



Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse: A Cross-Historical Study

Ben McCorkle

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According to Ben McCorkle, the rhetorical canon of delivery—traditionally seen as the aspect of oratory pertaining to vocal tone, inflection, and physical gesture—has undergone a period of renewal within the last few decades to include the array of typefaces, color palettes, graphics, and other design elements used to convey a message to a chosen audience. McCorkle posits that this redefinition, while a noteworthy moment of modern rhetorical theory, is just the latest instance in a historical pattern of interaction between rhetoric and technology. In *Rhetorical*

Delivery as Technological Discourse: A Cross-Historical Study, McCorkle explores the symbiotic relationship between delivery and technologies of writing and communication. Aiming to enhance historical understanding by demonstrating how changes in writing technology have altered our conception of delivery, McCorkle reveals the ways in which oratory and the tools of written expression have directly affected one another throughout the ages.


To make his argument, the author examines case studies from significant historical moments in the Western rhetorical tradition. Beginning with the ancient Greeks, McCorkle illustrates how the increasingly literate Greeks developed rhetorical theories intended for oratory that incorporated “writerly” tendencies, diminishing delivery’s once-prime status in the process. Also explored is the near-eradication of rhetorical delivery in the mid-fifteenth century—the period of transition from late manuscript to early print culture—and the implications of the burgeoning

print culture during the nineteenth century.

McCorkle then investigates the declining interest in delivery as technology designed to replace the human voice and gesture became prominent at the beginning of the 1900s. Situating scholarship on delivery within a broader postmodern structure, he moves on to a discussion of the characteristics of contemporary hypertextual and digital communication and its role in reviving the canon, while also anticipating the future of communication technologies, the likely shifts in attitude toward delivery, and the implications of both on the future of teaching rhetoric.

Rhetorical Delivery as Technological Discourse traces a long-view perspective of rhetorical history to present readers a productive reading of the volatile treatment of delivery alongside the parallel history of writing and communication technologies. This rereading will expand knowledge of the canon by not only

offering the most thorough treatment of the history of rhetorical delivery available but also inviting conversation about the reciprocal impacts of rhetorical theory and written communication on each other throughout this history.

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