamentally communicate. Among its varied users, Facebook is continually evolving into multiple genres, meeting different exigencies for different rhetors. In this thesis, I will explore what makes Facebook rhetorically significant today. I will look at how Facebook is changing the nature of rhetorical theory in Web 2.0 discourse practices by imposing specific constraints on expression and interaction while also allowing for new possibilities of communication. I want to examine particularly how Facebook, under the category of “new media,” has refashioned prior ideas of rhetorical situation and how it fits well within the framework of a “rhetorical ecology.” Through its status as a rhetorical ecology (i.e., the way the software is designed, the patterns by which information is circulated on the site, the way members communicate using the software, and the political and social practices that the site demands), Facebook is altering the way we communicate by altering social interaction and the organization of information.

1. Introduction

On January 20, 2009, millions of people worldwide watched Barack Obama sworn into office as the 44th President of the United States. It was a historic moment in American history and the start of a new era—and for more than just the initially observable reasons. Never before had technology played such an integral role in the election of the president, and this emphasis on technology was every bit as apparent in the coverage of the Inauguration by the major news media. Although the National Mall in Washington, D.C. was filled to capacity with attendees, most people had to find an alternate way to witness the Inauguration. If you couldn't make it to the actual event, what was the next best thing, the closest approximation to watching the event with thousands of people—strangers and friends? You could have turned on the TV, but TV lacks certain connectivity or interactivity.

Facebook and CNN provided one alternative, as they invited people to stream the live broadcast of the Inauguration with the CNN video player and then log into Facebook Connect, an application that allows visitors to log in to a site using their Facebook account information. (This is convenient, but also has a more powerful implication to the changing nature of online networking: people log in to a site using their real identities and no longer an anonymous Internet identity.) Next to the CNN video player, Facebook Connect posted status updates of those watching the streamed video. Facebook users

commented on everything, from their dislike of George W. Bush to seemingly illogical comments about Miley Cyrus. But, most importantly, users were engaging in a public discourse with each other about the historic day via status messages and posts.

This is considered to be the first event of its kind and millions of people watched the Inauguration this way. Over 2 million Facebook status updates were published on CNN.com/live on January 20th and CNN estimated that it hosted 1.3 million concurrent live streams and that around 8,500 people commented on the Facebook/CNN feed in the single minute before President Obama's Inaugural Speech. Facebook alone logged more than 1 million status updates during just the 90-minute ceremony. By 1 p.m. ET on Election Day, CNN had served up 18.8 million live streams globally. It was a historic day for "social TV" on the Facebook Platform and for social media in general. The CNN/Facebook integration showed that millions of people "want to talk with their friends while watching TV that they care about, even if they can't be in the same place to watch it together" (Perez).

According to the *Los Angeles Times*, Richard Greenfield, an analyst with Pali Capital, wrote on his blog, "CNN.com's broadcast is a watershed event. Live TV shifted from a passive to a social/interactive experience and underscored the power of the Internet to deliver video programming to a massive number of users simultaneously" (LA Times). Liz Gannes, a blogger who focuses on television, reiterated this statement, writing that the best inauguration coverage was "offered by CNN Live with Facebook Connect integrated, making the live stream experience social in a relevant way. . . . I really think it points toward the future of TV. I loved feeling like I was in a room of

friends watching the events. And not a room of friends who necessarily know each other—people from all different parts of my life were streaming into a feed of comments customized for me” (Gannes).

This CNN.com/Facebook event was indeed an important social networking experience. But if you break down the event in to its basic elements, it is simply a “single linear stream” that people around the world were watching at the same time (Gannes). This is one of the oldest entertainment experiences—reaching back to a time before hundreds of cable channels—when nearly everyone in America, for example, would watch the same news coverage on the same channels. It is a new experience spun out of an old one.

Although based on an older experience, the CNN.com/Facebook Inauguration event is a transformative one because Facebook, as a worldwide communication channel, is changing our understanding of rhetorical theory. Facebook’s unique “software practices, patterns of information circulation, communicative practices, social practices, and political contexts are articulated and refined by each other in complex ways,” creating a complex rhetorical ecology that is only just beginning to be explored by rhetoricians (Langlois et al. 416). Facebook has its own “code, language, and architecture, as well as other elements that produce a human-understandable visual interface, impos[ing] specific constraints on the communication process while also allowing for new possibilities of expression, and in that way, [it] redefine[s] what it means to communicate online” (Langlois et al. 420). It is changing how we communicate, why we communicate, and the methods and technologies that we use to communicate.

In this thesis, I will look at how Facebook is changing the nature of the rhetorical theory in our Web 2.0 society through the ways in which Facebook imposes specific constraints while allowing for new possibilities of communication, and particularly how Facebook, under the category of “new media,” has refashioned prior ideas of rhetorical situation and how it fits well within the framework of a “rhetorical ecology.” Through its status as a rhetorical ecology (i.e., the way the software is designed, the patterns by which information is circulated on the site, the way members communicate using the software, and the political and social practices that accompany the site), Facebook is altering the way we communicate by altering social interaction and the organization of information.

Facebook started out with much simpler aims in a Harvard dorm room. “I just think people are the most interesting thing—other people,” Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, said in an interview with *The New Yorker*’s John Cassidy in 2006, explaining what drove him to create Facebook and what continues to drive him to develop the social networking site. “What it comes down to, for me, is that people want to do what will make them happy, but in order to understand that they really have to understand their world and what is going on around them” (Cassidy 1). This was certainly the initial appeal of Facebook, and what makes it so popular still—it fulfills the basic human desire to know what other people are doing—but Facebook has evolved far beyond what its creators first intended. It is rapidly becoming “the web’s dominant social ecosystem and an essential personal and business networking tool in much of the wired world” (Stone 1).

When they first began exploring Facebook, Harvard undergraduates received it simply as a “platform for self-promotion, a place to boast and preen and vie for others’ attention as much as for their companionship,” and they considered it “mind-blowing” that their social networks at college could be represented visually as a diagram of sorts on a computer screen (Cassidy 3). Many people still use Facebook as a vehicle for self-promotion, but the website has evolved and expanded its format and its communications platform. As this evolution has unfolded, Facebook has become less focused around the personal profile, and more focused around the ways that Facebook friends can interact and communicate with each other. What was once considered to be mind-blowing has now become standard, a living map of connections that is continuously updating, evolving, and escalating.

Facebook is an aggregator of information about your social circle. The old (and, at one time, controversial) Facebook News Feed showed Profile updates from your friends, highlighting, for instance, a new movie that a user added to the “Favorite Movies” section of their profile or perhaps showcasing that another user added information to the “About Me” section of their profile. The new Live News Feed, instated during October 2009, shows only status updates, notes, wall posts from friends, photos and photo tags, friend requests, new friend connections, event RSVPs, and group memberships. Facebook uses Top News Feed and Most Recent News Feed algorithms to decide what to post to a feed, basing the posts on how recent it is, how many friends are commenting on a certain piece of content, who posted the content, and what type of content it is (e.g. photo, video, or status update) (Facebook Help Center: Homepage and

News Feed). A user's Facebook experience is from a "me-centric perspective," with only connections approved or sought out by the user featured on the Feed. Sites such as Facebook have shifted the organizing principle of online communication from hyperlinks to cloud computing and have changed "the status of the web as a relatively open and traceable archive" to "enclosed, portalized [websites] which invites users to stay within" the site and explore it from their limited perspective" (Langlois et al. 428).

With these innovations, Facebook has given users new ways to "connect and speak truth to power"—more so than any other social networking site—and it is changing the way we fundamentally communicate "by digitally mapping and linking peripatetic people across space and time, allowing them to publicly share myriad and often very personal elements of their lives" (Stone 1). Facebook is continually evolving into multiple genres, meeting different exigencies for different rhetors (for example, journalists, college kids, corporate entities, politicians, high school students—who may all use the site in different ways for different reasons).

The Facebook user experience is deceptively simple; the rhetorical ecology surrounding the site (i.e., the way the software is designed, the patterns by which information is circulated on the site, the way members communicate using the software, and the political and social practices that the site demands) is complex. To begin my exploration of how Facebook is changing the way we communicate, I will define concepts and terms that are significant to this thesis, such as social networking and rhetorical situation, and then I will explore the ways in which these concepts are being redefined by Facebook's own distinct contexts and contents, and how these

characteristics are changing the nature of rhetorical theory that can be applied to Web 2.0 discourse practices and interaction. I will then how Facebook, under the category of new media, has refashioned prior ideas of rhetorical situation, how it fits well within the framework of a rhetorical ecology, and why this is rhetorically significant.

2. Characterizing Social Networking and Facebook

When Naomi Baron wrote *Always On* (published in early 2009), Facebook described itself on the welcome screen of the website as “a social utility that helps people better understand the world around them. Facebook develops technologies that facilitate the spread of information through social networks, allowing people to share information online the same way they do in the real world” (Baron 84). The Facebook public relations department has since changed the description, which now reads, “Facebook is a social utility that helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family, and coworkers. The company develops technologies that facilitate the sharing of information through the social graph, the digital mapping of people's real-world social connections.” Facebook’s own official fan page description reads, “Giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected .”

The change in Facebook's self-description is a telling one. Facebook is putting more emphasis on communication and connection with real-world friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances, with the purpose of creating a more useful site for users. Zuckerberg wants Facebook to “increase people’s understanding of the world around them, to increase their information supply” (Cassidy 4).

In general, social networking sites invite “members to post a photograph and a few personal details—a profile—and link to other members, to exploit the peculiar logic

of networks, by which large numbers of people are connected through a small number of intermediaries and become part of a vast virtual community” (Cassidy 2). danah boyd and Nicole Ellison define social networking sites as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (boyd 2).

Facebook fits well within this basic definition. But Facebook has features that set it apart from other social networking sites, placing an emphasis on security measures (to a certain extent, as Facebook retains the right to use information posted on the site as they see fit) and the building of a particular sense of community. By strategically removing the focus from the profile and placing it on status updates, posts, and photo albums, Facebook emphasizes its function as a communication tool and showcases the similarities that people share within their networks. It trades on its exclusive beginnings within the walls of the Ivy League as it promotes security settings and network exclusivity, allowing people to feel comfortable posting personal information for consumption within their Facebook community. Facebook recently announced that users will be able to selectively choose, on a per-post basis, who can see the content they post to the site. Facebook is also going to “remove regional networks entirely, largely because some of those networks (like China) consist of millions of users, which makes them useless from a privacy standpoint” (Kincaid 1). With the deletion of regional networks, niche networks such as colleges and workplaces will become more popular, and Facebook social networks may begin to feel more exclusive and private, although most users have friends throughout

multiple networks and regions. The removal of the regional network will make users' profile privacy settings more powerful and give them peace of mind, still enabling users to connect with—and stumble upon—thousands of people throughout the whole of Facebook-sanctioned networks.

Media critic danah boyd declares, “For many young adults today, public life is primarily experienced online” (3). More people are online today than ever before and for many of these people, “there might not be any difference” between what they are doing offline and what they are doing online. Most people turn to the Internet to conduct their public life “because it is a more efficient way of doing things” (Cassidy 10).

Facebook is now the number one social networking site used throughout the world to experience public life online and stay connected to the world. As of this writing, “about 85 percent of all Internet users 18 to 34 visited Facebook, MySpace, or Twitter in August 2009,” according to ComScore, an Internet data research company. But Facebook is particularly popular, and it has yet to reach a plateau, despite reports to the contrary (Heffernan 1). Facebook gets about 200 billion page views per month, a total of 1.4 million images are uploaded every second, and Facebook users send 1.6 billion chat messages to each other every single day (Hogg 1). And Facebook is handily winning the competition in seducing social networking latecomers. For example, MySpace's monthly traffic dropped to about 64 million unique monthly U.S. visitors in August 2009, while Facebook's has soared to 92 million (Shapira 1). As more people join Facebook, the more people are drawn to it, because people want to go where their friends are; as boyd points out in “Social Networking Sites: Public, Private, or What,” “people join the sites with

their friends and use the different messaging tools to hang out, share cultural artifacts and ideas, and communicate with one another” (2).

Steven Johnson’s *Emergence* elaborates on boyd’s position. According to Johnson, Facebook follows many of the fundamental principles for building a successful system that is designed to learn from the ground up, as a social networking site should do. Facebook is “a densely interconnected system with simple elements, [which] let the more sophisticated behavior trickle up” (Johnson 78). The site is built so that the users can easily see the patterns that fellow members are creating on the site. Johnson believes that this “local information can lead to global wisdom.” He explains through his metaphor of ants in a colony: “The primary mechanism of swarm logic is the interaction between neighboring ants in the field: ants stumbling across each other . . . adding ants to the overall system will generate more interactions between neighbors and will consequently enable the colony to solve problems and regulate itself more effectively” (79). Applying this principle to Facebook, the more interactions that happen among your Facebook friends, the more Facebook members are stumbling across each other (79). This contributes to a more engaging site for the users, and provides a larger audience, which, in turn, can lead to more fruitful public discourse and a more entertaining Facebook experience.

This also allows Facebook users to build two kinds of social capital: bonding social capital, which involves receiving emotional support from our closest friends and our family; and bridging social capital, which entails the kind of information and interaction that we get from a diverse set of acquaintances and friends (Burke). For

example, without having to make a phone call or draft an email, a person can receive support from their best friends when they post about their bad day when they got a flat tire and got laid off. This same person might be browsing through the comforting comments from their best friends and notice that a person they know from middle school just posted a job opening at their place of employment.

The average Facebook user has 120 Facebook friends, but engages in two-way personal exchanges with an average of six Facebook friends (Broadbent). Yet perhaps the power of Facebook—and its influence on the rhetorical situation—lies in part in the knowledge that those who are reading your posts are usually people that care about what you have to say. If I post a new piece of information on Facebook, this piece of information could be accessed by thousands of people in my network, contingent upon my security settings. But most people on Facebook are not interested in the information posted by users they don't know, so the information is not accessed or used by this large number of people. However, when I post something that appears on my friends' News Feed, this information is more likely to be accessed, read, used, and commented upon by my Facebook friends. As more people comment on a post, the higher the likelihood that it will end up featured on the Live News Feed. A smaller number of people may be getting the information, but it means more to them and is therefore considered more valuable. Zuckerberg describes it as “the right information . . . going to the right people . . . giving people control over who sees what helps increase overall information flow” (Cassidy 5). He believes that what distinguishes Facebook from other sites is the control that it allows

over who can see what, arguing that “people want to share with just their friends is the most important stuff” (Cassidy 5).

In her article “Social Networking and Cloud Computing: Precarious Affordances for the ‘Prosumer,’” Jamie Skye Bianco describes how the specific computing processes of Facebook—known as cloud computing—power the social networking site and allow people to share the “important stuff” with their friends. Her technical description of the software processes behind Facebook illustrates how the unique information patterns contribute to the complicated rhetorical processes on the site. Bianco writes of social networking as a “huge range of personalized cloud computing platforms and functions of interaction on the web” (Bianco 303). These cloud-computing sites “use . . . a network-based application that handles user data storage” (303).

Bianco uses the term “prosumer” to describes Facebook users. A combination of the words “producer” and “consumer,” Bianco is pointing to the fact that everyone on the site contributes to the content as well as consuming the content. Unlike content distributed by more traditional forms of communication, Facebook “allows any computer literate person . . . to create [their own] textual and graphical World Wide Web pages” (Warnick 6). Facebook, as a cloud-computing site, offers prosumers a “variety of user controls that allow for the creation of a personal network” (Bianco 304). Facebook also offers users the option of “subplatforms,” which Bianco details as faculties that permit “messaging users directly through the web interface or via . . . text messages and incorporating various digital objects such as digital video and photos” into a Twitter-like message or “the ‘posting’ of an outside URL on the ‘wall’ of a Facebook user” (304).

These are the main communication options open to Facebook users, and most Facebook users take advantage of all the subplatforms on the site. Bianco's essay illustrates the fact that the communication process on Facebook "is not simply one of human actors mobilizing communication technologies, but also of communication technologies enabling new patterns" (Langlois et al. 424).

In her article, Bianco notes that she just "scratches at the surface of the complexities of self-production and distribution, sharing, networking, and community organization" capabilities that social networks such as Facebook make available to users. Rhetoric helps us to break down the complexities of communication so that we are able to understand and appreciate what is being said and how it is being said. Facebook is a "layered [entity] that involve[s] not only visual interfaces, but also informational processes and communicational practices" (Langlois et al. 420). With an example such as Facebook, the vocabulary with which we are equipped to discuss the new media proves to be lacking. As James Zappen notes, "new media support and enable the transformation of old rhetoric...into a new digital rhetoric" (Zappen 321). By looking at the production and distribution of content on Facebook first in terms of an "older" rhetorical theory such as rhetorical situation—and then in terms of rhetorical ecologies, a newer theory that encompasses the many computer processes and human practices—we can begin to understand the complexities of communicating with digital media and articulate the affordances and constraints that exist in a discourse that takes place on Facebook.

3. Defining Rhetorical Situation

Rhetorical situation is a fundamental concept in rhetorical theory, and it has been discussed as an idea since Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, although the phrase itself did not originate until 1968. Aristotle first presented the idea as he developed the concept of rhetoric through his three species or modes of rhetoric: deliberative, epideictic, and forensic. Deliberative rhetoric, the first species, is concerned with the discussion of politics. An example of deliberative rhetoric is a speech that might be given in the chambers of a legislature. This mode of rhetoric is focused on persuading for or against any future action that may benefit or harm society (Reynolds 1). Aristotle frames epideictic rhetoric as writing or speech that is considered ceremonial or demonstrative, given at a public occasion such as a funeral. Aristotle assigned "virtue (the noble)" and "vice (the base)" as those special topics of invention that pertained to epideictic rhetoric (*Silva Rhetoricae*). Forensic—sometimes referred to as judicial—rhetoric is concerned with defending or accusing with respect to the law. A forensic rhetor argues about past events in terms of the right and wrong, or the just and the unjust (*Silva Rhetoricae*). For Aristotle, these were the three "causes" of rhetoric. Although clearly not exhaustive, each mode had its own time, place, set purposes, and appropriate topics of invention. With these three species of rhetoric, Aristotle set the stage for rhetorical situation.

As communication and the situations that require discourse have evolved since the time of Aristotle, so too has the scope and definition of rhetorical situation. Since Lloyd Bitzer's 1968 article "The Rhetorical Situation," rhetoricians have variously defined rhetorical situation through the years, with certain core elements remaining while other aspects of the definition are furiously debated. It is important to characterize "rhetorical situation" in order to delineate how the definition is changing as Facebook becomes more integral to the social ecosystem of the web.

Lloyd Bitzer originated the term in his essay "The Rhetorical Situation," calling rhetorical situation a "controlling and fundamental concern of rhetorical theory" and briefly describing it as "the nature of those contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse" (1). Bitzer then further sketches out the concept, defining it as a "natural context of persons, events, objects, relations, and an exigence which strongly invites utterance" (5). Bitzer believes that rhetorical discourse obtains its rhetorical character from the situation which generates that discourse, such as a historic context, and that a work is rhetorical if "it functions ultimately to produce action or change the world . . . through the mediation of thought and action" (4). Bitzer's definition therefore is situational.

In Bitzer's definition of rhetorical situation, three elements or "constituents" are required for a discourse to be termed rhetorical. A rhetorical situation always has an *exigence*, something waiting to be done and capable of positive modification, or some material event or problem that calls for a discursive response; an *audience*, those persons who are capable of being influenced by the rhetorical discourse, and also those capable of

modifying the exigence or solving the problem; and *constraints*, those things that restrict the decision and action needed to modify exigence. Cultural constraints are beliefs, attitudes, motives, facts, traditions, and so forth. Material constraints might include limited access to communication channels, a communication platform that promotes a limited perspective, or a lack of reach with the discourse.

Many social networking Web 2.0 technologies—Facebook and Twitter specifically come to mind—are censured as being a pointless waste of time. However, a survey of rhetorical situation disputes this fact and firmly places Facebook within its definition. Facebook seemingly always provides a rapt rhetorical audience, plenty of material in which users can find exigencies and respond, as well as particular constraints (from the site itself as well as the personal constraints of the users). A good example of this occurred the death of Michael Jackson in July 2009 and the subsequent reaction on Facebook. At the time of his death, Michael Jackson’s Facebook fan page grew from 80,000 fans to just over 10 million, generating the largest response on a Facebook page ever (Busari 1). At the height of the Jackson mania, 20 fans per second were joining the page, as entire Facebook news feeds had become a stream of messages about Jackson’s death and filled with peoples’ memories of the legend. The Michael Jackson page wall turned into a virtual memorial for the pop legend’s life, with fans seeking community and comfort. During Jackson’s memorial, Facebook logged more than 1 million status updates worldwide. This is an example of a “historic situation so compelling and clear that the responses were created almost out of necessity. The responses . . . participated

with the situation and positively modified several exigencies” for Facebook members mourning Jackson (Bitzer 9).

Bitzer’s definition of rhetorical situation provoked a debate in the academic community as some critics called for a modified definition of rhetorical situation. One such critic is Richard Vatz. With his “The Myth of Rhetorical Situation,” Vatz responds to Bitzer’s essay, bringing to light an important distinction in the definition of rhetorical situation. Whereas Bitzer views meaning as intrinsic to certain situations (one example he gives is the rhetorical situation surrounding Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address and the inherent meaning that could be drawn from the battlefield on which Union forces defeated Confederate forces during the U.S. Civil War), Vatz views meaning as a consequence of rhetorical invention. Vatz writes that the communication of an event is a choice or an interpretation—not intrinsic to the situation—and therefore “the rhetor’s responsibility is of supreme concern” (158). (An example from Vatz: “There was a Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, not because of an event or group of events, but mainly because acts of rhetorical creation took place which created a political crisis” (159)). Newspapers pick certain topics to cover within their pages not because of the intrinsic importance of an event, but because rhetors (in this case, journalists or editors) decide that certain topics are salient, thus creating the rhetorical situation.

Vatz believes that “situations are rhetorical, utterance invites exigence, rhetoric controls situational response, [and] situations obtain their character from the rhetoric which surround or creates them” (159). When a President makes a national announcement on television, the situation is not controlling his response. Vatz reasons

that “the communication of the event was of such consensual symbolism that expectations were easily predictable and stable. . . . Rhetoric is a cause and not an effect of meaning. It is antecedent, not subsequent, to a situation’s impact. Rhetors choose or do not choose to make salient situations, facts, events” (160).

Vatz’s essential distinction from Bitzer is important to the concept of rhetorical situation in the age of Facebook, and the difference is illustrated well on the social networking site. Your Facebook friends may use the site as a platform—in many cases, it is now the only platform—on which to discuss the issues of the day, such as their views on the passage of a health care bill in Congress. Their purpose might be to express their identity—via their views—to their social connections, to join in the public discourse with like-minded people (or to provoke debate with opposing viewpoints), or to use Facebook as a means of persuasion to get other users to share their views and take action on an issue. Similarly, the Obama White House will post on its Facebook page a transcript of a speech or a call to action on a political issue and the posting will receive thousands of comments from users within a matter of minutes, with many users responding to other commenters in a public discourse—a fruitful source of direct public opinion for White House staffers eager to hear the voice of their constituents. Bitzer would argue that the health care bill has intrinsic meaning because of its historical context and the accompanying exigence behind it. According to Vatz, Facebook users are creating the importance of the event by posting about it on the site.

Further, everyone who joins in the discourse on Facebook is like a politician or editor and contributes to the salience of the exigence. Everything—the event, the people

responding to the event, the technology with which they respond—contribute and coproduce the exigence and the rhetorical situation. The theories of rhetorical situation posed by Bitzer and Vatz can only explain so much about the complicated and multiple levels of discourse that occur on Facebook. In order to create a more inclusive theory of rhetoric, which covers these multiple levels, critics have moved from rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies, as I discuss later in this thesis.

A majority of the things posted on Facebook seemingly lack the intrinsic importance that Bitzer requires for his definition of rhetorical situation, yet these are often among the most vital items on Facebook because the rhetor (a Facebook friend) deems them important. A friend posting funny details of his weekend plans, to convince his friends to join in on the action, can engender a great deal of reaction on Facebook, public discourse, and action in real life. (The scale is obviously not that of something along the lines of the Gettysburg Address, but it is of high importance to the friend and his social circle.) Similarly, right after posting details of complicated policy maneuver, the Obama White House uses the Facebook platform to post pictures of the Obama family playing with their pet dog, something which regular folks do every day, and which receives thousands of responses. These posts play an important role in developing an emotional connection between the President and his constituents—but it is hard to argue that they contain an intrinsic historical exigence. However, as danah boyd notes in “Digital Handshakes,” “comments are a form of currency [on Facebook] . . . a jumping off point to engage with networked publics” (2). A rhetor posts on Facebook in order to provoke a response, to garner comments from Facebook friends or fans. boyd continues:

“Getting comments makes a person look cool, but comments are also embedded in a social contract of reciprocity. Comments are not left on politicians’ profiles simply to be consumed by the aide who controls the profile; they are crafted to provoke a response by the politician or by anyone visiting the politician’s page” (2). Engaging with networked publics with “genuine messages”—no matter whether it is of historical importance—provides the rhetor and the audience with a “meaningful encounter” on Facebook (2).

In the next section, I will examine how critics began to frame rhetorical situation in terms of online communities and how that helps us understand Facebook on a rhetorical level.

4. Cyberspace and Rhetorical Situation's Evolution

In “Rhetoric, Community, and Cyberspace,” James Zappen, Laura J. Gurak, and Stephen Doheny-Farina further outline the evolution of rhetorical situation as he adapts the concept to a contemporary online rhetorical community. His analysis is especially suited to a rhetorical interpretation of Facebook, and he begins to hint at the transformation from rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies. Zappen et al. write that, in an online community (such as Facebook), the traditional notion of a single rhetor is no longer an entirely valid assumption. Although the single rhetor is certainly still present in certain rhetorical situations, it is less likely that one will find “a single rhetor seeking purposefully and intentionally to persuade an audience within a single community of shared beliefs and values” (Zappen et al. 400). Instead, there is more often an assembly of “‘voices’ from different places all ‘speaking’ at once in the same ‘place’ in fragments rather than complete discourse” (Zappen et al. 400). (The theory of rhetorical ecologies that I discuss later is helpful for examining how these diverse actors shape the discourse on Facebook.)

By applying this image of an “assembly of voices” to Facebook, “News Feed” section comes to mind. The News Feed confronts the user immediately upon logging into the site. Each user’s home page is a live feed of all the updates made recently by Facebook friends and those Facebook pages of which the user is a “fan.” It is similar to

an RSS feed to one might subscribe to in order to receive updates from favorite blogs or news organizations. The user may see, for instance, three new status updates from friends about the outcome of a football game that just ended in the past 10 minutes, a photo album uploaded by another friend about 15 minutes ago, and a post from Barack Obama about the importance of the passage of the health care bill because he or she is a fan of the “Barack Obama” page.

All of these voices are coming together in one place, snippets of a discourse that you can engage with or simply ignore. This is a significant change that increases our ability to control when we communicate and with whom we interact (Baron 6). One of the oft-cited reasons for Facebook’s popularity is the capacity to maintain relationships with the least amount of effort and interaction required—or the power to build and sustain relationships through frequent Facebook interaction; it is dependent upon the will of those who are communicating via Facebook whether they will be a passive or an active communicator. However, it is not just human will that supports and allows these choices, but also the memory and patterning capabilities of Facebook and its software that coproduce this kind of rhetorical situation. Any communication occurring on Facebook requires a person to log in to their Facebook account, to log in with great frequency to keep up to speed on the events in their News Feed, and read messages or wall posts they receive, and to respond to any messages or wall posts—all of which is made possible through the technology that keeps Facebook running.

Zappen describes online communities as a new a “public space within which limited . . . communities and individuals can develop mutual respect and understanding

via dialogue and discussion” (Zappen et al. 400). In “Virtual Friendship and the New Narcissism” Christine Rosen expands on this notion with her own explanation of the formation and development of friendships, and then communities, on social networking sites. Rosen writes, “Facebook friends tend to be part of one’s offline social circle,” and “users form groups based on mutual interests” (2). For example, you might be friends with all of your teammates from a recreational basketball league, and the team captain creates a Facebook group for your team to use as a message board and discussion page. According to Zappen et al., a site such as Facebook is, therefore, “less a collection of people joined by shared beliefs and values than a public space or forum that permits these people to engage each other and form limited or local communities of belief” (Zappen et al. 400).

In her article “Rhetoric, Community, and Culture of Weblogs: Blogging as Social Action: A Genre Analysis of the Weblog,” Carolyn Miller and Dawn Shepherd further discuss the idea of an online community as she examines the blog as a genre. She pays particular attention to understanding what “makes a rhetorical action ‘fitting’ within its cultural environment.” Miller and Shepherd write, “we must see genre in relation to kairos, or socially perceived space-time. What Bitzer called a ‘fitting’ response will survive to become recurrent and thus generic if the kairos also recurs, or persists” (online)³. Kairos describes “both the sense in which discourse is understood as fitting and timely . . . and the way in which it can seize on the unique opportunity of a fleeting moment to create new rhetorical possibility” (online). Further, Miller and Shepherd define blogs by that which the blogger is trying to accomplish with their blog and the

message the blogger is trying to send to the world with their blog posts. Miller and Shepherd's description of bloggers also describes Facebook users and their goals in using Facebook as a communication tool. On Facebook, users “seem less interested in role playing than in locating, or constructing, for themselves and for others, an identity that they can understand as unitary, as ‘real’ in the flux of continual change” that defines digital media. For a blogger, the blog serves a role in the “contribution to the art of the self,” similar to the role that Facebook statuses and posts play (18). A Facebook page is a tool “by which one ‘composes and cultivates one’s being in the world.’” Facebook can be seen “as a genre that addresses a timeless rhetorical exigence in ways that are specific to its time” (18). An online community made up of Facebook friends serves to acknowledge the rhetorical exigencies by which a user is moved to write. The Facebook friends acknowledge the motive in each other and often spur on other exigencies.

Based on this definition of blog as genre, Facebook posts and status updates contribute immeasurably to the online community. Posts, status updates, and other conventions present Facebook texts as “real” things in the continual flux of the social networking site; they showcase the rhetor’s personality and ideas. The poster’s Facebook friends usually are motivated to acknowledge the intentions of the poster, and are moved to take advantage of the circumstances and the opportune moment to create Facebook posts of their own.

5. Advantages and Constraints of Public Discourse on Facebook

The affordances provided by a site like Facebook “offer a number of advantages for public discourse that are unavailable in mass media. Among these are affordability, access, opportunities for horizontal communication and interactivity, online forums for discussion and mobilization, networking capacity, and platforms for multimedia” (Warnick 6). As “Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life,” it provides users with a number of different methods with which to interact and communicate with other users as well as establish their identities. On Facebook, users are creating highly individualized and personalized web pages. The discourse on Facebook is “me-centric” (Langlois et al. 418): The me-centric perspective is a constraint and greatly limits one’s view of the site, but it also offers “a specific context of cultural and social experience and enables new forms of sociality and new ways of accessing information” (Langlois et al. 419). Further, “the specific informational dynamics for sharing information”—such as the profile and wall post function—facilitate the spread of information to large audiences. Further, “the code is not simply mobilized [by a rhetor or cause]; it also enables new forms of more hidden...practices that make use of the potential of Facebook to gather information about the users—their demographic profiles, their likes and dislikes, their network of friends—allowing for multiple power relations, some visible, some hidden” (Langlois et al. 420).

A major “informational dynamic for sharing information” is the Facebook profile. The Facebook profile combines both textual elements and pictures to create a cohesive unit that forms the basis of a Facebook user’s identity. Everyone’s Facebook profile takes the same format in terms of design and the Facebook profile is the main representation of the user’s online identity. The profile is interactive and continually evolving; many users edit and update their profile daily. When multiple users view the same Facebook profile, each user’s interpretation of the Facebook profile as text varies depending upon both the individual’s interpretation of the profile itself and the broader use of Facebook as a website.

Another “informational dynamic” is the wall post, which is located on a tab on the user’s profile, and serves as a kind of electronic whiteboard, with users writing messages on the wall as they “stop by” the Facebook profile. A Facebook wall post is genre-specific and has multiple audiences, as it is more of a public announcement than it is a private note or email to the user.

Facebook’s visual interfaces, informational processes, and communication practices work in concert to shape the user experience on the site. The “constant personalization, the automated updates, and recommendations are not only restrictive, as they enable new forms of surveillance and control [by Facebook]” but they are “productive in that they set conditions for social bonding and cultural exchange” (Langlois et al. 419). With these constraints and conditions, it is clear that “the meaning of the message cannot be isolated from the mode of propagation” (Edbauer 10).

6. From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies

Jenny Edbauer's "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies" is a useful text for restructuring the boundaries of rhetorical situation in a Web 2.0 world. Although her argument does not center on social networking, she reframes rhetorical situation in terms of rhetorical ecologies in a networked space of flows and connections. Edbauer's rhetorical ecologies demonstrate that, on Facebook, rhetoric is something that we do, not just something that we find ourselves in (Edbauer 13).

As other critics have before her, Edbauer points out that the "sender, receiver, text" model is too simple to cover all the bases required of modern communication; Bitzer's and Vatz' theories dissect the "contextual dimensions of rhetoric," and this has "permanently trouble[d] the sender-receiver model" (Edbauer 7). Bitzer and Vatz added levels of complication to the communication model, but their discussions of rhetorical situation are still incomplete. For example, what about exigencies with multiple agents and constraints as we may find on Facebook? An online platform such as Facebook is a convergence of a diverse array of platforms: "different technical systems, protocols, and networks that enable specific user practices and connect users in different and particular ways" (Langlois et al. 419).

Further, older theories of rhetorical situation tend to “conceptualize rhetoric within a scene of already-formed, already-discrete individuals,” which Edbauer sees as problematic. Rhetoric is not the “totality of its discrete elements”—the elements of rhetorical situation should be recontextualized “in a wider sphere of active, historical, lived processes” because “rhetorical communication is always in a state of flux,” mostly due to the role that perception plays in the audience’s view of the rhetor, the message, and the issues (Edbauer 8).

Rhetoric does not often fit neatly into the boxes that Bitzer and Vatz constructed (although she says they are an “undeniably helpful” way to think “about rhetoric’s contextual character”) (20). Edbauer writes, “Rhetorical situation is part of what we might call...an ongoing social flux . . . situation bleeds into the concatenation of public interaction. Public interactions bleed into wider social processes. The elements of rhetorical situation simply bleed” (9). She goes on to say that “a given rhetoric is not contained by the elements that comprise its rhetorical situation (exigence, rhetor, audience, constraints). Rather, a rhetoric emerges already infected by the viral intensities that are circulating in the social field” (14). Beyond the ways in which rhetoric emerges, “the same rhetoric will go on to evolve in a parallel ways . . . the same rhetoric might manage to infect and connect various processes, events, and bodies” (14).

Before a message is delivered on Facebook, it is infused with meaning from “an amalgamation of processes and encounters” (8). Spurred to write by a series of events more so than one singular exigence, a rhetor creates a message through a “distributed act” of writing “rather than an isolated act of creation” (12). When a communication is

released from the rhetor, the interconnected nature of Facebook promotes the viral spread of messages. Once it is released, it can evolve beyond the rhetor's original intentions, depending on the perceptions of the varied audience. Edbauer terms these "counter rhetorics" and explains that they "directly respond to and resist the original exigence, [but] they also expand the lived experience of the original rhetorics by adding to them—even while changing and expanding their shape" (19).

A prime example of Edbauer's rhetorical ecologies at work emerged in the wake of the Virginia Tech shootings in April 2007. In his article, "Big Media Blunted by Blacksburg Tragedy," Matthew Creamer explores the way in which the old ways of network news reporting quickly became obsolete while a new rhetorical cycle was emerging. Creamer argues that the Virginia Tech shootings "will go down as our first Web 2.0 national nightmare" (1). He writes, "It's the latest reminder that the old news cycle, in which news networks and daily newspapers chase each other's tails until boredom sets in, is morphing into something different, with the story's participants taking their place as producers, distributors, and the real stars" (2).

For perhaps the first time in history, the American public turned first to network news broadcasts but found the coverage to be lacking. They quickly turned on their computers to surf the internet and found out information that was not available to them via their television sets. Americans turned to social networking sites to see if their friends, relatives, and acquaintances were safe and sound. They logged in to websites to look at and participate in memorials posted by other students for the ones who were lost or injured. The victim's own pictures and words were available as well as postings by

friends and families on the victims own Facebook profiles. Facebook messages about the tragedy were picked up by the major news outlets and were changed and expanded from their original intent (a message to express anger or comfort to friends, outlet for grief) to a counter rhetoric (a representation of the feelings on campus, an emblem of student life at Virginia Tech in the days that followed the shootings). The major media companies and their bold name journalists were not used to these distributed acts of creation in which voices from all over Facebook joined together to eulogize and grieve over the events.

Because of what Stephen Johnson would classify as feedback and emergence, conventional media began turning to social networking sites to inform their own stories, give them story ideas, and troll for interview subjects. Creamer writes, “For more than a day after the massacre, images of the killer and carnage were scarce, leaving Larry King and Dr. Phil, Geraldo and O'Reilly, and a parade of pundits, law enforcers, social critics, NRA members and psychiatrists to fill up the information vacuum with a rank stew of dime-store psychology, populist demagoguery and sociological sophistry. Meanwhile, TV producers were turning to the social networks to find interview subjects” (2). These leads proved to be far more fruitful. The viral spread of information on Facebook from those students and faculty who were living the situation turned into the best journalism that emerged in the wake of the shootings. Three years later, Virginia Tech students still use Facebook as a way to memorialize the day of the shooting, in an instance of ongoing discourse.

In light of the interrelationships within the rhetorical space and because public rhetorics “do not only exist in the elements of their situations, but also in the radius of their neighboring events,” communication on Facebook is “distributed through ecologies” that cannot be “properly segmented into audience, text, or rhetorician” (14, 20). Rather than replacing the foundation that Bitzer and Vatz have established, Edbauer shifts “the lines of focus from rhetorical situation to rhetorical ecologies” (9). More precisely, she adopts “an ecological, or affective, rhetorical model . . . that reads rhetoric both as a process of distributive emergence and as an ongoing circulation process” (13). Applying this to the Virginia Tech example, after the shooting, patterns emerged among Facebook users at Virginia Tech that became almost immediately obvious, as evidenced by the reaction of the conventional news media. The student discourse was posted to a specific audience on Facebook, but when it was amplified to a worldwide audience by the new media, the texts took on a new, profound explanatory meaning. Once the news media grabbed on to the texts and framed it for their own purposes, making different connections, the discourse changes and circulates even further.

In her book *Always Already New*, media historian Lisa Gitelman uses a similar model of ecologies of media as she defines the word media, and her definition supports and elaborates Edbauer's theory. Gitelman writes that a definition of media is not complete without two distinct levels or parts. The first part of Gitelman's definition is “a medium is a technology that enables communication” (Jenkins 13). The second part is that “a medium is a set of ‘protocols’ or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are

also cultural systems. Delivery technologies come and go all the time, but media persist as layers within an ever more complicated information and entertainment stratum” (Jenkins 13).

Gitelman goes on to explain that although “a medium’s content may shift, its audience may change, and its social status may rise or fall... it continues to function within the larger system of communication options” as long as that medium has “established itself as satisfying some core human demand” (Jenkins 14). She gives examples such as the printed word not making the spoken word extinct, television not killing the radio, and cinema peacefully coexisting with the theatre.

Gitelman elaborates on what she means by “protocols”: “Protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships. So telephony includes the salutation ‘Hello?’ and includes the monthly billing cycle and includes wires and cables that materially connect our phones...Cinema includes everything from the sprocket holes that run along the sides of film to the widely shared sense of being able to wait and ‘see’ films at home on video. And protocols are far from static.” (Jenkins 14). What Gitelman terms a protocol is another way to look at an ecology.

Further, as Edbauer updates rhetorical situation in terms of a complex system of multiple exigencies, she makes an important point about the way in which a blog—or Facebook—serves as a source of documentation and linking. Edbauer uses the example of a city blog in which “a blogger trackers the city . . . as a kind of local-research-in-the-wild” (22). Edbauer writes that the encounters the blogger posts about his or her interactions with the city “can be tracked among . . . users as an example of how

representations of place . . . are constructed discursively, visually, affectively, and link-fully” (22). She goes on to note, “Because this kind of documentation is public, often open to comments and citation in other blogs and websites, [it] grows in social waves” (22).

This same idea can be used to analyze Facebook. The networked nature of the site “puts [information] into a circulation that becomes linked, put to other uses, transformed. In fact, without such citation and use by others, a blog is as good as dead” (Edbauer 22). Although Facebook might not be “dead” without linking, Facebook recently added features that they believe will help people make important connections on the site: links on profile pages to other pages about the user’s interests, affiliations, and favorite activities. Facebook explains, “Going forward, the biographical information you include in your profile—such as current city, hometown, education, and work, and likes and interests—can be connected” to other Facebook pages (Li). Further, “Instead of just boring text, these connections are actually pages, so your profile will become immediately more connected to the places, things, and experiences that matter to you” (Li). According to Facebook, this serves to mirror more of the connections you make in your life—including organizations and interests that may not be people. Facebook is turning “documentation into a kind of social production in itself. Rather than thinking only in terms of audience, purpose, clarity, and information . . . [they will focus] on the effects and concatenations of our local ecologies” (Edbauer 22).

Edbauer’s essay is an important step toward explicitly updating the theory of rhetorical situation for a more inclusive theory of rhetorical ecologies; in the next

chapter, I will discuss Collin Gifford Brooke's book *Lingua Fracta*, in which he works to create a unified theory of new media by updating the classical canons of rhetoric—and he specifically focuses on ecologies of practice.

7. Reframing Classical Rhetorical Models to Analyze Facebook

In *Lingua Fracta*, Collin Gifford Brooke begins by outlining the distinguishing characteristics of a rhetoric of old media and a rhetoric of new media. The major difference that Brooke finds is “rather than examining the choices that have already been made by writers, [a rhetoric of new media] should prepare us as writers to make our own choices” (Brooke 15). He echoes Edbauer’s thought that a major shift toward thinking of rhetoric in terms of ecologies is required of—and is made possible by—new media: we should promote the “shift [of our] own perceptions of writing . . . not to think of . . . essays as empty, preexisting containers to be filled, but rather as texts emerging from an ongoing process of reading, thinking, writing” (Brooke 25).

Brooke also finds that an example of a new media format such as Facebook illustrates that no single communication model (such as sender-receiver-text) can cover the complicated rhetorical maneuvers that take place when people use Facebook to communicate with each other, just as Edbauer noted in her essay. Brooke would say that Facebook is a dynamic communication tool with “goals other than stability,” unlike older forms of communication with which there is usually a static printed page (28).

Brooke thinks that one way to come to terms with the dynamic nature of communication on Facebook is to frame social networking sites as rhetorical ecologies—or “ecologies of practice” as Brooke terms them. Ecologies are “a crucial framework” in

which to think of rhetoric. Unlike a static textual object we read on a printed page, a site such as Facebook is constantly in flux and therefore must be read through its changing interface. New media requires us to shift our thinking from *object* to *interface*, a “move from a text-based rhetoric, exemplified by our attachment to the printed page, to a rhetoric that can account for the dynamics of the interface” (26). Brooke places a great deal of importance on interfaces, which he describes as “those imperfectly bounded encounters where users, technologies, and contexts intersect” (200). The Facebook interface consists of all the elements—users, computing processes, constraints of types of messages and information sharing, the social and cultural exchanges common on the site—combined.

When it comes to digital writing, “we require a [rhetorical] model capable of taking account of not simply the process leading up to a release, but the activity that follows as well” (38). As new media plays a larger role in communication, interface has an increasingly important role in rhetorical models: “As the ratio between interface and object shifts with the advent of new media, our rhetorics must shift to account for these new realities and new possibilities” (25).

Further, we can no longer think of a rhetorical text as just the words on the page, but instead as an amalgamation of factors in the interface. With the interface as the mode through which we analyze the rhetoric of a communication method, it becomes unnecessary to think of rhetoric as producing a final product; rather, it changes “what we think of as products . . . are but special, stabilized instances of an ongoing process conducted at the level of interface” (Brooke 25). This is particularly true on a site such as

Facebook; the notion of a final rhetorical product is practically nonexistent on the site. A rhetor produces discourse and expects that there will be more information added in the form of comments or responses from friends. Additionally, a rhetor might continually update their Facebook page, using it as a living document.

Brooke structures his book around “revisions of the classical canons of rhetoric,” through which he “articulates some of the practices he sees cutting across varieties of new media” (196). This approach allows Brooke to “hint at both the fundamental continuities in production of discourse and the ways that such production changes over time” (196). The “canons can help us understand new media, which add to our understanding of the canons as they have evolved with contemporary technologies. Neither rhetoric nor technology is left unchanged in their encounter” (201).

To begin, Brooke reframes the classical trivium of grammar, logic, and rhetoric into a contemporary version of the trivium: code, practice, and culture (47). Brooke believes that “a revised trivium . . . can help map out differently scaled ecologies” (200). His revision allows for the complexities that are found when examining texts through dynamic interfaces instead of static pages. With this revision, “the canons provide a rich articulation of ecologies of practice, which focus on strategies and tactics that we bring to bear on new media at the same time that our technologies constrain and empower us” (41). Instead of describing “a process that culminates in the production of a textual object, the trivium and canons help us envision a discursive space that is ongoing—one that is shaped both by the intentions of individual users and contextual constraints” (200). Brooke writes that there is value to be found in the trivium, “specifically if we think of

each of the three as different scales or units of analysis” (47).

Brooke creates a more modern take on the trivium when he begins to think of the three parts “not just [as] things to be mastered by a student” but as things that would have relevance to the actual communications of the student. For example, to begin, Brooke reframes “grammar” in terms of an “ecology of code.” An ecology of code “is comprised not only of grammar, but also of all of those resources for the production of interfaces more broadly construed, including visual, aural, spatial, and textual elements, as well as programming codes” (48).

Brooke reframes “logic” in terms of an “ecology of practice,” a concept of particular importance in the book. Brooke explains, “Ecologically, practice includes all of the ‘available means’ and our decisions regarding which of them to pursue” (49). In the case of digital writing and interfaces, “this ecology also includes not only those practices involved in the production of a particular interface, but those made possible by it” (49). For example, an ecology of practice might be the ability to choose a book on Amazon based on what you or others have already purchased or the ability to get a new connection through the friend suggestions on Facebook.

In place of “rhetoric,” Brooke suggests “ecologies of culture.” An ecology of culture is the “category that operates at the broadest range of scales, from interpersonal relationships and local discourse communities to regional, national, and even global cultures” (49).

Brooke also reframes the classical canons of rhetoric in terms of ecologies. There are five canons of classical rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery.

Brooke discusses each canon in turn, with equal attention paid to each. Although some of the canons may seem outdated, we do practice each of the canons, just in new and different ways. (29).

The first canon that Brooke rethinks is invention. A rethinking of invention requires a shift in focus to “the generation of possibilities, rather than their elimination until all but one are gone and closure is achieved” (86). Because interfaces resist culture, the canon of invention when writing with digital media is now about generation and the multiplication of possibilities from which a rhetor could spin off to create discourse. Brooke terms this “proairetic” invention, by which “based on a fairly simple set of rules for drawing connections between users, pages, and tags, [social networking sites or social bookmarking sites] generate an associational network of sources ‘endlessly proliferating’ according to no overarching principle of rational design” (83). Brooke uses an example of a Google search. Using proairetic invention, a page search should serve simply “as a point of departure,” even and especially when the results are mixed (86).

In terms of Facebook, by joining a group, one user can find all the other users who are also members of the group and this could be just a jumping off point from which to connect with people; a user may be able to peruse friends, photos, statuses. Put a search term into Facebook's search engine, and (if applicable) the results page will show Facebook fan pages that you can join with the term in the title or description, friends' wall posts and status messages with the search term in them, friends' profiles with the term listed, as well as the first results in the Bing search engine. This truly is an “endlessly proliferating” network of sources from which to begin engaging in discourse on

Facebook. Further, with the real-time nature of status updates, the results of a Facebook search will literally change from minute to minute. Facebook offers infinite options for a rhetor to spin off to create discourse.

Although the traditional rhetorical canon of arrangement entailed the parts and order of an oration, Brooke believes it is necessary to rethink the canon of arrangement for digital media in terms of pattern. To write using new media is “to engage in the practice of patterning” whether or not the rhetor is aware of this fact (92). Instead of the arrangement of paragraphs in the order of an essay, Brooke considers the pattern of a database as a sort of narrative form; most digital media computing occurs through a database and “shapes our experience as it is used” just as traditional arrangement might shape our experience of an essay (101). Brooke explains, however, that databases provide order when users act upon them, and users impose a certain amount of order on the database, as most sites are designed to “respond accurately and meaningfully” when they are acted upon by users (101).

Facebook is first and foremost a database of Friends, and then a database of fan pages. As Lev Manovich notes, databases can be seen “as collections of items on which the user can perform various operations—view, navigate, search,” all operations which a Facebook user performs on their list of friends on a daily basis (101). However, Facebook only makes sense as a database when acted upon by its users. For example, many elementary schools or high schools start Facebook pages in order to gather alumni together in one place. This Facebook page then serves as a database for multiple outcomes, such as a place to distribute mass messages from the school to former students

in place of (or in addition) to a newsletter, as a site for planning events such as reunions and homecomings, or a venue for long lost friends to reconnect. The page serves as a database for the school, but also for all those who are members of the database. The database is now more interactive and open.

Further, the process of datamining—”which involves sorting through massive amounts of data to locate information, typically in the form of trends, relationships, and patterns”—produces a more pronounced narrative than “traditional approaches to the canon of arrangement can only hint at” (Brooke 104).

Facebook does a great deal of datamining in order to create the News Feed, to highlight the most commented on items in the News Feed and to formulate the Friend Suggestions, Group Suggestions, and so forth that are located on each user's home page. The user home page serves as a narrative in and of itself. Facebook operates a database on a more personal scale than Amazon and allows us to see “patterns and relationships [as they] emerge” (107). Because Facebook users are so intimately involved in the creation of the database of friends, they are “more likely...to perceive it incrementally and narratively” and to find pattern and narrative where others might not (110). For instance, a Facebook user might notice connections between friends from different networks, who they might not have otherwise known to be connected.

Brooke reframes style, traditionally thought of as “the artful expression of ideas,” in terms of perspective (*Silva Rhetoricae*). Perspective helps those using digital media to artfully express ideas through the new media interface. An interface is an “inextricable combination of visual and verbal elements within new media” (113) and therefore style

as a concept alone is no longer useful. An interface forces the rhetor to “alternate between two kinds of syntax: visual and verbal” (133). Brooke writes, “New media interfaces . . . help us move from the abstracted, single perspective of the reader of a static text . . . to the multiple and partial perspective necessary for many forms of new media” (114).

As any user of new media can attest, “we often toggle between looking through text and looking at it” (132). Brooke asks, “Is the desktop something that we look at or through?” and he answers that it is contingent upon “where we look from. It may well be that the desktop has diffused sufficiently into our culture so as to become invisible” (134).

This conception of *the* perspective is abundantly clear on Facebook whenever the developers change any part of the interface. Changes on Facebook are usually met with an immediate, passionate backlash from users. When Facebook first implemented the News Feed, and each time they tinker with it through updates, multiple Facebook groups crop up protesting the changes (many under the guise of users worried about security and privacy concerns), and Facebook receives thousands of messages and wall posts. These upset users are startled as they go from looking through the text, with a familiar interface, to looking at the text, with an unfamiliar interface. Within days, as users become used to the new format and can appreciate it for the innovation or improvement to the site, these protests disappear and users once again being looking through the interface and stop looking at the interface.

Brooke's main point with the concept of perspective is that “we as users participate in the construction of our interfaces” and our “interfaces redescribe our

perspectives” (134, 140). This takes on a more literal meaning with Facebook because we choose whom our friends are and this populates our homepage. The choice of Facebook friends greatly influences a Facebook perspective. Users have complete control over their Facebook friends and who they will allow to see posts. The number of friends, the frequency with which those friends post to Facebook, the topics about which they choose to post, the amount of interaction that those friends have with other friends, and the frequency and quality of responses to a user’s own Facebook posts can greatly influence a user experience and the experience of Facebook as a rhetorical ecology. It is easier to see the complexity of the system when a viewing of the News Feed illustrates a variety of exigencies from a multitude of users, all interacting and relating to each other on some level.

Facebook allows users control over their privacy settings. A user can group all of their friends from work together in a Facebook friend group and then block these users from seeing their posts while they are at work. A user can maintain a Facebook friend, but hide that friend’s posts if they occur with great frequency. The site allows a user to control their perspective, and, to a certain extent, the perspective of others through the modification of these settings.

Brooke rethinks the canon of memory (which traditionally dealt with memorizing a speech for delivery) as persistence. He thinks the canon must move beyond memory as storage of information; new media tools should be seen as making “it possible to achieve persistence of cognition” (147). Brooke finds memory as a canon to be limiting to new media because “the binary of presence/absence reduces memory to a question of storage,

with little thought given to the effects that various media might have on what is being remembered” (147). He promotes a shift in thinking to how we remember and “the construction/dissolution of pattern over time” (147).

With the sheer amount of information on the web, we “don’t always read an entire web page before [we] come upon a link that provokes [us] to move to the next text” (154). Many new media users are impulsive readers who have become accustomed to a certain way of perusing web sites, where we arbitrarily hop from page to page or from Facebook profile to Facebook profile, as they catch our attention. One such way to remedy this situation is through the persistence of cognition (an appropriate memory practice for the impulsive reader). The persistence of cognition is the “practice of retaining particular ideas, keywords, or concepts across multiple texts” and “marks a play between presence and absence” (157).

Brooke notes there are “certain new media [that] offer us tools for building persistence of cognition, the inductive perception of connections, and patterns across multiple sources” (157). His main examples are RSS Feeds— customized syndication/aggregators that check and update latest blog entries you are subscribed to. RSS feeds “distribute memory, freeing users of the need to remember” (160).

Facebook can be seen as an aggregator with the News Feed and the user home page in general. With Facebook, a user never has to struggle to remember a friend's birthday because Facebook lists a reminder on the user's home page. If a Facebook user is a fan of the television show *Glee*, he or she never has to remember when the show is on because they will see the updates in their News Feed. Many Facebook users no longer

have to remember that one of their friends had a difficult test to study for today; they will be reminded of that fact when their friend updates their status, and they can check in with their friend with a comment on the status.

Further, Brooke discusses the use of “tagclouds . . . [which] ‘remember’ the most important information topics over the course of a week or month . . . [and] require little involvement [on the part of the user]” (162). This is similar to the Facebook Top News feature on the user's home page. Facebook “perceive[s] connections among a set of texts to arrive at the conclusion that ‘everyone is talking about’ a particular topic” (164). It allows a user to see a personal post that many of their friends have commented on—or a corporate post that thousands of people have “liked”—without the user having to search through hundreds of posts and make determinations on the popularity of those posts.

Brooke reframes the final canon of delivery (which deals with *how* something is said, for instance, the use of voice and facial gestures, rather than *what* is said) in terms of performance. Performance is an alternate meaning of the word delivery and Brooke defines it as “communicating the message in such a way that it would be accepted and attended to rather than refused, ignored, or thrown in the wastepaper basket unread” (170).

Brooke claims that “a model of delivery restricted to the physical distribution of commodities is insufficient for an understanding of new media” (174). An example of performance in new media is a discussion list, which “is simply a list of email addresses, for example; it is only in the performance, the consensual invocation of a discussion space, that the list exists as a medium for conversation” (181). In that same vein, “most of

the software with which writers create weblogs are simply database interfaces that must be used in a particular fashion to create that particular medium” (181).

Brooke discusses the concept of performance through new media in terms of web credibility. He quotes Barbara Warnick who writes that “it is the quality of the performance that counts” when an audience is trying to discern credibility on the internet, not so much ethos or any proven connection to the real world (185).

On a social network like Facebook, credibility is earned through our everyday experiences. For example, “when we are looking for a book or a movie recommendation, we do not necessarily turn to the critics who are ‘most qualified’ to make that decision in an objective sense” (186). Instead, “we turn to friends, people in our immediate social network whose taste we perceive as similar to our own” (186).

The performance of identity on Facebook lends credibility to the site and to the statements made by us as users and those made by our friends on Facebook. New media draws us away from the “‘instance of reality,’ the one true rendering of reality in discourse, and closer to the ‘instance of discourse,’ where it is a particular performance, one that constitutes reality, that is taking place” (192). Online, on a site such as Facebook, a user “must write themselves into being” (boyd 12). Arguably, people have more control over what they post to the site than they have over the impression they make through everyday communication and most people try to present their best selves to their imagined audience. Facebook holds some control over identity performance, as every profile takes the same visual format and the profile only requests certain information (favorite books, favorite movies, education, and so forth). The user is constrained by

Facebook's limited interface as he or she endeavors to explain who and what they are—yet they have a new outlet to express themselves to their friends, family, and acquaintances. The performance of identity is executed through the user's network of friends, the user's status updates, the pages that the user has subscribed to, and the user profile and profile picture.

8. Conclusion

Facebook is a vast system of elements that are continually changing. The elements (i.e., the way the software is designed, the patterns by which information is circulated on the site, the way members communicate using the software, and the political and social practices that the site demands) are intertwined such that a small change can lead to consequences far beyond any original intention. The way that the elements of Facebook interact with each other has produced a rhetorical ecology like no other before it, and Facebook is changing the way we communicate by altering social interaction and the organization of information.

For example, for most of the 20th century, the only way that soldiers on the front lines of war communicate with their families and friends was through letters, which could take weeks or months to arrive at their destination, or through emails, which many soldiers did not have access to because of strict military rules regarding digital media. However, with the introduction of Facebook, the military has been forced to rethink their stance on digital media, and in turn, the way that they communicate within the military and with the public. The reasons for the military's acceptance of Facebook highlight the rhetorical ecology and how it is changing social interaction and organization of information.

In an entry on the O'Reilly website, blogger/journalist James Turner interviews Price Floyd, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, about how the public face of the military is changing—and how it has everything to do with Facebook and other social media. Floyd explains that the Department of Defense had to embrace social media in order to engage with their many audiences—from veterans groups to foreign publics to colleagues in the military. Floyd admits that prior to his involvement on Facebook, there was not a way to facilitate “two-way engagement” with multiple audiences. He says he promotes social media as “a better way to reach a broader audience with our message . . . [because] one-way communication . . . is not what we want to do. We want to engage with our audience, all of them, on the whole host of issues and policies that we deal with” (online).

Further, promoting the Department of Defense’s messages through Facebook means that they have “multiple spokesmen out there, thousands of spokesmen in essence.” Where once there was only one person representing the Department of Defense, there are now “thousands of people in the institution doing it for us . . . thousands of Facebook pages.” Floyd says he doesn’t worry too much about losing control of the message because of the credibility that Facebook breeds. For Floyd, “there's nothing more credible than the men and women who are out there on the front lines fighting the wars that we're in to send messages back to their family and friends.”

He knows that not many people will be interested a Department of Defense Facebook page, but engaging with people in the military through their individual Facebook pages is profound and personal. Floyd explains he thinks it is better to follow a

person—such as following him on Facebook or friending a unit commander on Facebook. In this way, social media makes it personal and there is an immediate, familiar connection.

Floyd also notes that when someone “makes a post on Facebook, it doesn't necessarily stay there. Other people that you never thought could see it will see it, even the media.” This has also changed how he feels about the communication methods of the Department of Defense. Floyd is “okay with us no longer controlling exactly what people say to the media and then trying to work with the media to make sure they get their story exactly the way we may want it.” He feels like he has to be okay with it because of the nature of social media. As danah boyd writes in “The Significance of Social Software,” “social software is about a movement . . . all about letting people interact with people and data in a fluid way. It's about recognizing the web can be more than a broadcast channel; collections of user-generated content can have value” (boyd 17).

Facebook's specific informational and social constraints/affordances allow for unique online communicational experiences. The new ways in which we interact socially and organize information online through Facebook are opening up rhetorical possibilities. With Facebook's latest platform innovation, they are hoping to further boost personalization on the web by highlighting those news stories on partner websites that a user or her friends “liked” or commented on, or by automatically playing music that a user lists in their profile on Pandora. This new platform reveals some considerable consequences with regard to living public lives online. Examining Facebook in terms of

rhetorical ecologies can provide a strong theoretical foundation with which to evaluate concerns and expectations.

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