

Rhetoric as Technic: Stiegler, the Sophists, and a Critical Theory of Digital Culture

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Damien Smith Pfister

Associate Professor

Department of Communication

University of Maryland

I'd like to open this panel by entwining my own paper with my role as chair in characterizing what it might mean to “theorize the technics turn.” My own project, and in many ways this panel, began on the terrace overlooking Madison’s Lake Mendota after a long day at the RSA Institute hosted by the University of Wisconsin, back in 2015. A group of us were talking about posthumanism (as you do) and Professor Boyle expressed his preference for Gilbert Simondon over Bernard Stiegler because of what he interpreted as Stiegler’s hostile attitude toward the sophists. Ever since we discussed Stiegler’s complicated relationship with the sophists, I have been looking for an opportunity to write a bit about Stiegler’s take on the sophists as a way to read Stiegler into the rhetorical tradition and vice versa. I wanted to better understand how Stiegler’s interpretation of the sophists shapes what is (I think) our most robust critical theory of digital culture; more importantly, I want to gesture toward what rhetoric and rhetorical theory provides to this critical theory of digital culture. So, I want to suggest the utility of Stiegler’s work in orienting us toward a technics turn in rhetorical studies and, by the end, I hope to show how the technics turn opens out beyond Stiegler, toward the work that my co-panelists and many in the audience are doing right now.

To consider what a “technics turn” might look like requires defining technics by parsing three related terms that are at the heart of rhetorical studies: *technē*, technique, and technology.

A *technē* is a teachable art or craft. A *technē* is guided by principles that enable replication in achieving an end, but those principles, and the various situations that require the principles to be tweaked or abandoned, can only be honed through practice. Thus, *technē* usually refers to “practical knowledge” instead of the theoretical knowledge of its more famous counterpart, episteme. You cannot learn a *technē* by simply studying the discrete parts of the craft, you have to be involved in the holistic, continuous process of *crafting*. Rhetoric, medicine, piloting, and politics are all *technē*.

A technique is a *technē*, grammitized. To develop a technique is to break down a *technē* into discrete parts. This, as John Tinnell has eloquently written about in an essay in *Computers and Composition* on Stiegler’s relevance for writing studies, is grammitization: the breaking down of a continuous flow into discrete components. A technique isolates the principle from practice and often turns the principle into a rule. Rhetoric’s “handbook tradition” lives on in popular press books that chew your *technē* for you so that the art of persuasion can be turned into easily digestible techniques, “tips and tricks of superstar speakers” ready for adoption by those readily

parted with their money. We rhetoricians regularly mock technique as a degradation of *technē*; nonetheless, we live in a world that technique built, too, as the recent attention to the power of algorithmic technique shows.

Technology is technique made durable. Technology “externalizes” and “formalizes” technique onto inorganic matter. A factory machine is made possible by breaking down the craftperson’s *technē* into discrete techniques which are then codified onto a set of durable machinic processes: stamp the metal, drill the hole, paint the part. Technologies must be programmed, which makes them less adaptable to changing situations. Technologies are programmed, but they also program: which is to say that the techno-logos orders our experience. A techno-logos makes visible that which it has been programmed to make visible, which, in turn, shapes our sense of the perceptible and thus our very sense of the epistemic. *Logos* has always been an ordering apparatus, but when *logos* goes techno it acquires a durable ordering power that often effaces itself.

“Technics,” then, is a covering term for the cognate words of *technē*, technique, and technology that orients us toward how these three terms interrelate in the production of subjectivity and culture. One of the most direct ways to understand Stiegler’s work is to appreciate the central assumption of his hermeneutic for interpreting the post-Platonic philosophical tradition: philosophy repressed technics. Since Plato, epistemics has been opposed to technics, and technics has been made out to be the lesser. This should sound like a familiar arrangement to rhetoricians, and this very homology is what I hope to make some sense of in this essay. Stiegler’s reading strategy is to show how this repression of technics, achieved most famously by Plato but locked in by thinkers in his wake, created conceptual problems throughout the history of philosophy. Furthermore, repressing technics prevents accessing the necessary resources for theorizing the new technologies of digitality in our current moment, in which the technical foundations of society are increasingly self-evident but still undertheorized.

What Stiegler has said about philosophy, could certainly be said about the history of rhetoric. For rhetoric, as a *technē*, has often repressed other technics and has *itself* been elided as a technic. For a good chunk of the 20th century, rhetorical studies in the public address tradition was relentlessly idealist (i.e., Wraga, 1947). This idealism was understandable, because the hope was that “ideas” would help alleviate major problems of the world (much as Burke and other modernists thought literature would soothe the savage beast within). Until relatively recently, the divide between rhetoric and media studies still loomed large, at least on the Communication end of the transdiscipline, and the very idea that rhetoric might be undergoing a kind of transformation because of the conditions of digital technics is still capable of ruffling some people’s feathers.

Stiegler’s critical theory rejects Platonism by embracing not rhetoric but the technical object, with Plato’s critique of the technology of writing offering a starting point for Stiegler (as it often does for rhetoricians, too). Despite Stiegler’s claims about the primacy of technics, his own account of the sophists often dismisses their technical virtuosity and, seemingly, the possibility that rhetoric is itself a technic. Of course, if Plato is the figure most associated with epistemics, then Stiegler *should* see the sophists as exemplary representatives of technics. But yet, through much of his corpus, Stiegler appears to embrace the Platonic dismissal of the sophists as being

anti-philosophical and so a threat to the good life. Which is to say, Professor Boyle wasn't wrong in his take on Stiegler and the sophists; although of course, I want to make it more complicated than that, because in other instances, Stiegler praises the sophists' playful practices as a useful break with orthodoxy that opens up more democratic possibilities for justice.

Stiegler opens the first volume of his foundational work, *Technics and Time*, with an account of the sophists that is the basis for subsequent accounts:

“At the beginning of its history philosophy separates *tekhne* from *epistêmê*, a distinction that had not yet been made in Homeric times. The separation is determined by a political context, one in which the philosopher accuses the Sophist of instrumentalizing the *logos* as rhetoric and logography, that is, as both an instrument of power and a renunciation of knowledge (Châtelet 1965, 60-61). It is in the inheritance of this conflict—in which the philosophical *epistêmê* is pitched against the sophistic *tekhne*, whereby all technical knowledge is devalued—that the essence of technical entities in general is conceived: [Following Aristotle,] ‘Every natural being . . . has within itself a beginning of movement and rest, whether the ‘movement’ is a locomotion, growth or decline, or a qualitative change . . . [whereas] not one product of art has the source of its own production within itself.’ No form of ‘self-causality’ animates technical beings. Owing to this ontology, the analysis of technics is made in terms of ends and means, which implies necessarily that no dynamic proper belongs to technical beings.”¹

Now, Stiegler could have, in this moment, aligned his own work on technics with the sophists, associated as they are with the *technê* of rhetoric. Instead, he appears to accept Plato's claim that rhetoric is not a *technê*, or is the wrong sort of *technê* associated with the wrong sort of person, and endeavors instead to reclaim the *technology* of writing from the clutches of Platonism by recuperating the relationship between writing and memory. As opposed to Plato's assertion about the primacy of anamnesis, the soul's ability to remember or forget without the aid of technical objects (“ana-” meaning “again, anew”), Stiegler recuperates writing technology as a hypomnemis (“hypo-” meaning “under, beneath” but also “lesser, less than” and “mnemonic” from the Greek root “mnesikos,” “of memory.”) Stiegler's whole project flows from inverting the association of hypomnesis with “lesser, less than,” arguing that hypomnesis is constitutive of the very possibility of memory and thus humanity. Indeed, this distinction between anamnesis and hypomnesis authorizes Stiegler to explore how technogenesis precedes anthropogenesis, largely through the work of the French anthropologist Leroi-Gourhan and through Simondon. For Stiegler, hominization required the externalization of memory in tools—the spear that rests on the cave floor is a reminder of its prior uses in the hunt. If, as Stiegler argues, technicity was gradually folded into cognition, or, put differently, technicity made possible the interiority that we now define as cognition, then human memory has always been co-constituted with technics, Plato be damned.

In an interview, Stiegler comments on rhetoric more explicitly, and in mapping a triangular relationship between the sophists, Plato, and Aristotle, more clearly elucidates his own perspective on rhetoric:

¹ Stiegler, *Technics and Time, Vol. 1: The Fault of Epimetheus* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 16; quoting Aristotle, *Physics*, Book 2, I, 329 (Barnes trans., Princeton, 1984).

“I think today we have to do with contemporary hypomnemata, what Plato did with the hypomnemata of the Sophists. You have to know that Aristotle taught rhetoric in Plato's Lyceum. What is rhetoric? It was the Sophists' attention-harnessing technology. Aristotle said we have to study the techniques of the Sophists to make them noetic techniques rather than techniques of psycho-technical manipulation. So, we have to do things like that today in the field of education. This is why I'm interested in the works of Katherine Hayles, because she has ideas like this.”²

This excerpt is super bonkers for at least four reasons. First, it identifies rhetoric as the fundamental hypomnemata of the sophists; second, it appears to limit rhetoric to an attention-getting strategy; third, it suggests that rhetoric was “purified” by Aristotle away from mere manipulation; and, fourth, it suggests that contemporary attention-harnessing technologies might be similarly steered towards a grander ethico-political project that would yield noetic—thinking—beings rather than beings simply at the mercy of attention merchants.³ I'm going to suggest that there's as much to like here as there is not to like. Stiegler's connection between rhetoric and attention parallels recent efforts by Katherine Hayles, Richard Lanham, Thomas Rickert, Nathaniel Rivers, and myself to articulate the manifold connections between rhetoric and attention. So, we might say that he's on the right track even as he has a limited sense of rhetoric as attention-grabbing. What makes rhetoric an ethical art is that it not only harnesses attention, but contains the resources to transform attention patterns as well. This is Aristotle's cardinal achievement in rhetorical theory, and one that Thomas Farrell captured well in his claim that rhetoric is “corruptible, but correctable.” Rhetoric's capacity to enlarge one's imagination and educate our emotions is how Aristotle addresses Plato's critique that rhetoric invariably drives discourse toward the lowest common denominator. It may well be that Stiegler rejects a sophistic rhetoric in favor of an Aristotelian one without quite recognizing it; and, indeed, one future project is to trace the influence of Aristotelianism on Stiegler's thought, seeing Stiegler's political economy of care as an updated, grand ethico-political project capable of steering technics toward the noetic and away from the manipulative.

But let's not be too quick to rescue Stiegler's relationship to rhetoric by making him an Aristotelian in waiting, for his intimation that sophistic rhetoric is mere psycho-technical manipulation seems a category mistake that, especially in light of *our* reclamation of the sophists over the last three decades, seems problematic. I think it's fair to say that Stiegler is largely unaware of this reclamation, based largely on his continued reliance on Plato's conceptualization and dismissal of the sophists. Indeed, Nathan Van Camp frames Stiegler's treatment of the sophists in a longer intellectual lineage that isn't flattering:

“The exploitation of the current mnemotechnical system by cultural capitalism prevents this system from turning into a support for the transformation of attention into a critical faculty, but instead aims at controlling attention and keeping it in a state of docility. According to Stiegler, this regressive tendency elicits nothing less than the emergence of a new Enlightenment. If Plato opposed the sophists because they kept the Athenian civilians from thinking for themselves by

² Patrick Crogan, “Knowledge, Care, and Trans-Individuation: An Interview with Bernard Stiegler,” *Cultural Politics*, vol. 6, no. 2 (2010): <https://read.dukeupress.edu/cultural-politics/article/6/2/157/8016/Knowledge-Care-and-Trans-Individuation-An>

³ See Tim Wu, *The Attention Merchants: The Epic Scramble to Get Inside Our Heads* (New York: Knopf, 2016).

selling written copies of their speeches and Kant was critical of the church leaders because their dogmatic adherence to the written letter of the Bible detained Prussian citizens from attaining maturity, then the task of the *Aufklärer* of our hyper-industrial consumer society should be that of analyzing and criticizing the attention capturing technologies of the global cultural industries which aim at reducing the civilians of contemporary late-democratic societies to gregarious consumers.”⁴

And, just to pull the thread through Stiegler’s most recent work, *The Negentropocene*:

“The possibility of *de-noetization* is *constitutive* of noesis: it is the very ground upon which all noesis must be thought, and it is in this that it *first confronts itself* – in this *affront*. And hence it is that philosophy was born in struggling against sophistic stupidity – or against the sophistical exploitation of a certain stupidity inherent to badly cultivated *logos*.”⁵

This is a classic maneuver by Stiegler—one blunt, sweeping, unsubtle characterization of philosophy emergent from “sophistic stupidity” followed up by a more generous, focused critique of how some of the more unsavory logographers exploited stupidity by appealing to bad or unethical *logoi*. My suggestion is that we need to read Stiegler as critical of the sophistic-logographers that elevate money over ethics, but that his work is amenable to a more robust appreciation of the more theoretically-inclined sophists like Protagoras. In other words, Stiegler’s critique is of the sophists who act as attention merchants yoked to the dominant markets—the law courts—of the time.⁶ Stiegler’s antipathy toward market logics offers some insight into this distinction that I am trying to make. In one of the few other passages in *Technics and Time* where Stiegler mentions rhetoric, he notes: “Rhetoric and poetry are also techniques. And there is something of poetry and rhetoric in all language. Is not language itself, *qua* skill, a technique, and a potentially marketable commodity? The speech that presupposes a type of skill is productive even if speech is not the specialty of the person speaking: it produces enunciations. These can be marketed or not, as is the case for all products of a *tekhne*.”⁷ In this passage, we get a glimpse of Stiegler’s conceptual difficulty with rhetoric: Stiegler acknowledges rhetoric as a technic, but reduces it to technique rather than identifying it as a *tekhne*. There’s also material for a recuperative read here, inasmuch as Stiegler acknowledges that language is rhetorical. But more consequential for the point I’m making is that he uses rhetoric and poetics to speak to the commodification potential latent in all technics. Market logics constitute a dividing line between the technics we should want and the technics we shouldn’t.

While Stiegler follows Plato’s assassination of all things sophistic, assuming that the sophists cannot be disentangled from market logics, he could, instead, appreciate how sophistic attitudes enliven, as Nathan Crick puts it, “an experimental approach to things, people, events, and ideas that brings intellectual resources to bear on the means and ends of artistic production in order to

⁴ Nathan Van Camp, “From Biopower to Psychopower: Bernard Stiegler’s Pharmacology of Mnemotechnics,” *CTHEORY*, May 9, 2012, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/ctheory/article/view/14946/5842>

⁵ Bernard Stiegler, *The Negentropocene*, Open Humanities Press, 2018, p. 83-4.

⁶ In contrast to, perhaps, seeking to enlarge or diversify what Yves Citton calls the attention ecology, in *The Ecology of Attention* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2017). The theoretical sophists might be re-read as trying to cultivate robust and diverse attention ecologies, a task that seems essential to reclaim in the context of contemporary attention economics. This is a point I hope to elaborate in an expanded version of this paper.

⁷ Stiegler, *Technics and Time*, 1, p. 94.

generate new methods of invention necessary to master the contingencies of life and guide the flux of nature.”⁸ I don’t intend to rehearse the case for the sophists capably made by scholars like Susan Jarratt, John Poulakos, and, more recently, Johanna Hartelius, as the neo-sophistic turn is now firmly embedded in our disciplinary vocabulary.⁹ What I do want to highlight is that sophistic theories of rhetoric that are not captured by the *logos* or *telos* of the market are necessary to Stiegler’s project of inventing new worlds out of words. If language is rhetorical, as Stiegler concedes, then Stiegler needs a rhetorical theory to power his theory of cultural transformation, which presumes that we can invent new futures by throwing symbols together.¹⁰

Indeed, since the myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus that Protagoras tells in Plato’s *Protagoras* is central to Stiegler’s take on technics, there may be some reason to believe that rhetorical theory can be harmonized with Stiegler’s critical theory. It is difficult to underline just how central this myth is in Stiegler’s work: but the fact that *The Fault of Epimetheus* is the subtitle of *Technics and Time, Vol. 1* should make it fairly clear. Briefly, the account Protagoras gives of this myth is as follows: the Titan Epimetheus doles out qualities to all the animals, but forgets to give any to humans. Rather than let them exist as talentless sacks of bacteria roaming the countryside, Prometheus steals fire and “the creative genius of the arts” (*ten entekhnen sophia*) from the workshop of Hephaestus and Athena and gives them to humans. We as human beings are constituted by this combination of fire with the care and capacities of the arts. The lesson that Stiegler draws from this myth is that humans are prosthetic creatures—we are constituted by the things around us, many of which we have made or tended to, which orients us backward in time through a series of retentions and forward in time through a series of protentions, or anticipations of interacting with things in the future. Indeed, we are so co-constituted with our things that Stiegler is prepared to make *tekhne* and *logos* bedfellows in prosthetic projection:

“Man [sic] invents, discovers, finds (*eurisko*), imagines (*mêkhane*), and realizes what he imagines: prostheses, expedients. A prosthesis is what is placed in front, that is, what is outside, outside what it is placed in front of. However, if what is outside constitutes the very being of what it lies outside of, then this being is *outside itself*. The being of humankind is to be outside itself. In order to make up for the fault of Epimetheus, Prometheus gives humans the present of putting them outside themselves. Humankind, we might say, puts into effect what it imagines because it_{SEP} is endowed with reason, with *logos*—that is, also with language. Or should we rather say that it is because it realizes what it imagines—as we said a moment ago, because it lies outside itself—that humanity is endowed with reason, that is, with language? Is it *tekhne* that arises from *logos*, or the reverse? Or rather, is it not that *logos* and *tekhne* are modalities of the same being-outside-oneself?...[W]hereas animals are positively endowed with qualities, it is *tekhne* that forms the lot of humans, and *tekhne* is prosthetic; that is, it is entirely artifice.”¹¹

⁸ Nathan Crick, “The Sophistical Attitude and the Invention of Rhetoric,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96, no. 1 (2010): 25-45.

⁹ Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale, IL: SIU Press, 1998); John Poulakos, “Toward a Sophistic Definition of Rhetoric,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (1983): 35-48; E. Johanna Hartelius, “A Protagorean Analysis of the United Nations’ Global Pulse,” in eds. Michele Kennerly and Damien Smith Pfister, *Ancient Rhetorics and Digital Networks* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2018), 67-87.

¹⁰ A nod to the projected 4th volume of *Technics and Time*, tentatively subtitled *Symbols and Diabols*.

¹¹ Stiegler, *Technics and Time, 1*, 193.

Riffing off the entanglement of *logos* and *tekhne*, I'd like to suggest that Stiegler and Protagoras are thus quite a bit closer than Stiegler conveys in his work. Prometheus is often referred to as an arch-sophist in Greek drama (as in Aeschylus's *Prometheus Unbound*), and was recognized as the "embodiment of intelligence" by ancient Greek audiences.¹² And of course what he steals is "*ten entekhnen sophia*," the creative arts of genius, as Stiegler translates it.¹³ Of course, what is at stake in Plato's *Protagoras* is if Plato's contemporaries can rightly claim the mantle of *sophist* from their mytho-poetic antecedents like Prometheus. Do the sophists marry tools and intelligence, craft and wisdom, *pharmaka* and care? Plato's Protagoras makes an argument that they do, and the reason that they do is tied directly to rhetoric. Indeed, the very myth of Epimetheus and Prometheus that Stiegler identifies as so foundational for his work is told by Plato's Protagoras in response to Socrates' question about whether or not virtue can be taught by studying the sophists' art of rhetoric! And Plato's Protagoras goes on to detail how technics are crucial to the project of human community, which illuminates how sophistic thinking can flesh out Stiegler's own critical theory.

Briefly: in this part of the Great Speech, Protagoras spins out how humans have taken the twinned forces of fire and *technē* to build cities and social fabrics hospitable to scientific and cultural achievements. In answer to Socrates' charge that the sophists' rhetorical education cannot teach virtue, Protagoras argues that living in community with others creates the conditions for thinking about how to live more virtuously, and rhetoric is that art that shows us how to, as Josiah Ober says, "go on with others."¹⁴ One way to read the Great Speech, then, is to see Protagoras as using the myth of Prometheus to show how humans use technics in order to enhance their own rhetoricity, their own capacity for responsiveness that is necessary for the collective project of living together. If, following Crick instead, we see the sophists as experimenters with *logos*, especially with the plural *logoi* that new media technologies like writing make possible, then we can appreciate rhetoric as that very art that makes possible living in democratic community. We might further appreciate how media technologies make possible the scaling up to the size of the *polis* with writing, the nation-state with broadcast technologies, and the globe with internetnetworked media. Reading the second half of the Great Speech into Stiegler's larger political project, which calls for new modes of *philia* outside the marketized realm of social networking sites and attention merchants, highlights the necessity for rhetorical pedagogies to make people more rhetorical—more attuned to and responsive to their rhetorical ecologies. Rhetoric is the gateway to *philia*; put differently, to have *philia*, one must *be* rhetorical. Rhetoric is the only art that appreciates the ecology of relationality, the power of affectability and sensation, and the centrality of constantly making the strange familiar and the familiar strange.¹⁵ This is the deep insight that Protagoras mines in the latter part of the speech, but which is sealed off from Stiegler's arhetorical approach to technics.

While Stiegler is critical of the specifics of sophistic relations to *logos*, he actually endorses the larger interaction between the sophists and philosophers as generative of a productive analysis of

¹² Eric Havelock, *The Liberal Temper in Greek Politics* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 64.

¹³ "*Sophia* and *tekhne* are nothing without fire," Stiegler says, in *Technics and Time, Vol. 1*, 194, which means there has to be a John Durham Peters fire sermon tie in somewhere here!

¹⁴ *Athenian Legacies: Essays on the Politics of Going on Together* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005).

¹⁵ I'm clearly riffing off Diane Davis, Jenny Rice, and Debbie Hawhee here and need to expand this bit more.

power, which is why I think that ultimately the Stiegler's work can be reconciled with rhetorical theory. Variants of the following passage appear across a range of Stiegler's work:

“We have been living, since Greece, in the critical era of the relation to language that gave rise to logic, philosophy, science, etc.—as well as to great historical and political crises. What happens first with the analog and, now, with the analogico-digital is of the same order. There is a great crisis, a generalized questioning, comparable to what had taken place in Greece with respect to language (of which sophistry and the philosophical response to it are epistemic consequences). From this crisis was born a critique, an extremely dynamic power of analysis, which had troubled the historical present by exposing it to the night of its past, which had literally been preserved, and brought to lucidity, a new kind of light, an *Aufklärung*, so to speak. We ought not forget that this epoch was also afraid of writing.”¹⁶

New media technologies—of which alphabetic literacy is the earliest—destabilize traditional ways of thinking. They introduce a “great crisis” and “generalized questioning” about *nomos* and *physis*, about the depths and limits of human knowledge, about epistemologies and ontologies. Stiegler identifies this “generalized questioning” as producing powerful analytical tools for understanding culture. The key to this generalized questioning is grammatization, which opens up new modes of analysis (and control). Writing materialized speech, made it visible and durable, which allows for the development of logic, history, science as we know them. In the passage directly above, Stiegler is referring to how the growth of the analogico-digital image is similarly grammatizing images, moving audiences from a position of synthesis (“this image is real”) to a position of analysis (“is this image real?”)¹⁷ Stiegler sees Aristotle as turning the sophists’ attention-getting art of rhetoric toward more noetic purposes, and the reason this is so is because Aristotle *democratizes the art of rhetoric by identifying and naming the grammar of rhetoric*.¹⁸ In systematically naming the constitutive parts of rhetoric—the parts of a speech, the kinds of proofs, the types of audiences, the ways of moving audiences, the mechanics of style and delivery—Aristotle makes the grammar of rhetoric more accessible (perhaps not to the Athenians, class-stratified as they were, but to all subsequent generations of students). In other words, Aristotle demystifies the sophistic art of rhetoric by expanding students’ theoretical repertoire regarding this art. Anyone can read Aristotle and understand the fundamentals of the art of rhetoric. The same cannot be said for the earlier sophists (and Isocrates), who tended to perform rather than theorize their art (at least in the extant writings that we have). This, I suspect, is why Stiegler finds it necessary to “purify” the sophists’ rhetoric through Aristotle. The grammatization that accompanies new media technologies are initially controlled by authorities, who try to naturalize their command of a new technic, in order to make those new technologies serve justice rather than power requires democratic access to them, which is exactly what Aristotle provides.

¹⁶ Bernard Stiegler, “The Discrete Image,” in trans. Jennifer Bajorek, *Echographies of Television* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2002), 160; for comparable passages, see Bernard Stiegler, “The Carnival of the New Screen: From Hegemony to Isonomy,” *The YouTube Reader*, p. 44-46; Pieter Lemmens, “‘This System Does Not Produce Pleasure Anymore’: An Interview with Bernard Stiegler,” *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* vol. 30, no. 1 (2011), 37-8.

¹⁷ Damien Smith Pfister and Carly S. Woods, “The Unnaturalistic Enthymeme: Figuration, Interpretation, and Critique after Digital Mediation,” *Argumentation and Advocacy* vol. 52, no. 2 (2016): 236-53.

¹⁸ Following Ehninger’s identification of classical rhetoric as essentially “grammatical” in orientation; Douglas Ehninger, “On Systems of Rhetoric,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (1968): 131-144.

The final move that I want to make here is to identify rhetoric as *the* architechnic, the original—or, better, foundational—technic. Now, obviously, there is a host of technics that precede rhetoric: cave paintings, songs, spears, pottery. However, these technics are not theorized as technics before Plato’s textual instantiation of them (yes—Plato’s separation of technics and epistemics is a technical marvel!) In other words, technics *qua* technics are born at the point that epistemics emerges as an ostensibly non-technical way of knowing and being.¹⁹ Technics and epistemics are co-constituted. Moreover, *rhetoric* specifically is that technic that is identified as the quintessential example of what Plato’s epistemics oppose. Plato does not juxtapose his own epistemology with the spear, or with cave painting—he contrasts it with rhetoric. In order to develop what he believed to be a non-technical means of acquiring knowledge, Plato had to repress technics; rhetoric was the first casualty of this repression, and Stiegler’s re-repression of rhetoric further conceals it as the architechnic.

“Arche-” orients us to origins, to the “first,” “to begin, begin from or with,” but etymologically it also means to “govern, rule over, be leader of.” Rhetoric the architechnic governs all other technics. I’m of course still trying to develop this argument, so am looking forward to your feedback here, but I’m trying to think of this as, among other things, a more posthumanist version of McKeon’s argument that rhetoric is architectonic.²⁰ If rhetoric is the architechnic, then it follows that all technics are rhetorical—by which I mean that all technics shape attention. Politics, piloting, algorithms, tips and tricks, computers, bikes: all shape how bodies attend. Spears, chairs, language, presentations, love: all shape how bodies relate. Tweets, desks, advice, argument, cars: all shape how bodies affect together. The expansion of rhetorical hermeneutics—seeing everything from science to everyday things as rhetorical—is indicative of rhetoric’s architechnicity. We see rhetoric everywhere because it is everywhere foundational to technics.

Let me elaborate three implications of rhetoric’s architechnicity for Stiegler’s critical theory of digital culture and for the technics turn more broadly. First, if we acknowledge rhetoric’s architechnicity, then the theories and critical methods we have developed for rhetoric can be put to use in mapping how technics shape horizons of possibility. In other words, rhetorical criticism provides a template for thinking about the criticism of all technics, and rhetorical theory provides a way of sketching relationships between technicity, the subject, and culture. Both are necessary for a robust critical theory of digital culture, and both are on display in Boyle and Barnett’s *Rhetoric, Through Everyday Things*. Such a marriage of technics with rhetorical theories and methods might open up alternative ways of thinking about digital culture that move beyond cybernetics, information theory, and technoliberalism. Second, if Stiegler were to see rhetoric as squarely at the center of any critical theory of digital culture, then the resources that he would have to animate his affirmative project would multiply. For example, many of the ancient values of rhetoric, grounded in sophistic thinking, are necessary antidotes to the dominant political economy of digitality today. As opposed to the dominant attention regime’s fetishization of calculation, we might position the sophistic defense of play and experimentation; against the dominant attention regime’s emphasis on *machina mensura*, we might revisit Protagoras’ *homo mensura* fragment; against the dominant attention regime’s embrace of seamlessness, we might

¹⁹ We might think about the technics-epistemics pairing as a Burkean dialectic, co-constituted by each other.

²⁰ See here a draft paper by Pete Simonson, in progress, on McKeon as a bridge from a humanist to a posthumanist rhetoric.

organize public culture around the enduring value of useful frictions. Stiegler's goal is to reconstruct that other world we've been hearing is possible since the 1990s, and my point is that to do so will always move one back toward the values that are associated with rhetoricity—because rhetoric is the architechnic. Finally, rhetoricity is the key to advancing Stiegler's political economy of care. Plato's Socrates pursues a care of the self that is rooted in the false hunt for authenticity, and, while Stiegler tries to escape this orbit, he has yet to discover another orbit to fall into. What if, instead of authenticity, we centered rhetoricity as the ultimate value not just for individual subjects, but for culture *writ* large? To develop a political economy centered on care requires that we pursue the capacity to affect and be affected; to cultivate response-ability alongside responsiveness; in other words, to pursue rhetoric in the largest sense of the wor(l)d.

The remaining three papers evidence the potential of the technics turn in rhetorical studies. While their papers center Stiegler's work, we hope you'll see them as representative as a broader turn toward technics capable of sustaining rhetoric's ongoing reinvigoration.

First, Nicole Allen, soon to be of Utah State University, will present "Temporal Technicity and Rhetoric." Second, Jon Carter, of Eastern Michigan University, will present "Transindividuating Nodes: Technics as Rhetorical Organizers of Networks." Finally, John Tinnell of the University of Colorado-Denver will present "Deliberations on Automation."