THE MEDIALITY OF TEACHER STRIKES:

RHETORIC AND THE U.S. 2018-2019 MOVEMENT FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

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The Mediality of Teacher Strikes: Rhetoric and the U.S. 2018-2019 Movement for Public Education

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In 2018-2019, US public school teachers and staff went on strikes across multiple states and cities to better their wages, benefits, and working conditions. What began as a seemingly localized protest over health insurance policies in West Virginia, spread rapidly across the country as a "strike wave." Hundreds of thousands of educators in Oklahoma, Arizona, Colorado, North Carolina, and Kentucky went on strike in the few short months following West Virginia's action. In the year that followed, some of the largest school districts in the country, like Los Angeles and Chicago, would also launch strikes to halt the divestment of resources in their school districts. These strikes were largely successful in earning raises for teachers and improvements for the state of public education in the United States. This dissertation focuses the rhetoric of the "strike wave" in the sector of public education by examining the relationship between media, publics, and scale. I offer a series of detailed case studies to interrogate the mediality of contemporary labor strikes. Mediality, or the nature of mediation that a particular communication technology engages in, allows me to explore the constitution, and conversely the rapid spread of, the publics that contained the circulation of discourses about the strike. By exploring the scales of public rhetoric, from face-to-face, networked, to global media, I come to understand the mediality of the communication technologies that anchored the existence of these strikes. It is my contention that media provide conditions of possibility for the emergence, expression, and trajectory of the U.S. movement for public education.

I dedicate this dissertation to my mother, Karen Ann Silverman Daniels (1967-2019), who was my first editor and my inspiration to be a writer.

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Introduction

In 2018, something unexpected happened within the realm of US public education. Teachers went on strike across the United States in record numbers.[1] It was unexpected because strikes, and the labor movement more broadly, have been in decline in the United States for over three decades. The era of "strike waves," in which strikes ripped across the country with hundreds of thousands of workers participating, was assumed by many to be over. The 2018 strikes were not a singular event, for the following year saw another record number of workers participating in a work stoppage.[2] Teachers were strategically refusing to do the work that was assigned to them, and as a result, they were winning raises and improvements in their working conditions. I will make my position clear: I think this story is about the bravery of teachers.

Public education in the United States is in shambles. Entering the 2017-2018 school year, teacher shortages affected every state in the country.[3] The reasons for this fact are both complex and simple. It is complex because a variety of cultural, political, and economic forces collide over the site of public education. The epidemic of school shootings and other violence on school grounds has made the profession many characterize as "white-collar" into a dangerous one. The battles over curriculum used in the classroom, which stretch back much farther than the recent moral panic over "Critical Race Theory," places teachers under the intense scrutiny of school

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[1] "20 Major Work Stoppages in 2018 Involving 485,000 Workers : The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," accessed April 28, 2023, https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2019/20-major-work-stoppages-in-2018-involving-485000-workers.htm.
[2] "Major Work Stoppages (Annual) News Release," February 8, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/wkstp_02082019.htm.
[3] Valerie Strauss, "Analysis | Teacher Shortages Affecting Every State as 2017-18 School Year Begins," *Washington Post*, November 30, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2017/08/28/teacher-shortages-affecting-every-state-as-2017-18-school-year-begins/.

boards and parents.[4] The broad divestment from public services funded through tax revenue, sometimes characterized as the era of neoliberalism, has lowered salaries and benefits for a career that requires a college degree.[5] For many teachers, paying off student loans requires working multiple jobs.[6] School budgets are intensely regulated and often require punitive assessment techniques for disciplining teachers, who are constructed as lazy and entitled. The issue of teacher shortages is also simple to comprehend because of the generalized disrespect that members of the profession face. 76% of teachers nationwide are women.[7] According to Los Angeles teacher Gillian Russom, the work of teaching, which is about caring for and nurturing the intellectual growth of young students, has become feminized in popular culture. She writes that, "The overwhelmingly female teaching pool became the scapegoat for failing schools, and that narrative has compounded a gendered disrespect of women's caring labor."[8] In light of these facts, maybe the only surprising part of the surge in teacher strikes is that it did not happen sooner.

The recent history of feminist movements in the United States is another key element of the story. Russom continues:

Women's leadership in the labor movement in 2018 should be understood in relation to the overall political climate and the large-scale rise of feminist activism for the first time

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[4] Robert Green III, "Conservative Opponents of Critical Race Theory Are Pushing Their Own Propaganda," *Jacobin*, accessed May 14, 2023, https://jacobin.com/2021/06/critical-race-theory-ban-public-education-republicans-florida-texas-abbott-us-history.

[5] Richard D. Lakes and Patricia A. Carter, "Neoliberalism and Education: An Introduction," *Educational Studies* 47, no. 2 (2011): 107–10.

[6] Slyvia A. Allegretto, Sean P. Corcoran, and Lawrence Mishel, *The Teaching Penalty: Teacher Pay Losing Ground* (Economic Policy Inst, 2008).

[7] Alia Wong, "The U.S. Teaching Population Is Getting Bigger, and More Female," The Atlantic, February 20, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/02/the-explosion-of-women-teachers/582622/.

[8] Gillian Russom, "The Teachers' Strikes of 2018-2019: A Gendered Rebellion," in *Strike for the Common Good: Fighting for the Future of Public Education*, ed. Rebecca Kolins Givans and Amy Schrager Lang (University of Michigan Press, 2020), 174.

in a generation. The groundwork for an era of resistance was laid by the #BlackLivesMatter movement, organized in 2013 by three Black women – Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi – in response to the acquittal of Trayvon Martin's murderer, George Zimmerman. Then the arrival in the White House of a president who brags about committing sexual assault set off a reawakening of women's activism: the Women's March on January 21, 2017, the largest day of protest in US History. In October 2017, the emergence of the #MeToo movement drew national attention to the persistence and pervasiveness of sexual harassment and assault. And millions marched again for the second Women's March in January 2018. West Virginia teachers went on strike a month later.[9]

The intersection of the oppression of women, racism, and the economic divestment from public services created the conditions for a rebellion in education. The overlapping movements for justice that had become a persistent feature in the political landscape of the United States had given millions of people practice in the exercise of protest. Further, each of the movements identified by Russom were in some way connected to the media environment of the digital era. #BlackLivesMatter, a movement whose name emerged from the hashtag functionality of Twitter, circulated in both digital and physical realms.[10] The Women's March was largely organized on Facebook with "Events," spawning across hundreds of cities to coordinate the days of protest.[11] The #MeToo movement, which largely existed as the circulation of stories about sexual trauma on social media, spanned multiple platforms and means of expression. The growth of social

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[9] Russom, 175–76.
[10] Sarah J. Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles, *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (MIT Press, 2020).
[11] Issie Lapowsky, "The Women's March Defines Protest in the Facebook Age," *Wired*, Jan. 21, 2017, accessed May 14, 2023, https://www.wired.com/2017/01/womens-march-defines-protest-facebook-age/.

movement activity before and during the Trump presidency was also a rehearsal of the practices of digital mobilizing. In this context, the movement of teacher strikes was born.

My story begins in West Virginia. The state employs tens of thousands of workers to operate the public services that are deemed essential for a functioning society. Teachers, bus drivers, firefighters, etc. are all part of this pool of public employees. Throughout 2016, a West Virginia legislature-appointed task force began making changes to the Public Employees Insurance Agency (PEIA), the group responsible for managing the health insurance for everyone employed by the state. Motivated by the specter of a fiscal crisis wrought by individual and corporate tax cuts, the elected government of West Virginia searched for means to cut expenses, because they did not have enough tax revenue. One source of budget cuts came from the state-managed fund for public employee health insurance. The PEIA began to introduce proposed changes in 2016; and while the full implications of these changes were realized in an uneven manner, public school teachers were some of the first to put the pieces together.

Jay O'Neal, a teacher at Stonewall Jackson Middle School in Hanawha County, WV wrote a set of dated entries after the strike to chronicle his experiences. These entries were published in a collection of West Virginia teacher-written essays entitled *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teacher Strike*.[12] His first entry states:

> September 2016: the first payday of the new school year had arrived. I eagerly opened
> my online bank account to see how much my yearly step increase would raise my
> paycheck for the upcoming school year… my step increase was more than eaten up by
> the new health insurance premiums in the PEIA health insurance bracket it had bumped

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[12] Elizabeth Catte, Emily Hilliard, and Jessica Salfia (eds.), *55 Strong: Inside The West Virginia Teachers' Strike,* (Belt Publishing, 2018).

me into it. Forget about keeping up with inflation, I would bring home $450 dollars less my second year of teaching in West Virginia than my first.[13]

The increase in premiums would be only one facet of the deteriorated public employee living standards, for soon after employees were alerted to additional changes to their insurance. Families would be required to report the income of every individual covered by the insurance; this meant the income of spouses and children who work would bump families into new brackets with higher premiums.

Additionally, every state employee was required to enroll in an invasive fitness surveillance program called Go365. Thousands of step-monitoring devices were shipped to the homes of workers; and to avoid an additional $500 fee for health insurance, workers would be required submit personal health information and achieve a designated number of steps in regular intervals. The idea was that if public employees could be coerced into meeting fitness goals with the threat of additional fees, they would take care of their health and cost less in the long run. Increased insurance premiums, punitive policies for working families, and a paternalistic surveillance program motivated one of the largest uprisings in the history of 21st century labor relations in the United States. During this tumultuous period, Jay O'Neal created a Facebook group to connect with other teachers worried about health insurance. He recounts:

> May 2017:…This realization spurred me to create a Facebook group called "West Virginia Teachers UNITED," hoping that it would be a space where teachers could work across unions to make our legislature listen. I added teachers from across the state who I knew were interested in making change and asked them to add others.

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[13] Jay O'Neal, "Jay O'Neal: Stonewall Jackson Middle School, Kanawha County", in *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers' Strike*, eds. Elizabeth Catte, Emily Hilliard, and Jessica Salfia (Belt Publishing, 2018), 20-22.

O'Neal continues,

> November 2017: The annual PEIA hearings. This year, my group of colleagues had a
> plan. Realizing that people who showed up to PEIA hearings were public employees who
> wanted the same changes we wanted, Emily Comer and I took clipboards to the
> Charleston hearing and gathered contact information in order to connect people to the
> Facebook group, which we had renamed 'West Virginia Public Employees UNITED.'

The decision to change the name of the group, an ability usable only by those with administrator status, invited the other workers whose job title was not "teacher" but who were none the less key participants in the educational system. Bus drivers, custodial staff, and paraeducators all provide integral forms of labor for the functioning of schools and, and most presumably relied upon PEIA health insurance. In O'Neal's final dated entry, he writes,

> January 2018: Our Facebook group had grown to 1,200 members, who were largely using
> the group as a forum to discuss PEIA changes. Many public employees had previously
> been unaware of what has happening to PEIA, but were furious when they found out.
> When one member asked, 'Just curious if there are any talks of striking?' the group saw a
> large uptick in activity.

As it turns out, the group would be the main forum for discussing, deliberating, and planning the upcoming strike. The Facebook group proved to be a vital resource for propelling what began as an annoyance from a few teachers seeing a smaller paycheck towards a statewide outrage at the systematic disrespect of the teaching profession. It led to over 35,000 educators participating in an illegal strike in February 2018 that lasted eleven days, and it also led to them winning an immediate five percent raise for all public employees in the state of West Virginia. Their

successes were widely reported on by local and national news outlets.[14] Soon after, Facebook groups were created in other states with undercompensated teachers.

March was a month of organizing, for on April 2nd, 2018 Oklahoma teachers began their strike. They, too, had used Facebook groups (Oklahoma Teachers United and Oklahoma Teacher Walkout – The Time Is Now!) to share information, create a sense of outrage, and coordinate their collective action. Their strike continued for nine days, and it threatened to interrupt the all-important standardized testing schedule that controlled funding mechanisms for public education. They, too, earned a five percent raise for their actions.[15] Teachers in Kentucky watched as their state legislature considered passing a bill that would restructure the state's pension system and threaten the defined-benefit retirement of public employees. After discussing these changes in a recently created Facebook group (KY120 United), teachers hastily organized a one-day walkout, also on April 2nd, to protest at the state capitol. West Virginia no longer seemed like an anomaly; for onlookers, it was now apparent that the strikes would continue.

By the end of April, this movement of teachers had coalesced around a name: the Red for Ed movement, referencing the shirt color that teachers across the country wore to signal participation. On April 27th, two teacher strikes began. Colorado teachers staged a one-day walkout to demand raises. Their protests at the capitol met fierce resistance from lawmakers,

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[14] Jess Bidgood, "West Virginia Raises Teachers' Pay to End Statewide Strike," *The New York Times*, March 6, 2018, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/06/us/west-virginia-teachers-strike-deal.html.
"'We Will Move Forward': With Deal on Pay in Place, West Virginia's Teachers Eye Return to the Classroom," *Washington Post*, March 6, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/education/wp/2018/03/06/deal-reached-on-raise-for-west-virginia-teachers-governor-says/.
Jake Zuckerman and Ryan Quinn, "'We Have Reached a Deal': WV Schools Reopening after Justice Signs Pay Raise Bill," *Charleston Gazette-Mail*, March 6, 2018,
https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/we-have-reached-a-deal-wv-schools-reopening-after-justice-signs-pay-raise-bill/article_7939c12d-7b0c-5929-972b-6b0864c60da8.html.
Kris Maher, "West Virginia Teachers Strike Ends With 5% Pay Raise," *Wall Street Journal*, March 6, 2018, sec. US, https://www.wsj.com/articles/west-virginia-teachers-strike-ends-with-5-pay-raise-1520358753.
[15] "Oklahoma Teachers Set To Walk Out Over Pay Dispute : NPR," accessed April 28, 2023,
https://www.npr.org/2018/04/02/598756612/oklahoma-teachers-set-to-walk-out-over-pay-dispute.

who had proposed a law that would imprison and fine striking teachers. Although the law did not pass, it potentially scared teachers away from greater actions.[16] In the southern city of Pueblo, the one-day walkout turned into a five-day strike and an immediate two percent raise for teachers.[17] Arizona was the second state to begin a strike on April 27th, and their strike lasted for five days, earning Arizona teachers an immediate eleven percent raise and an additional eight percent over the next two years.[18] Teachers in North Carolina led the last statewide walkout of the school year on May 16th, 2018, for one day.

In almost all the state-wide strikes of 2018 (with the exception of Colorado), the teachers were violating the law.[19] There is a saying in the labor movement that "there is no such thing as an illegal strike, only an unsuccessful one." In every case, no teacher or union organization was prosecuted for illegally striking because of the power that withholding labor exerts on political systems. Before the end of the year, approximately 400,000 teachers would go on strike, which exceeded the previous 32 years of the United States labor movement in terms of number of striking workers each year.[20] The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics measures major work stoppages through the metric of "idle days," which is the number of striking workers times the number of days in a strike. In 2018, there was an estimated 2,815,400 idle days and 90% of which came from the education sector.[21] The summer break of 2018 put a temporary pause on

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[16] Kyla Galer, "Bill to Punish Striking Teachers Not Moving Forward," *KKTV*, April 30, 2018, https://www.kktv.com/content/news/Bill-to-punish-striking-teachers-goes-to-Colorado-Senate-committee-481240431.html.

[17] "Pueblo Teachers Reach Tentative Agreement with District for 2 Percent Pay Hike," *The Denver Post* (blog), May 13, 2018, https://www.denverpost.com/2018/05/12/pueblo-teacher-strike-is-over/.

[18] "Striking Arizona Teachers Win 19% Raise, End Walkout," Los Angeles Times, May 3, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-arizona-teachers-20180503-story.html.

[19] Joseph Slater, "The Teachers' Strike of 2018 in Historical Perspective," n.d.

[20] "Major Work Stoppages (Annual) News Release," *U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,* February 8, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/wkstp_02082019.htm.

[21] "20 Major Work Stoppages in 2018 Involving 485,000 Workers : The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," February 12, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2019/20-major-work-stoppages-in-2018-involving-485000-workers.htm.

the rapid spread of state-wide teacher strikes, but it was by no means an end to the movement. These somewhat hastily organized and social media-fueled strikes converged with independent and long-standing efforts to strike in major metropolitan cities. The major difference between the 2018 and 2019 was the legal process of collective bargaining that prohibits teachers covered by a contract from engaging in a strike. In states that recognize teacher unions, strikes usually occur when contracts expire and negotiations for a new contract are unsuccessful. At this point, education workers can legally use the leverage of a strike to extract demands out of their respective school districts.

Starting in 2014, a group of educators in the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) undertook a concerted effort to win their union's leadership election and push for a strike to address longstanding concerns held by teachers. The slate of teacher-activists successfully took control of their union and entered bargaining with the school districts with a set of aggressive demands for improve racial and economic equity across LA's schools. The 2019 educators' strike in Los Angeles, California was an incredible effort of 30,000 public school educators fighting against neoliberalism and racism. Leaders of the strike, such as the union president Alex Caputo-Pearl, helped popularize the slogan, 'bargaining for the common good.' This approach to collective bargaining incorporates demands for the betterment of the community served by educators: students and their families. Across publications of the union, speeches given by elected union leaders, and testimonies of rank-and-file teachers, demands for reductions in class sizes and the hiring of nurses and counselors were consistently emphasized before the demand for a raise. Los Angeles has the second largest school district in the United States, has one of the lowest levels of per-pupil funding, and its schools are comprised of predominately students of color. It is no accident that the attack on public services

disproportionally affects non-white communities the hardest. By going on strike for the schools that their students deserve, educators in Los Angeles fought the forces responsible for the systematic divestment from working class communities of color.

In the years leading up to the strike, teacher-activists acted through their union to create an interpersonal network of teachers who could convey to their coworkers the goals of their union and move them to action. Cecily Myart-Cruz (the current president of UTLA in 2023) and Caputo-Pearl wrote in a reflection after the strike,

> The source of our power is members acting collectively and their connection with the community, but we must work with members to build the structures necessary to exercise this power. The most essential systems and structures we have built in UTLA are those that (a) ensure that all of our nine hundred worksites have elected rank-and-file chapter chairs (that is, building representatives or stewards), (b) guarantee that each worksite has a chapter action team (CAT), including one rank-and-file leader for every ten workers, and (c) make certain that each group of schools has a rank-and-file cluster leader.[22]

Clearly, the effort it took in creating the "systems and structures" that supported their strike was not accomplished in a spontaneous eruption of activity, but through a slow and methodical effort of preparing for the strike. It took five years from the time the new leaders were elected to union office to the begin of the strike.

Their strike lasted for six days, and it was successful in forcing the district to agree to allocating resources towards hiring hundreds of nurses, librarians, and counselors for schools that currently lacked these essential support services. As a result of their strike, class sizes were

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[22] Cecily Myart-Cruz and Alex Caputo-Pearl, "The LA Strike: Learning Together to Build the National Movement We Need," in *Strike for the Common Good: Fighting for the Future of Public Education*, ed. Rebecca Kolins Givans and Amy Schrager Lang (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 152.

limited across the district, improving the quality of education for students. They negotiated and won an end to a practice of removing students from class to search their belongings and bodies. This practice, according to the teachers, was mainly used to criminalize students of color. Their contract also included a provision to expand green spaces on campus, something that many schools in LA lacked. Finally, teachers and staff earned a six percent raise.[23] While only a single school district, the size of this strike was roughly equivalent to all teachers in the state of West Virginia. The actions of these teachers, while in the works since 2014, were no doubt buoyed by the strikes from the year before. The enthusiasm for public education carried from the states that were controlled by Republican state governments into states with Democratic leaders.

Shortly after the conclusion of the LA strike, teachers in Denver, CO began yet another strike on February 11th, 2019. Their contract had expired at the end of 2018, and because many teachers participated in the one-day Colorado walkout of 2018, the teachers in the Denver area had raised their expectations in the collective bargaining process. They knew that waging a strike would be popular in their community because of the practice they had in doing it the year before. After three days of striking and negotiations, the Denver teachers' union and the district reached an agreement that included an average 11.7% salary increase for teachers, with more significant increases for those working in high-needs schools, a reduction in using "performance" as a benchmark for pay increases, and the creation of a salary schedule that rewards advanced degrees and experience.[24] The agreement also included additional funding for support staff, including mental health providers and school nurses.

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[23] "A Look into the LAUSD, UTLA Contract Deal Ending the 6-Day Teacher Strike | LA School Report," accessed May 9, 2023, https://www.laschoolreport.com/a-look-into-the-lausd-utla-contract-deal-that-could-end-the-6-day-teacher-strike/.
[24] Alexia Fernández Campbell, "The Denver Teachers Strike Is over. They Won.," Vox, February 14, 2019, https://www.vox.com/2019/2/14/18224848/denver-teachers-strike-over-deal.

The 2019 Oakland teacher strike started on February 21, 2019, and lasted for seven days. The strike was led by the Oakland Education Association (OEA) and involved around 3,000 public school educators and support staff. The primary issues that triggered the strike were the insufficient funding of Oakland's public schools, excessive workload, and low pay and benefits for teachers and staff. The OEA argued that the Oakland Unified School District (OUSD) was diverting funds away from schools and into administrators' pockets, resulting in poor student outcomes and poor working conditions for educators. Following seven days of picketing and negotiations, the OEA and OUSD reached a tentative agreement. The agreement included an 11% pay raise over four years for teachers, lower class sizes, an increase in the number of counselors and nurses, and a commitment from the district to invest more in students with special needs.[25] Their victory was evidence of some degree of coordination, or at least cross-pollination, between the teachers of Los Angeles and Oakland.

The 2019 Chicago teacher strike began on October 17, 2019, and lasted for 11 days. The strike was organized by the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) and involved approximately 32,000 public school teachers and staff members. The main issues at the heart of the strike were the "Common Good" issues reflected in Los Angeles such as increased funding for public schools, smaller class sizes, and increased support staff like nurses and librarians. The CTU argued that the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) system was underfunded and that teachers and staff were being asked to do too much with too little support. After 11 days of striking, an agreement was reached between the CTU and CPS that included a 16% pay raise for teachers over the course of five years, as well as increased funding for support staff, reduced class sizes, and additional

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[25] Theresa Harrington, "After Seven-Day Strike, Oakland Teachers Approve New Contract," EdSource, accessed May 14, 2023, https://edsource.org/2019/tentative-agreement-reached-in-oakland-unified-teachers-strike/609342.

resources for students in need. Another similarity between Chicago and Los Angeles, besides the demands, was the emphasis union leaders placed on the structures and systems of organizing their members. Chicago teachers had plenty of experiencing striking, for in 2012 and 2016 the CTU had waged mass participatory strikes. According to labor studies professors Robert Bruno and Steven Ashby,

> The [2012] Chicago victory opened up a discussion within labor – and especially among teachers and school staff – about replicating the CTU's experience elsewhere. After the 2012 strike, the CTU leadership sent union leaders and rank-and-file activists across the country to tell their story. In addition, in 2013, the CTU initiated the United Caucuses of Rank-and-File Educators (UCORE), a national network of locals and caucuses within the teachers' unions that sought to build, on the CTU model, militant social justice unions."[26]

Chicago teachers, in effect, created their own network for teacher-activists to share knowledge and techniques for labor organizing. Their 2019 strike was yet another example of the role that strikes could play in improving the system of public education.

The 2019 city-wide strikes occurred in contexts where labor union organizations already had means of communicating with the participating teachers, mobilizing them to action, and deliberating over strategic choices. This is not to say that social media was not a factor, for in each of these cases there is empirical evidence this dissertation will explore to suggest that it was. Although the strikes in Los Angeles and Chicago emerged from long-standing efforts, it is undoubtable that the wave of teacher strikes in 2018 influenced the popular support for and success of these strikes. Further, the initial expression of these strikes in the environment of

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[26] Robert Bruno and Steven Ashby, "The Ripple Effect of the 2012 Chicago Teachers' Strike," in *Strike for the Common Good: Fighting for the Future of Public Education* (University of Michigan Press, 2022), 62.

social media may have influenced the practices of striking that followed the West Virginia Public Employees United group on Facebook.

Mass mobilizations of workers in a similar industry are not a new phenomenon. Brave acts of resistance in one area can spur others to take similar actions, and the cumulative effect can continue to grow. They are sometimes described as "strike waves,"[27] as noted earlier, and for as long as the modern wage system has existed there have been moments of mass resistance to it. In 1905, Russian railroad workers carried news of their strike down the train lines that they controlled, for they were the people who had built it. Postal workers in New York City went on strike in March 1970, and within two weeks 200,000 other letter carriers from across the country joined them. These mobilizations were facilitated by forms of media, publicity, and the social processes that united workers in common cause. Although the means of communication have changed (railroads, telegraphs, printing presses, radio, televised news, and social media), the strike persists. While united in the tradition of strikes that came before them, the 2018-2019 teacher strikes were characterized by a historically different terrain of struggle. The goal of this dissertation is to approach these strikes the dynamics of social movement activity within a new media environment. Thus, the research question that drives this project is: How do the affordances of specific communication technologies, and how do broader media ecologies, affect the rhetoric of contemporary strike protest?

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[27] For examples of the term "strike wave" see:
Michael Biggs, "Positive Feedback in Collective Mobilization: The American Strike Wave of 1886," *Theory and Society* 32, no. 2 (2003): 217–54.
Duncan Tarr, "Crossed Wires in the Motor City: A Genealogy and Analysis of the 1967 Riots and the 1968 Strike Wave in Detroit," *New Global Studies* 14, no. 2 (2020): 183–92.
Elizabeth J. Perry, "Shanghai's Strike Wave of 1957," *The China Quarterly* 137 (1994): 1–27.

Methodology

I believe that my story of the teacher strikes is not enough. Although I cannot hide my admiration and respect for the characters of this story, this story is not an example of what Lawrence Grossberg describes as a "diagnostic story," or one that looks "beyond experience to its conditions of possibility, of searching for what enables us to experience what we do, to make sense of things the way we do, to think and know what we do, to feel how we do."[28] The strike in West Virginia may seem like a simple story of brave teachers squaring off against greedy, conservative state legislatures. In general, it seems as if the story of every recent teacher strike could be simplified into the battle between the left, which typically supports funding social services, and the right, which typically opposes government spending and public goods. This story is politically counterproductive for equipping people with the resources to understand the problems faced by students, parents, and educators. Neither the left nor the right are homogenous political entities that can be mapped within this conflict. "Students," "parents," and "educators" are categories that refer to a host of different peoples, struggles, and circumstances. If the "left" were to exist as some knowable group of people, it would be a temporary balance of forces, but this stability can hardly be said to exist within the realm for public education. Charter schools, for example, articulate several varied political interests, sectors of capital, and discourses of equity and inclusion. The persistence of racism in public education, manifested as an exclusionary curriculum, standardized testing, or unjustly used disciplinary measures, further complicates this story. Teachers' unions, while an abstraction that is often referenced

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[28] Lawrence Grossberg, *Under the Cover of Chaos: Trump and the Battle for the American Right* (Pluto Press, 2018). 17.

derogatorily in corporate news outlets, are also concrete organizations filled with a heterogenous mix of political perspectives, systems of representation, and strategies for creating change.

To account for the complex multitude of forces that defines this period in history, I need a methodology that enables and assists a study of the complex and contradictory forces of historical periods. I understand the term "methodology" to mean a set of precepts and principles that allow researchers to generate insights consistently and in concert with each other. This is different from the term "methods," which refers to the specific practices of assembling evidence, investigating questions, and making formal evaluations, interpretations, and judgements. Textual analysis, data visualization, and criticism are all methods I plan to use in this study, but they do not necessarily lead researchers to investigate phenomena as a community of practice.[29] Characterizing the various social formations embedded in the battle over public education is a necessary step in the telling of a story about the rhetorical tactics and media use of striking teachers.

To accomplish this goal, I turn to theories of articulation offered by Stuart Hall, Lawrence Grossberg, and Jennifer Daryl Slack, which at least partially constitutes the broad methodology of Cultural Studies practitioners. Articulation theory is a set of investigative commitments that enable researchers to study emergent phenomenon embedded within changing historical circumstances. These commitments guide studies of cultural practices with a concern for the relationship between theory and method. As Slack argues,

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[29] For exemplary instances of each method see:
Textual analysis – Janice A. Radway, *Reading the Romance: Women, Patriarchy, and Popular Literature* (Univ of North Carolina Press, 2009).
Data visualization – Laurie E. Gries, "Iconographic Tracking: A Digital Research Method for Visual Rhetoric and Circulation Studies," *Computers and Composition* 30, no. 4 (December 1, 2013): 332–48.
Rhetorical Criticism – Mark Hlavacik, "The Democratic Origins of Teachers' Union Rhetoric: Margaret Haley's Speech at the 1904 NEA Convention," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 15, no. 3 (2012): 499–524.

Theory is thus a practice in a double sense: it is a formal conceptual tool as well as a

practising or 'trying out' of a way of theorizing. In joining these two senses of practice,

we commit to working with momentarily, temporarily 'objectified' theories, moments of

'arbitrary closure', recognizing that in the ongoing analysis of the concrete, theory must

be challenged and revised.[30]

The methodology of articulation theory enables a reflexive treatment of the contingent elements

within a domain of inquiry. Theories and abstractions will guide my study of teacher strikes, but

in coming to understand the context that shaped the strikes, new theories more suited to the

contours and shapes of the battle over public education will likely emerge. The product of this

research process will be a finer set of categories for understanding the different forces that are

propelling teachers into mass action and the cultural consequences of the strike practices.

Grossberg describes this process of theoretical refinement as "radical contextualization,"

and as a principle for understanding the process by which forces (assemblages of actors, objects,

affects, ideologies, etc.) are articulated together, it treats the context as the object of inquiry.[31]

For understanding the emergence of public education as the terrain over which a variety of social

forces are colliding, articulation theory avoids the tendency to treat singular phenomena, like

teacher strikes, as the whole story. Instead, I will use the teacher strikes as coordinates within a

broader tapestry of activity, filled with cultural divisions, economic structures, and competing

political perspectives. In Jay O'Neal's narration of his experience in leading a strike, the messy

realities of healthcare insurance are inseparable from the grand notion of public education as a

common good. The process of accounting for the context of teacher strikes leads me to

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[30] Jennifer Daryl Slack, "The Theory and Method of Articulation In Cultural Studies," in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London: Routledge, 1996), 114.
[31] Grossberg, *Under the Cover of Chaos*.

investigate and theorize the conditions that shaped their emergence; and by extension, I will investigate the rhetoric of social movements in a new media environment.

Articulation theory is well suited to capturing the dynamics of contemporary social and political struggles, and it serves to benefit the investigations of political action that are common in the field of rhetorical studies. One of Stuart Hall's most enduring contributions is the view that culture is a site of struggle. He writes,

> In our times, it goes on continuously, in the complex lines of resistance and acceptance, refusal and capitulation, which make the field of culture a sort of constant battlefield. A battlefield where no once-for-all victories are obtained but where there are always strategic positions to be won and lost.[32]

I offer the definition of rhetoric as the action in sites of struggle, and the expression of these struggles in discourse. I understand rhetoric as a tradition of scholarship in North America that has historically investigated the use of persuasion in speeches and oratory.[33] It has a strong connection to teaching the practice of democracy, the use of language in constituting a notion of the common good, and the communicative techniques of social change. While rhetorical studies has expanded well beyond the study of speeches, it has maintained a concern for the use, in political advocacy, of language, images, symbols and more. Further, as Phaedra Pezzullo and Ted Striphas have argued, "The significance of struggle—the act of grappling, striving, battling, or otherwise contraposing something or someone—is central to ancient rhetorical thought."[34] To

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[32] Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Popular' [1981]," in *Essential Essays, Volume 1*, Book, Section vols. (Duke University Press, 2018), 354.

[33] This is descriptive of rhetoric in Communication and Speech departments, which has a different history from rhetoric in English and Writing departments.

[34] Phaedra C. Pezzullo and Ted Striphas, "Resistance: Taking a Stand, Struggling to Matter," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (May 27, 2018): 307.

be sure, Stuart Hall was not a rhetorician, and his project of Cultural Studies did not emerge from

a shared history with rhetoric. However, the institutionalization of Cultural Studies in North

America within Communication Departments, if nothing else, has led to a physical proximity

between the scholars of these traditions. Rhetoricians and CS practitioners have concurrently

developed methods and theories for investigating culture and the communicative means by

which culture emerges. Many rhetoricians have internalized Stuart Hall's argument that culture

is something that is constituted by struggle, and this gives the insights of rhetorical studies of

media, performances, or discourses a political significance.[35] Further, articulation theory might

be understood as a type of rhetorical practice, whereby scholars contribute to a political project

by forging connections between disparate concepts, social formations, or movements.[36]

Historically, the discipline of rhetoric has centered on the interpretation and evaluation of

speech, whether in the form of *in situ* public oratory or as transcripts of previously-delivered

speeches. As one axis of my investigation, the fixation on speech and transcripts in rhetoric

presents a problem in accounting for articulated social forces of this cultural setting. While

speeches are no doubt important features in various cultural struggles, the means by which

speech is rendered available for criticism often elides over what I have begun to identify as a

core feature of this situation: media. The reliance upon different forms of media in the story of

teacher strikes necessitates an attunement in rhetorical methods. In recent decades, the scope of

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[35] For a series of essays on the overlap between these two intellectual traditions see: Thomas Rosteck, *At the Intersection: Cultural Studies and Rhetorical Studies* (Guilford Press, 1999).

[36] Kevin DeLuca lays out a theoretical basis for articulation as a rhetorical practice in his essay: "Articulation Theory: A Discursive Grounding for Rhetorical Practice," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 32, no. 4 (1999): 334–48. Further, examples of this type of synthesis work can be seen in these essays:
Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Contextualizing Boycotts and Buycotts: The Impure Politics of Consumer-Based Advocacy in an Age of Global Ecological Crises," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 8, no. 2 (June 2011): 124–45.
Samantha Senda-Cook, "Rugged Practices: Embodying Authenticity in Outdoor Recreation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 98, no. 2 (2012): 129–52.

phenomena that could be considered "rhetorical" has dramatically expanded from what used to be a narrow focus on speeches. Changes in the object of study within rhetoric have also yielded changes in the methods and uses of theory. Rhetorical criticism, a method long embraced by many rhetoricians, has evolved from various formal systems of classifying and treating texts to more fluid encounters between texts, the concepts scholars use to understand texts, and the histories in which texts emerge.[37] James Jaskinsi describes this latter treatment of theory as "conceptually oriented criticism," writing that,

> [T]he critic's understanding of the object grows or develops as conceptual thickening helps illuminate its diverse qualities. Various specific reading strategies might be employed (emphasizing issues of argument, structure, style, etc.) but, in conceptually oriented criticism, these strategies cannot be organized in any a priori fashion nor is their validation an important issue for the critic[38]

In the description of rhetorical criticism as an intellectual practice that resists theoretical formalism, I see the study of teacher strikes as an opportunity for conceptual thickening. While I am primarily concerned with texts produced by the movement, such as speeches, essays, and written, audible, or visual posts on social media, I am also intrigued by the rhetorical practices, technological affordances, and institutional and economic forces that weave these discourses into a tapestry of activity.

In my process of data collection, I was centrally concerned with speeches, essays, tweets, or other rhetorical forms prevalent of the public school teachers' struggle. However, the

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[37] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Thomas R. Burkholder, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*, 2nd ed., Book, Whole (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Pub, 1997).

[38] James Jasinski, "The Status of Theory and Method in Rhetorical Criticism," *Western Journal of Communication* 65, no. 3 (2001): 256.

emergence of these discourses can only be approached in the context of a battle over public education felt within what Hall describes as "the thick texture of social life and historical experience."[39] By using methods of archival analysis, data visualization, and more traditional rhetorical criticism, I seek to study this multifaceted struggle and its context—to generate rhetorical theories and insights that equip scholars with the necessary abstractions to better understand the recent wave of teachers' strikes and to study other emergent struggles.

Mediality

The strike wave of 2018-19 depended on face-to-face interactions and interpersonal connections both to create and sustain it, but integral too to the movement was social media, and new media more broadly. I wish, then, to account for the strikes' mediality, or the nature of mediation that a particular communication practice engages in. I see this as related to, but also different from, accounting for the affordances, forms, or properties of specific communication practices. I wish to do that *and* consider conditions of possibility, by locating the teachers' strikes within a media-cultural setting. Investigations of mediality are similar to the intellectual project described as "media archaeology" by media studies scholars like Jussi Parikka. He writes, "Hence, media archaeological excavation is committed to seeking the conditions of existence of cultural phenomena and the interplay between continuities and discontinuities."[40] In the case of teacher strikes, I am not attempting fetishize the technological aspects of contemporary labor disputes, but instead to combine an analysis of the context of public education in the United States with a detailed understanding of key communication technologies. Social media is only one facet of the media use that propelled the strikes to public attention, for

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[39] Stuart Hall, "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms," *Media, Culture & Society* 2, no. 1 (1980): 57–72.
[40] Jussi Parikka, *Digital Contagions: A Media Archaeology of Computer Viruses* (Peter Lang, 2007), xvii.

the rhetoric of the strike emerged across a spectrum of medialogical circumstances. While arguably the use of social media is a novel example of networked technologies coalescing with a social movement, it does not fully encompass the situation of teacher strikes. This is similar to how John Durham Peters describes media as "infrastructures of being." He writes that "Media… are vessels and environments, containers of possibility that anchor our existence and make what we are doing possible."[41] Peters' philosophy of media points me to the systems through which the teachers united themselves. In their school buildings, their voices carried through the air and reverberated off the walls. They cast their strike authorization votes on paper ballots with ink-filled pens. And their bodies stood beside one another in picket lines and marches, often holding printed or hand-drawn signs. Just as the affordances of social media anchored and contained the possibilities of their strike, so too did the media of pre-digital days. I want to argue that media provide conditions of possibility for the emergence, expression, and trajectory of the U.S. movement for public education.

My definition of mediality as the nature of mediation draws a connection between my invocation of this concept and the history of scholarship dedicated to understanding media. Across rhetoric, cultural studies, and media theory, mediation – the nominalized form of media into a noun– implies the act of mediating or the verb form "to mediate." Marxist theoreticians have understood mediation as a dialectical process of interaction between people and their environments, among other things. Capital is the medial form of the interaction between a worker and the economy, and the experience of living within a capitalist society is mediated by the social structures that support capitalist accumulation. Antonio Gramsci continued an interest

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[41] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

in the mediation of politics and culture in the constitution of hegemony, whereby the ruling class achieves consent to rule through a process of mediating members of the subordinate classes with ideas that support the existing system. Cultural Studies practitioners, such as Raymond Williams and Stuart Hall, further complicate Gramsci's view of hegemony as a mediation between the circulation of popular ideas, practices, and cultural expressions and the people within a capitalist system. This more dynamic approach to mediation recognizes the role that individuals play in supporting and resisting the ideas of oppression.[42] Further, mediation in Cultural Studies is not just the interaction between individuals and social structures, but also a process that is bound within definite contexts of technological development and cultural practices.

Rhetorical scholars, too, have maintained an interest in the noun-nominal form of media. Investigations of mediation in rhetoric come from scholars interested in the materiality of rhetorical action – or the means by which communication practices become a social and political force beyond merely through human language use. Understanding the materiality of rhetoric necessarily requires treating the phenomena of rhetorical action as necessarily mediated by forces outside the purview of language. As Peter Simonson argues,

> [L]anguage as a form of symbolicity has the potential to mediate connections with realities beyond the physiologically sensed present in ways not similarly available through other modes of address. (A history book is an account of a past world to a literate human, a potential headrest to a sleepy cat, and a food source to mold spores in a humid environment.) If we are to build out material conceptions of rhetoric not limited to the human world, we need good ways of accounting for the fact that, for instance, the materiality of the printed word silently read by dispersed members of a political public is

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[42] John Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture* (Routledge, 2010).

well different than that of migrating salmon physiologically processing the salinity of a

stream. We need to continue developing resources to account for heterogeneous forms of

rhetorical mediation.

Simsonson's approach, which may be described as a "post-humanist" theory of rhetorical

mediation, is expansive and imaginative as a resource for understanding the physical stuff of

rhetoric.

I turn to another nominalization of media, but this time as an adverb – mediality – which

expresses the "who, what, when, where, and how" of media rather than the metaphysical

qualities of the verb "mediate." I select this term to signal my indebtedness to the theoretical

work of German media theorists. Richard Müller describes mediality as, "common attribute of

techno-anthropological means of representation and communication, as developed and

developing through mutual interaction, such as to give rise to a particular environment in which

certain forms (of sense) can be distinguished."[43] The English translation of Friedrich Kittler's

Grammaphon Film Typewriter (English title: *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter)* opens with the

declarative sentence, "Media determine our situation."[44] I am drawn to the use of the term

"situation" in the work of Kittler, for it is demonstrative of the methodology I hope to employ in

this dissertation. The teacher strikes were a situation, or context, where colliding forces were

articulated together to create the outcome of hundreds of thousands of teachers refusing to work.

Throughout this dissertation, however, I hope to tread a fine line over the word "determines."

Ted Striphas (quoting Florian Cramer) offers another, equally compelling, translation of this

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[43] Richard Müller, "' Mediality': Some Fundamental Questions on the Theory and History of Media," *Dějiny-Teorie-Kritika (History-Theory-Criticism)* 1, no. 15 (2018): 49–67.
[44] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), xxxix.

phrase as: "Our situation depends on media."[45] I find relief in this retranslation of Kittler's

famous sentence. Dependence, rather than determinism, describes the relationship between

media and the cultural politics of teacher strikes with greater theoretical flexibility. It implies that

the combination of factors articulated into a "situation" rely upon the nature of media; but also

recognizes that as humans, too, are medial beings, our dependence is co-constitutive. I do not

mean to draw a distinction between humans and technology or nature and culture, for as Peters

writes, "By isolating acute parts of our world as technology that we should control, it effaces the

existential fact that we live environmentally, dependently, in apparatuses not of our own making,

starting with the womb itself."[46] In any case, deterministically or dependently, the conditions of

existence for the media that anchored these strikes should be analyzed with attention to the

historically specific machineries of recording, transmission, storage, distribution, and

reproduction. Mediality is a theoretical means for investigating how the dependence on media

comes to matter.

Todd Gitlin's book *The Whole World is Watching: Mass media in the Making and*

Unmaking of the New Left is an example of an academic study that is similarly concerned with

the efficacy and limitations of social movements within an earlier "new" media landscape.[47] His

book examines the explosive years 1965 to 1970, and he maintains a sociological focus on the

youth organization Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and their relationship to the national

media apparatus of newspapers and television networks. For reasons explored in Gitlin's study,

SDS became a mass organization with thousands of members across the United States,

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[45] Ted Striphas, "Caring for Cultural Studies," *Cultural Studies* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 11, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2018.1543716.
[46] Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 89.
[47] Todd Gitlin, *The Whole World Is Watching: Mass Media in the Making and Unmaking of the New Left* (University of California Press, 2003).

organizers of many newsworthy demonstrations, and celebrity-leaders of the emergent anti-war movement. They became an object of fascination for journalists and a target for repression from right-wing politicians. Gitlin primarily uses the metaphor of the spotlight to theorize the relationship between the media and this organization within the anti-war movement. SDS was an actor on a stage, and the spotlight gave this actor the visibility needed to grow an active audience. However, they were not in control of the spotlight. Those who did control it used it to exaggerate their features, make parts of their character invisible, and determine who shared the stage with the SDS. As Gitlin states, "To study the meteoric rise of SDS itself as an object of publicity, and the techniques SDS improvised to work in the media spotlight, is to move towards understanding the power of the media over an opposition movement and, dialectically, the nature and limits of a movement's response."[48] As it turned out, the concentrated ownership of mass media in the hands of a few corporations could not easily be appropriated by young people with the vision of creating a new society free of oppression and exploitation. Gitlin found that although mass media corporations sometimes gave publicity to people who want to overturn the entire social order, the editorial decisions made by producers and executives effectively blunted the potential of these movements to stay relevant. Gitlin's study is a useful model for my study of teacher strikes because of his attention to the embeddedness of media within the life of the movement. Throughout the book, he carefully qualifies his claims about the relationship between the actions and consequences of the SDS's engagement with news media. He does not attempt to advance a totalizing view of the oligarchy of media ownership as a force that will defeat each and every opposition movement; instead, Gitlin provides a careful theoretical and empirical reflection on the fissures within media landscapes, fissures that present opportunities for radical

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[48] Ibid., 79.

critique and mass action. Gitlin develops a unique methodology to study both the empirical existence of SDS and their activities, as well as conceptually accounting for the cultural apparatus of televised news and the constitution of public discourse in the late 60s.

Another example of this is Zizi Papacharissi's analysis of Twitter usage during the and 2011 Egyptian Revolution and Occupy Wall Street protests. She approaches media with the understanding that "media do not make or break revolutions, but they do lend emerging publics their own distinct mediality. Mediality shapes the texture of these publics and affect becomes the drive that keeps them going." [49] Her work investigates the contribution media makes towards the concept Raymond Williams describes as a "structure of feeling," or the accumulated habitus of articulated thought, mood, and feel of a particular historical movement.[50] Papacharissi's research builds toward an understanding of what effects communication technologies have on the creation of a structure of feeling, and she utilized a set of multimodal methods to analyze the networks, frequency, and flows of discourse in the media environment of these explosive movements. She uses a theory of affective publics to describe the potential of emergent media in constituting volatile social experiences of a given period into a new modality of civic engagement.

The work of Zeynep Tufekci serves as another conceptual and methodological touchstone for my project. Tufekci's *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* is one of the most comprehensive and empirical studies of the use of networked technologies during the Arab Spring in 2010.[51] Tufekci advances a history of the introduction of mobile

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[49] Zizi Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling: Sentiment, Events and Mediality," *Information, Communication & Society* 19, no. 3 (March 3, 2016): 307–24, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2015.1109697.

[50] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, vol. 1253 (Broadview Press, 2001).

[51] Zeynep Tufekci, *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest* (Yale University Press, 2017).

phones and the Internet infrastructures into Turkey and Egypt; and in doing so, she surveys the affordances and limitations of networked platforms for mass movements. Tufekci theorizes that networked publics, like Twitter, contain transformative capacities for evading state censorship and power of mobilization through publicity. However, she argues throughout the book that the ease of digital organizing can pave over the necessity of developing means of collective decision-making, systems of accountability, and long-term campaigns for political and economic transformation. The author does not foreclose the possibility that social movements may find new ways to engage with networked technologies, but her study offers a cautionary tale and series of practical recommendations for revolutionaries wanting to make use of new communicative modalities. Tufekci's method of storytelling produces a practical set of theoretical categories for people opposing to authoritarian oppression and media users in other social movement contexts. As an example of politically committed scholarship, *Twitter and Teargas* serves as an example of methodological principles for my dissertation project.

The West Virginia's teacher strike was hardly the first instance of social media being used as a tool for collective action, but it is an example of a vision for technology and society that long preceded the popularization of the Internet. Cyberdemocracy, or electronic democracy, describes a set of ideas originating in the 1960s about the utopian potentials for networked technologies to revolutionize democratic governance and participatory decision-making.[52] By the early 2000s, Western commentators hoped that these technologies would overcome the problems of a flawed political culture shaped by televised news and an apathetic citizenry. Well before the creation of Facebook, Bryan, Tambini & Tsagarousianou wrote, "New media, and particularly

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[52] Cathy Bryan, Damian Tambini, and Roza Tsagarousianou, eds., "Electronic Democracy and the Civic Networking Movement in Context," in *Cyberdemocracy*, 0 ed. (Routledge, 2002), 11–27, https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203448847-4.

computer-mediated communication, it is hoped, will undo the damage done to politics by the old media. Far from the telescreen dystopias, new media technology hails a rebirth of democratic life."[53] This utopian vision for networked technology viewed social movements as actors that would benefit from the proliferation of information and publicity.

In the decades since these early visions for technology and society, two sides of this debate arguably have emerged. There are those who think, overall, new media have benefited social movements. Ray Brescia, a legal scholar, argues in *The Future of Change: How Technology Shapes Social Revolutions* that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have been appropriated by activists to develop vast grassroots efforts.[54] Critically, Brescia locates the capacity for communication technologies, like printing or tweeting, to create networks of activity that are both local and tied-together to national or international movements. These networks have advantages based in the reduced costs of publishing and easier to access audiences. The opposing perspective locates Facebook in particular, and the networked media ecology more broadly, as responsible for an international degradation of political culture. Much like the techno-utopians viewed television as the poison responsible for a commercialized and substance-less public sphere, Siva Vaidhyanathan argues in his 2018 book *Antisocial Media* that Facebook is responsible for the erosion of public trust in civic institutions and structures of authority.[55] Further, Vaidhyanathan argues that Facebook's design harms expressions of deliberation and the political culture necessary for rational discussions of issues of mutual concern. He writes, "Its algorithmic design that amplifies content judged to attract attention and

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[53] Ibid, 5.

[54] Ray Brescia, *The Future of Change: How Technology Shapes Social Revolutions*, Book, Whole (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2020), https://go.exlibris.link/n07SP8xG.

[55] Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

interaction (clicks, shares, likes, comments) favors extremism and powerful emotions over rational and measured expression."[56] Vaidhyanathan updated the book after the January 6th, 2021 riot at the U.S. capitol, and confirms his argument by examining the role that Facebook, and the broader digital media ecology, played in promoting political extremism and motivating thousands of people to act on the belief that the 2020 election was stolen.

Social media as a site of politics is clearly a controversy worth investigating, and the teacher's movement is an empirical object that can ground the perspectives of this controversy within a real use of social media. It is important not to issue sweeping generalizations about the impact of social media platforms, specifically, and social media, broadly, on democracy and grassroots organizing, but instead to examine, empirically, the complex politics of social movements within emergent media landscapes by examining the activities of users as situated in determinate sets of relations.

I come to this researching owing my personal commitment to the struggle for investment in public goods. I am a student of public education. From K-12 to higher education, I have benefited from the provision of public dollars towards matters of an educated populace in the United States. I do not claim impartiality in my approach to this project, for throughout the unfolding of the events discussed in this dissertation I was a participating advocate in the broader movement. I want greater public investment in all levels of education; and more importantly, I want the educators of the world to strike for this much needed reform. I say this because I see the process by which workers come to realize their power is more important than the outcome of any given strike. Throughout 2018 and 2019, I felt like I was living through a revolutionary period of history. I was glued to Facebook and Twitter for updates on the next set of teachers who would

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[56] Vaidhyanathan, 2021, 233.

potentially join the strike wave. Each state and city that added their voice to the cacophony only strengthened my enthusiasm. I have vivid memories of waking up and immediately checking my phone to see the newest videos of teachers rallying at the West Virginia state capitol.

When the strikes came to Denver, Colorado I was an early PhD student at CU Boulder. I was deeply involved in socialist organizing in the area, and I jumped at the chance to support the teachers that I thought were acting with bravery and integrity. In preparation for the strike, I interviewed Denver teachers for a newspaper article with my co-author Carlos Valdez, a teacher in Aurora, CO.[57] This article was circulated nationally amongst a small audience of socialists. The article is unabashedly political; my co-author and I identify the history of charter schools and neoliberal "education reform" as the problems motivating the would-be strike. The interviews we conducted with teachers at Denver Public Schools revealed that the assessment practices that controlled compensation was the most important issue for these workers, and the 93% of teachers that voted to authorize the strike confirmed that it was a widely felt concern.

Along with other socialists, I helped organize a crowdfunded strike support operation. We raised $8,555 through social media to purchase and distribute tamales to picket lines during the strike.[58] We worked in coalition with the Denver Classroom Teachers Association (DCTA) and a local immigrant-owned bakery in Denver, El Molino Bakery. We bought and handed out thousands of tamales to teachers, and on the cold February mornings of the strike, the tamales were always met with smiles. Carlos, my co-author, taught me that tamales were originally made for warriors by the Aztec people. The tamales were wrapped in corn husks, which allowed them

[57] Carlos Valdez and Brandon Daniels, "Ready to Strike against Low Pay in the Mile High City," *SocialistWorker.org*, January 5th, 2019, http://socialistworker.org/2019/01/25/ready-to-strike-against-low-pay-in-the-mile-high-city.

[58] "Tamales For Teachers, Organized by Carlos Immortalis Valdez," gofundme.com, accessed April 28, 2023, https://www.gofundme.com/f/tamales-for-teachers.

to be carried into battle. For these warriors of public education, the tamales were the perfect food for the picket line: one hand holding a sign and the other a warm tamale. Throughout each day of the strike, I organized early morning carpools shuttling students from CU Boulder to picket lines through the Denver metro area. We walked, chanted, and sang with the teachers, talked with them about the historic importance of their actions, and built solidarity with the students and parents of the community. I was even interviewed by a local televised news channel.[59] After the conclusion of the strike, I helped organize a panel hosted at CU Denver with teachers from Denver, and with teachers calling in from West Virginia, and Arizona called "The Fight for Public Education: Lessons of the Teacher Strikes." Like many of the events I discuss in this dissertation, we streamed the panel using Facebook Live.[60]

Supporting the Denver teachers was not just something I thought was a moral necessity. It was a practical means of deepening my knowledge of labor organizing, so that I could apply the lessons of striking teachers to my life. The circumstances of being a white, cisgender-male graduate student in Boulder, CO were dramatically different from the majority of teachers in the Denver area, a majority of whom were women and many of whom were women of color. But my conversations with teachers in interviews, on the picket lines, and in the gatherings after the fact, revealed a shared circumstance: we were all underpaid and hurt by the divestment from public education. During this period, I was an emerging leader in my graduate student labor union. The inspiration I drew from the year of teacher strikes leading up to January 2019 pushed me to organize my workplace in a manner like the teachers of the U.S. movement for public education.

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[59] "Denver Teachers Strike: 'Tamales For Teachers' Offers More Than Food," February 13, 2019, https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/tamales-teachers-strike-denver-schools-picket-lines/.
[60] "The Fight for Public Education: Lessons of the Teacher Strikes," *Facebook*, accessed April 28, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/denvercommunists/videos/2488398044521984.

Graduate students at CU Boulder made a paltry salary of $22,000 a year in 2019, and we were forced to pay roughly $1,800 a year in student fees back to our employer. This pressure was compounded by the ever-rising cost of living in Boulder and throughout Colorado, another commonality with the Denver teachers. Our union organized a campaign around the fees many felt were unjust, and we began pressuring university leaders to provide a waiver that covered these costs.[61] We were directly inspired by the teachers that used the language of "walkout" to describe their plans for collective action, and we scheduled a walkout of our own in early February 2019. At the same time, Los Angeles teachers were on strike and Denver teachers were taking their strike authorization vote. I organized a photograph of some of our members, and I posted it to the Denver Teachers United Facebook group (which later changed its name to Flip DPS Right Side Up). I am still proud of what I wrote 5 years ago:

> I'm a graduate student at CU Boulder, and I'm a member of CRC- CU Graduate Labor Union. We wanted to send our support to Denver teachers because your fight is our fight. We are a union of teaching assistants, instructors, and researchers fighting for a living wage in Colorado. Next Tuesday, hundreds of UCB graduate students will walk out of our classrooms and laboratories to demand a raise. We are inspired by Denver teachers. When we fight together we will win together!

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[61] "CU Boulder Grad Student Workers' Push for Union Comes amid National Movement," *Boulder Daily Camera*, February 8, 2019, https://www.dailycamera.com/ci_32440565/cu-boulder-grad-student-workers-push-union-comes.

Figure 1 - Graduate students at CU Boulder posing in front of a chalkboard with the words "Solidarity with Denver Teachers" written on it.

It took two more years of organizing, including letter writing, mass call-ins, a sit-in at an administrative building and another walkout before our demand was conceded from the administration. In 2021, the CU Boulder's Graduate School announced that all graduate students on appointment would have their fees covered in full. While our victory was not as dramatic as the 2018-2019 teacher strikes, it was intimately connected to the broader movement for public education. Graduate students watched the teacher strikes closely for lessons, and we applied the knowledge from movements before us to achieve our victory.

The point I will make throughout this dissertation is that striking is a technê—an embodied knowledge that is anchored by media. The media technologies that facilitated the movement I anaylze are not simply the ones powered by electricity. They are also the

connections between people that are observing, assessing, and applying the experiences of others into their own struggles. I, too, am arguably a medium of this movement. At each step of my analysis, my subjectivity is central to my methodology. I could not hope to—nor would I want to—separate my commitment to the labor movement, my experience organizing workers, or my socialist politics from analysis of the mediality of teacher strikes. The lack of "critical distance," if such a position is possible, benefits my study, for it situates my findings in the experiences that led me to produce this dissertation. By that same token, I do not pretend that the knowledge produced herein comes from an objective viewpoint; but rather, from the questions, concerns, research practices that are born out of my positionality.

The political context preceding the wave of teacher strikes in the United States is both immediate to the event and bound within the *longue durée*. Neoliberalism can be understood as a historical period beginning in the 1970s, whereby governments coordinated a reduction in spending on social services, deregulation of markets, and privatization of public goods. While neoliberalism is recognizable by material changes in global policy making, theorists have also pointed to the formation of a neoliberal subjectivity that shapes discourse by projecting political matters through the prism of market relations. The neoliberal subject, according to this view, is primed to view public issues as a consumer operating within a competitive marketplace. In rhetorical studies, the work of Robert Asen is essential for comprehending the effect of neoliberalism on public discourse about education. Across journal articles and books, Asen's work tracks the impact of neoliberal policy and subjectivity on discussions of public education. He writes that, "For a neoliberal public, competition frames social relations as a zero-sum game; one person's success and standing appear at the expense of another. In contrast to models of the public sphere and practices that seek wider opportunities for agency, a neoliberal public presents

actors with strategic advantages in limiting the agency and denying the autonomy of others."[62] It is difficult to imagine a notion of the "public good" within a neoliberal public, for the assumed competition between individuals hoping to maximize their value destroys the foundation on which publicly owned goods rely upon. Public education, which emerged from a collective desire for a literate and informed populace, is imagined in neoliberal ideology as a drain on scarce resources. Neoliberal efforts at transforming public education attempt to graft market relations by forcing schools to be in competition with one another.

Asen's book, *School Choice and the Betrayal of Democracy: How Market-Based Education Reforms Fails Our Communities,* examines neoliberal "education reform" in the United States and circulation of discourse about public education the context of neoliberalism. While the Bush era policy of No Child Left Behind implemented in 2001 was the first major milestone of neoliberal education reform, the 2016 election of Donald Trump and the appointment of Betsy DeVos to the secretary of education position was a definite acceleration of this trend. Neoliberalism had long ravaged public funding for education, but the appointment of a billionaire heiress with a long history of dismantling public education made this long crisis feel immediate. Asen writes, "By the time Betsy DeVos took office as the eleventh US secretary of education, public discourse on education reform had shifted dramatically to highlight themes of accountability, competition, and choice.[63] DeVos's appointment was followed by federal changes in education policy to provide public funding to private schools through vouchers and accelerate the growth of charter schools. For many teachers participating in the strikes, Betsy

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[62] Robert Asen, "Neoliberalism, the Public Sphere, and a Public Good," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 103, no. 4 (2017): 239.

[63] Robert Asen, *School Choice and the Betrayal of Democracy: How Market-Based Education Reform Fails Our Communities*, vol. 26 (Penn State Press, 2021), 145.

DeVos was a villain that embodied the trend of attacking public education. As I will demonstrate throughout this dissertation, the teacher strikes that swept across the United States revealed a fracture in the neoliberal view of public education, and in the words of Asen, the strikes were a moment of resisting a neoliberal public.

Chapter map

Chapter one will establish the intellectual and political framework for the knowledge produced by my dissertation. Drawing inspiration from rhetoric, I develop a set of theories equipped to study media and its relationship the rhetoric of contemporary strikes. The tradition of rhetoric provides a rich set of theories and methods for studying social movements, such as the language of publics for describing the consequences of circulatory discourse. One problematic that will define the theoretical work in this chapter is the issue of studying these events at a scale that matches both the widespread and highly localized instantiation of the strikes. I am proposing that my methods match the scale of the strikes, and accordingly, my methods move scales from chapter to chapter. I offer the theory of *scalar publics* to index the movement between "medial layers" in this dissertation. Across the chapters, I deploy the concept as follows:

- Chapter two: I consider the "in situ" scale of speeches given at strike rallies, and I use the method of rhetorical criticism of speeches to consider the context and effects of this speech act.

- Chapter three: I turn to the "networked" discourses of state-wide Facebook groups (like the one co-created by Jay O'Neal), and by constructing an archive of reflections about the use of this platform by teachers, I explore the conditions of possibility for rhetoric with respect to this medium.

- Chapter four: I use computational methods to analyze a corpus of tweets about the movement to consider the effects of these strikes at a "global" scale. Each method deployed at different levels enables my study to account for the mediality of this phenomenon.

Method is a critical component of each chapter, but ultimately method is in service of rhetorical analysis. To that end, chapter two will examine a speech given at a rally during the Los Angeles teacher strike. By taking a speech in the strike as the object of analysis, I unpack not only "the speech" but also the media infrastructures that anchor the strike's existence for its participants. I rely on the method of rhetorical criticism, but I interrogate this method alongside my treatment of this speech. I investigate how the process of entextualization, whereby the performance of a speech is rendered suitable for close textual analysis through transcription, disappears significant aspect s of the mediality of the object of speech. I hope to contribute to the study of public address by considering the technologies of publicity that make possible addressing the public of a rally. Before I move to studying the digital "platforms" of social media, I theorize a moment of platform oratory. I mean this literally: how does the platform on which a speaker delivers a speech affect the expression of strike rhetoric? What are the sociotechnical systems, and their embeddedness in natural technologies, that constituted this moment of public address?

In answering these questions, I turn to canonical theories of rhetoric, such as *ars memoria* and *ars pronuntiatio,* to theorize technê as a matter of mediality. In *The Art of Memory,* Francis Yates argues that the adoption of writing helped shift the mnemonic techniques of knowledge preservation towards the storage and retrieval of information as texts, leading to a subsequent

decline in memorization as a practiced art form.[64] Nonetheless, memory and delivery practices

augmented by communication technologies are still, at least partially, embodied forms of

knowledge. By giving attention to the forms of media that are used in contemporary oratorical

practices, I hope to contribute to a deeper understanding of the technologies of public address.

Just as the canons of rhetoric were originally attended for rhetorical pedagogy, so too does this

chapter make inroads to the practical lessons for speaking in and through media environments.

Chapter three examines the written and spoken record of teachers: specifically, their use

of media to encourage other teachers to join the strike. These accounts were published or

recorded in the months that followed the strike, and they are attempts by striking teachers to

teach others about the methods of their strike. The state-wide strikes in West Virginia, Kentucky,

Oklahoma, Colorado, North Carolina, and Arizona all occurred within a 6-month period, and

prior to the start of West Virginia's strike there was little if any organized effort to do the same

in each state. These teachers quickly learned how to make the strike a reality and actively taught

others how to do the same. Just as Tufekci's study included the voices of participants in the Arab

Spring, this chapter considers how the teachers experienced and advocated for the strikes to jump

to other locations. As such, this chapter uses a series of fragments obtained from YouTube

videos, in addition to printed and edited collections put together by teachers. I organize and

arrange these fragments into an archive of rhetoric about technologically-enabled teacher

activism to further theorize the conditions of media, especially the use of Facebook groups.

Zizi Papacharissi's studies of the Occupy movement demonstrate that the social

constitution of networked technologies has deeply impacted the experience of public discourse.

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[64] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, vol. 3., Book, Whole (London;New York; Routledge, 1999), https://go.exlibris.link/Cb5gr0Lg.

Affective publics provides a starting point for conceptually thickening an understanding of the mediality of Facebook groups used by teachers. Papacharissi's focus on social media platforms led her to describes the "structures of storytelling" that emerge on the Twitter platform. As an approach for understanding the emergence of publics that move the social, theories of storytelling structures help account for the impact of social media platforms on collective produced discourses. In this chapter, I argue that the archive of digital teacher activism reveals a pedagogical storytelling structure. This structure (perhaps unsurprisingly) is both a product of the social and cultural position of teachers in the United States and (perhaps more surprisingly) the affordances of the particular communication technology they used. By analyzing the storytelling structures, I approach an understanding of the imitation and spread of strike action throughout 2018 and 2019.

Chapter four showcases an experimental set of methods for computational analysis of large datasets organized around the use of hashtags in publicly posted tweets. By using a dataset of twitter posts (approximately 170,000 tweets) with the hashtag #RedForEd, I use a method of corpus analysis to explore these tweets both temporally and spatially. As Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles demonstrate in their book *Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice*, online discussions of social movements often utilize the hashtag symbol with a phrase that encapsulates the movement.[65] #RedForEd became the dominant phrase for referencing and tagging posts about the 2018-2019 teacher strike. It emerged out of practice used by teacher union organizers that asked all teachers to wear red shirts on a specific day of the week. These days were described as Red for Ed days, and they were useful for gauging the support of a group of teachers for political action around funding public education. The red shirts

provided visual reminders that the workforce of any given school building was united. The hashtag version of this phrase gained prominence following the 2018 teacher strikes, and it became a moniker for the movement writ large.

I am inspired in this goal by the scholarship of digital humanities and the principles of conducting digital rhetorical research without transforming human stories into reductive representations of data. I am hoping, instead, to tell a human story with data from the strikes. In doing so, I justify the selections I make with regard to the data that I analyze throughout the rest of the chapters. I attend to not only the specificity through which the form of my data matches the research questions of my project, but also reflects on the ethics of gathering data at scale. The promises of digital rhetorical scholarship, especially of the variety that uses computational processes to ask questions of large data sets, requires a reflective methodology that understands the social constitution of computational technology and digital data.[66] Just as I investigate the mediality of the strike's spread, I consider the conditions of possibility that contain my methodology and methods. As such, I reflect on the theory of constitutive rhetoric for understanding the formation of political subjects in/through/on networked publics.

By using software tools often described as "natural language processing," I investigate trends across thousands of tweets without individually reading all 170,000 tweets (which I estimate to contain about 9 million words). For example, I use a computational technique called Named Entity Recognition to quickly discover the references to geographical locations made in

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[66] Lev Manovich, "Trending: The Promises and the Challenges of Big Social Data," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities*, ed. Matthew K. Gold, NED-New edition (University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 460–75, https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctttv8hq.30.
Michael Zimmer, "Addressing Conceptual Gaps in Big Data Research Ethics: An Application of Contextual Integrity," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 2 (April 1, 2018).

these posts.[67] By visualizing these locations and their relations to the time of strikes, I will gain a sense of the spatial and temporal circulation of the hashtag and the ideas of the movement. This method will generate insights about the rhetoric of strike protest at a global scale, and by rhetorically tracing the circulation of this hashtag, I analyze the effects of the Twitter as a communication technology on the teachers' movement.

Finally, the conclusion argues that these strikes matter for reasons far greater than the fact that many of the teachers used social media and other communication technologies. Indeed, the nature of media bears on the burning questions that confront movements for economic and social justice. The changing scales, both in the balance of forces and the technologies of publicity, make the concern for mediality more pressing. I hope to offer useful prescriptions for movements engaging with media based in the reality of my study. Further, the methodological journey you are about to begin will intervene into the story of rhetoric. The conclusion will be an opportunity to assess these interventions in light of their shared arguments. The discrete cultural setting of teacher strikes provides an opportunity to consider the appropriateness of the concepts and methods of rhetoric for apprehending the effects of communication technologies on contemporary expressions of social movement activity. Throughout the dissertation, I believe I will find that the situation depends on media.

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[67] Alan Ritter et al., "Named Entity Recognition in Tweets: An Experimental Study," in *Proceedings of the 2011 Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing* (EMNLP 2011, Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.: Association for Computational Linguistics, 2011), 1524–34, https://aclanthology.org/D11-1141.

Chapter 1: The Scale of the Public Rhetoric

Thus far in this dissertation, I have introduced the story of the teacher strikes, or at least a version of that story, and set up the research questions that guide the rest of this dissertation. There is more to this story than my view that these teachers acted with bravery. Indeed, the communicative practices of teachers during their protests offer important lessons for the discipline of rhetoric. As I show in this chapter, there are active sites of rhetorical scholarship developing theories to understand the relationship between social movements and media. This chapter outlines the academic literature that informs my investigation of teacher strikes, and it sets forth the two main concepts that I will develop and further theorize through a consideration of this historical phenomenon. I take care to review the literature as a process of conceptual thickening, rather than merely a laundry list of published works.

I am interested, first, in the study of "publics", the public sphere, or public rhetoric as it has manifested in studies of the *rhetoric of social movements*. Second, I am interested in "scale" as both a feature of *digital rhetoric* and a contested matter of importance for rhetorical methods. The theoretical work of publics and scales takes place in the disputes over their meaning, usefulness as theory, and implications. The terms have not remained stable, and part of the reason I will review the literature pertaining to these concepts is to trace the changes over time. Thus, throughout this chapter I tell conceptual stories of publics and scales, and toward the end I will consider how these stories shape this dissertation and each other. Moreover, the areas of rhetoric of social movements and digital rhetoric encompass decades of rhetorical knowledge generated in service of understanding rhetorical discourse. Social movements, as a persistent feature of the political landscape in the United States, have been heavily studied by rhetorical scholars seeking to theorize the process and effects of protests for social change. The persuasive

effects of technology, and digital media in particular, have also been studied by rhetorical scholars. Taken together, these subfields are some of the most active research areas in the discipline of rhetoric. The methods and question-driving-problematics of digital rhetoric and social movement publics provide my study of teacher strikes with conceptual resources and a continuity with the decades of previous scholarship. However, there is, I contend, a uniqueness to the teacher strikes that has yet to be captured in the theoretical terms of rhetoric. As I will argue, studies of publics often lack sufficient concern for mediality, a mediality that attunes the theory of publics to the specificity of their material of recording, transmission, preservation, etc. And studies of digital rhetoric tend to lack an explicit theorization of scale. At the end of this chapter, I consider how a theory of *scalar publics* can contribute to future analysis of social movements making use of traditional and emergent media.

On Publics

Leland Griffin notes in 1952 that "historical movements" are something that concerns rhetoricians. He argues that within the turning of history, there are opportunities for individual rhetors to make a case for their vision of the world. Skilled orators leading these movements were already acceptable objects of rhetorical analysis, but the broader movements could mean even more to rhetoric. Speeches given in front of mass audiences, such as in the March on Washington, were clearly examples of "public address." But, as Griffin writes, "Nevertheless, the belief has taken increasing hold that approaches to the study of public address other than the biographical ought to be encouraged."[1] Social movements, by nature of their mass character, required a methodological adjustment for rhetoricians. After rhetoric's departure from the object

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[1] Leland M. Griffin, "The Rhetoric of Historical Movements," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 38, no. 2 (April 1, 1952): 184–88, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335635209381762.

of study as exclusively speech, social movements, and all of their discursive manifestations,

emerged in the late 1960s as a prominent area of research within the discipline. Scholars

working in the rhetoric of social movements have studied the process by which people come

together to create meaning, mobilize participants, and utilize a variety of creative tactics to

leverage social change. While public address can be a component of this process, rhetoricians

have developed interests in other modalities of social movement communication. Bodies[2],

performances[3], and places[4] are some of the objects turned towards in place of or alongside

oratory, and each of them highlights the unique modes of persuasion often used by social

movement participants. These studies contested the notion that public discourse is merely the

institutional voices of government actors, and solidified the idea that the expressions of dissent in

social movements constituted a legitimate object of study for understanding the use of symbolic

resources in the political arena.

Accordingly, Gerald Hauser called for a turn to "vernacular rhetorics" as a means of

studying the discourses of ordinary people, in an attempt to understand, at least partially, the

consequences of social movement activity on, or as, matters of public opinion. He writes, "The

discourses by which public opinions are expressed, experienced, and inferred includes the broad

range of symbolic exchanges whereby social actors seek to induce cooperation, from the formal

speech to the symbolically significant nonverbal exchange and from practical arguments to

aesthetic expression."[5] This is an important move for rhetoric because not only is there a shift in

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[2] Kevin Michael DeLuca, "Unruly Arguments: The Body Rhetoric of Earth First!, ACT UP, and Queer Nation," *Argumentation and Advocacy* 36, no. 1 (1999): 9–21.
[3] Dwight Conquergood, "Ethnography, Rhetoric, and Performance," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78, no. 1 (1992): 80–97; Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Touring 'Cancer Alley,' Louisiana: Performances of Community and Memory for Environmental Justice," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (2003): 226–52.
[4] Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook, "Location Matters: The Rhetoric of Place in Protest," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 3 (August 1, 2011): 257–82, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2011.585167.
[5] Hauser, 91.

the object of analysis (institutional rhetors), but there is also a shift towards a wider

understanding of discourse as inclusive of potentially all types of human expressivity. This view

decenters the rhetoric of individual social movement leaders in constituting discursive spaces;

instead, it privileges the ongoing interactions of ordinary people. While not specific to social

movements, Hauser criticizes attempts to study public opinion through social scientific polling

methods. He argues that rhetoric can uniquely contribute to the study of public opinion with a

rhetorical perspective. He writes: "To revive a rich sense of discourse as the basis for public

opinion, the theory of public opinion itself must be informative of how rhetorically engaged

actors deliberate over social, political, and cultural issues. *Such a rehabilitation must widen the*

discursive arena to include vernacular exchanges, in addition to those of institutional actors"[6] In

Hauser's example of this methodology, he narrates an anecdotal experience he had in Greece

prior to a presidential election. By paying attention to the everyday experiences of political

discourse, such as banners in the street or mass rallies held by political parties, Hauser examines

the everydayness of rhetorical exchanges through vernacular media, and in the case of a political

or social movement, the function of rhetoric in constituting its own political arena.

Alongside vernacular rhetoric, concepts such as the public sphere, publics, and

counterpublics have enjoyed a fruitful life in the realm of rhetorical theory. Jurgen Habermas's

dissertation, later published as a book, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere,* made

note of the relationship between the nascent industry of printed news, literature sales, and the

ritual of middle-class Europeans discussing these texts with others outside of their homes in

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[6] Gerard A. Hauser, "Vernacular Dialogue and the Rhetoricality of Public Opinion," *Communication Monographs* 65, no. 2 (June 1998): 80, emphasis in original.

places like coffee shops and salons.[7] Habermas marveled at the potential for rational dialogue to create a social power capable of shaping the activities of the state, but he maintained that the conditions under which this "public sphere" had emerged in the nineteenth century—particularly the economies of mass media—constrained its democratic potential. The concept derived from this observation, the public sphere, caught on as a theory in various fields for discussing the practices of democracy, dialogue and deliberation, and the role of news media in political culture. Public sphere theory is a broad body of literature that spans disciplines as far as political theory to information sciences.

Hauser noted that rhetoric's engagement with the public sphere took on the concern for democracy, partially through the parallel tradition initiated by John Dewey. He summarized this relationship best in his essay "Civil Society and the Public Sphere," which connects the intellectual history of European thought to models of public opinion formation used in rhetorical theory. Civil society, a concept of the Enlightenment, is a way of understanding the social organization of people in relationship to a state. Through a network of interactions, people discussed shared matters of concern in ways that often resulted in a widely understood, if somewhat elusive, "public opinion" that could have political consequences. As even Hauser concedes, the theory of this process is highly idealized, deeply specific to the conditions of European history, and it fails to manifest in the contemporary relationship between media, politics, and society. Nevertheless, "public opinion" has maintained its cultural relevance as an object that is mediated by polls, news, and political actors. Hauser, by extending Habermas, notes that the object of "public opinion" sometimes displaces the public sphere as the object that

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[7] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, 1st MIT Press pbk, Book, Whole (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1991).

influences the state, and the decline of the public sphere as a site of dispute and contestation can be explained significantly by the rise of public opinion as a cultural object that is purported to reveal the "truth" about the views of ordinary people.

As Kendall Phillips pointedly noted, the use of public sphere theory in rhetoric was almost always accompanied by a narrative of decline or pathology. The narrative goes something like this: critical-rational dialogue would be the best means to achieve a fair and democratic society, if only it were not for the misunderstandings or fragmentation of culture or mass media that plagued every actually-existing public sphere. There is a certain telos to the studies of the public sphere that hope to rectify its failings and herald a new age of peaceful communication and democratic governance. Among other assumptions (impartiality, intersubjectivity, rationality), Phillips argues that public sphere theory is built on the assumption that consensus should be central to public spheres and, thus, to rhetorical scholarship. He writes, "The public sphere allows us to obscure the complexity of and diversity of contemporary discourse by excluding the marginal and resistant, by bracketing the differences that motivate dissent, and by elevating itself to the exclusion of other sites of dispute."[8] The theory of the singular public sphere as an ideal space of managing civil society through impartial dialogue privileges flawed assumptions about the nature of democracy and the sources of oppression. To that end, Hauser suggested "the" public sphere be recast as multiple, and advocates for an enhanced understanding of "publicness":

> If my analysis has any merit, it is shifting focus away from the political role of a unitary
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> public sphere and toward the communicative and epistemological functions of a

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[8] Kendall R. Phillips, "The Spaces of Public Dissension: Reconsidering the Public Sphere," *Communication Monographs* 63, no. 3 (September 1, 1996): 231–48, https://doi.org/10.1080/03637759609376391.

multiplicity of spheres, in shifting focus away from the bourgeois public sphere and toward the rhetorical conditions of 'publicness' that underwrite the latticed and reticulate nature of public spheres.[9]

The multiple publics perspective has significantly—and productively—underwritten studies of the rhetorical dynamics of social movements since the late-1990s.

Given the aforementioned concerns, there has been a movement in public sphere studies away from ideas of "dialogue," "consensus," and singularity in favor of a more agonistic view consistent with Phillips' "spaces of dissent." Much of this conceptualization has occurred under the banner of "counterpublics." While Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge are credited with having coined the term in 1972 (*Gegenöffentlichkeit*)[10], Nancy Fraser's famous essay, published in 1990, introduced the notion of "subaltern counterpublics," by which she referred to "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses."[11] Counterpublics made note of the exclusions from the idea of singular public sphere, whereby systems of oppression (sexism, colonialism, racism, etc.) and the concentrated ownership of media technologies suppressed the voices that were assumed by some to be included in the broad category of "the public." Fraser's key point is that individuals and groups who were excluded from the purportedly singular, majoritarian "public sphere" found alternatives to situate their own discussions and discursive actions. Subaltern counterpublics (or feminist counterpublics, or Black counterpublics, or decolonial counterpublics…) are spaces

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[9] Gerard A. Hauser, "Civil Society and the Principle of the Public Sphere," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 31, no. 1 (1998): 38.

[10] Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *Public Sphere and Experience: Analysis of the Bourgeois and Proletarian Public Sphere* (Verso Books, 2016).

[11] Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text*, no. 25/26 (1990): 67, https://doi.org/10.2307/466240.

whereby those excluded conversed with each other, and in some cases, used spaces of discourse to launch social movements[12].

Counterpublic theory also contains a robust debate about the standards of "counter," the relationship between discourse and oppression, and the relationship between subordinate groups and the state. Rob Asen has asked, "What is counter about counterpublics?"[13] Dan Brower answered by identifying these key characteristics of counterpublics: "oppositionality, constitution of a discursive arena, and a dialectic of retreat from and engagement with other publics."[14] He offers these characteristics to avoid a reductionism in which analyzing multiple publics becomes a project of taxonomy. As a theory, counterpublics guide scholars to examine the discourses of marginalized communities, and the theory considers the relationship between these discourses and the rhetoric of hegemonic actors. This articulated goal of counterpublic scholarship introduces difficult questions about the basis for defining a counterpublic. Are counterpublics defined by the identity of participants? Are the discourses of marginalized communities always "counter" to hegemonic ideals? Catherine Squires also intervenes in this debate, casting doubt on the necessity of describing certain publics as "counter." "Differentiating the 'dominant' public sphere from 'counterpublics' solely on the basis of group identity," Squires writes, "tends to obscure other important issues, such as how constituents of these publics interact and intersect, or how politically successful certain publics are in relation to others."[15] As Squires points out, rather than attempting to understand the heterogeneity of

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[12] E.g. Dana L. Cloud, "Doing Away with Suharto—and the Twin Myths of Globalization and New Social Movements," in *Counterpublics and the State* (SUNY Press, 2001), 235–64.

[13] Robert Asen, "Seeking the 'Counter,' in Counterpublics," *Communication Theory* 10, no. 4 (November 2000): 424–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2000.tb00201.x.

[14] Daniel C. Brouwer, "Communication as Counterpublic," in *Communication As...: Perspectives on Theory* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2006), 195–208, https://doi.org/10.4135/9781483329055.

[15] Catherine R. Squires, "Rethinking the Black Public Sphere: An Alternative Vocabulary for Multiple Public Spheres," *Communication Theory* 12, no. 4 (November 2002): 447.

marginalized groups, counterpublic theory runs the risk of reifying discourses from marginalized communities as inherently subversive or transgressive, regardless of the actual discourse. Accordingly, Squires proposes a deeper model for understanding the discourses of marginalized people without assuming the intention or function of their discourse. As in the case of Black journalism, the subject of Squires's scholarship, some discourses are not intended for "mainstream" audiences. These discourses may circulate among members of the same community, but in this "enclave public," there is no guarantee that the discourses are intended to address, much less transform, wider publics. Accordingly, Squires calls for a deeper theoretical and empirical consideration of the rhetorical conditions of publicness and whether discourses are intended to "counter" something else.

The ongoing conceptualization of counterpublics is complemented by empirical studies that ground these and related concepts in analyses of the rhetoric of social movements. For example, the Rob Asen and Dan Brower's edited collection *Counterpublics and the State* is filled with examples of social movement discourses.[16] From prison writing to AIDS activism and Black journalism, the chapter authors use the concept of counterpublics to explore how a variety of dissident groups create in-group communication, deliberate over strategy, and express themselves to and negotiate with broader publics. Similarly, Christina Foust, Amy Pason and Kate Zittlow Rogness's book entitled, *What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics*, is also filled with chapter-length case studies of social movements in various parts of the world and deep reflection on the usefulness of the term counterpublics for understanding the circulation of discourse in international and contemporary

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[16] Robert Asen and Daniel C. Brouwer, *Counterpublics and the State* (SUNY Press, 2001).

social movement settings.[17] I mention these studies because they highlight what I see as necessary for this dissertation: a treatment of publicity grounded in the empirical and the vernacular. And it is this long line of empirical scholarship that I wish to join and augment, by shifting what rhetoric typically understand as empirical and vernacular.

Counterpublics theory is especially useful for understanding social movement processes, for it pushes scholars to look past the "external rhetoric," such as press releases and speeches as Karma Chávez describes it, towards the "internal rhetoric" of enclavic counterpublic spaces:[18] that is to say, towards an understanding of how decisive elements of persuasion and world-making occur in the behind-the-scenes of social movements. There can be instrumental uses of persuasion in these spaces, such as in the debates between activists over strategy and tactics. But there can also be a deeper constitutive function of counterpublic rhetoric, for counterpublics are spaces used in crafting identity, constructing meaning with others, and challenging negative representations of a group. Counterpublic enclaves are the spaces in which this internal rhetoric occurs, and the circulation of discourse within them offers the participants a shared vocabulary and an imagined community. The enclavic dimension of Chávez's (and Squires's) work is a reminder that while certain discourses gain publicity amongst wider audiences, sometimes counterpublic discourse is addressed and intended only for members of a limited public. It is the attention to the specificity of discourse and its effects that makes Chávez a model for social movement research. Teachers circulated discourses in enclaves to prepare for their strikes, while

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[17] Raymie E. McKerrow et al., *What Democracy Looks Like: The Rhetoric of Social Movements and Counterpublics*, ed. Christina R. Foust, Amy Pason, and Kate Zittlow Rogness, 1st edition (Tuscaloosa: University Alabama Press, 2017).

[18] Karma R. Chávez, "Counter-Public Enclaves and Understanding the Function of Rhetoric in Social Movement Coalition-Building," *Communication Quarterly* 59, no. 1 (January 31, 2011): 1–18, https://doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2010.541333.

also projecting their discourses to wider audiences. As I explore in chapter 3, social media platforms facilitated a multivariate publicity, mixing enclave discourses with "viral" publicness.

Critical to my understanding of the teacher strikes is the notion that their strikes were a public *process*. Publicity is both a channel for strike participants to grow their audience and the constitutive form that drives future actions. The teachers contested the vocabulary of public discourse, used channels of publicity, and in the final act, disrupted the normal operations of an essential public institution. The teachers attempted to articulate a vision of the public good that emerged through a contested political battle in discursive spaces.[19] The language of publics offers a useful set of theoretical tools for describing the mediation of the strikes, the consequences of rhetorical action within the teacher's discursive spaces, and the discourses and vocabularies of their struggle. Michael Warner defines publics, when understood as multiple and overlapping rather as notion of a singular public sphere, as the sets of "relation[s] among strangers" that enables writing or speech or other forms of communication to have an indefinite audience through the circulation of discourse.[20] As such, it is through the language of publics that scholars can begin to explore the imprint of media upon the circulation of discourses within social movement contexts. Rather than trying to decide if teacher strikes fit the form of previous social movements, or if they are strictly "counterpublic," Warner challenges social movement and public sphere scholars to investigate the "contradictions and perversities" of the discourses shaping public controversies, including (in the case of this dissertation) teacher strikes. Warner elaborates:

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[19] Asen, "Neoliberalism, the Public Sphere, and a Public Good."

[20] Michael Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (2002): 55.

In a public, indefinite address and self-organized discourse disclose a lived world whose arbitrary closure both enables that discourse and is contradicted by it. Public discourse, in the nature of its address, abandons the security of its positive, given audience. It promises to address anybody. It commits itself in principle to the possible participation of any stranger. It therefore puts at risk the concrete world that is its given condition of possibility. This is its fruitful perversity. Public discourse postulates a circulatory field of estrangement that it must then struggle to capture as an addressable entity. No form with such a structure could be very stable. The projective nature of public discourse — which requires that every characterization of the circulatory path become material for new estrangements and recharacterizations — is an engine for (not necessarily progressive) social mutation.[21]

It is Warner's attention to the mediality of public discourse that makes his theoretical schemas captivating—but of course he was not the first theorists to posit a relationship between the media, publics, and the circulation of discourse.[22]

Crucially, Warner researched the nature of media in the published discourses of the American Revolution, and he accounts for the specificities of the medium of printed newsletters and pamphlets in the circulation of revolutionary discourses. He writes, "The history of printing,

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[21] Warner, 81.

[22] Prior to Habermas's (1962) "public sphere," there was Q. D. Leavis's (1932) *Fiction and the Reading Public*, which developed a set of quasi-ethnographic methods for literary criticism. Leavis was dissatisfied with the literary scholarship that seemed content with drawing interpretations from the canonically defined "great" novels. As she writes, "Here are recorded the plots and histories of all the well-known and many of the less well-known English novels; but there is no indication that they ever had readers, much less that they played any part in shaping the human spirit and were shaped by it; and this method precludes any serious discussion of values." Missing from literary criticism was a method for studying what people were actually reading, and the systems of production and distribution that enabled the circulation of texts amongst a literate population. It is this view that led Leavis to embrace the notion of multiple reading publics, such as book-borrowing publics, newspaper publics, magazine publics, etc. Crucially, Leavis identified the 20th century English institutions of public libraries as a key point of emergence for these publics. Leavis' publics are akin to, and in a certain sense prefigure, Warner's definition of publics, for they instantiate what was occurring in England at the time: relative strangers were reading texts.

in short, cannot even define its subject properly without asking about the history of the public and other political conditions of discourse."[23] His investigation of printing did not assume the existence of the printing press as an entity that was divorced from a cultural or political context; rather, he presented the constitution of this medium and its discourses as a set of political conditions, one facet of which was the structured labors and machinery often described as technology.

My primary contribution to publics theory is the analysis of mediality; but as Warner demonstrates, this is by no means a novel intervention. Mediality is both an explicit and implicit concern flowing through different threads of publics theory, and while it is occasionally ignored in favor of polls of "public opinion;" there has been a persistent attempt to explore the relationship between how people give attention to texts, the nature of media that anchors those texts, and social movement discourse. Rhetorical scholars, especially, have continued this thread.

Phaedra Pezzullo's essay, "Resisting 'national breast cancer awareness month': the rhetoric of counterpublics and their cultural performances" offers another important conceptual and methodological intervention in this regard. Her essay examines a coalition of activists working to raise awareness about environmental injustice and criticize the prevailing corporate-sponsored approach to breast cancer awareness. She uses the method of participant observation to understand the discourses of an activist group, The Toxic Links Coalition, and by being physically present during a "toxic tour," she uses her skills of rhetorical criticism to understand the function of discourses within this unique counterpublic space. As she notes, the methodology of studying publics and counterpublics prior to her essay consisted primarily in analyzing written

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[23] Michael Warner, *The Letters of the Republic: Publication and the Public Sphere in Eighteenth-Century America* (Harvard University Press, 1990).

texts from secondary sources like newspapers, magazines, or congressional transcripts. In this methodology, there was a persistent inability to record and analyze a range of cultural performances, insofar as they were largely illegible or irrelevant to dominant archival practices. Participant observation, and other field methods, compel critics, as Pezzullo describes it, "to travel to public spaces to feel, to observe, and to participate in cultural performances firsthand. It also helps critics to consider the rhetorical force of counterpublics and of cultural performances, and to consider that the ways in which we interact with and engage specific publics can influence our judgments."[24] Her argument for using participant observation for studying cultural performances helped initiate a surge of rhetorical scholarship utilizing field methods.[25]

While field methods are useful for uncovering the rhetorical discourses that elude documentation and archival, it is perhaps less well-adapted to studying the mediation of social movement publics through digital and analog technologies.[26] Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples examined the highly mediated 1999 World Trade Organization protests in Seattle, WA to understand the rhetorical conditions of protest in a mass media environment. Their theory, "public screens," offers a correction to the theories of the public sphere that valorize critical rational debate, and that sideline the conditions of mediation of public discourse. Inspired by Jacques Derrida and John Peters, they declare, "In counterpoint to a public sphere underwritten by consensus through communication or communion via conversation, dissemination reminds us that all forms of communication are founded on the risk of not

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[24] Phaedra C. Pezzullo, "Resisting 'National Breast Cancer Awareness Month': The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and Their Cultural Performances," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 4 (November 2003): 361.

[25] Sara L. McKinnon et al., *Text+ Field: Innovations in Rhetorical Method* (Penn State Press, 2016); Michael Middleton et al., *Participatory Critical Rhetoric: Theoretical and Methodological Foundations for Studying Rhetoric in Situ* (Lexington Books, 2015).

[26] Pezzullo's book *Toxic Tourism* includes a final chapter that explores this very dilemma, which I will further explore in chapter 2.

communicating."[27] This insight becomes centrally important in the context of destructive protests being captured on film and disseminated to a national audience of television viewers. The rhetoric of the protest cannot, in this model, assume to communicate its arguments in the traditional manner of the public sphere. In order to study this phenomenon closely, DeLuca and Peeple offer two sites of analysis: television screens and newspaper screens (or the visual layout of printed news). After offering some protests artifacts to understand the intention behind the protests (e.g., alternative newspaper and early websites), they move to focus on how the visual rhetoric of the protest was disseminated by public screens. In the television coverage of the event, the images of smashed windows and clashes between protests and the police created a spectacle for national consumption. These "image events" served to increase television coverage of the protests in Seattle, and as a result, gave publicity to the anti-free trade arguments offered by the protestors. Similarly, by analyzing mainstream newspaper coverage of the protests, DeLuca and Peeples found that the increased coverage of the protest also increased the protestor's criticisms of the WTO. They conclude, by way of their rhetorically-driven content analysis, that the media environment of the late 90s was defined significantly by the rules of the public screen, whereby publicity is awarded based on principles of hypermediacy, spectacularity, cacophony, and distraction. By adapting the theory of publics to what was then a "new" media environment, the method used by these scholars contributes to an understanding of the rhetorical conditions of publicness in contemporary social movement settings.

DeLuca and Peeples's essay was rooted in the historical moment in which it was written, and while they reference the Internet's potential as a mode of publicity, they correctly analyze

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[27] Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen: Democracy, Activism, and the 'Violence' of Seattle," *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 19, no. 2 (June 2002): 130.

the most prominent forms of media at the time, newspaper and television. However, the Internet has changed public sphere scholarship. Cultural anthropologist Mizuko Ito introduced the term "networked publics" to highlight the ways that "publics can be reactors, (re)makers and (re)distributors, engaging in shared culture and knowledge through discourse and social exchange as well as through acts of media reception."[28] Rhetoricians Jennifer Borda and Bailey Marshall examine how digitally-networked counterpublics function to bolster social movement activity and offer activists new avenues for challenging mainstream publics.[29] They explore the hashtag #SayHerName, its circulation on platforms like Twitter, and its connection to the broader Black Lives Matter movement. In order to analyze this campaign, Borda and Marshall textually analyze a report written by activists (The African American Policy Forum) and released on the Internet. Borda and Marshall trace the circulation of this report, and its associated hashtag, and discover that it resulted in concrete changes in journalistic practices relating to the murder of Black women. Their analysis demonstrates the interconnection between social media websites and traditional news coverage of global events by studying an activist campaign highlighting the disparity in news coverage for Black women killed by the police. The circulation of the hashtag first began in Black counterpublics, but its viral messages eventually attracted the attention of mainstream journalists. The idea of "networked publics" represents the most recent culmination of publics theory adapted to a new media environment, and as such, it will be a recurring reference point for this dissertation.

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[28] Mizuko Ito, "Introduction," in *Networked Publics* (MIT Press, 2008): 2.

[29] Jennifer L. Borda and Bailey Marshall, "Creating a Space to #SayHerName: Rhetorical Stratification in the Networked Sphere," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 106, no. 2 (April 2, 2020): 133–55, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2020.1744182.

Public sphere theory, and its theoretical augmentations, provides three lines of analysis. First, networked and vernacular publics can give attention to the discourses produced and circulated by ordinary people. By examining the "relative strangers" that fill the object of publics, this theory enhances the typical rhetorical concept of audience by situating the discourses within a field of on-going interactions. A second and related aspect of public sphere theory that I intend to draw upon is the analysis of circulation as a constitutive mode of publicity. In attempting to understand how networked media, like the Internet, has affected media practices and publicity, I examine the contradictions and perversities (a la Warner) that mark the formation of publicity. And finally, there is a need to not only study "public spheres" but also the media environments within and through which they emerge. The mediality of publics, whether networked, printed, or spoken, textures the discourse. In order to further my investigation into the situation of media, I turn to the literature of digital rhetoric to further explicate how rhetorical scholars have studied the process of publics in a digital age.

On Scale

As in the case of publics, "scale" is a word with many meanings. My intuitive understanding of the term is based in the sciences: scale as a function of measurement or tool of comparison as in the case of a map, whereby the scale indicates the ratio of representation. There is also its definition as a means of ascending, as in the case of a ladder (*scala* is Latin for ladder), or as in scaling a mountain. There is the musical meaning of scale as an ordering of notes set to ascending or descending pitches. "Scalar" in mathematics refers to a component that makes up a vector space, or a set of quantities that can be manipulated (scaled) through addition and multiplication. And there is the physiological notion of scale, as in "Part of an overlapping arrangement of many small, flat and hard pieces of keratin covering the skin of an animal,

particularly a fish or reptile."[30] For the purpose of this dissertation, I define scale as a method of enlargement and condensation that isolates select characteristics of a phenomenon, characteristics that are made visible through this method, and at other times, made invisible the layers that occlude background processes, functions, or textures of mediality.

Scale is hardly a central concept in the field of rhetoric, especially as compared to the idea of publics. However, this term is often operating in the background of many investigations of digital technologies and of rhetorical practices more generally. For example, rhetoricians often employ the method of *close* textual analysis, which could be understood as a scale for isolating, scrutinizing, and ultimately comprehending the subtle patterns and meanings of a text. Similarly, rhetorical investigations into networked publics often make note of the characteristics of electronic communication that enable the rapid dissemination of discourse. In order to study the effects of spread, scholars provide evidence to make claims about the significance of a particular example. Digital texts (e.g., tweets, videos, images, etc.) can be comprehended by the introduction of scale. Often this scale is a quantitative representation of the number of people that interacted with a digital text (liked, watched, retweeted, etc.), and it helps readers to grasp the attention digital text may have received. Scale is a matter of methodology, and in digital contexts it important to consider the varied uses of scale, and the movements between scales. By reviewing the literature of digital rhetoric, I hope to trace how scales are invoked, and consider the "rhetorics of scale" that are associated with digital technology.

Digital rhetoric is an intellectual formation that examines the relationships between and among technologies, symbol-use, and persuasion. According to Douglas Eyman, "The term

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[30] "Scale," in *Wiktionary*, July 3, 2022, https://en.wiktionary.org/w/index.php?title=scale&oldid=67607808.

'digital rhetoric' is perhaps most simply defined as the application of rhetorical theory (as analytic method or heuristic for production) to digital texts and performances."[31] To get at this relationship, Eyman strives to combine the Western canon of rhetoric (including Greco-Roman, Medieval, and contemporary theories) and a consideration of websites, user interfaces, and other "texts and performances" mediated through computers. One goal of this scholarship is to deepen an analytical understanding of the process of textual composition within a new medium, reflecting a need to adapt the techniques of rhetorical pedagogy to an emergent landscape of new media. And for this reason, Eyman sees digital rhetoric as a necessary contribution to contemporary practices of teaching writing: "These changes amount to what is essentially an epistemological shift from a view of the solitary writer who has available only limited material means of production and often no recourse to distribution or circulation of the work, to a view of composition as a collaborative activity that engages multiple means of production and that occurs within digital networks that provide broad opportunities for publication and circulation."[32] Digital, as the operative keyword, has been disputed by some in favor of terms like *networked, new, electronic, virtual, etc.,* but for the purposes of this dissertation, "digital rhetoric" will be the term I use to refer to the broader study of technology and rhetoric. I do so to further the links between rhetorical studies of digital media and the broader intellectual formation known as the digital humanities.

Beyond approaches to pedagogy, digital rhetoric for Eyman has enabled theorists to understand the suasive force of software, platforms, and other systems of digital rhetoric. Theories of rhetorical ecology, for example, can enable rhetorical critics to understand the

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[31] Douglas Eyman, *Digital Rhetoric: Theory, Method, Practice*, Book (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015): 13.
[32] Eyman, 95-6.

structures that pre-exist the composition of digital text. He builds on the work of Jenny Edbaur, whose model of "rhetorical ecology" was intended to supplant the Bitzerian approach of the "rhetorical situation."[33] This shift has important implications for methods that seek to study digital texts as they occur in a particular media landscape. According to Eyman, "Ecological systems as I see them can also be articulated in terms of scale (that is, the methodological lens can be focused narrowly or widely): digital ecologies can be identified as micro-ecologies (as in the work/portfolio of a single individual), midrange ecologies (which contextualize the work of collaborators, departments, research groups), or macro-ecologies (institutions, fields, disciplines, nations)."[34] Eyman's identifies an ecological approach to rhetoric as helpful for conceptualizing the levels of interaction within the theories of the rhetorical-ecological system, and such a view complements the definition of scale I forward here.

Moreover, Damien Pfister's *Networked Media: Networked Rhetorics* takes the ancient concern for deliberative democracy as a problematic to be examined in the discourses of early Internet political blogs.[35] He prefers the term "networked" over that of digital, for it reflects a focus on the social connections enabled by Internet communication technologies. Pfister offers a definition of rhetoric as, "that expressive art which shapes attention patterns capable of coordinating and transforming interaction."[36] Attention, as a key figure of this conceptualization of rhetoric, is a core concept that informs the study of the movement of discourses in a digital environment. Pfister examines moments from the 2000s-era "blogosphere" and the intervention

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[33] Jenny Edbauer, "Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecologies," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (2005): 5–24.

[34] Eyman, 89-90.

[35] Damien Smith Pfister, *Networked Media, Networked Rhetorics* (Penn State University Press, 2014).

[36] Pfister, 31.

of bloggers into public discourse. His case studies show the ability of these bloggers to direct attention of ordinary citizens and journalists towards events that would otherwise be ignored. As a corollary to publicity, he argues that attention is both a consequence and cause of discourse in digital media. Attention can be theorized as manifesting from how people use technology and interact with discourse and is a major feature in the constitution of publics.

Pfister's invocation of the rhetorical tradition through the theories of Kenneth Burke has a distinct focus on communication, political advocacy, and democratic culture. While Pfister largely praises networked technologies for lowering costs of publication, accelerating communication, and archiving information in an accessible manner, he reminds scholars that similar rhetorical forces were at work in earlier times: "Even before the growth of the internet as a medium for public communication, the work of the public was still done through the mass media, social movements, and citizen gatherings on a different scale, in different forms, and with different levels of success than the Athenian agora or bourgeois public sphere claimed."[37] Pfister's study of a particular genre of political discourse (Internet blogs about political scandals in the early Aughts) provides a theory for understanding the shaping of attention at work on digital platforms. What has changed between the Athenian agora and the blogosphere, though, is the scale at which discourse functions and circulates. Not merely quantitatively, Pfister's study is unique because of how it captures an emergent media landscape; and while the blogosphere is less relevant today than in the early 2000s, the dynamics of scalar media has only continued to expand and proliferate in layers.

Laurie Gries's *Still life with rhetoric: a new materialist approach for visual rhetoric* proposes a method for studying the circulation of visual texts without recourse to the canonical

[37] Pfister, 30.

theories of rhetoric. Indeed, Gries proposes a different conceptualization of the instrumental

frameworks that, traditionally, have focused primarily on human agents crafting texts. According

to Gries, "rhetoric, especially in a digitally mediated environment, is more like an unfolding

event—a distributed, material process of becomings in which divergent consequences are

actualized with time and space."[38] The new materialist framework used by Gries does not

preclude the production of rhetorical knowledge about the composition of digital texts, but it

does provide a deeper examination of how the effects of these digital texts exceed any intent of

the author. As the primary case study for the book, Gries studies the circulation of Shepard

Fairy's "Obama Hope" poster and the many transformations the image underwent throughout its

circulation. In doing so, she develops a method and set of principles for the "iconographic

tracking" of visual rhetorics. Gries provides readers with an empirical understanding of the

complex rhetorical life endured by the Obama Hope image, by tracing its flows with the aid of

digital research strategies, such as using the image-search capabilities of modern search engines.

The archive Gries assembled for analysis contained over 1,000 different examples of this image

circulating and visually changing in the process. In each visual text of the Obama Hope archive,

some person decided to mimic the style or content of the original poster. One traditional method

of studying this phenomenon might engage in a close reading and interpretation of a smaller

subset of the total amount of images on the Internet, treating them as a synecdoche for the larger

body of texts. Gries, however, provides a scale of analysis that yields a different set of insights

about a sprawling array of rhetorical objects in motion.

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[38] Laurie E. Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*, Book, Whole (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2015), 7.

Similarly, Derek Mueller has advocated for using "distant reading" methods for studying the changes in the discipline of Rhetoric and Composition over long periods of time. His work builds on Franco Moretti's book *Graphs, Maps, and Trees*, which initiated a surge of interest in what was called "computational literary studies." Studies in this field, like Moretti's book, have utilized large databases of digitized literature spanning hundreds of years. By using a variety of computationally-based statistical methods, these digital scholars have analyzed patterns across hundreds-of-thousands of texts. Mueller, for his part, wanted to approach the history of publications in the field of rhetoric and composition by rendering all texts published in certain journals open to computational analysis. He writes: "A sense of the field unfolds from these practices in reduction and simplification, of quantification and aggregation that, by way of these methods, amplifies patterns in textual and extra-textual metadata"[39] His argument is premised on the ever-growing complexity of the discipline, and the need for techniques that enable scholars to account for changes at scales beyond that of the individual text. His solution is to "envision the field as networked phenomena, phenomena that can be found in the imaged patterns that emerge over long periods of time and vast collections of materials."[40]

All that to say whether explicitly or implicitly, digital rhetoric has a theory of scale. There is, however, a tendency to treat the invocation of scale as an end in itself. Jenny Rice's essay "The Rhetorical Aesthetics of More: On Archival Magnitude," published in *Philosophy & Rhetoric,* offers a provocative comparison between Big Data research and conspiracy theories, and a compelling criticism of the rhetoric of scale.[41] She argues that the argumentative logic of

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[39] Derek N. Mueller, *Network Sense: Methods for Visualizing a Discipline* (WAC Clearinghouse, 2017). 30.
[40] Mueller, 30.
[41] Jenny Rice, "The Rhetorical Aesthetics of More: On Archival Magnitude," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 50, no. 1 (February 21, 2017): 26–49, https://doi.org/10.5325/philrhet.50.1.0026.

Big Data research is premised on archival abundance, and more specifically that the rhetorical force of an archive with billions of data points is similar to the paranoid style of assembling evidence for conspiracy theories. In Rice's experience researching conspiracy theorists, she encountered people who believed that the larger the assortment of "facts," the more likely that there is a conspiracy afoot. It did not matter that these "facts" were often unrelated to one another, nor that they were often contradictory. Instead, their persuasive power came from the sheer accumulation of the facts. Data science confronts a similar problem insofar as the proponents have used the enormous scale of data obtained through computerized collection practices as a basis for determining the quality of their results. Both styles of research rely upon the weight of the evidence that is marshalled in support of claims, but the magnitude of these findings is dependent upon an ever-growing archive of stuff.

Rice turns to the Aristolean notion of *megethos* as a theory for comprehending the invocation of scale for matters of argument. This concept theorizes scale as fundamentally a matter of aesthetics, and as Rice interprets Aristotle's *Poetics* she writes, "Aristotle tells us that a very tiny or a very giant thing cannot be beautiful because we find it impossible to take in."[42] Aristotle argued that a mountain or an insect exist at scales that are beyond the human observer's ability to truly consider, and instead the thing's *megethos* conveys only its magnitude. Similarly, established practices of data visualization rely on the aesthetics of scale to communicate the weight of the data represented in a graph or map. That is, they do not simply communicate underlying patterns within a dataset; they also communicate to the reader the sheer amount of different data points represented by the figures. There is a reduction that occurs in this process.

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[42] Rice.

As Rice writes: "The billions of data pieces within any Big Data map are fragments of lives and events that are immensely complex; too complex to be subsumed under the largest data set."[43]

I interpret Rice's essay as a call for an ethical pause on Big Data research, so that we can further consider the potential ramifications of the rhetorics of scale apropos of *megethos*, or the way that the scale speaks, as it were, for the rhetor. The aesthetics of graphs and maps with millions of data points conveys how the vast number of examples included within the study provide it with an epistemological rigor to describe reality accurately. The aesthetic power of these visualizations naturalizes the assumptions that go into the processes of data collection, aggregation, and application. As Ruha Benjamin make the case, the cultural biases held by the designers of software are embedded into the technology itself, but the technology is seen as somehow natural.[44] And in the case of Big Data, the uncurated datasets collected from the Internet *en masse* are filled with examples of hateful rhetoric that then form the basis for the technologies trained on the data. Digital rhetoric has an important role to play in criticizing the persuasive effects of Big Data. The form of conspiratorial thinking that fuels the ever-growing archive of data makes understanding the social consequences of Big Data and the rhetorical effects of this technology difficult to displace. There is an urgent need for scholars of digital rhetoric to investigate these technologies, but, I contend this should not lead to an abandonment of differing scales of rhetoric *tout court*. As I will address in the last section of this chapter, there are applications of computational methods that can enhance rhetorical scholarship without falling prey to the trap of an infinitely growing archive. By moving with the individual text, towards the

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[43] Rice.

[44] Ruha Benjamin, *Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code*, 1st edition (Medford, MA: Polity, 2019).

many millions of texts composed by many millions of users, rhetoricians can deepen their understanding of these technologies function *and* create new avenues for rhetorical theory.

Theories of digital rhetoric, such as in the work of Eyman, Pfister, Gries, Mueller, and Rice (Edbauer), overlap with other intellectual formations, including media studies. Indeed, it is difficult to read through this literature without finding a mention of Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media* or Lev Manovich's *The Language of New Media*.[45] Both authors explore the interactions between what is dubbed "technology" and "culture," and attempt to understand media through an investigation of the past. As McLuhan famously wrote: "We look at the present through a rear-view mirror."[46] Media theory has arguably led ways of thinking about the infrastructures that shape one another in the nexus that is technology. Manovich has explicitly written about his interest in "scale effects," or in the consequences that the growth in networked infrastructures and digital screens may have on culture: "new media technologies accelerate, expand, or scale already existing technologies, which leads to qualitative changes in society and culture."[47]

Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski helped usher in the infrastructural turn in media studies through their coedited collection *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures*, which focuses on the materiality of the digital realm, or the things that make networked publics possible. As they write, "a focus on infrastructure brings into relief the unique materialities of media distribution—the resources, technologies, labor, and relations that are required to shape, energize, and sustain the distribution of audiovisual signal traffic on global, national, and local

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[45] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge, MA, USA: MIT Press, 1994); Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (MIT Press, 2001).

[46] Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, "The Medium Is the Message," *New York* 123, no. 1 (1967): 126–28.

[47] "Scale Effects," (2005) accessed July 27, 2022, http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/scale-effects.

scales."[48] They define media infrastructures as "situated sociotechnical systems," whose design,

operation, and maintenance depend on resources, social hierarchies, and human labor. They

continue:

> Media infrastructures are material forms as well as discursive constructions. They are
>
> owned by public entities and private companies and are the products of design schemes,
>
> regulatory policies, collective imaginaries, and repetitive use. Interwoven within
>
> political-economic agendas, media infrastructures have historically been used in efforts to
>
> claim and reorganize territories and temporal relations. Their material dependence on
>
> lands, raw materials, and energy imbricates them within issues of finance, urban
>
> planning, and natural-resource development.

As this passage demonstrates, investigating media infrastructures requires a mode of inquiry and

set of methods that move. There is no means of grasping the entanglement of forces at work in

the existence of a social media platform without exploring both how interaction happens on the

micro and macro levels. As Starosielski's other work (*The Undersea Network*) demonstrates,

much of the essential infrastructure for maintaining global communications networks is

intentionally hidden from view. Making visible these infrastructures is a critical task for both

understanding the effects of Internet communication technologies and for envisioning a future

means for recreating and maintaining media infrastructures in a fair and just manner.

Blake Hallinan and James Gilmore extend this view in their call for an "infrastructural

politics," which aims to reconfigure infrastructures through an analysis of the significant

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[48] Lisa Parks and Nicole Starosielski, *Signal Traffic: Critical Studies of Media Infrastructures* (University of Illinois Press, 2015): 5.

relations and systems that constitute the current political, cultural, and technological moment.[49]

They identify scale as one of the key features for analyzing infrastructural politics, because the

vastness of Earth's logistical, digital, and social systems is matched only by the complexity of its

effects on any concrete situation. They write: "Discussions of the political significance of

infrastructure, from transportation systems to digital platforms, frequently appeal to the scale of

such projects, and with good reason… As built systems that endure over time and extend across

space infrastructures mediate between scales, connecting local practices with global systems"[50]

The communication infrastructures of social media platforms, for example, are significant in

their capacity to make the mundane, ordinary, and everyday connected to a system that structures

a global media ecosystem. It is not only a matter of a quantifiably larger potential audience, but

the various networks of interaction and relation that are possible throughout the infrastructure.

Scale is a necessary means of comprehending the different levels of operation for the variety of

forces colliding on communication forces.

John Durham Peters is one of the clearer cases of overlap between media studies and

rhetoric. His book *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* offers a

definition of media as "infrastructures of being." He writes that "Media… are vessels and

environments, containers of possibility that anchor our existence and make what we are doing

possible."[51] By offering an "elemental" view of media, Peter works to undo the typical view of

nature and culture as separate entities, and technology as something that is produced by culture

to control nature. Humans using their fingers to count is an example of how our bodies are just as

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[49] Blake Hallinan and James N. Gilmore, "Infrastructural Politics amidst the Coils of Control," *Cultural Studies* 35, no. 4–5 (September 3, 2021): 617–40, https://doi.org/10.1080/09502386.2021.1895259.
[50] Hallinan and Gilmore, 624-5.
[51] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 2.

much as technological devices as an abacus or calculator. "Our bodily infrastructures—skulls, teeth, and feet—are historical, cultural, and technical in shape and function."[52] Instead of understanding media as something that we use, Peters gives the reader a sense of media not as a choice of expression (Do I post this on Twitter or Facebook?), but as a thing that helps give order to expression (What is posting?). Peters' philosophy of media is especially useful for conceptualizing the scale of face-to-face communication, in addition to digitally mediated forms of communication. It is tempting to see an interaction like an in-person conversation as free from mediation. To do so, however, privileges a definition of media that presupposes a purely printed or digital understanding of the term, and it erases the history of continuity and change that led to the situation of face-to-face communication: the history of language, the history of social cooperation, the history of the human nervous system and the larynx, and the history of the atmosphere on Earth and its ability to carry sound waves. Scale is often mentioned in *Marvelous Clouds*, but it is not explicated as a methodological principle. Instead, by way of philosophy, Peters moves through scales of media that extend far beyond any exploration I could provide in this dissertation. Indeed, he scales media to the very cosmos.

Ultimately, I arrive a combination of the two core concepts around which this chapter is structured: *scalar publics*. I am not the first scholar to place an adjective in front of the word publics, but I feel it is justified for answering my research question concerning mediality. I define scalar publics as a theory for approaching the undulating and imbricating nature of media environments, circulatory discourse, and addresses to relative strangers. The expansion and contraction of media that captures or defers the attention of ordinary people needs to be approached as a scalar phenomenon, and the publics that sediment, dissipate, or layer should be

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[52] Peters, 267.

apprehended as products of the nature of media and the unique articulation of social, cultural, and historical forces.

Scalar publics account for the movement of discourse across space, time, and media. While publics theory may already account for the uniqueness of the medium in which discourse circulates, such as in the work of Warner, I seek to investigate the mediality of publics across multiple sites and scales of circulatory discourse. Networked publics are one attempt to highlight the vast scale and speed of the contemporary media environment, but my theorization of scalar publics seeks to arrange the discourses that are given attention across different forms of mediation: in-person, printed, digital, etc. Indeed, like the layered scales of keratin that coat fish and reptiles, the circulation of public discourse can only be partially perceived at an individual unit of analysis, for it is their arrangement into a pattern that the macro-effects of scales can be understood. And like the scales of music, scalar publics exhibit a harmony that can be appreciated by arranging different pitches alongside one another.

Notes on Methodology

I offer *scalar publics* as a way of telling a story about rhetorical methods alongside a story about the teacher strikes. In each chapter I move respectively through three different scales of public rhetoric, and I move my methods of inquiry to match the situation of media. Scale represents my attempts to locate sites of rhetoric and publicity across in-person and digitally mediated forms of communication. While this can involve the familiar scale of the closely-read text, it also necessitates the use of methods that can investigate the place of rhetoric in a social movement with hundreds of thousands of participants spread out across North America. The mass participation of educators in this movement is what made the concrete achievements of their strikes possible. More clearly, they would not have won without the involvement of as

many teachers as possible. The heightened attention for their strikes was achieved at a variety of scales. Some of the teachers were united because they worked in the same building. Other teachers worked across the state, but still felt compelled to join the strike. Teachers in different states were inspired by teachers they had never met, and workers in different industries gave attention to a strike that had little bearing on their work.

Rhetorical scholars should attempt to investigate persuasion at the varied scales at which it occurs. Doing so requires a consideration of the methods rhetorical scholars often use to study persuasion in relationship to particular theoretical terms. This dissertation is not a methodological manifesto; I have no definite answers as to what method is the most appropriate for studying the use of media during these strikes. Instead, I proceed by way of methodological experimentation. In each chapter, I begin with a reflection on rhetorical methods that I will employ to study teacher discourse, but I do so with an acknowledgment of the strengths and limitations of the method in question. At the end of the dissertation, I survey the multi-method journey and produce insights about the appropriateness of methods for comprehending the scales of rhetoric.

In my second chapter, I stick with the tried-and-tested rhetorical method of closely analyzing a speech. This speech was delivered in person, but it was recorded and uploaded to YouTube. I rendered the video of this speech as a text, and by analyzing the details of this text I investigate the concrete situation of media that facilitated the speech and its effects. In doing so, I theorize the conditions that made this an example of public discourse. Inspired by Warner, I read the text for clues about the auto-poetic nature of the speech's discourse and its constitution of a public. At the scale of the individual text, this speech provides an opportunity to consider the potentials for close textual analysis to generate insights about the teacher strike publics and the

discourses that circulate within them. However, as many other rhetoricians have argued, the focus on the text of a speech comes at the expense of the broader experiences of discourse.[53] Indeed, as I was not physically present at this speech, I cannot hope to analyze the felt intensities of the audience, nor the affective context in which the speech took place. I do not trace the circulation of this speech across digital platforms, nor do I provide evidence that the speech shaped discussions of education in the mainstream public sphere. At the small scale of the speech, I hope to heighten my reader's perception of the contradictions of public discourse by deepening the meaning within the speech.

In my third chapter, I construct an archive of meta-discourses about the use of digital technology during the strikes. I use this archive as a site for tracing rhetorical conditions of publicness on digital platforms. This archive, which is comprised primarily of teachers narrating their own experiences using digital platforms, reveals the conditions of existence that existed prior to and motivated the use of these platforms to help the strike. I use a series of fragments obtained from YouTube videos or edited collections put together by teachers. I organize and arrange these fragments into a digital archive of rhetoric about technologically enabled teacher activism to further theorize the conditions of media, especially the use of Facebook groups. An archive of this sort is necessary to comprehend the scale of rhetoric happening at a networked scale. First, the actual discourses used on the platform are digital ephemera that have tended to elude institutional archives. Privacy restrictions on a platform like Facebook groups makes full access to the discourses impossible. Second, this archive enables a method that situates the meta-discourses within a historiography of digital platforms. Significantly, this method requires the

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[53] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Cultural Challenges to Rhetorical Criticism," *Rhetoric Review* 25, no. 4 (2006): 358–61; Celeste Condit, "Rhetorical Criticism and Audiences: The Extremes of McGee and Leff," *Western Journal of Communication (Includes Communication Reports)* 54, no. 3 (1990): 330–45.

removal of assumptions about the positive or negative effects of social media use. This method is not intended to uncover answers about how certain platforms are more amenable to organizing protests than others. Instead, it seeks to uncover the conditions led to teachers grabbing hold of the digital platforms they had available and making use of it. Michel Foucault also used archives of discourse as a means of comprehending concepts (like madness, or punishment) at scales previous unexamined. And as Fredrich Kittler noted, Foucault's limitation was the lack of concern for the technologies that enabled archives of discourse, i.e. print media, libraries, and the typewriter.[54]

At the final scale of this dissertation (chapter 4), I use a set of quantitative and computational methods to characterize and interpret vernacular discourses of the movement. Rhetoric, defined as Pfister's shaping of attention, is a process of that occurs in mediated forms at scales that far exceed singular texts. The Internet is not a manifestation of the ideal public sphere, but it is a place of billions of ordinary people giving attention and shaping the circulation of discourse. Rhetoric takes place on websites like Facebook and Twitter. Computational methods allow rhetoricians to see patterns in discourse that can be the basis for claims of the theorized effects. I argue—and endeavor to show—that, contrary to Rice, computational methods should not be ceded to Big Data researchers, nor abandoned altogether. Techniques developed by corpus linguists and statisticians can be used to enhance a researcher's understanding of a large body of textual data. They can help draw patterns across time and space and visualize trends and effects in ways that would be invisible with traditional methods. While similar to the movement within English departments towards computational literary studies, computational rhetorical methods are centrally suited to study the manifestation of public rhetoric on digital platforms.

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[54] Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford University Press, 1990).

Computational rhetorical methods can be used to analyze contextual examples of rhetorical activity from millions of ordinary people. Rather than trying to compile the largest archive of examples of a particular activity (works of literature or Twitter posts), computational rhetorical methods should examine subsets of rhetorical activity occurring in a discrete context. This provides rhetoricians with an object of study that may be too large for an individual researcher to examine in its entirety, but not so large that the magnitude of its findings is entirely dependent on the vastness of its archive. There are no guarantees in my advocacy for this methodology, and having more examples is not necessarily better than the richness of investigating a singular text. The scale at which people use rhetoric on social media is difficult to comprehend as a casual observer or user of the various platforms. The aspects of digital rhetoric (indexability, hypertextuality, etc.) that are different from previous modes of composition and communication, identified by Gries, Eyman, and Pfister, are precisely what make possible—even necessary—the technologies to study these discourses differently. Computational rhetorical methods can be used to make advanced search queries about the presence of particular words, phrases, or forms of language-use that are present within a contextualized set of examples. It can enable rhetoricians to visualize the flows, both temporally and spatially, of discourses, sensations, and effects of language in places where symbols are used vernacularly. These tools do not supersede the close textual analysis of significant texts, but they can better account for the scale at which certain types of rhetorical activity operate.

Scale is not merely a matter of going "up"; scale attunes rhetoricians to different sites of rhetoric occurring in mediated forms. The relativity of scale reveals different characteristics of media by placing the varied means by which discourse circulates alongside one another. The focus on a particular scale, the text or small group of texts, is a widely accepted type of analysis

in rhetorical studies. The archive is another means of accessing rhetoric at a vast scale, sometimes containing examples across hundreds of years. The technologies that enable close textual analysis (language and printing) and archival research (libraries, databases, etc.) both alter the scale of rhetorical research. Computational methods can further extend the scale at which rhetoricians study, and they can do so without falling prey to the *megethos* style of Big Data. Computational methods can access a vernacular expression of public rhetoric in a way that does not require the authorized rhetorical critic to make choices about the ability of certain examples to stand as representative for the vernacular. Statistical and quantitative methods provide insight into the commonality across a body of text, and they can be used to find patterns that would otherwise elude the individual scholar.

There is, finally, a political reason to consider the large scale of the teacher strikes, and other examples of mass participatory political activity. Scales of social movements are centrally important for their ability to effect change. Small scale protests and campaigns can achieve significant victories and alleviate unjust burdens on certain populations, but they also can fall short of the total transformation of society necessary to stave of the worst effects of ecological disaster and the descent into a social environment that aids the spread of fascism. The ability of ordinary people to challenge a political system managed and controlled by a small group of capitalists requires a form of participation for billions of those people. Rhetoric also happens at the scale of the interpersonal or vernacular discourses of billions of people. Sometimes the effects of this rhetorical activity is limited to merely the few personal connections that a person might have, but sometimes the viral nature of rhetorical activity on digital platforms enables an ordinary rhetor an attentive audience of billions. The stakes of our political moment necessitates a scale of rhetoric in the billions.

Chapter 2: Mediating Public Address

As I have established *scale* as a concept that guides my methodological engagement with the wave of teacher strikes in the United States, I now move to examine the *in situ* scale of public address. *In situ*, meaning "in the original place," is a bit of an ironic descriptor for the scale of this chapter, for I was not present at the original place and time of the speech. However, as a term of archaeological inquiry, *in situ* denotes a thicker contextual description of artifacts. The scale at which my investigation occurs considers the performance of a speech in its original place; which is to say, I consider the layers of mediality at work in a speech delivered to an in-person audience. More specifically, I consider a moment of public address during the 2019 LA teachers' strike, performed by then-union president Alex Caputo-Pearl. This speech was delivered via a public address system, comprised of microphones and speakers, it was spoken behind a podium and upon a stage, parts of the speech were read from a phone or improvised in the moment, and the speech was translated by a sign-language interpreter standing next to the speaker. This speech was recorded and uploaded to official union social media platforms. Each of these technologies resulted in the "outcome" of the speech; and rather than begin from the assumption that *the text* of the speech matters most, or that it was most determinate of the "message," I recontextualize the method of rhetoric by theorizing practices, processes, and technologies of mediation as constitutive of public address.

I argue that the method of rhetorical criticism has tended to pay less attention to the mediality of speeches than it should. Traditionally, rhetorical scholars have been more interested in the study of transcripts than they have been in the practices of mediation that publicize address. The words of the speech are generally taken as the primary object of analysis, perhaps with some consideration of "context," but often with less scrutiny of the technologies of

publicity that enable speech to be heard, seen, or felt. I take seriously the everydayness of speech, and in the instance of a speech delivered to a rally of 50,000 striking teachers, I analyze the speech in accordance with the experience of witnessing it. The speech was not a transcript transmitted to the audience, but a process mediated by technological and other material infrastructures. I consider how two of the canons of classical rhetoric, *ars memoria* and *ars pronuntiatio*, would benefit from a heightened concern for mediality.

The 2019 Los Angeles teacher strike came to fruition following an unsuccessful process of bargaining with the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). This was the first strike waged by the United Teachers of Los Angeles (UTLA) in 30 years (since 1989), and the demands made by teachers were focused on the "common good," such as in reduction in class sizes and the guarantee of nurses and librarians at every school, in addition to the more traditional demands for higher salaries. LAUSD claimed that their budget prohibited their ability to meet these demands, a claim refuted by union leaders as cover for an untapped budget surplus.[1] After the negotiations in bargaining reached an impasse, union members overwhelmingly voted to authorize a strike.

Throughout this chapter, I make an effort to refer to the individuals who make up the union ("union members") in my description of the strike, as opposed to describing the subject of these actions as simply "the union." In anti-union rhetoric, there is a persistent attempt by enemies of unions to paint these organizations as third parties, or as shadowy groups whose interests are not equivalent to the workers they are supposed to represent. For example, the sentence "*the union* forced the teachers to go on strike" elides the fact that members

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[1] Bill Raden, "Is LAUSD Crying Wolf With Its Claims of Financial Distress?," January 18, 2019, https://capitalandmain.com/is-lausd-crying-wolf-with-its-claims-of-financial-distress-0118.

democratically decide to strike. In short, this is a reminder to my reader that "the union" is an

organization constituted by its members. There are, however, structures of leadership that make

some union members privileged to knowledge and decision-making power, such as in the

election of a union president. Typically, the person elected to lead the union gives up their rank-

and-file job to be employed as staff to the union, so that they can direct their energies towards

the goals set forth by the membership. Alex Caputo-Pearl was a public educator for 22 years in

Los Angeles before being elected to the president of UTLA in 2014. Even when he was spending

most of his time in the classroom, Caputo-Pearl was engaged in community organizing. In 2006,

he was administratively transferred from Crenshaw High School by the superintendent, in

alleged retaliation for his organizing efforts.[2] His election to the position of union president was

a part of a slate of other teacher-activists seeking to escalate their union's involvement in fixing

persistent issues within the school district.

Figure 2 - UTLA President Alex-Caputo Pearl address the LA teacher strike[3]

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[2] Mitchell Landsberg, "Teacher's Transfer Is Protested," Los Angeles Times, August 25, 2006,
https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2006-aug-25-me-crenshaw25-story.html.
[3] *UTLA, Do You Feel Your Power?*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eJBoWryKasU.

On the fifth day of the Los Angeles Teachers' strike, UTLA organized an open-air rally after days of forming picket lines outside of most school buildings. The strike caused a crisis throughout the second largest city in the United States. For each day of the strike, the 800,000 students of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) were without the care, protection, and lessons of their teachers. Parents of children enrolled in the district were then forced to rearrange work and care schedules, as many relied on the public school system for normalcy in their workday. "UTLA, do you feel your power?" yelled Alex Caputo-Pearl to an audience of an estimated 60,000 teachers, students, and parents. His question reverberated throughout the stretch of Downtown Los Angeles. The audience responded with cheers.

This spectacular moment of the speech can be felt even in the recorded version of the speech. While the traditional approach to rhetorical criticism may ask questions such as, "What did this question mean to the crowd, and why did the language choice resonate so?", I am aim to turn the method of rhetorical criticism on its head, or at least sideways. Jonathan Sterne makes a similar point about the embodied nature of speech technology when he writes, "A concept of communication as techné also requires us to rethink the relationships we posit between bodies and technologies. Modern media are vast aggregates or assemblages of techniques, institutions, and technologies. Machines and technological systems are an extension of the logic of possibility, practical knowledge, and realized action hidden in techné because they are essentially crystallized sets of repeatable activities and relationships."[4] By reading media more squarely into the classical rhetorical tradition, I argue that the canons of memory and delivery are enhanced by integrating concerns for mediality within matters of techné. Doing so reveals the embodied

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[4] Jonathan Sterne, "Communication as Techné," *Communication As…: Perspectives on Theory*, 2006, 94.

nature of public communication and the bifurcated role of technology and publicity in constituting rhetorical activity.

The Method of Rhetoric

Answering these questions requires arranging the fragments of discourse available in such a way that the mediality of this moment can be apprehended. To do so, I first review what is arguably still a dominant method for approaching the object of a speech, namely, text-centered rhetorical criticism. It is this method that is taught in graduate and undergraduate courses, written about in textbooks, exemplified in the pages of rhetoric journals, and it has had a significant hand in defining the field of rhetoric for roughly the past half-century. Rhetorical criticism is arguably that which rhetoricians do.[5] Describing rhetorical criticism as a method is only possible because of the pages of disciplinary history that have enshrined it as such, and within these pages there are often disputes about the appropriateness of describing criticism as a method.[6]

There can be no discussion of the North American tradition of rhetoric without attention to the practice of criticizing and interpreting oratory. Rhetorical scholars have often used transcripts of speeches delivered by prominent public officials (e.g., the President of the United States) to build the corpus of rhetorical theory and, by extension, rhetorical history. These speeches offered scholars an opportunity to consider the purpose of public address, the strategies of persuasion, and the role of language in the constitution of the political-historical moment of American exceptionalism. While the "rhetorical tradition" extended from the Greco-Roman

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[5] This is in reference to Edwin Black's famous quip that "Criticism is that which critics do." Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 4.

[6] Robert L Ivie, "Productive Criticism Then and Now," *American Communication Journal* 4, no. 3 (Spring 2001): 4; Condit, "Rhetorical Criticism and Audiences"; Loren D. Reid, "The Perils of Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 30, no. 4 (1944): 416–22.

classical texts of Aristotle, Cicero, etc., its uptake by 20th century professors in North America

coalesced within an intellectual project to use speeches as an object of analysis for mixing

literary, political, and historical modes of criticism. Presidents were not the only rhetors given

treatment during the early period of public address studies, of course, but there was a consistent

preoccupation with the oratory of people vested with institutional power. In the 1960s, the

tradition shifted in two significant ways: first, history necessitated that rhetorical scholars

account for non-institutional social movements in their studies of public address. There was a

need to account for the "rhetoric of the streets," as Franklyn Haiman described it.[7] Second, the

acceptable objects of analysis shifted beyond oratory. As Lucas recounted, "As reasoned public

discourse was overshadowed at every turn by discord and confrontation, it became clear that the

study of platform speaking could not explicate the informal, fragmentary, disruptive, and often

non-discursive modes of rhetorical influence employed by Black Power advocates and New Left

activists."[8] But the study of "platform speaking" did, in fact, persist. Following the "Age of

Reagan," new studies of presidential oratory became popular in the field once again.[9] So the

pendulum swings, recent (within the last decade) scholarship in the field of public address again

considers the world beyond oratory.[10]

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[7] Franklyn S. Haiman, "The Rhetoric of the Streets: Some Legal and Ethical Considerations," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 53, no. 2 (April 1, 1967): 99–114, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335636709382822.

[8] Stephen E. Lucas, "The Renaissance of American Public Address: Text and Context in Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74, no. 2 (May 1, 1988): 243.

[9] The edited collection *American Orators of the Twentieth Century: Critical Studies and Sources* features 58 essays on traditional studies of public address. Bernard K. Duffy and Halford Ross Ryan, *American Orators of the Twentieth Century: Critical Studies and Sources* (Greenwood Press, 1987).

[10] José G. Izaguirre III, "The Whiteness of LBJ's Rhetoric: The Appointment of Vicente T. Ximenes to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 2022, 1–22; Allison M. Prasch, "A Tale of Two Presidencies: Trump and Biden on the National Mall," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 107, no. 4 (2021): 472–79; Allison M. Prasch and Mary E. Stuckey, "'An Empire for Liberty': Reassessing US Presidential Foreign Policy Rhetoric," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 108, no. 4 (2022): 357–81; Randall Fowler, "Art of the Arms Deal: Reagan, AWACS, and the Rhetorical Presidency," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 105, no. 3 (2019): 273–96; Jamie Landau

Even so, rhetorical criticism continues to consist of numerous techniques including close textual analysis, genre analysis, pentadic analysis, and more, but, like literary criticism, it is perhaps defined most prominently by the critic's rendering of judgement. In this regard, it differs significantly from the methods found in the disciplines of the natural or social sciences. The subjectivity of the researcher plays a central role in the constitution of this method, for it requires the rhetorician to scrutinize the object with respect to both a theoretical framework and historical context. The challenge comes from balancing the inquiry into the speech itself (close analysis á la Michael Leff), the social, economic, and cultural milieu in which the speech took place, and the composition of the audience. Scholars have debated the primacy of each of these areas of analysis, with rhetorical history or rhetorical theory sometimes taking precedence over the speech itself. Regardless, there is a need for close reading of texts to appreciate and understand their internal dynamics, the formation of cultural meanings, and the relationship between the spoken word and the speech's features. These areas of study are valuable for teaching rhetoric; they provide a basis for emulation and composition. Rhetorical theory deepens the study of texts, for it contributes to an intellectual project of cataloguing persuasive strategies and conceptualizing their effects. And rhetorical history supports these other investigations, for it places the use of rhetoric within a frame of historical contingency and agency. As Lucas writes, "To explicate satisfactorily what a rhetorical text means or how it functions, we need to comprehend the very identity of that text as inextricably interwoven with its world."[11]

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and Bethany Keeley-Jonker, "Conductor of Public Feelings: An Affective-Emotional Rhetorical Analysis of Obama's National Eulogy in Tucson," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 104, no. 2 (2018): 166–88.

[11] Stephen E. Lucas, "The Schism in Rhetorical Scholarship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 67, no. 1 (1981): 6.

Like any method, rhetorical criticism is a loaded construct. Rhetorical criticism is describable as a method because of its formalization within textbooks, handbooks, and similar types of publications. These materials serve to "fix" rhetorical criticism as a feature of the discipline, and they ease anxieties about the knowledge produced for the field. Such anxieties were already apparent in 1963, when Marie Hochumuth Nichols criticized the field's missing function: "[T]raditionally oriented rhetoricians often lack an orderly—and one might say—demonstrably useful method for the analysis of speeches."[12] These anxieties could not last, and as a new generation of rhetorical scholars emerged, so too did attempts to stabilize the orderly treatment of speeches. Rhetorical criticism was constructed out of the need to teach others how to analyze speeches, and I labor in this chapter to treat the construction of rhetorical criticism as contingent upon the conditions of media.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, whose textbook perhaps instantiated rhetorical criticism as a method, reflects in the 21st century on the work she did to establish "the method" in the 1970s:

When I was a graduate student, rhetorical criticism was not taught in speech departments; we studied rhetorical history. I learned close textual analysis in American literature courses. I began teaching rhetorical criticism in the late 1960s and published *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric* in 1972, which was, I believe, the first criticism textbook.[13]

The fact that rhetorical criticism developed out of classes taken in literature studies grounds the intervention I am making in this chapter. Prior to her textbook, graduate programs in Rhetoric and Speech Communication focused primarily on rhetorical history. She translated the methods

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[12] Marie Hochmuth Nichols, *Rhetoric and Criticism* (Louisiana State University Press, 1963), 78.
[13] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Cultural Challenges to Rhetorical Criticism," *Rhetoric Review* 25, no. 4 (2006): 358.

of literary criticism, and her experience taking classes in other departments, for use in the realm of rhetoric. I use Campbell's method of rhetorical criticism as a touchstone for this chapter. I see studies of public address as a valuable basis for rhetorical pedagogy and generating knowledge about the use of persuasion in social movements; but further, I find the method of rhetorical criticism a fascinating starting point for a methodological journey in the study of mediality.

Literary criticism similarly suffers from the problems I am describing in rhetorical criticism, which is the negation of the mediality of the object. In the case of literary criticism, typically the object of analysis is a novel or poem, and the work of criticism seeks to uncover the meaning buried within the text (in the case of hermeneutical criticism) or to reveal meanings embedded within the textual environment (in the case of interpretive criticism). In both cases, the preoccupation with the text can ignore both the process and material of entextualization.[14] Friedrich Kittler's *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* uses a history of media to recast the foundations of criticism. In David Wellbery's foreword to the 1990 translation of Kittler's book, he notes "Whatever the historical field we are dealing with, in Kittler's view, we are dealing with media as determined by the technological possibilities of the epoch in question. Mediality is the general condition within which, under specific circumstances, something like 'poetry' or 'literature' can take shape."[15] I extend this insight to the field of rhetorical studies, which the object of "speech" takes shape in the conditions of entextualization, which is typically the typewriter, printing press, or word processor.

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[14] This claim is less true for studies in the area of "book history" which are attuned to the technologies of production that make books, book publics, and print culture possible.

[15] David E. Wellbery, "Foreword," in Friedrich A. Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (Stanford University Press, 1990) xiii.

Walter Ong takes up this dilemma in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World.* Rhetorical studies has almost always required the process of entextualization for the study of oratory, he argues:

> But the speeches – or any other oral performances – that were studied as part of rhetoric could hardly be speeches as these were being orally delivered. After the speech was delivered, nothing of it remained to work over. What you used for 'study' had to be the text of speeches that had been written down – commonly after delivery and often long after (in antiquity it was not common practice for any but disgracefully incompetent orators to speak from a text prepared verbatim in advance). In this way, even orally composed speeches were studied not as speeches but as written texts.

Unlike Ong, my intention is not to revive or rehash an interrogation of the differences in consciousness between primarily oral or literate societies, but to draw attention to the prevalence of *textual* modes of criticizing oratory within rhetorical studies; and further, to ask how the trope of mediality can bring an enhanced understanding of rhetorical methods.

The five canons of rhetoric (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) have been pedagogical touchstones for teachers of rhetoric since they were originally proposed by the Roman rhetorician Cicero. [16] They formed the basis for some of the first textbooks of rhetoric, and throughout the Greco-Roman tradition of rhetoric they have maintained a relevance in rhetorical theory. Cicero defined these five canons as:

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[16] Marcus Tullius Cicero, Edward William Sutton, and Harris Rackham, *De Oratore; De Fato; Paradoxa Stoicorum; De Partitione Oratoria* (Harvard University Press, 1977).

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> Invention is the excogitation of true things (res), or things similar to truth to render one's
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> cause plausible; disposition is the arrangement in order of the things thus discovered;
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> elocution is the accommodation of suitable words to the invented (things); memory is the
>
> firm perception in the soul of things and words; pronunciation is the moderating of the
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> voice and body to suit the dignity of the things and words.[17]

I take two of the canons of classical rhetoric, memory and delivery as concepts for playing with

the trope of media. For Cicero, memory and delivery were complex subjects. They are not

reducible to merely the memorization of the text of a speech. In the above quote, "things and

words" signifies both the subject matter and the language that express these subjects. Similarly,

pronunciation (delivery) is more than speaking clearly. Throughout this chapter, I attempt to

instill a medialogical valence in these concepts. Memory and delivery are especially significant

when considering the mediality of public address, moreover, for they foreground the

technologies of publicity that enable *a public* to be *publicly* addressed.

Throughout the rhetorical tradition, the five canons have been referenced, remixed, and

refuted as theoretical touchstones for further reflection on the techniques of rhetorical practice.

As with with most intellectual traditions, scholars use concepts for their own purposes; and as

such, there is a certain conceptual drift within the canons of rhetoric. For example, Peter

Simonson partially traces the extensive lineage of invention and its many invocations across

centuries of rhetorical theory. [18] He does so not to note that people condemn those who have

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[17] I take this translation from Francis Yates who notes it is based on the translation of Cicero's *De inventione* by H.M. Hubbell in the Loeb edition, but "made more literal in reproducing the technical terms *res* and *verba*." Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, vol. 3., (London;New York; Routledge, 1999), 8–9.

[18] Peter Simonson, "Reinventing Invention, Again," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (August 8, 2014): 299–322, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2014.938862.

strayed too far from the ancient texts but to gain insight from the variations and tensions that exists across invention theory. Kaltheen Welch notes that throughout the tradition certain canons have fallen out of theoretical fashion, and particularly in the realm of rhetoric and composition, the first three canons received a preferential treatment by scholars and pedagogues. She writes,

> When the canons are reduced to three composing issues – invention, arrangement, and style – not only is the definitive energy of the fluctuation among them deeply affected, but the relationship to culture assured by delivery disappears and the idea of a category-for-category's sake is able to acquire more importance. The deletion of memory and delivery from any canonical system undercuts the intentions and rhetorical fullness of the five-part structure… Many of the critics who remove memory and delivery from the canons regard them as mere rote memorization and as simple gesture.[19]

I do not intend to offer a correction to the rhetorical tradition for properly situating the canons, but I use these concepts as an inventional resource for rhetorical theory.

As part of this process of theoretical invention, I recognize that I am participating in an already-existent current of thought within rhetorical studies that engages media and mediated speech. For over 50 years, rhetoricians have investigated the interconnection between technology and practices of language. Craig R. Smith's 1977 essay "Television news as rhetoric" was an early attempt to incorporate contemporary concerns for mass media into the rhetorical tradition. Kathleen Jamieson's book *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* considers presidential speechmaking in mediated contexts, such as Theodore Roosevelt's use of the radio during his "Fireside Chats"

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[19] Kathleen E. Welch, "The Platonic Paradox: Plato's Rhetoric in Contemporary Rhetoric and Composition Studies," *Written Communication* 5, no. 1 (January 1, 1988): 6.

or the televised addresses of J.F.K and Reagan.[20] Elizabeth Welch's *Electric Rhetoric* offers the

first serious integration of ancient and contemporary rhetorical theories with the rise of Internet

technologies. Welch gives attention to the rhetorical nature of screens within a broader media

history of writing and other communication technologies. Bruce Gronbeck's persistent attempts

to incorporate the intellectual tradition of media ecology into rhetorical studies is another

example of this trend.[21] Damien Pfister and Michele Kennerly's recent volume, *Ancient*

Rhetorics/Digital Networks, is another entry into the record of rhetoric and media technology.

This edited collection demonstrates the utility of concepts from the Greco-Roman era of

rhetorical knowledge for understanding Internet phenomena.

    Lingua Fracta: Towards a Rhetoric of New Media, by Collin Gifford Brooke, offers a

full consideration of the five canons of classical rhetoric for studying new media technologies.[22]

I am building upon Brooke's argument that textual assumptions pervade attempts by rhetorical

scholars to comprehend mediated phenomena. He argues that early theories of hypertextuality on

the Internet reproduced print-culture era assumptions about the static nature of text-objects. As

these Internet objects are rendered suitable for rhetorical analysis, their dynamism and

interactivity is flattened. Brooke turns towards theories of "interfaces" and "ecologies" for

rejuvenating the rhetorical canons in the Internet age. He, too, considers the canons of memory

and delivery amid changing conditions of technology; and while he is specific to Internet

contexts, he attempts to provide a lens for rhetorical inquiry amid media. I draw upon this lens in

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[20] Kathleen Hall Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

[21] Bruce E. Gronbeck, "The Media Ecology Tradition of Communication Studies: Managing Legacies, Codifying Theoretical-Critical Practice," *Review of Communication* 7, no. 2 (April 2007): 180–85, https://doi.org/10.1080/15358590701371656; Bruce E. Gronbeck, "McLuhan as Rhetorical Theorist.," *Journal of Communication* 31, no. 3 (1981): 117–28.

[22] Collin Gifford Brooke, *Lingua Fracta: Toward a Rhetoric of New Media* (Cresskill, N.J: Hampton Press, 2009).

my analysis of the textual assumptions undergirding rhetorical criticism, and I hope to deepen the framework for incorporating media into rhetorical theory.

While I am building upon the work of the aforementioned scholars, I'm am also offering an approach to the practice of doing rhetorical criticism that I describe as a "*in situ* scale." I argue that concerns for mediality can be incorporated into rhetorical criticism by attending to the medial layers that constitute moments of public address. I am not the first rhetorician to propose the use of *in situ* methods for the practice of rhetorical criticism. Indeed, the turn towards qualitative fieldwork within rhetorical studies has used the concept of *in situ* as an entry point for theorizing the extra-textual functions of rhetoric, such as the effects of place, presence, and affect. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, the work of Phaedra Pezzullo is essential in understanding what is to be gained from the presence of rhetorical critics at the sites of rhetorical activity.[23] In a continuation of the approach intiaited by Pezzullo, Danielle Endres, Aaron Hess, Samantha Senda-Cook, and Michael Middleton proposed *in situ* rhetoric, also described as critical participatory rhetoric.[24] This model of *in situ* rhetorical methods requires that critics be physically present at sites of rhetorical activity; and by using their skills of analysis to understand the persuasive processes at work in the moment, these scholars propose *in situ* methods as a tool for deepening rhetorical practice. Critically, participatory rhetoric requires removing the physical separation between the scholarly observer and the rhetorical actor. They argue that scholars should be invested in and active participants of the forms of advocacy that they seek to understand, for both ethical and practical reasons.

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[23] Pezzullo, "Resisting 'National Breast Cancer Awareness Month.'"
[24] Danielle Endres et al., "In Situ Rhetoric: Intersections between Qualitative Inquiry, Fieldwork, and Rhetoric," *Cultural Studies<--> Critical Methodologies* 16, no. 6 (2016): 511–24.

My approach to *in situ* methods differs from the use of fieldwork, but my concern for mediality resembles many of the insights garnered from participatory critical rhetoric insofar as it challenges the methodological assumptions of rhetorical criticism. How would the study of public address be different if rhetoricians attended to the technologies of publicity, or to the question of mediation, as constitutive of the phenomenon of public address? Further, what if rhetorical criticism had concerns for mediality baked in from the very beginning, rather than assuming the object of rhetorical criticism was "speech?" I end this chapter by reflecting on the constraints on this method for the research questions I have posed, and as a transition to my next chapter, I chart the adjustments in method that can better approximate the nature of media in the teacher strikes.

The Speech

I first watched this speech the day after it occurred, for it flooded my labor-friendly Facebook news feed as a media artifact of the historic strike. It has been four years since my original viewing of the speech, and I have continued to re-watch this speech throughout my graduate program. I transcribed the 14-minute speech, and I printed out copies of the text that I created. I have shown the speech to my students in my *Social Movements* course, and I have pestered other graduate students into watching the speech with me. I have watched every recording I could find of the rally in which it took place, either uploaded to YouTube or Facebook. This includes the festivities that occurred prior to the speech and shortly after its conclusion. While the main video I reference in this chapter came from the UTLA YouTube channel, there are many vernacular videos that provide the crowd's perspective during the

rally.[25] I share these details to give a sense of how the speech was mediated for me, and how through this process of viewing, transcribing, reflecting, and reviewing, I (and presumably others) have come to understand it.

It is through a close viewing, listening, and reading of this speech that I hope to explicate a moment of public address, one that serves to buttress public address studies specific to social movement contexts. This chapter uses the method of rhetorical criticism, specifically as it is explicated by Karyln Kohrs Campbell and Thomas Burkholder in their textbook *Contemporary Critiques of Rhetoric*, to ascertain the mediality of this moment of public address.[26] I take the methodological practices of this "textbook" version of rhetorical criticism as a starting point for the arrangement of my comments, while at the same time I work to reconfigure the foundational principles of text-based rhetorical criticism. I begin with a descriptive analysis of the speech by closely analyzing a transcription of the recorded video; and by attending to the purpose, audience, and persona of the speaker, I render the rhetorical strategies at work. I then move to a historical-contextual accounting of the moments that preceded the beginning of the speech and the all-important question asked by Caputo-Pearl. I add an additional layer to the Campbell-Burkholder method of rhetorical criticism. In the penultimate section of this chapter, I directly explore the mediality of this moment of public address. While it is typical to synthesize text and context into the rendering of a criticism, but I keep my analysis of mediality separate from the typical moves of this method. I do so to make my intervention in this method clear, and to give space to the media-rhetorical layer as distinct from the traditional approach to rhetorical

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[25] *UTLA Strike 2019*, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eD9hZ8j4BQM; *UTLA Let The Sun Shine Rally*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq9gcsFXXCg; *January 22, 2019. UTLA VICTORY RALLY: Drum Cadence!*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fCO1OW_bBLs.
[26] Campbell and Burkholder, *Critiques of Contemporary Rhetoric*.

criticism. In apprehending the meaningfulness of this speech and its rhetorical effects, my criticism places this speech within the broad tapestry of strike activities of this dissertation. Throughout this section, I foreground the mediality of the oratory and the technologies of publicity that constitute the speaker, the audience, and in my view, the teacher strikes themselves.

Alex Caputo-Pearl's speech to the LA teacher strike crowd attempted to fulfill a definitive purpose: preparing the teachers for another week of protest. He accomplished this through rhetorical strategies that involved the audience within the structure of the speech and a persona tailored to its exigency. Audience participation served to relay a clear set of instructions and instill enthusiasm for an uncertain future. Furthermore, the instructor persona strategically utilized by the speaker fostered identification between the audience and Caputo-Pearl. It is important to keep in mind that the purpose of this speech was not to persuade the audience to go on strike, nor to convince the assembled teachers that striking would be a desirable course of action, nor even that the people of Los Angeles should support the strike. The teachers of Los Angeles had already gone through the democratic process of electing a bargaining team, deciding on priorities, and when met with resistance from the school district, a majority of teachers voted to go on strike.[27] This speech is less demonstrative of the rhetorical strategies used to persuade workers to take collective action than it is of the rhetoric of striking itself. Indeed, the speech itself offers little in terms of the lessons of argumentation. Caputo-Pearl gives relatively little care given to explaining the reasons for opposing charter school expansions, the problems with privatizing of public goods, or even the reasons for being a member of a union. Instead, the

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[27] Jennifer Medina and Dana Goldstein, "Los Angeles Braces for Major Teachers' Strike," *The New York Times*, January 7, 2019, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/07/us/teacher-strike-lausd-utla.html.

speech takes these arguments as a given and enthymetically references their conclusions as fodder for the speech's actual purpose. I include this speech as the first case study in a dissertation about teacher strikes and media in that it gives me opportunity to consider the use of public address in an active struggle, the type of rhetoric necessary for instilling energy into an audience of participants, and, ultimately, the mediality of speeches.

Alex Caputo-Pearl utilizes an instructor persona in his strike rally speech, which I define as a mode of public address that incorporates the form and style of classroom pedagogy. In the first half of the speech, the speaker uses most of his time lavishing the audience with praise, a form of epideictic rhetoric, for their actions in the week leading up to the moment of the speech. For instance, he states "You – over the last four days – you all have been brilliant" In the second half, Caputo-Pearl invites the audience to participate in the speech itself by instructing their voices, "We need to last. We need to last, one, day, longer than the billionaires. Can we do that? I wanna hear it from you now. I'm gonna say a couple things and I want you to say back to me." The shift from praise to instruction is marked by a change in the language and style of delivery, and it reflects both the immediate need for the teacher-participants to continue the strike and the history of organizing leading up to the LA strike that preceded the moment of the speech. One of the clearest expressions of the shift from praise to instruction is in Caputo-Pearl's use of pronouns. In the beginning of the speech, he includes the word "you" in almost every sentence. The implied person for this mode of second-person address is the teachers who are currently on strike. As he states:

> You have been resilient. On the line, in the rain, more rain than we have seen for
> years. But you have been there, and you haven't just been there, you've been doing
> dance contests, on the picket line, in the rain. You've been doing, singing contests,

on the line, in the rain. You are resilient; you are wonderful. Educators take pride in everything you do – you are wonderful.

Caputo-Pearl makes it clear that while the audience may be made up of students, parents, and community supporters, he is speaking directly to the workers on strike. The repetitive use of "you" positions the audience as the object of the speaker's praise. In this case, there is a displacement of ethos – from the speaker to the audience, which produces a feedback effect by bolstering Caputo-Pearl's own ethos as a former teacher-turned labor leader. By recognizing the work of the laborers whom he's praising, he

The shift from praising the teachers to instructing the audience is a major turning point in the structure of the speech itself. This shift reveals the importance of audience participation for Caputo-Pearl's rhetorical strategy. In the second half of the speech, Caputo-Pearl uses repetitive phrases and instructions to further involve and invest the audience in the text of the speech. Furthermore, he utilizes an even greater number of collective pronouns, such as "we" and "our." He begins each of these movements by issuing an invitation to his audience, "When I say [this] I want you to say [that]." After explaining instructions to the exercise, Caputo-Pearl says, "Practice," and repeats the desired statement. The first instance of this strategy examines the achievements made by the striking teachers, and it is oriented towards the past. In the second use of audience participation, Caputo-Pearl is oriented towards the future of protests yet to come. The structure of this section lends itself useful to the audience engagement desired by Caputo-Pearl, for it places the future success of the strike squarely into the hands of the audience. This rhetorical strategy demonstrates the centrality of mediality in the structure of the speech, for this method of communicating to and with the audience of the speech only works because of the

audience's ability to amplify the voice of Caputo-Pearl. It carries the words of the speech throughout the tens of thousands of audience members.

In the first movement of instruction, Caputo-Pearl offers a recap of notable events that have occurred because of the ongoing strike. He states: "Now I'm gonna tell you about some things that our picket lines achieved this week. And I want to hear you. When I say that *we achieved this*, I want you to say, 'Because our picket lines are strong.' Practice. 'Because our picket lines are strong.'" He then proceeds to recount some of the major achievements:

> So this week – over 30,000 people out striking, one of the biggest strikes in
> California history. *We achieved this* – 'Because our picket lines are strong.'
> Tens of thousands of parents in support and over 80% of the public polled are in
> support of this strike. *We achieved this* – 'Because our picket lines are strong.'
> Media everywhere is talking about how our strike is pushing the conversation about
> public education nationally. *We achieved this* – 'Because our picket lines are strong.'

With each statement, the crowd eagerly waited for their cue to join the speech. Caputo-Pearl placed a teacher-esque emphasis on each use of the phrase "we achieved this," and the audience followed each cue perfectly. His pronunciation of each syllable is full and follows a regular tempo. He gestures towards the crowd on their cue to participate. Each of the statements that preceded the cue for participation continued the praise initiated in the first part of the speech; however, the agent has shifted from you (the teachers) to we (the full audience). This move not only broadens the appeal of the speech's address, but it also adds the speaker into the mix.

In the second movement of instruction, Caputo-Pearl prepares the audience for another week of protest labor and strike activity. In order to achieve the demands set by the union, the picket lines would need to be more intense in the following week. He instructs the crowd:

> I wanna hear it from you now. I'm gonna say a couple things and I want you to say back to me. "Lines. Stronger. Next Week." Practice. "Lines. Stronger. Next Week." Lines. Stronger. Next Week. Lines. Stronger. Next Week. [Caputo-Pearl stops speaking, but the crowd continues for 3 more verses].

The simplicity of this four-word-phrase made it easy for the audience to join the speech, and the emphasis added by Caputo-Pearl onto each word (which I notate in the transcription through periods) makes the meaning of the phrase unmistakable. The picket lines that were just attributed as the reason for their achievements in the previous movement are now constructed as the goal for future victory. In this moment of instruction, Caputo-Pearl listed some of the major demands that motivated the teachers to initiate a strike:

> For reducing class size. "Lines. Stronger. Next Week."
>
> For more nurses, counselors, librarians, psychologists, psychiatric social workers. "Lines. Stronger. Next Week."
>
> For a fair wage for educators. "Lines. Stronger. Next Week."

In this movement, the strategic use of pronouns has all but disappeared, and the audience is mostly speaking in sentence fragments that lack definitive subjects. While the major demands listed by Caputo-Pearl resemble something of a sentence, by including articles and prepositions, the audience's participation lacks the previously emphasized pronouns. One might ask, whose line is it anyway? The answer is again implied via enthymeme: the voices that are committing

themselves to the future ("Next. Week.") are also the ones claiming responsibility for the picket lines.

For Caputo-Pearl, the structure of the address is largely constructed around the figure of the audience. In the beginning of the speech, the praise of the audience establishes how important the striking workers are for this fight; and in the end of the speech, the instruction of the audience to join the speech cements their role as the primary agents of the strike's success. By moving from the past week and towards a vision of the next, Caputo-Pearl instills a significance within the actions, both past and future, of the audience. Moreover, Caputo-Pearl deploys a metaphor about boxing to frame the purpose as a literal fight against another group of people:

> The last five days of being on strike in Los Angeles has achieved many, many things, and we are going to tell you a little bit about that. But the biggest thing it has achieved, is it has STUNNED our opponents. The billionaires, the district bureaucrats, the nay-sayers, the non-profit-industrial-complex that lines up with whatever the privatizers say. We have stunned them by taking over this city. If you know what you do, if you are a boxer, do you know what you are do when your opponent is stunned? You double down and keep on punching them, more! And you try to end it, right there!

By constructing the strike as a fight within a boxing metaphor, the speaker creates an opportunity to specifically name the opponents of the audience. While this list includes other groups of people, Caputo-Pearl references the opponents elsewhere in the speech simply as, "the

billionaires." According to the metaphor, in one corner of the ring we have an elite group of billionaires, and in another, we have the grassroots—the teachers of Los Angeles.

Furthermore, in another moment of praise, Caputo-Pearl describes the opponents of the teacher strike as in a state of weakness. In the speaker's boxing vernacular, the stunned opponent is ready to be dealt a finishing blow. Caputo-Pearl does not hold punches in this moment, for he viscerally describes what is metaphorically necessary for victory: more punches. He states:

> We have stunned our opponents. And if we get to next week and we need to remain
>
> on strike. Are you ready for it to be stronger than this week? Are you ready for it to
>
> be stronger? Are you ready to go in when our opponent is stunned, and double down,
>
> and punch, punch, punch until we get an agreement for our students.

The speaker uses this metaphor to construct the teachers as engaged in a fight with the billionaires who control the city, but the supporting material works to endow this fight with added political significance, one that extends their care for their students as the underlying purpose of the strike. In conjunction with the supporting material that provides a basis for the fight being waged on behalf of a vision for social justice, the boxing metaphor provides the audience with a way of seeing themselves as heroically fighting the good fight, against a larger and seemingly better-resources opponent. Caputo-Pearl's speech to the LA teacher strike crowd attempted to fulfill a definitive purpose: preparing the teachers for another week of protest. He accomplished this through rhetorical strategies that involved the audience within the structure of the speech, which, according to Mari Boor Tonn and Mark Kuhn, is a traditional property of

labor union rhetoric.[28]Audience participation served to relay a clear set of instructions and instill enthusiasm for a potentially exhausting fight.

There may be a temptation to describe this style of oratory as call-and-response, an African-American oratorical style that emerged from Black churches and the legacy of slavery, which rhetorician Janice Hamlet further defines as, "…a spontaneous verbal and nonverbal interaction between speaker and listener in which the speaker's statements are punctuated by responses from the listener(s). Although the practice has been ritualized in traditional Black churches, it can also be observed outside of the church, from the academic classroom to comedy, rap, and rhythm and blues concerts."[29] Owing to the influence of the civil rights movement on the broader culture of social movements in the United States, the call-and-response style of oratory can also be observed in many contemporary social movements. While Caputo-Pearl was no doubt influenced by this powerful tradition, I would suggest that his specific approach to instructing the voices in a deliberate manner differentiates this style from the traditional understanding of call-and-response. First, there is less of a dialogic quality to the style used by the speaker. Call-and-response is usually a spontaneous expression of the audience's involvement in the communication of the sermon, speech, or performance. It is less of a matter of repeating word-for-word a set of instructions, and more of a constant exchange between the speaker and listener(s).[30] Second, Caputo-Pearl is not Black, nor is a majority of the audience. The fact that the speaker specifically gives the audience an opportunity to practice this style of

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[28] Tonn, Mari Boor, and Mark S. Kuhn. "Co-constructed oratory: Speaker-audience interaction in the labor union rhetoric of Mary Harris "mother" Jones." *Text and Performance Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1993): 313-330.

[29] Janice D. Hamlet, "Word! The African American Oral Tradition and Its Rhetorical Impact on American Popular Culture," *Black History Bulletin* 74, no. 1 (2011): 28.

[30] Geneva Smitherman, *Black Talk : Words and Phrases from the Hood to the Amen Corner* (Boston : Houghton Mifflin, 1994), http://archive.org/details/blacktalkwordsph00smit.

participation demonstrates the lack of a cultural connection to the tradition of call-and-response. Nonetheless, this rhetoric of instruction achieves similar goals and definitely borrows from the African-American oratorical tradition, while fitting it to the exigency of addressing a crowd of teachers.

The technology I am attempting to highlight here can be understood through the text-based-transcripts I have provided, but the experience of witnessing these words extends beyond the system of language which give them meaning. The techné of audience participation highlighted in this section is both a strategy of the speaker and the nature of media within the discrete context of a strike rally. I am arguing that the audience itself is one of the technologies that constitutes this moment of public address, and in the process of coming together at a central location to repeat words in unison, this moment of public address achieves what Erin Rand describes as "choric collectivity."[31] She theorizes that common social moment rituals such as chanting serve an important rhetorical function in "establishing and affirming the cohesion of the group, not merely expressing it; in other words, it is the performance itself that produces and intensifies solidarity among members."[32] During the practice phrase of the last moment of instruction, the audience's repetition of the phrase "Lines. Stronger. Next. Week." had the property of what music theorists call *accelerando*, or a gradual speeding up of the tempo. This was not something that came from the speaker, as if he were the conductor, but a spontaneous occurrence emanating from the crowd. The rhythm of these four words, strung together as a short sentence, helped achieve the cohesion of the group.

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[31] Erin J. Rand, "'What One Voice Can Do': Civic Pedagogy and Choric Collectivity at Camp Courage," *Text and Performance Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (January 2, 2014): 28–51, https://doi.org/10.1080/10462937.2013.853825.
[32] Rand, 39.

Before apprehending the experience of hearing or seeing the question, "UTLA, do you feel your power?," it is worth investigating the place this question was asked. In Pezzullo's study of the Toxic Links Coalition tours through downtown San Francisco, she notes that the cultural performances of protest make use of the surrounding area as a rhetorical strategy. She writes,

> In addition to physically, visually, and emotionally performing TLC's message, the tour also turned public spaces into a theater of sound. The speakers used a microphone, enabling their voices to be heard by tour participants and those passing by. Participants blew whistles, clapped, hissed, laughed, shouted, and repeatedly chanted TLC's message, "Stop cancer where it starts." Walking amid the skyscrapers and traffic of downtown San Francisco, those of us on the tour frequently saw people peering down at us from their office windows to see/hear what all the noise was about.

Pezzullo's attention to the mediality of protest, gained from an *in situ* scale of analysis, reveals the embodied techné of social movement rhetoric. Similarly, Danielle Endres and Samantha Senda-Cook offer the heuristic framework for approaching the places of social movement rhetoric as *place in protest*.[33] They write, "Using place as a heuristic for studying social movements recognizes not only that social protest is inherently out of place, but also that place is more than just a backdrop for the rhetoric of social protest."[34] In this regard, the LA teacher's strike offers a clear lesson about the places of protest, for their picket lines formed by teachers happened outside of most of the schools within the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). Picket lines are a unique tactic of strikes that serve to fulfill the goal of suspending

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[33] Endres and Senda-Cook, "Location Matters."
[34] Endres and Senda-Cook, 260.

the normal operations of a workplace. By using a form of embodied rhetoric, picketers hope to

dissuade, or even intimidate, other employees from "crossing the line" and entering the

workplace.

Figure 3 - Teachers walking on a picket line[35]

LAUSD covers 720 square miles of Southern California with over 1,000 school buildings, so the

task of organizing picket lines throughout this city was surely a daunting one.[36] Nonetheless,

each day of the teacher strike featured a schedule that asked striking teachers to form picket lines

in the morning and then to converge downtown for an afternoon rally. These rallies took place

outside of LA City Hall in Grand Park, and because the expected size of the rallies surpassed the

30,000 members of the union, organizers arranged for a stage and sound system to meet the

exigency of the place. City Hall was where the "bargaining room" was located, so one of the

intended effects of the rally was to place pressure on the negotiations happening during the

strike. As a busy part of the city, however, an added effect of the rallies was the disruption of the

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[35] "LA Teachers, District to Resume Negotiations amid Strike," Magnolia Banner News, January 17, 2019, https://www.magnoliabannernews.com/news/2019/jan/17/la-teachers-district-to-resume-negotiat/.
[36] "District Information / District Information," accessed October 13, 2022, https://achieve.lausd.net/http%3A%2F%2Fachieve.lausd.net%2Fsite%2Fdefault.aspx%3FDomainID%3D32.

streets normally used by motor vehicles that cut through the park. To quote Endres and Senda-Cook again, "[A]ny protest that marches through city streets not only sent a visual message of the strength of the movement through images of city streets brimming with people but also temporarily reconstructed city streets from places for transportation into places of protest."[37]

Figure 4 - Aerial view of the rally[38]

While the re-making of place in protest was an important part of the street rallies in downtown, the combination of dispersed picket lines and converged rallies each day helped anchor the activities of the strikers in a shared feeling of solidarity. Caputo-Pearl's question and the audience's enthusiastic response, then, existed in the context of five days of these strike activities and the various places in protest. The felt power of members of the teachers' union is inseparable from the physical context in which this statement was uttered. In asking the question to the audience, "UTLA, do you feel your power?" the speaker set the scene for the rest of his speech.

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[37] Endres and Senda-Cook, "Location Matters," 258.
[38] Kelley Czajka, "Los Angeles Unified School District Teachers Strike (in Photos)," Pacific Standard, accessed January 10, 2023, https://psmag.com/news/los-angeles-unified-school-district-teachers-strike-in-photos.

After the audience grew quiet from their expression of power, Caputo-Pearl addressed the audience directly with a set of sentences that from the perspective of an outside observer listening to the speech years later seem almost meaningless. He states, "You- and I'm not just talking about UTLA being something different now. UTLA meant something 5 years ago." His use of the pronoun "you" connects it to the opening question, setting up his audience as the labor union. But he immediately interrupts his sentence to offer a remark about how the union has changed over the past five years. "When I say UTLA now, we are talking about our student allies, and our parent allies. UTLA is a movement now." It is clear in the viewing of the video that the speaker is deviating from his planned statement. The ambiguity in the speaker's choice of words, "being something different" or "UTLA meant something" is an example of the shallowness of the transcribed version of this speech. The teachers present in the audience, and especially the ones that have taught for the school district for over five years, may hear meaning in this phrase that is impossible to apprehend. This odd remark may be interpreted as a statement about the inclusion of students and parents alongside the teachers, but I argue that it is a moment in which the historical context of the speech is constitutive of the public address.

Five years before the speech, rank and file teachers of Los Angeles (including Caputo-Pearl) formed a caucus to win leadership elections in the union and remove from power a group of leaders they saw as insufficiently responding to the problems faced by teachers. This caucus, Union Power (originally called Progressive Educators for Action – PEAC), sought to alter the strategy of the union towards the use of the strike to achieve the improvements desired by teachers in the district. In the decades that preceded the formation of this caucus, the elected leaders of UTLA participated in what Dana Cloud describes as "business unionism." This paradigm has shifted the role of labor unions from vehicles for class struggle into organizations

for conciliation with employers. As teacher union activist Ellen David Friedmand notes, "By the 1980s, as the numbers of unionized teachers swelled and dues revenue soared, the unions began to staff up and professionalize, precipitating a culture of negotiating instead of fighting, servicing instead of organizing, and relegating members to client status."[39] The anti-democratic nature of business unionism is an obstacle for union members who want to use their organization as a vehicle for social change. Fortunately for contemporary labor organizers, there is a history of rank-and-file members organizing themselves independently of the union, in caucuses, to challenge the established leadership. These caucuses build support for their political perspectives and attempt to outmaneuver older leaders in the leadership elections. Once in power, rank and file reform caucuses begin to transform the organizational culture of the union, and this usually entails preparing for a strike. In an article written by Alex Caputo-Pearl and Cathy Garcia published in *Labor Notes* in 2011, the authors wrote "Progressive Educators for Action has a vision for public education that's directly counterposed to the billionaires' agenda. PEAC is a caucus working to transform the 45,000-member United Teachers Los Angeles (UTLA) into a social justice union so that it can powerfully represent its members, and go much further."[40]

After he was elected President of UTLA in 2014, Caputo-Pearl gave a speech to the union's annual conference. He stated that, "We aren't going to win by having a union president make clever arguments in small negotiation rooms. We're going to win through proactively organizing people into a powerful collective that can't be ignored."[41] The formation of Union

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[39] Ellen David Friedman, "What's Behind the Teachers' Strikes | Dollars & Sense," Dollars & Sense, June 2018, https://www.dollarsandsense.org/archives/2018/0518edfriedman.html.
[40] "Education Reform the Union Way," Labor Notes, February 4, 2011, https://labornotes.org/2011/02/education-reform-union-way.
[41] Randy Childs and Gillian Russom, "A Comeback for the UTLA?," SocialistWorker.org, accessed January 17, 2023, http://socialistworker.org/2014/11/17/a-comeback-for-the-utla.

Power was a response to the failed strategy of business unionism, and the members of the caucus were advocates for union democracy. Union Power leaders worked to transform the organization into one that could put up a meaningful fight. They directed union resources towards the development of leaders across the hundreds of schools in LA, and they publicly attacked the education reform agenda. They argued that the union needed to take a bigger role in challenging the understaffing that was common in LA schools, both in the ballooning class sizes and the lack of support specialists like librarians and nurses. Union Power caucus members systematically spread the idea that the strike could challenge the trend of strained public resources. Furthermore, they incorporated demands for racial justice into their platform, such as the demand for an end to the practice of "random searches" that predominantly impacted students of color.[42]

A persistent theme in Caputo-Pearl's history as a union leader is his criticism of the "bargaining room" as a source of power for his union. Before he was elected, he criticized the previous union leaders for focusing too much on negotiations and less on the power of an active membership. In the speech, he returns to this theme in through his instructor persona. He reminds the audience:

> Now, you all know this, it's already been said. That our bargaining team is inside city hall right now. And, I've gotta say, just as UTLA president, that how awesome of a bargaining team that we have. They are incredible, classroom educators, officers, etc. But I want you to understand something, and listen to this real closely. Bargaining is not just about what happens in that room. Bargaining is about what happens here. That's why,

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[42] UTLA, "Random Searches Memorandum of Understanding" https://www.utla.net/resources/random-searches-mou

because what happens here influences the bargaining room more than any strong arming in that room does.

The theory of change operating in this moment of the speech hinges upon the publicness of the rally. Rather than the logical appeals made in the private space of the bargaining room, Caputo-Pearl argues to the crowd that their public gatherings and strike activities are the relevant source of power for a successful strike.

So, when Caputo-Pearl said that in comparison to five years ago, "UTLA being something different now", he was not merely commending the parents who had decided to take an interest in their children's learning conditions. His statement was a type of inside talk whereby members of the union would recognize that their struggle came about as a result of the effort to transform the union into a fighting organization. This subtle nod to the history of organizing that preceded the strike is indicative of the speech's rhetoric, for it is yet another example of Caputo-Pearl shifting the agency from himself to his audience. Caputo-Pearl's excellence as a rhetor stems from a contradictory position in for the study of rhetoric. He is at once a skilled orator whose adopted persona and thematic choices achieved the purpose set out for the speech, but the speech itself is premised upon the rhetorical work of union organizing in the years the preceded the strike. I am reminded of the late Mike Davis's words on the role of union organizers as "patient gardeners," he writes, "Unlike the broad-chested heroes of proletarian novels or Eisenstein films, rousing their workmates to rebellion with a single fiery speech, the classical rank-and-file organizer was more like a patient gardener constantly weeding

daily plant life of its inevitable dissensions and jealousies."[43] There is evidence of such

gardening in the text of this speech, but the historical context of the Union Power caucus makes

this clear. Alex Caputo-Pearl was a rank-and-file member of the teachers' union, and the strategy

pursued by his co-organizers and him propelled their caucus to leadership, and eventually, to the

moment of this strike.

Mediality of Rally Speeches

Rhetorical criticism is a method, but its treatment of speeches often exists in service of a

larger goal of building rhetorical theory and, of course, insight into the politics and poetics of

public discourse. I am building the theory of mediality for rhetorical studies, and I use this

perspective to draw attention to the nature of media at work in a rally speech during a strike.

John Durham Peters' description of bodily media is a useful reminder that this speech, while

delivered in-person, is nonetheless *mediated*. He writes, "Speech is a muscular exercise that

modifies pressure gradients, moving matter around, both in the vocal and hearing organs of the

speakers—their bodies—and in the conducting medium of air or water."[44] The video recording

of Caputo-Pearl's speech shows how physical this moment of public address was for those in

attendance. Caputo-Pearl struggles to read his pre-written speech from the phone in his hand, for

his enthusiasm in the moment spills into his gestures and body language. He wrestles with the

energy he projects with his voice with the plans he made for the speech prior to the moment.

While it is his body's muscles that make the sounds of the speech, he is using a microphone

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[43] "Plant" in this quote is a double entendre, for not only are "plants" the thing that gardeners care for, they are also sites of work, such as factories or school buildings. Mike Davis, *Old Gods, New Enigmas: Marx's Lost Theory* (Verso Books, 2018), 53.
[44] John Durham Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds: Toward a Philosophy of Elemental Media* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), 91.

connected to a public address (PA) system so that his voice can carry farther than it would without the aid of amplification. Alongside the speaker is a sign language interpreter whose labor translates the audible version of the speech into gestures for deaf audience members. Caputo-Pearl's larynx, the public address system, the electricity that powered the speakers, the cables that transmitted to the audio signals, and the sign language interpreter are all forms of media infrastructure, and the resources that support these media came from the dues paid by individual union members. To approach the mediality of this moment, I consider the publicness and scale of the speech.

This speech is a traditional moment of public address in the sense that it is an address given to an immediate and direct audience with the goal of achieving a desired outcome. According to Gerald Hauser, this is what the literature of public address was made for:

> The extensive public address literature has placed its emphasis on public messages as addresses, as speeches delivered to some audience capable of judging and acting on the merits of an appeal… Although the contemporary milieu appears to lack a vibrant and vital public address (e.g., people no longer rely on formal speeches as in the past, public speeches are seldom artful and almost never eloquent), this does not spell the death of rhetoric.[45]

And indeed, this example is a moment in which the publicness of the formal speech was relevant for the situation (and as I argued previously was both eloquent and artful). While many rhetoricians have lamented the decline of oratory as an expressive art form, often attributing its

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[45] Gerard A. Hauser, "Features of the Public Sphere," *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* 4, no. 4 (December 1, 1987): 437-8.

decline to mass media, the occasion of this moment of public address is a unique opportunity to consider the places where oratory is still relevant (namely, social movements).[46]

I have methodologically operated at a close scale throughout this chapter. By analyzing the language and logistical choices made by the rhetor and the occasion, I am attempting to theorize the scale of media as it was felt by the members of the audience. In this regard, the established tool of rhetorical criticism has proven useful. My analysis stems from viewing a recording of this speech and research into the conditions of union organizing the preceded it. However, I am not attempting to scale up the dissemination of this video (the video only has 566 views on YouTube and 66,000 views on Facebook), nor am I considering the rhetorical effects of the video's circulation. I am concerned primarily with the immediacy of the speech's mediality. While this moment of public address may have lacked the conditions necessary for becoming a "viral" piece of rhetoric, persisting well after Caputo-Pearl concluded his remarks, it would be a mistake to think of this as a small-scale of media.

I now move to consider the mediality of this public address by turning to two of the canonical theories of rhetorical artistry, memory and delivery. I use these concepts as a way of connecting with the rhetorical tradition, and by extension, the method of rhetorical criticism. In this regard, they help reconsider how rhetorical criticism might ask different questions and arrive at different answers with regards to media. I hope to connect with the language of the rhetorical tradition to make ideas legible to an audience of rhetorical scholars.

Frances Yates explores the transformations in the use of memory over a two-thousand-year history in his famous book *The Art of Memory*. She writes that Cicero included memory in

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[46] Jr Robert E. Denton, "Rhetorical Challenges to the Presidency," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (2000): 445–51.

the canons of rhetoric because: "…in the ancient world, devoid of printing, without paper for note-taking or on which to type lectures, the trained memory was of vital importance. And the ancient memories were trained by an art which reflected the art and architecture of the ancient world, which could depend on faculties of intense visual memorisation which we have lost."[47] My invocation of memory as a concept of rhetoric differs from the prevailing conception in the use of this term. Recent studies in rhetorical memory are concerned with collective, or public memory, of a given society. The concept of memory has motivated scholars to consider physical artifacts, such as statues or memorials, as rhetorical acts that seek to effectuate public memory and are understood as types of public address.[48] Bradford Vivian explains that there is less of a concern with the techniques and technologies used by speakers to remember what needs to be said, and instead:

> The historically recent resurgence of interest in memory as a rhetorical phenomenon entails a fundamentally different relationship between memory and rhetoric. Rhetorical theories and methods provide one set of humanistic resources with which to examine the social formation and transformation of collective memory. But they do not enjoy an exclusive or especially natural explanatory role, compared to other relevant disciplinary perspectives, in accounting for the genesis and perdurance of such memory. Neither do rhetorical techniques enjoy, as in centuries past, a privileged instrumental relationship to the fruits of carefully cultivated memory. Present-day rhetorical perspectives on memory

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[47] Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory*, vol. 3., Book, Whole (London;New York; Routledge, 1999), 4.
[48] Kendall R. Phillips et al., *Framing Public Memory* (University of Alabama Press, 2004).

overwhelmingly contribute to critical analyses of collective memory, not to closely allied

practices of memorization and communication.[49]

While this is not beyond the scope of Cicero's theorization of memory, which according to

Christopher Pieper a theme expressed in the *Catilinarian Speeches* was the shared memory of

Roman society, it is nonetheless a difference in the approach I take here.[50] Indeed, the practices

of memorization and communication, which are rarely discussed in rhetorical theory, raise

important questions about the nature of technology and mediality. As Yates' history of the arts of

memory demonstrates, the widespread use of writing technologies resulted in a shift in the

practice of memorization and necessarily the practice of oratory.

This brings me to Caputo-Pearl's speech, and his use of his cell phone to recall the words

and things he intended to reference during his speech. Throughout the address, there are

moments in which the speaker deviates from his prepared remarks. This is recognizable in the

recording of the speech, because the speaker's eyes shift away from the phone in his left hand,

and further, the words he utters as he looks up from his phone are off topic from the previously

stated sentence. In one such moment, Caputo-Pearl diverges from his planned statement,

indicated by his double use of the phrase "by the way," and he takes a moment to praise the

creativity brought out by the strike: "This week, and by the way, by the way, there are a ton of

great signs out here. Let's give it up for your creativity…No one makes better homemade signs

than teachers." This is further evidence of the displacement of ethos Caputo-Pearl uses to lavish

his audience with praise, but it is also an example of the impromptu nature of some of his

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[49] Bradford Vivian, "Memory: Ars Memoriae , Collective Memory, and the Fortunes of Rhetoric," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 48, no. 3 (May 27, 2018): 293.
[50] Christoph Pieper, "Memoria Saeptus: Cicero and the Mastery of Memory in His (Post-) Consular Speeches," *Symbolae Osloenses*, December 16, 2014, https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00397679.2014.964473.

remarks. Following this remark, and the cheers from the audience is initiated, Caputo-Pearl returns his glance to his phone to read the next part of his speech. His returning words are, "So, this past week, has been stunning for us. We have stunned our opponents. And if we get to next week and we need to remain on strike. Are you ready for it to be stronger than this week?" The use of the subordinating conjunction "so," demonstrates that the speaker is returning back to the idea he was previously going to mention before he felt the need to praise the audience, and it is a reminder that his purpose of the speech is to prepare for another week of striking. However, this aside demonstrates an important point about the mediality of memory. The phone, and presumably the computer on which Caputo-Pearl originally composed the text of his speech, are media. While it is tempting to say that the remark about homemade signs came "off the top of his head," or as an improvisational moment of oratorical invention, the movement between previously reading a previously recorded text and impromptu speaking are both examples of mediation. The speaker's brain matter, located at the "top of his head," too is a form of media. This is the argument made by Yates, whereby the "mnemotechnics" developed in ancient Greece are related to the technologies of writing that aid in the capacity of humans to remember. Both are matters of techné, and drawing an artificial barrier between the means of memorizing speech, whether by writing notes in a phone or by imagining physical places related to the subjects of the speech separates the embodied nature of mediality. Whether he decided in that exact moment to comment on the signs, or he previously noted how impressive they were prior to the speech, this faculty of oratory is a technology essential to public address.

As Walter Ong stateds in *Orality and Literacy*, "[I]n antiquity it was not common practice for any but disgracefully incompetent orators to speak from a text prepared verbatim in advance," such was the case for in era that the art of memory was practiced and valorized.

However, the changing conditions of media and memory have made it more acceptable for speakers to rely on previously recorded transcripts, such as in the commonly used teleprompter for presidential oratory. Caputo-Pearl's use of a phone are in line with this technological augmentation of oratory, but his use of audience participation helps resuscitate what could have been a dry reading of a lecture. I see this as an interplay between the forms of media that constitute the public address. There are times in the speech where the almost monotonous reading of the phone's text are punctuated by cheers from the audience. During the first moment of instruction, in which the speaker asked for the audience to respond with "Because our picket lines are strong," Caputo-Pearl's text is filled with names and facts that were clearly not committed to his brain's memory. In describing the support the strike has received, he stated, "Richard Dreyfuss, Kamala Harris, Bernie Sanders, the national football league players association, and many more celebrities have come out in support. We achieved this…[Audience](Because our picket lines are strong.)" Besides being an eclectic mix of so-called "celebrities," the reading of this list is not a smooth moment of oratory. It is clear, in the Ciceronian sense, that Caputo-Pearl's memory is not of the "things and words," for his reading of these names is entirely reliant upon the phone. This statement and the statements that precede and follow it are examples of the phone doing the speech for Caputo-Pearl. However, it is the audience's interruption of the phone that makes the speech engaging again. Had the speaker simply listed the achievements by reading verbatim from his phone, the outcome might have resulted in a dampened enthusiasm.

Perhaps Caputo-Pearl may have benefitted from being a committed Ciceronian student of rhetoric, whereby he was practiced in the "mnemotechnics" of antiquity, and he delivered the speech without the aid of his phone. This would not be the case of a speaker being free from the

constrains of media, but simply limited in different ways. The speech may have lacked the specific ideas that made it engaged with the most up-to-date facts about the strike, or it might have lacked any useful information about the reasons the strike would need to stretch into a second week. *Ars memoria*, in a paraphrase of Kittler, is dependent upon the technological possibilities of the epoch in question. The canon of memory should be regarded more than the training of effective speakers through rote memorization, and instead should be thoughtfully integrated with concerns for mediality as a means of producing engaging oratory. Public address scholarship can benefit from a renewed concerned for memory and media, not merely in the collective memory of a given society, but in the memory facilitated by media that results in the constitution of public address.

I again wish to return to the opening question of the speech, "Do you feel your power?" This was one of the only moments in the public address where the speaker moves from a stationary position on the stage, and it was shortly after he was handed the microphone. The sonic vibrations produced by the speaker's voice and amplified by the public address system had an observable effect on the audience. The opening question of the speech produced an expression of energy that clearly fulfilled the purpose of the speech, enthusiasm for the continuation of the strike. Kathleen Stewart describes the theoretical term "affect" as "felt intensities," and it is difficult not to see the spread of affect from the asking of this question.[51] Indeed, it would appear as if the "power" referenced by Caputo-Pearl was intensely felt. The delivery of this question is not reducible to the text that I have provided, nor the video that documents its effects. It is the layers of mediation that enabled the intensities to be felt by a crowd of 50,000 people. The stage,

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[51] Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, *Ordinary Affects* (Duke University Press, 2007).

public address system, and sign language interpreter were crucial technologies of publicity that made the conditions for this moment of public address.

As previously mentioned, studies of rhetorical delivery are less common following the development of writing technologies. As Ben McCorkcle makes the case,

> [It] was delivery's virtual absence, its downplayed status in rhetorical theories of the time, that helped foster print technology's eventual hegemonic rise as the dominant force on the communication landscape. In other words, diminishing or ignoring the embodied, performed rhetorical act and refocusing that attention on written expression constitutes one means by which rhetoric functioned as a site of remediation for both hand-produced and machine-produced technologies of writing.[52]

While Cicero defined the canon of delivery as "the moderating of the voice and body to suit the dignity of the things and words," he did so before the invention of the gramophone, microphone, or the electroacoustic transducer (loudspeaker). As is typical fashion for studies of rhetoric and technology, I argue that limiting an understanding of delivery to the individual human's body or voice does little to elucidate the conditions under which speech is made. Rhetorical studies of new media have benefitted from the analysis of rhetoric beyond the speaker. Well before the emergence of new media technologies, other technologies of publicity were used by orators to enhance their delivery. In ancient Greece, theatres (including hard surfaces, which could reflect and amplify sound), podiums, and the agora, were often the settings in which rhetoric took place, and they necessarily served as elements of delivery. Christopher Lyle Johnstone's essay, "Communicating in classical contexts: The centrality of delivery" makes this point by attending to the "architectural and acoustical properties of the physical settings in which orations were

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[52] Ben McCorkle, *Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse: A Cross-Historical Study* (SIU Press, 2012), 71.

performed during the 5th and early 4th centuries"[53] As such, the stage on which Caputo-Pearl spoke is, I would argue, an element of his pronutiatio. It not only provided some degree of acoustic amplification, by elevating the source of his voice, it also visually constructed his presence as listen worthy. The stage, which featured an elevated platform for standing, vertical scaffolding for electronic equipment, and a black tarp above and behind the platform, is a genre of delivery. The visual cues provided by the stage direct the gaze of the audience, and they imply that the person or people standing on the stage should be heard and seen. The stage was comprised of parts that made it easy and safe to deconstruct and move after the conclusion of the rally and was most likely rented by UTLA for the purposes of the strike. Its speaker system was connected with cables running on top of the stage or below it to the pre-amplifiers, amplifiers, and receivers that coordinated the electronic signals collected by the various microphones. Large speakers hung from the rafters on the left and right side of the stage, which were forward facing so that the sounds picked up by the microphones could be projected thousands of feet into the Los Angeles park.

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[53] Christopher Lyle Johnstone, "Communicating in Classical Contexts: The Centrality of Delivery," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 87, no. 2 (May 2001): 126.

Figure 5 - Tom Morello on stage performing Rage Against the Machine's song "Killing in the Name Of" with UTLA sign language interpreter Justin Mauer signing the lyrics "Fuck you, I won't do what you tell me." UTLA marching band in the background.[54]

Prior to Caputo-Pearl's speech, the stage was used by musical performers to entertain the crowd. Tom Morello, the lead guitarist of the band Rage Against the Machine, was accompanied by a volunteer marching band made up of UTLA members and supporters on this stage. They performed as the crowed swelled in size, for people were travelling from their assigned picket lines earlier in the day to the end-of-week rally. The amplification used by the rock musician and the UTLA band played an important role priming the audience for the speech by Caputo-Pearl. The amplification relied on the aforementioned technologies of publicity such as speakers, microphones, and sound cables. Kittler notes that the development of recording technologies for rock music were developed alongside weapon technologies for World War II. Methods of transmitting and recording sound were integral for bomber and submarine pilots to find their enemies, "the misuse of military equipment that had been devised for tank divisions, bomber

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[54] *Tom Morello at UTLA Strike*, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nd4VGTNq1zs.

squadrons, and packs of U-boats led to rock music."[55] Kittler argues that the technologies of amplification are not merely accidental off-shoots of military equipment, but also contain the logics under which they were developed. Rage Against the Machine's music is still very much the lyrics of war, and the performance enabled by amplificatory technologies prepares the audience for the war of class struggle.

Alongside Morello was the UTLA sign language interpreter Justin Mauer. Mauer was contracted by UTLA to provide his interpreting services throughout the strike, starting with a press conference announcing the strike's beginning a week earlier. According to a news article written about Mauer after the strike's conclusion, he formed a bond with the deaf teachers, parents, and students that relied on his translation, and so the union continued to hire him.[56] As he wrote on his personal blog one year after the conclusion of the strike:

> UTLA, the LA teachers union was committed to equal access to communication for the Deaf educators on strike and for the Deaf parents, students, and community members affected by the strike (some numbers show that nearly one million Deaf and Hard of Hearing people live in Southern California, many of them in LA County). By the end of the 6th day, we were all like family and I really feel honored to have been treated like a fellow family member.[57]

In the video recording of Caputo-Pearl's speech, Mauer is standing at the edge of the frame and his gestures are only partially visible. However, the audience members who relied on his use of

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[55] Friedrich A. Kittler and Erik Butler, *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence* (Palo Alto, Stanford University Press, 2014), 160.

[56] "Interpreter Became the Reluctant Face (and Hands) of the LAUSD Strike," *Daily News* (blog), January 24, 2019, https://www.dailynews.com/interpreter-became-unlikely-face-and-hands-of-the-lausd-strike.

[57] "One Year Anniversary of the LA Teacher's Strike," *Justin Maurer* (blog), January 16, 2020, https://justin-maurer.com/2020/01/16/one-year-anniversary-of-the-la-teachers-strike/.

sign language can be clearly seen as in dialogue with Mauer, clarifying some of the comments made by the speaker. They are positioned at the front of the crowd, so that there are no obstructions in their line of sight of the interpreter.

Bodily gestures are thought of as a classical component of an orator's delivery. However, there are few studies of the rhetorical performance of sign language delivery.[58] Martin Law's dissertation "Democratic Disharmony: Indecorous and Uncontrollable Rhetorics of Black Lives and Disability Justice" re-examines the category of eloquence in the context of racism and ableism. [59] Law proposes a theory of ineloquence for comprehending the rhetorical performances of black, disabled hip-hop artists and the effects these performances have on resistance to ableism. One of the subjects of Law's dissertation provided both English and American Sign Language interpreter services at their live performances, and while ineloquence rejects a concern for traditional conceptualizations of "persuasion," the technologies of accessibility at these performances demonstrates a political commitment towards eradicating ableism. The idea that delivery is limited to the individual speaker of public address limits the understanding of translation services that are necessary for a multi-lingual audience. Justin Mauer's mediation of Caputo-Pearl's speech provides an avenue of publicity for Deaf audience members to meaningfully participate in the speech. This raises a significant concern for the mediality of delivery, for what if the speaker system failed, or if Mauer missed a line of the speech? The speaker's strategic use of pronouns, his boxing metaphor, or his facts and details

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[58] Johnson, Pliner, and Burkhart examined the structures of ableism that limit deaf students from engaging within the communication classroom, and the principles of universal instructional design that could provide the necessary accommodations for deaf student participation in the public speaking course. One such accommodation is the provision of translation services. Julia R. Johnson, Susan M. Pliner, and Tom Burkhart, "D/Deafness and the Basic Course: A Case Study of Universal Instructional Design and Students Who Are d/Deaf in the (Aural) Communication Classroom," *Basic Communication Course Annual* 14, no. 1 (2002): 12.
[59] Martin Peter Law, "Democratic Disharmony: Indecorous and Uncontrollable Rhetorics of Black Lives and Disability Justice" (PhD Thesis, Indiana University, 2022).

about the on-going negotiations would have been lost on the audience. In other words, the mediality of public address is an essential component of understanding the capacity of a speaker to be understood, and rhetorical criticism should seek to understand the layers of mediation that can succeed or fail to publicize address.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have reconfigured the method of rhetorical criticism to begin with the assumptions of mediality in the task of analyzing public address; and throughout this chapter, I demonstrated the sometimes undertheorized elements that constitute the object of speech. While I did utilize a transcribed version of this speech in order to conduct this analysis, I have attempted to reconstruct the rhetorical artifact *in situ.* The transcript, which in this instance was something I produced based on an audiovisual recording, is still an important part of performing rhetorical analyses; however, as I have demonstrated, more work can be done to contextualize transcripts within the reality of their performances, settings, and histories. Further, rhetorical criticism benefits from scholarly attention to the conditions of possibility determined by media. Investigating the layers of mediality helps rhetoricians understand the affordances and limitations of the available means of persuasion*;* but further, concerns for mediality deepen the appreciation for rhetorical acts by investigating the nature of their facilitation. The exigency of a speech delivered to an in-person reminder is an exceptional reminder of the power of presence, the needs fulfilled by gathering, and the function that a speech can provide during a pivotal historical moment. Speeches have always been more than a collections of rational arguments and good ideas, which can be expressed neatly in transcripts. Memory and delivery, whether conceptualized as concepts used for analysis in rhetorical theory or as techniques to be practiced by orators, reveal the reliance upon media that has constituted public address since well-before

antiquity. I have assembled in this chapter other studies that accentuate investigations of

mediality in the field of rhetoric, and it is my hope that my use of two of Cicero's canons,

rhetoric can continue to explore the extra-textual and mediated ways through which public

address works.

Beyond the concerns for mediality and rhetorical criticism I have raised here, this speech

is significant for pedagogical reasons. According to Lucas, the American oratorical tradition is

worth studying as a means for reviving the appreciation and emulation of rhetorical excellence.

In an era of revived labor militancy, particularly fueled by the organizing of young people, why

shouldn't public speaking courses be sites of training for future strike rally speeches? And what

studies of public address would be useful for this cause? Mediality deepens this line of inquiry

because it asks our students to consider the necessary forms of infrastructure that can enable a

successful rally speech. It broadens the horizons of thinking for future rhetorical actors by asking

students to consider the technological and social resources that can be marshalled during times of

collective action.

By highlighting the technologies that constituted this public address, I do not mean to

downplay the human element of this strike rally. I do so, in fact, to demonstrate the co-

constitutive nature of media and the collective action of people. The various technologies

assembled to make possible this moment of public address are, in the words of John Durham

Peters, infrastructures of being. Infrastructures that in some instances were supported by the

financial resources of the teacher's union. Like most labor unions, UTLA is funded by member's

dues payments. According to their website, members are required to pay 1.5% of their annual

salary to their labor union to fund its various activities.[60] Afterall, the stage on which Caputo-

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[60] "Dues Structure," UTLA, July 20, 2022, https://utla.net/resources/dues-structure/.

Pearl spoke, the microphone that amplified his voice, the interpreter that translated his message to deaf audience members, and even the energy he used to write and perform the speech were all made possible by resources, both financial and otherwise. These are essential infrastructures for a gathering at this scale, and it is worth understanding the economic means by which they came to be. The payment of dues is a form of personal sacrifice made by each member of the union. Teachers, as it is well known, are not paid enough, so each additional deduction from their total take home salary is significant. The 1.5% of the resources they are expected support their livelihoods with each year is money that is not being used to purchase delicious food, take leisurely vacations, or enjoy the time they spend outside of the classroom fulfilling themselves however they see fit. For each member, this can be over $1,000 a year. And yet, without the sacrifice of the members the infrastructures that constitute this public address, and the strike writ large, would be substantially less enabling. Sign language interpreters alone, whose labor requires intense concentration and skill, can cost thousands of dollars per day. It is possible for workers to strike without the support of the financial infrastructures of labor unions (as in the case of West Virginia, discussed in the next chapter), but this strike rally is an example of the enabling capacity of media infrastructures for both publicity and access.

The *in situ* scale reveals the traditional object of "speech" as a highly mediated form of communication, and although the LA teacher strike began about a year after the "wave" of state-wide strikes, it nonetheless serves as a starting point for the next portion of my investigation. As I move into a scale of analyzing the rhetorical conditions of publicness on a national and international level, it is worth remembering the starting point of speech and the history of rhetorical criticism. Indeed, rhetorical scholars have long since broadened the horizon of persuasion beyond the individual speech towards the many multifaceted ways that people use to

effectuate change. In the next chapter, I begin to analyze the forms of rhetoric that were facilitated by what is commonly referred to as "social media," and although the fact that these rhetorical acts were indeed mediated is more obvious when compared to a speech, the conditions of possibility that determined their mediality is less so.

Chapter 3: Archaeology of State-wide Strikes

Rewind to 2018. The teachers of West Virginia launched a state-wide strike that, compared to the meticulously planned LA strike, was a spontaneous uprising. Following the revelation that changes to the employee health insurance plan would adversely affect the take-home salary of teachers across the entire state, a flurry of organizing began to take shape. While not every teacher closely followed the minutia of policy changes, the few teachers that did talked with others to share their outrage. The conversations had in the workplace could only go so far at involving the tens of thousands of teachers who would potentially be impacted by the increase in insurance premiums, so some of the teachers turned to social media. According to Katie Endicott, "We didn't know some of these changes that were happening. In years past, those changes happen and they happen so quickly that we weren't aware. But with the Facebook page, now everybody is aware. Because if you can't go to the meeting, someone is live streaming that meeting and you are still able to watch."[182] In 2018, Facebook was still the most popular social networking site in the world, and Facebook groups were a commonly used tool for connecting with others over shared hobbies and interests. After the teachers of West Virginia utilized a Facebook group that accrued 30,000 members to successfully win their strike, this tactic was adopted teachers in other states to similarly organize their strikes. Facebook groups in Oklahoma and Arizona were media in and through which communication about their respective strikes occurred, but their mediality differed from the original manifestation of this techno-organizational form in West Virginia.

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[182] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_cYpsDXXdHo.

I am not attempting to claim that the use of social media in this instance is an exceptional phenomenon that proves or disproves the benefit of social media for protest movements. Siva Vaidhyanathan makes this point clear in his book-length criticism of Facebook, *Anti-Social Media*:

> A full and measured examination of protests and uprisings around the world since 2007 yields a mixed collection of successes and failures. That's no different from any other global set of uprisings in any other ten year period of the past 250 years. Sometimes people protest. When they do, they use the communication tools at their disposal. Sometimes they overthrow a government. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes the protest is a one-off event, and it withers as history recedes from it. Sometimes a protest is one small step in a long process of cultural and political change. It's sad that discussions about protests over the past decade have been locked in a shallow and unhelpful prism. The question of whether social media mattered or not, caused change or not, is ultimately silly. We can't run tests on the protests in Athens, Madrid, Cairo, Casablanca, Istanbul, Washington, and New York City between 2007 and 2017 to see if they would have happened, or happened the same way, without social media. They happened. And some people used social media before, during, and after the protests. The use of social media is perhaps the least surprising thing about those protests.[183]

Similarly, I cannot test whether or not teachers in the United States would have revolted at the same rate without the use of Facebook. However, I believe "the question of whether social media mattered or not" can be interrogated without falling prey to a techno-optimist, or techno-determinist, view of Facebook as fomenting protests worldwide. I argue that the use of social

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[183] Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media*, 132.

media did matter for these protests, and it is the mediality of Facebook groups that should be examined for a deeper understanding of how media anchored the movement and its rhetoric across digital and physical realms.

The scale of media in this situation necessarily extended beyond the in-person avenues of communication that held together a strike in a singular city. In this chapter, I move to a new scale of rhetorical activity, and as such, I make note of how the movement between scales alters the visibility of select characteristics and enables an isolation of these characteristics through the process of enlargement and/or condensation. In the last chapter, the *in situ* scale revealed some of the technologies of publicity that constitute public address. This chapter moves towards a distributed site of scale. Rather than an "artifact" studied in its "context," I investigate the *networked* scale of rhetorical activity occurring within and across geographic boundaries. I am interested in the use of Facebook groups by teachers who participated in the state-wide strikes of 2018, which by-and-large were filled with teachers employed within a particular state. Teachers in West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona (and to a lesser extent Colorado, North Carolina, and Kentucky) each had separate Facebook groups for coordinating and discussing strike actions. A networked scale is necessary for comprehending this period of the strike wave, because the activity did not occur in a singular place. More specifically, I move to a more familiar understanding of "technologies of publicity" by considering the unique organizational form of groups on the social networking site of Facebook. By "familiar," I mean that this manifestation of social media is the more common understanding of technology and media. In some ways, the mediation of rhetoric on a platform like Facebook is more obvious: that is, it is clear to observers and participants that their activity on a website lacks the full presence of their body. However, this is all the more reason for the concept of mediality to be used to explore this context.

In some regards, the scale of this movement could be understood through an index of states. The self-organization of the strikes was bound by the state lines of the United States, but as it expanded beyond West Virginia these lines mattered less. This is mostly due to the funding structure for public employees in these states. While school districts are usually funded through a mixture of state and county revenue (such as through income or property taxes), health insurance is primarily handled at the state level for the benefit of a larger insurance pool. As such, public employees are bound in similar circumstance beyond the individual school building and school district. This regionality textures the use of media by teachers, but it does not necessarily determine it. Facebook is not limited by the state lines of the United States, and the topics that gain an audience of users overcome geopolitical boundaries. For this reason, understanding the scale as networked is useful for understanding the interaction between geopolitical boundaries and social media technologies. So while the expression of these strikes at the state level is a component of the scale of my analysis, the larger story is the movements between and among state-situated actors as a matter of scale.

Facebook Groups are a feature specific to the platform, one that allows users to share content with other members of a group. Groups can be created by any user of Facebook, and they allow for people of similar interests to share posts specific to the group's context. Users who created groups are given administrator privileges to moderate discussions within the group, such as deleting posts. According to an article published in the *Guardian*, Facebook Groups were launched in 2010. The article cites a Facebook blog post (since deleted) quoting company founder Mark Zuckerberg, who said:

We've long heard that people would find Facebook more useful if it were easier to connect with smaller groups of their friends instead of always sharing with everyone they

know. For some it's their immediate family and for others it's their fantasy football

league, but the common concern is always some variant of, 'I'd share this thing, but I

don't want to bother 250 people. Or my grandmother. Or my boss.'[184]

Indeed, not wanting to share posts about a plan to strike with the bosses on social networking

sites would be an important feature of the product. Groups created something akin to the way

that Michael Warner described publics as made up of *relative* strangers.[185] The members of a

group may or may not know each member personally, but they have a relation defined by a

shared interest, identity, or concern. Each member decides to join a Facebook group for a

specific reason, and the group serves as a forum for publicizing address related to the topic that

organizes the discourse. Groups are parts of the Facebook platform that users can navigate to in

order to read posts made by members, and depending on user settings, posts made within groups

are inserted into the main "News Feed" of Facebook. Posts can contain text, images, videos, and

interactive polls, and a comment section. Users can make a post and other members of the group

can comment below to add to the discussion.

Writing about the 2018 Facebook Groups five years later is a difficult task. In *Algorithms

of Oppression,* Safiya Umoja Noble studied Google's search engine as a manifestation of the

discriminatory data gathering and application practices that plagued the technology giant's most

lucrative service. Studying a technological product like search engines presents a series

methodological problem for scholars of media and technology, for changes and updates to the

service are rolled out frequently and in a manner that is often invisible to users. She writes:

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[184] Charles Arthur, "Facebook Groups to Offer Users More Control," *The Guardian*, October 7, 2010, sec. Technology, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2010/oct/07/facebook-groups.
[185] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."

Technology is changing rapidly, as are technology company configurations via mergers,

acquisitions, and dissolutions. Scholars working in the fields of information,

communication, and technology struggle to write about specific moments in time, in an

effort to crystallize a process or a phenomenon that may shift or morph into something

else soon thereafter. As a scholar of information and power, I am most interested in

communicating a series of processes that have happened, which provide evidence of a

constellation of concerns that the public might take up as meaningful and important,

particularly as technology impacts social relations and creates unintended consequences

that deserve greater attention.[186]

A similar problem applies to the services offered by Facebook because of the political-economic

changes happening at the company. In 2021, Facebook, Inc. changed its name to Meta Platforms.

In 2018, Meta Platforms and the "metaverse" did not yet exist, and Facebook, Inc. was still the

company that managed each of the platforms owned by the company (Instagram, purchased in

2012, WhatsApp, purchased in 2014, and Oculus, purchased in 2014). Beyond the corporate

shake-ups, platform changes on Facebook are frequent, opaque, and lack accessible archival

documentation. Changes to Facebook's features like the "News Feed" or "Messenger" are made

constantly, and there are rarely announcements that explain what or how these changes affect

users—or what the changes even are. While some larger changes are accompanied by news

articles written to capture the public's interest in a platform used daily by billions of people, the

subtle changes to design, functionality, and algorithmic preferences are oftetimes imperceptible

and almost impossible to track. This is compounded by the fact that developers are usually

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[186] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York, UNITED STATES: New York University Press, 2018), 10.

testing changed features on a subset of the population (often called A/B testing) to see how it hurts/helps engagement and ad clicks. In any case, my attempt to study this platform cannot rely on traditional archival research methods. Just as in the last chapter I discussed the methodological entailments of rhetorical criticism, I now move to approach an archival methodology for apprehending Facebook Groups.

I engage in an archaeological project, but it is important to note what is not contained within my constructed archive per se: that is, within posts made within Facebook groups. The posts made within these Facebook groups are long gone. While I followed the formation of these groups in 2018, as I was then an active user of Facebook, I did not record or archive what was occurring within these groups. I merely observed as people regularly showcased the growing number of members in these groups, the types of posts that generated heavy engagement, and the connections that were forming across state lines. There are cherry picked screenshots of posts within the Facebook groups floating around in various articles and think pieces written on the topic, but these do not offer an accurate reflection of the quotidian experience of being a user during the prime of these Facebook groups. I argue that the written and spoken reflections of teachers on the subject of the Facebook groups offer a more coherent and illuminating archive for apprehending the mediality of the groups.

Methodology

Meaghan Morris wanted to study the cultural politics of tourism in Australia. She visited a tourist attraction in a Sydney shopping center called the Sydney Tower in 1981 to write a feminist criticism of the topic. She made a number of observations about the imagery of race in Australian history, and more specifically the representations of colonialism that permeated the

iconography, included within the tower. But when she revisited the tower for a continuation of the research project she noted:

> So you can imagine my surprise when I went back to the Tower one day in 1989, with the reordering of detail in mind, and it was almost all gone. Worse, it was as though none of the representations I was laboring over had ever been there. I pestered every employee I could find with questions about the renovations, but none of the part time, casualized, and underpaid staff had been around long enough to remember the decor of the Tower having ever been any different from the way it was on that day. So the episode ended with a crazed cultural critic staggering around the turret, crying, "What have you done with the evidence?"[187]

As I confront a similar problem in my attempt to study Facebook groups a mere five years after their creation, I am wondering: what has Facebook has done with the evidence for *my* analysis and criticism? Facebook has undergone dramatic changes in the years since these strikes. As a researcher, I confront a problem whereby I no longer use the platform I an intent on studying. While I was an active Facebook user during 2018 and 2019, I, along with many others, have elected to leave the platform behind in my daily habits. While some of the original Facebook groups still exist, there is no feature that allows for the archiving of posts made within the groups during their pivotal months of strike planning. In the years since, many thousands of non-teachers joined the group to observe, infiltrate, or support the teachers. The "Timeline" feature of the Facebook platform makes accessing posts made from a particular period difficult if not impossible, because it does not allow sorting or indexing. There is a search feature that is limited

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[187] Meaghan Morris, *Too Soon Too Late: History in Popular Culture*, vol. 22., Book, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 18–19.

to words, so there is no function to look for a post from a particular time frame. Users can merely scroll infinitely and hope what they are looking for appears in a logical order.

Morris's solution to the problem of ephemeral research objects proceeds from the following proposition: "[W]hen I offer a historical account of the production of an object or touch on questions of social usage, I do so for purposes defined by my critical project. Such borrowings help me to question aesthetic propositions about the historical and social effects of cultural practices."[188] Similarly, I weave in this chapter historical accounts of Facebook with the evidence I can scrape together of how teachers used this platform. This is inseparable from the global economic, political, and technological shifts that shape the emergence of the teacher protest movement, which are also subjects integrated into my analysis.

This chapter examines the written and spoken record of teachers about their use of media to encourage other teachers to join the strike, and after the conclusion of their own strike, the "extra-curricular" attempts to encourage teachers in other states to wage their own strikes. These accounts were published in the months that followed the strike, and they are attempts by striking teachers to teach others about the methods of their strike. The state-wide strikes in West Virginia, Kentucky, Oklahoma, Colorado, North Carolina, and Arizona all occurred within a 6-month period, and prior to the start of West Virginia's strike there was little if any organized effort to do the same in each state. These teachers quickly learned how to make the strike a reality and actively taught others how to do the same. This chapter considers how the teachers experienced and advocated for the strikes to jump to other locations. As such, this chapter uses a series of fragments obtained from YouTube videos or printed and edited collections put together by teachers. These videos and essays discuss the use of Facebook groups, even if they were not

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[188] Morris, 22.

primarily circulated within the groups, and it is from these remarks that I interpret the articulation of networked technologies during this moment of struggle. I organize and arrange these fragments into a digital archive of rhetoric about technologically-enabled teacher activism to further theorize the conditions of media, especially the use of Facebook groups.

In order to analyze the event of the strikes, I have assembled an archive of stories told by teachers about their strikes. These artifacts vary in their medium, but each example is situated from the perspective of teachers. It is their narratives that deserve critical attention, and not just for the rhetorical moves made within these modes of public address, but also for the situated perspective of the workers whose labor is being withheld. One major source of my teacher narrative archive is a published, edited collection of essays written by teachers within the first strike, West Virginia. The book, *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teacher's Strike*, documents the conditions that predicated the strike, the actions that teachers took in order to make the strike happen, and countless examples of the solidarity shown by ordinary people to make the strike a success. The volume is useful for approaching the strike from the perspective of teachers. The essays are filled with moments of realization, and since they were solicited directly from the teachers, the editorial practices reveal which aspects of the strike the teachers found most significant. And further, the essays are oriented outwards. The teachers are not merely interested in recollecting a part of lives, but rather they are interested in spreading their strategy for reforming public education to teachers in other locations.

Another source for the social movement archive is a series of recorded speeches given by some of the leaders in the strikes. These speeches, delivered in New York City and Chicago, were delivered to rooms filled with thousands of socialists. The meeting in New York City was organized by a coalition of labor and socialist activist organizations, and it took place just four

days after the West Virginia strike concluded on March 10th, 2018. Three of the leaders from the strike, Emily Comer, Katie Endicott, and Jay O'Neal, gave a presentation entitled "Solidarity with West Virginia Strikes" on April 2, 2018. The event was hosted by the New York State Nurses Association. It was livestreamed on Facebook by the socialist magazine *Jacobin*, and saved to a YouTube channeled called WeAreManyMedia.

Eric Blanc's book *Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics,* published by Verso Books in 2019, is filled with interviews with striking teachers from three of the strikes: West Virginia, Oklahoma, and Arizona. The author flew to each of the states while the strikes were on-going to report for *Jacobin*, and he compiled his experiences into this longer form book. His book contains a number of reflections and critiques of the different strikes, which, while informative, are not from the perspectives of the striking teachers per se. His documentation of the strikes is nonetheless useful, for they contain information about the protests that are unreported on elsewhere.

Finally, in *Strike for the Common Good: Fighting for the Future of Public Education,* there is a collection of essays edited by Rebecca Kolins Givan and Amy Schrager Lang that documents and investigates the inner dynamics of the strikes beyond just West Virginia. Included material covers some of the teacher strikes which were semi-spontaneous expressions of outrage about substandard compensation, and in other instances, chapters discuss the meticulously planned strikes such as the LA teacher strike from the previous chapter of this dissertation. *Strike for the Common Good* comparatively assesses the processes and outcomes of the 2018 state-wide strikes (West Virginia, Arizona, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Oklahoma) and the 2019 city-based strikes (Los Angeles, Chicago, Denver, etc.). The authors included

within the collection range from public school teachers who led some of the strikes to students and staff members who supported their striking teachers in practice.

The archive I construct here enables an archaeological mode of analysis suited to interrogate the mediality of Facebook groups in the distributed situation of the statewide teacher strikes, albeit in something resembling their negative outline. I define archaeology as a method inspired by the theoretical work of Michel Foucault that investigates the ways discourse formations develop and transform, and by tracing the various forces that shape the emergence of discourse, gain an understanding of the conditions of existence for any type of utterance.[189] Similarly, Freidrich Kittler deploys an archaeological methods for the study of technology's role in shaping the conditions of existence of discourse.[190] I move chronologically in this chapter through 2018, starting with the West Virginia teacher strike in February, and concluding with the Arizona teacher strike ending in May of that year. At this scale of analysis, I am attuned to the constructions of Facebook groups as a medium for realizing the strike across states. I continue a thread from the previous chapter by attending to the canonical theory of *memory*; except rather than considering the techné of memory that enables a singular rhetorical performance, such as in the rally speech, I turn towards a collective sense of memory and the technologies that underwrite them. Facebook groups are a technology of memory, for the posts contained within them work to shape the collective memory of group members and the platform also functions as an archive with retrievable bits of knowledge about the strikes. However, this technology of memory, like print technology or oral traditions, is defined by the conditions of its emergence and existence. The consolidation of an essential avenue of collective memory under corporate

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[189] Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge Classics (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002).
[190] Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*.

control has consequences. While it is tempting to think of the ease of access of Internet

publishing as democratizing, the mediality of the Facebook group platform is limiting. I explore

throughout my analysis how the mediality of memory technologies textures the struggle for

teachers in the United States.

Next, through the concept of *vernacular rhetorical pedagogy*, I comprehend the archive

as filled with examples of strikers teaching other strikers how to replicate their strategies. I build

on theories of rhetorical education, and I consider how the methods of propagating strikes to

different locations relies on a form of vernacular pedagogy. Jessica Enoch defines rhetorical

education as "any educational program that *develops* in students a communal and civic identity

and *articulates* for them the rhetorical strategies, language practices, and bodily and social

behaviors that make possible their participation in communal and civic affairs."[191] This

definition is inclusive of the activity contained within my archive. Enoch states that "any

educational program" can be understood as rhetorical education, not merely the curriculums

developed by licensed scholars of rhetoric. However, I add the term *vernacular* for my

conceptual work to highlight the emergent and collaborative nature of the strike teachers.

Building on the rhetorical theory of Gerald Hauser, who reflects that vernacular rhetoric, "[Is] a

dimension expressed in the ongoing dialogue on public issues among those who belong to a

community or a society."[192] I attend to how teachers construct a program for rhetorical pedagogy

in a language that is particular to their group. The program was, in the saying of Myles Horton

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[191] Jessica Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education: Women Teaching African American, Native American, and Chicano/a Students, 1865-1911* (SIU Press, 2008) 6, emphasis in original.
[192] Gerard A. Hauser, *Vernacular Voices: The Rhetoric of Publics and Public Spheres* (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1999), 6.

and Paolo Freire, a road made by walking.[193] Further, I think the term "pedagogy" is more appropriate than the term "education," for these are teachers after all. Of course, Enoch does not wish to preserve a hierarchy between teachers and students, but in the case of teacher strikes, the students are not easily identifiable subjects. As I will show in the analysis, the rhetorical activity of the strike teachers was oriented towards an audience of strangers, or more simply, these were acts of public pedagogy.

West Virginia

After the conclusion of the West Virginia strike, three teachers from the state, each representing a different county, flew to New York City to talk about their experiences. The previously mentioned "Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers" event was intended as a moment of public pedagogy for the states that were gearing up to follow the lead of West Virginia. It also featured a teacher from Oklahoma who called into the event, and the remarks of the teachers were oriented towards teaching others to follow in their footsteps. In the following quotes from this livestreamed panel, I focus on the remarks that mention the uses of social media. The edited collection *55 Strong,* also quoted in this section, was published after conclusion of the state-wide teacher strikes in July of 2018.

Jay O'Neal, recounting the history of the Facebook group, wrote that in January 2018, "Our Facebook group had grown to 1,200 members, who were largely using the group as a forum to discuss PEIA [Public Employee Insurance Agency] changes. Many public employees had previously been unaware of what has happening to PEIA, but were furious when they found out. When one member asked, 'Just curious if there are any talks of striking?' the group saw a

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[193] Myles Horton, *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change* (Temple University Press, 1990).

large uptick in activity."[194] An Internet forum for discussing the minutia of insurance policy

transformed into a space for the planning of an illegal teacher strike.[195] This process occurred

over a number of months in the context of a felt crisis by the teachers of West Virginia. In

previous years, however, the slow grinding of rising premiums and stagnant wages were

insufficient for igniting the flurry of organizing and activity. Media played a role in this

transformation. As Katie Endicott stated: "When a group of four legislators sponsored a bill that

would change public employee insurance benefits from 80/20 coverage to 60/40 coverage, a

teacher made a social media post that profiled these four 'enemies of education.' The post

instantly went viral and created outrage and frustration. Quickly, posts like these became

commonplace…"[196] The fact that Endicott described the outrage and frustration as something

that was "created" by the post is no accident. The technology of publicity afforded by this

Facebook group helped make the details of insurance policy into a breaking point for the

teachers of West Virginia.

These teachers often turned to the word "viral" to describe the activities within the

Facebook group. Emily Comer, who felt empowered to attend committee meetings on PEIA

because of the interest within the group, shared that she "ended up confronting the chair of the

committee later on camera, and sharing that video later in the group. It went viral—West

Virginia viral."[197] During the livestreamed panel presentation, multiple speakers would use the

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[194] O'Neal, "Jay O'Neal," 22.
[195] Public sector workers are forbidden from striking in the state of West Virginia as a matter of public safety. This includes firefighters, police, teachers, etc. This came from a 1990 ruling from the West Virginia Supreme Court of Appeals. "West Virginia Legislature Codifies Illegality of Public Employee Strikes – Arbitration Info," April 18, 2021, https://law.missouri.edu/arbitrationinfo/2021/04/18/west-virginia-legislature-codifies-illegality-of-public-employee-strikes/.
[196] Katie Endicott, "Katie Endicott," in *55 Strong: Inside the West Virginia Teachers' Strike*, ed. Elizabeth Catte, Emily Hilliard, and Jessica Salfia (Belt Publishing, 2018), 24.
[197] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*

phrase "West Virginia viral" to describe events that led up to the strike. This term demonstrates what I mean by describing the scale of media as networked. While describing something online as "viral" was by no means a new phenomenon in 2018, the addition of the state qualifier "West Virginia" restricted the meaning of this term. Its virality is discursively limited to the confines of a single state; but additionally, its significance for the people of this state is enhanced by references to place. Posts supporting teachers and attacking politicians circulated within the Facebook newsfeeds of people with an interest in West Virginia, and according to Comer, this was happening outside of the teachers' Facebook groups. According to her testimony, her recorded confrontation was posted on her personal Facebook page, and it was shared widely.[198]

Posts containing information about insurance or politicians were not the only forms of communication circulated through social media. Once momentum started to build for action, educators began sharing tactics for organizing their schools. Emily Comer described the popularity of "walk-ins" at the livestreamed panel:

> A walk-in is an informational picket outside of school before school starts as parents are bringing the kids and school buses are dropping off the kids. We would hold signs with all of the teachers outside of the school… We let parents know that we had been engaged in this fight, and we were hoping that we could win it before having to go out on strike. I think we gained a lot of support from the community that way… That idea came from our union leadership, but it spread throughout the group really quickly. Pictures of the walk-ins took off throughout the group and then it spread to other areas throughout the state,

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[198] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*

and soon enough you had people in all 55 counties doing the walk-ins. Or at least it

looked like it across the Facebook group.[199]

Perhaps one, two, or many different counties were not participating in this tactic. From the

perspective of a teacher whose attention was shaped by the Facebook group, such details

mattered little. The effect of sharing this tactic through the Facebook group was a perception that

hundreds of these walk-ins were occurring daily. Each county has dozens of schools, and in a

group of 25,000 educators the deluge of posts showcased a systematic outreach to parents and

community members that was significant.

Emily Comer added that another strategy used by teachers agitating for a strike was the

popularization of "Red For Ed" (sometimes stylized as "#RedForED") days. Or as she described

it: "Another thing that happened around that time was coordinating these days of wearing the

same colors... Because you had everybody on Fridays would wear red. You would get home

from school on Friday and I would look at my phone and I would see pages and pages, my entire

phone, would be… every employee posing for picture wearing the color red…It really felt like

everybody is in this together, we are wearing red across the entire state." As the organizers in the

panel described it, the walk-ins and Red For Ed days were more than publicity stunts for social

media users. They were intended as escalation tactics for the already committed organizers to

gradually build in the involvement of their colleagues. As counties in the Southern part of the

state were rapidly heading towards a strike, teachers in other less radicalized counties were

worried that they would be left behind. Their fear was that jumping to an extreme form of

workplace protest, the strike, would alienate the teachers who could potentially be supporters of

the cause but were not yet convinced that striking could alleviate the problems they faced.

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[199] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*

Endicott, Comer, and O'Neal all remarked that what surprised them the most about these smaller actions, walk-ins and Red For Ed days, was the teachers who they had previously assumed would not support the movement transforming into inspired activists.

These tactics spreading rapidly across networks reveal two important aspects of the social media use of teachers in West Virginia. First, the intentionality of the organizers shaped and was shaped by the mediality of the Facebook group. Walk-ins and Red For Ed days were actions that were visually spectacular, and the photos taken of these actions were prone to spread across the image posts made within the Facebook group. This tactic resembles the rhetorical concept of "image events" theorized by Kevin Michael DeLuca and Jennifer Peeples.[200] Their understanding of this concept came from an emergent tactic in the environmental movement whereby activists and organizations, such as Greenpeace, would stage spectacular actions that were prone to being photographed or video recorded and spread across the channels of mass media (newspapers and televised news). This tactic made use of the media landscape of the time and created opportunities for generating mass publicity among an audience of people who may be unaware of the environmentalist movement. The image events of social media worked in a similar manner, albeit with a more limited audience of circulation. Rather than disseminating through a nationally syndicated printing operation and television apparatus, image events in Facebook groups circulated among an audience of already-interested spectators/participants.

The image events were not necessarily staged as an embodied means of offering an argument to the wider public sphere; but rather, they served to buttress a social atmosphere conducive to enthusiasm about the movement. While textual descriptions of actions taken by teachers were no doubt included in the posts and comments in the group, they did not seem to

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[200] Michael DeLuca and Peeples, "From Public Sphere to Public Screen."

create the sensation that led Comer to believe her phone was overflowing with images of solidarity across the state. As Comer stated, the walk-in idea originally came from union leaders, and their knowledge of the tactic came from other union struggles. Its implementation across the state was, as evidenced by the comments about the Facebook group, a spontaneous adoption by organic leaders at each school site rather than a carefully planned network of veteran organizers. Second, the chaotic nature of the Facebook group was both a boon and detriment to the intentions of the organizers. Facebook groups resemble the newsfeed of the personal Facebook page, insofar as an unpredictable algorithm determines what appears in a feed versus what is hidden in a deluge of posts. With the exception of "pinned" posts made by administrators, Facebook groups are a continuous feed organized by an algorithm designed to increase engagement and views. This made it difficult to aggregate posts made on a specific topic, such as ones relating to PEIA or organizing efforts, and it made it even harder to find posts that were buried under new posts. If a teacher saw a post during a planning period or lunch break, they were likely to have had difficulty finding it again later in the day due to the flurry of activity within the over 20,000-person group. However, this was not entirely a problem. The chaos of the platform led to a sensation of overwhelming solidarity, and while the group was not the best place to make concrete decisions about logistics, it served a vital purpose in transmitting the affective dimensions of the growing movement.

In this regard, Zizi Papacharissi's theory of *affective publics* is profoundly descriptive of the Facebook group organizational form. She argues that like networked publics, affective publics are formations that enabled the networked technologies and the expressions of sentiment shared and circulated through digital media. She writes, "Mediality shapes the texture of these

publics and affect becomes the drive that keeps them going."[201] Each platform, then, lends a

distinct texture, tone, and rhythm to the circulation of affect. The felt intensities of affective

publics create discursive spaces that contribute to what Raymond Williams describes as a

"structure of feeling," or "social experiences in solution, reflecting the culture, the mood, and the

feel of a particular historical moment."[202] The mediality of social media platforms, then, affords

the storytelling structures within affective publics. According to Papacharissi:

> I am interested in how structures of feeling are both rendered and reorganized by the soft
>
> and networked architectures of online media... The moods, instantiations, and singular
>
> space-time blocks that mark *kairos*; the affectively sensed and internalized atmosphere of
>
> the here and now; and the ways in which this is collaboratively, digitally, and
>
> inadvertently imprinted into our personal and collective subconscious. The soft,
>
> networked structures of feeling that help us tell stories about who we are, who we
>
> imagine we might be, and how we might get there. The same stories that may inspire
>
> powerful disruption, accumulate and diffused intensity and tension, or simply, serve as an
>
> organically generated digital manifestation of who we are, and who we might like to
>
> be.[203]

The image-events of the walk-ins for teachers in West Virginia told a story to the teachers

participating in the affective public. This story had a rhythm of increasing intensity, it was

building tension towards what many perceived as an inevitable strike, and it manifested a

structure of feeling that made the actions of teachers protesting their working conditions seem

righteous. This structure of feeling is perhaps best described as rebellious: the affective public

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[201] Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling," 308.
[202] Raymond Williams, *The Long Revolution*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 133–34.
[203] Papacharissi, 311.

operating in and through Facebook groups contributed to a social atmosphere priming the teachers for dramatic action.

At the January 2018 school board meeting in Mingo County, WV, teachers were discussing their planned response to the PEIA changes. Mingo County is home to the town of Matewan and the history of violent repression against striking coal miners. Katie Endicott recalled the speech she gave at this meeting, which channeled these histories:

I believe it is clear that we have decided to quit talking and finally take action. However, this alone is not enough. We cannot leave this room until we decide on a date. Whether we realize it or not, the eyes of the state are on Mingo County. Right now teachers in the other fifty-four counties know that we have called this meeting. They have scheduled their own meetings later this week, and they will chart their path based on what we choose to do here this evening. It's not enough to tell them we are going to have a one-day [walkout]. We must tell them when. Will all fifty-four follow us? No. However, we don't need fifty-four. We just need a spark. If we can do this, if we can stand, then we know that our brothers and sisters in Wyoming County are not going to let us stand alone. We know that our brothers and sisters in Logan County will not let us stand alone. The south WILL stand. And if the south stands, the rest of the state will follow our lead.[204]

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[204] Endicott, "Katie Endicott," 27.
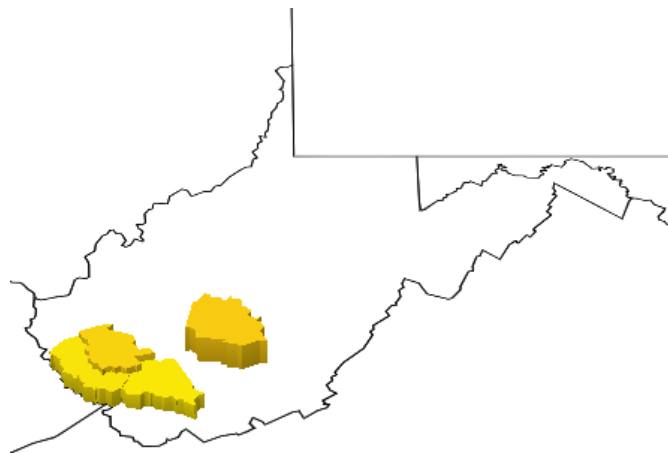
Figure 6 - February 2nd, "Fed Up Friday"

The four counties in Southern West Virginia visualized above (Mingo, Fayette, Wyoming, and Logan) are covered by a small teaching staff of 1500 educators. As anger was building at the state legislature, the teachers of these counties voted to participate in a protest they described as "Fed Up Friday." While only 4 of 55 counties participated in this action, teachers in every county were watching. Jay O'Neal stated: "Our [Facebook] group had grown to over 21,000 members. Four counties (Mingo, McDowell, Wyoming, and Logan) voted to do a one-day walkout. I got chills as I watched them rally in the capitol rotunda on Facebook livestream during planning [period], I knew their brave act would spur others on."[205] Similarly, Katie Endicott who, as a Mingo county teacher, was at the capitol that day, stated: "On Feb 2, when those 4 counties walked out, we were live streaming it and put it on our Facebook page. Everybody on their planning and during their lunch, they were watching this livestream… I had messages from people I didn't even know in that group that were saying, 'I'm in this county and I'm so sorry we didn't walk with you, but we won't miss that opportunity again. Not too long after that 7 counties then decided they were going to do a one day."

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[205] O'Neal, "Jay O'Neal," 22.

The decisions to go on strike is not an easy one, for you are putting yourself and your students in a vulnerable position—socially, professionally, and economically. To be confident that strike action could be effective, the action needs to be well-coordinated. Endicott argued:

> With the Facebook page, we really can't overstate the importance of that. Because that really allowed us to get networked. And we were able to, at that point, get the pulse of all 55 counties really quickly. So, where I teach in the southern part of the state, I already knew the pulse of the southern counties, but because of this page I'm now able to see what counties in the eastern part of the state, what counties in the northern part of the state. What their thinking. That and as well as the unity with our unions that started happening and the fact that we were bridging those divides, that sorta created the perfect storm.[206]

Endicott's choice of words with regards to "the pulse" of the state demonstrates a type of collective knowledge that was gained from the public interactions on social media. This knowledge provided the strikers with security that they would be unified in their shared vulnerability. It was this textured rhythm of the affective public operating in and through the Facebook group that made it a valuable resource for the teachers of West Virginia.

The West Virginia Department of Education has a public website for informing students and parents whether schools are open. While usually this page is used for severe weather conditions, on the eve of the strike it became an indicator of unity. There were many actions taken to make the possibility of a strike as mass-participatory as possible, such as a coordinated strike votes taken at schools across the state. There was no guarantee, however, that every county would have enough support to go out on strike. According to Eric Blanc, "On the evening of the

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[206] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*

strike, workers across the state would obsessively check the Department of Education website to see whether all other counties had voted to go out the next day."[207]

For today, **Monday February 26, 2018** - as of Feb 26, 7:18am

County	Status	Last updated
Barbour	Closed	Feb 25, 3:05pm
Berkeley	Closed	Feb 25, 3:36pm
Boone	Closed	Feb 25, 12:17pm
Braxton	Closed	Feb 25, 2:58pm
Brooke	Closed	Feb 25, 9:15am
Cabell	Closed	Feb 25, 4:49pm
Calhoun	Closed	Feb 25, 3:44pm
Clay	Closed	Feb 25, 1:06pm
Doddridge	Closed	Feb 25, 5:38pm
Fayette	Closed	Feb 25, 1:29pm
Gilmer	Closed	Feb 25, 3:35pm
Grant	Closed	Feb 25, 3:00pm
Greenbrier	Closed	Feb 25, 3:05pm
Hampshire	Closed	Feb 25, 5:14pm
Hancock	Closed	Feb 25, 8:38am

1-hour delay
2-hour delay
3-hour delay
Closed
Early dismissal

Figure 7 – Department of Education Website on February 26, 2018[208]

On February 23rd, 2018, all 55 counties of the West Virginia public education system were closed due to the strike. Coincidentally, the website uses red to signify a closed school district. High school teacher Daniel Summers noted, "Our mantra, '55 Strong,' wasn't a battle cry or a slogan. It wasn't union propaganda or a glittering generality. It was a truth. We were strong." (p. 106). As Summers's anecdote demonstrates, the teachers drew inspiration from the unity across all counties in West Virginia. Or as Endicott put it, "No one wanted to be the county that made it

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[207] Eric Blanc, *Red State Revolt: The Teachers' Strike Wave and Working-Class Politics* (Verso Books, 2019), 61.
[208] Image obtained from "School Closures Continue as West Virginia Teacher Strike Stretches on - The Washington Post," accessed April 24, 2023, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/school-closures-continue-as-west-virginia-teacher-strike-stretches-on/2018/03/01/d34aeeca-1d71-11e8-9de1-147dd2df3829_story.html.

54. We knew once we got to 55, we were staying 55 strong."[209] This is tantamount to saying: the power of peer pressure was a contributing factor to the continued resilience of the strikers.

The protest at the capitol in Charleston, West Virginia differed significantly from the LA strike analyzed in the previous chapter. In line with the ad-hoc and spontaneous nature of the action, each day of the 12-day strike consisted of occupying the public capitol building. While many pizzas were donated from union supporters across the world, in the words of Eric Blanc: "There were no daily rallies, no sound system, and no campout infrastructure. Each day the protest consisted almost entirely of chanting and singing in front of the Senate chamber doors."[210] Remarkably, the strike continued after an attempt from the union leaders to end the strike after day four. Leaders from WVEA (West Virginia Educators Association) and AFT West Virginia (American Federation of Teachers) reached an agreement with legislatures on February 27th that would give only teachers a 5% raise.[211] Neither of these unions represented a majority of teachers in the state, but they had stepped in as negotiators in the lack of clear leadership from the movement. Notably, this proposed raise left out the service personal (bus drivers, custodians, cooks, and teaching aides) who were also adversely affected by the proposed PEIA changes. These workers were also on strike (which is why they Facebook group title was changed from West Virginia Teachers United to West Virginia Public Employees United), and this deal would have left them with nothing to show for their participation. The movement did not have a formal mechanism for deciding to continue the strike, but school districts realized that not enough

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[209] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*
[210] Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 91.
[211] Ryan Quinn, "WV School Employee Strike to Continue across State," Charleston Gazette-Mail, February 28, 2018, https://www.wvgazettemail.com/2018_wv_teachers_strike/wv-school-employee-strike-to-continue-across-state/article_d824f764-2c6f-51ac-bf00-68f1873ca2a6.html.

employees would return work to open schools safely. The workers organically decided to defy the union leaders and continue striking for an additional ten days, until March 7th, 2018.[212]

At the end of the strike, legislators announced that they had reached a deal to give all public employees a 5% raise and to review changes to PEIA. Upon hearing the announcement, Katie Endicott remarked that the strikers, "[S]ang ["Country Roads" by John Denver], we held hands, we cried, we hugged each other, we gave high fives, but then we started chanting, 'West Virginia first, Oklahoma next.'"[213] Word had already spread that similar Facebook groups had started in other states, and teachers in Oklahoma were quickly following with the pace and tenacity showcased the West Virginia teachers. Indeed, the reason that the livestreamed panel was so quickly organized after the conclusion of the strike was for the lessons to be quickly transmitted to other states that similarly needed direction and strategy.

Oklahoma

After Endicott, O'Neal, and Comer concluded their remarks at the "Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!" event, Larry Cagle called into the event. One of the presenters held their phone against the microphone so that audience members and livestream viewers could listen to what Cagle had to say.[214] Cagle taught in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and after witnessing the movement grow in West Virginia through social media, he decided to create his own Facebook page, Oklahoma Teachers United. He later composed a "A Love Letter to West Virginia," coauthored with other teachers with whom he had connected online, which he read over the phone to the panel. I quote it its totality here because it demonstrates the significance of the West Virginia actions for teachers across the country:

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[212] This type of action is often described as a "wildcat" strike.
[213] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*
[214] This was well before the pandemic and the wide use of Zoom.

Dear West Virginia, I am writing to tell you I love you. In the last few weeks, you've shown me what it feels like to be loved again. Your courage, your passion, your kindness, and the way you just seem to know how I was hurting. I am beginning to believe I deserve respect. I deserve to be heard. I am a person of value. So, I want to run to you. I'm sorry, but I can't leave just now. I should have said something earlier; you need to know that I'm married. Clearly, I know you will understand, it's not been a good marriage. What person flirts with a state when they are already married to another state. Please don't tell Oklahoma. I don't know if they'd understand what the past few weeks has meant to me. I feel like the love I give to my work and my community could matter again. You helped me to believe in that. But Oklahoma is my first love, and they have promised me that they are going to work on this marriage. I'm going to try one more time to make it work. I know it is a lot to ask of you, but I need time to see if this marriage can be what they'd promise it'd be. I've heard that you've been talking to Arizona and Kentucky. I understand your life must move on. You are something special, and you have shown that to the people of your state. I can totally see what Arizona and Kentucky would be so excited to hear from you. Know that I am grateful for you. Think of me from time to time. I love this state, and I love this marriage. I am going to fight to make this state all that we dreamed it could be. Love, Oklahoma Teachers United.[215]

The feelings articulated in this letter go beyond the rational descriptions of teacher strikes as simply being a matter of low pay. While this is an issue, low pay is a symptom of the systematic disrespect of the profession. The letter translates what is at the heart of many labor disputes: a

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[215] *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!*

battle for human dignity. It shows that Facebook mediated not only information about strategy and tactics, but a rebellious structure of feeling emerging from workers in the field of education.

Oklahoma Teachers United was not the only Facebook page operating in Oklahoma. According to Blanc: "The second, and much more influential, Facebook page was Oklahoma Teacher Walkout – The Time Is Now! (TTN), created on February 28 by Stillwater teacher Alberto Morejon. Within hours, the membership of TTN had shot up to 18,000 – and in a matter of weeks, it had become Oklahoma's most influential rank-and-file hub, with over 70,000 members.[216] According to an article published in the *Los Angeles Times,* which featured an interview of Morejon: "Stillwater, Okla., teacher Alberto Morejon was sitting on his couch, watching TV news coverage of the teachers' strike in West Virginia, when he thought: Something also needs to be done at home, where teachers have similarly low pay."[217] While some connections across states were made by interpersonal relationships between teachers, such as Larry Cagle networking with the panel of teacher-activists, the mention of Morejon's news-watching offers an insight into the mediality of the spreading strategy. The spread of the Facebook group organizational form occurred through the traditional medium of televised news. In this regard, it demonstrates the interplay between "new" and "old" media. The publics were formed, transformed, and extended through the interaction across media (networked and televised) forms.

There are some crucial differences between the use of Facebook in West Virginia and Oklahoma. First, Oklahoma Teachers United was a Facebook page not a Facebook group. Facebook Pages lack the participatory functions of groups, for they are centrally controlled by

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[216] Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 143–44.
[217] Pearce, Matt, "Oklahoma Teachers Set a Strike Date, April 2, as Educator Unrest Spreads across U.S.," Los Angeles Times, March 9, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/nation/la-na-oklahoma-teachers-20180308-story.html.

either a single person or a small group of people. Facebook Pages are used by businesses, organizations, or individuals that seek to accrue a following. Rather than require "Friend Requests," as in the case of personal Facebook accounts, Pages only require that users "Like" the page to receive updates in their newsfeed. This is potentially advantageous for several reasons, since it places the content produced by the page under the complete control of administrators, and the page is still promoted by the newsfeed algorithm. This reduces the flurry of posts made about a particular topic, and Pages can be a more authoritative and centralized source on information and planning. While Alberto Morejon's TTN was a Facebook group, it was similarly restricted to administrative control. As Blanc wrote, "In contrast to West Virginia's United page, only Morejon could make posts to his group – others could only respond to polls or make comments under his posts."[218]

Groups in West Virginia and Oklahoma worked throughout the strike to mobilize participants to gather at the capitol. They also served as a means of exerting pressure on the small teachers' union that existed in Oklahoma, the Oklahoma Educators Association (OEA, an affiliate of NEA). Just as in West Virginia, teachers' unions stepped in to serve as impromptu negotiators with legislators; and although they lacked membership across the state, they made decisions about the timing and logistics of the strike. The timing of the Oklahoma teacher strike was a struggle by the rank-and-file teachers against the unions and school administrators. Under pressure from school district superintendents and principals, OEA announced a starting strike date of April 23, which would have put the strike after Oklahoma's scheduled standardized testing. Teachers were upset that they were not included in the decision to give up this leverage they had over the school districts, whose funding is tied to the scores from standardized testing.

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[218] Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 145.

Because of outcry from the teachers in the TTN Facebook group, the OEA was forced to change

their decision. Morejon posted a poll to the then 60,000 member group, which asked which start

date for the strike teachers preferred, April 2nd or April 23rd. According to *Education Week,*

*"*Nearly 7,000 people voted for April 2, while only about 250 people voted for the later date."[219]

Alicia Price, the president of OEA, released a Facebook video on the OEA page that stated: "The

communication coming out of OEA has not been clear. And for that, I am sorry. I have listened

to the anger and frustration of teachers from Atoka to Enid, to Bartlesville all the way to Altus,

our members are ready to act now. And so, we are accelerating our strategy."[220]

As evidenced by the struggle over the start date, the OEA played an outsized role in

shaping the strike. According to a financial report released by the NEA Secretary-Treasurer in

2019, there were 16,384 active members in Oklahoma during the 2017-2018 school year.[221]

Oklahoma has what are often described as "right-to-work laws," which stops unions from

automatically enrolling workers covered by collective bargaining agreements as union

members.[222] West Virginia is also a right-to-work state, but the unions there played a lesser role

in the organizing of the strike. OEA, in the absence of effective leadership from the major

Facebook groups, was able to make major decisions about the strike. According to Amanda

Ewing, a teacher and OEA member: "A lot of what we were doing was focused on logistics: how

[219] Madeline Will, "Oklahoma Teachers' Union Sets Strike Date for April 2 After Teacher Outcry," *Education Week*, March 7, 2018, sec. Teaching & Learning, Teaching Profession, https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/oklahoma-teachers-union-sets-strike-date-for-april-2-after-teacher-outcry/2018/03.

[220] "OEA President Alicia Priest has a message about the acceleration of school closures.," accessed March 27, 2023, https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10157664876594848.

[221] Mike Antonucci, "Mixed Results From New NEA Membership Numbers Pre-Janus Ruling, Post 2018 Teacher Walkouts in W. Va., Okla. and Ariz.," *The 74*, June 19, 2019, https://www.the74million.org/article/mixed-results-from-new-nea-membership-numbers-pre-janus-ruling-post-2018-teacher-walkouts-in-w-va-okla-and-ariz/.

[222] There is a common misconception that "right-to-work laws" means forming unions is illegal. This is not the case. The ability to form a union is a first amendment right to "peaceably assemble." States, however, are not compelled by federal law to recognize and bargain with unions that represent workers in the public sector, who are not covered by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935.

to set up parking, how to get people inside the capitol, setting up Port Potties, all that. But my

main regret is that we could have communicated better. This was true in general, but particularly

for non-members: we basically didn't have an infrastructure to communicate with non-OEA

members."[223] OEA was an important vehicle in organizing the strike, but as a pre-existing

membership organization it was not able to capture the full scale of the teacher outrage within

the state. Meanwhile, Facebook groups were a technology of scale that could capture and

externalize the desire for action vis-à-vis the networked affordances of social media. The

Oklahoma Facebook groups had the capability of mobilizing through its technologies of

publicity that exceeded OEA.

The week before the strike began, the Oklahoma legislature and governor passed a bill to

provide teachers with an average raise of $6,000 per year.[224] Teachers in the Facebook group and

in OEA agreed that this was insufficient, and they demanded an average raise of $10,000 per

year and a capital gains tax to more sustainably fund education in the state. After the Oklahoma

teacher strike began on April 2nd, it continued for nine school days, concluding on April 12th. It is

difficult to know the full scale of the strike, as in the case of West Virginia's unified 55 counties.

Each day teachers rallied at the state capitol in Oklahoma City, and as Ewing's comment

demonstrates, there was a good deal of thought put into a set of in-person protest infrastructures

to sustain the actions. However, leaders within OEA, such as Alicia Priest, did not believe a

better deal was coming from the Oklahoma legislators, and specifically they doubted any new

forms of tax revenue on corporate profits. The strike ended unceremoniously; OEA called for

teachers to return to their classrooms, but also stated that they did not speak for all teachers in the

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[223] Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 157.
[224] Dana Goldstein, "Teachers in Oklahoma and Kentucky Walk Out: 'It Really Is a Wildfire,'" *The New York Times*, April 2, 2018, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/02/us/teacher-strikes-oklahoma-kentucky.html.

state and that some may continue striking.[225] Most school districts announced that classes would begin again the following week.

Stephanie Price reflected after the conclusion of the strike: "At the time, it felt like we were moving forward, but looking back I feel like we were far less organized than the other states that struck, Arizona in particular. When I eventually found out that they had liaisons at every school, it made me wonder how effective we could have been had we built that kind of organization from the start in our strike process."[226] Indeed, the *overreliance* on social media infrastructures perhaps contributed to the less-than-ideal outcome for Oklahoma teachers. The Facebook groups, while powerful contributors to a shared sense of outrage and disrespect, did not immediately translate into a well-organized plan of action and strategy to win. Oklahoma's strike was similar to other statewide mobilizations that were in a concurrent time frame. Colorado, Kentucky, and North Carolina each had teacher strikes with varying degrees of impact. Kentucky and North Carolina were defined by single day protests, or walkouts, that were in response to pieces of legislation considered by their respective state legislatures. Colorado teachers similarly held a statewide protest at the capitol in Denver, but the momentum of the nationwide movement also propelled teachers in the Southern Colorado city of Pueblo to continue their strike for twelve days. In each of these events, which all featured uses of Facebook groups, decisions about strategy were chaotically made by either union leaders without state-wide mandates, or by administrators within the Facebook groups. More consequently, the strikes were initiated, as Price argued, without the foundational work of escalation that made the West

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[225] Emily Wendler and Ryan LaCroix, "'There Is Wisdom In Shifting Focus': Oklahoma Teachers Union Calls Off Walkout," KGOU, April 13, 2018, https://www.kgou.org/education/2018-04-13/there-is-wisdom-in-shifting-focus-oklahoma-teachers-union-calls-off-walkout.
[226] Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 155.

Virginia strike resilient from the pressure to end the strike early. The walk-in actions, coordinated colored shirt days, and the county-wide meetings in West Virginia created a network of leaders that extended beyond the social media networks of a Facebook group. Indeed, the leadership of the three teachers from three different counties who appeared on the *Solidarity with West Virginia Strikers!* panel is evidence of the far-reaching human infrastructure that emerged to anchor the strike.

Arizona

Arizona teachers were some of the last teachers to strike in 2018, and although it was clear that they were following in the footsteps of West Virginia (recall Larry Cagle's comment that Arizona was "talking" to West Virginia), the approach of leaders within the newly formed organization Arizona Educators United (AEU) reflected a methodical approach to tactics and strategy. Teachers in Arizona formed this organization as ancillary to the established unions operating within the state (AEA, Arizona affiliate of National Education Association and AFT Arizona), and as an attempt to channel the nationwide teachers movement into a formation that pushed teachers into action. While many organizers within AEU were also members of their respective teacher unions, they saw their new organization as an opportunity to goad a greater number of teachers into participating. Rebecca Garelli was a teacher in Phoenix, Arizona, but she began her teaching career in Chicago. Garelli was a previous member of the Chicago Teachers' Union (CTU), and she was an active member during their 2012 strike. After moving to Arizona and witnessing the spectacular strike in West Virginia, she did the same as other teachers across the country: logged onto Facebook. Garelli was particularly adept at both organizing and making use of social media. Her chapter in the edited collection *Strike for the Common Good* reads as an instructional guide for worker-activists to effectively utilize social media for striking. Just as the

West Virginia teacher panel was publicly oriented, Garelli has spoken and published in multiple

venues about her experiences helping to lead the strike in Arizona and encouraging others to do

the same.[227]

As evidence of their social media acumen, organizers in AEU centralized their campaign

around the hashtag "#RedForED." This allowed participants to aggregate information about the

movement in Arizona and connect it to the nationwide movement for public education. As I

explore in the next chapter, this hashtag was prevalent across each of the statewide teacher

strikes. Hashtags activism, in the words of Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault

Welles, "works to naturalize and center the politics of counterpublics, develop repertoires of

political contention, and attract allies."[228] It stemmed from the tactic used by West Virginia

teachers coordinating the wearing of red shirts on the same day, but only in Arizona was it

incorporated into the messaging of the movement. Across all images, videos, and printed

materials made by AEU, the hashtag was displayed prominently. While not unique to the

Facebook platform, it does have the functionality on the platform for users to search content

containing the hashtag.

AEU overcame problems from previous uses of Facebook groups without resorting to

total control over who can post. Garelli described how they developed a structured system for

allowing maximum participation without limiting the posting ability of members. They did so,

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[227] "Educating During a Crisis w/ Megan Erickson, Rebecca Garelli, & Jay O'Neal - YouTube," May 14, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ajJABvBe6fU; Alden Woods, "'I'm Tired': Phoenix Teacher Fights to Lead Her Classroom and #RedForEd," *The Arizona Republic*, October 17, 2018, https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-education/2018/10/17/phoenix-teacher-fights-maintain-passion-education-redfored-arizona-walkout-rebecca-garelli/1574786002/.
[228] Jackson, Bailey, and Welles, *#HashtagActivism*, 185.

more specifically, first by understanding, and then by carefully utilizing, Facebook's affordances for credentialing, posting, sharing, and moderating:

> Originally, five teachers served as the Facebook group's 'administrators' and about twelve other teachers were 'moderators.' Administrators could post events, share information, organize mobilizations, create polls, and discuss action plans with fifty two thousand other educators and supporters; moderators were responsible for reviewing content, screening requests to join the group, and actually moderating the Facebook page. Moderators put together a list of rules for norms that members of this Facebook group needed to adhere to and followed through with the enforcement of these rules when necessary. [229]

This middle-of-the-road option—between the chaotic open-posting of earlier Facebook groups and the severely limited Oklahoma groups—proved to be effective for allowing the organic spread of the structure of feeling related to the crisis of public-school educators. Although organizers in AEU attempted to impose their preferred approach to organizing a strike, the participatory Facebook group allowed ideas and content to emerge from the group members who were less connected to the organizing team. It reflects a leadership style that is open to the innovations of ordinary teachers and vernacular expressions of the movement. Just as in West Virginia, where ideas about how to build support in the community came from group members across the state, there was an active recognition that teachers in the most popular county (Maricopa, home to Phoenix) could not be the only ones offering advice. Further, AEU made the decision to divide their presence on the social network into smaller groups. Garelli described

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[229] Rebecca Garelli, "Educators United Online," in *Strike for the Common Good: Fighting for the Future of Public Education*, ed. Rebecca Kolins Givans and Amy Schrager Lang, Class: Culture (University of Michigan Press, 2020), 104–5.

how this allowed them to overcome the negative effects of Facebook groups through a novel use of the platform:

> While many of the other "United" educator groups online used Facebook to organize in their states, the AEU used this platform differently from these. Most groups had one central, or main page, where all aspects of the movement were discussed. AEU instead set up a large network of linked Facebook pages. As the movement in Arizona grew, the main Facebook page became overcrowded and disorganized. Our important actions, events, and information were getting lost in the chaos.[230]

By creating a network of networked publics, as it were, AEU further developed the organizational form initiated by teachers in West Virginia. Their doing so demonstrates how these teachers could shape the mediality of Facebook groups within a discrete context defined by the properties of groups. Rather than let the mediality of Facebook groups determine the form in which the movement advanced, the decisions made by organizers made use of what they could control on the platform. The rules, functions, and

Garelli is clear that they actively observed and learned from the strategy used by teachers in the strikes that preceded theirs. In the discourses of "escalation," the AEU organizers recognized that the scale of a statewide strike necessitated more than felt expressions of online outrage. Indeed, it would require the careful planning that allowed West Virginia teachers to unite every county in the state for their strike. As Garelli stated: "The page was out of control. Lots of people on it wanted to strike—*now*. But I said 'No way, there's no way we're ready for that! I knew from Chicago that we had a lot of work to do before we were ready for something

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[230] Garelli, 105.

like a strike, particularly a statewide action."[231] The "work" that was necessary before a statewide action required building up support in the counties that were less radical than the metropolitan school districts already eager and willing to strike. This was particularly important in the context of school funding, because although school districts can set the wages of their employees, they do so at the discretion of available state funding in Arizona. In order to reach this point, Garelli describes how

> [W]e copied the 'walk-in' tactic successfully used in West Virginia and in the Chicago Teachers Union strike in 2012: teachers, wearing union colors, meet before school to talk to parents, school employees, and education activists and literally walk in to school together at the start of the day. We encourage site liaisons to communicate with parents to tell them that we would be holding walk-ins and what to expect. We also created 'live videos' on Facebook to walk through the basics of how to host a walk-in and provided sample walk-in flyers for folks to download and use in their communities.[232]

There is a double pedagogical rhetoric at work in this quote. Garelli is describing to her audience of readers, people whom she hopes would learn from the Arizona experience and develop strike-ready organizations of their own, how they were actively engaged in educating teachers in their state about actions they could take to teach others about striking. West Virginia teachers did something similar by sharing their walk-ins, but AEU organizers took this a step forward by developing an educational program intended to prepare a network of "site liaisons." It is one thing to find and connect with teachers who share frustration about the state of public education through social media, but it is another thing to transform those teachers into active leaders who

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[231] Quoted in Blanc, *Red State Revolt*, 172.
[232] Garelli, "Educators United Online," 110.

are connected to a larger movement. Doing so requires a scaffolding of involvement that takes passionate individuals who are inexperienced at motivating their colleagues to take risky action into "site liaisons" who are adept at the rhetoric of striking. The pedagogical materials, such as video tutorials or sample flyers, helped create the network of people that could translate digital outrage into an in-person infrastructure of committed teachers.

This was not something that AEU organizers hid from their audience, for they did not see teachers as a passive audience of consumers who would respond to their call for a statewide strike. AEU produced a graphic, shown below, that was spread throughout their network of Facebook groups explicating this escalatory strategy. By using the visual metaphor of a thermometer, AEU organizers communicated that they wanted to turn up the political heat. They would do so through a series of steps that would gradually build the capacity and momentum towards their explicit goal of a statewide walkout. Starting from the bottom, the beginning steps provided a low barrier of entry with smaller risks of retaliation from school district officials.
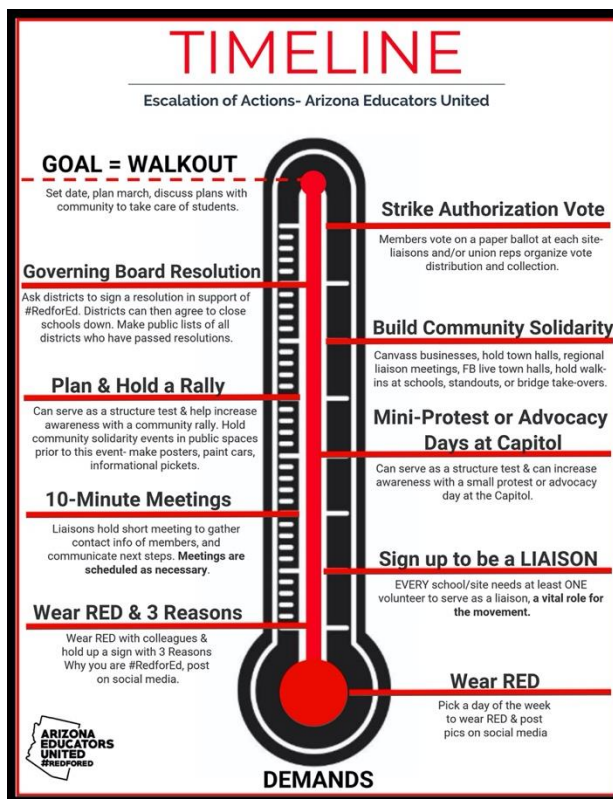
Figure 8 – Graphic used by organizers in Arizona to explain their escalation strategy to other teachers[233]

What is remarkable about this image is the layers of mediality implicitly theorized within the various tactics of each step. The Arizona teacher strike was a scalar public, and it needed to be to successfully execute a statewide strike. From the embodied wearing of red shirts, the in-person conversations between education workers, the #RedForEd social media posts articulating "3 reasons," the interpersonal networked connections of site liaisons, the systematic collection of contact information from teachers, the collective actions of mini-protests, walk-ins, and rallies, to the specification of "paper ballots" for the strike authorization votes, the escalation strategy assembled a public that organized the discourses across media of communication. While Facebook groups were certainly a medial infrastructure that initiated and held together important

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[233] Garelli, 107.

facets of the movement, such as the general feeling that participants were involved in something bigger than themselves, it was intentionally followed up with adjacent types of digital media to further materialize the strike. The binding function of Facebook groups relies on, and at the same time contributes to, the mediality of the broader, scalar public. As Garelli wrote,

> The network of Facebook pages was an excellent approach to organizing, but we knew it could not be the only approach we employed. Not everyone was on social media, and we had to develop other communication networks. In addition to the Facebook network, we used email to collect data and contact information from the beginning, and we also used a texting app called Remind to help reach teachers outside of Facebook. Without any funding or resources, this online organizing was done primarily by Vanessa Arrendondo, a teacher and AEU organizer in Yuma, Arizona, who dedicated herself to developing the infrastructure through countless email lists and Google Forms. By developing these alternate modes of communication, Arizona's movement circumvented the primary drawbacks to organizing through Facebook – both access and the fact that (especially in a group of forty thousand to sixty thousand people) the amount of content and information on a Facebook page can be overwhelming and vital information consequently buried or lost.[234]

Social media, emails, and text messages all anchored the connections between tens of thousands of Arizona teachers in a way that unified their actions towards a strategic end goal. In a matter of weeks, Arizona Educators United emerged as an organization that was independent of the established teachers' unions and networked across the state-wide scale of a teacher strike public. Doing so resulted in a scalar public imbued with the qualities typically attributed to digital

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[234] Garelli, 105–6.

networks: redundancy, resiliency, and magnitude. In comparison to Oklahoma, where Facebook groups achieved a great deal of digital engagement but shallow capacity, Arizona teachers were not singularly reliant upon any one Facebook group or singular communication platform.

By delaying their strike to a later date, Arizona teachers prepared for an effective strike that could challenge a hostile state legislator and political context for public education. However, by sacrificing expediency in the name of resiliency, they also gave the enemies of public education time to organize themselves. State legislators, too, where watching the strikes in other states and learning lessons on how to maintain control. This was realized when on April 12th, one week before the planned strike authorization vote, Arizona Governor Doug Ducey signed a bill giving teachers a 20% raise spread over three years.[235] It addressed only one of the demands put forward by teachers, and it failed to provide reliable funding for the support staff who were integral to the education system. This resembled the strategy of the Oklahoma government, for it attempted to thwart the strike before it had begun. And it resembled the West Virginia strike, by attempting to placate only teachers and not the full coalition of educational workers. It was unsuccessful, ultimately, for 78% of the over 50,000 teachers who voted stated their intention to strike. On April 27th, the strike began. Unlike in Oklahoma, however, the strike continued until the state government passed another bill increasing funding for support specialists, five days after it had begun.[236] While the final deal did not address every demand put forward by AEU, it was a clear demonstration that their action had effectively forced the state legislator to quickly provide support for public education.

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[235] Joseph Flaherty, "The Teachers Won," *Phoenix New Times*, May 8, 2018,
https://www.phoenixnewtimes.com/news/the-teachers-won-how-arizonas-strike-unfolded-10403354.
[236] Flaherty.

By the time the Arizona strike ended in May, the nation's school semester was ending. In a little over three months, over 400,000 workers in the US education sector had illegally taken part in work stoppages.[237] These strikes were significantly facilitated by social media, but, as I have shown, the scale of media far surpassed an individual platform. I now move to consider two concepts of rhetorical theory in light of the archive of teacher discourses assembled here.

Memory

Facebook groups are similar to what Nathan Johnson describes as memory infrastructures. He described this concept as the background resources that enable memory practices, which are "…struggles between individuals, institutions, environments, social mores, and. technologies, and they are executed whenever and wherever there is recordkeeping."[238] Johnson's work builds upon the rhetorical canon of memory, and it is similar to Francis Yates' conceptualization of memory as a form of technê embedded in the sociotechnical practices of orators, writers, listeners, and readers. Indeed, Johnson argues that "Memory infrastructures are instantiated through mnemonic technê, specific techniques that support remembering and forgetting but depend on the resources of an encompassing infrastructure. Mnemonic technê emerge in particular times and places at the interfaces of remembering and forgetting. As techniques, they are instantiated in innumerable physical embodiments, including people, technologies, and commodities."[239] He draws special attention to the movement from centralized bookkeeping and institutional archives to the more distributed practices characteristic of the

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[237] "Major Work Stoppages in 2018," February 8, 2019 *Bureau of Labor Statitics U.S. Department of Labor, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/wkstp_02082019.pdf*.

[238] Nathan R. Johnson, *Architects of Memory: Information and Rhetoric in a Networked Archival Age* (University of Alabama Press, 2020), 2.

[239] Johnson, 26.

Internet. And in this regard, Facebook groups are a prime example of the changing terrain of memory practices and infrastructures.

Across all the teacher discourses about Facebook during the strikes, there is a persistent trend in criticizing the difficulty of using these groups to provide accurate and consistent information about the status of the movement. As I explored at the beginning of this chapter, this is also a problem for the archival work of uncovering these Facebook groups, for there is no obvious mechanism by means of which to aggregate, sort, and locate posts within the groups. This is in the words of software development: a feature, not a bug. The Facebook designed News Feed was one of the first instantiations of what has become the modern web user experience, or infinite scrolling. The News Feed dynamically loads content into a user's webpage or mobile application based on a set of algorithms designed to select posts with which users will engage. This is departure from the previous mnemonic technê that defined the Internet's memory infrastructures: networks of hyperlinks. Previously, discrete web pages allowed users to remember information by providing hyperlinks to other pages with related information. These static pages could be recalled when users needed to find them again, and they were persistently locatable by the URL associated with the page. The News Feed dramatically changed how users remember, and more importantly, forget, information, for it is does not make posts locatable through networked hyperlinks. While it is possible to use URLs to link directly to posts on Facebook, these posts are only accessible following a set of permissions limited to users' friend connections and group memberships. Posts are found most of the time through the process of navigating the news feed.

The infinitely scrolling News Feed is designed to maximize the number of advertisements users encounter while they are searching for content to remember. This trend, which was

pioneered on Facebook, has now become ubiquitous across social media platforms. If a user reaches "the end" of the content they elected to follow and consume, platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and TikTok now suggest content from accounts that resemble the preferences, or memory practices, of the user.[240] Were it possible to easily locate posts made within a group or page, it would limit the number of advertisements the platform could serve to users. This is just one of the consequences of corporate-capitalist control over the memory infrastructures of digital media. Another far more insidious consequence is the often-invisible changes made to Facebook considering how social movement participants made use of the platform. In 2020, Facebook introduced Facebook Workplace, a digital tool for employee collaboration, which was intended to compete with Slack and Microsoft Teams. In a report by *The Intercept*, Lee Fang discovered plans for Facebook to provides employers with content control tools, such as the ability to blacklist terms like "unionize." While Facebook Workplace exists in a different context from the Facebook groups that were utilized during the teacher strikes, it nonetheless demonstrates the platformatic changes emerging from the social media corporation and the opaqueness by which ordinary users can understand these changes. While it is difficult for ordinary Facebook users to track the spread of discourses within the algorithmically decided news feed, the greater access behind the scenes of Facebook open the platform to data surveillance by firms interested in avoiding labor unrest.

While the corporate ownership of memory infrastructures dramatically increases the avenues through which collective memory is shaped by capitalist formations and used as a means for generating profit, this process does not occur within a sociotechnical system that is under the

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[240] "Facebook Changes Users' Feeds to Look More Like TikTok," *Bloomberg*, July 21, 2022, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-07-21/facebook-changes-main-timeline-to-work-more-like-tiktok.

complete control of the engineers at technology firms. Indeed, there are ways in which the mnemonic technê of users spills beyond the design of the platforms. I turn to Tony Sampson's book *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* and his use of the social theory of Gabriel Tarde to explore the process by which things go "viral."

> [Tarde] explains social relationality accordingly as composed, decomposed, and recomposed by imitative radiations of desire, appropriated by social inventions, and coming together in the shape of shared beliefs, sentiments, and performances. It is this imitative radiation that stirs the social into action and brings about constant adaptations of stability and instability.[241]

The imitative ray is a useful concept for approaching the collective memory and mnemonic technê of teachers in their Facebook groups. Tarde posits that rather than social systems determining the activity within collectives, as in the sociology of Durkeim, social anomalies and accidents act like energizing molecules, initiating chain reactions in their surrounding assemblages. He describes this process as "imitative rays of desire," which spread and lead to adaptations and uptakes that further expand the rays. Curiously, Sampson and Tarde use the phrase "social inventions" to describe the encounter with the imitative ray and the corresponding adaptation of the social anomaly into a new act with its own rays of desire. In context of the Facebook groups, the *rhetorical* invention of discourses about teacher strikes came from the collisions with discourses of other teachers and their chosen medium of Facebook groups. Sampson argues that the encounter and imitation of previous inventions are not identical, and the differences in the Facebook groups in Arizona and Oklahoma are evidence of the adaptations these innovations underwent.

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[241] Tony D. Sampson, *Virality: Contagion Theory in the Age of Networks* (U of Minnesota Press, 2012) 18.

The conditions in which the ray of desire imamates occurs according to an assemblage of non-human and human actants. The posts that went "West Virginia viral," in the words of Emily Comer, did so because of social atmospheres that exist in material, historical, and technological contexts. As Dora Zhang describes, atmospheres "[A]lter the kinds of things that can be said in a space, the kinds of actions that are thinkable, and the modes of sociality that are possible, and I want to suggest that we have still yet to fully recognize and attend to their importance as social and political phenomena of everyday life. A persistent atmosphere of hostility can cause someone to drop a class, leave a community, or participate in a protest or a strike."[242] Comer's description of ending a week of teaching, going home, using her cell phone, and scrolling through a seemingly endless feed of photos of teachers wearing red relies upon a number of relations that allow for a flow of a contagious desire. The stress of a work week combined with the relief of the weekend. The bright hue of red shirts worn by teachers with smiling faces. The physical act of swiping on a phone and receiving images of relative strangers. The relationalities articulate the structure of feeling beyond a crisis of working in education, but as a kind of joy in collectivity that spread through networks. Sampson writes, "Inventions stemming from desire are then contagiously passed on, point to point, via radiating ideas, fascinations, passionate interests, beliefs, and any other suitable social media for imitation, feeding into a continuum of invention and further adaptations of the entire social field."[243] The "molecular" model of Tardean sociology helps explain both how within a particular state, West Virginia, the imitations are

[242] Dora Zhang, "Notes on Atmosphere," *Qui Parle* 27, no. 1 (June 1, 2018): 121–55, https://doi.org/10.1215/10418385-4383010. See also: Kathleen Stewart, "Atmospheric Attunements," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, no. 3 (2011): 445–53; Ben Anderson, "Affective Atmospheres," *Emotion, Space and Society* 2, no. 2 (2009): 77–81.
[243] Sampson, *Virality*, 25.

adapted to their unique circumstances, such as in references to the history coal miners; and it helps explain the spread of the strategies of using Facebook to other states.

Memory is a resource for invention, and the mediality of memory infrastructures shapes the circulation and spread of social inventions, in this case rhetorical strategies. Facebook groups helped give expression to a collective memory of teachers within a social atmosphere of outrage and militancy. It provided background resources for practices of remembering how politicians had wronged them and how teachers elsewhere had won material changes to their working conditions This was not a case of Facebook groups providing only positive benefits to the expression of the teacher strikes; for in the cases with less than desired outcome (e.g. in Oklahoma), failing to effectively utilize the platform hamstrung the movement's reliance on Facebook as a tool for mobilizing teachers.

Vernacular rhetorical pedagogy

At the heart of Tarde's model is the idea of imitation being a fundamental feature of social being. As it happens, *imitatio* is a well-discussed topic in the rhetorical tradition. Specifically, rhetorical theorists have conceptualized imitation as a tool of rhetorical pedagogy. Robert Terrill argues, "imitatio, as a rhetorical pedagogy, cultivates a form of duality that is an especially productive resource for citizenship, and that these doubled attitudes are among the outcomes of a rhetorical education that are its most significant contributions to public culture."[244] Typically, imitation is used in rhetorical pedagogy by asking students to study a text, analyze the rhetorical situation, and invent a discourse that resembles the original. Terrill continues: "Imitatio is not a single-minded process in which the rhetor simply absorbs and then regurgitates

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[244] Robert Terrill, "Mimesis, Duality, and Rhetorical Education," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 41, no. 4 (July 1, 2011): 297, https://doi.org/10.1080/02773945.2011.553765.

another's ideas, but a double-minded inventive process through which the student rhetor analyzes both the model text and the target situation in order to craft discourse fitted to her purposes, abilities, and audience."[245] In this view, imitation is a pedagogical tool to be used by teachers of rhetoric who usually are the ones authorized to select texts worthy of imitation. It is in line with the definition of rhetorical education by Enoch referenced at the start of this chapter, and it similarly fulfils a civic impulse at the heart of the rhetorical tradition.

The intervention I offer considers how rhetorical pedagogy manifests *vernacularly* according to the media environments in, through, and by means of which rhetoric is practiced. It seems safe to assume that most of the teachers who participated in the strikes do not teach rhetoric to their students, and consequently that their pedagogical aims in circulating discourses about waging successful strikes and using social media were oriented towards their colleagues. Vernacular rhetorical pedagogy is the teaching of "the rhetorical strategies, language practices, and bodily and social behaviors" in publicly oriented medial contexts.[246] As such, vernacular rhetorical pedagogy is a concept keenly attentive to the expressions of rhetoric on networked platforms, in which the educational program references its own mediality. Critically, vernacular rhetorical pedagogy does not need to be understood as a type of deliberate teaching per se. West Virginia teachers may or may not have intended the livestreaming of their walk-ins to be an educational program, one meant to be imitated by their pupils (i.e., other teachers.) Nevertheless, the vernacular nature of this type of rhetorical activity is still pedagogical because of the relational context of its circulation.

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[245] Terrill, 302.
[246] Enoch, *Refiguring Rhetorical Education*, 6.

This understanding of vernacular rhetoric reverses the typical relationship between imitation and pedagogy. Imitation is typically subservient to the goal of pedagogy. Instead, the act of vernacular rhetorical pedagogy is one that is intended to be imitated. The teachers who recorded their experiences in edited volumes and panel presentations did so because they wanted to impart a particular set of lessons for the people seeking to imitate their actions, but their actions that preceded these explicitly educational productions were equally pedagogical. The rhetoric to be imitated was the experiences that informed their set of lessons.

Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have been operating at a networked scale, to account for the forces at work in the rapid spread of statewide teacher strikes. Throughout my analysis of Facebook groups and the discourses of teachers about such groups, I have struggled to navigate describing the unfolding of events in a way that is agnostic to the effects and consequences of media use. In attempting to understand the mediality of this discrete historical phenomenon, I have alternated between casting the scalar publics of teacher strikes as something that was constructed by people and brought into being by the sociotechnical forces that defined the strikes. It reminds me of Karl Marx's famous remarks in "The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," when he stated, "[Humans] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."[247]

Nothing encapsulates this more than my description, from the discourses of teachers, of the role of "organizers." In my archive, organizers are teachers, and teachers are organizers.

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[247] Karl Marx, "18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.," 1852,
https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-brumaire/ch01.htm.

There is a difficulty, however, in locating the actions of organizers along a continuum of agentic capacity, for they are the people who, at least partially, see themselves as the drivers of the movement. I have described an "intentionality" in the actions of organizers based on the words they used in describing the strikes, and such as conceptual vocabulary exists at odds with the theoretical understanding of these strikes as anchored by the media through which they spread. One resolution of this theoretical conundrum is the recognition that Facebook, too, was an organizer in the teacher strikes. Beyond being a tool used by human organizers, Facebook was, in the idea of John Durham Peters, an infrastructure of existence that bound the strike into a media ecology. As a "container of possibility," Facebook anchored the rebellious structure of feeling into existence.[248] The rendering of posts visible to a community of others followed an algorithmic logic that is akin to the work of a human organizer doing outreach work. In Arizona, AEU organizers used email lists and phone numbers to systematically contact teachers across the state. Assumedly, these methods of contacting people involved repetitive actions followed in a discernable pattern, much like an algorithm chooses which users to show posts. Facebook played a similar role doing outreach, and it was a team member in planning and executing the "stuff" of the strikes: formulating demands, planning rallies, circulating messages. The problem is that the algorithmic logic of Facebook is intentionally difficult to understand, and although the team members working with Facebook as an organizer understood some of its dynamics, assessing the outcomes of Facebook's actions was not as easy as dialoguing with a human organizer in a planning meeting. Even the metrics provided by the platforms, such as the number of "likes" or "shares," did little to elucidate the level of organization that each teacher strike had reached.

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[248] Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 2.

The technology of Facebook groups was not the only technê, or embodied knowledge, that organized these strikes. The encounter of human organizers with the traditions, institutions, and practices of social movements, technologies, and other relationalities articulated the intentionality of actors in the statewide strikes. Rebecca Garelli's experience in the 2012 Chicago Teacher Union strike, for example, shaped and formed her reaction to the conjecture of the 2018 strike wave, as did her use of social media in her personal life. This is not an attempt to minimize the role of her leadership in the Arizona strike, but to recognize that according to her own words, her encounter with the social atmosphere of a strike wave was an extension of the activity of participants in the 2012 strike. Pedagogy itself can also be considered as an encounter with the relations of being that orient one towards being imitated. It should be no surprise that the profession of the people willing to teach other how to strike was teachers. Educators, by nature of their work, are primed towards the sharing of knowledge, and the archive of discourses analyzed here is evidence of their propensity towards teaching others effective means of striking. Whether they intended it or not, striking teachers teach others to strike.

Chapter 4: Tracing Rhetorical Circulation

I now move to the final scale of this dissertation, the global scale of media, or rather, the Internet. I do so by taking the rhetorical object of a hashtag and carefully studying its movement across the world. More specifically, by examining tweets containing the hashtag #RedForEd, I use a set of computational methods of analysis to explore the circulation of strike rhetoric across time and space. This chapter also contributes to a methodological conversation of studying the intersection of social media and social movement rhetoric, and—building on the preceding chapters—it does so in conjunction with a culturally/historically informed understanding of the teachers' movement. I offer a somewhat novel set of methods—at least, for rhetoric—for studying the intersection of social movements and digital media platforms, social media, or other forms of networked community. By examining a particular hashtag (#RedForEd), I endeavor to explore the digital media practices that helped fuel and frame the strike, and that helped spread this tactic to other locales.

The goal of this chapter is also to understand the *constitutive* force of Twitter as a medium for the strike. I do so by tracing the public instantiated by the circulation of a hashtag, a feature of publics that Michael Warner described as self-organized discourse.[1] The media form of the Twitter platform is inseparable from the rhetorical production of social movement discourse, I contend, and while the mediality of Twitter is not singularly constitutive of the teacher strikes, the rhetorical utterances of the strangers participating in this public were, at least in part, constituted by the affordances of the platform. In this, I build on the scholarship that accounts for the constitutive function of rhetoric. Maurice Charland's famous essay "Constitutive

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[1] Warner, "Publics and Counterpublics."

rhetoric: The case of the *peuple québécois"* argues that political subjects are called into being through rhetorical narratives.[2] Charland's theory works towards understanding of the discursive means by which ideology creates the conditions for the existence of collective subjectivity, and it heralded a trend in rhetorical studies for recognizing the linguistic practices that create the reality they also describe. According to James Jasinski, who describes this as the "constitutive turn" in rhetorical studies:

> Intentionally, texts exhibit constitutive potential through the invitations inscribed in various discursive forms (tropes, arguments, etc.). Extensionally, texts exhibit constitutive force through the cultural circulation and discursive articulation of their textual forms in ways that enable and constrain subsequent practice. Texts invite their audience to experience the world in certain ways via concrete textual forms; audiences, in turn, appropriate, articulate, circulate, and/or subvert these textual forms in ways that release and transform their potential constitutive energy.[3]

Jasinksi identifies that the text's affordances are part and parcel of the constitutive effect of rhetorical activity, but he does not identify what medial form this text takes, much less the effects this may have on the constitutive force of rhetoric. I make the argument in this chapter that the mediality of texts, namely tweets, is an essential feature of constitutive rhetoric within the context of teachers' strikes.

Moreover, I am interested in how the rhetoric of teacher strikes on Twitter potentially constitutes a form of *eloquence*. Michael Leff finds that the humanist tradition of rhetoric, from

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[2] Maurice Charland, "Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the Peuple Québécois," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 73, no. 2 (May 1987): 133, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335638709383799.

[3] James Jasinski, "Constitutive Framework for Rhetorical Historiography: Toward an Understanding of the Discursive (Re) Constitution of 'Constitution' in The Federalist Papers," in *Doing Rhetorical History : Concepts and Cases*, ed. Turner, 1998, 74–75.

the Roman era of Cicero to the Christian eloquence of Saint Augustine to the Renaissance era of

Coluccio Salutati, has relied on the concept of eloquence to render the power of oratory in its

capacity to transform audiences.[4] Historian Hanna Gray argues that the uniting concern for the

Renaissance humanists was the pursuit of eloquence. She writes,

> "The Renaissance humanists believed that education should equip a man to lead a good
>
> life, and that therefore the function of knowledge was not merely to demonstrate the truth
>
> of given precepts, but to impel people toward their acceptance and application. They
>
> believed also that men could be moulded most effectively, and perhaps only, through the
>
> art of eloquence, which endowed the precept with life, immediacy, persuasive effect, and
>
> which stimulated a man's will as well as informing his reason."[5]

The purported goal of their intellectual activity was in service of being an eloquent orator and

training others to obtain knowledge and embody similar virtues. For this period of the rhetorical

tradition, fashioning a rational argument was only one component of an eloquent speaker.

Eloquence was a combination of factors that required, according to Gray, a commitment to

humanist ideals. She continues, "The true orator, they maintained, should combine wide

learning, extensive experience and, according to most humanists, good character with persuasive

capacity. His role was to instruct, to delight, and to move men toward worthwhile goals. His

eloquence would represent a unity of content, structure, and form, without ever losing sight of

the sovereignty of substance or of the didactic aims which were to be realized, and could only be

realized, through the cooperation of argument and style." Gray outlines the standards of

eloquence used by the humanists, such as the splendor of words and the oratorical performances

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[4] Michael Leff, "Tradition and Agency in Humanistic Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 36, no. 2 (2003): 135–47.
[5] Hanna H. Gray, "Renaissance Humanism: The Pursuit of Eloquence," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 24, no. 4 (1963): 500–501.

that project the wisdom of the speaker onto the audiences. In this regard, eloquence was a civic matter for educating populaces. Kenneth Cmiel argues in his book *Democratic Eloquence* that early American political culture was in part defined by a search for a version of civic eloquence that did not emerge from aristocratic styles of language-use.[6] Changing cultural practices of linguistic styles, idioms, or tastes made previous descriptors of "refined" or "vulgar" modes of speech difficult to differentiate.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson's *Eloquence in an Electronic Age* works to update understandings of eloquence for mediated forms of communication. By studying presidential oratory made in and through technologies of publicity, such as the radio or televised broadcast, Jamieson accounts for the changes in speechmaking that constitute a form of "new eloquence." The experience of oratory had changed dramatically during the 19th century; for instead of listening to a speech delivered to a crowded audience, speeches were often listened to in private living rooms. Jamieson argues that these changes led to a conciliatory and conversational mode of presidential address that avoided conflict. F.D.R.'s fireside "chats" are but one example, and her work explicates some of the consequences of a mass media environment on presidential oratory. In the era of television advertisements, sound-bites shaped the language used by presidents to quickly engage their audience. Jamieson writes, "Where the old eloquence consisted in delivering cogent, compelling, verbal claims, the new entails an alliance among self-disclosure, conversation, visual dramatization and verbal distillation. Ironically, this "new" alliance reincarnates the "effeminate" style which for centuries was spurned by all who wished to speak credibly in the public forum."[7] Jamieson points towards the shifting standards of

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[6] Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (Univ of California Press, 1991).

[7] Jamieson, *Eloquence in an Electronic Age*, 66.

eloquence which for centuries had limited the demarcation of eloquent oratory to the performances delivered by men.

Celeste Condit also argues that the traditionally defined criterion for rhetorical eloquence prioritizes white men from the upper class, but seeks to reconceptualize eloquence for a diverse range of audiences and context. She writes, "Eloquence is not a simple property. Its fundamental task is to take an incompletely spoken, fragmentary set of experiences and to articulate those experiences in a coherent set of relationships that nourishes a particular audience in a particular context, perhaps even moving them to new visions from old ones. To achieve this dynamic synthesis, the rhetor has only the most ephemeral resource – words."[8] This definition of eloquence is especially relevant to the rhetorical work of feminist spokespeople, who by virtue of their voices, cast their experiences of patriarchal oppression into public judgement and re-articulated social values. Condit is insistent upon reclaiming a version of eloquence—a skillful deployment of language that resonates with a particular audience—is essential for the rhetorical tradition to understand the capacity of language-use to promote cooperation and shared visions. This is similar to the move made in Martin Law's dissertation which broadens the conversation on oratorical eloquence beyond the Quintilian notion of the "good man [*sic*] speaking well." Law's concept of "ineloquence" reveals the alternatives to theories of persuasion reliant upon ableist criteria for judging rhetorical activity.[9]

Peter Simonson offers "digital religious eloquence" as a concept for an even more up-to-date account of eloquence made in and through forms of new media. He argues that, "[D]igital eloquence comes in a number of qualitatively different forms—from digital books and long-read

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[8] Celeste Michelle Condit, "In Praise of Eloquent Diversity: Gender and Rhetoric as Public Persuasion," *Women's Studies in Communication* 20, no. 2 (October 1997): 107, https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.1997.10162405.
[9] Law, "Democratic Disharmony."

online journalism to YouTube videos, blogs and other material from webpages, Twitter posts, and even SMS messages."[10] Simonson examines two examples of religious rhetoric on digital platforms to explicate this theory: Muslim sermons delivered through YouTube and tweets of Bible quotes. For both examples, the eloquence emerges from the interaction between the language of religious worship and the circulation of this language (sometimes accompanied by visuals) on Internet platforms. In both cases, the composition of tweets or YouTube videos are "a kind of aphoristic spiritual wisdom that re- mediates the letter and spirit of traditional religious texts, all of which is embedded in the linguistic sensibilities, aesthetic tastes, and rhetorics-of-being practiced by the audiences called out by them." There is a continuity, then, between the role played by the rhetor in Simonson's digital religious eloquence and the traditional or "new" eloquence of oratory. Machinic eloquence is a departure from the traditional and even contemporary theories of rhetorical eloquence. It abandons the rhetor as a category from which eloquence emerges, for it places an emphasis on the patterns of activity across a multitude of voices.

Definitions of eloquence in rhetoric are not just the use of language, but the particular manifestation of language in oratory, including the rhythm, tone, and volume of the spoken word. In this, eloquence has primarily been a matter of voice. However, the category of "the rhetor" is too individualistic for the circumstance of the strike wave, and the medium of the spoken word does not capture the full extent of rhetorical activity. By attending to the multiplicity of "voices" at work in these strikes, I discover that the use of this hashtag is an example of what I call *machinic eloquence,* or the platformatic inflection of the language that

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[10] P. Simonson, "On Digital Eloquence and Other Rhetorical Pathways to Thinking about Religion and Media," *Religion across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, 2013, 96.

nourishes audiences and resonates within a particular context. While these tweets were, assumedly, written by humans, the manner in which Twitter inflects the "voice" of a tweet is an aspect of the platform's mediality. The spread of the hashtag resembled the spread of the strikes themselves, and by accounting for the linguistic prosperities of tweets within my dataset, I explore the machinic eloquence embodied in, through, and by this hashtag.

This approach arguably necessitates my use of computational rhetorical methods for apprehending the discourses of the teacher strike on Twitter. Just as rhetoric needs to acknowledge the machinic eloquence of tweets and hashtags, so too might rhetoricians embrace machinic resources to co-analyze rhetoric at the scale of the internet/digital media. I work to displace "the rhetor" towards an understanding of the technê by which the circulation of a hashtag was constituted by an assemblage of machinic and human relations. This necessarily transforms how the category of eloquence is understood by rhetorical theorists, for rather than being able to judge a performance as eloquent before understandings the effects of the rhetorical act, machinic eloquence is necessarily a matter of consequences. Machinic eloquence, as a distributed form of eloquence, differs from Simonson's digital religious eloquence in a post-humanist sense. It draws our attention away from the individual act of composing rhetoric towards the ecologies of production and circulation that co-constitute eloquence. Many thousands of people participated in the writing of tweets about the strikes, and they did so on a platform that significantly shaped the expression of their voices. I render the global scale of the public constituted by the Twitter media form through quantitative-computational methods that takes the words of each tweet into consideration. I argue that this method provides an analysis of the hashtag's mediality in the expression of strike rhetoric.

Hashtags

Elizabeth Losh's book *Hashtag* provides a cultural history of the now ubiquitous symbol in online communication.[11] She writes that, "Although hashtags are very condensed as expressive cultural artifacts, like other pieces of writing they merit the scrupulous attention paid to a poem or short story in unpacking their complexity and decoding all the influences and historical context that may have informed their production."[12] The hash symbol (#), or pound sign, or number sign, or octothorpe emerged as a linguistic feature from a constellation of forces: accounting practices in England, standardized keyboards on typewriters, and touch-tone telephones. This character was originally stylized similar to "lb," an abbreviation of libra pondo, or pound weight.[13] For purposes of clarity and legibility, it was reformulated as four intersecting lines. The character held a dual meaning in accounting ledgers. According to Losh, "A 1917 manual for business arithmetic explained that '#' could mean both 'number' when 'written before a figure' and 'pounds' when 'written after a figure.'"[14] Thus, historically, the symbol referred to both a number sign and pound sign. Although using it as a character for weight has largely been abandoned, it is still described as the "pound sign" by many.

As a symbol that was commonly hand-written in accounting documents, it appeared in some of the earliest standardized keyboards for typewriters. According to Losh, starting in 1878 typewriters contained a key for the # symbol. As Bell Labs began developing the first mass-produced telephones in the 1960s, they considered what keys would accompany the numbers 0-9 for utilizing the machine instruction capability of touch-tone technology. Touch-tone telephones

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[11] Elizabeth Losh, *Hashtag* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).
[12] Losh, 4.
[13] Keith Houston, *Shady Characters: The Secret Life of Punctuation, Symbols, and Other Typographical Marks* (WW Norton & Company, 2013).
[14] Losh, *Hashtag*, 16.

use unique sounds for each of the buttons on a phone to convey instructions to the telecommunications network. Designers at Bell Labs considered a diamond key for accessing additional features outside of the numerical dialing options, but according to Losh: "the # key was preferable because there was no diamond key on standard office typewriters. And Bell Labs designers knew that typewriters would be needed for producing corporate instruction manuals to explain the new telephones to employees."[15] The emergence of this symbol was determined in part by the technological possibilities of the epoch, and its continued history maintains those conditions.

The hash symbol's use for machine instruction became standard following the adoption of touch-tone telephones in the late-1970s. In the programming language "C," first released in 1972, the # symbol precedes directives for the program that should be completed prior to the problem being compiled (or translated) into machine code. Put differently, the hash symbol is used by humans writing code to provide special instructions to a machine, and these instructions are like the header to a document, which provide correspondence between the following set of instruction and other programs on a machine. For example, "#include" is a preprocessor directive that includes the contents of a file during compilation, much like a citation includes the ideas of another document. Here, the hash symbol functions much like it does on the touch-tone phone: it provides a character for human input that is translated into a signal for machine instructions. As new programming languages were developed, the symbol took on new functions. Another common use of the symbol is for the machine to ignore any characters that follow the hash symbol, so that text comments can be left in code for different humans to make sense of what the program is supposed to accomplish. The hashtag has a heritage as a symbol for human and

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[15] Losh, 15.

machine communication; and in this instance, it is a signal for human interpretation of machine code.

Internet Relay Chat (IRC) is a text-based chat protocol for transmitting messages for group communication, and it uses the # symbol to differentiate "channels" as shared places of discussion. IRC emerged as a technology for chat rooms through free and open-source software sharing and a collaborative shaping of the technical means through which messages were shared. The history of IRC resembles the theoretical concept that Christopher Kelty describes as "recursive publics," for its emergence was shaped by the users who participated in the circulation of discourse on the platform.[16] The early users of IRC were also the developers of the protocol, and they shared a concern for the technical conditions of possibility for their own association, which is how Kelty defined recursive publics. The use of the # symbol, for example, gave users an ability to chat about topics across multiple servers, so that special "channels" (e.g. #startrek) could organize themselves without distracting from discussions occurring in more general channels.[17] IRC was a recursive public because the software that orchestrated the transmission of messages was open and available for anyone who wished to make modifications; but as the Internet switched to a proprietary model of ownership and operation, the technical means through which discourse circulated was no longer modifiable by ordinary users. As Kelty writes, "Openness… is a practice and a concept on which recursiveness depends: If one cannot access and see the software and protocols, if they are not open, this particular public cannot exist."[18]

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[16] Christopher Kelty, "Geeks, Social Imaginaries, and Recursive Publics," *Cultural Anthropology* 20, no. 2 (2005): 185–214, https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2005.20.2.185.

[17] "History of IRC (Internet Relay Chat)," accessed April 11, 2023, https://daniel.haxx.se/irchistory.html.

[18] Kelty, "Geeks, Social Imaginaries, and Recursive Publics," 186–87.

Thus, when Twitter was formed by a group of entrepreneurs in 2006, its operating

protocol was not open to the public—an arrangement often described as "closed source." Twitter

was originally predicated upon the use of text-message technologies within cellphones

(described as Short Message Service or SMS), for it allowed users to send and receive messages

(called "tweets") by sending text messages to the Twitter phone number. The reliance on SMS

shaped the original 140-character limit of tweets, for SMS texts had a limit of 160 characters.

The hashtag was not a feature that originally existed on the Twitter platform, but it became a

common means through which users grouped their content of their discussions. The character

limit pushed users to develop truncated means to express their ideas within the context of a

stream of messages from strangers also using the platform. This is one example of the shaping

effect of mediality on the communication of humans, much like the telegraph affected the nature

of communication in/through/on the telegraph system by accelerating the speed of language

transmission across distance.[19] Rather than use precious characters to explain the topic users are

discussing in their tweet, users could append a hashtag to explain the relevance of their words to

discussions happening on the platform. It was only in 2009 that engineers at Twitter formalized

the use of the # symbol by automatically transforming the characters (excluding spaces)

following the symbol into a hyperlink.[20] This hashtag would link users who clicked on it to a

search query using the hashtag's characters. It allowed users to quickly find other tweets that

similarly contained the hashtag, and it marked the prevalence of Twitter's search feature for

finding other users and discussions. Like the IRC channels that had preceded it, the hashtag

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[19] Marshall McLuhan et al., *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (University of Toronto Press, 2011).
[20] "Twitter Makes Hashtags More #Useful," July 2, 2009, *TechCrunch,* accessed April 11, 2023, https://techcrunch.com/2009/07/02/twitter-makes-hashtags-more-useful/.

helped organize the circulation of discourse within the platform into user-selected topics. The search feature of Twitter, much like the function of early Internet search engines like Google, made the content published on the website accessible to a wide audience of users. Hashtags that were automatically formatted into hyperlinks intensified the platform's focus on publicity, indexability, and aggregation. By making the content of tweets open to machine indexing, the hashtag maintained its use as a conduit of human-machine interaction.

The hashtag is an example of what Jeff Scheible describes as "loose punctuation," or the process through which symbols that have through the history of print culture served as a conduit of syntactic function. For example, Scheible notes the shift from symbols like the period indicating the end of a sentence towards punctuation symbols "loosening" and serving a semantic function, like the equal sign serving as a political symbol for equality. The argument of Scheible's book *Digital Shift* is that the transformation of writing in the digital age is revealing of broader trends in practices of signification, aesthetics, technology, and culture. Scheible writes that, "The hashmark's popular use on Twitter, a social microblogging website composed of updates famously limited to a maximum of 140 characters, provides an opportunity to further condense the most salient topic of an already short message into a keyword, a phrase, or a string of keywords and phrases. In this sense, the hashtag represents what is arguably the single most pronounced feature of new textual practices: the brevity of communication and expression."[21] The shift towards loose punctuation is one the ways in which machinic voice co-constitutes the expressions of rhetoric on the Twitter platform. The mediality of the hashtag is bound within the socio-technical conditions of the ledger, the typewriter, the touch-tone telephone, and open-source software protocols.

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[21] Jeff Scheible, *Digital Shift: The Cultural Logic of Punctuation* (U of Minnesota Press, 2015).

Methodology

Much like the history of Facebook groups, studying the use of the Twitter platform by teachers, students, and parents during the teacher strikes requires conceptualizing the broader context in which the technologies existed. The methods that I employ within the chapter depend upon the mediality of hashtags, and comprehending the results of computational methods requires rendering the means by which data can be collected, aggregated, and visualized. I offer the history of the hashtag as a "preprocessor directive"—that is, as a steppingstone by means of which to move more fully into a reflection of what I described as computational rhetorical criticism. I am not the first to use data science techniques to study Twitter posts. Communication scholar Zizi Papacharissi developed a unique set of quantitative and qualitative methods for studying the connective logic afforded by networked, affective technologies.[22] In an analysis of Twitter usage during the and 2011 Egyptian Revolution and Occupy Wall Street protests, she approaches media with the understanding that "media do not make or break revolutions, but they do lend emerging publics their own distinct mediality. Mediality shapes the texture of these publics and affect becomes the drive that keeps them going."[23] To get at this phenomenon, Papacharissi constructed a corpus of tweets to investigate the structures of storytelling attuned to the cultural politics that undergirded both moments of social movement activity. She utilized a set of multimodal methods to analyze the networks, frequency, and flows of discourse throughout this dataset. Her work was some of the first scholarship in communication and media studies that utilized the massive scale of data obtained from social movements alongside a culturally and historically informed analysis of technology and social change. By utilizing

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[22] Papacharissi, "Affective Publics and Structures of Storytelling."
[23] Papacharissi, 308.

various computational techniques for sorting, aggregating, or otherwise making sense of large datasets, Papacharissi's scholarship enables other researchers to understand the expressions of social movement discourses *at a scale* that matches the attention it receives from ordinary people. Sarah Jackson, Moya Bailey, and Brooke Foucault Welles in their book *Hashtag Activism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* similarly use a set of computational tools for analyzing the use of hashtags as expressions of social movement discourse.[24] They use forms of network analysis to understand the circulation of tweets from Twitter accounts into wider networks of social movement publics. Their book demonstrates the use of hashtags for the purpose of shaping public discussions on matters of racial and gendered violence, and the success that activists have had in projecting counternarratives related to ongoing movements such as Black Lives Matter and #MeToo.

The first tweet with the hashtag #RedForED was made in 2011, seven years before the West Virginia strike began. The tweets were made in response to the protests at the Wisconsin State Capitol opposing legislation that took away the ability of public sector unions to collectively bargain on matters of pensions and healthcare. Further, the legislation transformed Wisconsin in to a "right-to-work state" by prohibiting the automatic collection of membership dues for public sector workers covered by a collective bargaining agreement. According to rhetorician Yvonne Slosarski, over 100,000 public sector workers gathered at the capitol building in Madison, WI to protest these changes, and many of these protests were teachers in the public education system.[25] According to labor reporter Mike Elk, the 2011 protest was significantly mediated through social media: "Even though I wasn't in Wisconsin during that first week of

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[24] Jackson, Bailey, and Welles, *#HashtagActivism.*
[25] Yvonne Slosarski, "Jamming Market Rhetoric in Wisconsin's 2011 Labor Protests," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 13, no. 3 (July 2, 2016): 250–68, https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2016.1151537.

protest, thanks to Twitter I felt like I was there…the images of the Capitol covered in a sea of red

T-shirts – painted a picture so rich in my mind that I often forgot I was in D.C., looking at a

Twitter stream."[26] While there was an organized effort to coordinate red shirts among the

protestors, this was not a protest limited to public education, and so the RedForEd slogan did not

fully capture the movement's discourse. Nonetheless, a Twitter user sent one of the first tweets

containing the hashtag on February 28, 2011 with the following text: "I weep for my state...

#weareWI #redfored."

In September 2012, members of the Chicago Teachers Union (CTU) went on strike for

nine days demanding lower class sizes, higher teacher pay, and an end to discriminatory school

closures.[27] The CTU was the first teacher's union in the United States, and it was founded

explicitly on the principles of enhancing democratic citizenship by protecting the working

conditions of teachers.[28] Their union's colors are red and white, and while there is little evidence

to suggest the union members coined the phrase RedForEd, it was an obvious choice for

describing their choice of clothing during their 2012 strike. There is only a small handful of

tweets that use the hashtag during this timeframe, but the few that exist demonstrate the tactic of

wearing red in a show of solidarity that would become all-the-more common during the 2018-

2019 strikes. As one Twitter user stated in 2012, "Today, I am wearing red in #solidarity w/

@CTULocal1! We must work to provide the quality edu that students deserve! #RedForEd

#CTUStrike." Between 2012 and 2018, there are approximately 1,000 tweets that continued the

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[26] Mike Elk, "On The 10th Anniversary of the Wisconsin Capitol Occupation – Payday Report," accessed April 13, 2023, https://paydayreport.com/on-the-10th-anniversary-of-the-wisconsin-capital-occupation/.
[27] Michael J. Steudeman, "Indeterminacy, Incipiency, and Attitudes: Materialist Oscillation in the 2012 Chicago Teachers' Strike," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101, no. 3 (July 3, 2015): 509–33, https://doi.org/10.1080/00335630.2015.1055786.
[28] Hlavacik, "The Democratic Origins of Teachers' Union Rhetoric: Margaret Haley's Speech at the 1904 NEA Convention."

use of this hashtag and discussions of issues facing the system of public education. It is not until

2018, however, that an explosion of tweets containing the hashtag occurred in relation to the

statewide and city strikes.

By using the Python programming language and techniques described as "natural

language processing," I can investigate trends across thousands of tweets without individually

reading all 170,000 tweets—about 9 million words—myself. This form of analysis uses

quantitative-computational methods for deriving a set of interpretations based on the dataset.

Before I begin outlining the specific methods employed in this chapter, it is important to note

that I don't intend to describe a universal tool for studying any social movement phenomenon

that engages with digital media for purposes of rhetorical activity. Instead, I am approaching this

study with an historical and cultural knowledge of this particular social movement and the many

factors that led to its emergence. Since I am interested in mediality as a key factor of these

strikes, I needed to pair these computational methods with a broader methodology that both

interprets and contextualizes these insights. Indeed, making sense of social media data without

this prior knowledge is a risky endeavor that is in danger of misinterpreting or missing important

aspects of the data.

Accordingly, this chapter develops an area of rhetorical inquiry I describe as

"computational rhetorical methods." By using tools borrowed and adapted from data science,

rhetoricians can identify recurrent rhetorical features across large sets of textual data. This

resembles the quantitative/computational methods that are used across the discipline of

communication studies, but it incorporates the humanistic principles that undergird traditional

rhetorical analysis. In this regard, I articulate computational rhetoric in conjunction with the

intellectual formation known as the digital humanities, which as the writers of *The Digital*

Humanities Manifesto 2.0 put it, "harnesses digital toolkits in the service of the Humanities' core methodological strengths: attention to complexity, medium specificity, historical context, analytical depth, critique and interpretation."[29] Which is to say, my approach to computational rhetoric is not intended as a naively positivist paradigm that searches for validity and predictive capacity. The method I develop and use in this chapter is not readily adaptable to social media uses in other contexts. My use of computational tools to explore a textual dataset is intended to render a *specific* set of artifacts visible at a scale of media beyond the local speech or the regional Facebook group. As a version of the project Stephen Ramsay describes as "algorithmic criticism," my approach to computational rhetoric seeks to extend the practices of rhetorical analysis to a different domain and scale. He writes: "For while it is possible, and in some cases useful, to confine algorithmic procedures to the scientific realm, such procedures can be made to conform to the methodological project of *inventio* without transforming the nature of computation or limiting the rhetorical range of critical inquiry. This is possible because critical reading practices already contain elements of the algorithmic."[30] Indeed, rhetorical analysis considered to be "close reading" can still be comprehended as containing elements of the "algorithmic": a critic whose method directs them to study only figurative uses of language within a speech arguably uses a non-computational algorithm—a set of more or less codified procedures— for determining which words to ignore and which to include within a corpus for analysis. Similarly, a survey of rhetorical works that uses a criterion to determine which voices to include, such as Karlyn Kohrs Campbell's *Man Cannot Speak for Her*, gathers data through a

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[29] "The Digital Humanities Manifesto 2," https://www.humanitiesblast.com/manifesto/Manifesto_V2.pdf.
[30] Stephen Ramsay, *Reading Machines: Toward and Algorithmic Criticism* (University of Illinois Press, 2011), 16.

particular logic of inclusion.[31] The reason for Campbell's famous book was that the previous

algorithm for determining rhetorical excellence was patriarchal, and just as in the case of

machinic algorithms, there is a political logic to the codified procedures of selecting, reading,

canonizing—and also ignoring. Whatever the case, the aim of this chapter is not to reveal an

inner truth about the nature of discourse within Twitter hashtags, but to gain a new perspective

about the medium in which the teacher strikes were expressed.

As noted earlier, I am not the first communication scholar to use computational

methods—nor am I the first rhetorician to do so. One of the first distinctly rhetorical approaches

to computational textual analysis came in 1987 from Roderick P. Hart's program DICTION,

which he used to analyze a distinctly rhetorical topic: presidential address.[32] Hart's program,

which he has updated over the decades since its commercial release in 1997, uses predefined

dictionaries to measure the use of words against conceptual metrics like, "certainty, activity,

optimism, realism, and commonality."[33] Hart's work emerged out of contact with the field of

computational linguistics, which has a much longer history than the interplay of rhetoric and

computer science. It helped initiate interest in the overlap between these two fields, which has

found an intellectual home in the journal *Computation & Argument*. Moreover, Graham, Kim,

Devasto, and Keith use a method they describe as "statistical genre analysis" to extend the utility

of computational rhetoric beyond purely linguistic approaches. They characterize this method as

an "iterative mixed-methodological hybridization of qualitative coding and statistical analysis,"[34]

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[31] Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, *Man Cannot Speak for Her: Volume I; A Critical Study of Early Feminist Rhetoric*, Illustrated edition (New York: Praeger, 1989).

[32] Roderick P. Hart, *Verbal Style and the Presidency: A Computer-Based Analysis* (Academic Press, 1984).

[33] "DICTION Overview – Diction Software," accessed April 11, 2023, https://dictionsoftware.com/diction-overview/.

[34] S. Scott Graham et al., "Statistical Genre Analysis: Toward Big Data Methodologies in Technical Communication," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 24, no. 1 (2015): 76.

which combines the trained capacity of the rhetorical scholar with the affordances of computational tools. Similarly, Scott Graham's work uses "large-scale human-coded content analysis to assess if certain discussant variables (education, economic relationships), sources of evidence (biomedical, experimental), and modes of reasoning (statistical, experiential) predict voting outcomes at Food and Drug Administration Drug Advisory Committee Meetings."[35] In both instances, the work of coding was enhanced by the use of code, which is to say, samples of data were assigned values by human researchers and then extrapolated onto larger data sets to identify recurrent rhetorical features. Finally, the research of Zoltan Majdik represents some of the most recent developments in computational rhetoric.[36] He and his co-authors use machine learning technologies to train statistical models on curated data sets of rhetorical structures, and with the aid of larger language models, classify rhetorical structures embedded within varied contexts of language use.[37] Each of these invocations of computational rhetoric leans harder than I do on the affordances of social scientific research paradigms in revealing an accurate representation of their dataset; and in this regard, they attend less to the specificity of their chosen media and historical context. Zoltan's work specifically is oriented to causal claims about the rhetorical effectiveness of certain appeals that can lead to a predictive capacity, and while this is valuable research, it is not my intention to judge how well the dataset I am using in this chapter contributed to popular support for the teacher strikes. Instead, my intention is to

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[35] S. Scott Graham, "The Opioid Epidemic and the Pursuit of Moral Medicine: A Computational-Rhetorical Analysis," *Written Communication* 38, no. 1 (2021): 10.

[36] Zoltan P. Majdik, "A Computational Approach to Assessing Rhetorical Effectiveness: Agentic Framing of Climate Change in the Congressional Record, 1994–2016," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (July 3, 2019): 207–22, https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2019.1601774.

[37] Zoltan P. Majdik and James Wynn, "Building Better Machine Learning Models for Rhetorical Analyses: The Use of Rhetorical Feature Sets for Training Artificial Neural Network Models," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (January 2, 2023): 63–78, https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2022.2077452.

investigate trends within the dataset for recurrent rhetorical features that demonstrate the constitutive effects of the Twitter platform on the discourse of the teacher strikes.

For this reason, I turn to a method developed by Laurie Gries, described as "rhetorical tracing," which provides a framework for the interpretation and analysis of cultural materials on a wide scale.[38] This approach was intended to track the changes of visual rhetoric associated with popular images that have been repeatedly circulated and modified, but the method of rhetorical tracing can also be used to document the emergence and transformation of posts using certain hashtags. Gries's method requires researchers to assemble a large dataset of circulated images, and then to closely examine this dataset to discover patterns and mutations. Here, data visualization serves as an exploratory method for uncovering rhetorical trends in the dataset.[39] It is a process for asking further questions about the uptake and circulation of these phenomena across networked technologies. Further, the new materialist research principles utilized in Gries' study offer a critical paradigm for investigating the mediality of rhetorical activity that privileges the specificity and contextuality of technological affordances.

Further, I wish to situate the data work I do in this chapter within a framework described by Catherine D'ignazio and Lauren F. Klein as "data feminism": "a way of thinking about data, both their uses and their limits, that is informed by direct experience, by a commitment to action, and by intersectional feminist thought."[40] Such a framework is necessary because of the overwhelmingly masculine bias in data science research, which, sometimes despite its intentions, has suborned the use of data as a tool for domination. Whether through surveillance, militarism, or technologically-enabled discrimination, data has been a means of asserting power over non-

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[38] Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*.
[39] Gries, "Iconographic Tracking."
[40] Catherine D'ignazio and Lauren F. Klein, *Data Feminism* (MIT press, 2020), 8.

dominant groups of people. As Safiya Umoja Noble's book *Algorithms of Oppression* demonstrates, the biases held by the predominately white and male workforce of computer and information system engineers are embedded in data-driven technologies through design and programming choices.[41] The sociology of data scientists is one way of understanding the intertwined nature of technology and the cultural politics of the white cis-heteropatriarchy, but it is also worth critiquing the philosophy of science that undergirds much of the data science research. This leads D'ignazio and Klein to the work of Donna Haraway, whose essay "Situated Knowledges" provides a foundation for understanding the pursuit of so-called objective knowledge through data-driven methods.[42] According to Haraway, the appeals to objectivity that are pervasive in Western scientific knowledge production are used as a "god-trick" for providing an illusion of neutrality and epistemic superiority. By presenting findings from an observer who is assumed to be outside and above the observed, the god-trick of objectivity assumes that the knowledge produced in this frame is universal and less prone to bias. Haraway argues, however, that all knowledge is situated within a specific social, historical, and cultural context, and that attempts to hide this fact are attempts to diminish the knowledge that is based in a person's experience.

Haraway's argument is especially applicable in the context of in the practices of data visualization. Graphs, charts, and maps are rhetorical objects crafted by information researchers. These objects are often used to abstract the phenomena contained within a dataset for viewing a simplifying representation of patterns. It is in the metaphor of vision, though, the data

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[41] Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York, UNITED STATES: New York University Press, 2018).
[42] Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (1988): 575–99, https://doi.org/10.2307/3178066.

visualization practices often fall prey to the illusion of objectivity. Haraway writes, "The eyes have been used to signify a perverse capacity—honed to perfection in the history of science tied to militarism, capitalism, colonialism, and male supremacy—to distance the knowing subject from everybody and everything in the interests of unfettered power"[43] Similarity, the rhetoricity of data visualization tends to convey the idea that the knowledge of the data comes from a "view from nowhere."[44] Similarly, graphs that represent thousands of datapoints are not merely communicating some aspect of the metrics contained therein; they also convey the assumption that the knowledge is more reputable because of its formal expression as a product of "data science." According to D'ignazio and Klein, "The god trick and its underlying assumptions about neutrality and truth are baked into today's best practices for data visualization."[45]

The solution for this problem is not the abandonment of data visualization, nor of the methods of data science. For the framework of data feminism, data can be a tool of oppression or liberation—or of both at the same time. Methods of knowledge production, such as data visualization, must therefore be situated as partial. No graph tells the whole story, and no dataset captures the full nature of reality. It must therefore be political. The context in which data is produced and visualized is one marked by deep inequalities that are embedded within every practice of collection, aggregation, processing, publication, and more. Intersectional feminist theories are a guide for uncovering the manifestation of the discriminatory structures of technological oppression, and they work best when oriented towards praxis. Research cannot be a disinterested act that serves to generate knowledge for the sake of knowledge. As a situated act, computational methods should challenge unequal power structures. As communication scholars

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[43] Haraway, 581.
[44] Haraway, 580.
[45] D'ignazio and Klein, *Data Feminism*, 76.

Graham and Hopkins argue: "Statistical methodologies have long been a primary tool of the oppressed for rendering their oppression visible. The false ideology of meritocracy is diffracted when racist employment and promotion statistics are brought to bear. The gender wage gap is exposed when salary figures are tracked and accounted for. And, when the US government refuses to monitor state violence, Black Lives Matter activists leverage statistical techniques to demonstrate the extent of the problem."[46]

The methods to which I turn in this chapter could be understood as similar to the methods described by Franco Moretti and Ted Underwood as "distant reading" for computational literary studies.[47] One of the affordances of large datasets for algorithmic criticism is that they displace the role of the lone, authoritative critic for comprehending the texts contained within the data. Rather than trust that I have carefully read each of the texts, extracted the most meaningful and representative examples, and provided an interpretation that accurately reflects the themes, figures, and rhetorical strategies contained within, computational rhetorical methods rely on statistical methods for providing evidence of such internal dynamics. In contrast to the method of close reading, computational rhetorical methods provide a unique vantage point for understanding the scale of rhetorical expression within digital media. However, as a project aligned with the principles of data feminism, I argue that the distance provided by these methods is one that still integrally relies on my positionality as a researcher. I avoid the "god-trick" of objectivity by making clear, at each step in my methodology, the decisions I make in processing my dataset as a product of my subjectivity. The computational critic is still an authoritative critic,

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[46] S. Scott Graham and Hannah R. Hopkins, "AI for Social Justice: New Methodological Horizons in Technical Communication," *Technical Communication Quarterly* 31, no. 1 (January 2, 2022): 90–91, https://doi.org/10.1080/10572252.2021.1955151.
[47] Franco Moretti, *Graphs, Maps, Trees: Abstract Models for a Literary History* (Verso, 2005); Ted Underwood, *Distant Horizons: Digital Evidence and Literary Change* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

in my view, for there is no approach to large datasets that does not require deliberate choices made by a researcher to sort, aggregate, and visualize datasets. Beyond my choice of the hashtag object, I also use preprocessing tools to prepare my dataset for computational analysis, such as in removing "stop words" (e.g. "the", "and", "to", "for", etc.) and hyperlinks do not fit as examples of ordinary language (Twitter "shortens" links, which gives them a unique URL that is difficult to compare). After preprocessing, I interpret the output of the methods to find results that I find significant based on my knowledge of the dataset and, building on the preceding chapters, the cultural context in which it was produced. The visualizations I have crafted are partial representations of the rhetorical processes I found to be most revealing of machinic eloquence. Pretending that the method of distant reading speaks from a position of the non-authorized critic is exemplary of Haraway's "view from nowhere." Instead, I argue that my use of computational methods provides an *appropriately scalar* reading of the thousands of tweets included within my dataset. This is especially true because I rely on different scales throughout the research process; that is, I use metrics from aggregating the tweets to know where to "zoom-in" and take a closer look. Further, my use of scalar reading is embedded in my position as a researcher of teacher strikes, from a commitment towards action for their continued success, and from an understanding that these tweets occurred in a cultural context defined by the raced, gendered, and classed politics of public education.

I now describe my methodology with particular attention to the choices that shaped my dataset. First, to the best of my ability, I obtained all Twitter posts containing the hashtag #RedForEd. Twitter's search and hashtag aggregation system does not differentiate capitalized letters, so it is more accurate to label the hashtag as #redfored (though admittedly not as accessible for persons with vision impairments who use text-to-speech software). I utilized a

Python library named Twint. It uses the Twitter search function to automatically query for tweets, and its functions allow for searches based on particular words or hashtags. Twint returned all tweets containing the specified search term, and these tweets include several metadata fields (date/time, likes, retweets, etc.). After I obtained the data and saved it as a CSV file (comma separated values, a type of spreadsheet), I used the Python libraries Numpy and Pandas to simplify and organize the dataset.[48] I limited the dataset by date/time based on my historical knowledge of the social movement. These strikes occurred during a period of heightened frequency between January 2018 and December 2019. I limited my temporal domain to these two dates for a few reasons. First, the West Virginia teacher strike began in February 2018, and the Chicago teacher strike of 2019 ended in November of 2019. I added an extra month on the range of these dates to include tweets discussing the strikes both prior to and after their effective dates. In the months between these dates, the number of tweets varies dramatically. There is, for example, a noticeable drop-off in the discussion of #RedForED during the summer months, when school was not in session. However, the dataset demonstrates that the tweets containing the hashtag continued to be posted throughout the entirety of the two-year period.

I have taken steps to minimize the risks of violating the privacy of users included within my dataset by following research community's ethical norms with regards to studying material obtained from the Twitter platform. Casey Fiesler and Nicholas Proferes argue that while tweets are considered public data and are not subject to the requirements of Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight, ethical research practices should be approached contextually based on the subject matter of studies. Their study of research practices confirms that perceptions of

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[48] These Python libraries are frequently used by data scientists, for they allow researchers to perform mathematical operations on datasets, such as summarizing, aggregating, or manipulating data based on selected attributes.

"publicness" of users on the Twitter platform varies. "[T]his work, they state, "suggests that in making decisions about ethical use of tweets, researchers should pay close attention to the content of the tweets, the level of analysis with respect to making the content more public, and reasonable expectations of privacy."[49] Although the Twitter platform does not limit people who do not follow certain users from discovering their tweets, as in the case of Facebook, users may not be aware that their Tweets can be discovered by others.

Accordingly, in gathering data, I abided by the following principles and procedures:

- First, my research design uses the hashtag as an organizing principle of publicness. My assumption is that users who voluntarily add the hashtag #RedForEd do so because they wish to be connected to a public conversation on the movement for public education. Whether users wish to register their support or criticize the teacher strikes, the functions of hashtags on this platform imply a level of publicness. Further, tweets made from accounts that are marked as "Private" cannot be discovered by my method. Only users who follow private accounts can see these tweets, and my research process does not include any users marked as private.

- Second, I have anonymized all tweets within my dataset. While the process of obtaining the tweets includes the username of the person or group that posted the tweet, I do not include this at any point in the process of my analysis. When I quote tweets in this chapter, I do not quote them verbatim, and I do not include

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[49] Casey Fiesler and Nicholas Proferes, "'Participant' Perceptions of Twitter Research Ethics," *Social Media + Society* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2018): 11, https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118763366.

any identifiable information about the author. The process of obfuscating the text of tweets makes it difficult to be re-identified through Twitter search mechanisms.

- Third, I do not quote in this chapter the tweets that were made in "reply" to other users. According to the ethical research design of Jackson et al., users tend to perceive that conversations had on the platform are not intended as public statements but interpersonal communication between users.[50]

- Fourth, I only publicly release data from my research process presented in aggregate form. For instance, data that counts the number of tweets within a monthly time period does not contain the tweets themselves – only the total number of tweets. I am not releasing the complete dataset, and any tweets that are deleted or made from accounts that have switched to private would not appear in future attempts to obtain this data. However, for reasons of intellectual openness and research integrity, I have publicly released the code I used for my research.[51] As a proponent of computational rhetorical methods, it is my hope that the work I have completed in this dissertation could inspire or educate other scholars to adopt similar methods. To that end, I have provided carefully documented versions of my code that explain each step of the process. Further, the methods I used can be verified by scholars who wish to confirm, challenge, etc. the results of my research.

- Finally, I dropped all duplicate tweets based on the text of the tweet itself. If the same text was tweeted multiple times, only one version of that tweet is retained in

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[50] Jackson, Bailey, and Welles, *#HashtagActivism.*
[51] You can view the code used in my dissertation at this link: https://github.com/brandon-daniels/Mediality-of-Teacher-Strikes/

the dataset, which removed redundancies that would potentially skew the analysis.

The process of sorting through the immense noise of Twitter posts from across the

globe and selecting a single hashtag reduced this dataset to a modest size of 57

megabytes when saved as a comma-separated-values (.csv) filetype. It would be

inaccurate to describe this study as utilizing "big data," since the dataset is small

enough to be explored by any modern computer using Microsoft Excel (it would

be tiresome, though, to navigate the 163,966 rows).

To summarize, the dataset is not a window into how all Twitter users behave or respond to the

topic of teacher strikes. Any tweets that mention or otherwise discuss teacher strikes without this

hashtag are not available to study. It is, rather, an opportunity to examine how teachers,

supporters of public education, and commentators on the strikes more broadly expressed

themselves through this platform, generally, and through the hashtag #redfored more

specifically.

Since I am centrally interested in the language used in these tweets, I prepared the dataset

by simplifying, or cleaning, the tweet text column. First, I removed all twitter usernames by

locating any group of letters that begins with the @ symbol with up to 15 letters following the

symbol. People compose tweets with usernames to reply to others or to in some way reference

other Twitter accounts, but the use of usernames in tweets is not a conventional use of natural

language; rather, it is a function of the platform. Next, I removed any hyperlinks that were

included in tweets for the same reason. For consistency in my analysis, I made all text lowercase

and removed punctuation, including the hashtag symbol. While this decision might seem as

though it reduced the importance of hashtags, the characters that follow the hashtag are

preserved; and since hash tagged terms cannot contain spaces, these groupings of words are still recognizable as such (i.e. "red for red" is now rendered as "redfored").

Topic modelling is a quantitative method of analysis that uses unsupervised machine learning[52] to identify connections across the use of certain phrases or words. The process builds a statistical model of the probability for certain words to appear in a sentence with other particular words. Topic modelling outputs a list of words that are likely to appear in the same document (in this instance, tweets), and these can be interpreted by a researcher to gain a broader understanding of the types of discourse included within a dataset. In order to prepare the dataset for topic modelling, I converted each unique word in the dataset into a token and removed common stop words. Tokens are numerical versions of unique words, and in this form, the model can compare it to other words used in the dataset. I use a tool called MALLET (Machine Learning for Language Toolkit), which runs in Java (another programming language) but can be orchestrated through Python. MALLET uses Latent Dirichlet Allocation, a generative statistical model that measures the co-occurrence of words as a means of gauging their shared relevance. After the user inputs the desired topics, MALLET generates a unique model, which can be displayed as plain text with a set of values corresponding to the probable topics. Selecting the number of topics to generate is an important decision for shaping the output of this process. If there are too few desired topics (k), the probabilistic models generating by MALLET will only capture the most frequently used words in the dataset, and it will miss some of the less discussed but still distinct topics. The benefit of topic modelling is that it can discover word groupings that,

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[52] Unsupervised refers to not using prior models to evaluate the values of a dataset. This means the words have no meaning or valence during the process. Supervised machine learning means that a researcher intervenes in the process to "teach" the model which words are significant. Sentiment analysis, which is a supervised method that matches words with a score of positivity or negativity, requires researchers to label words with a corresponding score.

while occur relatively infrequently in comparison to the total dataset, still show a high degree of coherence as a topic. If there are too many desired topics (k), the output of the process will show many overlapping word groupings and dilute the possibility for interpretation on the part of the researcher. Choosing the correct number of desired topics thus requires experimentation and play. I iterated through 2-35 topics, and based on my knowledge of the movement's context and the content of many tweets, I selected 16 topics as a reasonable number for making relevant results. I arrived at this number by interpreting the results and recognizing topics that were distinct from each other while still uncovering unique word groupings.

Topic modelling relies on an unsupervised learning technique for natural language processing, as noted earlier, and thus it avoids some of the pitfalls associated with using a model generated from bias-laden datasets. This is a type of "machine learning," which is a way of describing the process of a computer algorithm performing a task without explicit instructions. Supervised learning describes workflows where researchers give their selected algorithm some type of information to guide the process. Unsupervised machine learning, on the other hand, occurs without inputs from a researcher that labels data with relevant information. To be clear, topic modelling does not engage with the meaning of words or phrases—only their probability of appearing next to other words or phrases. As a matter of probability, there are no guarantees about the outcome of the machine learning process, and the output will slightly differ each time the model is trained. As a result, topic modelling does not yield a result that is easily operationalized as a variable nor interpreted as a source of objective truth. Researchers can examine the results of the topic modelling process and come to a deeper understanding of the different patterns or genres of language use within a corpus. Once again, it requires that researchers have an intimate prior knowledge of their dataset, for its results require significant

interpretation. However, combining this quantitative method with historical/cultural methods of inquiry can yield fascinating results about the use of language at a scale beyond the individual text post.

Next, I combined the generated topic model with the metadata of tweets related to the date they were posted. By incorporating this time series data into the model, I generated visualizations that compare the likelihood of predicted topics appearing during the timeframe of the dataset. It shows that some topics occur frequently throughout the dataset, and other topics occur during specific moments in the two-year history. This deepened the insights gained from the topic modelling process by showing the transformation of word groupings (topics) over time. I learned about this method from Melanie Walsh, a digital humanist who authored an online textbook entitled *Introduction to Cultural Analytics & Python*.[53] She argues, "Topic models are useful for understanding collections of texts in their broadest outlines and themes…Topic models can also be helpful for looking at the fluctuation of topics and themes over time."[54] Her textbook contains a full tutorial for incorporating this method into any potential research project, including example Python code. Time series topic modelling is especially useful in my study because of the temporal nature of the strikes' spread across the country. The strikes did not all occur at the same time. Different events throughout the history shaped the circulation of discourse and potentially altered the resources by means of which rhetorical expressions manifested on the platform.

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[53] Melanie Walsh, *Introduction to Cultural Analytics & Python*, vol. 1, 2021, https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4411250.
[54] Walsh, https://melaniewalsh.github.io/Intro-Cultural-Analytics/05-Text-Analysis/06-Topic-Modeling-Overview.html.

The next method I utilized with this dataset can be described as geoparsing. This approach to natural language processing uses the tools of Named Entity Recognition to extract references to geographic locations. This process relies on trained models of language use that are supervised through a process called part-of-speech tagging. I used the Python library spaCy and their large English language model to accomplish this goal. The large English language model was trained by its developers on a selection of news articles, blog posts, and comments written in the English language. A community of researchers then worked to annotate this corpus with the relevant grammatical information for each word in the corpus. The spaCy library uses statistical models to predict how certain words function (part of speech) in relation to the other words used in the sentence. For instance, the sentence "I am at Denver East High School" can be tagged as containing a pronoun "I", a verb "am", a preposition "at", and a set of nouns "Denver" and "East High School." By comparing input text to the English model, the spaCy library can probabilistically estimate the part of speech of a particular word as used in a sentence, and through this process, make an educated guess if a word is a named entity. Further, based on this model, the spaCy library can identify if the named entity is describing a location or geographical place.

By running the processed and cleaned text of tweets in the dataset through these functions, I extracted all tweets that likely contain a reference to a location. Using a library called Mordecai, I then attempted to match these references to a set of latitude and longitude coordinates for mapping.[55] This Python library requires that the external tool ElasticSearch is running and a downloaded gazetteer (a directory of places with corresponding geospatial data) is

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[55] Andrew Halterman, "Mordecai: Full Text Geoparsing and Event Geocoding," *The Journal of Open Source Software* 2, no. 9 (2017), https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.00091.

available. The ElasticSearch container quickly searched through the gazetteer to match the string

from the Named Entity Recognition process to a physical location. For example, if a tweet

contained the text "I'm supporting the #RedForEd movement from Durham, North Carolina," the

geoparsing function would automatically generate a corresponding datapoint for the geographic

location (or an approximation) of Durham, North Carolina (35.9940° N, 78.8986° W).[56]

Some of the potential problems with this method stem from the wide variety of how humans (and

Twitter users in particular) use language. Sometimes the references to location will correspond to

the user's location, such as in the example above, but this is not often the case. People often

tweet about things happening elsewhere. In other words, it helps visualize how even if the strike

is occurring in one location, news and attention may have spread to a different location.

These location references cannot be assumed to be the user's location, or a gauge of

support in a particular part of the country. There are many datapoints in the output of this process

that, while correctly parsed based on the language, do not reflect a connection to a particular

place. For example, one tweet stated, "Yes. #RedForEd is a #Socialist movement. These are the

folks who want is[*sic*] to become Venezuela…" The geoparsing process identified this Tweet

with the latitude and longitude coordinates of the South American country, even though the

reference is not an indicator that the user is posting from Venezuela. This presents an important

caveat to the visualizations I produced based on this method: not all references to a geographic

location can be assumed to have the same semantic meaning. The method does, however, allow

for discoveries that would have otherwise gone unnoticed in the scale of digital media—as in

another example that stated, "indigenous representative join the march today in #Bogota for

rights and access to #education…#colombia #redfored…" The spread of this hashtag on a global

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[56] This is a hypothetical example to demonstrate the method, and this is not a real tweet in the dataset.

scale is noteworthy and justifies the use of this sometimes uncertain method for apprehending the meaning and medaility of the hashtag.

Findings

I began my study with various quantitative techniques—to ask certain questions about the dataset and created visualizations that attempt to answer them. What was the frequency of the tweets? How did these tweets share words beyond the hashtag? What places were referenced by the tweets? This exploratory form of data visualizations is motivated by Laurie Gries' argument that visualization is a form of inquiry that leads to deeper research questions about the rhetorical properties of circulation. Since I am also concerned with the temporality of the tweets containing the hashtag #RedForEd, I asked about the frequency of these tweets appearing on a monthly basis across the strike's 2-year period. I summarized the metadata about the tweets by counting the number of tweets that occur in each month and sort them into piles. The graph immediately below visualizes these amounts, with each bar representing one of the 24 months included in the dataset.
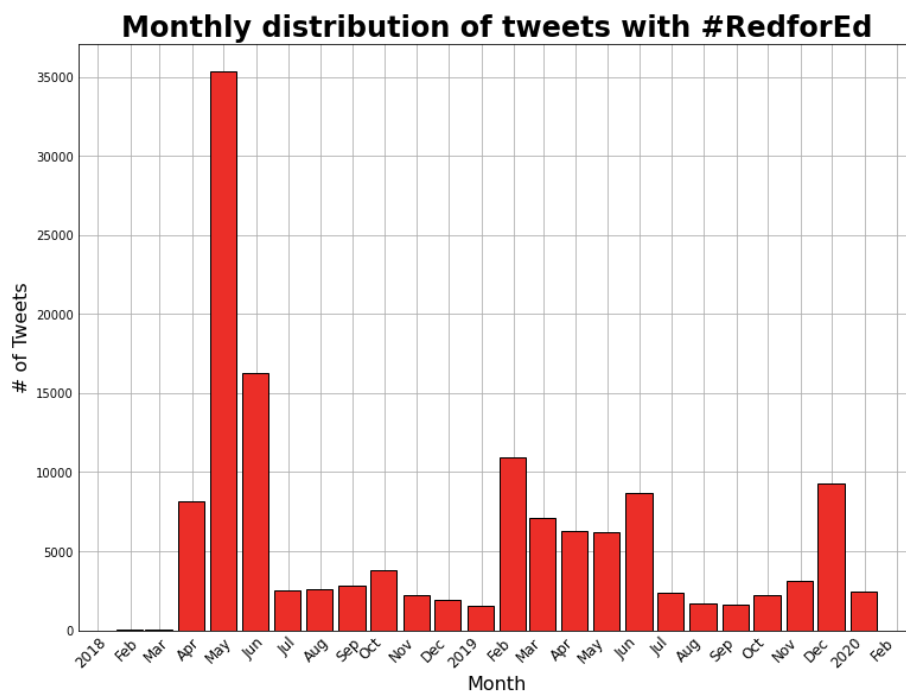
Figure 9 – Bar graph visualizing the number of Tweets summarized by the month they were posted.

The graph demonstrates that the strikes manifested in an uneven manner on the Twitter

platform. As I explored in the previous chapter, the use of Facebook textures the dataset I work

with here. Whereas teachers in West Virginia (Feb 2018-March 2018) used Facebook as a means

to organize and discuss their collective action, there was less of an expression of the social

movement rhetoric on Twitter with the hashtag. Although the archival discourses of the previous

chapter demonstrate that Red For Ed was a prominent slogan during the West Virginia strike, the

graph demonstrates that it was not necessarily incorporated as a hashtag for use on the Twitter

platform. This could be because the teachers and supporters were less likely to use Twitter, or

because tweets about their strike did not coalesce around this hashtag. The increase in tweets

beginning in April 2018 and the explosion in May 2018 represent both the organic process by

which the hashtag came to capture discussions of teacher strikes and the collective effort from

organizers to use the hashtag as an organizing tool. Organizers in the Arizona strike asked

teachers and supporters to make posts on social media with the hashtag as part of their escalation

strategy, and the jump up to over 35,000 tweets in a single month could be partially attributed to this tactic. In chapter three, I provided an image used that asked participants to tweet three reasons why they are wearing red and include the #redfored. This example demonstrates the carryover between the scales of media use. There are also subsequent jumps in the number of tweets correlating to the Los Angeles teacher strike in Feb 2019 and the Chicago teacher strike in Dec 2019.

I made the next visualization by counting the total number of other hashtags used in conjunction with #redfored. While hashtags are used primarily for tweets on a given topic so that they signal participating in a larger conversation, multiple hashtags used in conjunction with one another localize these conversations to a given area or subject matter. So, while #redfored signals that a tweet is participating in a discussion about the teacher strikes occurring across the United States and even the globe, #utlastrong was a hashtag used to connect tweets to the strike in Los Angeles and the UTLA union. Further, additional hashtags are opportunities to add to the message of supporting teachers with other slogans that represent desired changes in the system of public education. This gives a sense of some of the specific demands of the movement across different locales.
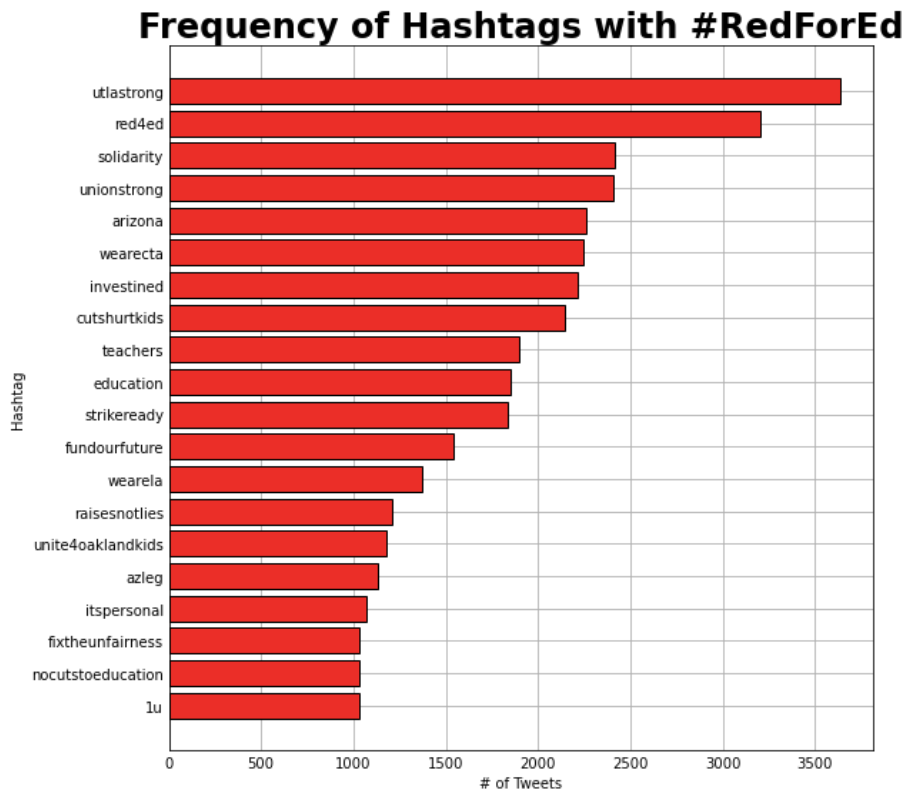
Frequency of Hashtags with #RedForEd

Figure 10 – Bar graph visualizing the most common hashtags that accompanied #RedForEd

The hashtag #utlastrong had the highest frequency, potentially demonstrating a high level of coordination across the tweets. Other location-based hashtags represented here are #arizona, #azleg, #wearecta (California Teachers Association), #wearela, #unite4oaklandkids. Interestingly, each of these co-occurring hashtags are in Arizona and California. The non-location referencing hashtags demonstrate some of the language used by thousands of teachers and teacher supporters, such as #investined, #fundourfuture, signal a focus on fiscal policy and the budgets produced by state legislatures, while other hashtags like, #raisesnotlies and #itspersonal, signal a focus on the dignity of the teachers and the perceived disrespect from politicians. Notably, the total number of tweets containing one of these other hashtags is relatively low compared to the 170,000 tweets in the dataset. The hashtag co-occurrences only represent a small portion of the total dataset, and so the vast majority of tweets do not participate in any one of these other hashtags. This could be evidence that the process of adding additional

hashtags to an already established hashtag is difficult. Doing so requires that others feel a resonance in the language of a hashtag and are compelled to include the same hashtag in their tweet. It also demonstrates that once a main hashtag is established, adding additional hashtags is less important.

Analyzing other hashtags included in tweets with #redfored provides a scalar understanding of how hashtags are used during the teacher strikes but is not inclusive of the ordinary uses of language in tweets with the hashtags. For this reason, the method of topic modeling is useful for gaining a zoomed-out view of how the language of #redfored tweets worked across the two-year period. As a reminder, topic modelling measures the likelihood of specific words to appear in the same tweet with other words. Some of the topics generated through the iterative process showcase how there are certain types of tweets that are heavily represented in the dataset. One such example is tweets that contain the words: 'red', 'support', 'wear', 'wearing', 'today', 'tomorrow', 'show', 'wednesday', 'public', 'education', 'day.' The topic modelling process discovered this as a combination of words that are likely to appear in each tweet within a given topic. The graph below, which incorporates the time-series information obtained from Tweet metadata, shows the likelihood of this topic is to appear in a given month. While the topic occurs throughout the dataset, it has a higher chance of appearing in tweets during the Arizona, Los Angeles, and Chicago teacher strikes.
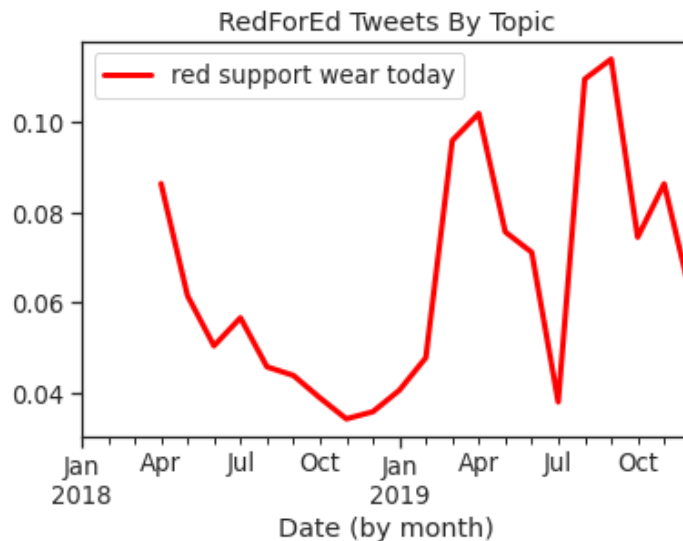
Figure 11 - Time series topic model graph of wearing red topic

As shown in the archive of the previous chapter, teacher-activists would often ask their colleagues to join them in wearing red on specific days of the week to showcase their support for public education. Wearing "red for ed" gave organizers a sense of how united their co-workers were behind their demands for better pay and smaller class sizes. These words were statistically likely to appear in the same sentence together because of how many different tweets used similar words.

Topic modelling is also useful for discovering tweets made about a particular location, for these tweets are likely to contain references to local unions, city names, or state governments. While this is not reliable for discovering all locations mentioned by tweets, since there are a limited number of discoverable tweets within a given topic model, topics containing identifiable locations showcase a high number of tweets using similar words. For example, one topic included words such as, 'osstf', 'onpoli', 'etfo', 'etfostrong', 'nocutstoeducation', 'cutshurtkids', which appeared in relation to a struggle over education funding in Ontario providence in Canada. The teachers in Ontario led a series of protests to shape legislation being considered by the

Ontario government.[57] Their protests culminated in a strike in early December 2019, and they used the same hashtag as teachers in the United States, giving this movement an international circulation. The graph for this topic shows the specificity of the language used by tweets contained within the model, for the words used in the topic have a low probability of appearing at other points in the dataset. The hashtag slogans, #cutshurtskids and #nocutstoeducation, can be assumed to be originated by the movement in Ontario, giving this topic a high degree of coherency and difference from the other topics.
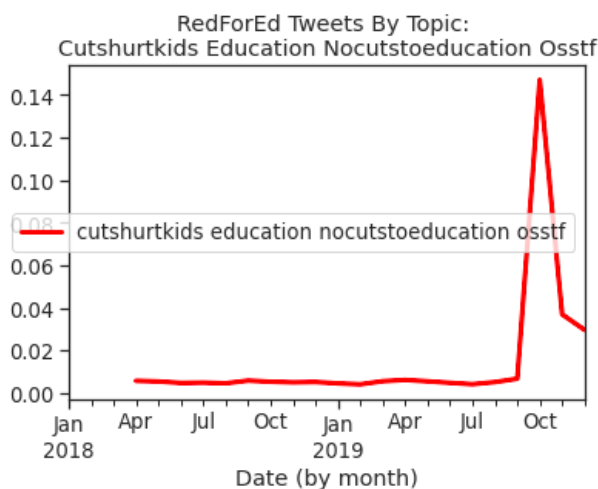
Figure 12 - Time series topic modelling graph of Ontario related topic

Further, topic modelling reveals that there are shared circumstances that motivate a particular use of language by participants in the #RedForEd public. The following visualization contains the frequency of occurrence for a topic that contains the words "lead," "water," "schools." It shows that in months with activate strikes (April 2018 - Arizona, January 2019 – Los Angeles, October 2019 - Chicago) there are a recognizable number of tweets that showcase a concern about the public infrastructure of school buildings. Teacher unions reference the state of

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[57] "Ontario Teachers' Strikes: A Timeline of Key Events and Actions Taken | Globalnews.Ca," accessed April 20, 2023, https://globalnews.ca/news/6433115/ontario-teachers-strike-timeline/.

disrepair of educational facilities as a resource for mobilizing community support, but it does not usually reach the prominence in public consciousness that issues like class sizes or teacher pay are afforded. This demonstrates the utility of topic modelling for revealing the groupings of words that, while are not the most represented within the dataset, still show a high degree of coherence as a discussed matter of the teacher strikes.
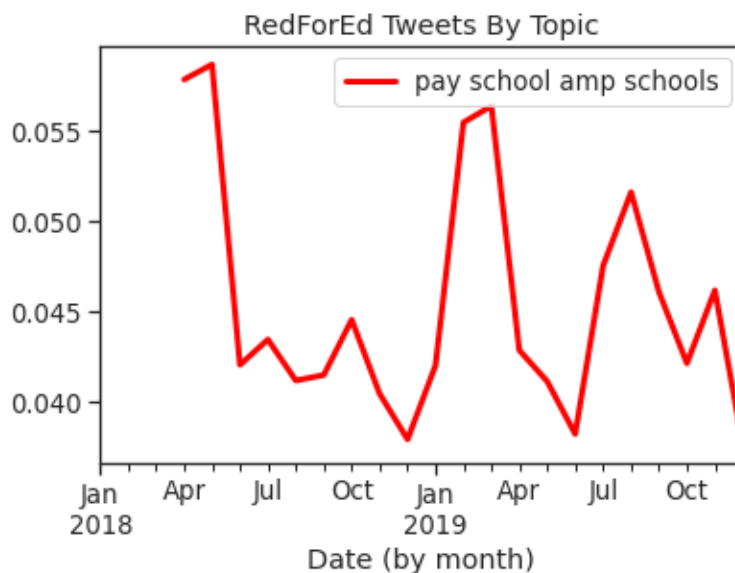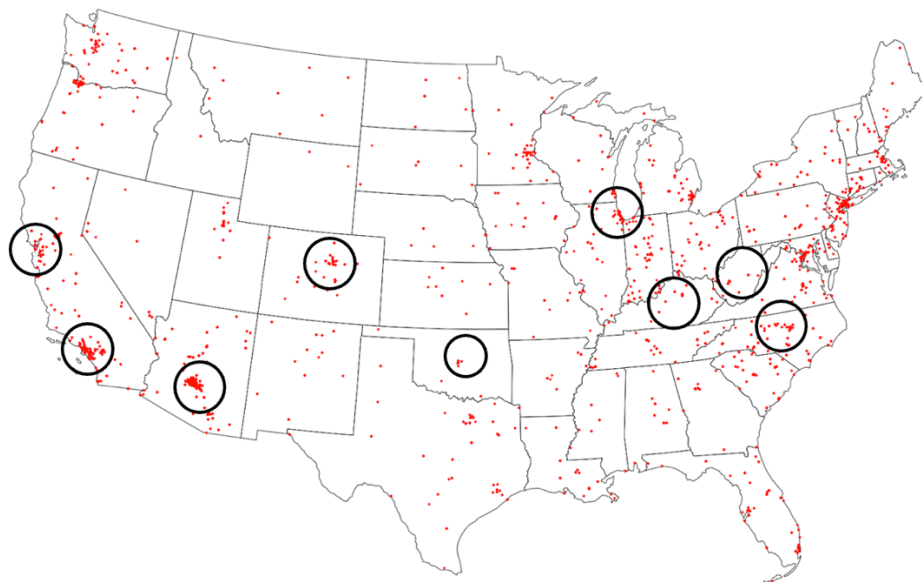

*Figure 13 – Graph of frequency for the topic containing the words ['pay', 'school', 'amp', **'schools'**, **'lead'**, 'year', 'per', **'water'**, 'years', 'students', 'salary', 'teaching', 'state', 'class', 'make', 'less', 'average', 'student', 'dont', 'jobs']*

Figure 14 – This visualization is limited to the continental United States and excludes a number of datapoints that appear internationally as well as in Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Guam. I have added circles for the teacher strikes discussed in this dissertation (West Virginia, Kentucky, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Colorado, Arizona, Los Angeles, Oakland, and Chicago).

Geoparsing is a promising method for exploring the spatiality of the tweets and its relation to the ongoing movement. In total, approximately 25,000 tweets of the dataset were parsed as containing a reference to a geographic location. Obviously, states that had active strikes (West Virginia, Colorado, Oklahoma, Arizona, California, Illinois, Washington, and Oregon) are well represented in the number of tweets that reference a location.

However, this map demonstrates the far-reaching spread of interest in the teachers' movement, and the circulation of this hashtag into areas that have not yet gone on strike. Many of these tweets are merely users announcing their support for teachers from their various locations, but in some instances, they are tweets made by teachers, located elsewhere, expressing a desire to also to go on strike. States like Florida, Maryland, and Minnesota are well represented within the dataset, although no actual teacher strikes occurred in these states during the date range of 2018 and 2019.
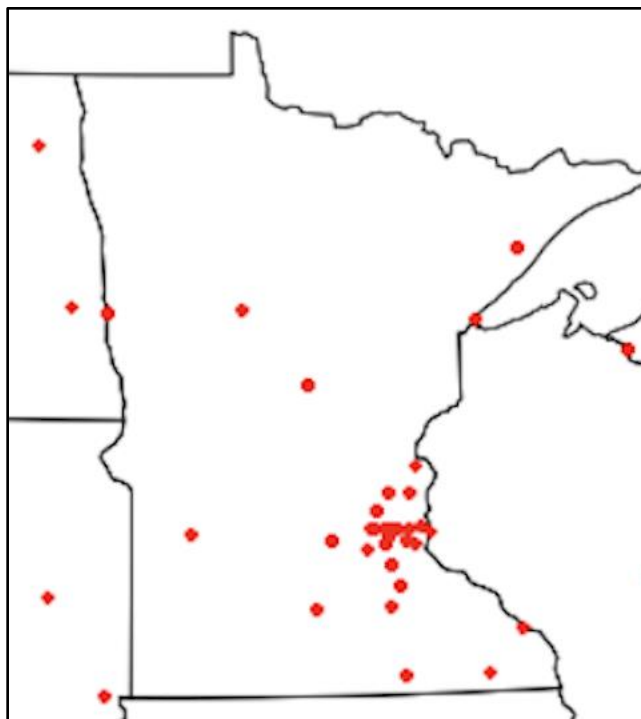
Figure 15 – Zoomed in view of Minnesota

There is an observable cluster surrounding the twin cities of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, whose

teachers did not strike during the period of this dataset. On March 8, 2022, however, three to four

years after these tweets were made, teachers in Minneapolis went on strike for eighteen days [58]. I

would not necessarily claim that this method is predictive. It does, however, suggest that use of

the hashtag in this instance is evidence of the ideas of the movement spreading to new

locations.[59] One of these tweets, made on April 26, 2018 (during the Arizona teacher strike)

states: "Rocking the #RedForEd in MN today, in #solidarity with my fellow #TEACHers in #AZ

& #CO. I have friends in both, sending them support as they take to the streets & capitols. If the

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[58] Steve Karnowski, "Minneapolis Teachers Reach Tentative Agreement to End Strike," AP NEWS, March 25, 2022, https://apnews.com/article/covid-health-education-minnesota-minneapolis-c01c3dd8eab19054fd2dde25e079dd0d.

[59] I also think there is a danger in attempting to develop predictive models for social movement activity. Predictive logics are than likely to be used as a weapon against movements for economic, political, and social justice, than in support of them.

politicians won't stand up for the students, then WE will! #publicschoolproud." This post also features an image uploaded by the user wearing ("rocking") a red t-shirt, which is another example of the topic modelling findings listed above. This teacher-activist's post demonstrates the geographic circulation of attention during intense moments of social movement activity. The user, whose tweet indicates they were located in Minnesota at the time, was invested in strikes happening in other states, and their tweet indicates that the attention and news of teacher strikes in other states served as inspiration for future struggles in differing locales.

A little over a year later, on December 5, 2019, another user posted: "Building power to fully fund public education in Minnesota. Be there! #FundOurFuture #RedForEd #edmnvotes #edmnvoice". This post retweeted an invitation to a statewide summit for educators to pressure legislators to increase funding for public education. The phrase "building power" demonstrates the circulation of social movement tactics through digital platforms, and the intent of a group of teacher-activists in this region to learn from the struggles that preceded them. While this is not unique to social media, it is an example of social movement knowledge being transferred from a different period of technological history. Like I discussed in chapter 3, the lessons carried by Rebecca Garelli from her experience in the 2012 Chicago teacher strike into the 2018 Arizona strike were an embodied memory infrastructure. This example retains characteristics from previous medialogical practices of social movement organizing, while incorporating new elements of scale, addressability, and publicity. It further shows the on-going work of organizing that happens behind the scenes of spectacular mobilizations like strikes/walkouts, and the importance of circulation and attention in the periods between social movement activity. This makes the scalar reading methods of this chapter less attentive to *social movement rhetoric* per se, and more attentive to the *rhetoric of social movement organizing*. The distinction is the

sometimes behind-the-scenes work of crafting coalitions, gaining participation, and persuading individuals at a local scale. The hashtag that made this post visible to other supporters (#redfored) serves as a digital tool for connecting the nascent movement in Minnesota to the nationwide movement of public teachers, and the use of digital platforms helped continue this movement many years after the initial surge in teacher strikes. While these users may never have imagined that their union would lead to an eighteen-day strike three years later, the circulation of messages about previous strikes gave attention and inspiration to the tactics of teacher-activists.

The above visualizations are static representations of the geoparsing method, but I have prepared another visualization that allows users to interact with a similar map containing the circles.[60] Users can zoom into certain locations, pan the view of the projection, and hover their mouse over circles to see the text that was assumed to be containing a location reference.
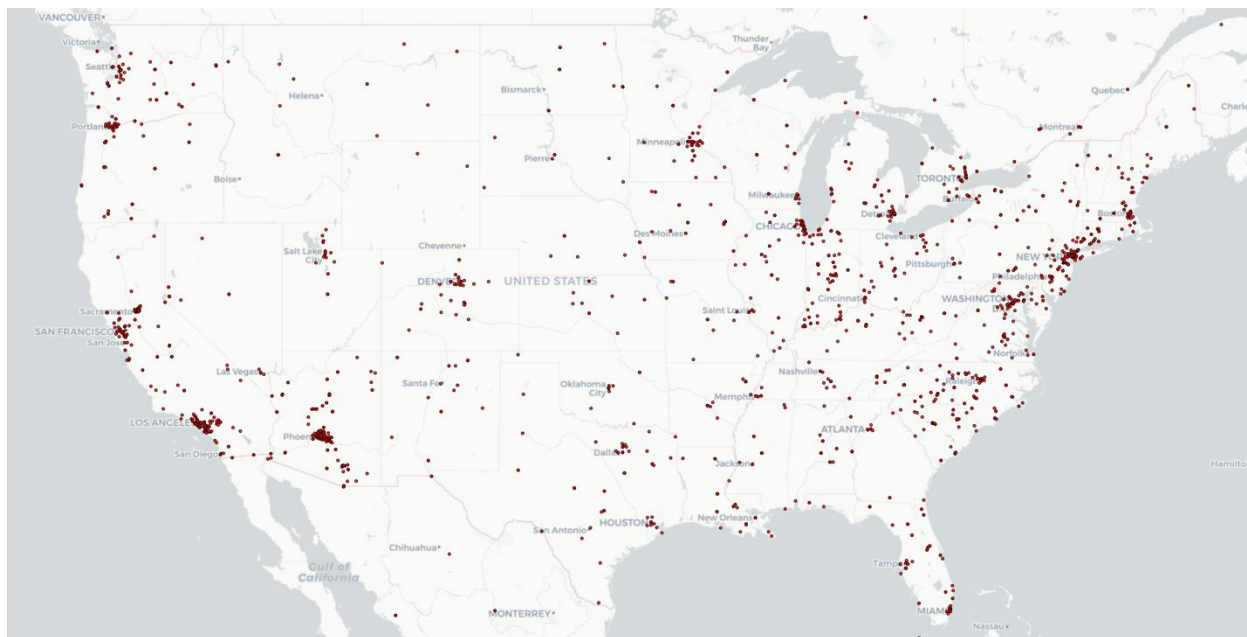

Figure 16 - Screenshot of the interactive version of the geospatial visualization.

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[60] Please view the interactive visualization at this link:
https://brandon-daniels.github.io/Mediality-of-Teacher-Strikes/

This version of the visualization is useful for verifying, or revealing uncertainty, in the geoparsing method. It also demonstrates some of the problems with geospatial visualizations. For instance, a vast majority of the georeferenced tweets occur within Southern California and Arizona. While there are plenty of circles clustered around these locations that convey the large number of tweets referring to these places, the scale of this representation is skewed by the limits of geospatial projection. Since the total area of, for instance, the county of Los Angeles is less than the total area of the United States, it might mislead viewers of the visualization into believing that there is a similar significance between a singular dot in the middle of a state like Iowa, which can be easily observed by a casual viewing of the map, and the clusters around these locations. A similar problem confronts visualizations of electoral data, in which the area of a state is assumed by viewers to be representative of the magnitude of data.

Rhetoric of Data

Figure 17 - The user interface for composing a tweet.

The Twitter platform asks users before they compose a tweet the question, "What's happening?" and in more ways than the posing of a question, the platform inflects the utterance in the tweet that follows. My computational analysis of a dataset has revealed the means by which the circulation of a hashtag on the Twitter platform led to a cohering of language across participants in this public. Topic modelling demonstrates that language-use reaches similarity around words and phrases that are shared by participants in shared circumstances, such as geographical or educational contexts. The similarities in language choices made by Twitter users in Ontario, Canada or by users who are concerned about the presence of lead in water at schools

shows that while these tweets were written by humans, they are inflected with and by the

machinic voice of Twitter. References to geographic locations is another example of the

machinic inflection on this subset of teacher strike discourse. The lack of contextual cues on

Twitter leads commentators to tweet the names of locations, because there is a need to make the

content of a post relevant to the circulation of the hashtag. By putting the name of a school,

county, or state in a tweet, users can demonstrate their connection to a place and the larger

movement. Whereas Facebook Groups prompt discussion in ways about the group, the open

question of "What Happening?" introduces a platformatic pressure to write the tweet in a way

that conforms to the patterns already present. The fact that an estimated 25,000 tweets of the total

170,000 tweets included in the dataset contain some type of reference to a geographic location is

significant. In the context of teacher strikes, Twitter prompts users to consider and discuss their

location, and perhaps then to acknowledge a semblance of their own positionality.

The question the trends identified by computational analysis raises is: what if anything do

we learn anew about rhetoric by this detour through data science? I argue that, first, the concept

of machinic eloquence can help scholars understand the resonance of language in/through/on

Twitter. Typically, eloquence is a characteristic attributed to spoken oratory, and it is identified

not just by the diction of a speaker, such as the tropes or arguments made in a speech, but by the

sonic qualities of the medium. Volume and rhythm are concepts used to understand rhetorical

delivery and assess the criteria of eloquence. It may seem odd, then, to propose that eloquence be

expanded to the analysis of social media posts. If, however, we take Condit's definition of

eloquence— a use of language the nourishes audience in a particular context and helps reach a

shared vision—then eloquence is something that can exist as expressed on digital platforms by a

multiplicity of voices. This conceptualization displaces the role of the individual rhetor and opens analysis to the co-constructed eloquence of users on Twitter.

Further, the sonic qualities attributed to eloquence in the spoken form is translatable to digital contexts. In oratory, the vibrations made by the speaker's vocal cords reverberate outwards into the audience for a felt experience of eloquence. The sound waves are carried by the air, the latter acting as the medium for moving the audience physically, emotionally, politically, and culturally toward cooperation. The spread of hashtags across the Twitter platform occurs in a similar manner. Instead of air, hashtags are carried by electrical signals across media of cables and radio waves. The wave is received through the screen of computers and phones, and it is refracted by the users that participate in composing of tweets about the hashtag.

Volume in oratory refers to the intensity of the sound waves. Eloquence is the skillful modulation of volume for communicating emphasis and imparting the speaker's passion. It is not just a matter of speaking loudly so that the words of the speaker can be heard by the audience, but the variation in volume to create an effect that draws listeners in and impacts them at key moments. Volume is a double entendre in my usage, for this word also references a measure of quantity in addition to a measure of sonic intensity. The first visualization in my findings section shows the frequency of Tweets occurring throughout the dataset; or put differently, it is a visualization of the amplification of Tweets containing the hashtag. The hashtag roared during the Arizona strike whereby it gained its constitutive status as a moniker for the movement. It quieted – but did not grow silent – during the summer months where school was not in session and the work of organizing continued. It returned with a crescendo during the Los Angeles and Chicago teacher strikes. This was not the eloquent orator raising and lowering their voice during a speech, but it was a multiplicity of voices matching the intensity of their moments with the

amplification of their messages. The quality of volume in machinic eloquence requires stretching the length of what we consider a rhetorical utterance across days and months. Just as the mediality of Twitter alters the nature of communication, such as truncating language to fit into the character limits, it should also alter the nature of rhetorical analysis.

The rhythm of oratory is the modulation in speed and rhyme that a rhetor uses to deliver their remarks. It is the flow or cadence of words in a speech; and in examples of eloquent oratory, the flow takes on a musical quality that delights listeners or conveys the emotions associated with the themes of the speech. I argue that hashtags, especially ones that are widely circulated, are eloquent in their rhythm of words. As Jeff Scheible's theory of loose punctuation makes clear, the semantic function of the hash symbol shapes the characters that follow the punctuation. Since the index of the hashtag is terminated by the space character, only the letter characters immediately following the hash symbol are considered a part of the hashtag. It forces users to combine multiple words into a singular phrase, or to select the single word carefully. There is a reason that the central hashtag of this movement was not a longer and clunkier set of words like #wearingredforeducation. The qualities that make a hashtag circulate widely could be described in the vocabulary of machinic eloquence. The other hashtags that frequently occur in this dataset are evidence of the rhythm at work in the selection of a hashtag, for example "#cutshurtkids" and "#investined" are short, pithy phrases that concisely express the themes of the movement. In each of these examples, there is a near rhyme that gives the hashtag a pleasant-sounding noise when spoke aloud. The shared vowels and similar number of syllables in each word give hashtags a rhythm that makes them suspectable to being adopted by other users on the Twitter platform.

Rather than spring forth from the ability of single rhetor, the beauty of machinic eloquence lies in its unfolding eventfulness. As the wave is refracted through the different users that participate, adapt, and recirculate posts containing the hashtag, it is transformed into a chorus of activity with its own unique harmony. In this regard, I am directly inspired by the work of Gries and her new materialist framework for rhetorical research methods. I have attempted to trace the reception and circulation of a hashtag across unexpected occurrences, but I have not captured each way this collection of characters has manifested in the life of the social movement. As Gries writes: "[I]f one is interested in discovering the complex rhetorical life of a thing and the multiple ways it contributes to collective life, the limitations of such boundaries must be fully considered; a case study bound by narrow conceptions of space, time, activity, function, and genre often delimit a thing's rhetorical becomings in ways the fail to acknowledge its complex, unfolding ontology."[61] By limiting my dataset to Twitter posts made within a discrete time period, I am ignoring the variety of ways that the hashtag was modified on other platforms, on handmade signs, or in other languages. However, my tracing of its rhetorical circulation has revealed unexpected ways in which the hashtag's life has and continues to unfold. It is surprising, to say the least, that the hashtag also was featured in tweets about struggles over public education in Canada and Colombia. The unexpected unfolding of this hashtag's rhetorical life can be attributed to the assemblage of networked technologies, linguistic practices, and political and social conditions of public education across the globe. Did the person who first tweeted "#redfored" in 2012 know that six years later their choice of hashtag would represent a movement of hundreds of thousands of educators striking? Unlikely, and such is the case of the unfolding nature of rhetoric.

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[61] Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*, 92.

This is perhaps what most differentiates my invocation of eloquence from its traditional usage as a criteria for oratorical excellence: machinic eloquence is not a property that can be attributed in the immediate conclusion to the performance of a rhetor. Its unfolding harmony only appears as such in the event of its mass circulation. While there are techniques that participants in the multiplicity of voices can use to encourage machinic eloquence, such as in the crafting of a rhythmic hashtag, its unfolding eventfulness depends on conditions that rhetors cannot control. In the vocabulary of Gries, the consequentiality and futurity of rhetoric cannot be secured. It can, however, be analyzed after the fact to understand the conditions of existence that led to the consequences of rhetorical action.

I argue that machinic eloquence is a useful category for approaching the co-creation of rhetoric by a multiplicity of voices and the technologies of dissemination. Machinic eloquence describes the process through which users compose tweets in accordance with platformatic pressures to conform their use of language with patterns that are suspectable to spreadability. Most important to my understanding of this term stems from Condit's expanded criteria for rhetorical eloquence, the nourishing of a particular audience in a particular context to promote cooperation through a shared vision. I argue that the tweets contained within the dataset organized by the hashtag RedForEd achieves exactly this. The nourishing occurs through the connection afforded by Twitter and the words of participants sharing their vision for a better system of education. Whether by sharing the issues that affect users personally or through the references to geographic locations, the tweets in this dataset achieve a status of machinic eloquence through their circulation in/through/on Twitter.

The second lesson for rhetoric gained from the findings of my analysis concerns the constitutive force of hashtags for social movements. Constitutive rhetoric has been used as a

means of understanding the formation of political subjects, or identities, that are called into being

through discourse and, at the same time, mobilized into action. While there are mentions of the

affordances of the "text" in these essays on constitutive rhetoric, there is not a systematic

treatment of the production, manufacture, and distribution, which is to say the mediality, of these

texts in the constitutive function of rhetoric.[62] On Twitter (and in Facebook groups and at in-

person rallies), the nature of mediation effectuates the political identities constituted by rhetorical

activity. The subject of the striking teacher is called into being not merely by the "text" of

tweets, but also by the anchoring of these texts within the medial context of networked

technologies. Twitter co-constitutes the rhetorical utterances expressed on the platform, and by

extension, the discourse of social movements that spread across it.

Constitutive rhetoric offered a significant contribution to the study of rhetoric by

introducing the role of discourse as a system of statements that shape the way humans think, talk,

and act in the world. In the language of Michel Foucault, rhetoric depends on the preexisting

"grids of intelligibility" that make possible something like addressing a public.[63] Rhetorical

utterances must exist within this grid or system. As such, the rhetorical effects of a shared vision

rely on the constitution of political subjects within and against the field of discourse. The

constitutive function of rhetoric, then, lies in its capacity to reconfigure the system of statements

towards the production of new subjectivities. The intervention I am making in the theory of

constitutive rhetoric is by questioning the technological means through which discourse comes to

exist. The fact that the Quebec whitepaper and Federalist papers were inscribed, printed,

reproduced, and stored to be later analyzed already predetermined the conditions of existence for

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[62] Michael Warner's *The Letters of the Republic*, however, does attend to matters of mediality. Warner, *The Letters of the Republic*.
[63] Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*.

these exemplary moments of constitutive rhetoric. The historically specific machineries of textual practices are the framework within which the constitutive rhetoric of Charland and Jasinksi exist.

This leads me to not only theorize the constitution of striking teachers as political subjects, but also the constitution of the public in which these subjects circulated rhetorical utterances. In my dataset, both the public and the subjects are anchored by the media they rely upon to operate. Tweets are the containers of possibility for the constitution of the Red for Ed public, and I have demonstrated in my findings section computational methods for approximating the nature of these containers. In what I have described as the heritage of the hashtag, I have labored to show, in a Kittlerian fashion, the media of hashtags are determined by the technological possibilities of the epoch in question. Indeed, I could not measure the volume of tweets in this dataset without the practices of accounting shaped by the technology of the ledger. I could not comprehend the text of tweets without the standardization in language afforded by the typewriter. I could not locate and index the tweets containing the characters "#redfored" without the history of human-machine communication, such as in touch-tone telephones and the C programming language, that motivated the creation of the hash symbol. Just as the knowledge of the technological possibilities that precede and undergird Twitter makes possible this study, so too does it shape the constitution of the political subjects and publics within the teacher strikes.

Conclusion

By visualizing the metadata about the tweets and aspects of how the tweets use language, I gain a sense of the spatial and temporal circulation of the hashtag and the ideas of the

movement. This method generates insights about the rhetoric of strike protest at a global scale,
and by rhetorically tracing the circulation of this hashtag, I analyze the effects of Twitter as a
communication technology on the teachers' movement. The mediality of the platform can be
compared to the previous uses of media in this dissertation. Beyond the symbol of the hashtag,
the creation of slogans to accompany Red For Ed were determined by the affordances of the
modern keyboard, the character limit of tweets, and the need to succinctly capture some aspect of
the movement. The platform of Twitter textures the discourse analyzed in my dataset. Tweets are
less contextually specific compared to Facebook posts made within groups. Except for tweets
made in reply to other Twitter users, tweets are made as standalone proclamations—mere
drops—in a stream of discourse. The reason that hashtags emerged as a technology of
aggregation for tweets was to give users a way of signaling to others the relevance of the words
they included their tweet to an ongoing topic understood by others. Posts made within Facebook
groups are bound within a context specific to the group's existence, and there is not a need to
specify how the content of a post relates to the teachers' movement. On Twitter, however, there
is a need to specify how the content of one's tweet relates to a larger discursive formation.

The mass circulation of tweets with the hashtag demonstrates the constitution of a public
in and through the Twitter media form. The loose punctuation of the hashtag, which takes on a
semantic property in the context of tweets, shapes the reception of the phrase Red For Ed and the
subsequent uptake by users that reappropriate its use for their local context. Much like the
hashtag slogan #BlackLivesMatter became a synecdoche for the movement, news articles began
to refer to the teacher strikes as the #RedForEd movement.[64] Although Facebook groups were

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[64] Some examples of this tendency: "A Year after the Teacher Walkout, a Timeline of Arizona's #RedforEd
Movement," The Arizona Republic, accessed May 5, 2023, https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona -

initially thought of as the primary medium through which the strike wave spread, the hashtag's prominence as a descriptor for the movement is evidence of the constitutive role played by the Twitter platform. The lack of tweets containing this hashtag during the time period of the West Virginia strike and the way it "caught on" throughout the Arizona, Los Angeles, and Ontario strikes shows the way this language resonated within a particular audience and context. It provided a language for capturing the experiences of teachers, students, and advocates of education that nourished their shared vision for the fate of public schools. This machinic eloquence, formed in part by the multiplicity of voices participating in the movement and in part by the heritage of the hashtag, was a component of the cooperation that made the strikes possible.

Researchers can use computational methods to investigate the dynamics of social movements in the age of digital media. By examining social media data with a variety of quantitative and qualitative tools aided by computational technologies, scholars gain an understanding of how social media platforms are used in the vernacular, by "ordinary" persons. It lends a new scale of analysis that demonstrates across a wide variety of regions, histories, and cultures how humans use, and are used by, social media to express their desire for social change. While individual researchers can spend an extreme amount of time reading, coding, and analyzing thousands of tweets, as is common in more traditional approaches to qualitative research and content analysis, doing so would not necessarily lead a scholar to draw connections between word co-occurrences. From the vantage point of the entire corpus, the differences

education/2019/04/11/arizona-teacher-walkout-timeline-red-for-ed/3337757002/; "What Is #RedforED? Behind the Hashtag That's All the Rage in Teacher Strikes," *Education Week*, May 3, 2018, sec. Education, https://www.edweek.org/education/what-is-redfored-behind-the-hashtag-thats-all-the-rage-in-teacher-strikes/2018/05; "Red for Ed: The Movement Strengthens and Continues," Rethinking Schools, accessed May 5, 2023, http://rethinkingschools.org/articles/red-for-ed-the-movement-strengthens-and-continues/.

between these two terms can be noticed and analyzed as a discursive pattern of social media use during an active social movement. This is not to suggest that the sheer size of datasets is something that guarantees the epistemic rigor of studies; but instead, by attending to matters of scale, computational methods provide another view to assist with more traditional modes of communication research. By attending to the circulation of social movement rhetoric on digital platforms, these methods can deepen the insights of the study of media, culture, and politics.

In a time when it is impossible to say whether the nitrogen cycle or the Internet is more

crucial to the planet's maintenance, I believe we can learn much from a judicious

synthesis, difficult though it be, of media understood as both natural and cultural.

- John Durham Peters[1]

Conclusion

On the fifth day the Los Angeles teacher strike, the sun was shining. This was cause for

celebration, for it had uncharacteristically rained for the previous four days. Alex Caputo-Pearl

stated early in his speech, "And by the way, by the way, this is the first time I'm going to ask you

to give a round of applause to a basic element in the universe. Let's give it up for the sun!"[2]

This dissertation takes this remark seriously, as a lesson about the media and mediality of

strikes. What would it mean to consider the speech *and sun* as both crucial to the success or

failure of social movements? The sun's presence in Los Angeles is an assumed given; and when

it did not manifest for the first four days of the strike, the outdoor activities of picket lines and

rallies were significantly impacted. It revealed the role of nature as the background to all possible

meaning. "Giving it up" for the sun, or having a round of applause for basic elements in the

universe, should be a feature of more social movement speeches. Our existence is made possible

by the vast array of techniques humans use for managing the sun's power. Its warmth creates the

conditions for liquid water, soil organisms, and agriculture. The cooperation necessary for aiding

survival and cultivating crops required some system of interaction between humans. The sun's

rays provide the possibility for communication on Earth. Peters argues that media are

environments, or "containers of possibility that anchor our existence and make what we are

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[1] Peters, *The Marvelous Clouds*, 2.
[2] *UTLA, Do You Feel Your Power?*

doing possible." This insight has led me to investigate media as a constitutive force in the existence of teacher strikes. Caputo-Pearl's speech, which was mediated by both natural and human technologies, did not necessarily make possible the Los Angeles teacher strike. But the medium of speech, anchored by the environments of sound wave-carrying air, gestured languages of signing, and electronic means of amplifying, recording, and transmitting audio-visual signals were constitutive of the rally and, in part, of the rhetorical activities happening there. Moreover, the social media-fueled strikes of 2018 were similarly contained by the intertwined natural and human technologies.

By now it is perhaps uncontroversial to say that the situation of teacher strikes "depends on media."[3] It should be no surprise that the action of striking, which requires high degrees of coordination and shared understandings between people, relied on the vessels of communication I call "media." In recognizing the dependence between a situation and the media that anchors its existence, there is also a need to account for the mediality, or the nature of mediation that a particular communication technology engages in. This line of inquiry takes up the task of understanding how the historically specific machineries of storage, transmission, reproduction, and distribution are articulated together with the rhetoric of contemporary strike protest. I have proceeded throughout this dissertation by examining a discrete situation in which teachers went on strike; and with the resources available to me, I have drawn connections between the discourses of the movement and the communication technologies that anchored them. It is my contention that media provide conditions of possibility for the emergence, expression, and trajectory of the U.S. movement for public education. The mediality of communication

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[3] Striphas, "Caring for Cultural Studies," 11.

technologies, from "speaking into the air" to the composition of tweets, textures the life the rhetorical movement.

Rather than privilege one form of media for my analysis, I have operated through a theory I described as *scalar publics* for approaching the undulating and imbricating nature of media environments. In my first chapter, "The Scale of Public Rhetoric," I outlined the indebtedness of my multi-variate methodology to the broader history of scholarship within rhetorical studies. Publics are the social formations that emerge from the circulation of discourse, and their reality depends on the infrastructures that make circulation possible. Publics have effects. They can generate new identities, modify morality, or dispose government officials. Social movements rely on publics to achieve attention, and the increasingly networked manifestation of publics implicates their efficaciousness. However, publics should not be limited to a singular medium of circulation. I argue that attending to the scale of publics, by expanding or contracting the level of analysis, is essential for understanding the constitutive force of media. Publics are layered, like the scales of a fish; and in the chapters that followed this one, I have expanded and contracted my analysis of rhetoric to demonstrate the circulation of discourse across different layers of mediation. In chapter three, Oklahoma teacher Alberto Morejon learned about the West Virginia strikers' use of Facebook groups, leading him to make his own version for his state's situation. In chapter four, the organizers in Arizona asking other teachers in their state to make posts that include the hashtag #redfored contributed to a noticeable spike the in latter's adoption. These layers must be apprehended through a movement in scale, and conversely, a movement in rhetorical methods.

In chapter two, "Mediating Public Address," I made two principal moves. First, I interrogated the process and materials of entextualization often go unconsidered in the method of

rhetorical criticism. Second, I endeavored to revitalize the traditional conceptualizations of the rhetorical canons by attending closely to matters of mediality. My analysis of the speech by Caputo-Pearl, and the environment in which the speech is performed, revealed the limits of relying purely on textual transcriptions of the words included within the speech. It is thanks to the technology of audio-visual recording that I was able to render the phone used by the speaker as a conduit of memory, and the stage's electronic public address system as an embedded matter of delivery. Justin Mauer, whose sign language interpretation of the speech made the rally more accessible, would be ignored by a traditional approach to close textual reading. My concern for mediality enhances rhetoric's understanding of technê, for the practical knowledge of public address depends on the socio-technical activities and relationships that exist beyond the adept use of "words and things." I looked closely at the *in situ* scale of rhetoric for Caputo-Pearl's speech, and while the condensation of scale may perhaps occlude the circulation of this speech across networked media, it reveals the nature of mediation in a discrete setting that likely resembled other situations repeated throughout the many strikes covered in this dissertation. Which is to say, other strike rallies occurred, presumably with some of the same features that defined this one. The scales of a fish can be examined individually or in array, and the *in situ* methods of analysis allow my readers an appreciation for the individual so that the array may better be understood.

In chapter three, "Archaeology of State-wide Strikes," I moved to the scale of specific social media networks to understand the mediality of Facebook groups. By employing a vernacular rhetorical pedagogy, the teachers in Facebook groups cultivated a set of techniques for engaging with the Facebook platform. I discovered that Facebook groups served as a medium for the creation of affective publics that contributed to a rebellious structure of feeling or social

atmosphere. The archival method I used in this chapter contributed to an evolved understanding of technê and memory from the previous chapter; for rather than serve as a mnemonic technique for the singular performance of public address, its function bound together medial layers networked by a multiplicity of rhetors. Facebook effectively co-organized the strikes that rapidly spread from West Virginia across the country to Arizona; and in the process, generated headlines about a new social movement, the Red for Ed movement. The reliance upon a channel of communication controlled by a corporation was not without its consequences, for the algorithmic design of the Facebook News Feed contributed to disorganization and misunderstandings about the decisions made by leaders in the movement. Ultimately, the platform facilitated engagement with posts to deliver advertisements to the screens of its users – not to serve as a democratic organ in the organization of teacher strikes. The fact that both happened in/through/on Facebook groups, with varying degrees of success, demonstrates the theoretical value gained from analyzing the mediality of social movement discourse. The social invention of using Facebook groups to cultivate an atmosphere that primed users for taking risky collective action spread like molecules in a cascading reaction, but the instability associated with this sort of human-machine assemblage did not persist as a permanent feature of the platform—or the movement. The citywide strikes of 2019, while publicized on Facebook, did not rely on groups in the same manner. In my experience supporting the Denver teacher strike, the Facebook group was filled with community members (like me) and not teachers attempting to pressure their union leaders to continue the strike. Facebook, and the broader media ecology, has changed in the years since the strike wave, and it has not yet been reactivated as a means to quickly organize strikes across disparate geographies.

In chapter four, "Tracing Rhetorical Circulation," I introduced the concept of "machinic eloquence" to make sense of the adoption of #RedForEd as the moniker for the movement; and in a similar vein, I argued that this served as an example of a media-infused constitutive rhetoric. By zooming out to the platform of Twitter and, arguably, to the global scale of the Internet, I gained an even more expansive view of the public that formed around the movement for public education. My use of computational methods revealed the interaction between users of the Twitter platform and the two-year history of discussions about the movement contained by the hashtag. I showed that language-use cohered around identifiable topics, or word groupings, that reflected unique circumstances about each of the strikes. Additionally, the dataset frequently included references to geography, with users selecting words related to either an observed location or a place personally significant to them. I argue that both of these findings are evidence of the machinic "inflection" of Twitter on the voices of the strikes. The composition of a tweet does not happen free of influence from other users or platformatic design choices. Computational methods can demonstrate the impression of mediality by identifying patterns and recurrent rhetorical features across hundreds of thousands of tweets. I argue that this final movement of scale demonstrated the need for a unique set of methods in each chapter, for the texture of discourse on Twitter was embossed by the circulation of strike discourse at other medial layers. For as long as there have been publics, the people who have participated in them have not limited themselves to a single form of media. Habermas's study of publics, after all, was based in part in the interaction between printed news and spoken word. The fact that the hashtag, a digital phenomenon that originated on Twitter, came to label the strike wave is demonstrative, at least partially, of the interaction between the mediality of Twitter and other medial layers (news, Facebook, in-person conversations).

The constitutive force of media operating in and across multiple overlapping scales, I contend, made possible the public and the movement itself. Scalar publics may not be a new feature of public rhetoric, but the increasing complexity in the interaction of humans with sociotechnical systems of communication make theoretical attention to varying scales of circulatory discourse necessary. I have attempted to sketch how studies of scalar publics could proceed, and by reference to concepts and methods from within the rhetorical tradition (and some from without), I have situated this study of a discrete phenomenon as a means of understanding the context of media. As noted in the introductory chapter, I see this akin to Lawrence Grossberg's principle of "radical contextualization" in articulation theory.[4] It is my hope that scalar publics can contribute to an understanding of how rhetorical practices, communicative technologies, and social movements are articulated together, co-creating the contexts with which they come to be identified. And if it has not been made abundantly clear, it is also my hope that the intellectual labor manifested in this dissertation is seen as in service of a political project for the advancement of the movements for economic and social justice.

The theory of scalar publics could be viewed as an example of a trend that is already well under way in the field of rhetorical studies: the dissolution of the rhetor. The figure of the rhetor animates much of the scholarship in the field, because at the end of the day, we too are educators who hope to impart our knowledge on would-be rhetors: our students. Many of the concepts of rhetoric, such as memory, delivery, and imitation, are oriented towards the preparation of students for rhetorical performances they may imitate, memorize, and deliver. However, in recognizing the entangled state of rhetorical composition and production with the natural and cultural technologies that are media, there is a need to look at, and also past, the figure of the

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[4] Grossberg, *Under the Cover of Chaos*.

rhetor. Doing so opens our inquiry and understandings to the varied forces that shape and are shaped by rhetoric. Where does the user/rhetor end and Twitter begin? As I discussed in chapter four, computational methods can demonstrate the repeated and crystallized patterns that form the embodied knowledge of tweeting. Many of the scholars operating in digital rhetoric have made this point clear already: the complex interactions of humans with machines have dissolved any straightforward notion of the individually-crafted utterance. I wish to take this thought further, by extending this insight to social movements. If human memory is also thought of as a media infrastructure, then the life of a movement anchors and makes possible the existence of its participants. Rebecca Garrelli, the Chicago teacher who moved to Arizona, is a combination of the people and things who imparted their knowledge of labor organizing to her. I am but the collection of lessons from the movements that preceded my entry into organizing higher education. I do not feel diminished by this fact but empowered – and relieved. I do not need to be "the rhetor." The best thing I can do for the life of the movement is to build out its infrastructure for the multiplicity of voices.

It is worth noting the limitations of my methodology in this dissertation. In chapter two, I deploy what I describe as "*in situ* scale" for analyzing a speech, but I was not physically present at this speech itself. As I argue in that chapter, the origin of "in situ" from the archaeological sciences describes an approach to studying unearthed artifacts. It orients studies towards the locations of artifacts that are found and oftentimes removed and taken elsewhere; it doesn't just mean "site specificity," but it signals ways of getting back to the original place. *In situ* need not only be a call for the researcher's physical presence; but instead, it requires recognizing that rhetoric occurs somewhere, and attempting to reconstruct a context after the fact.

As Laurie Gries points out, researching the complex life of rhetoric makes for hard choices.[5] Boundaries are necessary for studies such as this because of the finite resources of academic scholarship: time, money, and words. It is tough to decide where to set the edges of a study, and this decision dramatically shapes the outcome of the research. Accordingly, I want to briefly discuss the limits of this dissertation and how, despite its limitations, this project can still shape possibilities for future research. The study of media-use in labor organizing could no doubt benefit from ethnographic and participant observation research methods, to say nothing of added attention to both the political economy and political ecology of contemporary media systems . I want to know what other media anchored the strikes, especially the media that eludes archival documentation. How did teachers vote to authorize the strike, or on what material did they register their vote? Paper ballots or emailed polls? Pencils or pen? From where were these resources obtained, or extracted? Whose lives were affected in the acquisition of these resources, and how? These answers to these questions are not irrelevant details, for they provide a greater understanding of the media that textured pivotal moments in the struggle.

Fieldwork would provide a greater understanding of the *in situ* scale of mediality for labor organizing, and it would elucidate the behind-the-scenes rhetorical activity that precedes the spectacular moment of a strike. While most suited for detailing the non-digital forms of media that are typically ignored by documentation, these methods could also deepen an understanding of the networked and global scale of media in the strikes. In chapter three, a remark by Emily Comer about her experience scrolling on her phone after the end of a work week was revealing for the affective encounters in the West Virginia Public Employees United Facebook group. I believe that insights such as this could be deepened with a greater closeness to

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[5] Gries, *Still Life with Rhetoric: A New Materialist Approach for Visual Rhetorics*.

the devices used for navigating social media. What impact does the user interface, the texture of the screen, the touch-capability or the mouse-wheel have on the networked interactions within affective publics? And where, after all, do all those touch screens go once they've reached the end, whether real or perceived, of their life-cycle? My theory of scalar publics requires expanding and contracting the level of analysis for understanding the layered effects of mediality, and the method of participant observation could reveal new insights about the felt intensities of labor organizing in the digital era.

The problem with my desire for being present for the build-up to a strike is the unpredictable and ephemeral nature of workplace struggles. No one, other than a handful of teachers in Mingo County, anticipated the eruption of the West Virginia teacher strike. It would be difficult, but not impossible, for a researcher with a specific set of concerns about media and rhetoric to be present prior to the next upsurge in strikes. I mention its possibility because, as the Los Angeles and Chicago teacher strikes demonstrated, sometimes the sites of struggle are predicable if one knows where to look. And as the problems of public education are by no means resolved with the temporary cessation of mass strikes, there is reason to believe that such a movement could happen again.

There is a need to appraise the role of social media platforms for the practices of democracy. I do not believe that the story contained within this dissertation provides evidence that there is a singularly positive potential for social media to enhance grassroots movements. It does, however, provide an anecdote for experimental practices through digital media that escape the corporate capture of the platform's owners. The fleeting moments of Facebook Groups serving as a public for organizing workers dissipated before the end of the strike wave. By the time of Arizona's strike, the value of the groups had waned significantly for propelling the

movement to take dramatic action. This particular way of using media was useful for social movement organizing, but it almost became obsolete before the end of the movement. Ultimately, the practices invented and imitated on social media for social movements get assimilated into socio-technical systems and diverted away from their revolutionary potentials. Subtle changes in the engagement algorithms can quickly make what seemed like a permanent feature of a platform into unimportant background noise. Publicity as a function of mass media has never been easily accessible to those who seek to challenge the economic structures on which the technologies of publicity rest. Nonetheless, practitioners should search for gaps and fissures within these systems to exploit the mass scale of publicity on and through digital media.

I needed to demarcate the time period of this dissertation in order to complete it. I simply could not hope to keep up with the turning of history before completing this project. Since 2019, however, a number of events have occurred. The start of the pandemic in 2020 resulted in one of smallest annual number of strikes in U.S. history, with only 8 major work stoppages occurring throughout the year.[6] Lockdown and social distancing made organizing workers difficult. Public education became another site of struggle during and after the period of lockdown, for a variety of forces collided over the return to pre-pandemic operations at school buildings. In the beginning of 2022, Chicago teachers struck for five days over negotiations for in-person learning.[7]

The pandemic did not end the momentum of the labor movement growing prior to lockdown. A "wave" of union elections at Starbucks locations has erupted since 2021, with about

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[6] "8 Major Work Stoppages Began during 2020 : The Economics Daily: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics," accessed May 13, 2023, https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2021/8-major-work-stoppages-began-during-2020.htm.
[7] Mitch Smith and Dana Goldstein, "In a Clash With the Teachers' Union, Chicago Cancels Classes for a Day," *The New York Times*, January 5, 2022, sec. U.S., https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/04/us/chicago-teachers-union-remote-learning.html.

300 stores voting to form a union, a number that continues to grow at the time of writing.[8] The

first successful attempt to organize an Amazon warehouse occurred in April 2022, when a

majority of the workers at JFK8 in Staten Island, New York voted to form a union.[9] In late 2022,

48,000 graduate workers and post-doctoral researchers went on strike throughout the University

of California system.[10] Graduate students at private universities like MIT, University of Chicago,

John Hopkins University, Yale, Northwestern University, Boston University, and Syracuse

University have all won union elections in 2022 and 2023. Faculty, students, and staff at Rutgers

University led a five strike in 2023 winning significant raises for themselves.[11] The Writers

Guild of America launched a strike on May 2nd, 2023.[12] In what could shape up to be the largest

single strike in recent U.S. history, the nation-wide contract covering 350,000 workers between

the Teamsters and the United Parcel Service (UPS) expires on July 31st 2023, and the newly

elected president of the union has escalated his strike rhetoric.[13]

In looking toward the future, I believe that the experiences of teachers using media/being

used by media offers some lessons for the broader labor movement. Movements need to scale,

but not just upwards. In chapter three, I discovered that the overreliance on Facebook groups, or

the scale of networked publics, was detrimental in the outcome of the Oklahoma teacher strike.

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[8] "Starbucks," accessed May 13, 2023, https://unionelections.org/data/starbucks/.

[9] Karen Weise and Noam Scheiber, "Amazon Workers on Staten Island Vote to Unionize in Landmark Win for Labor," *The New York Times*, April 1, 2022, sec. Technology, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/01/technology/amazon-union-staten-island.html.

[10] Michael Sainato, "'Many of Us Are Struggling': Why US Universities Are Facing a Wave of Strikes," *The Guardian*, April 21, 2023, sec. US news, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2023/apr/21/us-universities-wave-strikes.

[11] Emma Bowman, "The Rutgers University Faculty Strike Is over, for Now, after a Deal Is Reached," *NPR*, April 15, 2023, sec. Education, https://www.npr.org/2023/04/15/1170284149/rutgers-university-faculty-strike-ends-tentative-deal.

[12] Brooks Barnes and John Koblin, "'It's Going to Be a While': No End in Sight for Hollywood Strike," *The New York Times*, May 8, 2023, sec. Business, https://www.nytimes.com/2023/05/08/business/media/writers-strike-hollywood.html.

[13] Alex Press, "Inside the Teamsters' Preparations for a UPS Strike," accessed May 13, 2023, https://jacobin.com/2023/02/teamsters-ups-contract-negotiation-strike-sean-obrien-rank-and-file.

Prioritizing scaling up simply for the sake of scale is not a reliable strategy for waging successful strikes because of the need for coordination at smaller scales. Workplace struggles require democratic decision making and mass participation; and while the large scale of social media may have the capacity to mobilize people *en masse*, if there are not medial layers developed to involve participants in the decisions that define a strike (when to start, when to end), then the struggle can be circumvented by opposing forces. These medial layers need not be the traditional structures of labor unions, for as the West Virginia strike demonstrates, a distributed form of decision-making allowed the teachers to ignore the labor union leaders instructing them to return to their classrooms. Scaling movements, especially the labor movement, requires interacting with the varied levels of media that anchor the publics of resistance. It requires circulating discourse at the different scales in which relative strangers encounter one another: the school building, the district, the state, the nation, and the world.

At the same time, the fate of public education cannot be determined by the success or failure of individual strikes winning percentage-based raises. While these might temporarily stall teacher shortages by keeping skilled educators in their workplace, it does not halt the general trend of divestment from public services and the degrading working conditions in public schools. Beyond merely the sector of public education, the labor movement cannot improve the living and working conditions of the global workforce without a combined effort towards the reallocation and control over the world's vast resources. Success in improving the conditions of one group can easily come at the relative deprivation of another, unless the sources of artificial scarcity are eliminated. Global inequality cannot be solved by the workers of a single industry, nor the workforce of a singular nation. There is, and always will be, a need to grow the scale of social movements. By that logic, the forms of media that enable global communication must anchor the

future. Labor unions and movements for justice should grab hold of the available means of publicity to grow their capacities and effectuate change at every scale.

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