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June 6, 2008, 09:01 AM EST

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## COMPOSING FOR RECOMPOSITION: RHETORICAL VELOCITY AND DELIVERY

**East Lansing , MI** – In this webtext, we propose that new concepts are needed to discuss increasingly common rhetorical practices that are, we think, not closely aligned with the ways in which rhetorical delivery has historically been situated. We are specifically interested in situations where composers anticipate and strategize future third-party remixing of their compositions as part of a larger and complex rhetorical strategy that plays out across physical and digital spaces. We find this type of thinking—the asking of “how might the text be rewritten?” and “why, where, and for whom might this text be rewritten?”—an increasingly important set of questions in a digital age characterized, for instance, by swift, easy, and deep web searching and by copying and pasting practices.

We introduce a new conceptual consideration in this webtext: what Jim Ridolfo has called “rhetorical velocity,” and we emphasize types of composing as *composing for strategic recomposition*. We propose that there is a field need for an even greater lexicon to explain the sort of rhetorical moves made by increasingly complex strategies of delivery.

In professional writing, an archetypical example of this sort of strategizing is the press advisory and media release—a document specifically and deliberately strategized by a writer or writers with inventive considerations conscious of third-party recomposing. We chose a press release design for this article because it is distributed as analog and digital, with specific strategic use and importance associated with each of these physicalities; it also demonstrates an implicit consideration and structure for its recomposition. Certainly, a press release is not the flashiest or most compelling example of rhetorical velocity in digital spaces, but we think this genre is a useful place to begin thinking about the strategic appropriation of compositions. This genre, though constrained by rigid formatting conventions, offers a useful starting point for thinking about how such strategizing may predate and also change shape with the widespread adaptation of digital composing literacies. Additionally, this genre—with its disposition to alphabetic text—offers quick, easily locatable research examples for discussion and comparison (see the Defense Department example we've included elsewhere in this webtext). This genre scaffolds well into classroom conversations, and challenges students and researchers to find, argue for, and discuss other instances and mediums where ideas change shape, gather speed, and are elsewhere delivered.

The term *rhetorical velocity*, as we deploy it in this webtext, means a conscious rhetorical concern for distance, travel, speed, and time, pertaining specifically to theorizing instances of strategic appropriation by a third party. In thinking about the concept, we drew from several definitions:

1. Rapidity or speed of motion; swiftness.
2. *Physics* A vector quantity whose magnitude is a body's speed and whose direction is the body's direction of motion.
3. The rate of speed of action or occurrence.

Combining these definitions allowed us to create a term (i.e., rhetorical velocity) that allows us to wrestle with some of the issues particular to digital delivery, along with layering in a concern for *telos*.

“We are proposing the beginning of a field conversation about how composers strategically design texts for re-appropriation by third parties,” said Jim Ridolfo a PhD Candidate in Rhetoric & Writing at

Michigan State University.

“When a rhetorician has successfully produced and strategized the third-party use of boilerplate files, text, images, and videos by a third party, a strategic type of ‘plagiarism’ becomes the desirable ‘end’,” said Jim Porter and Danielle Nicole DeVoss, faculty in Professional Writing at Michigan State University.

For more information visit <http://www.digitalwriting.org/velocity>

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## COMPOSING FOR RECOMPOSITION: RHETORICAL VELOCITY AND DELIVERY

**East Lansing , MI** – Remix, appropriation, and composition. Polano and Pierpaolo (1993) argued, “true innovation is one that is rightly able to link the adaptive history embodied in any artifact with the changes of production tools whenever they occur.” At the 2005 CCCC in San Francisco, Larry Lessig opened his featured talk by defining remix as “what we do when we mix together culture or knowledge, and then give others the opportunity to re-express that which we have mixed... culture is remix, knowledge is remix, politics is remix. **Remix is how we as humans live and everyone within our society engages in this act of creativity.**” Remixing—or the process of taking old pieces of text, images, sounds, video and stitching them together to form a new product—is how individual writers and communities build common values; it is how composers achieve persuasive, creative, and parodic effects. Remix is perhaps the premier contemporary composing practice. To situate remix more appropriately and accurately, however, we need to leave behind what we think are the two dominant views of remix: 1) remix as simply a cutting-and-pasting practice, and 2) remix as anchored and only related to music. We want to add another, less visible and less discussed aspect of remix here: That is, composing *for* remix, composing *for* recomposition .

A few months after his CCCC talk, speaking at Wikimania 2006, Lessig shifted his focus slightly to talk not just about remix culture, but of “rewrite culture.” And at Linuxworld 2006, Lessig again emphasized that “writing is how we remix culture.” At both venues, he spoke of the new technologies that have created “tools of creativity,” “tools of speech”—and, importantly, tools of rhetoric. Appropriately for this audience, he lauded the success of Wikipedia as an ideal democratic space in which users take culture, remix culture, rewrite culture, and thus make culture. He noted that the success—the growth and, we would argue, the velocity—of Wikipedia was not possible with 20th century technologies. The velocity of Wikipedia is impressive; within 24 hours of September 27, the number of English-written news articles in Wikinews topped 10,000. Now, less than 6 months later, that number is more than 11,500. More than 2.5 million articles are included in the English-language area of Wikipedia.

We start with this discussion of Lessig’s work because we think it speaks powerfully to the context in which writers currently compose. His arguments offer us much to wrestle with in the ways in which we approach remix and understand the potentials of digital meaning-making tools. Although Lessig comes to his work with a background in law, composition studies has certainly wrestled with remix for quite some time now. We might, for instance, identify patchwriting as remix; composition teachers have always encouraged students to remix their own work, copying and pasting and merging and moving their own words and sentences as they reorganize and revise.

A new element, however, enters the mix when we situate remix in today’s digital culture; **more elements and others’ elements become much more readily available to mix, mash, and merge.** And, in fact, processes of mixing are valued across these spaces, where savvy mixers are recognized as their YouTube channels hit the top ten and as their videos become streamed across hundreds of servers. What is obvious here is that composing in the digital age is *different* than traditional practices of composing. **Rhetorical practices in a digital age are different than traditionally conceived.** Electronic copying-and-pasting, downloading, and networked filesharing change the dynamics of writing and, importantly, of delivery.

Siva Vaidhynathan (2003) noted “that’s how creativity happens. Artists collaborative over space and time, even if they lived centuries and continents apart. Profound creativity requires maximum exposure to others’ works and liberal freedoms to reuse and reshape others’ material” (p. 186). Vaidyanathan also argues that we need to shift from

a focus not on An Author—with its romantic connotations and narrow, textual associations—but on producers, the “unromantic author” (p. 10). When academics uphold distinctions between author and producer, we are left in an uncomplicated, often acontextual space that does not provide the tools we need to best negotiate the ways in which production and authorship become more slippery in digital spaces and within remix projects. Freedom from romantic authorship is crucial to rhetorical velocity, and the speed with which artifacts can move and be remixed across networks, audiences, and contexts. In fact, the romantic author figure stands in opposition to rhetorical velocity.

Lev Manovich (2005) creates a telling picture of both remix and velocity that links both directly to changes in delivery:

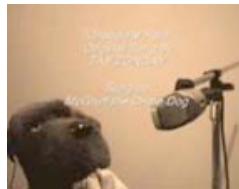
If a traditional twentieth century model of cultural communication described movement of information in one direction from a source to a receiver, now the reception point is just a temporary station on information’s path. If we compare information or media object with a train, then each receiver can be compared to a train station. Information arrives, gets remixed with other information, and then the new package travels to other destination where the process is repeated.

What Manovich is getting at here are the ways in which delivery happens in remix culture. Instead of a single author producing solitary work in isolation, and that work being attributed to that single, solitary author and delivered in one-way fashion, we have distributed, shared views of authorship—think of spaces like Wikipedia, for instance, where work and authorial agency is attributed often in diverse, diffuse ways.

In our day, writing often requires composers to draw upon multiple modes of meaning-making. Computers and robust networks allow writers to choreograph audio, video, other visual elements, text, and more. Writers engage in taking the old and making new. Appropriating words and images. Taking pieces, splicing ideas, compiling fragments. Transforming existing work. Transformation occurs when the rhetor delivers a text into a new context; collects the text with others to make a new compilation; adds additional materials to the text; and more (Meldelson, 2002; Porter & DeVoss, 2006). Most importantly here, transformation occurs as and when the composer remixes--see the "Chocolate Rain" original and remixes below.



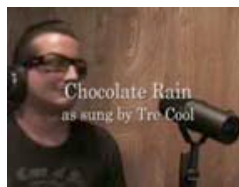
"Chocolate Rain" by Tay Zonday



"Chocolate Rain Sung by McGruff the Crime Dog"



"Chocolate Rain: The Music Video"



"Chocolate Rain" by Tre Cool



"Chocolate Rain" by Chad Vader



"Chocolate Rain"



"Vanilla Snow" by Peppergod



"Fast Food Chain" by Carl Jessee

The "Chocolate Rain" original and remixes are interesting and at times innovative examples of remix. Likely, however, Tay Zonday did not write and produce his original piece with remix in mind. So what does it mean to take future composing and re-composition into strategic consideration while composing? That is, what does it mean to compose with re-composition in mind? This is a question key to this webtext, and one we return to later. Before turning to that question, however, we want to situate our work further in the history of delivery and in contemporary approaches to delivery in rhetoric and composition studies.

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**Delivery: Rhetoric History and Theory** – From the texts of Cicero, rhetorical scholars have learned the story of the Greek Demosthenes. When Demosthenes was asked his opinion of what constituted the most important element of rhetoric, he three times repeated one word: “delivery, delivery, delivery” (Corbett & Connors 22: *De Oratore* III 56.213). Nothing additional has survived regarding Demosthenes’ thinking on delivery, and his answer remains a mystery in terms of what may have informed his conclusion as to the critical nature of delivery. In *De Oratore*, Cicero meditated on Demosthenes’ assertion; Cicero noted that he had observed how “many poor speakers have often reaped the regards of eloquence because of a dignified delivery, and many eloquent men have been considered poor speakers because of an awkward delivery” (17.56). Based on Demosthenes’ observation, Cicero theorized that: “If, then, there can be no eloquence without this [delivery], and this without eloquence is so important, certainly its role in oratory is very large” (Ibid). In this work, delivery is clearly of foundational importance to rhetoric.

In Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, delivery is presented as an important component of oral delivery, but one not regarded as a virtuous area of study. According to Aristotle, “No systematic treatise upon the rules of delivery has yet been composed; indeed, even the study of language made no progress till late in the day. Besides, delivery is—very properly—not regarded as an elevated subject of inquiry” (1404A). In this respect, Aristotle both notes the critical nature of delivery, but undercuts its study when removed from other subjects. What Aristotle does do, however, is put forward commentary that stigmatizes the study of rhetorical delivery, even within the realm of orality where it has been relegated: “It is those who do bear them [the concerns of delivery] in mind who usually win prizes in the dramatic contests; and just as in drama the actors now count for more than the poets, so it is in the contests of public life, owing to the defects of our political institutions” (1404A). In this sense, from Aristotle’s ethical distinction of delivery something remains true today: its consideration remains paramount in much of political life today. This fact alone should elevate rhetorical delivery to a higher status, particularly when its study or analytical application — bringing in a theory of rhetorical delivery for complex rhetorical analyses — leads to social action. This delivery-toward-action is not developed in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*; rather, much of the conversation focuses on the technical particulars of delivery, which, as Corbett and Connors suggest, are a “concern for the management of the voice and for gestures (*actio*). According to Aristotle:

There are three things that affect the success of a speech greatly; but hitherto the subject has been neglected. Indeed, it was long before it found a way into the arts of tragic drama and epic recitation: at first poets acted their tragedies themselves. It is plain that delivery has just as much to do with oratory as with poetry. It is, essentially, a matter of the right management of the voice to express the various emotions—of speaking loudly, softly, or between the two; of high, low, or intermediate pitch; of the various rhythms that suit various subjects. These are the three things—volume of sound, modulation of pitch, and rhythm—that a speaker bears in mind. (p. 1404A)

It is no mystery, then, that a rhetorical treatise on delivery does not seem to exist which includes as its primary subject matter stories of carrier pigeons, messengers, scrolls, and complex narratives of oral circulation. Aristotle (and much of the Roman and Medieval rhetorical theory responding to Aristotle) does not leave very much room for this sort of rhetorical theory. And we think we would be better able to theorize complex practices of delivery today if there was this type of room.

It can no longer be assumed, even in a contemporary instance of oral delivery, that the time, place, and medium of delivery will necessarily be the same for both the speaker and the speaker's audiences. As John Trimbur notes in *Composition and the Circulation of Writing* a "focus solely on oral rhetoric, absent of other technologies, is not sustainable as a theory of rhetoric. Public forums are diffuse, fragmented, and geographically separated. Speech is both literally and metaphorically broadcast through expanded means of communication" (Trimbur, 2000 p. 190). We agree with Trimbur's analysis and also think that many of the concepts for and activities of delivery in active use today are not currently theorized in attempts to understand rhetorical delivery. Our project in this article is to introduce one of these theories and begin to expand the rhetorical toolbox for additional concepts of delivery.

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**Delivery: Contemporary Composition Studies** – In this section, we survey a few occurrences of how rhetorical delivery is discussed by different scholars in rhetoric and composition studies. Obviously, the need to rethink delivery is felt not only in rhetoric and composition studies (although, we would argue, our field has been most attentive in reconsidering delivery in light of changing technologies and shifting trends, especially technological trends). Jeff Rice has reminded us that folks like Walter Ong and Marshall McLuhan, for instance, were reconceiving delivery in the 1960s. In *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), for instance, McLuhan and his collaborator, graphic artist Quentin Fiore, explored electronic delivery systems. They opened the text with this comment: “The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life... Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication” (p. 8). *The Medium is the Massage* is part textbook, part manifesto, and part guidebook for media students and scholars in a changing world. It is thick with grand claims (e.g., “‘Time’ has ceased, ‘space’ has vanished,” p. 63) and compelling, provocative graphical content (e.g., a photograph from the interior of a car where we sit in the driver’s seat racing through a tunnel, with a cut-out of a horse and buggy in the rear-view mirror).

Two of the perhaps most-compelling claims made in the text are “Our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old” (repeated throughout the text) and “electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement” (p. 8). McLuhan’s work deserves much, much more than this brief mention here. We certainly don’t want to dismiss the importance of McLuhan’s work, and we want to pause—as many others have done—to assert the ways in which McLuhan’s work resonates so loudly and profoundly today, almost a half-century after the publication of his work. (For readers who want to follow this particular path, we suggest, specifically, the work of Jeff Rice, especially his 2003 “Writing about Cool,” where Rice describes digital writing in the context of hypertext, juxtaposition, and cool, and his 2006 “The Making of Ka-Knowledge,” where Rice extends the work of Ong and McLuhan in terms of sound and the nature of knowledge).

In what follows, we attend not to the work of McLuhan or other communications scholars, but instead present a review of work anchored to composition studies, because we think it is necessary to base our understanding of rhetorical delivery on existing field conversations, specifically those that make use of the term. We do not focus on conversations of medium theory, which, although we do see these discussions as extremely relevant to rhetorical delivery, we view as historically distinct within our discipline from conversations of classical rhetorical delivery. As is clear from the dates on these recent field conversations in rhetorical delivery, in the past 20 years there has been a flurry of scholarship that re-evaluates delivery in light of radical changes to modes of production, delivery, and distribution. Within the context of these changes to the means of distribution, field conversations in rhetoric and composition have surfaced specifically asking how classical rhetorical concepts such as delivery are impacted by changes to the means of distribution.

We are interested in expanding considerations of rhetorical delivery to include complex elements of strategy, and are interested in introducing one specific concept in light of some of these changes, *rhetorical velocity*, which we



will discuss in a following section. For now, we review recent field conversations in rhetorical delivery discussing changes in the means of distribution. One early discussion occurred in 1993, where Sheri Helsley wrote:

Rhetorical delivery is enormously important in an electronic age. Word processing and desktop publishing, for example, are now readily available to student writers, and classical rhetoric prompts us to address the use and adaptation of these powerful post-typewriter presentation technologies. When we interpret delivery as presentation or secondary orality, we do important things for ourselves and our students. We restore the recursiveness and synthesis originally envisioned in the interaction of the five rhetorical canons. We move into important discussions of inevitable technologies and new structures of consciousness in the electronic age. We expose our students to the power of presentation in both encoding and decoding—an issue that has been largely ignored in contemporary education. (p. 158)

Helsley was one of the first to make the argument that the canon of rhetorical delivery would become increasingly important in the digital age. In addition, she also noted how considerations of delivery in composition education are critical to the writing classroom. With a broader, more corporeal sense of concern, Virginia Skinner-Linnenberg's 1999 book *Dramatizing Writing: Reincorporating Delivery Into the Classroom* also echoes these concerns.

Skinner-Linnenberg's book is an important work for delivery studies because it provides the field with the most comprehensive historical survey of rhetorical delivery to date. Additionally, her book develops a rich understanding of how rhetorical delivery can be theorized as corporeal, bringing a host of new concerns to the writing classroom. Skinner-Linnenberg notes that in "dramatizing writing, students employ both their physicality and their noetic processes, whether they are the writers or the audience" (p. 109), and theorizes extensively how teachers might make the composition classroom a more oral, physical, corporeal environment to study, write, and deliver: "Delivery in the classroom through dramatizing writing aids students to use their bodies and minds in their writing. With delivery, students can, with the help of others, study themselves, hear themselves, and see themselves as users of language" (p. 111), theorizing that the dramaturgical elements of delivery—elements she reads as once existing in classical rhetoric—have been lost to the contemporary classroom, and challenges the field to consider "where does *ethos* fit into dramatizing writing?" (p. 110). In this sense, Skinner-Linnenberg is early in asking—rather, returning to—Aristotle's question about the ethics of rhetorical delivery.

Kathleen Welch also participates in this conversation in her 1999 *Electric Rhetoric: Classical Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy*. Welch argues that there is an even greater political imperative to delivery at the end of the 20th century:

It is crucial to an understanding of Western literacy at the newly electrified turn of the millennium to recognize that the disappearance of memory and delivery is not a benign removal. Rather, it is part of a larger movement in the United States to pablumize the humanities in general, and to vitiate writing in particular, by behaving (especially in our educational institutions) as if it were a mere skill, craft, or useful tool. The colonizing of memory and delivery reproduces the form/content binary that drives the movement to regulate writing to skills and drills and perpetuates the status quo of racism and sexism. (pp. 144–145)

For Welch, there is a clear political imperative for the teaching of memory and delivery, because she implies that to not do so is to debilitate the efficacy of the writer. According to Welch, "The elimination of memory and delivery in the majority of student writing textbooks constitutes the removal of student-written language from the larger public arena" (p. 145). This concern for delivery and student-written language is also picked up by John Trimbur (2000) in "Composition and the Circulation of Writing."

Trimbur advances that "neglecting delivery has led writing teachers to equate the activity of composing with writing itself and to miss altogether the complex delivery systems through which writing circulates" (pp. 189–190). He adopts a Marxist approach to delivery, one that equates rhetorical delivery with Marx's notion of circulation because:

delivery can no longer be thought of simply as a technical aspect of public discourse. It must be seen also as ethical and political—a democratic aspiration to devise delivery systems that circulate ideas, information, opinions and knowledge and thereby expand the public forums in which people deliberate on the issues of the day. (p. 190)

Additionally, Trimbur argues that the “isolation of writing from the material conditions of production and delivery” should be a concern for compositionists (p. 189). In this sense, both Trimbur and Kathleen Welch see a call to delivery as a necessity at a similar technological and political moment. Trimbur’s analysis of the material circulation of delivery is that:

students’ sense of what constitutes the production of writing by tracing its circulation in order to raise questions about how professional expertise is articulated to the social formation, how it undergoes rhetorical transformations (or “passages of form”), and how it might produce not only individual careers but also socially useful knowledge. (p. 214)

Across the work of Skinner-Linnenberg, Welch, and Trimbur, there is a consistent thread of technological changes alongside a re-examination of delivery in the wake of its movement into the realm of the electric. A more recent piece of scholarship by DeVoss and Porter acutely addresses issues of ethics, file sharing, and delivery. In “Why Napster Matters to Writing,” the authors call attention to changes in the means of distribution: “the new digital ethic is characterized by drastic changes in delivery, and reminds us of the power of delivery” (p. 36). DeVoss and Porter argue that a change in the infrastructure and systems of cultural delivery and distribution is affecting students’ attitudes toward the composition and delivery of writing.

DeVoss and Porter supplement their discussion of electronic delivery with a heuristic of what might constitute a rubric for considering digital delivery and distribution. They make use of the Napster controversy as an example to argue for an “expanded notion of delivery, one that embraces the politics and economics of publishing: the politics of technology development as they impact production and distribution; the politics of information” (DeVoss & Porter, p. 25) in an ever-unfolding and ever-present digital landscape. In addition, their article provides a highly useful list of criteria to help composition scholars think about digital delivery and contemporary theories of delivery:

The choice of tools for production and the choice of medium for distribution—a.k.a, publishing practices—that is, the technical and human methods of production, reproduction, and distribution of digital “information” (broadly understood to include audio and video, as well as graphic and textual data);

Knowledge of the systems which govern, constrain, and promote publishing practices—including public policy, copyright laws and other legislation, technology design and development, publishing conventions and economic models (both micro and macro);

Awareness of the ethical and political issues that impact publishing practices—that is, who decides? What policies best serve the interests of society? What constitutes “digital fair use?” how should content producers be credited for their work?. (DeVoss & Porter, p. 26)

“Why Napster Matters” indirectly expands on Trimbur’s discussion of delivery, with a call for economic analysis synonymous with Trimbur’s discussion. Further, both works of scholarship bring attention to a base-motivating factor for the movement of rhetoric, one that has hitherto not been included in 2,000 years of scholarship on rhetorical delivery.

Recent work by Doug Eyman (2007) *Digital, Rhetoric: Ecologies and Economies of Circulation* also examines methodological considerations for doing rhetorical research. In his recent dissertation, he seeks to examine how “the interactions of texts and contexts can yield a more comprehensive picture of interaction than the traditional approach of rhetorical invention, composition, and delivery; it can also provide a map of the relationships between work and activity that are often hidden because we simply don’t have the means to uncover them” (pp. 8–9).

Eyman provides a wealth of methodological approaches for scholars interested in studying the overall circulation of a composition, from conference proposals, seminar papers, web texts, and more.

Nancy Welch raises a concern similar to Eyman's for both delivery and economics. In her 2005 piece, "Living Room Rhetoric: Teaching Writing in a Post-Publicity Era," Welch discusses a seminar she taught while the second U.S.-Iraqi war began in the spring of 2003. Her article covers issues of audience, circulation, and delivery, specifically how these concepts "add to the growing body of work that has the potential to reorient us from regarding rhetoric as a specialized *techne*—the property of a small economic and political elite—to understanding and teaching rhetoric as a *mass, popular art*" (p. 474).

Her work provides an account of Katie, a student activist involved in the composition and delivery of writing in opposition to the approaching war. Welch notes that a central compositional consideration for Katie was how she might circulate her work: "I want these poems to be *out there*, not just in a chapbook where my friends will read them and say, "Oh, Katie wrote a poem. Isn't that nice" (Welch, p. 472). This concern echoes Trimbur's call to see delivery as "inseparable from the circulation of writing and the widening diffusion of socially useful knowledge" (Trimbur, p. 191). Welch discusses how public spaces for sharing, posting, and hosting information (e.g., parks, telephone poles) have been locked down to prohibit communication and maintain a tidy public face. She advocates that rhetorical education should include a greater exposure to the rhetoric of mass struggle, because it offers the opportunity to learn about strategies of action. But perhaps most interesting is how her student, Katie, revisits her strategy of rhetorical delivery and distribution. By the end of the article, Katie decided that the poem needed to be hand-delivered, and this form of delivery seemed better suited for her writing and the occasion than her initial strategy of tacking the poem on telephone poles or utility boxes.

Similar to the approaches advocated by Skinner-Linnenberg, Nancy Welch lists a number of additional corporeal concerns dealing primarily with the legal status and physical safety of the rhetor involved in public acts of rhetorical delivery. According to Welch, "as students and teachers ponder in the fullest way possible the rhetorical canon of delivery, there might even be (as one student suggested at the end of the women's studies seminar) training in civil disobedience or at the very least a guest lecturer from the ACLU" (Welch, p. 478). The list and example Welch offers provides rhetoric and composition studies with a fine theoretical synthesis of both the corporeal and the growing focus on emerging concerns for delivery, place, and location.

In the next section we would like to add to the several areas of rhetorical theory dealing with delivery (the corporeal, the legal, the composition classroom, the digital), to introduce a conversation involving the anticipation of remixing, or the strategic composing for future acts of recomposition as part of a rhetorical objective or series of objectives. We introduce this concept first as a conceptual tool useful for thinking about complex strategies of rhetorical delivery, and later as one practical for classroom discussions (an analytic) focused on the recomposition of writing as part of what Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo call "the amplification effect." We see this concept of rhetorical velocity as adding to the growing body of literature focused around rethinking rhetorical delivery within rhetoric and composition studies.

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## COMPOSING FOR RECOMPOSITION: RHETORICAL VELOCITY AND DELIVERY

**Rhetorical Velocity and the Amplification Effect** – In the July 2007 Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty special report on Iraqi insurgent media titled *The War of Images and Ideas: How Sunni Insurgents in Iraq and Their Supporters Worldwide are Using the Media*, Daniel Kimmage and Kathleen Ridolfo investigated how Sunni insurgent groups are strategizing the delivery and circulation of their media for local and international audiences. The RFE/RL report does a unique job of surveying “the products, producers, and delivery channels of the Sunni Insurgency’s media network” (p. 4); the authors, in addition, document how the insurgent groups are carefully examining and crafting their messages, along with gauging both potential and ideal impacts of those messages. Although the main purpose of the report is to bring “Iraqi insurgent media from the margins to center stage so that outsiders without a command of Arabic can glimpse the ‘other half’ of what is happening in Iraq as it is presented by the other side” (p. x), the report also provides important case examples for theorizing how the fifth canon should be reconsidered in light of both digital networks and these compelling, violent contexts of distribution. According to Kimmage and Ridolfo, “the Internet is more versatile than traditional delivery platforms because it can serve as a vehicle for those [traditional] platforms in addition to Internet-specific information platforms like websites” (p. 35), and the pair notes that:

Insurgents’ willingness to forego a centralized brick-and-mortar production infrastructure and their reliance on the Internet as the primary distribution channel for their media products have lead to the emergence of a decentralized, building-block production model in which virtually any individual or group can design a media product to serve insurgent aims and goals. As the preceding overview of insurgent media products shows, both text and audiovisual products begin with simple units and proceed to more complex creations. For text products, the basic building blocks are operational press releases and topical statements; for audiovisual products, footage of insurgent activities and statements recorded by prominent insurgents and sympathizers. Of these building blocks, only the footage of insurgent activities and statements by insurgent leaders need be recorded on location in Iraq. One or more individuals working anywhere in the world can create everything else. (pp. 34–35)

We are specifically interested as compositionists in this report in terms of how the notion of “building blocks” are discussed regarding strategic and rhetorical affordances. The observations in this report should direct our field’s attention to an increasingly common and widespread compositional moment: strategically composing for the express, deliberate purpose of providing materials for future potential acts of appropriation and re-composition by others. Certainly, boilerplate and templates abound in corporate contexts, for instance, but the difference here is that these recomposers are perhaps unknown to the initial composer or creator of video and text—existing elsewhere across digital and sneaker networks, and potentially across the globe. These third parties may very well be news agencies or brick and mortar organizations, but they may also be much more dispersed: Using the example of “attack videos,” Krimmage and Ridolfo explain how the production and re-composition of content is diffused, and allude to a process of circulation that affords composers the ability to conceive of how their work may be

recomposed:

In the case of short attack videos, only the footage of the actual attack need come from Iraq. Once an affiliated individual has received that footage and basic accompanying information, which can be transferred over the Internet or by mobile phone, he has only to add the insurgent group's logo, a short title sequence, and perhaps a soundtrack with a motivational song. He then uploads the resulting video product to a free upload-download site and posts an announcement to a forum. The video-editing software required to produce such a video is cheap and readily available. (p. 35)

According to Krimmage and Ridolfo, the amplification effect is the way in which the media infrastructure serves "to amplify the message of the Sunni insurgency by using insurgent press releases and statements as the basis for their coverage of events in Iraq" (p. 61). In addition, emergent digital media infrastructure affords a:

variety of means for amplifying the insurgent message. Materials posted to insurgent group homepages are regularly picked up and posted to broader forms. A message or video posted to one form is then reposted to other forms, thereby amplifying the message to potentially thousands of Internet users. From there, mainstream Arab media access the materials and use them in their print and broadcast reports. For example, Al-Jazeera often runs video clips from insurgent attacks in its newscasts. (p. 61)

What we see in this report, then, is a study of how composing practices are increasingly taking delivery into consideration in very particular ways. Although this can occur in oral rhetoric, we see emerging in the variety of compositional mediums available an increase in this sort of thinking about delivery: How will the press advisory I write be recomposed by the reporters I have a working relationship with? How will my media packet be utilized in the production of broadcast news? From the perspective of the compositionist as rhetorician, we think of this concept as composing with rhetorical velocity in mind.

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June 6, 2008, 09:01 AM EST

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## COMPOSING FOR RECOMPOSITION: RHETORICAL VELOCITY AND DELIVERY

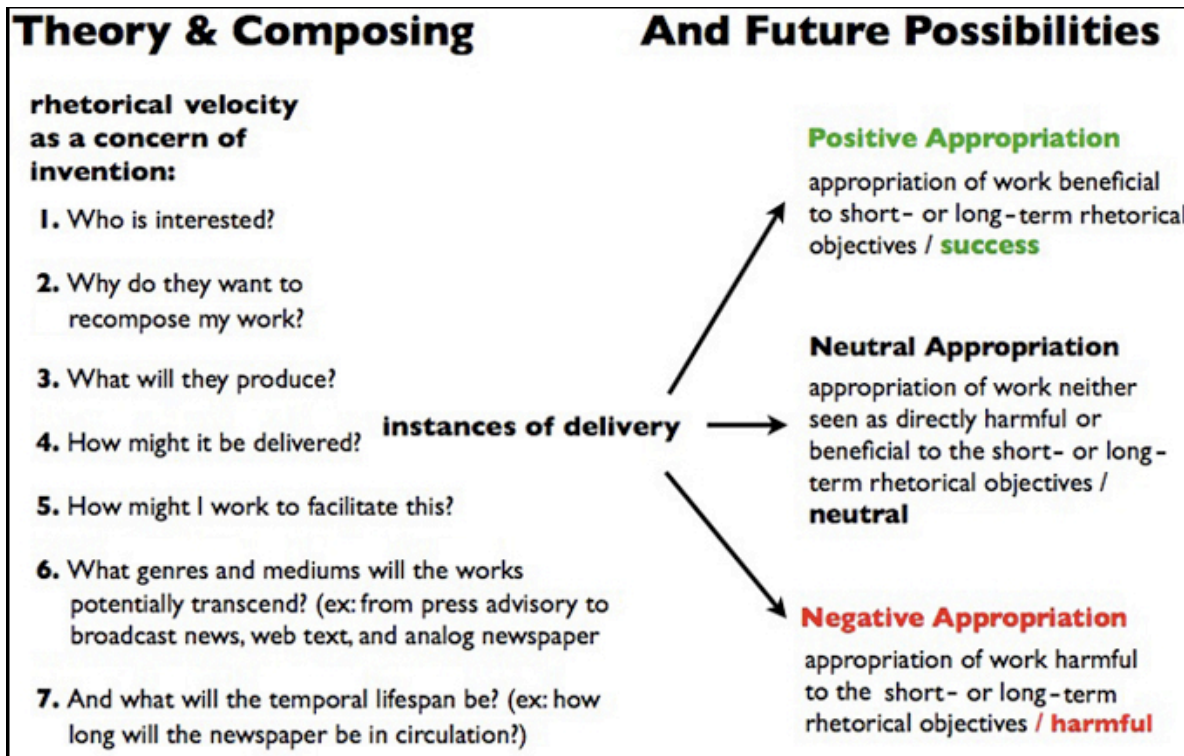
**Rhetorical velocity** – Rhetorical velocity is, simply put, a strategic approach to composing for rhetorical delivery. It is both a way of considering delivery as rhetorical mode, aligned with an understanding of how texts work as a component of a strategy. In the inventive thinking of composing, rhetorical velocity is the strategic theorizing for how a text might be recomposed (and *why* it might be recomposed) by third parties, and how this recomposing may be useful or not to the short- or long-term rhetorical objectives of the rhetorician. In this sense, the rhetorician weighs the positive and negative possibilities of different types of textual appropriation against desired objectives: “if I release the video in this format, could the video be used *in this way*, and *would it be worth their time to do this?* And *would it be supportive of my objectives for them to do that?* And in this sense the theorizing of the question of “is it worth the time to do this” a set of economic and material concerns are called into question.

As a set of practices rhetorical velocity is, secondly, a term that describes an understanding of how the speed at which information composed to be recomposed travels—that is, it refers to the understanding and rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistribution, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces. Thinking with rhetorical velocity in mind requires one to have an idea about the working conditions of the third party and what type of text it would be useful (or not) to provide: What document format should a file be sent in for certain types of future remixing? What resolution should images be released in if they are to be reprinted in a print publication? What level of quality and format should video be released in if it were to be cut up into additional tapes? What segments of these texts may be useful, and to whom, and for what sorts of media production? In each of these strategic questions rhetorical velocity requires on the part of rhetors a careful consideration of the future time (and particular moments) and place(s) of where, how, and potentially into what texts may be recomposed – and what this may mean.

or example the rhetorician may strategically consider these temporal elements: “What is the publication cycle of this newspaper? How long does the television station keep its video archives online? How long until Google indexes the mailing list archives?” as part of thinking with rhetorical velocity in mind. A classic example of composing with rhetorical velocity in mind is the press release—a mingling of boilerplate text and very specific, deliberate, targeted text written to be used and often directly recomposed by local or national television stations, newspapers, or broadcast news. As the diagram below shows in the theory and composing state rhetoricians may balance the future possibilities in terms of possible positive, negative, and neutral outcomes for recomposing, remixing, and appropriation. The rhetorician writing the press release may, for example, acquire institutional knowledge based on experiential outcomes between theory-composing and how anticipated future possibilities actually turned out. In this sense we highlight in the diagram the epistemic nature of composing with considerations of rhetorical velocity, and highlight the knowledge production that is taking place between the theory and practice, particularly when contrasted between multiple strategies, experiences of rhetorical delivery and composing with a sense of rhetorical velocity in mind.

**Figure: Rhetorical Velocity as a Concern of Invention**





An example of using rhetorical velocity as an analytic to discuss appropriation across a 3-day timespan can be drawn from a recent United States Department of Defense media release (click images for larger view):



The main page for the U.S. Department of Defense web site.



The main page for the "News Releases" area of the U.S. Department of Defense web site.



A February 29, 2008 (No. 168-08) news release, "Charges Referred Against Detainee al Darbi."





The results of a Google search of the detainee, using quotation marks to limit the search: "Ahmed Mohammed Ahmed Haza al Darbi of Saudi Arabia" (268 instances of that particular phrase found).



A story dated March 2, 2008, based on the original U.S. Department of Defense media release.

As we can see from this example, past text has been utilized for future instances of writing (not simply an RSS feed), based on the boilerplate text of the press advisory. This sort of analysis, which we discuss as an assignment in the next section, attempts to understand what has happened in instances of rhetorical delivery by initial authors and by third parties. We see this as also a knowledge-generating research approach to delivery, one where research questions may be discussed, examined, and addressed by analyzing the size, scope, and strategy of how texts are delivered.

We do not know if the writers of the press advisory explicitly anticipated these particular instances of appropriation, but we think it is probable and certainly worth discussing the possibility. We think this strategizing is complimentary to the genre of the press advisory—the genre we have chosen for this webtext—to think in such ways. This one example is typical of how it is possible to learn how a process of rhetorical delivery occurs (and how delivery is knowledge-producing). In the example above, this is evidenced by the textual interactions different news organizations have had with a particular press release. Further study could yield partial institutional patterns of rhetorical delivery, as well as forms and ranges for various types of appropriation, recomposition, and remixing by different composers, such as the interaction between the DefenseLink and blogs, web sites, and news agencies.

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## COMPOSING FOR RECOMPOSITION: RHETORICAL VELOCITY AND DELIVERY

**Composing for the Future and Teaching Rhetorical Velocity** – “Today, we are witnessing... a writing public made plural... Whatever the exchange value may be for these writers—and there are millions of them, here and around the world—it’s certainly not grades. Rather, the writing seems to operate in an economy driven by use value” (Yancey, 2005, p. 301).

Along with Helsley, Skinner-Linnenberg, Welch, Trimbur, and others whose work we have cited here, Kathi Yancey has also addressed digital delivery. In the print version of her 2003 Conference on College Composition and Communication chair’s address, “Made Not Only in Words: Composition in a New Key,” Yancey (2005) speaks of the circulation of texts, and points toward ways in which we might better equip students to approach issues of digital delivery as an often rhizomatic process. She also wrote regarding *deicity*—the now and then of texts, and the ways in which texts change shape as they circulate in digital spaces. She speaks, in rich, eloquent, and illustrated ways, about the “proliferation of writings outside the academy” (p. 298).

Writing happens—and happens a lot—and lives in digital spaces like fan fiction sites, YouTube comments, blogs, and other spaces, and, Yancey notes, this writing dramatically counterpoints the writing done within the academy. Students are writing. A lot. They’re sharing. A lot. They’re circulating texts. A lot and across multiple spaces. As citizens and as professionals, they may be engaging in the strategic acts of composing-for-appropriation and composing-for-remix that Kimmage and Ridolfo (2007) describe. And this isn’t the sort of writing we’re asking them to do. And we certainly aren’t often enough asking them to think about rhetorical velocity, about how their texts might change shape in digital realms, and about how delivery shifts in networked spaces.

We have long well known that students enter our classrooms with rich, established, accumulated, multimodal literacy practices (Brandt, 1998; New London Group, 1996; Cope & Kalantzis, 1999). This is nothing new—this was as true 50 years ago as it is today. What is new, however, are the spaces, surfaces, and interfaces in which and through which literacy practices are shaped and rhetoric happens. Jay David Bolter (1991) called our time—or at least the time 17 years ago, Jurassic in light of the rapidly evolving digital spaces in which we now compose—the “late age of print” (p. 150). We don’t think it’s time to say goodnight to print, but we do feel a need to recognize that “print,” “text,” “composing,” and, importantly, “delivery” change shape in different realms, and that, as composition instructors, we must grapple with those realms and what transformations occur in/through/with writing in these spaces.

The texts Yancey notes we typically ask students to produce are defined in the most traditional, narrow, and academic sense: white paper, black ink, 12-point font, one-inch margins, an appropriately linear approach to topic and development, writing toward conclusions and claims, etc. These conditions were the product of certain approaches to writing, certain values, certain understandings of delivery. And these approaches to writing are expanding, and the values that shape what writing is and what writing does are shifting—at least in the spaces in

which many of our students write and deliver their texts. We initially wrote this conclusion on Thursday, March 6, 2008, and that day's context was this:

- As of 2:16pm CST, 4,150 photos had been uploaded to Flickr in the previous 60 seconds. In the last 24 hours, some of the “hottest” tags include aolm (Adventures of Lego Man), ie8, lpruck (uploaded and tagged as part of a Lonely Planet photo challenge), and mix08. The all-time most-popular tags include family, party, japan, and wedding.
- Six months and two hours prior, at noon on Thursday, September 27, the very first of the MySpace / MTV presidential candidate interviews aired, marking the first time that viewers—dispersed across space, time, and technologies—could immediately and automatically respond to a candidates' response to questions. Viewers submitted questions through MySpaceIM, mobile devices, and email while watching the event, and online reactions and feedback were gathered and aired during the event.
- Within the past 24 hours, the number of English-written news articles in Wikinews topped 11,500. More than 2,290,000 articles are included in the English-language area of Wikipedia, up 300,000 from six months prior.
- More than 150,000 new users are signing up daily on Facebook, founded in February 2004 and opened to public user accounts in September 2006; Tom has 226,983,254 friends on MySpace, up 2.4 million since about 5 months prior. Friendster, launched in 2002, is considered near-defunct.
- Members of librarything have cataloged more than twenty-four million books, up six million titles from 6 months prior.
- On LiveJournal, users/writers have posted more than 199,259 entries in the past 24 hours.
- Users/creators on worth1000 have contributed to more than 8000 galleries and 318,000+ original images.

We don't mean to imply that these bits and bytes speak for themselves, but we do see these as compelling evidence of the ways in which writers and composers are remixing, rewriting, rescripting, and redelivering work in digital spaces. Each of these moments and the texts created within these moments and spaces point to the landscape of digital composing practices.

Kathi Yancey calls attention to the ways in which our classroom writing approaches are out of sync with the ways in which students are writing in the world. She encourages us to think about the ways in which we can better situate students to be citizens writing in and to the world—members of a “writing public” (p. 31). Importantly, she also notes that we should better attend to medium and address issues of delivery—and the multiple ways in which a piece of writing can be shared “in those different media, to different audiences” (p. 311).

We see our challenge then, at the end of this article but still at the beginnings of this field conversation, to provide teaching materials that help foster these emerging conversations in our first-year classes, undergraduate courses, and graduate seminars. This is important because we think that in the next 10 years the canon of delivery will be reconstructed with an emergent range of concepts, and the best examples of these will likely begin in classroom conversations, where it is the coming generations who will be the most immersed in this type of remix activity. We propose the following exercise as just one route toward discussing issues of rhetorical velocity in the classroom:

**Step One)** Go to a government news release site such as [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil) or a corporate public relations newswire such as [www.prnewswire.com](http://www.prnewswire.com) or [www.i-newswire.com](http://www.i-newswire.com).

**Step Two)** Select a recent press advisory or release from the list (from within the last 7 days). A highly popular or an event-specific story may be a good place to start.

**Step Three)** Select and search for phrases (in word groups of three, preferably including one proper name) on both the web and the Google news aggregate site ([www.google.com/news](http://www.google.com/news)). Use quotation marks to perform a more honed search. So rather than searching for a string of terms, search for an exact phrase from the original release, for instance: “three U.S. servicemen, missing from World War II, have been identified and will be returned to their families for burial with full military honors.” The quotation marks will direct the search engine to search for that particular phrase, rather than for web pages that happen to have individual words (e.g., families, burial, honors) within their content.

**Step Four)** If you've located some hits, analyze the results and compare what you have found to the original press release. In what different types of documents has the press release content been used? For what purposes? For what audiences? Are there any authors listed on the original release? On the new documents you have found? What can we learn about the compositional use of the original release?

**Step Five)** To launch discussion, ask students to ponder the degree to which is it strategically plausible to think that experienced writers in this genre anticipate or strategize the re-composition of their work. You might also ask students to think about contexts in their professional lives in which they will likely do this sort of recomposing, or in which they will likely be the original writers of documents written to be recomposed.

We have integrated versions of the activity above in first-year courses and in undergraduate courses in professional writing. Drawing on the work of Jim Ridolfo, Doug Eyman has also developed undergraduate teaching materials explicitly around a concept of rhetorical velocity. In an assignment titled "Rhetorical Velocity: (Press Release)" for his introduction to professional writing course taught at Michigan State University (a course oriented toward first-year and sophomore students), Eyman facilitated conversations around strategizing and delivery by working through the lens of economics, circulation, and delivery. His assignment offers a range of classroom possibilities:

1. Collect a minimum of six press releases (we'll call this our "corpus" for the following analysis). Looking at the examples you found, identify the common elements of the press release as a genre. Make sure that you look at textual construction, visual representation, and the activities supported by the release (that is, what does a press release *do*? What is the activity or activities embedded in the genre of the document?). You should write this as a brief report, using appropriate headings and organization of your findings. Include the URLs for the press releases as an appendix.
2. Imagine that you are in charge of an event or activity that you would like covered in the press. Write a press release for this event or activity, using the generic features you identified in Part 1 (that is, engage in the same practices that you see as contributing to a successful press release).
3. Taking into account the cycle of (re)appropriation outlined in the definition of "rhetorical velocity" above, write a memo that explains the decisions you made when you drafted the press release—what elements did you include or exclude? How did you hope to facilitate appropriation by the media? (Eyman "WRA 202")

We see surfacing in the ideas of rhetorical velocity an emergent, conceptual approach to rhetorical delivery, one that will surely yield many new heuristics and approaches to the fifth canon over the next decade. We are in agreement with Paul Prior and his colleagues (2007) that "the canon of delivery does not focus attention on the possible rhetorical configurations of distribution, mode, and other mediations." We think, however, that delivery is a highly useful container and category to think from as a conceptual space. But there is work to be done to make the fifth canon useful as a classroom heuristic to talk about practice, and we see promise in these sorts of assignments.

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