03

RHETORICAL FOLKNESS

Reanimating Walter J. Ong in the Pursuit of Digital Humanity

JONATHAN W. STONE

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9781478022371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

I begin this chapter with a confession.

I am a lifelong fan of Phil Collins, the British drummer turned pop superstar.

Since I moved on from grade school—when "Against All Odds" was a radio hit and such an affinity still had social cachet—my fandom is a secret I have been able to conceal with limited success over the years. I keep my public listening contained to headphones, but my neighbors know. They heard me through an open window singing "Sussudio" in the shower, and it is not something I am likely to live down.

Recently, while searching YouTube for interesting Phil Collins tunes, I stumbled on a compelling version of "In the Air Tonight" sung by the choral group Choir! Choir! Choir![1] C!C!C! is an ad hoc ensemble that meets in a bar in Toronto once a week to sing pop music. The group was formed by Daveed Goldman and Nobu Adilman and modeled after an Argentinean *peña*, which, as Goldman explains, "is just a place where people can go and hang out, even at three o'clock in the morning, and sit at tables with their guitars, drinking red wine or Coca-Cola, and stay up all night singing Salteño folk

songs."[2] Goldman and Adilman's choir operates on a completely volunteer, no-audition basis. Folks just show up and sing. Adilman directs the group and Goldman accompanies on guitar. Together, they arrange the harmonies and make the song selections, which range from A-ha's classic "Take On Me" to Robyn's more contemporary "Dancing on My Own."

In a 2012 NPR story on the group, Adilman relates that the choir started with just twenty participants but quickly grew to a group of over a hundred singers. In the piece, C!C!C! members speak of the ways that the group became a thriving and meaningful community for its participants—a kind of musical refuge—and how the group filled a gap in their social lives. Since its formation and success, Goldman and Adilman now frequently take C!C!C! into the larger Toronto community where they perform in hospitals and for veterans and other groups. In February 2016 the choir raised C$60,000 for Syrian refugees seeking safety in their city. In addition to this community outreach work, C!C!C!'s musical rhetoric has been used in both satire and eulogy. In 2014 they posted a slightly revised version of Sting's "Russians" in response to Vladimir Putin's homophobic comments about LGBTQ athletes participating in the Sochi Winter Olympics, and in 2016 C!C!C! honored the memory of Prince by inviting 1999 people to join them in a stirring rendition of the late singer's "When Doves Cry." Much too large to fit in their regular barroom, this expanded C!C!C! filled Toronto's Massey Hall.

In my initial YouTube encounters with C!C!C!, I was moved by the ways that they projected a rare spirit of participation, care, and celebration of shared cultural experience. That spirit reminded me of the work of another favorite (much more socially acceptable) artist of mine, Pete Seeger. For over seventy years Seeger was an ambassador of vernacular music, an amplifier of marginalized voices, and an untiring advocate for cooperation—for coming together in both song and labor to remember history and plan for the future. C!C!C!'s undertaking resonates with Seeger's values. They are a diverse group and not particularly virtuosic, but when you hear them it is clear they have spent time and care rehearsing the songs in their repertoire. Aside from our shared love for Phil Collins, I was surprised by my strong emotional response to the group's performances. I never cared much for Gordon Lightfoot's "If You Could Read My Mind," for instance, or thought to juxtapose it with "Basket Case" by Green Day, but re-presented in this context, those tunes took on a vibrant quality, a kind of digital vernacular newness. I use the term "vernacular" here in its most basic sense to mean "everyday language," but Houston A. Baker's definition is also useful. He describes vernacular expression in contrast to "high art" as "arts native

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

or peculiar to a particular country or locale."[3] C!C!C! brings together two distinct vernacular practices, two "locales" of shared public experience: popular music and the digital interface. In a strange but unmistakable way, the group's YouTube channel has become a spontaneous digital archive of late twentieth and early twenty-first-century popular culture, which many of us are still ensconced within. More than a playlist on iTunes or a mix CD you might give to a friend, the embodied nature of community singing stored and shared on the public network of YouTube is affecting, drawing me in as a proxy participant. I spent time not just listening to the group but also singing along. In fact, I was inspired to try it out myself. Soon after discovering C!C!C! I brought a guitar and a pile of lyrics sheets to a friend's party and, without much prompting, had twenty people singing "In the Air Tonight" on a porch in Champaign, Illinois. It turns out I'm not the only one with a secret.

Choir! Choir! Choir! and similar groups embody an overlap between popular culture, sound as orality, and the archive that is only beginning to be imagined and activated, let alone theorized, within our contemporary digital culture. The Toronto-based project is a powerful example of what might be called "digital humanity"—a kind of vernacular residuum resulting from the same digital affordances, technologies, and methodologies now being utilized and studied by the emerging institutional formation called digital humanities. Ungoverned by any institution or discipline, digital humanity describes the myriad ways humans are linked together digitally through the common cultural experiences, tools, networks, and technological ambience of the electronic age. C!C!C! brings together the rhythms of popular music with the algorithms of the digital archive and in doing so becomes part of the growing and indelible imprint of digital affordances on human memory-making and -keeping. C!C!C! represents just one of many ways the human coalesces with the digital to preserve, enhance, and perpetuate the rhythms of cultural memory and, by extension, the refrain of human values.

This chapter is my response to the call from the editors of *Provoke!* for essays to better understand digital sound studies by tracing deep histories of digital sound technologies and their predecessors and also to critically evaluate how technology continues to shape auditory culture. To this end, I draw together concepts from ancient and contemporary rhetoric to theorize and historicize this notion of digital humanity for the future of digital sound studies. The rhetorical tradition has been underutilized as a tool for understanding sound in the larger field of sound studies—an oversight I believe is (at least in part) tied to the disavowal of Walter J. Ong in prominent sound

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

scholarship. I will argue that Ong anticipated the current media landscape, including the circumstances I have designated as digital humanity, and that he tied these contemporary mediated realities to both sound studies and rhetoric.[4]

A concept like digital humanity is plausible only because its evidence is everywhere. Everyday lives are becoming more and more reliant on digital tools, not just for connecting and relating to one another, but also in the rhetorical practice of preserving and propagating cultural values and systems of civic belief. Digital humanity is integral to this emergent vernacular digital culture and, as I will argue, can be understood and made useful for sound scholars in terms first conceptualized by ancient rhetoricians, and then retheorized by Ong. Given Ong's fall from scholarly fashion, I will tread carefully if deliberately through that critique in order to articulate a future of digital sound studies that is open to both rhetorical interrogation and a remixed and reanimated Ong. This reanimation, I argue, will help to forge an incipient bridge between sound studies and rhetoric based around a reconceptualization of Ong's sonic theory of secondary orality, one Ong rooted to sound and rhetoric. In other words, Ong's theory reminds us what is rhetorical about sound studies. Rhetoric, generally studied as a tool for persuasion, also has deep connections to sonic ways of value- and knowledge-making. As such the field of sound studies—particularly at the cutting edge of its marriage of the vernacular and the digital—can be better understood and articulated when rhetoric is included as part of the field's conceptual Pro Tools.

Reanimating Walter J. Ong

Once known as a preeminent sound theorist whose "version of the 'great divide' between orality and literacy [for a time] dominated the approach to literacy," Ong now occupies a tenuous position within the fields of literacy studies and sound studies.[5] In fact, Ong has become a kind of Phil Collins figure: both had hits in the 1980s, and while many of us know the words and can sing along to both, it is becoming harder and harder to admit it in public.

Ong was associated with Marshall McLuhan and the influential Toronto School of communication theory.[6] As such, he emphasized key epistemological differences between orality and literacy, arguing for the need to "reawaken the oral [and sounded] character of language" within the

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

scholarly world. He taught that an emphasis on visual, literate (and by extension, logical, empirical, and positivistic) epistemologies led to a diminished understanding of oral/aural types of knowledge. Ong argued that the sound of the voice is an essential feature to understanding humanity and that "the phenomenology of sound enters deeply into human beings' feel for existence, as processed by the spoken word."[7] These claims won the theorist wide acclaim as an innovator and, for a time, helped to bring sound into scholarly vogue. However, critics have since maligned Ong and his contributions as part of a larger grouping of misguided "phonocentrists" who mistake voice and sound for a metaphysical and mythic presence. One of the more notable critics, Jonathan Sterne, describes Ong's position as theocentric and as part of an "audiovisual litany" that seeks to privilege sound over visuality in a kind of hierarchy of the senses. For Sterne, Ong's championing of orality is merely "a restatement of the longstanding spirit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism."[8] Sterne's perspective is persuasive, and his voice, alongside those of other prominent critics, has contributed to Ong's work falling out of scholarly fashion.[9]

Seeking to "recover" Ong or to rationalize his spiritualism would be futile. He was, after all, *Father* Ong—a Jesuit priest—and he would not have felt compelled to rationalize his spiritual focus either. Instead, in much the same way that C!C!C! brought Phil Collins into a new sonic space, it is more useful to reanimate and redress Ong's intellectual contributions within a secular, rhetorical paradigm, directing attention to the ways he connected his theories of sound to a more technologically diverse understanding of human flourishing—to digital humanity. Ong's work is important not so much for the ways that he tended toward essentialism but in the ways that he understood and began to theorize contemporary society as a hybrid of the traditional and the technological and what that hybridity might have to teach us about human value-making as we move deeper into the electronic age.

THINKING CONJUNCTURALLY: Epideictic Rhetoric, Folkness, and Ong's Secondary Orality

I have already used the term "digital humanity" to gesture toward the ways that people utilize technology to generate new knowledge, tools, and networks for understanding the world and other people. However, the notion that these behaviors lead to the disruption, modification, and even creation

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

of new systems of value has ancient origins. Aristotle conceptualized the deep, humanistic work of belief formation and propagation as a species of rhetoric he called *epideiktikon*, or "epideictic," and he used the word to describe the value-making oratory inherent to ceremonial, ritualistic, and poetic discourse. "Epideictic" remains common parlance in rhetorical criticism, but there are many synonyms across the disciplines. In the 1950s and 60s, for example, musicologist Charles Seeger used the word "folkness" in much the same way. Echoing Aristotle, Seeger defined folkness as the "funded treasury of attitudes, beliefs, and feelings toward life and death, work and play, love, courtship and marriage, health and hearth, children and animals, prosperity and adversity—a veritable code of individual and collective behavior belonging to the people as a whole."[10] While this definition hails from a particularly poignant moment of folk revival, I contend that it points to a more or less universal idea about the ways that humans build systems of value and public memory together in vernacular, or everyday, discursive spaces. Neither epideictic nor folkness is inherently sonic, but both have a close historical relationship with sounded and rhythmic expression, which can also be found commonly at the vernacular level, particularly when paired with rhetorics of remembering. Sound's rhetorical folkness is alive and well within digital culture-making. It is at the heart of C!C!C!'s ethos, for example, but it can also be found in any user-generated or open-source community where memory making and memory keeping have become a public affair due to the increasing ubiquity of electronic affordances: smartphones, inexpensive high-definition sound and video recording devices, and networked platforms such as YouTube. For example, consider "OutKasted Conversations," Regina Bradley's YouTube archive of public conversations about the hip-hop group OutKast and contemporary black southernness. "OutKasted Conversations," addressed in chapter 5 of this book, brings together a number of sonic elements—OutKast's music, digitally mediated conversation, and user-generated comments—all of which contribute to the rich digital humanity of Bradley's work and archive.

In his 2013 collection *The Sound Studies Reader*, Jonathan Sterne asserts that a primary goal for the future of sound studies should be to "think conjuncturally about sound and culture."[11] I have been working here to draw connections, then, between disciplines and terms in order to map these potential conjunctures. Ong also worked conjuncturally, making explicit the connections between value-making, rhythmic sound, memory, and technology in his recurring notion of "orality." Orality was derived from the system of thought known as "media ecology," a central philosophical

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

tenet of the Toronto School.[12] Media ecology's trajectory holds that technological mediation is central to understanding the development of human consciousness and has traversed four major "ages": tribal, literate, print, and electronic. Operating mainly within the trajectory of Western cultural history, Ong's work deals in large part with the transition between each age, and relabels "tribal" with his term "oral." Ong was fascinated by the liminal moments between the ages—with the profound transference that occurs as one dominant mode of communication gives way to the next. We can get a sense for Ong's modus operandi in the title of what is arguably his most intellectually enduring work, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958). In *Ramus*, Ong chronicles the cultural impact of the printing press, which included a shift from the dominance of speech and dialogue in the public sphere and led, through new emphases on method and "reason," to the cultural circumstances that directly preceded the Enlightenment. For Ong, the historical trajectory that began with preliterate culture and continued through the age of print always includes a steady march away from "aural-type phenomena" and toward ways of knowing structured by "visual-type" methodologies and the abstract thinking made possible by the affordances of literacy and, by extension, technology.[13] This was the case, at least, until the mid-twentieth century and the dawn of a new age.

Ong develops the notion of "secondary orality" as a way of describing the state of human consciousness in the then-emerging electronic age in which the visual's dominance was beginning to wane. The electronic age is one imbued with a "high-technology ambience," where "a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print."[14] Ong gives primary and secondary orality as key concepts for understanding the impact and permutations of media ecology's continuum across history. Secondary orality is "new" because technological advance brought sound back into prominence within communication technologies in a way not emphasized since the days of ancient, or "primary," orality.

Ong's writings on secondary orality, however, are somewhat limited. Ong scholar and rhetorician Abigail Lambke argues that "secondary orality should be read as incomplete, suggestive, and germinal" (and this, perhaps, is the right approach to working with Ong in general). Lambke points toward two particularly cogent elements within Ong's cursory beginnings that help define this slippery term.[15] First, Ong writes that "new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas." Next, secondary orality also "promotes spontaneity because through analytical reflection we have decided that spontaneity is a good thing. We plan our happenings carefully to be sure that they are thoroughly spontaneous."[16] Rendered this way, secondary orality reminds us that humanity, as we currently experience it, is a mix of both traditional and progressive paradigms and cannot be otherwise. Digital humanity, then, reveals itself within this symbiosis of the past, present, and future as emerging technologies present opportunities to participate in, preserve, and be "conspicuously spontaneous" in our various technologically enhanced social interactions.

Recall again the ways that Toronto's Choir! Choir! Choir! embodies each of these elements. Participants gather together in planned spontaneity to sing. Their performances are recorded, archived on YouTube, and thereby distributed to the world where we can then participate with them and even emulate them in our own communities. This is in many ways a stunning reversal of the prediction made by Robert Putnam in his popular book *Bowling Alone*, published at the dawning of the twenty-first century. Instead of bowling alleys emptying of people due to technology's "individualizing" tether, people are gathering in public places to perform the ways technology brings them together in common folkness.[17] Indeed, digital networks like YouTube are pulling dispersed individuals into purposive communities and enabling the singular voice of radio, television, and internet to become a collective one.

And YouTube is not the only space where technological advance is creating new communities of participatory sonic culture. The Berlin-based online audio distribution platform SoundCloud, for example, has become a hub for musical collaboration, sample sharing, and new-artist promotion and has a reported forty million registered users and five times that many listeners.[18] Also, smartphone platforms such as Instagram, Vine, and Snapchat, which allow for the quick and simple distribution of vernacular sound and video to a large audience, also meet these criteria (as do video streaming apps like Twitter's Periscope and Facebook Live). With seventy million users (and before its abrupt demise), Vine had become so popular and ubiquitous as to have produced its own "stars"—fascinating evidence of a vibrant community drawing on both traditional (celebrity culture) and emerging paradigms of interaction ("followers," "revines," and "likes"). And while digital platforms and apps are perhaps the most conspicuous places to locate digital humanity, they are not the only places public sonic

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

archives emerge. Libraries and community centers are beginning to invest in open-to-the-public facilities for digital content creation and sharing. The St. Louis public library, for example, recently opened a recording studio—open to anyone with a library card—that has become a popular hub for recording both music and other sonic projects.[19] These various shapes and sounds of digital humanity also represent a realization of Ong's predictions for orality's sweeping communal and participatory potential when sounded through contemporary technologies.

Memory, Archives, and a Step Beyond Secondary Orality

In many ways Ong relies on his audience to intuit a sense of what secondary orality entails by following along carefully with his development of primary orality. Whether primary or secondary, "orality is orality in some ultimate sense," Ong quips with his trademark essentialism, and we are left to assemble the pieces on our own.[20] Ong's interest in the sonic experience of orality is often tied to a deeper human interest in technologies of remembering. And while Ong had an implicit preoccupation with spiritual remembrance (or not forgetting God), we need not be spiritualists to find some insight and value in the importance of memory and its connection to sonic activity. Archives, for example, offer an important site for understanding the negotiation, interplay, and overlap between memory and data, a dichotomy that fits more or less analogously beside the notions of orality and literacy, tradition and progression, folkness and technology—all ideas that I have been engaging here. Orality, if tied to our understanding of the archive, loses much of the acrimony the concept receives from Ong's critics. After all, even before digital or material archives, humans used their memories as archives to preserve important cultural knowledge and also to carefully organize the memorized elements of an eloquent oral performance (a practice that continues).[21]

Ong develops orality's relationship to human memory's potential as an archive along two disparate but related trajectories, one with anthropological ends and the other rhetorical. Each is concerned with what Ong and other media ecologists call "oral-formulaic composition," or the use of rhythmic formulae as a way of preserving memory, knowledge, and culture. Ong jumps to some problematic conclusions in his anthropological research that seem to suggest that literacy develops with clean evolutionary determinism across all cultures, in predictable patterns, and always toward alphabetic

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

literacy.[22] This paradigm has come under significant critical scrutiny, the sharpest of which is from ethnographer Brian V. Street, who sees much of Ong's work as methodologically reductive, empirically weak, theoretically deterministic, and based on assumptions about cultures he knew little of.[23] In a like manner, this (pseudo-)anthropological line of thinking does not do much to advance the development of secondary orality.

Within the rhetorical tradition, however, Ong argues that oral formulas as "knowledge storage and retrieval devices" have a rich history.[24] Ong connects the orality of ancient rhetorical theory to the secondary orality of his twentieth-century moment. The rhetorical tradition has its roots in ancient poetic traditions in which the formulaic and rhythmic memory aids, fashioned as oral mnemonic devices, passed as oral tradition from the Homeric epoch to into later antiquity. The use and memorization of poetic figures (commonplaces) and the use of carefully curated *topoi* (topics) are well-documented practices in both the teaching and performance of rhetoric in ancient Athens. Writing about the methods of ancient teachers of rhetoric known as the Sophists, George Kennedy relates that even "as the composition of oral poetry and the oratory in it was built up with blocks of memorized material adapted to a variety of situations, so sophistic oratory was to a considerable extent a pastiche, or piecing together of commonplaces, long and short."[25] Aristotle catalogues many of these "formulary materials" (as Ong calls them) in his *Rhetoric*, written in the fourth century BCE; he was followed in this practice by Roman orator-teachers Cicero and Quintilian in the first century of the Common Era.

Writing at the end of the 1960s, Ong points to the folk revival—to folkness!—as a site of secondary orality where this same kind of oral-formulaic discourse of public memory reemerges. For Ong, the appeal of folk song "derives from the overwhelming persuasion of its devotees that it is of great antiquity (often it is not) and connects with their past."[26] In the United States, folk "revival" in the early and mid-twentieth century revolved around the search for and archiving of vernacular artifacts that reverberated with the cultural memory cataloged in Charles Seeger's earlier definition, but it also engaged with a kind of longing for authenticity. "Folklife" archives have become an important part of countless communities and are housed (often with digital components) in libraries and universities across the United States, with the preeminent example at the Library of Congress. Ong, however, pushes past the idea of folklife as something that should only be engaged within a careful, cataloged archive and moves toward a more dynamic folkness of innovation, satire, improvisation, and

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

play that begins to emerge as part of the rhetorical life cycle of figures and commonplaces—including their eventual decay and/or descent into cultural cliché.[27] Digital sound studies should be similarly postured toward sound's various permutations as shaped by and through digital platforms and tools (which is important work), but sound studies should also seek to understand how those sonic permutations are resonant with and respondent to the dynamics of folkness mentioned above. This orientation is distinctly rhetorical, as sound's radical potential for influence is tied (here rephrasing Aristotle's famous definition of rhetoric) to the perceived uses for and malleability of the figures and commonplaces of shared cultural memory in any given scenario.[28] One brief, humorous example of this might be found on a recent horror-film forum in the open-source sound community freesound.org. Freesound allows users to post sound files and respond to requests for specific sounds and music needs. Foley artist AlienXXX posted a one-second audio file titled "Blood_splat_015b.wav" with the following description: "I had a sound request for a 'bloodsplat.' Created these sounds by throwing small portions of water or wet sponge. Recorded with a Zoom H1."[29] In this instance, and in many others like it on freesound.org, user interactivity and sound productions are respondent to user need and request. In the process of creation mediated through freesound's forums, communities form, disperse, and reform to the ebb and flow (and blood splats) of digital humanity.

Here again, Phil Collins becomes a useful lodestar for further understanding of and engagement with how this process works. Over the last half-century we have circulated at least once or twice through what now appears to be the revolving cycle of secondary orality: from the earnest seeking of authenticity, through satire and irony, to innovation and play, and back again. Other closeted Collins fans will remember that before his solo career took off, he performed as part of the progressive rock group Genesis, whose members were known for their innovative musicianship and frequent political themes. As a solo artist, however, his popularity reached its peak during a brief period of (now cringe-inducing) earnestness during the 1980s. Since then, however, Collins's music has remained in the popular sphere, in karaoke bars and among community sing groups like C!C!C!, to be sure, but also as samples in the work of hip-hop DJs and MCs. In fact, my favorite song, "In the Air Tonight," has been sampled by DMX ("I Can Feel It"), Lil' Kim ("In the Air Tonite"), Nas ("One Mic"), and even the legendary 2Pac ("Staring through My Rearview").[30] Collins's work takes on

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

new life as a DJ's sample. When juxtaposed with hip-hop lyrics and themes, the song functions as a common cultural touch-point—a backbeat—useful in response to (and even subtle commentary on) evolving exigent issues. "In the Air Tonight" carries the broad cultural marker (or commonplace) of emotional intensity, which can be taken up, reworked, and deployed in the praise and blame—the *epideictic* critique—of shared values within and across U.S. popular culture. 2Pac's lyrics, "I wonder when the world stopped caring last night / Two kids shot while the whole block staring," rapped over the iconic keyboard and drums of "In the Air Tonight," are indisputable as poignant oratory and an example of what contemporary epideictic rhetoric sounds like. Collins's work, then, is part of a revolving cycle of rhetorical folkness: from innovative art to tired cliché and back to art—but in new keys and accompanied by new voices.

The folkness of digital humanity, which exists, perhaps, as a step *beyond* secondary orality, takes advantage of a technologically hybrid culture where knowledge/retrieval systems (or "external memory" as we are now wont to call it) have become ubiquitous. In other words, digital humanity is evident in the kind of technical literacy and rhetorical fluency central to the DJ's expertise (mash-up/remix) and can be observed across media and in digital discourse of the everyday. This notion of digital humanity invites a new and emergent folkness that embraces, circulates, and rearticulates each of these stages *ad infinitum*, forever blurring the lines between tradition and progression. Harkening back to both Aristotle's and Lambke's insights, while the ever-changing folkness of digital humanity creates unprecedented opportunities for participation and spontaneity—from open-source software builds to open-audition community choirs—this radical openness also requires new ways of understanding the dissonance of this potential cacophony of competing voices and values. Here rhetoric's concepts and theories, starting with epideictic and blossoming outward, can provide both perspective and conciliatory resonance to these issues as well as those within conversations around digital sound studies more broadly. As mentioned earlier, Ong reminds us what is rhetorical about sound studies. His anticipation of these technologically imbued circumstances and phenomena, his use of rhetoric and rhetorical history to understand and situate them, and his open notion of secondary orality as the mode in which they can be theorized are ample justification for a reconsideration and reanimation not only of Ong's work in relation to digital sound studies scholarship but also of rhetorical studies more broadly.[31]

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

Consider, in conclusion, how Ong's view on technology (which always exists as a demonstration of the hybridity of oral and literate ways of thinking) speaks to this justification:

> Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness. Alienation from a natural milieu can be good for us and indeed is in many ways essential for full human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does.
>
> Technologies are artificial, but—paradox again—artificiality is natural to human being. Technology, properly interiorized, does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it. The modern orchestra, for example, is the result of high technology.[32]

Phenomena such as a C!C!C!, freesound.org, and the DJ sample (and, for that matter, Phil Collins and Walter Ong themselves) exist along a continuum of mediated experience that includes activities that look and sound like Ong's descriptions of primary and secondary orality. I do not need to subscribe to Ong's spiritual ideals to find something transcendent and human about the activities implied by these terms, their various permutations, and the ways that they relate across that continuum. On the other hand, subscribing to and expanding on Ong's frequent use of "rhetoric" to account for the complexity of oral and aural experience has immense potential. This chapter has been about drawing that potential out, connecting rhetorical terms to sonic experiences, and beginning to theorize the folkness of digital humanity.

As we look toward the future of digital sound studies, each of the above frameworks, from secondary orality to digital humanity, usefully conceptualizes the various ways that contemporary vernacular culture is embedded within, performed through, and transformed by digital technology. For those in sound studies, an orientation that acknowledges the inherent folkness of those technologies is, as I have sought to show, a rhetorical orientation. As such, this rhetorical folkness is resonant within digital technologies as the coalescing rhythms and algorithms of past and present memory/value systems resounding in and beyond the code. Within these systems (archives and revolving traditions), groups like Choir! Choir! Choir!, platforms like YouTube, and samples by Phil Collins can be understood not only as sites for the careful study of sound's digital potentials but also as the raw materials available for the crafting of new and rich digital rhetorics.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

NOTES

1 Following the group's lead, I generally refer to Choir! Choir! Choir! as C!C!C! throughout for brevity. Find them on their website (accessed January 13, 2018, www.choirchoirchoir.com); on their YouTube channel (accessed January 13, 2018, www.youtube.com/user/CHOIRx3); and on SoundCloud (accessed January 13, 2018, https://soundcloud.com/choir-choir-choir).
2 Myers, "Choirstarters."
3 Baker, *Blues, Ideology*, 2.
4 Like sound studies, "rhetorical studies" (and, more broadly, the "rhetorical tradition") designates a large and not entirely coherent grouping of scholars and scholarship. This grouping includes at least two prominent disciplinary iterations in the academy: one often found in communication departments, where the scholarly focus tends to be on speech; and another in English departments, where writing and composition are the primary objects/activities of rhetorical inquiry (though this is a somewhat vapid simplification). My evocation of "rhetoric" is meant to name a common tradition that transcends disciplinary divisions. Ong himself studied and wrote of rhetoric and its histories outside of these paradigms and as a professor of literature.
5 Street, "Critical Look at Ong," 153.
6 The Toronto School came about through Harold Innis's and Marshall McLuhan's application and expansion of the work and theories of Eric A. Havelock; all three men were associated with the University of Toronto. This work, which often "explored different implications of ancient Greek literacy to support [its] theoretical approach," was generally focused on the notion that human communication is central to understanding the structures of both human culture and human minds (see Kerckhove, "McLuhan and the Toronto School," 73). Central works include Innis's *Empire and Communications* and McLuhan's *Understanding Media.* Havelock's *Preface to Plato* is also notable here due to its explicit focus on rhetoric.
7 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 6, 76.
8 Sterne, *Audible Past*, 16.
9 See Derrida, *Margins of Philosophy;* Street, "Critical Look at Walter Ong."
10 Seeger, "Folkness of the Non-Folk," 3.
11 Sterne, *Sound Studies Reader*, 3.
12 The theory and practice of media ecology came about through the work of McLuhan, Neil Postman, Ong, and other members of the Toronto School. Central works include McLuhan's *Understanding Media* and Postman's well-known (and often critiqued) *Amusing Ourselves to Death.* Media ecology as a theory continues to have a strong academic presence in several anthologies. See, for example,

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

Crowley and Heyer's *Communication in History* and the journal *Explorations in Media Ecology*, which is devoted to its history and development.

13 Ong, *Ramus*, 107.

14 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 11.

15 Lambke, "Refining Secondary Orality," 203.

16 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 136, 137.

17 Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 216–17.

18 See Graham, "Who's Listening to SoundCloud?"

19 See Clark, "St. Louis Central Library."

20 Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, 284.

21 In addition to their memories, humans also use their bodies as archives. See Taylor, *Archive and Repertoire*, and Schneider, *Performing Remains.*

22 Ong was intrigued by the literary-turned-anthropological work of Milman Parry and his student Albert Lord. Parry is known for his pioneering work in Homeric oral poetry in which he demonstrates convincingly the formulary nature of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which, though eventually written down and deemed "literature," hailed from a much earlier oral tradition. Lord took Parry's work into the former Yugoslavia, where he studied Yugoslav narrative poets who could not read and found the same kinds of formulaic devices at work there that Parry had found in Homer. See Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 59.

23 See Street, "Critical Look at Walter Ong."

24 Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance*, 285.

25 Kennedy, *Classical Rhetoric*, 28.

26 Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance*, 285.

27 Ong points humorously to the then-contemporary duo Simon and Garfunkel, whose music, he argues, is rife with play on "worn rhetorical clichés." The lyrics offer blatant informality within formal musical settings, "total irony," and "total casualness"—all as playful innovations replacing tired formulaic commonplaces. Recall, for example, the comically mundane line "Citizens for Boysenberry Jam" from their 1968 song "Punky's Dilemma."

28 Aristotle defines rhetoric as "the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion." *On Rhetoric* 1.2.1.

29 Freesound.org (accessed January 13, 2018, http://freesound.org/people/AlienXXX/sounds/198827).

30 The site whosampled.com (accessed January 13, 2018) helped me discover this information. According to the site's search engine, "In the Air Tonight" has been sampled in forty-three hip-hop songs to date.

31 For recent work that takes up sound's relationship to rhetoric and the Western rhetorical tradition, see Walker's *Rhetoric and Poetics*, Hawhee's *Bodily Arts*, Johnstone's *Listening to the Logos*, and Rickert's *Ambient Rhetoric.*

32 Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 82–83.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

WORKS CITED

Aristotle. *On Rhetoric: A Theory of Civic Discourse.* Translated by George A. Kennedy. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Baker, Houston A. *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

Clark, Patrick. "St. Louis Central Library Recording Studio Has Become a Hotspot for Artist." *Fox 2 Now,* August 11, 2015. http://fox2now.com/2015/08/11/st-louis-central-library-recording-studio-has-become-a-hotspot-for-artist.

Crowley, David, and Paul Heyer, eds. *Communication in History: Technology, Culture, Society.* New York: Routledge, 2011.

Kerckhove, Derrick de. "McLuhan and the Toronto School of Communication." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 14, no. 4 (1989): 73–79.

Derrida, Jacques. *Margins of Philosophy.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Graham, Jefferson. "Who's Listening to SoundCloud? 200 Million." *USA Today,* July 17, 2013. www.usatoday.com/story/tech/columnist/talkingtech/2013/07/17/whos-listening-to-soundcloud-200-million/2521363.

Havelock, Eric A. *Preface to Plato.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1963.

Hawhee, Debra. *Bodily Arts: Rhetoric and Athletics in Ancient Greece.* Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004.

Innis, Harold. *Empire and Communications.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950.

Jarratt, Susan C. *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured.* Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.

Johnstone, Christopher Lyle. *Listening to the Logos: Speech and the Coming of Wisdom in Ancient Greece.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009.

Kennedy, George A. *Classical Rhetoric and Its Christian and Secular Tradition from Ancient to Modern Times.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980.

Kerckhove, Derrick de. "McLuhan and the Toronto School of Communication." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 14, no. 4 (1989): 73–79.

Lambke, Abigail. "Refining Secondary Orality: Articulating What Is Felt, Explaining What Is Implied." *Explorations in Media Ecology* 11, nos. 3–4 (December 2012): 201–17.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man.* New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964.

Myers, Paul. "Choirstarters: Toronto's Choir! Choir! Choir! Sings the Praises of a (Social-Media-Assisted) Real-Word Experience." Co.Create. Fast Company. Accessed April 27, 2015. www.fastcocreate.com/3024227/choirstarters-torontos-choir-choir-choir-sings-the-praises-of-a-social-media-assisted-real-w.

NPR Staff. "In Toronto, an Ad-Hoc Choir Becomes a Community." *NPR Music.*

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024

Accessed April 27, 2015. www.npr.org/2012/12/23/167882491/in-toronto-an-ad-hoc-choir-becomes-a-community.

Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word.* New York: Routledge, 1982.

Ong, Walter J. *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958.

Ong, Walter J. *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology; Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture.* Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971.

Plato. Dialogues. References to Plato are given in the usual Stephanus numbers.

Postman, Neil. *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business.* New York: Penguin, 1986.

Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

Rickert, Thomas J. *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013.

Schneider, Rebecca. *Performing Remains: Art and War in Times of Theatrical Reenactment.* London: Routledge, 2011.

Seeger, Charles. "The Folkness of the Non-Folk vs. the Non-Folkness of the Folk." In *Folklore and Society: Essays in Honor of Benj. A Botkin.* Hatboro, PA: Folklore Associates, 1966.

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Audible Past.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Sterne, Jonathan. *The Sound Studies Reader.* New York: Routledge, 2012.

Street, Brian V. "A Critical Look at Walter Ong and the 'Great Divide.'" In *Social Literacies: Critical Approaches to Literacy in Development, Ethnography, and Education,* edited by Brian V. Street, 153–59. New York: Routledge, 1995.

Taylor, Diana. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas.* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

Walker, Jeffrey. *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Downloaded from http://read.dukeupress.edu/books/book/chapter-pdf/672190/9780822371991-004.pdf by guest on 24 July 2024