ABSTRACT

DIGHTON, DESIREE. Encountering Gentrification: Affordances of a Feminist Approach to Rhetorical Circulation and Twitter Data Studies. (Under the direction of Dr. David Rieder and Dr. Helen Burgess).

Encountering Gentrification: Affordances of a Feminist Approach to Rhetorical Circulation and Twitter Data Studies develops an in situ approach for studying everyday rhetorical exchanges as they assemble, interact, transform, and move through digital and physical environments. Focusing on viral activity and smaller, situated encounters in and beyond a social media platform, this approach utilizes a large Twitter data collection, visualization applications, and grounded theory to locate unfolding rhetorical encounters that occur around shared interests rather than unified and stable hashtags or images. This approach extends theoretical insights by Laurie Gries, Sara Ahmed, and Gerald Hauser who call for attending to rhetoric’s movement, transformation, and consequences in social scenes and encounters. By incorporating new materialism philosophies and feminist technology studies, this dissertation examines and traces social scenes and encounters partly through accounting for multiple materialities, like Twitter users, activists, technologies, visual expressions, affects, and geographical places. To enact this approach, I offer a feminist rhetorical methodology for social media data studies and practice its principles on a Twitter data collection of approximately 2,000,000 tweets and associated metadata collected using the keyword, “gentrification.” The resulting two-part case study of anti-gentrification rhetorical circulation on Twitter 1) attends to the viral movements of ad hoc anti-gentrification encounters and 2) examines smaller data to develop a more situated study related to the grassroots anti-gentrification coalition, Defend Boyle Heights (@DefendBoyleHts). By doing so, I find that comparative studies of large-scale data collections aimed at locating encounters amplify perspectives of ordinary people who create, transform, and circulate rhetoric.
to challenge dominant views of socio-political phenomena, recast historical narratives of “heroes” and “villains,” and remap power structures organizing the culture and spaces of gentrification. This approach enables us to bear witness to polyvocal perspectives that have the potential to disrupt and transform knowledge and practices related to both data and sociopolitical issues like gentrification. The implications of this study and its methodology of locating rhetorical encounters suggest future potentials for critical rhetoric, rhetorical field methods, and the growing body of work that reinvigorates the rhetorical canons in light of the digital. This dissertation concludes by suggesting how feminist rhetorical methodologies for social media data research could improve undergraduate education in rhetorical circulation, data literacy, and studies of activism by integrating inventive computational data methods and projects into rhetoric and writing studies.
Encountering Gentrification: Affordances of a Feminist Approach to Rhetorical Circulation and Twitter Data Studies

by
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BIOGRAPHY

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Preface

My first encounter with gentrification began a few days before Thanksgiving in 2014, when a neighbor posted a message on Nextdoor, a popular social networking platform. The neighbor, a long-time resident of downtown Raleigh, North Carolina, was writing to express her outrage and fear: she and her mother, along with all the other residents living in duplexes that bordered my own backyard, were being evicted, not due to violations they’d incurred, but because the property had been sold to a developer. Over the next month, the $600-a-month duplexes were gradually emptied, and the residents who had lived there for decades, some dependent on nearby public transportation and other walkable resources, scrambled to find housing and, eventually, left the neighborhood. Subsequently, one morning, I awoke to a rumble and then the crackle of breaking boards. Just over my fence, a bulldozer wiped away the last trace of “Tiny Town,” as it was called. Soon after, large-scale luxury homes appeared in Tiny Town’s place: the suburbs had been dropped down in the urban core. A new sign went up: Oakdale at Mordecai, a new name to cement the erasure of “Tiny Town,” one parlaying off of the prestige and demand for the neighboring historic district. The new homes started in the mid-$500,000 and climbed to $800,000, a sizeable jump from the $400,000 homes they’d initially proposed for the newly zoned residential infill. Despite this drastic rise in price, before one home was completely built half of the new homes were sold, and months later all of the remaining properties belonged to new residents.

With these housing and population changes, local businesses began to close and more expensive restaurants and boutiques took their place. A beauty salon for women of color was replaced by a craft beer bar, the second in a five-block radius, and perhaps the tenth drinking establishment in the same area, catering to younger, more affluent, predominantly white
newcomers. As tax values increased, middle-class homeowners like me felt the pressures of gentrification too, and after months of financial struggle and efforts to make it work, my family and I gave in, sold our home, and moved to a more affordable area. For me, encountering gentrification caused an affective response—sadness for the loss of long-time residents and my own relocation, shock at the rapid change in the neighborhood, and the desire to better understand the history and present manifestation of housing inequality. Encountering gentrification also influenced me to make an uncomfortable and unwanted choice—to sell our home, leave our community, and start over again somewhere else. My encounter with gentrification, the costs and rewards to me, however, are a jumbled flux. I’m protected from the most harmful affects of gentrification by my status as a homeowner and my middle-class resources, statuses earned, in no small part, due to my privileged skin color, my belonging with whiteness.

Whatever emotional, social, and logistical losses I felt were minor compared to those who were forced to leave their homes, their neighborhoods, and their access to social and material resources. I also know that, while gentrification has affected me negatively, I’ve also participated in advancing it. For instance, I often patronized the new establishments catering to preferences and tastes I often shared with newcomers—the new boutiques, cocktail bars, and fine-dining restaurants. Furthermore, even though I would’ve rather stayed in my home and downtown neighborhood, I profited by owning and then selling a house that had increased in value due to increasing demand for housing in this newly desirable neighborhood. These positionalities and situated experiences, of course, affect my dissertation research and perspective on gentrification. While I undertake this work as both a scholarly and a political project and while my stance on gentrification is not neutral but allied with anti-gentrification
activism, my positionality is also shaped by relative privilege and distance from gentrification’s most harmful effects. I acknowledge this difference and realize that my intentions and rigorous efforts towards examining and challenging dominant power structures in the “overlapping, counterintuitive, veiled, and highly complex webs of relationships” does not mean that this work is infallible or without “perspectival limitations” (Middleton et al, 2011, p. 401).

When I use the term, encountering, throughout this dissertation, I’m referring, and in part examining, the “complex webs of relationships” involved in gentrification. Specifically, in this dissertation seeks to locate gentrification encounters: traces of social, economic, political, historical, cultural, and emotional interactions circulating through materialities like media, built environments, lived experiences, and narratives. We live in a time of unprecedented urban growth and global, digital connectivity. On one hand, we create and post our own media and images that carry perspectives and narrative fragments that can be circulated across vast social networks, times, and situations. These circulations may gather together other people, technologies, and media in ongoing encounters and generate numerous and varied potential consequences. On the other hand, we are increasingly separated by social and economic disparities, racial tensions, and structures—such as housing configurations and algorithms—that partly determine, and sometimes manipulate, what is circulated and how it is encountered. To wrestle with these materialities, possibilities, limitations, and entanglements, is to examine power structures and, also, to attempt to understand circulation.

In 2015, when I entered North Carolina State University as a Ph.D. student in Communication, Rhetoric, and Digital Media, I was interested in identifying frameworks for studying rhetoric and writing as they intersected with social media and for using those frameworks to better understand the consequences of the writing and rhetoric circulating in those
digital networks. Before entering the Ph.D. program, I’d taught undergraduate writing courses at Shaw University for five years and developed, along with students, a participatory Instagram campus history project. From this experience, I knew that composing and circulating images and texts through social networks online and in situated physical and social contexts could reshape narratives and challenge stereotypes, in this case, those held by students, the campus community, and the larger social field that encountered this project. I also knew that crafting these Instagram narratives, both collaboratively and individually, had the potential to collectivize publics who might communicate and act to advance shared goals and affect material change, such as reviving student activist groups like Shaw’s Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, and improving dorm-life conditions. Over the years between this project and completing my Ph.D. program, however, the optimism and positivity surrounding social media’s potential, for me and for many in our society more broadly, has waned and often morphed into doubt, skepticism, and, for some, vilification. This transformation followed numerous controversies and scandals related to, among other concerns, data privacy, election tampering, and filter bubbles. Such controversies have sparked important public and scholarly engagements, like efforts to understand how fake news circulates, how algorithms reinforce racial bias, and how encounters in social networks influences our beliefs and practices in our offline lives.

As our collective mood towards social media understandably shifts and we increasingly develop studies aimed at understanding its harms, we should also continue to study and understand social media’s positive potentials. Feminist philosophies teach us to hold both sides in our hands and to examine where their boundaries defy categorization. Patricia Hill Collins (2016) states that “relationality” is one of six core ideas that shape feminist intersectional theory and methodologies: “Relational thinking rejects either/or binary thinking, for example, opposing
theory to practice, scholarship to activism, or blacks to whites. Instead, relationality embraces a both/and frame. The focus of relationality shifts from analyzing what distinguishes entities, for example, the differences between race and gender, to examining their interconnections” (28).

Just as my own experiences push me to think about the complexities of my participation in and resistance to gentrification, this both/and frame opens up “intellectual and political possibilities.”

For me, one of these possibilities has been to formulate a study of anti-gentrification rhetorical circulation that attempts to account for power and agency through relational thinking. Consequently, this work shows, in part, that the same technologies and practices that allow fake news to skitter from Twitter feed to Twitter feed also afford positive potentials for encounters that advance social justice and activism. If we only attempt to account for the harms, while forsaking the positive potentials, we risk forming knowledge that is binary and reductive. This one-sided perspective could influence restrictions that limit nefarious forces both/and hamstring activism and ordinary, everyday encounters that might accrue and generate positive social, political, and cultural transformation.

A frequent proponent of increased government regulations of social media platforms, Zeynep Tufekci also acknowledges, “[s]ocial media have greatly empowered protesters in three key areas: public attention, evading censorship, and coordination or logistics. Old forms of gatekeeping, which depended on choke point access control to few broadcast outlets, neither work as effectively nor in the same way as they did in the past” (p. 2). Tufekci’s quote not only speaks to the positive potential of social media for activists, it articulates social media’s importance to studies of rhetorical circulation. Social media platforms, unlike media outlets of the past, do not operate through traditional publishing business gatekeeping structures like editors, publishers, photographers, and writers. Although the temptation, and indeed the rhetoric,
surrounding social media has tended to describe it as “free and open,” akin to a democratically equal field of citizen media producers, distributors, and consumers, we now know that social networks are not democratic utopias. Like other configurations of human existence, online social networks are flawed social fields structured through power systems, and yet these networks are organized in new ways, producing access limitations, algorithmic logics, and attention economies, among other consequences that merit scholarly and political attention. Despite the reality that social media is no utopia, that its consequences are, at times, harmful, we should continue to develop studies to understand rhetorical circulation on social media in all its flux and complexity. By attending to these social media’s competing movements and values, we not only improve our theories and methodologies but, also, our knowledge of the powers that structure daily life.

As the dissertation project described in subsequent chapters demonstrates, feminist and rhetorical understandings also provide frameworks of “situatedness” that inform critical methodologies for big social media data research. Rather than the empirical approach to data studies increasingly taken across disciplines, data can and should be studied as “partial, situated and contextual” (Leurs, p. 134) circulating in a “wider sphere of active, historical and lived processes” (Edbauer, p. 8). As such, social media platforms are important and unique sites, especially for studies of vernacular rhetoric--the fragments of narratives and partial perspectives of ordinary people challenging power structures and dominant narratives (Hauser, 2009; 2011). Feminisms, like studies of vernacular rhetoric, often endeavor to work from non-dominant perspectives that are ignored or under-represented in other media. As such, social media is a valuable field site to access marginalized perspectives and communications around issues that
are not often given voice in our mainstream public spheres (Steinert-Threlkeld et al, 2015; Tufekci, 2014).

In the gentrification scene I described at the beginning of this preface, the social networking platform Nextdoor was used by a local resident to voice and circulate her perspective and experience related to being evicted and displaced from her home. Outside of this neighbor’s social media post, a local independent newspaper, The Indy Weekly, ran a few stories related to the demolition of Tiny Town and the displacement of its residents. Encounters with gentrification that include the perspective of the gentrified, like this one, rarely circulate in national news stories, and, at the date of this writing, gentrification resistance and activism has not collectivized into a unified, massive global social movement, the likes of which might attach to a hashtag and perhaps gain mainstream attention. Stimpson (2016), in her own dissertation project that focuses on gentrification rhetoric, states, “[o]nce reviled and resisted, mainstream perceptions of gentrification have shifted quite significantly since it was first studied in the 1960s. Several scholars have started to explore the ways in which gentrification has come to be an accepted form of urban development in academic and public discourses” (p. 15). Following Tom Slater, a long-time urban studies scholar, Stimpson goes on to observe that “[a]cademic studies that have been most cited in the popular press deny displacement as a problem of gentrification and suggest gentrification is a common good. Such studies are taken up and help legitimate and naturalize gentrification” (p. 15). Other urban scholars and historians (Gregory, 1999; Hyra, 2017; Muhammad, 2011; Zukin, 2008, among many others) point out that narratives of the city circulate through the press, scientific literature, and popular culture continue to influence the policies and public opinions that shape cities and racially segregate people. These narratives and visions contributed to the “white flight” of the 1950s and 1960s,
subsequent disinvestment/ghettoization of urban cores, and the revitalization campaigns of the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Presently, visions of urban living circulating in city planning and real estate advertisements often urge potential newcomers to take advantage of the dwindling opportunities and become part of the urban return. Oakdale at Mordecai is not the only new development in the neighborhood. Months before the demolition of “Tiny Town”, ground was broken on a newly branded neighborhood called Oakwood North. As KB Homes, developers of Oakwood North, state in a press release and marketing flier, new residents are “enthusiastic about a highly desirable location surrounded by historic neighborhoods in the heart of downtown Raleigh, as well as the attractive design of its new homes which offer floor plans that can be customized to each buyer's tastes and preferences” (November, 2014). In many ways, understanding gentrification’s circulation is fundamentally a project of visual rhetoric, tied to visions of city and self. While there have been valuable studies of gentrification rhetoric circulating in the mainstream press and by city planners and developers, social media has yet to be undertaken as a field site of anti-gentrification activism. As gentrification has become an urgent concern across the globe and as other kinds of activism have found a valuable ally in social media, organized anti-gentrification and ad hoc activism encounters circulate on social media and through lived experiences in situated locations. For many, these communications are urgently expressed, as they see their surroundings, their neighbors, and their very homes and bodies increasingly erased from the urban landscape.

Social media studies of rhetoric necessitate rethinking and thinking anew about our theories and methodologies, both for understanding this rhetoric and for working with data and the computational tools that accompany data collection and analysis. By doing so, the field of rhetoric will be enriched and brought to bear on some of the most pressing social and
technological issues of our day. Likewise, social media data studies provide opportunity for “examining intersecting power relations in context” and in their relationality (Hill Collins, 2016, p. 29). At the center of my dissertation, I locate encounters that generate and circulate anti-gentrification rhetoric, rhetoric that is inseparable from considerations of affect, symbolic representations, and embodiment. These avenues, mediums, and encounters structure rhetorical circulations that combat and illuminate racialized aesthetics, patterns of consumption, and alternative narratives and perspectives on gentrification. In her recent book, Democracy’s Lot: Rhetoric, Publics, and The Places of Invention, Candice Rai states that encountering gentrification makes “‘diversities’ visible to the eye—in the form of architecture, aesthetics, and bodily and spatial markers of race and class” (p. 3). And yet, that visibility may last only as long as it takes to displace and replace the existing culture, residents, and built environments. Locating anti-gentrification encounters through social media data, in part, helps to keep these diversities visible.
Chapter 1

Materializing the Social Media Turn in Rhetoric and Writing Studies

Writing involves everything you do, everything you encounter, everything you are when making sense of the world through language. Writing is contaminated, made possible by a mingling of forces and energies in diverse, often distributed environments. Writing is defined, ultimately, by its radical *withness*.


Over the last twenty years, partly due to the rising popularity of participatory digital technologies and the influences of actor-network and affect theories, rhetoric and writing studies have increasingly paid scholarly attention to rhetorical circulation and its relationship to materiality. Thematically, this has manifested in a wide range of topics, but attention to circulation frequently involves adopting a “new materialist” orientation. New materialism in rhetorical studies of circulation have largely retained rhetoric’s concern with materiality, but conceived of materiality more expansively—not only in association with the tactile and visual but also the digital and even the unseen, from emotions to algorithms. New materialism nudges rhetoric beyond human-centric notions of persuasion and beyond discrete moments and texts; it asks us to account for and reassemble human and nonhuman rhetorical encounters across multiple temporal movements to more thoroughly conceptualize rhetoric and its consequences. Understandably, this presents methodological challenges to rhetoric and writing studies. New materialist rhetorical studies often limit, or resist entirely, interpretation or close reading; instead, new materialism often uses description along with various forms of “tracing” or “mapping” to locate various encounters between temporalities, objects, bodies, and affects, among other “things”. Increasingly, aspects unique to digital communication, even the unseen technological
infrastructures like platforms and software programs, have become an important consideration in rhetorical circulation studies that examine these digital actors’ roles in the shape, distribution, and transformation of rhetoric.

This dissertation project takes a new materialist approach to big social media data study of the rhetoric of gentrification circulating on Twitter, particularly connecting to new materialism’s origination in feminist technology studies (Reichert and Richterich, 2015). In part, feminisms ask us to resist binarizing digital and material, human and nonhuman, and to, instead, think relationally (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016), while also honoring, if not subjectivity, “situated knowledge” (Haraway, 1988). In rhetoric and writing studies, new materialist studies strive to account for human action and symbolic communication, the traditional artifacts and concerns of rhetoric and writing studies, in relation to more distributed and amorphous “co-evolving environments” (Syverson, 1999). Considering co-evolving environments in big social media data studies necessitates, among other concerns, accounting for computational tools, software, and visualization necessary to “read” data and examining social media’s role in shaping rhetorical encounters and the subsequently generated data. In addition to contributing to new materialist rhetorical and writing studies theories and methodologies, big social media data studies, like the one outlined in the following chapters, provide rhetoric and writing studies new entry into contemporary, unfolding social, cultural, and political issues vital to our understanding of, and participation in, nation and citizenship. Just as importantly, focusing on the rhetoricity and materiality of social media, data analysis, and visualization can contribute much needed skepticism and nuance to the rush and hype around the use of data, enthusiasm that often results in uncritical perspectives and consumption of data-enhanced visualizations, projects, and scholarship.
To provide an understanding of rhetorical circulation’s relationship to (new) materialism and its implications for the methodology I offer for the rhetorical study of big social media data, this chapter identifies disciplinary shifts in rhetorical theories and studies of circulation, particularly as they have evolved along with communication technologies. This chapter specifically focuses on how circulation theories and methodologies arising from rhetorical study influenced interdisciplinary study related to visual culture and public sphere theory. In rhetoric and writing studies, attention to circulation has influenced new understandings of the rhetorical situation and rhetorical force and agency. Through these and other shifts, new materialism urges rhetorical studies to consider rhetoric beyond human-centric models of symbolic persuasion to more distributed, fragmented, encountered, and ongoing processes that transform not just ideas but “beingness.” To provide a lens by which to frame this dissertation project, I center my review on scholarship involving how circulation studies’ origin in visual rhetoric and print artifacts has broadened to consider non-print contexts and artifacts. Despite changes in the objects under investigation, these studies have retained an emphasis on circulation being a rhetorical process of transformation and movement, a process by which rhetoric’s materiality impacts everyday lived experience and social practices that structure civic life. This chapter then concludes by reflecting on the need for methodological shifts in future rhetorical studies of circulation. Specifically, I argue that we can enhance our understanding of circulation through big social media data studies. Theories and methodologies built around critical rhetorical and technological engagements with big social media data provide for deeper attention to rhetorical circulation’s connection to the materialities of the digital both/and the digital’s connection to bodies and spaces.
Rather than viewing the digital and physical as separate realms or “rhetorical situations,” the social media data study I’ve developed in this dissertation attempts to account for rhetoric’s circulation in digital and physical embodied spaces as part of distributed rhetorical co-evolving environments connected, at times, by technologies and shared interest. In order to account for circulation’s rhetorical force and its impact on public attitudes, social relations, and actions, I argue we need to continue to explore and question the borders assumed between new materialism and rhetoric and the distinctions made between digital, physical, and embodied rhetorics; to embrace macro and micro approaches to the study of circulation, including rhetorical studies of large-scale data; and to visualize rhetorical circulation as more than its movement and flow but also to locate moments of “stickiness” that bind communities, tracing this smaller, perhaps “slower” circulation. Taking such an approach necessitates developing new methodologies, like the one I formulate in Chapter Two. I apply the theoretically informed macroanalytic approach of this methodology in Chapter Three’s large-scale social media data analysis of gentrification rhetoric on Twitter. In Chapter Four, I show how rhetorically analyzing and digitally visualizing a small subset of this data can provide complementary perspectives on gentrification rhetoric’s circulation not just on Twitter but within particular communities and locations. Delving into social media data analysis deepens our rhetorical circulation theories and methodologies by beginning to account for social media’s complex materialities and consequences. As we are only beginning to glean, social media shapes many aspects of public life. This dissertation project will demonstrate that accounting for rhetorical encounters in this space can provide insight into rhetorical studies of social movements and allow rhetoric and writing studies increased opportunities to not only produce research around political and social disruption, but perhaps even participate in these rhetorical interventions. These disciplinary considerations and
implications are largely taken up in the concluding chapter of this dissertation, along with considering some of the ethical approaches we must develop in order to work with social media data, especially if we take a critical rhetoric (CR) and even participatory approach.

**The Exigency of Gentrification**

Since 2008, many people in the world now live in cities that are quickly becoming “megacities;” Globally, we are experiencing rapid, intense urbanization that also exacerbates social and economic inequality (Lees, et al, 2016). In the U.S., existing wealth disparity, especially since the Great Recession, “has widened along racial and ethnic lines,” (“Wealth inequality has widened...,” Dec. 12, 2014, n.p.). Consequently, gentrification is an increasingly pressing concern across disciplines and the broader public. “Gentrification” is a term originally created by sociologist Ruth Glass (1964) to articulate the spatial change she observed in several working-class London neighborhoods from the 1930s through the 1960s. This spatial change, Glass notes, involves wealthier populations moving in and ultimately displacing the culture and, eventually, the residents who historically existed in these neighborhoods. Glass further observes, “[o]nce the process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the original working class occupiers are displaced and the social character of the district is changed” (p. xviii-xix). Since Glass’s observation, physical and cultural displacement continue to be gentrification’s greatest perceived danger, what Glass originally observed as the middle-class “invasion” and subsequent displacement of working-class London. Regardless of our various investments in, and understandings of, gentrification, the way cities develop, and the bodies and cultures that, resultantly, are or are not displaced, have wide-reaching social and economic consequences. Some of these consequences are already unfolding in monumental rental market
crises, lack of affordable housing, billions of government dollars needed for subsidized housing, and increased race/class tensions and violence (Desmond, 2012; Hyra, 2015; Pattillo, & Brown-Saracino, 2013).

Academically, urban studies and geography are most associated with the study of gentrification, and, increasingly, studies have involved discourse, communication, and rhetoric (especially notable examples include Bridge, 2014; Lees, 2000; Slater, 2002; Smith, 2005; Wilson and Grammanos, 2005). As urban studies and geography have undergone a rhetorical turn, writing and rhetorical studies have experienced their own urban materialist turn, including various volumes of *Urban Communication* (2007, 2010, 2013) and, increasingly, book-length studies of gentrification by rhetoric scholars (notably, Rai, *Democracy’s Lot*, 2016; Rice, *Distant Publics*, 2012; Stimpson, *Gentrification by Design*, 2016). Increasingly, general audience non-fiction explores and documents the current gentrification crises, especially in relation to histories of race and class oppression that continue to structure law, housing, neighborhoods, and society. (notably *Evicted*, Desmond, 2016; *The New Urban Crisis*, Florida, 2017; *How to Kill a City*, Moskowitz, 2017; *The Color of Law*, Rothstein, 2017). As many of these studies note, gentrification, as process and experience, varies, perhaps shaped by location, particular local histories, and present local economies. Despite these differences, gentrification research often focuses on common causal factors and the social, economic, and cultural consequences of displacement. Besides the physical loss of one’s personal home and community, displacement contributes to a wide range of other negative consequences for individuals and society, including widening social and economic inequality, racially re-segregating spatial patterns, homogenizing culture and space in accordance with white racial norms and preferences, and contributing to the neoliberal takeover of the State (see Smith, 2002, 2005; Zuk et al, 2015; Zukin, 1987; among
others). Among other considerations, this scholarship emphasizes gentrification beyond a spatial process, noting that people may lose their cultural “place” in gentrifying spaces even before losing homes and being physically displaced.

In the first urban studies textbook devoted solely to gentrification, Lees and Wiley (2008) include cultural and physical displacement as part of the definition of gentrification, a definition that also emphasizes the political: “We argue strongly that the term ‘gentrification’ is one of the most political terms in urban studies (implying, by definition, class-based displacement) and to lose the terms would be to lose the politics and purchase of the term” (p. xxii). For Lees and Wiley, gentrification is synonymous with displacement: “Gentrification for us, like for Zukin (2010), is a displacement process, where wealthier people displace poorer people, and diversity is replaced by social and cultural homogeneity” (p. 9). Along with Lees, critical race theorists, economists, and historians point out that process of urban change is not neutral or colorblind but, historically and contemporaneously, undergirded by racially-biased ideologies (Allen, 2001; Muhammad, 2010). Although many of us might acknowledge racially-biased ideologies have shaped housing in the past through practices like redlining and discriminatory lending, as Stimpson (2016) observes, rarely, do as many acknowledge how these histories continue to shape present urban redevelopment. Twitter, as a field site, provides for the in situ study of gentrification rhetoric study. Extant scholarship in urban studies and in rhetoric and writing studies, for the most part, examine gentrification rhetoric in hindsight. While there are benefits to historical studies, for those interested in how residents and activists are understanding and communicating about present day gentrification and who perhaps also strive to take a participatory approach, social media sites like Twitter afford the “study of vernacular, material, and ‘live’ rhetorics” (McHendry et al, 2014); such in situ studies fill an important gap, bringing
digital field sites to critical, participatory rhetoric and bringing rhetorical perspectives to
gentrification studies. Additionally, by collecting, reading, visualizing, and preserving
contemporary social media data on gentrification, this project seeks to trace anti-gentrification
rhetoric circulating on Twitter to enhance rhetorical circulation theories and methodologies and
to amplify knowledge and narratives about gentrification created and framed not by the media,
government officials, or urban planners, but by ordinary citizens and activists who are
experiencing various forms of gentrification first hand.

Circulating Citizenship Through Visual Rhetoric

emphasizes the way in which studying urban change entails inquiry into “the nature of
citizenship and citizen participation” (p. 7). Citizenship--who belongs and is allowed to
participate in particular societies--has been central to rhetorical studies from Ancient Greece to
the present. Relevant to this dissertation, circulation studies that have engaged with rhetorical
inquiry into citizenship often examine how visual and other material rhetoric move to constitute
publics and certain types of subjects (Rice, 2012), influence public attitudes on social issues
(Finnegan, 2003), and shape public identities in relation to cultural notions of democracy
(Hariman and Lucaites, 2007). Since the widespread use of the internet and social media
technologies, circulation studies has also focused on visual and material rhetoric in relation to
public formation and collective activity, often shifting from interpretive analyses of images
themselves, increasingly, to devoting attention to the *movement* of visual and material rhetoric.
This movement resultants in various encounters that generate numerous possible rhetorical
consequences, such as opening or closing avenues for agency, increasing access to political
participation, and influencing collective action towards shared goals (Bradshaw, 2018; Gries, 2015; Topinka, 2016). While this body of scholarship accounts for rhetoric beyond the discursive, rhetoric and writing studies has considerable opportunity to grow these theories of rhetorical circulation beyond their relationships to iconic images or other discrete material/digital artifacts. Rhetorical circulation can also be observed in less structured social encounters, and studies developed with social media data and visualization applications can help researchers locate those encounters, enhancing our understanding of rhetorical circulation in relation to rapidly evolving technologies and social practices.

This chapter will lay the groundwork for this dissertation’s two-part comparative study of anti-gentrification rhetoric circulating on Twitter. Twitter data studies are particularly challenging, in part, because Twitter data often takes many forms at once: an attached image or video, the tweet text, perhaps including a visual metaphor and emoticon in the tweet field, and geolocations that conjure particular “images” of places, just to name a few. Processing this data takes still other forms through various visualizations, like maps, charts, and graphs. In its aggregate form, a large social media data set like the one I’ve collected for this study, roughly comprising two million tweets and associated metadata, might seem to completely lack an identifiable or visible form, at least until other technologies like data analysis and visualization applications act upon and shape it into a human-readable form. These technological and visual entanglements are key to the study of social media data and as Chapter 3 and 4 will demonstrate intrinsic to the phenomenon of gentrification and its disruption through digital and embodied activism.
Encountering Visual-Public-Digital Sphere(s)

Scholarship in this section outlines circulation’s relationship to visuality, rhetorical theory, and public sphere theory and how circulation studies have generated new rhetorical theories and methodologies for understanding agency and public formation, especially as these concepts relate to social equality and citizenship. In “Visual Rhetoric in Communication: Continuing Questions and Contemporary Issues,” Lester Olson, Cara Finnegan, and Diana Hope (2008) write that visual rhetoric as a mode of scholarship evolved during the late Sixties and Seventies partly because scholars “began to recognize that rhetorical theory offered important analytical tools for approaching the challenges to perceived injustice where they increasingly occurred—in the street—and where they were seen by most of the public—on television” (p. 5). This recognition moved the field beyond its conventional emphasis on speeches and alphabetical texts, largely created by powerful political figures and other elites, to the visual, material, and embodied rhetorics intrinsic to the Civil Rights Movement and the prominent and ordinary individuals who took part in the struggle for greater social equality. The rhetorical study the Civil Rights Movement has often been inseparable from considerations of the media technologies of the time, such as television, newspapers, and magazines (Cox & Faust, 2009; Gallagher & Zagacki, 2007; Johnson, 2017). Although the locus of Cara Finnegan’s scholarship predates the Civil Rights Movement, and instead largely focuses on the visual rhetoric of The Depression, Finnegan demonstrates throughout her considerable body of work that “circulation itself is a decidedly rhetorical process” and that “the study of images must remain grounded in the materiality of their rhetorical circulation” (2003, p. 221). As she and other scholars push rhetorical studies to take a visual turn, Finnegan argues that we must develop methodologies for understanding images beyond simply what they seem to represent but, equally as importantly, to
attend to these images’ appearance and reappearance within specific forms, publications, audiences, and the historical moments in which they circulate.

Finnegan’s (2003) *Picturing Poverty: Print Culture and FSA Photographs* examines various “scenes of circulation” involving several photos commissioned by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) during The Depression. Finnegan offers a methodology that looks at and beyond discrete images to offer a mode of visual rhetorical analysis that addresses what Finnegan argues are key rhetorical considerations of visual rhetoric: 1) the technical creation of image (production), 2) its arrangement, augmentation, and framing across publication contexts (reproduction), and 3) its movement through different publications, audiences, and social and historical contexts (circulation). She further argues that attention to circulation can account for how the recurrence of these images may create different kinds of publics and counterpublics in new historical and social situations. Her method of analysis, she argues, reveals how this visual rhetoric’s circulation plays a role in shaping “public attitudes” on intersecting social issues such as poverty and racial prejudice.

In Finnegan’s theorization of circulation, the movement of a text (broadly construed to include images) is never separate from the “confluence of social, economic, and technological developments in the production, reproduction, and consumption” of media (2003, p. 169). By connecting the rhetorical force of visual rhetoric to the “social, economic, and technological” forces that allow for its production, reproduction, and circulation, Finnegan begins to address the importance of technology to shaping the rhetorical objects that influence our “public attitudes” and acknowledges that circulation is, at the same time, not just a technological process of distribution but one bound to and capable of influencing the social and economic norms and practices in “historic particularity.” Throughout her examination of FSA photographs, like
Dorthea Lange’s “Migrant Mother,” Finnegan demonstrates not just how visual rhetoric has moved through publications to influence public attitudes about poverty, but also how that circulation has been, at times, limited, pointing out that some images failed to circulate widely due to various publishing decisions. Because this failure was only partial, however, Finnegan argues that circulation effectively promoted “the FSA and its goals” (2003, 219). This issue of “failure to circulate,” a concept related to the “stickiness” mentioned previously in the chapter, is an aspect of circulation I’ll return to later in Chapter Four as I examine anti-gentrification rhetoric on a smaller scale, a type of circulation perhaps not meant to circulate in great numbers to a mass audience but to stick to certain kinds of bodies and places. I argue that this “failure to circulate” has its own rhetorical goals, and studying these smaller, slower, and even stagnant circulations is valuable to building richer theories of rhetorical circulation that account and value non-movement and small-scale movement inside social networks along with the vast, quick movement perhaps most often associated with the speed of digital media, or what has at times been considered the digital “public sphere” (Gries, 2018; Lim, 2014; Salvatore, 2013; Shirky, 2011).

In “Sighting the public: iconoclasm and public sphere theory,” Finnegan and Kang (2004) further contribute to circulation studies theories and methodologies by connecting circulation to public sphere and actor-network theories. In this article, the authors urge against focusing the locus of analysis only on static publication contexts and expand analytical possibilities by attending to circulation in relation to public sphere theories: “By making circulation a theme of our study of discourse (as opposed to freeze-framing specific instances of discourse), we would learn how pictorial and linguistic discourses illuminate the landscape of the public sphere as well as learn more about the nature and function of circulation itself” (Finnegan
& Kang, p. 121). In this brief quote, Finnegan and Kang argue that the meaning and influence of rhetoric are not contained within particular representations or even confined to specific moments or publications; instead, rhetoric is expressed and best understood through its movement across “the landscape of the public sphere.” With “public sphere,” Finnegan is connecting to an array of interdisciplinary literature on public sphere theory, largely influenced by Habermas’s notion of publics being constituted through discourse. Finnegan, along with other rhetoric scholars, finds public sphere theory valuable for understanding how rhetoric plays a role in shaping democratic participation and citizenship.

Although acknowledging the influence of Habermas and Dewey to public sphere theory, Finnegan argues that scholars overemphasize the importance of discourse, at the expense of visuality, to reasoned participation and agency in the public sphere. Finnegan points out that, typically, critical readings of both theorists tend to focus on their anxiety towards images’ relationship to democratic participation; however, to the contrary, Finnegan finds evidence that reading Habermas and Dewey as anti-image and pro-literacy isn’t quite so cut and dry, finding evidence that both were at least conflicted about visuality’s role. Furthermore, she argues that visual rhetoric theories should be used to revise and improve theories of the public sphere. She cites work from DeLuca and Peeples, particularly their conception of the “public screen,” as “a metaphor for thinking about the potential for political activity in today’s ‘hypermmediated’ context,” and demonstrates how rhetoric scholars have indeed developed theories and analyses that show how democratic participation is possible through visual communication and technologies, like television screens, which afford both visual expression and circulation of that expression (p. 390). Finnegan is unsatisfied, however, with visual rhetoric studies that, although broadening our understanding of public sphere theories, reinforce binaries between “image and
text, visual and verbal, deliberation and dissemination, consensus and dissent” (p. 391) and “‘proper’ from ‘dangerous’ images (p. 393). Further pushing the field to break down these binaries and to attend to the complexities of both visual and linguistic texts, Finnegan points to Michael Warner’s contribution to public sphere theory, particularly, “Publics and Counterpublics” (2002), as being highly influential to rhetoric scholarship. Specifically, she explains the core tenets of Warner’s public sphere theory as intrinsically connected to the concept of circulation:

For Warner, it is circulation, not conversation or deliberation, which enables the formation of public discourses and the emergence of publics. Warner outlines several characteristics of circulation. First, he observes that circulation is at once notional and material. We can imagine that ideas circulate in public, yet circulation is also material: newspapers have subscribers, magazines are passed around the beauty shop, a real person reads our letter to the editor. In addition, Warner notes that circulation is temporal: it is indexed punctually by the rhythms of publication and display, such as newspapers that appear daily. Finally, circulation is reflexive: it is not just that discourse circulates, but also that we recognize that it circulates. In other words, Warner’s point is that a public thinks of itself as a public because it recognizes and imagines the fact of circulation. (p. 101)

I’ve quoted this passage at length to demonstrate Finnegan’s reading of public sphere theory through the lens of rhetorical circulation. Such a reading emphasizes key aspects shared by circulation and public sphere theory: materiality, temporality, and reflexivity, or what Charland (1987) termed the “constitutive” function of rhetoric. By making these connections, Finnegan provides a valuable perspective on how circulation can reshape personal and national narratives.
and how rhetorical studies of circulation can reveal the impact of these narratives on public attitudes, and ultimately the material conditions of lived experience.

Finnegan and Kang are careful to point out that rhetorical impact is not contained within the textual or visual representation but revealed by the process of circulation itself. The authors adopt the stance that texts are always mediated and augmented by those who interact with them, and visuality is always intertextual, even capable of referencing changing historical, cultural, and social norms, processes, and representations. Since meaning and visuality are always mediated and always in flux, they focus their analytic approach on understanding rhetoric’s impact through its movement. Summarizing this analytic approach, Finnegan and Kang state, “Circulation enables us to avoid untenable distinctions between images and texts, focusing not on individual types of discourse, but on their movement in a scene of circulation” (p. 396). By doing so, attention to circulation “frees us from the paradox of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ images, from the will to cherish them and the will to destroy them” (p. 396). Rather than focusing on interpreting and placing a value on the images themselves, studies of circulation ask us to attend to the way in which rhetoric moves and transforms. By reorienting our attention from interpretation to understanding movement and transformation, “[w]e might be in a better position to rethink (and perhaps retheorize) our understanding of how images and vision operate in the public sphere” (p. 379).

In Finnegan’s scholarship related to circulation, perhaps especially in Picturing Poverty, she demonstrates how attention to visual rhetoric’s circulation--its movement, recurrence, and transformation--is, indeed, capable of Charland’s (1987) constitutive function. She argues that circulation can create different kinds of publics and counterpublics as rhetoric changes and moves through various historical, social, and technological scenes. Although not yet engaging
with internet technologies or social networks, Finnegan’s notions of emergence, reemergence, and transformation are particularly relevant for studying rhetorical circulation within shifting visual forms and digitally networked structures. These structures, however, challenge rhetorical notions of creator and text and trouble efforts to establish the provenance of an image. Subsequent circulation studies scholars have built upon Finnegan’s foundational theories in visual rhetoric and public sphere theories to develop related theories and methodologies for analyzing circulation beyond static situations and stable media. In the next section, the literature more specifically addresses theorizing circulation and visuality in relation to digital media.

**Materializing Digital Citizenship Through Vernacular Rhetoric**

Since the visual turn, rhetoric and writing studies scholars have continued to study the circulation of visual and material culture; recently, this interest has extended to contemporary digital forms of images and materiality (Gries, 2013, 2015; Hariman & Lucaites, 2007, Jenkins, 2014). This shift in circulation studies to the digital is very recent, and, as Gries and others have noted, rhetorical circulation theories and methodologies were built around the study of archival or contemporary print and material artifacts, often focusing on reconstructing histories of an artifact’s circulation. In Finnegan’s FSA study, for instance, she looks into the particularities of the images in their “historical milieu,” pinpointing specific photographs and delving into particular publication contexts, including the various actors making decisions such as editors and publishers, simultaneously developing histories of the artists and the FSA itself. Such an approach relies on substantial secondary research of other print sources to reconstruct how media--largely circulated before the researcher’s time--were shaped by various institutions and actors. In addition to primary and secondary sources available in archives, historical studies of
circulation like Finnegan’s have the advantage of published histories and hindsight to theorize how circulation functioned and, in Finnegan’s case, shaped public attitudes about poverty. While there’s nothing wrong with archival, historical study or print and physical materiality, it is not our only way into rhetorical studies of circulation.

Theories of vernacular rhetoric, or rhetoric of the everyday, recognize that rhetoric “is constituted by the ongoing social exchanges found in dress, manners, material culture, popular arts, social gatherings, and the like” (Hauser, 2011, p. 164). Hauser, importantly, includes everyday social encounters as rhetoric that circulates in present popular culture and gatherings. Additionally, Hauser advocates for participant-observer approaches to studying rhetoric as it happens in the streets and in social networks alike, in “ongoing discourse among ordinary people on matters that intersect their lives” (p. 167). This attention to presently occurring, ongoing conversation between ordinary people, Hauser observes, is also a process of negotiating citizenship, or the “ongoing struggle between those in and out of power by which society continually produces itself” (p. 170).

Taking on the mantle of circulation and its constitutive and civic function, particularly in relation to new media, Hariman and Lucaites (notably in No Caption Necessary, 2007) argue that photography and its digital remixing, what today we might call the creation of memes, can “provide performative models of citizenship” (p. 12). In this way, they demonstrate how images can serve as inventionial resources to constitute collective identity, influence public opinion, and inspire agency. Observing the way in which photos are shared and remixed in internet chat rooms, Hariman and Lucaites theorize that the circulation of visual rhetoric is changing with the advent of Web 2.0 technologies that allow for greater degrees of social participation and user-generated media. This kind of participatory technology provides a vastly increased level of
interactivity and speed of interaction without the tightly-controlled institutional structures of print publications, like those covered in Finnegan’s FSA examination. Participatory technologies, like those witnessed by Hariman and Lucaites in internet chat room that predate our present social media platforms, uniquely trouble the rhetorical situation’s distinct divisions between creator and audience. Furthermore, participatory internet technologies allow for continuous and messy cycles of circulation, the re-emergence of previous rhetoric, and the augmentation of existing media by nearly any user; these affordances make it particularly difficult for rhetorical studies of internet media to pinpoint and anchor their analysis on fixed, singular moments, entities, and situations. Despite these difficulties, Hariman and Lucaites argue that the technological possibility of remixing and circulating these images through participatory technologies provides new points of entry for more diverse individuals and publics to intervene into public arguments and issues. Through this collaborative rhetorical invention and circulation, Hariman and Lucaites argue these technologies and practices, perhaps, offer users greater agency to participate in civic life.

Partly due to these kinds of changes in media technologies, Gries (2018), following DeLuca and Wilferth (2009), urges rhetoric and writing studies to innovate and develop new theories of circulation that are not so heavily “indebted to print culture” and instead more thoroughly account for rhetorical circulation’s “ontological and contingent dimensions” (p. 9-10). By “ontological and contingent,” Gries connects to rhetoric’s enduring concern with contingency, or the context and circumstances that give rise and shape rhetoric. She also pushes circulation beyond rhetoric’s traditional focus on persuasion to “ontological” aspects of being while also acknowledging that human beings are not the only entities for which we need to account. Rhetoric not only occurs in and circulates through participatory digital technologies and
social network platforms, like those chat rooms observed by Hariman and Lucaites. Accounting for rhetoric as ontological entails shifting from models of persuasion to understanding rhetoric as a process of being and becoming, often involving mutual identification within networks of relations. Consequently, Gries and others argue that rhetoric and writing scholars should develop new theories and methodologies for studying rhetorical circulation, theories which consider the highly variable form of media and the complicated, sometimes global, networks of capital, people, and things that help to structure rhetoric’s circulation.

By focusing rhetoric circulation studies in “new” materialism that accounts for a broader range of entities, Gries and others push the field to move past representational interpretive analysis alone and to also include analytical methodologies for tracing the movement and transformation of a wide range of materialities. Conceiving of rhetoric, not as reasoned persuasion alone, but as ontological relationality that holds the capacity to reconfigure “beingness” in the world places analytical focus on relationships, encounters, and interactions (Rickert, 2013). This shift--from human-centric to distributed network of materialities and from persuasion to beingness--also shifts how circulation studies conceive of agency. According to Gries, ontological understandings of rhetoric attune to “the way in which things become agentive and vital as they become engaged in various activities” (2015, p. 10). By theorizing circulation in relation to new materialism theories and digital media technologies, Gries’ work marks an important shift in thinking about circulation, one in which media and the transformations and movements allowed by different kinds of technologies, including participatory technologies like social media, are accounted for as entities that partly shape rather than simply distribute rhetoric. Rather than focusing strictly on the human agents who make decisions about the production, distribution, and circulation of a text, broadly construed, rhetorical circulation theories and
methodologies that incorporate new materialism stances on human and nonhuman agentive forces further incorporate actor-network and ecological theories that also attempt to account for the various structures that allow, confine, and even contribute to rhetorical expression while also directing its movement, seemingly, at times, algorithmically and/or autonomously.

In using the terms “agentive and vital,” Gries connects new materialism and actor-network theories from scholars like Bruno Latour and Jane Bennett who have both theorized the way in which nonhuman actors like digital networks and “things”—from doorstops to dead rats—have “vibrancy” and agency in any given situation, or in the language of new materialism, in any given “assemblage”. According to new materialism, nonhuman things and humans alike come together and interact, often changing each other as well as the rhetorical traces they leave behind, “in heterogeneous assemblages in which agency has no single locus, no mastermind, but is distributed across a swarm of various and variegated vibrant materialities” (Bennett, 2009, p. 96). Formulating agency as a distributed assemblage rather than as discrete actions carried out by humans alone not only reorients studies of rhetorical agency to include inanimate objects like digital infrastructures and objects that circulate within and outside of them, but also emphasizes the way in which rhetoric shouldn’t be reduced to a static interpretive meaning but rather understood through its movement and encounters with multiple contexts and human actors: “In this assemblage, objects appeared as things, that is, as vivid entities not entirely reducible to the contexts in which (human) subjects set them, never entirely exhausted by their semiotics” (Bennett, 2009, p. 5). By pointing out the multiple contexts and encounters made possible by assemblages that come together, disperse, and reconfigure in other locations and times, and in relation to still other human and nonhuman agents, the rhetorical situation becomes both more dispersed and more dynamic and changing, adopting the features of circulation itself. In this
circulating movement of things and humans, perhaps most importantly: “Agentic capacity is now seen as differentially distributed across a wider range of ontological types” (p. 9).

Agency has long been a concern of rhetoric and writing scholars, and as scholars Ronald Greene (2004) and Catherine Chaput (2010) have pointed out, the task of locating agency and determining its rhetorical consequences has challenged our disciplines: “Committing themselves to endless debates about correct responses in situated spaces, rhetorical theories that underscore agency lose site of the world in flux and of our participation in that world’s unpredictable unfoldings” (Chaput, 2010, p. 2). Rhetorical theories of circulation, influenced by new materialism and actor-network theory, provide ways to account for the “the flux and participation” of a multitude of agents who unlock the rhetorical situation from its Bitzerian constraints--contained notions of exigency and sender-receiver models of rhetoric--and account for rhetoric’s dynamic flow. Chaput elaborates:

This ontological shift takes us from the rhetorical situation as a temporally and spatially fixed site of exigency, constraints, and discourse to rhetorical circulation as a fluidity of everyday practices, affects, and uncertainties. Unhinged from its role in negotiating political agency, rhetoric bursts through its site-specific bounds, circulates, and gives value to everyday practices just as the constant circulation of production and consumption generates political economic values. (p. 6)

By theorizing agency as a kind of value, Chaput conceives of rhetorical force and agency in economic terms: “its persuasive power can be seen as deriving from the repetition of values added and exchanged through disparate communicative acts” (p. 6). This economic view on the rhetorical situation and its reconfiguration of rhetorical force as the “values added and exchanged through disparate communicative acts,” according to Chaput and others, is a necessary shift in
rhetoric, partly because it puts our theories and studies in relation to the technologies and systems of power that structure everyday contemporary communication and lived experience. This shift, too, allows our disciplines opportunities to formulate theories and studies of circulation that account for assemblages, movement, and the everyday practices that happen within and outside of digital technologies. Theories of rhetorical ecologies and economies improve our methodologies for tracing rhetorical circulation in greater “specificity and fluidity,” (Finnegan, 2006) and allow us to examine a greater range of actors and artifacts, including a seemingly endless array of humans and artifacts connected across various temporalities, media types, technologies, and physical locations.

**Affecting Citizenship**

Ecological theories of rhetoric’s structure and distributed notions of agency are particularly necessary for my project’s interest in understanding how rhetoric moves through Twitter to bring bodies together in ways that have consequences in digital and physical environments. Circulation, too, gives rhetoric a means by which not just to account for humans, things, and technologies, but to account for unseen materialities like histories and emotions in rhetorical encounters. This section proceeds by describing theories and studies of rhetorical ecologies that also include attending to the circulation of histories and emotions that function to collectivize attention, bodies, and actions, often by placing them in opposition to other bodies and identities. Understanding circulation not just as material but also as bodily, emotional, historical, and cultural provides more nuance to understanding how anti-gentrification rhetoric happens and moves to transform beingness in relation to urban change and histories of colonization.
Given that rhetoric scholars like Finnegan and Gries assert that circulation, itself, is rhetorical, rhetoric and writing studies have begun to advance useful theories and methodologies that account for contemporary media technologies and users’ engagement with these technologies, as well as the broader social, political, economic, and institutional structures that influence circulation and rhetoric’s potential for ontological transformation of these structures. Following this scholarship, attending to circulation involves reimagining the rhetorical situation not as defined and stable categories, nor as occurring in singular moments and places, but to attempting to account for the many possible assemblages of human and nonhuman actors distributed and dispersed through digital and physical spaces, encountered in various configurations, and reappearing, perhaps in modified forms and variations, across multiple temporalities. To move beyond the rhetorical situation and the idea that rhetoric is contained in “a collection of elements often called by such names as speaker-audience-message, ethos-pathos-logos, or rhetor-audience-constraint-exigence” (p. 9), Jenny Edbauer Rice (2005) argues that we need to move away from understanding rhetoric as merely persuasion. Instead, she urges the field to theorize rhetoric as a process that occurs in “temporal, historical, and lived fluxes”, and as “a circulating ecology of effects, enactments, and events” (p. 9). In her seminal article, “Unframing Models of Public Distribution: From Rhetorical Situation to Rhetorical Ecology,” Edbauer Rice (2005) reformulates the rhetorical situation as an ecology and argues that “rather than replacing the rhetorical situation models that we have found so useful; however, an ecological augmentation adopts a view toward the processes and events that extend beyond the boundaries of elements” (p. 20).

Utilizing a case study of Austin’s recent redevelopment, Edbauer Rice traces the movement and transformation of the slogan, “Keep Austin Weird,” from its roots as an anti-
corporate development slogan created by indie bookstore owners to its widely dispersed and often augmented form, such as the slogan or variations of the slogan reappearing in subsequent temporalities and materialities, like through being printed on T-shirts and stickers that circulated around the city of Austin. Although initially created to ward off corporate takeover of Austin’s urban development, Edbauer Rice demonstrates the way in which this phrase and its material instantiations changed over time. She further demonstrates how tracing the movement and changes of this slogan reveal varied and competing rhetorical purposes of this slogan and participate in “a kind of distributed ecological spread of this rhetoric” (p. 19). Edbauer Rice is not merely interested in accounting for the various transformations of this text and its competing purposes--it’s ecology--but also in accounting for the affective characteristics experienced as citizens “encounter” this public rhetoric. By affect, Edbauer Rice nods towards the economic model of emotion accruing rhetorical value as a way to rethink rhetorical force (Bennett, 2009, 2010; Chaput, 2010; Greene, 2004). Such theorists define affect as an energy, somewhat akin to emotion, that resides not within humans but in the “experiences and moods that cohere around material spaces. This is why sites are not just seen but (perhaps even more so) they are felt” (p. 11). Affect and emotions, then, become part of what is traced and accounted for when considering rhetorical circulation and help shape rhetoric’s force in the public sphere.

In the afterword to the second edition of *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed (2015) theorizes citizenship in terms of affect, or her preferred term, “emotion”: “Citizenship becomes a requirement to be sympathetic: an agreement with feeling. To be a sympathetic part is to agree with your heart” (p. 229). For Ahmed, citizenship is a matter of fitting one’s emotions and body into the national body by sharing its values and emotions. She points out that this state of citizenship is not static, but one that is performed and reperformed in different ways,
becoming more crucial during times of national upheaval and insecurity. Emotions function rhetorically and in relation to broader social and political histories that, perhaps mostly beyond individual awareness of their circulation and force, constrain types of individual emotional responses that shape our reactions to other bodies.

Affective theories of rhetoric like Ahmed’s rely on a Spinozian understanding of bodies, and conceive of a body, not as strictly human, but as any gathering or encountering of entities that affect each other. Ahmed points out Spinoza’s second principle of affect, by way of Deleuze, to emphasize the relationality of both rhetoric and emotions, particularly to one’s notion of self: “a body affects other bodies, or is affected by other bodies; it is this capacity for affecting and be-ing affected that also defines a body in its individuality” (Deleuze, 1992, p. 625). According to Ahmed, both emotion and identity do not come from within but are produced in the middle of bodies coming into contact, and, in her theorization, the contact of hidden, emotion-laden histories. Much affect theory theorizes agency and affect as distributed processes of encounter that provide the potential for movement and transformation. This understanding of bodies and agency is about what’s possible, and those possibilities are constrained by networked relationality between various entities. In this way, we aren’t separate from the conditions and the relations that surround us, but instead we are always being shaped and shaping them, providing the possibility for rhetorical, ontological transformation. Like the Spinozian body, Ahmed theorizes affect as relational and integral to understanding power relations and the resistance to, or transformation of, those relations. She uses the terms affect and emotion synonymously, and argues against critics who want to separate discussions of emotion and affect, like Lauren Berlant (2011). For Ahmed, separating theories of emotion and affect would exclude theorists in feminist and queer studies who’ve written about emotion as affect prior to the recent affective
turn. Instead, she specifies that affects/emotions are the zones of contact that allow for bodies’ transformative potentials. Emotion, for Ahmed, is a “feeling and an orientation.” She argues that emotions aren’t subjective states but circulating forces that “do things” (p. 209). These emotions don’t belong to individual subjectivities, but they do work through interactions between symbols and bodies. She terms this circulating force, “affective economies,” and argues that emotions, in part, work “to bind subjects together” (2004, p. 119). Emotions, according to Ahmed, are what establish collectives by binding some together while simultaneously separating these collectives from “others”. She uses the word “economies” to emphasize the way that emotions accrue value and accumulate power by circulating some emotions, partly through narratives and bodily reactions that conceal but nevertheless circulate and re-enliven “hidden histories.” These histories often connect to racial identities formed through various previous encounters, encounters that may not have been directly experienced through an individual presently in an encounter but rather felt through identification with a collective.

Ahmed points to practices like stop and frisk and discourses like hate speech as examples of circulation that move with emotions and hidden histories as a way to exert power over “others”. In the case of stop and frisk, police interactions with nonwhite bodies are shaped by the circulation of nonwhite criminality narratives and the fear generated by these narratives. Ahmed provides a rhetorical taxonomy of emotions, discussing fear as an emotion that functions by perceiving threats to one’s self, often through feelings that a racial or social “other” might subsume or destroy the individual or collective. She argues that fear has a sense of futurity—this person may commit a crime in the future (because of all the accrued narratives of crimes committed by bodies like this in the past) and so that justifies stopping and containing that body now. In addition to fear, hate is also an emotion that Ahmed understands as shaping racial
identities and relationships through establishing physical and bodily boundaries between the self and the other. For Ahmed, hate comes into visibility when the self and an “other” are felt to be in dangerous proximity. This proximity provokes fear of having one’s identity replaced by that of the “other”. In Ahmed’s theorization, hate is tied to physical and bodily space and functions as a mode of resistance against a perceived intrusion that endangers the self through its occupation of spatial proximity. This theory of affect is particularly relevant to thinking about the history of race and space in urban America, as well as citizenship, as being tied to the ability to occupy and own space, themes I’ll return to in relation to affect in the case studies described in Chapter 3 and 4.

Ahmed’s take on the rhetorical force of circulating “hidden histories,” made manifest through emotional responses and encounters, guides Cultural Politics and is particularly salient in her analysis of an excerpt for one of Audre Lorde’s essays. In this excerpt, Lorde recounts a moment from her childhood in which she simultaneously becomes aware of a white woman’s revulsion at the proximity of Lorde’s small black body next to her own during a public bus ride and aware of her own blackness as part of her being and as the object of hatred. Ahmed elaborates on her analysis of the exchange, one that Lorde stresses transpired by the proximity of bodies and the circulation of emotion through bodily movement, rather than any direct verbal or written exchange:

The transformation of this or that other into an object of hate is over-determined. It is not simply that any body is hated: particular histories of association are reopened in each encounter, such that some bodies are already encountered as more hateful than other bodies. Histories are bound up with emotions precisely insofar as it is a question of what sticks, of what connections are lived as the most intense or intimate, as being closer to
the skin (p. 54).

In this quote, Ahmed observes that affect is located both in bodies and in objects--the outcomes of the encounter are partly determined by the strength of what’s felt, of what emotion circulating in these histories “sticks” in the present encounter. These moments of stickiness emerge in symbolic communication and in the bodily reactions and movements during particular encounters. These sticky moments are not just illustrative of the present but of the present’s connection to histories and narratives of the past that continue to function culturally and rhetorically, such as Lorde’s recounting of the bus exchange and the moment’s connection to racially charged narratives that transform and “hide” but still structure the present encounter. Furthermore, Ahmed’s analysis of this encounter connects to rhetoric and writing studies conceptions of the body and its movements as rhetorical force and text. Through tracing bodily movement, we can also uncover emotions that continue to circulate during specific encounters and, among other functions, bring us together with like “others,” or separate us, largely based on hidden histories of “others”. Revealing these moments of affective and bodily encounter, then, is a way of uncovering the histories “that stick” and how they function in particular moments, perhaps to reify or transform social problems like racism.

Ahmed’s notion of emotions that function to align oneself with “like types” is similar to the constitutive function theorized by Charland (1987). Initially, Charland’s conception of constitutive rhetoric was meant to account for the audience’s role in the rhetorical situation. According to Charland, following Althusser’s theory of interpellation and Burke’s notion of identification, in order for rhetoric to be effective, rhetoric must not merely persuade, but an audience must participate in the rhetorical encounter by recognizing itself in the text. In short, not only must the speaker or creator address an audience, which at the same time ideologically
shapes that audience, but the audience must accept that identity and participate in its ongoing circulation. This constitutive function is how publics and communities are created through texts, according to Charland. Like Charland, rhetorical studies of circulation examine identification as constitutive rhetoric working through a variety of contemporary mediums. For example, Catherine Chaput observes that Donald Trump’s brand has functioned constitutively through affective encounters between Trump and ordinary citizens and that this circulation is especially expansive and powerful through its attachment to reality TV programming, socially-networked images, and tweets that accumulate affective value through ongoing encounters: “Like a blinking neon sign, Donald Trump’s rhetorical performance imperceptibly and physiologically primes participating bodies to think and act along certain pathways” (Chaput, 2018, p. 202). As Chaput points out, affect can generate not only identification but can also moves bodies “to think and act along certain pathways.” Megan Foley (2010) argues that the serialized television circulation of O.J. Simpson’s murder trial “creates a rhythmic pulsation of apathy and attachment” (p. 83). This vacillation between “apathy and attachment” is enabled by serialized TV coverage that uses narrative elements like cliffhangers to elicit feelings of suspense and fatigue, feelings, Foley argues, that allow white privilege to circulate and reproduce itself without being identified by those taking shape in its ongoing maintenance.

Contemporary adaptations of constitutive rhetoric, like those cited above, have noted that rhetorical encounters need not be linguistic, but can also function through visual framing, material structures, and embodied performances that are encountered, circulated, and reencountered. Furthermore, these contemporary adaptations pick up on the affective seed left in Charland’s original theorization of constitutive rhetoric: identification functions through narratives and the social practices of shared aesthetics and feelings. When Ahmed analyzes
Lorde’s encounter, then, her analysis is partly focused on the constitutive function of that encounter in which the white woman identifies with previously circulated narratives about black bodies being revolting and hated. This “alignment” with those narratives and identities is felt and continues to circulate through the movement of bodies, like the movement of the white woman’s body away from Lorde’s: “Importantly, then, the alignment of some bodies with some others and against others take place in the physicality of movement; bodies are disorganised and re-organised as they face others who are already recognised as ‘the hated’ (p. 54). Ahmed goes on to characterize this “re-organization” as a way to create borders between identities and spaces.

In considering anti-gentrification rhetoric, the focus of subsequent chapters of this dissertation, Ahmed’s theorization of emotion’s constitutive function is key to analyzing how rhetoric is encountered and circulated on Twitter. Significant to this circulation, tweets and visual media that produce affective responses also generate identification or resistance to identify with certain kinds of embodiment. Furthermore, tracing anti-gentrification in Twitter and in situated geographies and bodily encounters shows the consequences of anti-gentrification rhetoric on different kinds of bodies that shape space differently, particularly illuminating anti-gentrification rhetoric’s connection to circulating and identifying with certain kinds of racial histories as one means by which to contest and claim space, thereby, often contesting restrictive notions of citizenship and belonging. Following Ahmed, and in its most simplistic form, citizenship is about performing and embodying dominant norms. How one performs resistance, then, is through making the power relations that shape those norms visible and by transforming those norms so that new modes of performance, embodiment, and citizenship are able to come into being. This is especially difficult, however, as circulation theories emphasize, due to the way in which normative control and agency are networked, circulated, and dispersed, rendering
power structures at times nearly invisible and unnoticed. This complicated and shifting assemblage of actors and rhetorical representations make tracing rhetorical consequences all the more difficult because encounters not include particular subjectivities or places but intertwined, circulating, and often invisible networks of relations.

Edbauer Rice’s notion of rhetorical ecologies and Ahmed’s affective economies are useful for understanding the flow of rhetoric through bodies, and such theories of circulation and affect are increasingly productive to rhetorical studies using social media. Although Edbauer Rice does not engage directly with the implications of the internet on circulation and affect, she examines vernacular rhetoric utilizing network theories like virality to emphasize the “affective encounters” that are always in motion and informed by past encounters: “Life as Network also means that the social field is not comprised of discrete sites but from events that are shifting and moving, grafted onto and connected with other events” (p. 10). It is during these affective encounters on social media, then, that rhetoric and writing scholars might turn their attention, and, by contributing new methodologies for studying circulation better account for and attend to rhetoric’s movement, transformation, and consequence through contemporary media that circulates everyday conversations and shapes lived experience and public life.

Recent work theorizing affect, or emotion, in relation to rhetorical circulation also contributes to new materialism-influenced conceptions of rhetorical agency that include accounting for nonhuman entities, movement, and transformation. Rather than being tied to particular individuals or even strictly human, rhetoric moves in networked and relational ways. Ambient rhetorical elements like affect are not only social, distributed, and encountered in the physical places of our lives but also in the “virtual” networks within which we participate. Rickert (2013) makes way for us to theorize virtual spaces like Twitter in relation to ambient
rhetoric, “a responsive way of revealing the world for others, responding to and putting forth through affective, symbolic, and material means, so as to at least potentially re-attune or otherwise transform how others inhabit the world to an extent that calls for some action” (p. 162). In the ambient rhetoric of Twitter’s space, the data I’ve collected related to the keyword, “gentrification,” is one way to gather together many, many fragments of anti-gentrification encounters. As one possible means by which to trace social media data as fragments of encounters occurring over disparate temporalities and manifesting through diverse materialities, I’ve utilized data visualization to trace the circulation of anti-gentrification rhetoric and locate encounters that occur around gentrification. These data visualizations also reveal something of the affects and histories that circulate in these encounters. Particularly in Chapter 3’s discussion of the most retweeted tweets in the data set as a whole, visualizations help to demonstrate how such encounters involve media objects, narratives, and affects that also circulate racial and social histories, moving some users to identify, or resisting identification with certain kinds of bodies, commodities, cultural products, and ways of being in the world. Chapter 4’s case study of the anti-gentrification coalition Defend Boyle Heights (DBH) explores how affect and identification function locally and globally in smaller, slower circulations that nevertheless bring users and bodies together on Twitter and in urban spaces of gentrification. Mapping this smaller data set to the local geography of Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, reveals specific, situated encounters and the affective, symbolic, and material consequences of these encounters on local space and bodies. This chapter also examines how DBH emerges and encounters to affect minds, bodies, and processes outside of the local area to disparate situated geographies. Encounters, which are the primary focus of the macro and micro data case studies in Chapters 3 and 4, exhibit ontological opportunities and negotiations of beingness in relation to gentrification—the movements in these
encounters have consequences, perhaps small and incremental, on structures for living, structures such as housing and neighborhood configurations, which are, at the same time, entangled with communication structures like social media and relations between bodies, often oriented by identification and affect.

**Circulation & Social Media’s Materiality**

In her ongoing project and considerable scholarship devoted to tracking the Obama Hope image, Laurie Gries has explored social media as an important entity in the rhetorical circulation, transformation, and consequences unfolding through the various forms of this image’s ongoing circulation: “Obama Hope’s distributed emergence and ongoing circulation would certainly not have been as intense without the help of social media sites such as Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, blogs, etc. (“Actor-Networks,” “Mapping Obama Hope,” para. 9). “Iconographic tracking,” the methodology she develops for studying visual rhetoric as it circulates and transforms through social encounters and digital and social networks, is a flexible methodological process that involves four phases: 1) “data hoarding”: gathering as much data as possible, 2) assembling a collection: Gries describes this step as synonymous with “data mining—a process of sorting through massive amounts of saved data to locate patterns, trends, and relationships,” 3) collecting additional data to diversify the research archive and explore patterns revealed in the previous step, and 4) narrowing in on a locus of closer study (2015, p. 111). Gries further describes this fourth step:

[R]esearchers conduct a close study of specific collectives to determine how an image intra-acts with humans and various technologies and other entities to materialize, spark change, and produce collective space. Such investigation entails attending to seven
interrelated material processes—composition, production, transformation, distribution, circulation, collectivity, and consequentiality. Mapping out these processes helps discover how many different happenings, desires, peoples, technologies, collective actions, and so forth come into play during an image’s rhetorical becomings. (p. 113)

Gries’ description above echoes elements of Finnegan’s analytics for the study of visual rhetoric—composition, production, distribution, circulation—with a few important additions from Gries: transformation, collectivity, consequentiality. These additions are influenced by actor-network theory and new materialism and provide especially valuable contributions to understanding rhetoric within our contemporary, participatory new media landscape, one which more easily facilitates the transformation and collective participation of media. Recent technological advances in machine reading, data analytics, and digital mapping also offer new tools for visualizing rhetoric’s potential consequences. Although Gries uses social media and computer-based analytic and visualization applications in her iconographic study of the Obama Hope image, Still Life with Rhetoric (2015), access to data has since expanded, not unproblematically, as have the capabilities of computational tools used to collect, process, and visualize such data.

calling for updates and modifications to her “consequentialist approach.” For instance, in step two of iconographic tracking, Gries discusses the process of creating labels and folders for the data she’s collected, a process that can be assisted by data collection tools and analytic applications. These tools are not without their limitations and ethical problems, some of which will be discussed in later chapters; however, they can aid researchers in organizing, sorting, and visualizing vastly greater amounts of data and in ways impossible or unfeasible without them.

The benefits and consequences of large data collection and analysis are issues this dissertation engages but certainly does not claim to resolve; however, we cannot adequately address ethical
concerns unless we begin to understand how these technologies shape social media data and data-informed scholarship like this dissertation study of anti-gentrification rhetoric circulating on Twitter. While the methodology in the following chapter is influenced by Gries’ iconographic tracking and subsequent applications of this methodology, new materialism, and circulation theories and methods in rhetoric and writing studies, it also modifies critical and technological these approaches.

In “Entanglements that Matter: A New Materialist Trace of #YesAllWomen,” Edwards and Lang (2018) point out that Gries’ iconographic tracking allows for the study of a hashtag’s circulation beyond its existence on Twitter to its “entanglement” with material existence, like public conversations, embodied activism, and affective reactions. Ronald Greene and Kevin Kuswa (2012) configure “rhetorical maps of power” to trace how protest maps “new cartographies of power” (284). New materialism is part of their theoretical approach to mapping how protest reconfigures both place and power through various temporalities. In this reconfiguration, Green and Kuswa observe that “[c]ommunication technologies provide another means by which places of protest form; they invent regions in/of protest” (284). Both Edwards and Lang and Greene and Kuswa are notable examples of new materialist approaches to studying activism of rhetoric in digital social networks as a way to trace digital activism’s relation to offline life and consequence. Both pieces, too, speak to the positive potentials of affective identification leading to collective action and knowledge transformation that disrupts and reshapes dominant power structures towards more democratic models of equal citizenship for historically marginalized groups. This potential, of course, is not guaranteed, nor are positive consequences that do occur always stable or lasting ones; however, whereas studies of affect often emphasize their negative functions like tribalism and irrational decision making, Edwards
and Lang demonstrate that affective circulation and shared histories can also “build relationships of solidarity” (Greene and Kuswa, 2012, 280). These relationships help to challenge and even transform structures like patriarchy and oppressive government regimes. Scholarship summarized in this chapter also demonstrates that circulation theories and methods still reflect interest in visual rhetoric, but now also account for digital media, everyday conversations, and material and social structures, and, perhaps even more so, circulation troubles the very idea of clear boundary lines between digital and material, visual and textual, human and nonhuman.

In “Mapping Obama Hope: A data visualization project for visual rhetorics,” Gries (2017) emphasizes the potential for, and importance of, increasing rhetoric and writing studies engagement with large social media data sets. She observes that although tools for gathering and analyzing large data sets are available, rhetoric and writing studies have yet to seriously adopt and augment our methodologies to include their use. Aaron Beveridge (2018) considers lack of methodology as a barrier to access, but urges our disciplines to take necessary steps to overcome the various barriers in working with data:

First, we need to continue to improve our understanding of the circulation data that is available. Next, we need better access to that data. Access is not limited to the physical, material access to that data; it includes the availability of methods for processing and analyzing data. Finally, integrating data analysis with circulation research will require that we expand and transform many of our current research methodologies. (p. 245)

Indeed, social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter increasingly restrict and monetize data, resulting in less access for academic researcher who lack funding to pay for data. Without access to this data, not only do our disciplines lose access to important aspects of communication and culture, but a knowledge gap grows between our disciplines and those who
can afford to work with data. Increasing our engagement with social media data, we not only improve rhetorical theories and methodologies, we bring rhetorical perspectives to the critical and ethical collection, use, and application of social media data. What’s more, collecting social media data can work towards recovery and preservation of narratives and voices that are absent for the master narratives published in mainstream media and academic texts. These large data sets, especially when made open to other researchers, can serve as ongoing sites of scholarship and offer the means by which to build data methodologies in our disciplines, even if APIs become closed to academic research. By doing so, we will enrich our disciplinary engagement with material rhetoric and its constellating fragments of texts, bodies, affects, histories, structures in their encounters and circulations as they function in our present political realms, lived experiences, and environments, issues that have long been at the forefront of rhetorical study. Indeed, circulation “addresses rhetorical concerns with bodies, access, and power; ecological concerns with affect, publics, and writing; and digital concerns with infrastructure, distribution, and global economies” (Gries, 2018, 7). As the following chapters demonstrate, studying anti-gentrification rhetoric’s circulation through big social data certainly reveals encounters between all of circulation’s key concerns: “bodies, access, and power,” “affect, publics, and writing,” and “infrastructure, distribution, and global economies.” To locate these encounters, rhetoric and writing studies needs methodologies for working computationally and rhetorically. Because our discipline values reason, evidence, and empiricism, and also values intuition, narrative, subjectivity, and perhaps most importantly, *technē* (art) and *prohairesis* (practical decision-making), perhaps we are especially well trained and oriented to create data methodologies that reflect rhetoric’s epistemologies rather than neo-positivist notions about observable truth and rational outcomes.
**Materializing a Large Social Media Circulation Project**

To enhance theories of rhetorical circulation and build methodologies for large social media data studies, this dissertation develops a project to study anti-gentrification rhetoric circulation on Twitter through locating encounters and interrelated digital, physical, and material ecologies. Although less than a decade has elapsed since Makagon’s and Rice’s rhetorical studies of gentrification, the media and technological landscape has changed drastically, and scholars across disciplines have noted the importance of studying social media as both a site of activism and a valuable entity involved in rhetorical circulation. In the following chapters, anti-gentrification rhetoric on Twitter reveals encounters with a wider ecology of social media platforms, physical environments, and bodies, and by taking a macro and micro analytic and rhetorical method, various unfolding consequences emerge. This study especially informs our understanding of rhetorical circulation in relation to activism in the digital age and how networked communication technologies both improve and complicate our understanding of circulation, agency, and collective action. This study’s focus on anti-gentrification rhetoric illuminates how racial histories and affective responses to those histories continue to shape the organization and inequalities of bodies and environments. And yet, as other scholars have observed, the internet and social media are particularly valuable sites over activism (Papacharissi, 2002; Tufekci and Wilson, p. 2012); However, social media sites are under-examined as places of informal activism outside of hashtags and organized protest and social movements. A big social media data study, like the one I develop, organized around a keyword, reveals encounters of vernacular rhetoric that also recovers the narratives of “ordinary people [who] engage in the ongoing struggle between those in and out of power by which society continually produces itself” (Hauser, 2011, p. 170). By constructing and circulating knowledge
about dominant social, economic, political, and cultural forces complicit in their oppression, these encounters also challenge, resist, and, perhaps, contribute to transforming these structures. The study also contributes to rhetorical circulation theories and methodologies by expanding the focus of visuality from discrete objects and images, often deemed “iconic,” originally created by elite artists, photojournalists, and first distributed in popular and mainstream publications (Finnegan, 2003; Gries, 2015; Hariman and Lucaites, 2007), to encounters that include visuality of the everyday, often created and/or re-crafted by ordinary people and manifested across the range of linguistic, material, and visual artifacts.

In order to accomplish this, I formulate a theoretically informed methodology for studying anti-gentrification rhetoric on Twitter influenced by new materialism, intersectional feminisms, and critical data studies. The rhetorical feminist methodology is developed in Chapter 2 and practiced in the anti-gentrification circulation case studies described in Chapter 3 and 4. These case studies, in part, account for how anti-gentrification activism circulating on social media results in encounters that ontologically challenge and transform master narratives of urban revitalization as a neutral, or at the very least inevitable, process of redevelopment. Chapter 3’s macroanalytic approach to the Twitter data set as a whole and Chapter 4’s microanalysis of a Twitter data subset, in part, allows for the both/and study of circulation and anti-gentrification activism through aggregate and situated perspectives on this data. These perspectives illuminate shifting ecologies of grassroots anti-gentrification groups and ad hoc individuals encountering gentrification in popular culture, commodities, and geographic locations. Taken together, these multiple encounters and perspectives coalesce into a more expansive understanding of gentrification as it occurs in physical and cultural space and acts through histories of white supremacy and colonization. As Chapter 4 will demonstrate, this circulation functions to activate
publics, often based on constituting a shared racial and/or ethnic heritage and a racialized “other,” and remap power relations, not just on Twitter but in networked local geographies.

First, however, Chapter 2 will develop a rhetorical feminist methodology for social media data study. In this chapter, I’ll reconcile how large-scale data analysis is complemented, perhaps even transformed, by rhetorical theories and feminist data methods that not only contribute data methodologies and circulation theories to uncover rhetoric’s consequences but examine and reflect on the consequences of our research methodologies.
Chapter 2

Arranging a Rhetorical Feminist Methodology for Big Social Media

Feminist embodiment, then, is not about fixed location in a reified body, female or otherwise, but about nodes in fields, inflections in orientations, and responsibility for difference in material-semiotic fields of meaning. Embodiment is significant prosthesis; objectivity cannot be about fixed vision when what counts as an object is precisely what world history turns out to be about.

Donna Haraway, Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective” (1988, p. 588)

In this chapter, I discuss recent scholarship in rhetoric and writing studies that has engaged with technological tools and data as part of their research methodology. This review is supplemented with feminist technology studies scholarship, which provides advantages for developing a critical methodology for the rhetorical study of big social media data. This scholarship influences the theoretical framework for this dissertation’s feminist rhetorical methodology for big social media studies. Adopting Twitter as a rhetorical field site, this methodology is critical, inventive, and participatory. In applying this methodology to the study of the circulation of anti-gentrification rhetoric, it critiques technologies through rhetorical theory and critical data studies; inventively reworks technological affordances to reframe visualizations and reorganize data; and participates by recovering and amplifying narratives of ordinary people, further opening avenues for other kinds of knowing, acting, and being in relation to gentrification possible. Methodologies like the one I offer in this chapter also exert feminist interventions into the data paradigm increasingly influencing scholarship, public knowledge, and lived experience. By participating in acts of recovery, valuing multiplicity and narrative in knowledge making, and illuminating and privileging subjectivity, feminist data methodologies disrupt the empirical, positivist epistemologies that dominate data studies, even those in the humanities. Doing so unsettles the credence increasingly given to digital
methodologies that privilege and rely on quantified results and computational models of human phenomenon and communication, often as objective evidence to support the “truth” of a particular interpretation or hypothesis.

This methodology is particularly relevant to studies of activism on social media, in part, because Twitter has been an important site of social activism (Tufekci & Wilson, 2012) and social media data collection can act as a valuable form of recovery, archiving and visualizing contemporary activism (Jules, Summers, and Mitchell, 2018). When studying anti-gentrification activism, particularly, these voices and images can quickly vanish as people are displaced and physical spaces are changed. A study of anti-gentrification rhetoric and activism right now is relevant globally, as urbanization continues and housing crises worsen. Indeed, recently prominent gentrification scholars like Loretta Lees call for interdisciplinary, comparative studies of anti-gentrification activism.

To develop the framework for a feminist rhetorical methodology of big social media data, this chapter moves forward in the following ways: 1) I begin by situating gentrification study within rhetoric and writing studies, including discussing this literature’s connection to relevant themes, methodologies, and objects of study taken up in this dissertation project, 2) I then connect this review to large data studies in rhetoric and writing studies, highlighting how this literature values inventive and critical methods; 3) I supplement this critical technology literature with interdisciplinary feminist theories that are particularly relevant to technologies used in this project, such as data visualization, and that emphasize epistemologies involving multiple perspectives and narratives; 4) Influenced by this scholarship, I offer a rhetorical feminist methodology for big social media studies; 5) I conclude by describing how this methodology has influenced my methods and choices related to data collection, organization, and visualization;
furthermore, 6) I address how this methodology has informed the macro and micro case studies of anti-gentrification rhetoric, the focus of Chapters 3 and 4.

**Gentrification in Rhetoric and Writing Studies**

In rhetoric and writing studies, scholarship related to gentrification, thematically, has illuminated the role of artists in advancing gentrification (Makagon, 2010), graffiti and public art in relation to urban ghettoization (Lennon, 2009) and revitalization (Bruce, 2016; K. Martin and V. Gallagher, 2013; M. LaWare and V. Gallagher, 2007), and gentrification as rhetorical style that advances white hegemony (Stimpson, 2016). As objects of study, this work engages a variety of materialities, including popular press news articles (Makagon, 2010), public art, public space, bodily movement, and social encounters (Bruce, 2016; K. Martin and Gallagher, 2013; M. LaWare and V. Gallagher, 2007). Kristin Svea Stimpson (2016) focuses on gentrification discourse, which she broadens to include material, architectural, and visual forms. Stimpson’s framework for analyzing the rhetorical style of gentrification emphasizes Brummett’s rhetoric of style and critical theories in whiteness studies. She argues for rhetorical attention to style and aesthetics as racialized symbolic and material forces, patterns she discovers in city planning documents, meeting notes, and the built environment of and related to Austin, Texas. Consequently, Stimpson points out, gentrification is losing its negative connotation and becoming part of the status quo:

> Even if (as Edward Soja argues) there is a growing awareness of inequality and increased need for spatial justice (197), mobilizing people, communities, and cities around the problem of gentrification has proven difficult (Katiya and Reid 294-5, 304). More and more, gentrification is “often viewed as the natural outcome for urban neighborhoods,
and increasingly viewed as the way things ‘should’ be” (Lees, Slater, and Wyly, Gentrification p. 247). (Stimpson, p. 23)

In this excerpt, Stimpson speaks to the disconnect between our present day “consciousness” and openness about the inequality in urban neighborhoods and the apparent lack of resistance to gentrification. Presently, rhetoric and writing studies are responding to the exigency of urbanization by increasingly contributing research and scholarship related to gentrification also creating opportunities for our fields to offer rhetorical interventions in present scenes of urban redevelopment. The 2019 RSA Project in “Power, Place, and Publics: Rhetorical Cartographies of the UNR Campus Master Plan” has been designed around eight working groups, each led by prominent rhetoric and writing studies scholars such as Laurie Gries, Jacqueline Royster, and Ronald Greene. The resulting projects are intended to rhetorically analyze and intervene in the University of Nevada Reno’s newly designed Campus Master Plan, “which outlines an ambitious expansion into the surrounding city over the next six years as well as a plan to redevelop those liminal urban areas” (RSA Project in Power, Place, and Publics, para. 2). As our fields engage with creating opportunities for rhetorical interventions into urban redevelopment and its relationship to gentrification, this dissertation aspires to contribute to that work through a rhetorical study of anti-gentrification activism on Twitter. With increasing interest in and urgency for studies related to urban inequality and gentrification, my dissertation project is an analytical and interventionist study aimed at locating, tracing, and describing anti-gentrification rhetorical circulation, while also recovering and amplifying perspectives and lived experiences of ordinary citizens and organized activists.
Arranging Possibilities in Data Studies

In recent years, a few rhetoric and writing studies scholars have begun to work with large data sets and the technologies used to collect, analyze, and visualize various types of data related to a vast array of social phenomena. In Still Life with Rhetoric, Laurie Gries (2015) employs various technologies and technological artifacts, including social media data and mapping applications, to track the ongoing circulation and transformation of what she terms a “single-multiple image,” data which corresponds to the various material forms and movements the Obama Hope image undergoes as it travels and transforms through diverging temporalities and networks. In another large data study, William I. Wolff (2015) collects a sizable corpus of tweets centering on a Bruce Springsteen concert and uses both technological and human methods of coding to understand the range of Twitter-based fan writing practices. Even more recently, Jason Palmeri and Ben McCorkle (2017) analyze 100 years of English Journal through coding schemes and data visualization methods in order to historicize the disciplinary development of writing studies’ relationship to technology. In each instance, the scholars have accumulated large data sets, data sets that require some level of computation or machine reading in both their collection and analysis. Each of these studies, too, incorporates reflections on the constraints and limitations of the technology-assisted studies, particularly highlighting the ways in which choices in data collection, processing, and visualization have shaped their findings.

Douglas Eyman (2016) argues one of the emerging directions in digital rhetoric is a socio-cultural and technological engagement with infrastructure, including “the often blackboxed software tools that allow nearly anyone to expertly remix content across multiple modes and media” (p. 29). Key to Eyman’s definition of infrastructure is an understanding and fluency with the ways different kinds of technologies work, including the social and institutional knowledge
of the infrastructures in which these technologies are housed and employed. Since Eyman’s observation, rhetorical concerns with infrastructure have manifested in multiple special issues in digital rhetoric journals, like *Present Tense*’s special issue on the Rhetoric of Platforms, which emphasizes that theorizing and practicing digital rhetoric is inseparable from considerations of infrastructure, or “a meeting point of hardware, software, and culture” (*Present Tense, Platform CFP*). Such research points to the way in which digital infrastructures create unique and constantly shifting constraints and possibilities for composition and agency. As Jim Ridolfo and Danielle Nicole DeVoss (2009) argue, the infrastructure of Web 2.0 allows for the “rhetorical velocity” of texts and necessitates a digital update to the canon of delivery. John Gallagher (2017) reveals how the infrastructural layer of algorithms creates new media audiences that participate in the remix and remediation of digital texts and data. This growing body of rhetoric and writing studies literature focusing on infrastructure, to varying extents, acknowledges that the shape data and visualization take is not controlled solely by the researcher, nor is agency enacted only by users, but co-constructed by the technologies and multiple situated contexts that become involved in communication and analytic technologies.

Not only are technological tools and platforms active players in our digital research practices and the meanings we communicate as our findings, but Kevin Brock and Ashley Rose Mehlenbacher (2017) argue that “code might produce and reproduce certain norms, values, and social actions” (p. 2). These same authors also argue that “the ‘digital,’ as a collection of computational machines and the logics and experiences involved in using them, remains obscured for many” (p. 5). Knowledge of digital logics and experiences—another issue of access just beginning to be addressed—is deeply tied to the transparency of and familiarity with technological and social infrastructures. Aaron Beveridge (2018) identifies several barriers for
rhetoric and writing studies’ access to and engagement with data analytics and literacy, especially involving social media data. Equally as important as physical access, Beveridge emphasizes the importance of access to “current research methodologies” for the study of large data sets often generated through streaming APIs like Twitter’s. Although scholars like Laurie Gries and Aaron Beveridge are both advocates of creating data analysis and visualization tools for the specific research needs of those in rhetoric and writing studies, and indeed both have projects underway to do just that, existing tools provide opportunities for rhetoric and writing studies to begin developing digital methodologies adaptable to changing technologies and use cases. Gaining experience with data analysis and visualization technologies will allow us to push against their affordances and perhaps contribute insight into the ways in which future tools and their uses might be designed in more rhetorically-informed ways.

Rhetoric and writing studies scholarship summarized above works to acknowledge the influence of “the interplay of material infrastructures, users and texts,” that can also complicate the objective and scientific valence often ascribed to data analysis and visualization, especially when attached to “Big Data” (Leurs, 2017, p. 137). And yet, for rhetoric and writing studies to influence our own communities and others involved with data studies, we need to continue to formulate large data studies of our own; by doing so, we can better contribute methodological perspectives that illuminate technologies’ vast rhetorical consequences and provide new possibilities for rhetorical study, particularly as data intersects with the study of contemporary phenomena and in the places of everyday, lived experiences.

Conversations occurring on and in relation to social media data are everyday, vernacular rhetoric: “ongoing social discourse serves as a mode of influence on what people think and do” (Hauser, 2011, p. 169). As with much of the circulation studies scholarship covered in the
previous chapter, I’m interested in how vernacular rhetoric on social media might circulate and enable encounters that create and spread knowledge to contest master narratives; constitute publics through emotion and identification; and influence digital and physical actions to advance shared goals. I’m also interested in understanding how visualizing various assembled encounters over time illuminates distributed, at times collaborative, movements to remap power structures. I focus my collection on tweets because Twitter has proven to be a communication space for marginalized populations to voice dissent and to collectively act to challenge dominant power structures (Jules, Summers, & Mitchell, 2018, White Paper). Likewise, Leigh Gruwell (2018) observes that some rhetoric and writing studies scholars have “embraced social media as both an object of study as well as a methodological tool,” and yet the authors point out that we have not gone far enough to consider how these platforms shape our research (para. 2). In part to answer calls like Gruwell’s, this study engages with Twitter as an entry point into a wider ecology of emergent social media platforms, physical environments, and bodies that leave traces we can follow to better understand the consequences of their ecological relations. Developing methodologies to better account for and understand interactions on social media is one important entry point for rhetorical engagements with present socio-political phenomena like gentrification circulating through everyday communications at various scales.

**Feminist Critiques: Attending to the Rhetoricity of Data Through Feminisms**

Rhetoric and writing scholars have not been the only researchers to emphasize the rhetoricity of data collection, arrangement, analysis, and visualization, and the rhetorical consequences these processes have on knowledge production and epistemologies. Feminist and critical technology scholars (D’Ignazio & Klein, 2016; Frost, 2016; Haraway, 1988; Hill,
Kennedy & Gerrard, 2016; Leurs, 2017; Petersen & Walters, 2018; Tufekci & Wilson, 2012) argue against the presumed objectivity and neutral quality of data, pointing out that data is neither objective, nor neutral, but constructed, often many times over, from the transformation of some “thing” or some body into data points. In *Raw Data is An Oxymoron*, Lisa Gitelman (2013) points out that “the seemingly indispensable misperception that data are ever raw seems to be one way in which data are forever contextualized — that is, framed —according to a mythology of their own supposed decontextualization” (p. 6-7). This seemingly abstract quality of data is part of how it carries and reproduces cultural logics and social values, often without humans catching on, just as preceding symbolic forms of communication have done so. Indeed, Wendy Chun (2009) argues that “race and technology impact each other’s logic and development” (p. 38). In some academic and public circles, however, data is synonymous with objective evidence and truth, rather than conceived of as communication formed through and in relation to particular subjectivities. This presumed objective neutrality, Gitelman observes, when collected in vast quantities, categorized, and counted is the “aggregative quality of data [that] helps to lend them their potential power, their rhetorical weight” (p. 8). Catherine D’Ignazio and Lauren Klein (2016) argue that data visualization and design practices could benefit by adopting feminist tenets, including challenging “claims of objectivity, neutrality and universalism, emphasizing instead how knowledge is always conducted within specific subject positions” (para. 4). For D’Ignazio and Klein, challenging data’s neutrality includes making explicit the rhetorical choices of the researcher/designer and the affordances of the technology, as well as disclosing the cultures surrounding the data’s construction and arrangement, including the researcher’s particular experiences and background factors that may influence these choices.
While subjectivities and positionalities are always in flux and have the possibility of transformation (Chaput, 2000; Massumi, 2002), a rhetorical feminist data analysis and visualization methodology can and should incorporate ways of explicitly accounting for the situatedness of data and the positionality of the researcher as s/he is part of a data-based study. In her seminal text “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Donna Haraway (1988) redefines objectivity not as the absence of subjectivity but as an embodied critical perspective on how these technologies shape knowledge and broader social and human experiences: “[u]nderstanding how these visual systems work, technically, socially, and psychically, ought to be a way of embodying feminist objectivity” (p. 583). Rather than aspiring towards conventional notions of objectivity, the critical perspective Haraway advocates for is an “embodied, and therefore accountable objectivity.” She elaborates, “For example, local knowledges have also to be in tension with the productive structurings that force unequal translations and exchanges-material and semiotic-with-in the webs of knowledge and power” (p. 588). In this quote, Haraway’s text could be mistaken for a new materialist take on ecological relationality, and, indeed, new materialism and feminist philosophies share some principles, like accounting for the entities, structures, and bodies that converge to structure power or to dismantle it.

Haraway, and feminisms more broadly, put much needed value and focus on “local knowledge” and “embodied” epistemologies, while also seeking to illuminate larger “structurings” and “webs of knowledge of power.” The move towards embodied objectivity that Haraway advocates for both asserts one’s embodied viewpoint, not allowing it to be denigrated as “bias,” and suggests a comparative approach from situated, local positions to larger “structurings” controlling the movement of “material-semiotic” exchanges. In addition to the
material-semiotic, Haraway attends to the rhetorical, epistemological, and social effects visual technologies, particularly, have had on reifying power structures through seeming “to look” objectively and to create “neutral” visions of “facts.” To work against “unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims” of scientific methods and visual technologies, Haraway argues instead for “subjugated standpoints” and “situated knowledges” that can generate “specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organizing worlds” (p. 584).

For Haraway and other feminist standpoint scholars, this situated, embodied knowledge and attention to multiple, partial ways of knowing” demonstrates the “loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view, even when the other is our own machine” (p. 383). Importantly, Haraway includes machine perspectives as part of accounting for and making knowledge through multiple perspectives. Her take is not anti-technology, but, rather, inclusive of understanding particular rhetorical perspectives afforded by different technologies, reflecting on how technologies structure human perspectives, and grappling with these perspectives and partial views.

Subsequent feminist critical technology scholarship has troubled notions of objectivity by, in part, bringing to light and contesting the categorization necessary for research that relies on databases for analysis and visualization. Many of these scholars observe that categorization relies on taken-for-granted norms to structure data that then, often, participates in reifying binaries and reproduces historically-rooted social hierarchies and power dynamics. D’Ignazio (2017) urges researchers and designers to critically examine our data structuring choices and the choices made for us by APIs and software. Rather than accepting the structure and content of data as it flows through infrastructures to become what we term a collection, she emphasizes the need to reflect an awareness that data is shaped in particular ways and that collections will
always be missing data. She further argues that these structures and gaps should be acknowledged and perhaps figured into our data analysis and visualization.

Johanna Drucker (2017) observes that “[s]preadsheets are rhetorically powerful encodings of values and belief whose graphical features participate in their appearance of neutrality – of “unmarkedness” – through the way they graph their relations of power” (p. 909). This power functions through its seemingly neutral organization, which Drucker notes, “enacts its power through an effective erasure of the structuring apparatus” (p. 909). Drucker conducts a deep dive into the form and function of visualizations, arguing that they operate through established and familiar “conventions for communicating information in graphs, charts, or diagrams [to] make them readily legible. Perhaps, too readily, since the use of these familiar formats often allows them to be consumed without hesitation – or critical consideration” (p. 906-907). Instead of seemingly neutral and passive conventions, she argues that visualizations, and the spreadsheets that underlie them, are created through “authored activities”. Authored activities include practices like the naming of columns and rows, the way items are coded and classified by humans and, increasingly, by technologies that feed researchers information in established categories that are then replicated in spreadsheet form. Data construction and analysis involve various actors and computational processes at many levels, including the collection and aggregation of this data into quantitative forms meant to identify trends and patterns in large-scale distant readings of the data. Even interactive visualization, according to Drucker, provides only “[t]he illusion of control or agency, even of authorship” (p. 912). This illusion “is produced by the interaction with the features, the dials, input boxes, and so forth that all speak me as they speak to me. You, they each say, are the one who does this, and not that, or that, and then this and so on” (p. 912). In this quote, Drucker theorizes visualizations as a form of direct address,
one in which the visualization interpellates its user into its ideology by its seeming lack of subjective authorship. Following Drucker, the user develops a false sense of agency and control, an illusion predicated on the reality that interactive possibilities have already been controlled and constrained by the structure of the underlying data and the functions of the visualization.

Given these critical examinations of data and infrastructure, what are the possibilities of working towards more rhetorically informed data analysis and visualization? Although Klein (2018) critiques the distant view involved in data mining, analysis, and visualization, she also points out that power inequalities, “like sexism or racism, are also problems of scale but they require an increased attention to, rather than a passing over, of the subject positions that are too easily (if at times unwittingly) occluded when taking a distant view” (para. 9). Far from rejecting large-scale data analysis and visualization, Klein argues that “we need to assemble more corpora—more accessible corpora—that perform the work of recovery or resistance” (para. 11).

Methodologies that ask us to assemble more data, interrogate it, and account for multiple subjectivities can be challenging for researchers and research norms that may value standardized, replicable designs and unified conclusions; however, Elizabeth Losh, Jacqueline Wernimont, Laura Wexler, and Hong-An Wu (2016) argue in “Putting the Human Back into the Digital Humanities: Feminism, Generosity, and Mess” that we need to embrace “messier” methodologies and projects that also more thoroughly account for the rhetorical functions and power dynamics of working with data.

One way forward is to develop methodologies and visualizations that resist objectivity, the “God-trick” perspective Haraway observes. To accomplish this, D’Ignazio argues for including dissenting perspectives, providing a concrete example in visualization labels. She cites a decades old academic-community research and visualization project, The Detroit Geographic
Expedition and Institute (1971). This project employs titles that decidedly reflect a dissenting perspective rather than one of objectivity, like the map entitled, “Where Commuters Run Over Black Children.” Using this example and others, D’Ignazio points out that feminist visualizations should not only incorporate dissent but situate data in geographical locations and bodies. Within rhetoric and writing studies, researchers have developed feminist digital methodologies to address archival silences and participate in recovering unaccounted for contributions to our discipline. In the Metadata Mapping Project, Graban (2013) describes her processes of data collection, interrogation, and intentional arrangement as integral to her project’s. Graban chose to “gather, geospatially organize, and portray the archive not as a series of stable locations of recoverable documents, but as a network of information,” (p. 173). Through this methodology and research design, she also intends to transform the paradigm of whose work and what kind of work is considered valuable and responsible for shaping rhetoric and composition.

Natasha N. Jones, Kristen Moore, and Rebecca Walton (2016) argue for feminist recovery of social justice-oriented scholarship to the contribution of Technical and Professional Communication’s (TPC) disciplinary development: “Although TPC scholars have long been exploring issues of inclusion, the collective contribution of this work has gone largely unnoticed, (over)shadowed by the dominant narrative that technical communication is most concerned with objective, apolitical, acultural practices, theories, and pedagogies” (p. 211-212). The methodology of locating and circulating “antenarratives” illuminates activist-oriented TPC and participates in modifying and transforming dominant narratives of TPC’s “neutral, apolitical, and acultural practices.” Similarly, in “Apparent Feminism,” Erin Frost (2016) states that due to the public nature of TPC and the way in which such communication is often consumed as value-neutral and objective, feminist approaches require TPC scholarship to “pay attention to activists
operating in the public sphere” (p. 8). For Frost, feminist methodologies “can take up this call to tell such stories and, thus, insert feminist apparency” (p. 8). “Apparency” has the two-fold goal of challenging dominant power structures that undergird TPC’s neutral-seeming values, like efficiency, while also making feminist activist work more visible to the discipline through increasing feminist-oriented scholarship. Discussing the transformation of the rhetorical situation from the objective observation of Bitzer’s model to Vatz’s, which Frost reads as more attuned to the role of perception in creating rhetorical interpretation, she states, “[i]ndeed, when considering the urgent need for apparent feminism, we see that the situation is highly rhetorical and that particular kinds of utterances, texts, and rhetorical acts create public biases—or, we might say, crises—which in turn demand an apparent feminist response” (p. 12). Like TPC’s presumed neutrality, data-based projects demand an apparent feminist response. Based on the scholarship summarized in this section, the following feminist rhetorical methodology for social media data studies highlights principles, methodological possibilities, and research and project design choices, not as a recipe to be followed to the letter, but to elucidate tenets that have guided this project’s data collection, analysis, and visualization.

Framework for Feminist Rhetorical Data Visualization Methodology

1. Attend to subjectivity and consider incorporating dissent in the representation of data and conventional features of visualizations. This could manifest in numerous ways, such as through:
   - Choices about categories and structuring data
   - Labels and naming practices of visualizations
   - Including communities in the shape of research and the visualizations produced

2. Attune to silences and gaps; recover what might be missing from the archive or data collection. This might include:
   - Locating and emphasizing what’s overlooked by quantitative measures
● Creating visualizations that counter dominant perspectives
● Asking what isn’t reflected in the resulting visualization
● Coding the data using grounded theory to include themes that might be missed using other means of analysis

3. Incorporate an awareness of the way in which data and visualizations are “authored” in unseen ways by humans and technologies. Ask how we might:

● Augment and challenge existing structures
● Bring awareness to the way in which data and classification both ignores and creates difference
● Apply a critical lens to and make apparent the way in which framing and other visualization features create a form of direct address, structure certain kinds of viewpoints, and position data and its viewers as passive and neutral

4. Create visualizations that put big data in conversation with small data and other ways of knowing. This could include:

● Situating the data in embodied and geographic contexts
● Incorporating other data types like interviews and participant communities
● Using data visualization to tell stories of activism

In Chapter 3 and 4 of this dissertation, I will demonstrate how I’ve practiced elements of this feminist methodology through strategies of rhetorical data analytics, arrangement, and visualization that recover stories of activism, value the small data in large collections, and reflect multiple perspectives that add poly-vocal nuance to this project’s social media data study of anti-gentrification activism. First, however, as part of the methodology developed in this chapter, I will account for the way in which I collected and organized the data for analysis and visualization.
Rhetoric as It Happens: Calling the Twitter API

To work with data visualization tools like those I’ve employed to work with a large data set, it’s often necessary to begin by building a database. In *Lingua Fracta*, Collin Brooke (2009) confronts Lev Manovich’s claim that “database and narrative are natural enemies” (Manovich, quoted in Brooke, p. 97). In Brooke’s reading of Manovich, this binary relationship comes down to the sequential organization of narrative: a narrative is structured by a sequence of unfolding events and the subsequent actions of characters. Since a database doesn’t adopt a sequential structure, a sense of time passing through lived experience (this happens and then this happens) in Manovich’s view, it cannot be a narrative. A database, alternatively, is structured in rows and columns and populated by individual items; therefore, most modes of analysis often involve counting seemingly equally weighted individual datums that elide the subjectivity pointed out by scholars like Klein and Gitelman. By focusing on narrative as sequential order, Brooke argues that Manovich is missing a key reconfiguring of the canon of arrangement in the digital age: instead of sequential organization of events that represent time progressing, in digital media, arrangement is rhetorically configured by the user’s or researcher’s practice: both the choices and the tools s/he employs. Brooke further elaborates: “building a database of related items allows patterns and relationships to emerge” (p. 107). It is pattern, rather than sequence, that defines arrangement in the database structure that allows for many digital media expressions.

Although writing nearly ten years ago and before our present “Big Data” moment, Brooke’s emphasis on pattern finding is especially relevant today. Large data sets necessitate computational modes of reading—perhaps analytics and visualizations—and these processes often rope in other software structures and logics to generate something easily read by human eyes, a bar chart or line graph, for instance. These visualizations are often dependent on
database-structured data. Once in database form, digital tools and applications can, indeed, read the data in ways that will generate analytical results, often as visualizations. In dissecting Manovich’s claim that “database and narrative are natural enemies,” Brooke does not quite make the point that these patterns and relationships can be understood as narratives, and narratives, as Walter Fisher (1984) elucidated are “public, moral arguments” (p. 12). Indeed, in the digital era, academic programs and corporate jobs are increasingly created around “data storytelling.” A recent editorial in *Forbes Magazine* argues that data storytelling skills and literacies are increasingly valuable: “data storytelling is a structured approach for communicating data insights, and it involves a combination of three key elements: data, visuals, and narrative” (para. 4). Although often the data storytelling model is geared towards the interests of business—perhaps data is compiled and analyzed to increase a company’s reach and profits and limit its vulnerabilities and losses—data storytelling can be a means by which rhetoric, writing studies, and technical communication expand our respective research and pedagogical practices in a way that also reflects and enriches broader understandings of rhetorical circulation through data visualization, particularly its constructed and rhetorical qualities.

**Defining the Archive and In Situ Circulation**

At the time of this writing, Twitter’s API has several access levels, the most robust of which involves paying a use or subscription fee; however, using the free-access level, researchers can continuously collect a sample of tweets in real time and over an extended period of days or even years. Twitter’s free access level only allows researchers to collect seven days into the past. Due to this time constraint, researchers have to collect, either, after an event has already begun to unfold, or choose a topic or phenomena that they expect will have ongoing
interest and activity. In February 2016 when I began collecting data from Twitter’s API, it wasn’t in response to one specific event or an existing hashtag campaign, but more from the desire to understand how the conversation about gentrification might be developing and circulating on Twitter over a sustained period of time, both locally and globally. Since I was interested in ongoing data collection, I used Twitter’s Filter Tweets API. This API allows me to continue collecting tweets containing my desired keyword, according to Twitter’s API restrictions, in real time and over an extended period of time, in my case two years.

I collected continuously over an extended period of time using the keyword, “gentrification,” to garner a data set that would allow me to look at Twitter encounters forming around this contemporary topic, one which may or may not attach to a specific hashtag or other unified object. As William Wolff (2015) points out, social media APIs like Twitter’s allow for in situ rhetorical studies. Endres et al. (2016) use the concept of in situ to describe a critical and participatory methodology that “provides a means to account for the rhetoric of the everyday, to locate rhetoric in relationship to broader cultural discourses, and to open space for critics to analyze, participate with, and contribute to an emancipatory form of critique” (p. xiv). The authors point out that this participatory approach has deep roots in rhetorical criticism wherein a researcher’s particular perspective and relationship to the political and social issues at hand are explicitly involved in the resulting critical product and its possible interpretations. Endres et al. further observe that rhetoric is currently undergoing a participatory turn, which they emphasize relinquishes objectivity and even embraces an awareness of our influence on our research and knowledge products. In this perspective, research is inventive, rather than scientific. Endres et al. also emphasize that “critical approaches to fieldwork highlight the value of using it to access those everyday rhetorics that would otherwise go unnoticed, undocumented, and unexamined”
(p. 517). Although the authors don’t apply an in situ rhetorical fieldwork to social media data collection, Yarimar Bonilla and Jonathan Rossa (2015) “examine the possibilities, the stakes, and the necessity of taking these forms of activism seriously while remaining attentive to the limits and possible pitfalls of engaging in what we describe as ‘hashtag ethnography’” (p. 5).

**Arranging Twitter Data for Analysis and Visualization**

As discussed in Chapter 1, many rhetoric and writing studies examine communication on Twitter, like Yarimar and Bonilla’s study, by focusing on hashtag collections. When I began collecting Twitter data in February 2016, I wasn’t aware of any major hashtag campaigns related to gentrification. Perhaps more importantly, I wanted to understand how people communicated about gentrification in more informal networks and encounters. Thus, rather than collecting around particular hashtags or groups, I decided to collect using the keyword, “gentrification.” Keyword collection include any tweets that contain “gentrification,” this could include a hashtag, but could also correspond to any word within the tweet. To develop a large-scale data set over time, I collected from February 2016 through the end of February 2018. This choice was influenced by personal experiences with urban change, reading news pieces, listening to everyday conversations, and observing the growing prevalence of gentrification themes in recent television programs and films. I chose the keyword term “gentrification” to also limit my results, surmising that since character-limited tweets would be encumbered by a lengthy and academic word like gentrification, those tweeting out the term would be perhaps more intentional, even political, about their engagement with the issue. After a year, I had collected over 600,000 tweets, and after two years I had almost tripled that number, resulting in a final data set of 1,914,243 tweets and associated metadata. To understand what this large data set contained, I
first used computational methods to glean a thematic overview of the data set as a whole and to locate frequently circulated media and tweets.

During the first year of data collection, I converted the JSON files of the Twitter data I’d collected into a spreadsheet form that mimicked the structure of the data Twitter afforded. Rows were delineated by tweet IDs, and columns corresponded to the Twitter features I covered before, characteristics like user location, tweet text, and coordinates. To get a grasp of important themes, as least those that were most frequently mentioned in tweets, I followed Kris Shaffer’s (2017) example in “Mining Twitter data with R, TidyText, and TAGS.” Shaffer describes how researchers might use applications that combine the Twitter Archiving Data Sheets (TAGS) application with R to enable text mining and frequency analysis on Twitter data sets. Among other uses, these tools allow for word frequency charts and the parsing of bigrams, two-word associations that most frequently occur in a data set. As Shaffer and Fitzgerald further point out, generating bigrams can be a starting point for other kinds of computational and traditional analyses, which generate different possibilities for interpretations and comparison and, potentially, contribute complexity to an analysis. Since Twitter data is rich in metadata, there is multidimensionally within each tweet entry. Shaffer and Fitzgerald ultimately focus in on the way in which URLs are shared and disseminated across social networks of users, endeavoring to better understand how misinformation spreads on Twitter. I began with a similar though simpler approach to the data set I collected, focusing first on producing word frequencies and bigrams. To protect users’ privacy, I followed Shaffer’s advice on using R to remove personal identifiers, like handles and usernames, as well as employing a standard list of stop words.
Authoring Analyses and Visualizations: Tableau and 2,000,000 Tweets

Tableau, a “freemium” data analytic software designed primarily for professional data analysts in business and nonprofits, has also been used in Twitter-related academic research and visualization in the humanities and social sciences (Bruns, 2018; Felt, 2016). After exploring various options that required more programming skills, I began to use Tableau because of its easy-to-use Graphic User Interface (GUI) and drag and drop analytical functionality; however, the visualizations, like line charts and bar graphs, that Tableau offers provide a pseudo-objective perspective, like Haraway’s conquering gaze from nowhere, in which the greatest quantity of items appear to be most significant.

Since it is not feasible to human-read a collection of nearly two-million tweets, visualization is a necessary part of working with this data and, particularly for this dissertation study, allowed me to locate data for further study. Tableau’s many different graphs, charts, and map visualizations, as Drucker points out, are “formats [that] are effective, efficient, and surprisingly obfuscating” (p. 907). By “obfuscating,” Drucker is referring to the way in which these visualization conventions seem to be objectively relaying neutral information: “nowhere is there a single overt marking that indicates the image is a mode of address, a structuring instrument rhetorically engaged in productions of power” (p. 907). Even when the audience of the visualization is the researcher, as in my case, it’s important to be aware of how the visualization directs one’s focus to read the most quantitatively visible tweets as the most significant. It would have been easy, for instance, simply not to see tweets that appear only once, or users whose tweets aren’t retweeted in viral proportions; however, since Tableau allows users to click on any point in the line and explore the underlying data, including data which often includes more than just the most prevalent posts, conceivably, as I’ve done, a researcher might...
also include and/or account for tweets that aren’t the most frequently occurring. This would have to be a conscious methodological decision, and one based on familiarity with the tool’s affordances, since the graphic visualization functions by graphically orienting the gaze to the quantitatively greatest data items. Indeed, visualizations like Tableaus are mostly different shades of quantitative measurement of attributes, like dates that correspond with tweet activity, users who tweet the most, and tweets that are retweeted most. In order to reorient our gaze from the greatest to what might be hidden beneath the most frequently occurring aspects of our data set, we can push against data analytic and visualization software to find small data that might otherwise go unseen.

These computational ways of exploring the large data set provided a method to locate gentrification encounters and begin to understand how anti-gentrification rhetoric circulates. The macroanalysis and visualization of this dissertation project’s entire data set of two million tweets, for instance, illuminates that gentrification circulates in relation to histories of white cultural domination, appropriation, and commodification of nonwhite culture and spaces. As interesting and worthwhile of examination as this macroanalysis is, however, it didn’t readily illuminate any of the tweets made by more organized anti-gentrification groups, nor did the aggregate measures illuminate particular situated knowledge of gentrification. I knew anti-gentrification activist groups existed in the data set, partly through the initial R frequency analysis of bigrams that showed the frequency of the term, “anti-gentrification,” and also through human reading portions of the data set spreadsheet. To make Tableau see these smaller groups, who, because they act more locally and outside of the realm of celebrity and entertainment, are often not retweeted to a viral extent, I organized a smaller data subset in a separate database and conducted additional research to develop a case study on the activist group, Defend Boyle Heights (DBH). This
smaller-scale partial view of anti-gentrification rhetoric also strives to situate and contextualize data in bodies and geographical spaces.

**Dissenting from Analytics: Locating DBH in Situated Geographies**

In the smaller data study, the subject of Chapter 4, I initially tried the same Tableau techniques used with the large data set on a subset of this data, approximately 1200 tweets related to Defend Boyle Heights (DBH). By doing so, I was able to examine key moments and encounters, partly through examining peaks of Twitter activity. These line graphs, charts, and maps, although useful for gleaning an overview of the group’s Twitter activity, central themes of concern, and geographic reach, also produced a disembodied, neutral, and quantitatively-valued perspective that wasn’t adequate to visualize the nuances and consequences of DBH’s circulation. To better situate DBH’s tweets in more specific locations and embodied actions, I used grounded theory to create a coding structure. Cresswell (2014) describes grounded theory as a “design of inquiry” whereby “a researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants” (p. 14). In the case of this study, I understood DBH’s perspective to be limited to the expressions and materialities contained in their tweets and in other digital profiles. The process I followed to code DBH’s tweets “involves using multiple stages of data collection and the refinement and interrelationship of categories of information” (p. 14). For me, these stages included reading and rereading all of DBH’s tweets and also examining every piece of attached media. Initially, my coding scheme involved identifying over twenty actions. This coding condensed particular actions within more general, although less precise, categories. To visualize this information in a way that was usable and clear, I further reduced the action codes down to three overall types: communication practices,
direct actions, and legal actions. I retained the more granular codes, like celebrating, mobilizing, surveilling, fundraising, art intervention, etc., so that these actions would still appear in the visualizations, but would not be one of the interactive features controlling the points on the map. I created another spreadsheet column to code for the targets of these actions and, again, went through a process of condensing over twenty different codes down to six broader categories: art, business, community building, entertainment, government forces, and housing. I then coded each tweet, looking both at the visual media and the text of each tweet.

Coding is far from a cut and dry process. Partly due to the time and labor required to manually read and code each tweet, my technological skill level, and the affordances of visualization applications, I chose to apply only one primary action and theme code to each tweet. Although many tweets contain explicit or implicit language and media that might tie to another code, at least in this first iterative phase, I coded for what I determined was the primary subject of the tweet, the primary action (sometimes this resulted in two codes since both seemed to be equally emphasized), and I identified any location information in the tweet or media. As previously mentioned, tweets weren’t often geolocated, but in the case of DBH’s tweets, many were geotagged and almost all of them referred to a specific location in some way, perhaps by including an address or named entity in the tweet or the attached media. Therefore, in order to determine location, I scoured the tweets and attached media for location information. Although some visual analytics exist, like Google Vision API, few if any will reliably analyze a large data set for free. After experimenting with a few options like Google Vision API, I found that existing computational tools wouldn’t be able to carry out this location coding and perform it with the accuracy of human reading. In DBH’s tweets, many locations are names of businesses that I could only identify because of my familiarity with DBH. For instance, a tweet might mention “la
bbq”, without indicating that it’s the name of an art gallery or providing any recognizable street address or entity. Additionally, location info was often contained in photos, graphics, or videos, which are currently not easily or reliably read by existing applications. This media can be more accurately coded by humans looking to locate building, place, or street names. This process of reading and viewing and then rereading and viewing to code each tweet for location, action, and theme probably required 100 or more hours of my personal human labor, and it’s by no means scientific; however, the additional codes provide a way to understand gentrification through grounding this understanding in DBH’s tweet perspective and geographic location in a way that also allows for data visualization based on those codes, created according to my specific project goals and decisions about categorization.

After this coding process, I used a number of mapping applications, like Carto and Google Maps, to visualize the data. The resulting maps are in the early inventive phases, and although I have plans for adding additional visual elements, like symbology and more visual texture, I haven’t yet found a way to completely depart from the omniscient perspective maps afford; however, by coding and mapping from the perspective of DBH’s tweets, the view of Boyle Heights is one that surveils incoming gentrifying forces and illuminates the tactics DBH has used to oppose these forces.

Organizing tweets by distinct categories, and then separating and joining these categories in spreadsheets and visualization applications, elides the ways in which these tweets, DBH’s themes and actions, could be coded and visualized to produce different resulting visualizations and perspectives. For instance, everything I coded could be labeled a communication practice since each one corresponds to a tweet. Similarly, some art interventions leaned more towards communication practices, like handmade zines and eviction maps, while others, like graffiti and
splashed paint outside of galleries, might be considered more akin to direct actions. In future iterations of this map, I hope to better represent this nuance. In addition to the struggle over distinct categorization, some actions and practices are combined under broader umbrella terms. As I noted previously, this broader categorization achieves a greater level of usability and clarity, but it loses meaningful distinction. For instance, “government forces” includes those posts that reference policing, Immigration or Custom Enforcement (ICE), and transportation, as well as white supremacy, imperialism, and patriarchy. To limit the number of categories and the visual attention required to understand the map, I combined these terms under the category “government forces,” since each subcategory relates in some way to state power structures, but the term is not quite sufficient to represent the underlying data, let alone the lived experiences.

This is just a brief discussion of many of the ways in which the feminist rhetorical framework I previously outline in this chapter has influenced methodological choices around structuring data and shaped the visual perspectives. The visualizations described in the next two chapters are far from a complete study of how anti-gentrification rhetoric has circulated on Twitter, in no small part because they reduce visually rich and emotion-laden interactions to points and symbols that only communicate a fraction of the depth and nuance of the rhetorical action and, doubtlessly even less so, of the embodied moment. Before delving into this smaller data case study, however, the next chapter will provide several ways of analyzing and visualizing the dominant themes and viral visuality present in the data set as a whole, what I’m terming the “macroanalysis.” By doing so, this large scale data view of anti-gentrification encounters on Twitter illuminates the spread, frequency, and transformation of dominant anti-gentrification perspectives circulating on Twitter, themes that will resonate in Chapter 4’s smaller data study of the activist group Defend Boyle Heights.
Chapter 3  

Circulating Ad Hoc Anti-Gentrification Rhetoric

Beginning with the gradual disappearance of traditional manufacturing and growth of financial services, moving through the residential conversion of lofts and office buildings, and promoted by media buzz about alternative sources of art, design, and cuisine, these neighborhoods have been re-imagined as the creative hub of a symbolic economy.


Imma just ask for everybody out there, tf is gentrification?

Anonymous Tweet, 2017

This chapter applies the rhetorical feminist methodology developed in Chapter 2 to the entire Twitter data set I collected using the keyword “gentrification” from February 2016-February 2018. To better understand the circulation of vernacular rhetoric related to gentrification in a data set of approximately 2,000,000 tweets and associated metadata, this chapter describes the data visualizations I’ve employed to locate encounters through frequently circulating themes, tweets, and media. The perspectives generated through these visualizations, and more generally by attention to frequency, however, are not the only perspectives from which to view this data. Later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 4, I will demonstrate how rhetoric and writing studies might work with data visualization tools to reinvent their potentials for research guided, not just by frequency, but by rhetorical and feminist principles.

To unpack the disciplinary connections between this chapter’s large data analysis and studies of activism on social media, I will begin by briefly highlighting rhetoric and writing studies scholarship that focuses on hashtag movements and digital composing practices, particularly those relevant to understanding agency and social change. The discussion will situate this dissertation project’s study in relationship to the aforementioned scholarship, and, importantly, demonstrate how feminist rhetorical methodologies can account for consequential
encounters outside of their associations with unified hashtags or iconic images. Next, I will describe particular visualizations generated from my analysis of the entire data set and reflect on various elements shaping these visualizations. Additionally, I’ll more closely examine individual tweets and images at the peaks of activity and at the times when one might say these tweets went viral. This macroanalysis, as well as the subsequent chapter’s micro-analysis, demonstrates that anti-gentrification rhetoric circulated, in part, due to the accumulated value of affective economies, shared histories, and cultural identification encountered through user-generated visuality. Affective responses, and the histories to which they connect, are part of what propelled this rhetoric to circulate through Twitter and through additional assemblages encountered on- and offline. I argue that these circulations carry the possibility of shaping alternative knowledge of gentrification, partly through visual narratives that surveil gentrification as white supremacy and oppression, a force which manifests in popular culture and commodities as well as in physical spaces.

**Situating a Large Twitter Data Study of Anti-Gentrification Activism**

Even though rhetoric and writing studies scholars are adept at analyzing texts and visual artifacts, we have just begun to scratch the surface of working with large social media data. And yet, social media, for better or worse, is where rhetorical encounters increasingly happen and, increasingly, the consequences of these encounters reverberate through other interactions and spaces, shaping public life. Accessing data through the platforms and networks in which it moves, often at a scale and speed that require researchers to employ technologies to gather and “read” it, is complicated further by the difficulties in defining the object of analysis. Each individual tweet is multimodal and dynamic, especially in the aspects of its movement, often
connecting to other users, times, and media through conventions like retweets. These multimodal and dynamic qualities are compounded in Twitter data, in which tweets are not only more numerous and varied than when examining tweets manually gathered; this data also includes elements beyond the tweet, such as user location and number of followers. The layering of texts possible in just one tweet is enormous. Each tweet can correspond to numerous user-generated and technology-created characteristics like user profile information, location information, attached photos and videos, linked URLs, and, of course, the actual text of the tweet, which is often not a standard sentence containing standard words, and might even be recycled text, like a retweet or quote. These tweets, retweets, and quoted tweets, along with any attached and linked media, connect to other users--friends and followers but also potentially any Twitter user--and each of these connections shares the same additional attribute and composition possibilities.

Beyond the complexity of users and tweets, other fluctuating social and technological possibilities arise through hyperlinks and follower connections, possibilities that offer more opportunities for additional encounters, for instance, in the comment threads on other websites, YouTube videos, and social network platforms. These data layers represent composing practices, rhetorical tools, and pathways of circulation, and their affordances are partly shaped, too, by Twitter’s platform design and complex display algorithm, which are shifting, largely unknown, and invisible sets of rules that influence what’s seen and by whom. Such layers and pathways can seem infinite and impossible to completely account for, especially because tweets and images are often revived, remixed, and transformed for different rhetorical purposes, by different users, across different temporalities. Attempting to study social media data as circulating rhetoric is a rich, complex, frustrating process, one that is also continually in flux due to rapidly changing
technologies and social practices. Thus, data, especially social media data, necessitates a new kind of rhetorical engagement.

In rhetoric and writing studies, as well as in other disciplines, Twitter has proven valuable for understanding the rhetorical complexity and consequences of hashtag protest (#blacklivesmatter, Dadas, 2018; #myNYPD, Hayes, 2017; #ferguson, Bonilla & Rossa, 2015; Yang, 2016; #OWS, Deluca et al, 2012; Penney & Dadas, 2016, #notokay, Sternberg, 2018). Cultural anthropologists, Bonilla and Rosa (2015), call for more scholars to take up hashtag ethnography methods as a means to study contemporary social movements and activism on social media. Examining Twitter activity following the police killing of Michael Brown, an unarmed black man, in Ferguson, Missouri, Bonilla and Rosa argue that a Twitter community formed around this event partly through their use of hashtags to index topics and unite publics. In rhetoric and writing studies, Caroline Dadas (2018) in “Hashtag Activism: The Promise and Risk of ‘Attention’,” notes that the affordance of Twitter hashtags and activist creation and use of hashtags provides productive ways “for directing attention to social and political causes” (p. 17). Dadas points out the limited character allowances of Twitter, but also the way in which tweet content can “thicken” through the use of attachments, like URL links and photos of text, a technique often used to skirt Twitter’s character limit. Using the concept of rhetorical velocity theorized by James Ridolfo and Danielle Nicole DeVoss (2009), Dadas describes how hashtags enable the potential for messages to quickly spread far outside of a Twitter user’s initial network:

In this sense, the rhetorical velocity of a tweet can ensure broad readership in a short amount of time. The ability to embed short URLs enables Twitter users to encourage their followers to read further about the context of a hashtag or brief argument—all while staying within the constraints and generic expectations of the platform (p. 21).
For Dadas, Twitter’s design affords a multi-layering and multiplicity of circulating pathways that, depending on how activists interact with it, can enable them to better contextualize their content and circulate it to a “broad readership.” Through agile digital composing practices that utilize and push against Twitter affordances, like hashtags, linking, and tagging, activists can often achieve instantaneous delivery to an immense network of users, thereby expanding the breadth of their online attention. Expanding reach and influence, however, is not solely determined by how widely tweets circulate, but also influenced by activists’ ability to obfuscate Twitter’s character-limited tweet field in a way that also situates their tweets in wider contextual circumstances, both present and past. She points out, however, that even given these practices, Twitter’s affordances present challenges for activists to sufficiently articulate the social histories necessary for continued identification and sustenance of social movements, stating, “the complex politics, histories, and economics that led to these injustices cannot be reduced to a hashtag” (p. 18). Despite the limitations of Twitter, Dadas call for scholars in rhetoric and writing studies “to continue to theorize how composition on social media represents a rich site of rhetorical activity in a variety of contexts” (p. 33). Pertinent to this study, Dadas argues rhetorical social media research informs our understanding of how “massive grassroots efforts like #blacklivesmatter seek to address deep-seated structural inequities” (p. 34). Dadas’ study is valuable for understanding social media activism, especially in relation to a hashtag. Expanding from work conducted by Dadas and others, this chapter demonstrates that hashtags are not the only way to locate encounters. Large social media data sets collected by keyword, rather than through hashtags, allow for the possibility of locating publics who coalesce around a shared interest, like gentrification, encounters which may or may not correspond to more organized hashtag campaigns or social movements. Although perhaps less organized than massive online hashtag
protests, these encounters often also “seek to address deep-seated structural inequities” and contribute to rhetorical and social transformations. The following pages will describe how I’ve used data visualizations to locate encounters in which users attempt to address structural inequalities related to gentrification, or what I call ad hoc activism. Ad hoc activism refers to improvisational encounters involving users, media, affects, histories, and representations that experience ongoing and/or recurrent circulation, generating various kinds of potential consequences, especially as these encounters accumulate around shared interests.

Identifying ad hoc activism in large social media data sets is a valuable contribution to understanding activism in the digital age, especially outside of organized, massive movements, like those associated with a hashtag. Hashtag analysis relies on the existence of this ready-made form in connection with an established conversation or social movement, like the #OWS for the Occupy Wall Street movement or #blacklivesmatter for the Black Lives Matter movement. Certainly, we can acknowledge that meaningful encounters around shared concerns occur on Twitter outside of their association with hashtags, just as they have always occurred before and beyond the existence of online social networks. This chapter provides ways of locating such encounters beyond those occurring in relation attachment with singular objects like hashtags or iconic images. Collecting Twitter data over time using a keyword rather than a hashtag provides entry into less structured encounters that are none-the-less meaningful and consequential. These encounters can be partially understood through connections with shared visuality, and researchers can locate, trace, account for, and compare visual patterns that emerge around shared interests, like this study’s focus on gentrification. The application of last chapter’s feminist rhetorical methodology is also influenced by Laurie Gries’ work and method of iconographic tracking. Iconographic tracking is designed to gather disparate, seemingly unconnected data, and
reveal their connections, often made through sharing some aspect of the original Shepard Fairey Obama Hope image. The connections she draws between various, sometimes divergent forms an image might take and yet still retain characteristics or connections, she admits, are intuitive rather than concrete characteristics from an original actualized image. Indeed, as image-making technologies advance and become more accessible to more people, and as the technologies for sharing those images proliferate and become nearly ubiquitous to our lived experience, locating an “original actualized image” becomes increasingly difficult, if not impossible. A large-scale Twitter data study of anti-gentrification circulation, utilizing feminist rhetorical methodologies, allows researchers to locate encounters and transformations outside of hashtags and iconic images. The data visualizations in this chapter help account for aspects of circulation, including encounters that shape knowledge about gentrification, influence public attitudes, and contribute to transforming social, material, and cultural norms and practices related to gentrification.

**Using Machine Reading and Data Analysis: A Tale of 2,000,000 Tweets**

The visualizations in this section corresponds to 600,000 tweets collected during the first year of Twitter data collection (February 2016-February 2017). In the initial word frequency graph generated through R (Figure 1), issues of race and specific locations are some of the most frequent themes indicated through word frequency. Interestingly, “white,” is more frequently occurring than “black,” but both are among the most frequently occurring words, and “displacement,” although lower in the frequency graph, is a significant term, especially considering the number of tweet characters it consumes.
This preliminary analysis demonstrates that Twitter users circulate perspectives and narratives about gentrification that relate to race and displacement. Furthermore, the 6th most frequent term, “anti”, seems to indicate that “anti-gentrification” discourse is frequently circulating on Twitter. These indicators, though just sketches of what might be in the data, were useful instruments for focusing the future trajectory of my research on anti-gentrification rhetoric, especially since it seemed to have a significant presence in the data set as a whole.

Additionally, this initial word frequency chart reveals frequent locations, like Brooklyn, San Francisco, and London, indicating high circulation of tweets on gentrification related to these locations. Traces of affective economies, too, emerge from this initial frequency data, particularly in words like “stop, death, fight, police,” which seem to indicate tension, discord,
and perhaps violence. While other words like “shit, fuck, and love,” for instance, speak more specifically to emotions encountered and circulated in relation to gentrification. Although these are interesting results, they are merely fragments of possible narratives and knowledge-making about gentrification. To glean a little more context, I used R to generate bigrams, frequent two-word associations.

**Figure 2: R Bigram Frequencies Analysis (Feb. 2016-Feb 2017).**

In Figure 2, the bigram “anti-gentrification” is the most frequent two-word association in the data set. Related terms, like “gentrification protesters,” “fighting gentrification, “fight gentrification,” also occur frequently. “White people” is the third most frequent bigram, but, interestingly, “black,” a frequently occurring term in the single word visualization, doesn’t register as part of a frequent two-word association, indicating that it is not connected frequently.
to one other particular word in the way that “white” and “people” frequently occur together. California locations, like San Francisco, Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, and Boyle Heights, frequently occur, as well as locations like New York, Berlin, and Boston’s Chinatown. The locations, agents, and affects emerging in the bigram analysis provide some sense of the kinds of narratives most frequently circulating across the Twitter data set.

For instance, some of word pairs in Figure 2 combine location and an event or person, like “shamed san,” “francisco rebecca,” and “rebecca solnit.” Looking through the spreadsheet, I found that these pairs all refer to the same news article, which was shared so often that words in its title became some of the most frequent bigrams: “Death by gentrification: the killing that shamed San Francisco,” by Rebecca Solnit, published in The Guardian on March 21, 2016. Solnit, raised and educated in California, is a commercially successful, well-known “writer, historian, and activist,” who, in addition to writing for publications like The Guardian, has authored “twenty books on feminism, western and indigenous history, popular power, social change and insurrection, wandering and walking, hope and disaster” (rebeccasolnit.net). The “death” in “Death by gentrification” refers to the recent police killing of Alejandro Nieto in San Francisco’s Bernal Hill Park. Some of the circumstances leading up to the shooting are contested, but Solnit establishes that Nieto, a frequent visitor to the park, encountered a “newcomer” resident, a tech professional, and his unleashed dog “cornered Nieto against a bench” (para. 11). Nieto, an off-duty security guard, took out his taser to defend himself against the dog, the two men argued, and the newcomer resident, observing Nieto’s Latino ethnicity and assuming his bright clothing were a sign of gang-affiliation, called the cops.

I won’t attempt to recount the circumstances around the shooting, as those too are contested, but Nieto was shot by officers fourteen times and his family has since filed a civil
rights lawsuit against the San Francisco Police Department. In her article, Solnit alternates between narratively recounting Nieto’s death and chronicling San Francisco’s tech-boom fueled economic and social transformation, one that she observes has made San Francisco “a cruel place and a divided one.” Solnit’s title, “Death by gentrification: the killing that shamed San Francisco,” aptly expresses her perspective, perhaps one shared by those who circulate it on Twitter, that Nieto’s death is not a one-off, but characteristic of the “cruelty” of San Francisco’s gentrification. This cruelty is not just about economic inequality and displacement but also the physical danger gentrification causes nonwhite bodies. Solnit writes, “Nieto died because a series of white men saw him as a menacing intruder in the place he had spent his whole life” (para. 5). Solnit’s perspective on gentrification reflects her positionalities, “feminist, historian, and activist,” rather than mainstream narratives that often positively characterize San Francisco’s tech growth as “progress.”

Authoring Analyses and Visualizations: Tableau and 2,000,000 Tweets

The R frequency visualization described above allows for preliminary insights into most frequently occurring locations and possible themes in the data set as a whole. As my data collection continued throughout another year, I examined this first year’s 600,000 tweets in other ways. I clicked on URLs, read linked articles and blogs, viewed visual media attached to some tweets, and copied some tweet texts into a working file for later close reading and research. Reading every tweet, following every URL, and viewing every piece of attached media simply couldn’t be humanly done, not even on this smaller preliminary data sample of 600,000 tweets, at least within the constraints of this dissertation timeline; therefore, machine reading and analysis, like the R frequencies, were valuable for viewing this large data set through several
frequency measures that guided further research. Such a sketch isn’t a comprehensive representation of all the data, and yet despite it being a sample, machine reading serves as a useful step toward further research. In later chapters, I’ll describe how other visualization applications helped me to examine the circulation of tweets over time, to locate frequently retweeted tweets, as well as to quantify and visualize other Twitter data attributes like location information and hashtags. These multiple analytics helped me better understand tweets in relation to time, place, and movement and account for more aspects of gentrification’s circulation on Twitter.

![Tableau Analysis of Tweet Frequency (Feb. 2016-Feb. 2018)](image-url)

Figure 3: Tableau Analysis of Tweet Frequency (Feb. 2016-Feb. 2018).

In Tableau Analysis of Tweet Frequency (Feb. 2016-Feb. 2018), the line chart depicts various peaks of tweet activity (Figure 3). The highest peak occurs on August 25th, 2017 with other peaks, most approximately half the height of the August 25th peak, occurring throughout the collection. A greater frequency of peaks occurs during the second year of collection,
indicating more frequent circulation of gentrification rhetoric in that year. Tableau is interactive in the sense that it allows users to explore the granular data underneath the lines by clicking on a point in the chart, clicking on the “view data” icon, and then clicking on the “full data” tab. A pop-up box displays the underlying data, in this case the rows of tweets and metadata. Using these features, I was able to sort and export this data for further exploration, providing much smaller, more manageable data subsets that correspond to peaks in user activity around gentrification and, in some cases, tweets and visuals that had gone viral. By exploring these peaks, I was able to see tweets in my data set that were most frequently retweeted in relation to particular times, events, and locations. In many of the most retweeted tweets, users encountered gentrification in connection with popular culture and commodities. Often, these frequently retweeted tweets circulated knowledge of gentrification not as merely a spatial process, but as an agent of cultural appropriation and commodification. For example, the highest peak in the data set, occurring on August 25th, 2017, includes retweets and responses to the original tweet text and image depicted in Figure 4.

![Figure 4: Most Retweeted Gentrification Tweet—Swift Formation Meme.](image)

In the retweets, mentions, and remixes that follow the tweet, users encounter, participate, and shape the circulation of gentrification in relation to a specific cultural event, but also to
histories of racial oppression and appropriation. The meme reflects the perspective that the pop star Taylor Swift’s music video for “Look What You Made Me Do,” performed and televised during MTV’s Video Music Awards, gentrified Beyoncé’s “Formation” song and choreography. Tweet responses and retweets often include variations of the original Swift Formation meme, such as remixed lyrics like, “I got ketchup in my bag, swag,” and “I see it, I want it, I steal it so I’ll own it.” The date of this tweet corresponds with the airing date of the VMAs, and many users were probably involved in the Twitter practice of live tweeting the event. Interestingly, the Swift Formation meme didn’t only circulate on Twitter. After the meme went viral, publications like the *Miami Herald* (Harrell, Aug. 25, 2017), the *Huffington Post* (Sieczkowski, Aug. 25, 2017), and others subsequently reported on the Twitter conversation around the Swift Formation meme; By doing so, these publications aided in the circulation of perspectives on gentrification as white appropriation of nonwhite culture. These reports often remarked on how Twitter users observed that Swift’s use of aesthetic visual styles and lyrical content were similar to those in Beyoncé’s “Formation.” This reporting is an important element of understanding circulation through “microcultures,” the Twitter conversation interacting with “metaculture” (Gries, 2015). Gries states “[t]hat the pace at which culture changes is driven by motion generated between the circulation of metaculture or ideas and interpretations about culture, and that thing it comments upon” (p. 126). Following Gries, microculture like the creation and rapid circulation of the Swift Formation meme and the metaculture created and circulated by secondary sources interacting with Twitter assemblages indicate potential for cultural transformation, however incremental.

Indeed, Gries (2015) emphasizes that circulation generates potential consequences, elaborating that these potentials become more likely if images are followed by “the production of other actualized versions with the same image or derivatives that may resemble it in form, genre,
style, content, or function” (p. 122). In this passage, Gries could be describing the form of the meme itself, which often involves repeating or transforming an original image to accomplish a new rhetorical goal. In the Swift Formation meme, user-created text modifies Beyoncé’s original lyric, “Okay, ladies, let’s get into formation,” to “Okay ladies now let’s gentrification.” By doing so, the user changes the context and meaning of Beyoncé’s black feminist empowerment lyric to a memed lyric that portrays Swift’s performance as a call to white women to “gentrify”. By associating Swift’s song and performance with gentrification, this tweet re-presents, partly through visuality, Swift as a gentrifier of Beyoncé’s art, and doing so also circulates histories of white racial oppression of nonwhite others. Ward (2017) notes, Beyoncé is considered “as a Black radical messianic figure,” and observes that as Beyoncé circulates through various media, “audiences are forced to deeply engage images of Black womanhood—an identity construct loaded with historical signifiers and material conditions—and to reflect on the sensory perceptions that these images rouse” (p. 154). In the replies that follow the Swift Formation meme, it’s clear that this image aroused many emotions—from tweeting texts and memes “crying,” as a way to indicate both laughter and sadness to expressing outrage, like “man what the fuck is this.” Through remixing visuals and texts, like the improvised lyrics mentioned earlier, to combining these remixed texts with modified versions of the original meme, these tweets produce and circulate media contesting Swift’s performance and also broader issues of cultural appropriation and commodification. Ward’s observation that bodies are “loaded with historical signifiers and material conditions” makes apparent that this Twitter encounter also involves particular kinds of bodies situated in particular histories as well as present situations.

Encounters like this circulate those histories and provide possibilities for remapping power dynamics, partly through memes that call out and parody Swift and, simultaneously,
whiteness as a power structure. Besides the Twitter encounters occurring on August 25th and subsequent news media coverage of those encounters, both the meme and the phrase, “okay ladies let’s gentrification,” continue to circulate, although not always together. This subsequent and somewhat transformed visuality demonstrates how ongoing circulations can generate future assemblages, encounters, and potentials, while also continuing to circulate rhetorical elements from previous encounters. For instance, as recently as May 4th, 2019, users continue to tweet the meme and phrase, “ok ladies now let’s gentrification,” in association with a wide variety of images. Perhaps the consequences of this encounter’s ongoing circulation and its potential to contribute to shaping knowledge, lived experience, and material change are exhibited through a Twitter encounter occurring around November 14, 2017. An ordinary user located in Dublin, Ireland, with a modest number of Twitter followers (approximately 300), tweets, “Ok ladies now let’s gentrification” (Figure 5).

![Ok ladies now lets gentrification](image)

Figure 5: Ok Ladies Development Tweet.

In Figure 5, the user “quote tweets” another user’s tweet, image, and response thread, circulating the phrase, “Ok ladies now lets gentrification,” along with an image and conversation related to a condominium development. This quote tweet includes a parodied conversation between city officials and property developers and includes a city planning design drawing for a
mixed-use condo development. By using the Swift meme’s phrase with a new image and context, this user participates in circulating media that encounters both moments, histories, and affects, uniting the cultural critique of the Swift meme and histories of white commodification and oppression of nonwhite culture and bodies with present practices of urban redevelopment. This tweet provides ongoing life to the Swift meme phrase, transforming it within a new encounter that retains elements of the former while folding in new interacting entities.

The Ok Ladies Development tweet also links to the quoted tweet’s response thread, providing another pathway to another encounter related to gentrification. In this thread (Figure 6), the Twitter user posting the Development Meme is an ordinary citizen located in Philadelphia, not a celebrity or other elite; however, this user has a larger following, approximately 1000 followers, and on the user’s profile states: “Labor/community organizer. 1st generation American. #1u Current: @PhillyAFLCIO Alum: @NextGenAmerica @AFTunion @UFCW @WorkingWa @USStudents opinions mine!” This encounter between the Dublin user and the Philly user not only demonstrates how Twitter allows for connection across space and time but also how ad hoc anti-gentrification rhetoric, exhibited by the Dublin user, can be shaped by grassroots activists based in distant locations connected through Twitter.
These modifications emphasize providing validity to tweets’ sociopolitical contexts, often by providing situated perspectives, even, as in this case, the situated context seems to clash with the message, since the specific image corresponds to affordable, accessible housing. In still other replies, another ordinary Twitter user, this one based in Seattle where the senior housing property depicted in the image is situated, replies with, “a reminder that all new buildings tend to look this way because of modern zoning codes and construction methods—yeah, even low-income housing.” This remark brings legal and economic structures into the encounter, accounting for their force in shaping the aesthetic style, which, according to this user, now makes gentrification
and efforts to prevent it stylistically indistinguishable. The Seattle user’s profile states she/they are a “designer, cartoonist, activist, metalhead, gnc MexAm in Seattle. Has never had any chill. (she/they).” As a designer and activist, based in Seattle, she/they have a more situated and expert perspective of this location, property, and design. Identifying as gender-nonconforming and Mexican American, this user’s perspective is shaped by multiple cultural affiliations, often the same cultural affiliations shared by groups most negatively affected by gentrification. This encounter also demonstrates how these happenstance moments of interactions bring ordinary citizens into encounters with grassroots activists and by doing so shape ad hoc activism circulated by these ordinary users, like the Dublin user; Additionally, these moments connect grassroots activists across space and time—like the Philadelphia user and the Seattle user—an encounter that brings in larger structures, like legal and construction practices, and provides for collaborative shaping of knowledge from situated, particular images to knowledge based on situated identities, expertise, and shared perspectives on broader aesthetic and sociopolitical patterns. The dialogue between the two grassroots activists, separated geographically, also brings embodied activism and situated scenes of gentrification into the Twitter encounter. In another portion of the Okay Ladies Development Meme reply thread (Figure 7), replies shared between the two grassroots activists attest to the affect circulating in their encounters of gentrification on Twitter and in their local communities. The Philadelphia user ironically expresses her “delight” at having her meme “corrected by “white Portland DJ bros” who tell her she’s a “bad person.” The Seattle user replies by offering comfort and encouragement that validate the Philadelphia user’s perspective on gentrification, one she/they share, “I’m waist deep in this fight. Lots of housing injustice.” The two users then share separate but related embodied actions taken to fight gentrification in their communities. Philadelphia User: “I’m an organizer
by trade and I help out with housing justice fights where I live now. I silently helped catalyze the (soon to be) passage of a Just Cause for Eviction law.” To this, the Seattle User replies, “Hell Yeah, I’m in many groups here when I can. Lots of tenant protection passed here but we need more. We got the renter’s Commission up in the city hall too!” This exchange demonstrates a shared experience of embodied action to change laws that affect housing and gentrification, experiences that, though widely separated in time and space, bring these users together in Twitter’s space through mutual identification with shared experiences, values, and beliefs.

Figure 7: Activist Encounter.

This interaction demonstrates shared identification and perspective, attests to embodied legal activism outside of Twitter, and also circulates care and respect that gathers some users and bodies together in alliances, which, along with anger, outrage, and resistance, shapes the field
and entities of contemporary gentrification scenes and actors. Encounters like this, which occur spontaneously around visual media that connects to gentrification, offer ongoing opportunities for public formation that shapes media, knowledge, and locations. Similar circulation characteristics are evident in other encounters highlighted by the Tableau peak activity graph.

**Encountering the Gilded Ghetto**

In the December 18, 2016 peak, a Twitter user has posted a modified photograph: half of the image depicts a drink list from a local bar and the other half depicts a particular item on the drink list, a Colt 45 served in a brown paper bag for $15. The user has added text across the top of the spliced image, “Bro, lmaoooo,” and tweeted it out with the text, “Dawg, Gentrification at its finest, Wow!!!!” (Figure 8).

![Dawg, gentrification at its finest. Wow!!!!!](image_url)

**Figure 8: Colt 45 Meme.**
In the 22,416 retweets and responses that follow, users circulate affective responses to the meme and to the actual situation of a bar offering a Colt 45 in a brown paper bag and charging $15. Similar to the Swift Formation meme, users post other kinds of memes and visual rhetoric in response to the Colt 45 meme. For example, users respond with tweets like, “RIP” and an attached image of a Colt 45 being poured out; Another tweet includes a user-generated video depicting the user drinking a Colt 45 in a brown paper bag and parodying whiteness: “sippin’ my natural, grass-fed, non-GMO 40 in a bag.” Several memes depict different versions of surprised and outraged facial expressions, humorous GIFs frequently shared on social media. Other users respond with tweet texts that express a range of emotional reactions from humor to anger and sadness, tweets like, “I just showed my pops this and he aint calmed down yet im cryiiinggg,” ”’with brown paper bag’ what the fuck,” “white people really out here charging other white people $15 for a 40????? They played themselves,” and “I laughed, but then I got mad... and then sad.” Other users try to justify or normalize the $15 Colt 45 by arguing that the price jump might be typical of restaurant and bar markups on alcohol, while still others insist on the product’s appropriation of black “ghetto” culture as racist and akin to gentrification, signified in the following tweets, “I get it now set up shop in the hood then sell hood shit overpriced,” “5 bucks extra to go outside to pour it out for your homies,” and “Nothing says street like ordering your 40 in an upscale bar and hoping people notice how street you are. Oh wait...no” to “damn, white people dont think gentrification exists either????.” Through retweets, memes, and replies, along with the practice of tagging others by tweeting their usernames, users work within and around Twitter’s constraints to circulate versions of the Colt 45 meme that also circulate emotions and histories related to gentrification’s history and relationship to racial oppression and commodification. This encounter is similar to that surrounding the Swift Formation meme in its
perspective on gentrification as white appropriation of nonwhite culture, but, importantly, this encounter locates gentrification in the aesthetics and commodification practices of a situated small business rather than the massive global entertainment industry. Furthermore, the $15 Colt 45 meme makes visible small business practices that connect to larger, structural collaborations between businesses and city officials to rebrand black spaces in order to attract and sell those spaces and experiences to whiter, wealthier groups, groups who will not just visit, but relocate and claim that space as their new home (Hyra, 2017; Zukin, 2008).

In an excerpt from the reply conversation attached to the Colt 45 meme (Figure 9), users interact in ways that allow this specific, situated location to emerge from its relationship to the digital meme and conversation. Their tweets also demonstrate how users define gentrification within historical definitions of gentrification that attach to spatial change and within aesthetic commodification practices of businesses that profit from sanitizing and thereby “safely” offering white consumers the thrilling proximity to black culture stereotypically associated with urban histories of “ghettos,” urban areas made dangerous and off-limits to whites through association with blackness.
David Hyra, public policy professor at American University, has written two books about race and gentrification, focusing on Bronzeville in Chicago and the Shaw/U Street area of DC. Hyra observes that, in these locations and others like them, narratives of the “dark ghetto” once motivated white flight to the suburbs; however, 21st century urban redevelopment often operates by both using and transforming this narrative of the “dark ghetto” into a “gilded ghetto.” Hyra (2017) describes this transformation as one that changes “urban ‘no-go’ Black zones to hip, cool new places filled with chic restaurants, trendy bars, and high-priced apartments” (p. 7).

Significant to this transformation, and one that sets it apart from urban renewal patterns of the past, is that signifiers of blackness are not removed, but rather used to rebrand the areas and attract new white residents to Black-identified spaces as areas of “excitement, entertainment, and authenticity.” This rebranding is contingent on retaining associations with black ghetto stereotypes, a rebranding mechanism that depends on white desire for, as Hyra terms it, “living
the wire.” Hyra elaborates on “living the wire,” stating, “the thrill, the edge, the coolness, the
Black brand, is based on preexisting Black ghetto stereotypes--Black men and women as
entertainers, drug dealers, and lazy people hanging out on the corner. It also brings up images of
Black people as the Other” (p. 99). The Colt 45 meme circulates a situated instance of this
branding mechanism, the meme depicting the $15 Colt 45 in paper bag, and those who encounter
it also confront the stereotypes it relies on. Many users involved in this encounter contest the
“subtle racism” Hyra identifies, partly through user-created visuality that makes racism visible
and connects gentrification to this situated instance.

In this excerpt from a much longer response thread, one user objects that gentrification
doesn’t apply to selling a $15 Colt 45 in a brown paper bag: “this isn’t gentrification lol.” To
which the original tweeter of the Colt 45 meme responds with, “The area this place is got
gentrified.” In subsequent responses, the user who tweeted the original meme claims his situated
knowledge of the location and business represented in this meme, asserting its authenticity and
sharing the narrative of his personal experience in this space as a gentrified area. Users involved
in this encounter are widely separated by geographical locations, and yet many of them seem to
recognize aspects of the meme, often expressed through guesses about the bar’s location: “Is this
fieldhouse?” “Isn’t that st felix or whatever in Hollywood?,” “This screams Culver City or San
Diego” and “worked at a fancy bar where we did this with the Pabst Tall can…”. Many other
users involved in this encounter demand to know where the business is located, a question the
original user who tweeted the meme declines to answer, despite owning up to taking the photo
and even purchasing the Colt 45, in his words, “just to do it.” His admission of purchasing the
product problematizes an understanding of this meme as activism; However, it also reveals how
people and other entities can **both resist and participate in** reifying dominant power structures like capitalism and whiteness that also prop up gentrification.

The original user’s intent also doesn’t detract from the encounters and the critical counterpublic that assembled around the Colt 45 meme. For instance, this excerpt also shows another user joining into the conversations with: “Imma just ask for everyone out there..Tf is gentrification?” This user’s tweet is significant because it explicitly addresses not only the original tweeter and the users participating in the thread, but also “everyone out there.” This phrase assumes a public: the user is not only asking for himself, but for others like him, who have yet to voice, but who the user assumes also share his puzzlement over the meaning of the word, “gentrification.” This user’s comment, directly addressing an assumed public, demonstrates the process of identification that aids in both circulation and counterpublic formation. In response, another user replies by providing a definition of gentrification as spatial takeover along class lines. The remaining tweets in this thread show an ongoing process of collaborative knowledge making, often based on sharing similar perspectives and related situated knowledges of gentrification, responses that echo Hyra’s observations about rebranding urban areas as gilded ghettos to attract new white residents interested in “living the wire.”

Rather than the hostile encounters that are often discussed in relation to Twitter conversations, these users caringly negotiate differences in perspective, relying on a stronger sense of cultural connection and shared experience. Following the user’s public address to users like him who aren’t familiar with the term, other users not only offer gentle corrections and definitions but encouragement and affirmation to the group as a whole, expressed in tweets such as, “look at those magnificent brains go. I had no idea what that meant myself.” Not only does this response demonstrates how this public continues to constitute and grow through mutual
recognition, it exhibits care. This care is exhibited by other users as they also express willingness to correct previous tweets, tweets like “you're right, i should've included that part. pushes out small businesses as well.” Circulating care, along with knowledge making that remaps power, attests to the possibilities of these digital spaces and moments to produce relations that can be mutually empowering and activate publics who collectively move towards shared goals.

Encounters like this one don’t only occur between two users, a meme, and a situated location within Twitter’s network and communication affordances; they potentially fold in many other users and could include countless “invisible” entities. For example, in addition to the unknown number of users who may passively view the meme and the reply thread, thousands of other users retweeted, liked, and responded, shaping this ongoing encounter in complex and sometimes divergent ways, both in the time of its posting and in its ongoing life. In the case of just this original tweet, since I last noted its retweets and likes, this number has grown by thousands in each instance, demonstrating its ongoing vitality and circulation—its potential for generating other encounters not easily traceable but, nevertheless, connected to this initial tweet.

Besides the retweets that continue to circulate this image and its message and to generate other assemblages and encounters, publications from blogs to popular magazines subsequently contributed to circulating the $15 Colt 45 meme. For instance, Food & Wine published a piece titled, “This Bar Selling $15 Bottles of Colt 45 Took Twitter By Storm” (Pomranz, Dec. 20, 2016). In the online version of the magazine, the article links to the original tweet, commenting on its unexpected virality, stating that it “even ended up on Twitter’s Moments List” (para. 3). The article also tells readers that, “you may want to avoid dropping in over the next couple days: Something makes me think it might be a hot drinking spot for a while.” SFGate, an online magazine focusing on San Francisco, also published a story on the tweet and the bar, adding a
slideshow of images connecting the $15 Colt 45 to other outlandishly priced food and beverage products in California, notably eliding any discussion of the Colt 45’s subtle racism. Online features in bet.com and independent blogs were more sympathetic to the outraged perspectives characterizing much of the original Twitter encounter. One blogger even made a connection to the Colt 45’s association with black stereotypes, but stopped short of explicitly calling out the $15 Colt 45’s racism: “Colt 45 has long been associated with America’s inner-cities, sold at corner stores and bodegas for a few dollars at the most. Over the years, the beverage has been featured in countless rap songs and music videos, and conjures up images of New York City stoops and house parties” (Jackson, Dec. 22, 2016, para. 2). While this further circulation of the Colt 45 meme doubtlessly expands the scope of its circulation, the consequences of this circulation outside of Twitter are shaped by these news outlets reframing of the memes, which, at times, cleanse this encounter of its connection to racial stereotyping and gentrification and, instead participate in popularizing the bar selling these stereotypes, like the Food & Wine perspective. Others neutralize the $15 Colt 45 by visually associating it with other images that depict locations related to exorbitant prices but lack connection the gilded ghetto/living the wire branding. This more mainstream circulation moves the image through additional possible encounters and transforms the narrative from one of the product’s relationship to racism and gentrification to a more problematic story cleansed of these associations, potentially increasing the popularity and profits of the original bar, St. Felix’s in L.A., and advancing gentrification and the subtle racism that allows it to flourish.
Subjectivity and Dissent: Conclusions on the Macroanalysis

These data visualizations and the encounters they illuminate, however, aren’t the whole story of anti-gentrification circulation on Twitter. Data collection, analysis, and visualization technologies, as the previous chapter has begun to discuss, have also shaped these findings and influenced the analysis of this chapter, partly by steering my focus to the quantitatively greatest data. Twitter, too, has shaped the data, analyses, and visualizations that follow. It’s important to point out that even though this is a large data set, it is not inclusive of every tweet related to gentrification. Instead, it is a sample of two million tweets, partly shaped by the results of Twitter’s API restrictions and the constraints of my chosen search term, “gentrification.” Doubtlessly, this collection is missing important data, and the perspectives, narratives, and bodies that connect to that missing data. While I acknowledge these important limitations, however, I also argue that these visualizations illuminate ad hoc anti-gentrification encounters, often connecting users across disparate locations and scenes of gentrification. These encounters are partly due to shared interests and participatory composing practices that reveal gentrification’s relationship to commodities, pop culture, and power structures like whiteness. Additionally, these ad hoc encounters function as vernacular rhetoric. Hauser and McClellan define vernacular rhetoric by its “(1) polyvocality, which makes it possible for vernacular discourse to (2) appear under the surface— not always in full view of the “official” discourse, where it can (3) perform an interrogation of “official” discourse in ways that challenge or resist it, and thus (4) perform power in mundane, often unnoticed, ways” (p. 30). Even though these specific encounters might be tenuous, perhaps only momentary, anti-gentrification rhetoric on Twitter is ongoing, continuing to circulate through various transformations and within new social fields. This ongoing circulation indicates the potential for broader cultural transformations of
norms and practices related to gentrification, perhaps resulting in transformations that benefit more people equally, or at least make racism more visible; Conversely, however, ongoing circulation through mainstream publications with large followings could contribute to the opposite consequences: By cleansing racism from the gentrification narratives circulated on Twitter, these future circulations potentially intensify the gentrification and commodification processes these tweets attempt to disrupt and reverse by, instead, contributing to the increased consumption of these products and spaces.

This potential negative consequence, while something to account for, should not overpower our consideration of the potentials and consequences for ad hoc public formation and activism. In their study of Occupy Wall Street (OWS) on Twitter, Joel Penney and Caroline Dadas (2014) observe that the:

[S]haring functions essential to the design of contemporary social media platforms (such as the retweeting feature on Twitter) allow movement members who are not present at face-to-face actions to participate in the circulation of texts and thus take on active roles in the shaping of a critical counterpublic. (p. 16)

Although most users whose tweets were collected as a part of my two-year study did not participate in organized protest like the OWS protesters in the Penney and Dadas’ study, the authors’ observations are applicable: Twitter’s design affordances allow users who might be widely separated in geographical area to “participate in the circulation of texts” and, by doing so, actively shape critical counterpublics. Perhaps examining individual tweets and visual rhetoric like the Swift Formation and Colt 45 memes are richer ways of knowing this data than the Tableau graphs and charts, only a few of which I’ve included in this chapter; However, it’s not feasible to human read a collection of nearly two-million tweets, nor would the scope of this
dissertation allow for close reading each piece of shared media. Thus, data visualization is a necessary aspect of this study. Importantly, however, data visualizations, like Tableau’s many different graphs, charts, and map visualizations, as Drucker points out, are “formats [that] are effective, efficient, and surprisingly obfuscating” (p. 907). By “obfuscating,” Drucker is referring to the way in which these visualization conventions seem to be objectively relaying neutral information: “nowhere is there a single overt marking that indicates the image is a mode of address, a structuring instrument rhetorically engaged in productions of power” (p. 907). Even when the audience of the visualization is the researcher, as in my case, it’s important to be aware of how visualizations direct one’s focus to read the most quantitatively visible tweets as the most significant.

By using data visualization like those above, it would be easy simply not to see tweets that appear less frequently, nor to include user perspectives whose tweets aren’t retweeted in viral proportions. Tableau’s visualizations are, indeed, meant to highlight the quantitatively greatest numbers in data sets, like dates that correspond with the most tweet activity, users who tweet the most, and those whose tweets are most retweeted. In order to reorient our gaze from the most to prioritize what might at first appear more marginally significant—what, in effect, is hidden beneath the most frequently occurring aspects of our data set—we can push ourselves and our data analytic and visualization software to illuminate the small data that might otherwise go unseen.

Data visualization can be productive ways to locate rhetoric that has circulated widely and quickly, the viral moments in my Tableau analysis, for instance, and to explore and describe particular encounters that occur in these instances of circulation, even gesturing towards multiple potential future consequences. This kind of “macroanalysis” (Graham, Milligan, and Weingart,
2015) was vital for grasping characteristics of this data set in its aggregate form, however partial this reading might be. Machine reading the data set with R generated word and bigram frequencies, what I construe as possible thematic patterns in the data set, an analytical task I wouldn’t have been able to undertake with human reading alone. However, the macroanalytic results described in this chapter shouldn’t be interpreted as “conclusions” that characterize anti-gentrification circulation as a whole nor even this data set as a whole; instead, this macroanalysis generates several perspectives: some machine-based, like the frequency graphs and charts; some human, demonstrated by the contents of tweets I’ve described and by my choices of data, visualizations, and tweets to include in this chapter. These perspectives and fragments exhibit patterns and practices that are part of what is circulating in relation to gentrification on Twitter. Measuring the most frequent words is just one possible way to describe that circulation, charting tweets over time is another way, and examining specific viral tweets and media still another. None of these visualizations reflect all of the perspectives in my data set, let alone all of the missing data not included in my collection, data which might have changed these word frequencies.

To resist the urge to view macroanalytic outcomes as definitive conclusions, practicing rhetorical feminist methodologies in this study involves moving from macroanalysis to closer attention on the situated encounters, like those I’ve described in this chapter’s discussions of tweet peaks. To do so, I organized a smaller data case study that involves human reading, coding, and visualizing anti-gentrification rhetoric related to a particular activist group, Defend Boyle Heights. This approach further situates the data in particular moments, embodied accounts, and social encounters. Comparative data studies shaped by rhetorical feminist methodologies better account for data in its situated complexity—the circulation of ideas, texts, visualities, entities,
practices, and social encounters that are always already connected to larger technological, historical, social, and cultural structures and circulations. In the following chapter, the smaller data case study of Defend Boyle Heights demonstrates the value of small data study for this project’s understanding of anti-gentrification circulation on Twitter and for improving our knowledge of circulation’s relationship to embodied and digital scenes of activism.
Chapter 4

Circulating Defend Boyle Heights:

@DefendBoyleHts as Affective Latinx (his)Story of Gentrification

[G]entrification is the appropriation of land to serve the interests of the wealthy. Despite gentrification being a significant planetary process, very little has been written about resistance to gentrification and even less about successful resistance.

Loretta Lees, Hyun Bang Shin, Ernesto López-Morales
(Planetary Gentrification, 2016, p. 218)

On April 28th, 2018, Defend Boyle Heights (DBH) organizers gathered with other community members and coalitions in front of the recently vacated 356 Mission to celebrate the gallery’s closing. Against a backdrop of urban industrial space, various members addressed the community through a microphone, congratulating the crowd for coming together to defend their neighborhood from artist gentrifiers and crediting social media for helping them successfully push back encroaching gentrification. DBH’s Twitter profile, @DefendBoyleHts, circulated this scene by recording and tweeting out a video of the moment. Like many others who’ve viewed this video, I wasn’t physically present at this event, but through Twitter and various other digital platforms, I can witness their celebration, and even play some small role in its ongoing circulation and potential impact, any time that I click play or retweet it. In this chapter, I will refer to Defend Boyle Heights (DBH) to signify the grassroots coalition and @DefendBoyleHts to refer to the Twitter account associated with the coalition. Defend Boyle Heights and @DefendBoyleHts circulate through the actions and communications of ordinary citizens, technological affordances and digital spaces, and conventional and digital popular press outlets. During these multiple encounters and movements, “[t]hings do not just move inconsequentiality and unchanged through space and time; They are both impacted by and impact that which they
encounter” (Gries, 2015, p. 37). In this quote, Gries emphasizes that circulation’s impact is not singular, but multiple and continuously unfolding. In part, this chapter will demonstrate how DBH circulates through embodied and digital forms, generating ongoing encounters and possibilities for transforming the lived experience of gentrification in their community and in other situated locations.

To understand DBH’s ongoing circulation and the effects of its various encounters, this chapter will explore how Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates, in part, to constitute publics through identification with shared cultural histories. Some of these publics collectively act, digitally and physically, against gentrification in specific, material locations. Yet the effects of these actions aren’t fixed and determined but are ongoing and in continual flux. Additionally, Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates through mainstream media coverage, independent press accounts, and ordinary citizens’ perceptions of the organization’s movements, communications, and actions. Exploring these various shifting ecologies and encounters shows how Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates along with other actors and technologies, encountering and shaping anti-gentrification resistance in complex and varied ways. On their blog, Defend Boyle Heights states,

All eyes are on Boyle Heights and we have a responsibility to win, not just for the sake of our neighborhood but for the sake of neighborhoods facing gentrification across the country and across the world. In a time when gentrification seems “inevitable,” Boyle Heights is proving otherwise. We encourage every other individual, organization, and coalition to hold the same line. (n.p.)

In the passage above, DBH relies on conceptions of “us” and “we” to shape a narrative of gentrification particular to DBH’s situated, embodied experience, while also reaching out to
readers, perhaps widely dispersed, who recognize themselves in DBH’s struggle against
gentrification. In this chapter, I trace DBH through physical and media spaces of encounters that
unite some bodies and energies through identification and distance others. To further practice the
rhetorical feminist methodology I outlined in Chapter 2, this chapter focuses on the themes and
movements present in the smaller data collection and slower circulation of @DefendBoyleHts
Twitter data. By doing so, I depart from Chapter 3’s macroanalytic methods that focused on
frequency over the data set, and I attend to what Bradford (2018) identifies as an ethical
imperative of social media study, slow circulation. Bradford argues that while virality gets a
great deal of attention and is, indeed, important to consider, particular when studying social
movements, slow circulation is also consequential but often overlooked and undertheorized. He
states that “[s]ince the rate of rhetorical exchange is an important factor to successful rhetorical
work, we can also argue that slow is a speed (and, for that matter, local is a reach)” (p. 484). In
social media studies, viral circulation is often the primary focus, and slower circulations, like
small data, often go unaccounted for. This chapter demonstrates how small data and slow
circulation can also reveal meaningful consequences and potential for “civic change over time”
(p. 484). In examining small data and slow circulation, I apply Chapter 2’s rhetorical feminist
methodology by 1) attending to subjectivity and incorporating dissent in structuring
visualizations, 2) striving to recover what might be missing in large data analysis and dominant
narratives, 3) incorporating awareness of how data and visualizations are “authored” by humans
and technological affordances alike, and 4) putting small data in conversation with big data to
tell stories of activism.
Small Data and Subjectivity

In “Feminist Data Studies: Using Digital Methods for Ethical, Reflexive and Situated Socio-Cultural Research,” Koen Leurs (2017) states, “‘Big data’ are only meaningful in interaction with in-depth ‘small data’ that value human subjectivities and meaning-making” (p. 139). To put the previous chapter’s big data in conversation with small data, I’ll trace the visuality of anti-gentrification protest as it shows up in the particular times, places, media, and bodies that circulate partly through the movement of the Defend Boyle Heights coalition and their Twitter profile @DefendBoyleHts. I’ll also compliment my use of data analytic software like Tableau, a tool which has limited affordances for smaller data, with data I’ve manually coded for themes, actions, and locations identified in @DefendBoyleHts tweets. Finally, I generate a series of network and map visualizations to illustrate Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts’ circulation in relation to the movement of gentrification in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles. Ultimately, this case study demonstrates that the smaller data studies derived from large data sets provide opportunities for rhetoric and writing studies to explore data sets comparatively and to understand rhetorical circulation in more pluralistic and inter-related ways, partly by attending to slow circulation as well as virality.

The previous chapter’s analysis demonstrated the way in which machine reading can be used to locate encounters and tweets that circulate most frequently, perhaps to the greatest number of users, and how those circulations often interact and shape events and culture, primarily in relationship to defining and resisting gentrification as white appropriation of nonwhite culture. In this chapter’s case study of Defend Boyle Heights, analyzing smaller data contributes a comparative perspective that demonstrates how the circulation of anti-gentrification rhetoric can generate ongoing vibrancy that connects, distributes, encounters, and moves bodies
and materials across multiple digital platforms and physical spaces. As this chapter will show, movement not only occurs in situated locations like Boyle Heights, L.A., but also through networked encounters that influence other bodies and practices. This vibrancy is facilitated by technologies, bodies, and symbols that often push against dominant material processes at work in gentrifying spaces, partly by building critical counterpublics through identification with modern Latinx identities and shared histories of colonization that result in accumulating affective economies.

This chapter’s “small data” study is relative to my overall data collection of approximately two million tweets and associated metadata. This smaller collection of data focuses, primarily, on approximately 1006 tweets by or mentioning @DefendBoyleHts and includes associated metadata like location information and attached media. Attending to small data connects to feminist and critical data scholarship that emphasizes the ethical imperative of balancing big data studies with small data cases (boyd and Crawford, 2012; Felt, 2016; Knigge and Cope, 2015). Part of this ethical imperative involves questioning the way in which machine reading, data analytics, and visualization applications, like those used in the previous chapter, provide a perspective that privileges dominant data, and, therefore, biases possible interpretations towards reading the data set as a whole in accordance with these dominant trends and patterns. Especially when analyzing social media data, these dominant trends often relate to celebrity, popular culture, and national/international news and events, effectively overlooking and even perhaps silencing unique lived experiences. Furthermore, dana boyd and Kate Crawford warn against big data’s mythology: “the widespread belief that large data sets offer a higher form of intelligence and knowledge that can generate insights that were previously impossible, with the aura of truth, objectivity, and accuracy” (2012, p. 664).
Although the rhetorical feminist data methodology I’m modelling throughout this dissertation is far from the predictive, statistical models that are perhaps boyd and Crawford’s primary focus, it’s important that rhetoric and writing studies scholars do not fall for similar big data pitfalls in our own studies. One way to safeguard against an over-assurance in the large-scale trends and patterns of machine reading and data analysis, especially in its ability to speak for or represent the whole, is to put large data analysis in conversation with smaller data case studies. This macro/micro data approach can balance the use of computational tools with human reading and methods of manually coding research. In addition to applying feminist theoretical principles, this chapter will enact an in situ approach to studying activism as it happens outside of massive hashtag movements, focusing instead on smaller, local collectives and wider ecologies of emergent encounters.

Taking this smaller data case study approach to rhetorical studies of circulation improves our methodologies and theories by attending to emergent technologies, communications, and socio-political crises as they occur. Although it is perhaps more difficult to accurately account for things as they emerge, by doing so we are able to take a more participatory approach to those technologies, communications, and socio-political crises, thereby enacting rhetoric’s goals, not just of description and critique, but of participation and intervention. Although the ultimate consequences of emerging phenomena may not yet be evident, consequences and possibilities are always already apparent and in flux. By examining circulation in situ, we apply rhetorical circulation theories to “specific conditions and its set of possibilities” (Bennett, 2009, p. 96) without over-determining or freeze-framing but, instead, gesturing towards the potential for ongoing transformation and movement. An in situ study of gentrification, particularly through a participatory social media data approach, applies circulation’s “rhetorical concerns with bodies,
access, and power; ecological concerns with affect, publics, and writing; and digital concerns with infrastructure, distribution, and global economies” (Gries, 2018, p. 7). This chapter is meant to address rhetorical, ecological, and digital concerns inherent in both circulation and gentrification studies, while also acknowledging that any study of activism, particularly those connected to existing groups and struggles, has the potential to impact activists and other bodies, perhaps in unintended, negative ways. To attempt to minimize the vulnerability of activists, I do not name DBH members, nor do I intend to publish particular visualizations without the organization’s permission; however, developing ethical ways of working with social media data needs more attention from our fields, a subject I’ll return to in Chapter 5.

Although this chapter primarily focuses on the visuality of DBH circulating on Twitter, the digital tools and visualization techniques I’ve used also shape its findings. The following sections of this chapter emphasize the importance of visibility and visuality to gentrification and anti-gentrification activism. The visualization tools I’ve employed influence how we see gentrification and DBH taking shape and moving within Boyle Heights and other scenes of gentrification. The data I’ve used to create these visualizations does not provide a complete or totalizing picture, nor do @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets completely represent Defend Boyle Heights’ perspective on gentrification. The data and visualizations are partial fragments, providing possible narratives and ways of understanding the circulation of anti-gentrification rhetoric through @DefendBoyleHts. The visualizations in this chapter have been influenced by my own encounters with the data, including decisions I’ve made in coding and visualization practices. Although not without drawbacks and limitations, inventive and partial perspectives, like those created in this chapter’s visualizations, illuminate how resistance can take shape, circulate, and impact digital and material networks during political and social crises like
gentrification. Lastly, I also acknowledge that to do truly culturally situated work on activism, more than social media data is necessary, a topic which I’ll explore briefly during the conclusion of this chapter and more thoroughly in the final chapter of this dissertation.

To characterize the visuality of DBH in its transformations and circulations, I follow its movement across platforms and through spaces, beginning with Twitter data I’ve previously collected; However, as Gries (2015; 2017) points out, tracing the movement and impact of visuality also involves further collection of additional data, like news media, other social media data, and various kinds of research, which helps situate the data in time, space, and culture. Ultimately, I explore how DBH circulates within complex structural constraints of digital and material spaces, what Walls (2011) terms, “material rhetorical ecologies,” to better understand the potential ongoing consequences of @DefendBoyleHts’ circulation. During the latter stages of this chapter, I digitally map this manually-coded dated to visualize the neighborhood of Boyle Heights according to @DefendBoyleHts tweet perspective, illuminating a visual narrative of the conflicting agents vying for this sliver of Los Angeles. This chapter’s study of Boyle Heights also connects to themes identified in last chapter’s macroanalysis of the data set as a whole, such as histories of gentrification as racial oppression, cultural appropriation and commodification, and aesthetic pattern and practice. What’s more, tracing the movement of DBH reveals the multitude of actors who influence gentrification’s shape and impact, illuminating DBH’s vibrancy—a rhetorical force that moves within and beyond the Defend Boyle Heights collective.

**Placing Twitter**

As previous chapters have discussed, Twitter studies related to activism often focus on hashtags and/or Twitter activity following a single inciting event, such as a police shooting or
massive protest (Bonilla & Rosa, 2015; Penney & Dadas, 2013). Much of this scholarship has provided insight into activism after disparate users have coalesced, often around a hashtag, coming together in networked space and sometimes also in embodied protests. In “Entanglements that Matter: A New Materialist Trace of #YesAllWomen,” Dustin Edwards and Heather Lang (2018) modify a version of Gries’ iconographic tracking to explore this kind of hashtag activism. Although they see network theories as having been fruitful for understanding various actors and relationships, for Edwards and Lang, new materialism proves more appropriate for understanding “what happens when a tag reaches a point of expressivity outside its well-defined activist network” (p. 120). Edwards and Lang focus on #YesAllWoman and how it transforms as a rhetorical “thing” across various digital and material fields: “To call a hashtag a thing is to call out its materiality, relationality, and affectivity” (p. 120). Synthesizing topos theories from Aristotle with new materialist notions of vibrancy and affectivity of non-human entities like hashtags, they argue that “#YesAllWomen” has its own existence and rhetorical and material force, periodically undergoing change as it travels through various digital and physical spaces, instantiations, and times. While I agree with Edwards and Lang that hashtags are material and consequential, we can also theorize and trace the vibrancy of activism beyond its association with a hashtag. One possible approach is to shift our focus to grassroots, local groups, like @DefendBoyleHts, or to other user accounts and/or media whose vibrancy and thing power becomes apparent in the analysis of a large Twitter data collection. As subsequent sections of this chapter will show, @DefendBoyleHts moves, transforms, and acts within and outside both the boundaries of digital networks and individual human actors and activist networks in ongoing encounters and assemblages that also have vibrancy and consequence.
The concept of vibrancy relates to Gries’ and Mitchell’s understanding of image as an immaterial thing that sometimes instantiates itself as a particular form and/or material object. As such, there is no single image of Defend Boyle Heights (DBH), just as there is no singular human actor that represents DBH. There are many actors and images circulating through various digital accounts, physical spaces, and bodies that attach to Defend Boyle Heights; Therefore, DBH is an assemblage of social media accounts, human actors, news reports, photographs, videos, handmade objects like zines and graffiti, and memes, among other things, that encounters both gentrification and other social media accounts, human actors, physical spaces, built environments, and even legislation. Although some of the effects and flows of these instantiations may match the intentions of DBH as an anti-gentrification coalition, my goal is not to analyze @DefendBoyleHts solely by its intentions, nor to measure rhetorical effectiveness in any one given situation, but to trace how DBH moves as an ongoing rhetorical vibrancy that continues to circulate, transform, and shape communications, human bodies, lived experience, and material development in multiple, sometimes competing, ways.

Rhetoric and writing studies, especially studies of circulation, benefit through comparative large and small data Twitter studies of activism that explore how organized activism circulates outside of hashtags and beyond national events, ecologically, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, and in situated particularities, the focus of this chapter. Doing so enhances our theories of circulation through attending to slow circulation and situated contexts as well as the dynamic, large-scale movements of hashtags and events that capture national attention and account for the bulk of rhetorical scholarship. Collecting Twitter data on a keyword like “gentrification” rather than on a particular hashtag reveals vibrant resistance as it emerges and circulates in relation to socio-political problems like gentrification, even if those vibrancies never
develop into viral global hashtag social movements. Although @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets will probably never achieve the digital reach of celebrity-endorsed hashtag campaigns like #metoo, or the global attention of reactions to anti-racism movements like #blacklivesmatter, vibrancies like @DefendBoyleHts, nevertheless, have possibilities for shaping local and global consequences that come into being, partly, within the networked space of social media.

While collecting social media through a hashtag like #metoo improves understanding of large-scale social movements in light of circulation and rhetorical theories, collecting through a keyword provides valuable insight into circulation’s function of public building and transformation in the context of smaller circulations that are emergent rather than established and/or historical; Therefore, this in situ study through a keyword affords opportunities to identify possibilities for consequence and impact on smaller, incremental scales that are also distributed and, perhaps, consequential to other locations and bodies in smaller local and wider global networks alike.

Vibrant visuality borrows from Jane Bennet’s new materialist theories of vibrancy and vital materialism (2009). Examining processes that run the gamut from environmental to political, she argues that agency derives from assemblage and the “improvisational possibilities” present in the particular moment. According to Bennett, rhetorical force and impact do not depend solely on individual or even collective human intention, but on the complex interaction of human and nonhuman energies and capabilities. In this view, tracing DBH is not only a process of following activist bodies, but an effort to assemble the human and nonhuman actants that both move within and transcend the times and spaces of the collective group Defend Boyle Heights. By theorizing DBH’s movement as vibrant visuality, I’m emphasizing the visual properties of its embodiment and its ongoing life, an energy and force that also bleed beyond
symbolic representations, human intentions, and specific bodies. Because vibrancy spills beyond human bodies, communications, and intentions, Bennett identifies “the public” a possible unit of analysis:

If human culture is inextricably enmeshed with vibrant, nonhuman agencies, and if human intentionality can be agentic only if accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans, then it seems that the appropriate unit of analysis for democratic theory is neither the individual human nor an exclusively human collective but the (ontologically heterogeneous) ‘public’ coalescing around a problem (p. 108).

By attending to DBH’s vibrancy as “accompanied by a vast entourage of nonhumans,” this chapter illuminates the complex relationships between bodies, place, technologies, and histories in conflict—these punctuated encounters constitute critical counterpublics as they emerge in response to the process of gentrification in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, in relation to @DefendBoyleHts on Twitter, and in connection to disparate situated locations networked by digital and embodied means. This “coadaptive, vital, and buoyant interaction” (Rickert, 2013, p. 107) can be traced, in part, by accounting for the movement and transformation of media, objects, built environments, and human and nonhuman bodies that connect and encounter Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts in digital and physical spaces.

**Encountering DBH: Tweets, Media, and Metadata**

Small data sets, like the one I’ve collected and organized around @DefendBoyleHts, provide opportunities for closer exploration of the improvisational possibilities available in digitally and physically networked spaces and the co-adaptive relationships between collectives and other bodies, objects, and built environments. Through numerous encounters, Defend Boyle
Heights/@DefendBoyleHts emerges, mobilizes, and moves in particular ways and spaces; however, the previous visualization tools I’ve used, such as Tableau, were, at least initially, not useful in locating or visualizing DBH’s vibrancy. Initially, the data I’d collected corresponding to @DefendBoyleHts was roughly 460 tweets or .02% of the entire data set, far too quantitatively insignificant for Tableau to highlight any of @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets. In the first-year R bigram frequencies examined in Chapter 3, however, “Boyle Heights” was one of the most frequent two-word pairs. After skimming the data to explore media related to frequently occurring locations, I began to develop a smaller data case study around @DefendBoyleHts, partly due to its frequency in the R graph, but also due to encountering @DefendBoyleHts through attached videos, like the one I’ve described in the opening paragraphs of this chapter.

When I encountered @DefendBoyleHts through reading their tweets and viewing attached media, I was moved by scenes and expressions that illuminate whiteness’s ongoing complicity in gentrification. Equally as moving, and somewhat surprising given gentrification’s global advance, Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts has contributed to ebbing and “holding the line” against the progression of gentrification into Boyle Heights, LA. To further develop a smaller, more situated data study around Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts, I collected all of @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets up to the time of this writing, any tweets that used “@” to mention DefendBoyleHts, and various other data published by or in association with the Defend Boyle Heights coalition. This resulted in a smaller Twitter data set of approximately 1200 tweets and associated metadata, the primary focus of the rest of this chapter.
Tracing Defend Boyle Heights (DBH)

In much of their media, like the video described at the beginning of this chapter, DBH is often represented by women, sometimes speaking solely in Spanish, who, according to DBH’s blog, along with queer people, make up the majority of their members in the 94% Latinx neighborhood of Boyle Heights, LA. At protests and marches, many members tie bandanas across their faces to protect their identities and wear communist-style berets, sometimes chanting “El barrio no se vende! Boyle Heights se defiende!” and “Hey hey, ho ho, these gentrifiers have got to go!” Since coming together in late 2015, the group has developed alliances with other local anti-gentrification groups like Boyle Heights Alliance Against Artwashing and Displacement (BHAAAD) and a handful of other organizations, from allied artist groups that acknowledge art’s role in gentrification to coalitions representing tenants’ rights. For DBH and its coalition members, gentrification is not a harmless process of social and material uplift, nor is it an inevitable conclusion based on increasing urbanization. They state on their blog:

We commit to building and maintaining a safe(st), affordable and accessible Boyle Heights for the oppressed who have historically borne the brunt of displacement (womxn, indigenous, black, undocumented, youth, elderly, homeless/houseless folks, people with disabilities/differently-abled, LGBTQIA2S, those who have been here for generations.)

In this quote from DBH’s “Points of Unity Statement,” members describe gentrification as a force that operates on intersectional levels of oppression. They emphasize that those who have the greatest stake in maintaining an affordable community also often have multiple vulnerabilities based on gender, sexuality, ability, indigeneity and ethnicity, documentation status, and age. From DBH’s perspective, gentrification doesn’t just operate as neutral spatial
change, but as a material-cultural flow that affects some bodies differently, and far less beneficially, than others. Among other concerns, gentrification endangers bodily safety, rights to housing, and cultural ties to the community. By understanding gentrification as a material-cultural flow, much like historical forms of colonization that occurred through spatial development and commerce, DBH’s movement and visuality connect to larger, interconnected networks, histories, and actants.

Figure 10: Attached Media in 1st @DefendBoyleHts Tweet.

Defend Boyle Heights formed in late 2015, and @DefendBoyleHts posted its first tweet on May 13th, 2016: “#ElBarrioNoSeVende #BoyleHeightsSeDefiende #DefendBoyleHeights #DefendYourHood.” These same phrases are often used throughout DBH’s digital, physical, and material movements, and although some hashtags are unique, others, like #DefendYourHood and #ElBarrioNoSeVende, connect DBH digitally to other anti-gentrification groups from around the globe. In addition to using hashtags to connect with shared interests, DBH uses these hashtags to constitute a Latinx-identified counterpublic. In their first tweet, in addition to using the four
hashtags described above, @DefendBoyleHts attaches a digital social media flier (Figure 10) to promote a rally against gentrification and displacement. In the flier, time and location information are printed across the shadowy image of a raised clenched fist, a prevalent symbol throughout their communication up to the present day. The clenched fist is an important symbol of the American Civil Rights movement, perhaps most associated with the Black Power movement; However, the clenched fist was previously designed and used as a symbol of the communist resistance in the Spanish civil war and even earlier in pre-Columbian culture. @DefendBoyleHts invokes this Latinx cultural history and revolutionary symbolism, constituting a community identity that braids revolutionary Chicano movements of the past with present-day intersectional Latinx identities and a socialist ethos. What’s more, the clenched fist’s explicitly revolutionary, anti-capitalist stance as well as its form—strength resulting from fingers closed together in unity—resonates with DBH’s other visual instantiations, shaping an assemblage of Latinx histories, political activism, and anti-assimilation against dominant power structures.

Roughly around the same time of their first tweet, DBH created Facebook, Instagram, and BlogSpot accounts. Across platforms, many of their first posts are dedicated to targeting PSSST Art Gallery. As Defend Boyle Heights and others have noted, gentrification often begins with the movement of art: artists move in, investment and development around this cultural “enhancement” follows, and the existing culture, structures, and working-class people of color in the neighborhood are erased, demolished, and/or forced out, a narrative which echoes observations by rhetorical critics and urban studies scholars alike (Cameron & Coaffee, 2005; Lees & Melhuish, 2015; Makagon, 2010). In a 2017 report published on their blog, DBH describes their defense tactics:
We don’t need the gentrifying spaces. We make our own through our immediate resources and places! Our cultural work enables hood artists to show their work, keep it in the hood, and offer alternatives to the individualistic, careerist, capitalist cultural production produced and promoted by the “white spatial imaginary” evicting us out of the hood. (n.p.)

Although DBH states that they’re not “anti-artist”, they explicitly target incoming art galleries, along with other businesses and real estate developments, white or non-white owned, as material forces that advance gentrification in their neighborhood, in part, by ignoring and erasing existing Latinx cultural work, “evicting us out of the hood.” Their tactics are confrontational, focused on making gallery owners and visitors feel uncomfortable, perhaps even unsafe, through embodied and digital actions.

As Defend Boyle Heights often points out across platforms and in physical protests, art doesn’t need to be introduced into their neighborhood. On the contrary, their neighborhood has a rich history of cultural and artistic engagement. Through tweets, other digital communications, and embodied protest, DBH connects these histories to the current affordable housing and gentrification crisis in Boyle Heights, LA. Boyle Heights, like most U.S. cities, was configured by racist housing policies that segregated nonwhites from whites through restrictive covenants and other racist lending practices and laws, processes further complicated by gender and citizenship categories and biases (Estrada, 2017). Since Los Angeles’s founding around the turn of the 20th century, the neighborhood was designed to contain nonwhite bodies, predominantly working-class and poor people from diverse cultural backgrounds and religions; However, in the past several decades up to the present, the character and population of the Boyle Heights neighborhood has been predominantly Mexican and Latin American, currently 94% Latinx.
(Estrada, 2017). Historically, restrictive covenants and redlining made it difficult for people of color to buy property even within Boyle Heights’ boundaries. Redlining practices were followed by the construction of housing projects and seven freeways that ripped through communities and caused environmental pollution. These structures and practices lowered property values in Boyle Heights, but as LA gradually became one of the least affordable areas of the country, Boyle Heights’ low property values made it ripe for revitalization and development. Estrada (2017) points out that Boyle Heights residents have been fighting gentrification since urban renewal efforts began in the 1970s, as the City of Los Angeles and developers began to realize growth and profit opportunities created through years of racist housing and zoning policies. Presently, Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates histories and emotions involved with these and other racially oppressive practices along with contemporary situated experiences and emotions related to Boyle Heights current gentrification crisis. Estrada (2017) observes the influx of art galleries and protests against galleries by DBH and others, groups who’ve gone so far as to splash red paint inside galleries, and engage in what some would characterize as vandalism, like spray painting the words, “Fuck White Art” on the outside of Nicodim Gallery (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Nicodim Gallery Door, Published in The Guardian, November 4, 2016.
Although DBH doesn’t claim responsibility for spray painting Nicodim Gallery, popular press articles from the *The L.A. Times* to *The Guardian* reported that the LAPD were investigating DBH in relation to the graffiti as a possible hate crime due to targeting “white” art. Articles like those published in *The Guardian* and *LA Times* follow the rhetorical pattern Makagon observes in his study of popular press framing of art and gentrification: artists are both rhetorical heroes of urban wastelands and victims of gentrification. This narrative contrasts to independent press and blog coverage of the event marked by titles like, “The Battle for Sovereignty in Boyle Heights, Los Angeles,” (Latinxspaces.com), “Boyle Heights Activists Say Gentrification Is The Real Hate Crime,” (Laist.com), and “Here’s why Los Angeles’ anti-white graffiti shouldn’t be investigated as a hate crime,” (mic.com). Blogs and indie presses adopt a more sympathetic perspective, representing the graffiti as activism against systemic oppression rather than an act of hate crime. These perspectives more closely align with DBH perspectives that frame gentrification as race and class-determined state-sanctioned violence. Following the graffiti incident, @DefendBoyleHts tweeted out their own photo, one that had been slightly altered, also posting the image on Instagram and subsequently on their blog. Figure 12 depicts @DefendBoyleHts’ modified photo: the spray painted gallery door has been framed by additional text, describing the graffiti as an art installation: “unknown artist, Boyle Heights, Los Angeles, graffiti on metal door.”
Since the graffiti’s original occurrence and the subsequent circulation of related images in popular and indie press venues and by Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts, the phrase, “Fuck White Art,” has been replicated, modified, and distributed across various mediums and materialities, from T-shirts and buttons to protest banners, even appearing in a scene from the Starz series, *Vida*, set in Boyle Heights and, as DBH would later protest, appropriating their gentrification battle for profit (Figure 13).

**Figure 12: Defend Boyle Heights Instagram of Graffiti as Protest Art.**
The tension between Latinx groups like Defend Boyle Heights and incoming “white art” is particularly acute because this area of Los Angeles is internationally known for Chicano/Latinx art. The national mural movement began here in the 1960s, and in the eastern part of Los Angeles, as in many other parts of the nation, these murals were visual manifestations of the Chicano Movimento, or the Mexican-American Civil Rights Movement. Barnet-Sanchez and Drescher (2016) chronicle the relationship between this rich visual and social history in Give Me Life: Iconography and Identity in East LA Murals:

These early murals’ themes, the sources of the imagery that provoked the national movement as well as international efforts, brought to the fore neighborhood residents’ concerns, both critical and positive. Working with local political activists, muralists painted images about housing issues, police corruption and brutality, struggles for civil rights, and labor and unions; a few were in opposition to the Vietnam War, and another few were about health care. Direct references to capitalism were sparse, but many addressed ethnic pride and women’s liberation (p. 32).
In their tweets and activities, @DefendBoyleHts acts within this legacy of neighborhood Chicano activism, broadening their cultural umbrella to encompass more inclusive notions Latinx identity, a non-binary term to refer to people of Latin-American descent. Through visuality like the Instagram photo of “Fuck White Art,” @DefendBoyleHts circulates visuality that acts within this legacy of resistance art and against the gentrification they see taking shape in their community, often through incoming art galleries. Like the protest murals of the past, @DefendBoyleHts makes visible their right to their neighborhood space by enhancing the visibility of local discriminatory issues that crisscross the field of lived experience, intersectional issues explored in more depth in upcoming sections of this chapter. From housing to police brutality, @DefendBoyleHts circulates visuality that exposes numerous forces encountered with gentrification, and the vibrancy of their activity transcends specific digital and physical locations.

Defend Boyle Heights and Anti-Gentrification Visuality

A few years before the closing of Mission 365, the event depicted at the beginning of this chapter, members of Defend Boyle Heights gathered together in protest against the opening of PSSST art gallery. In this initial protest action on May 14th, 2016, the group projected their own protest art on the outside wall of PSSST, depicting a series of digital images: a rose blooming, money falling from the sky, and a screen-printed figure with the words “PISS on PSST.” Simultaneously, protesters chanted, “El pueblo unido jamás será vencido!” In English: “The people united will never be defeated.” DBH tweeted 14 times that day, one of the peaks of activity in the Tableau visualization of their Twitter activity over time (Figure 14), and this event marks the beginning of their war against invading art galleries. Interviewed by City Lab, a Defend Boyle Height’s member defines “artwashing” as “the use of art and artistic labor to
perpetuate and enable gentrification” (Delgadoillo, March 1, 2017, para. 5). *City Lab* and other media outlets occasionally report on DBH’s protests, sometimes including or linking to @DefendBoyleHts’ media.

Figure 14: Tableau Chart of @DefendBoyleHts Tweets From May 2016-Oct. 1 2018.

On the day of the PSSST protest, all of @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets refer to the PSSST protest, some tweets in Spanish, some in English, speaking to the perspective that artwashing is gentrification and connecting gentrification to histories of white supremacy, colonialism, class warfare, displacement, and state violence. Less than a year later, PSSST would close, stating through various media that the closure was due in part to the “harassment” of anti-gentrification groups like DBH. Figure 14 also demonstrates that @DefendBoyleHts activity on Twitter increased substantially in its second year, with the vast majority of tweets occurring between
September of 2017 and October of 2018. Each spike on the line graph indicates an increase in the number of tweets on those particular days, perhaps by @DefendBoyleHts creating an original post, posting through a retweet, or by other users mentioning @DefendBoyleHts.

On @DefendBoyleHts first day on Twitter, the May 8th, 2016 peak, all of the tweets are original tweets posted by @DefendBoyleHts regarding the embodied protest against the PSSST gallery. Attached photos and videos depict a community march down Anderson Street, rapidly becoming an arts district, which ends in a rally in front of PSSST gallery. Tweet texts, like “It has begun! Meet us on Whittier and Boyle” and “#boyleheights residents shutting down Anderson Row LAPD chopper called on community,” circulate crucial logistical details that assist in gathering together fellow community members, while other tweets, like “We don’t need art galleries we need higher salaries!” and “#PSSTOutOfBH,” attempt to push out outsiders and businesses. This moment, like many of related to @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets, shows how technologies can assist in circulating messages and visual media like photos and videos through Twitter’s networked structure and thereby amplify DBH’s embodied actions, widening activist presence, visibility, and vitality. All of the locations in this initial peak are local ones, specific street names that serve as meeting locations and protest targets. As @DefendBoyleHts’ activity continues into the next year, the frequency of tweets increases, and more retweets, mentions, and quotes demonstrate a growing engagement and circulation outside of their immediate local environment.

As an example of their growing reach, the tweets in the March 11, 2018 peak show that @DefendBoyleHts has connected with users across disparate locations: Lincoln Park in Chicago, IL; Las Vegas, NV; Rochester, NY; and San Francisco, CA. These encounters involve shared concerns over gentrification, and @DefendBoyleHts often amplifies anti-gentrification efforts in
other locations, circulating media and tweets, such as, “RT @nychange: Rochester tenants are on a strike protesting deplorable conditions…” and “RT@lyndametz: I think a lot about how Lincoln Park once had a very sizable Puerto Rican population in the 60s and 70s and were displaced to other parts of the city when gentrification started overtaking the neighborhood in the 80s.” In this last tweet, @DefendBoyleHts retweets a conversation between a Chicago blogger and Chicago Tribune contributor Lynda Metz, connecting anti-gentrification efforts in Chicago to Latinx histories and identities shared by activists in Boyle Heights. Additionally, by communicating with a Chicago Tribune writer, @DefendBoyleHts engages with and perhaps plays a role in future popular press narratives of gentrification through venues like the Tribune. With Metz’s large Twitter following and her position as a writer in a major national news outlet, @DefendBoyleHts plays a role in the possible transformation of the rhetoric that circulates about gentrification inside and outside of their home neighborhood of Boyle Heights, Los Angeles.

Visualizing @DefendBoyleHts Twitter activity creates a timeline of their protests, each peak, though miniscule in comparison to overall trending Twitter topics, tells a small story of Boyle Heights and its resistance of gentrification, generating encounters with potential consequences. As previously mentioned, DBH’s resistance often takes shape in protests against art galleries, PSSST just the first in a long line, with nearly a dozen since shuttering their businesses, some relocating to friendlier neighborhoods. Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts also protests against other kinds of new businesses, whether white or nonwhite owned, who participate in changing the Latinx, immigrant, working-class flavor of the neighborhood. Often catering to newcomers rather than existing residents, businesses like expensive coffee shops and craft breweries often share characteristics observed in Stimpson’s
“gentrified style” and Hyra’s “gilded ghetto,” aesthetics that capitalize on the existing neighborhood’s cultural cache to attract predominately white middle and upper class consumers.

Figure 15: Defend Boyle Heights Tweet & Instagram Post.

To go beyond Twitter’s character-limited constraints, @DefendBoyleHts often tweets out an image and/or link to their Instagram, Facebook, or blog accounts (Figure 15). The Instagram-linked tweet pictured above spreads the word about and gathers support for local mariachi musicians who are being evicted. By using an image of text, this tweet bypasses Twitter’s character limits, including more context for the Los Mariachi rent strike and DBH’s upcoming rally. In this image, @DefendBoyleHts expresses fear over losing the Mariachis and Boyle Heights’ Latinx culture. Los Mariachis perform in Boyle Heights’ Mariachi Plaza, a central public space in the neighborhood, as well as in other public and private spaces, and due to drastic rent hikes, the musicians went on rent strike and were served evictions. In addition to coordinating a rally in support of Los Mariachis, this tweet and others directly name landlords
Tweeting Out: Acting Locally and Circulating Globally

@DefendBoyleHts amplifies and participates in local anti-gentrification efforts in digital and physical scenes of gentrification, like those previously described, and recurrent resistance activity often shows up as peaks in the Tableau graphs. The March 14th, 2018 peak includes a large number of tweets and mentions directed at @betterbikeshare with a user profile describing it as “a grant-funded collaboration created to build equitable and replicable bike share systems.” Although framed by a social justice mission to “build more equitable” bike shares, @DefendBoyleHts infiltrates @betterbikeshare’s Twitter chat about a possible bike share program in Boyle Heights. A “Twitter chat” is a kind of Q&A in which users, organizations, businesses, and/or institutions try to reach out to other Twitter users, local community members and/or expert publics, and engage them in a particular discussion. On March 14th, 2018, @betterbikeshare poses a series of questions related to bike shares increasing social equality, such as this third question: “Q3: What is the role of bike share and biking infrastructure in changing neighborhoods, and what happens when marginalized communities feel that bike share is not meant for them?” DBH responds by posting a meme (Figure 16).
Although there are many ways to define memes, Huntington (2013) states that memes are “remixed images and videos circulated online, inviting participation through creation of derivatives” (n.p.). Huntington goes on to argue that memes function as subversive forms of visual rhetoric: “Memes are more than internet humor; research shows them to function by appropriation and resistance to dominant media messages” (np). In its meme, @DefendBoyleHts resists @betterbikeshare’s polite rhetoric and any scenario in which bike shares are beneficial to communities facing gentrification and displacement. The bike share meme shows up in retweets and @ mentions by and to @DefendBoyleHts and @betterbikeshare, along with photos of
vandalized bikes, a digital protest of subversive visual rhetoric. These tweets and visual media circulate an oppositional rhetoric: the perspective that bike shares and bikes are forces of gentrification and erasure in working class and poor communities of color. @DefendBoyleHts also tweets out research that supports this bike-share-as-gentrification argument, attaching a bike share study report and City Lab article. Indeed, urban studies research supports the link between bike shares, biking infrastructure, and bikes and the advancement of gentrification (For representative examples, see Lees, Slater, Wiley, 2013; Stehlin, 2015; Stein, 2011). In addition to the meme, @DefendBoyleHts also posts the text: “empowers white gentrifiers, landlords to evict undocumented tenants, coffee shops, art galleries, #BBSPchat #gentrification #California.” By doing so, @DefendBoyleHts connects the proposed bike share with interrelated forces of racial and economic oppression that advance gentrification in Boyle Heights and other nonwhite and/or working class communities by increasing evictions, heightening immigration enforcement, and attracting gentrifying businesses and nonprofits. In a follow up Q&A posted on Better Bike Share’s blog, they acknowledge the validity of @DefendBoyleHts’ position:

The criticism from the community group Defend Boyle Heights is justified. Metro Los Angeles has changed the community drastically in the last 10 years and their engagement with residents was a checked box at best. Boyle Heights is changing and local families are being displaced by a multitude of factors that are part of larger systemic issues. The threats are real and services like bike share being placed in low-income communities of color like Boyle Heights are a kind of a nail in the coffin that the community is changing at the cost of long-time residents.

In this excerpt, Better Bike Share describes the proposed LA Metro bike share expansion into Boyle Heights as “a nail in the coffin that the community is changing at the cost of long-time
residents.” Better Bike Share connects the Twitter encounter with @DefendBoyleHts to Better Bike Share’s decision to engage in future partnerships with LA Metro Transportation: “While MCM isn’t working directly on the issue of bike share right now, we are still keeping a close watch as to how it will continue moving forward, since it has such a deep impact wherever it is placed.” Art galleries, coffee shops, and bike shares are just a few of the gentrifying forces Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts moves against.

Although Tableau was useful for locating glimpses into movement and the resulting encounters, to more thoroughly trace its vibrancy and circulation I used other visualization and coding methods, some of which will be described in the next sections of this chapter. The choices made in technologies and manual coding were aimed at better visualizing how Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates in physical and digital space and at providing a perspective other than that afforded by Tableau’s charts and graphs. Additionally, I wanted to better account for the consequences of @DefendBoyleHts’/Defend Boyle Heights’ circulation on other bodies, built environments, and placemaking. To advance these project goals, I used grounded theory to manually code @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets by theme, action, and location. The following section will discuss the resulting visualizations, but first I’ll briefly describe the coding and visualization process.

@DefendBoyleHts: Visualizing Encounters

Although many of @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets were geolocated, most of these coordinates correspond to general locations, like city coordinates for Los Angeles or neighborhood coordinates for Boyle Heights. To gain more specific location information from individual tweets and attached media, I read and manually coded all of the approximately 1200
@DefendBoyleHts tweets, first coding for specific places identified in each tweet and attached media. Additionally, I read each tweet, embedded URL, and attached media for content themes, eventually coding for six themes: art, business, community building, entertainment, government forces, and housing. Each one of these general categories includes more granularly specific topics. For instance, the art theme includes tweets that reference art galleries, artwork, murals, and graffiti as well as resistance art and artwashing. The businesses theme corresponds to tweets naming businesses, like coffee shops and restaurants, which @DefendBoyleHts identifies as being a “gentrifying” forces in the neighborhood, as well as tweets relating to the tech and entertainment industries. The community building theme refers to public meetings, invited talks, neighborhood celebrations, as well as to digital forms of community building, like sharing Twitter profiles to connect users and sharing community photos, events, and tweets. The government forces theme includes tweets that reference Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), local policing practices, calls to police by residents, and the increased presence of police in gentrifying areas, among other kinds of government-related issues. Government forces also indicates infrastructure systems like bicycles, mass transit, and freeways. The housing theme contains tweets that reference eviction, real estate development, rent hikes, homelessness, the YIMBY movement (Yes In My Backyard), homelessness, and Airbnb, among other related issues. I identified these themes, as previously stated, through the grounded theory process of reading each tweet and attached piece of media for each of these themes. Although more than one of the themes might occur in any one tweet, I coded for the primary theme that I identified as the focus of the tweet. In this way, I was able to structure the data and visualize its thematic priorities, better tracing various movements and encounters involving Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts and other entities.
In part, the coding process illuminates that Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates by activating identification with a shared past, one that puts the present battle against gentrification in a longer historical continuum of racial oppression and denials of citizenship. Encounters with Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts often include the circulation of cultural histories related to immigration stories, border crossings, and land grabs. “La Raza,” (in English, “the race”) is a phrase that refers, particularly, to the 1960s political and cultural movement for Mexican-American civil rights. Since that time, la Raza more broadly refers to shared Chicán racial/ethnic identity, connecting histories and people who identify as or descend from Chicano/Chicán, perhaps more broadly Latin American and/or indigenous people. Often, the term also still retains the liberating, sociopolitical inflection of its origin, while being applied to contemporary contexts. In “Making Chicano Life Visible” (2017), New York Times reporter Maurice Berger expounds upon the importance la Raza, discussing the visuality published in the former L.A. indie newspaper, named La Raza:

Some of the most compelling images in La Raza depict protest...Other photographs document government pushback against this activism, including police surveillance, brutality and harassment. Some depict the activities of everyday life, from a woman styling hair in a beauty salon to a boy shining shoes. And others portray the robust cultural expression of the Mexican-American community, from posters and graffiti to murals and theatrical performances. In the end, these photographs helped shape the collective identity and political consciousness of the Chicano community. By making these images available to fellow members of the Chicano Press Association, as well as to mainstream and underground outlets, La Raza challenged media stereotypes by showing a self-possessed, engaged and resilient people (np).
Like *La Raza*, @DefendBoyleHts circulates images of protest, policing, and everyday life to shape collective identity, perform resistance, and contest media stereotypes of Latinx people and places, challenging gentrification’s erasure of nonwhite bodies and culture. The visuality shows others that Boyle Heights is not a blank slate, but populated by a long-standing and vital community. Whereas city planning images and mainstream media narratives of redevelopment often render existing residents as invisible, impoverished, criminal, or addicted by, @DefendBoyleHts circulates images that display strong, resistant, culturally- and community-engaged people.

Depicting everyday community life, @DefendBoyleHts circulates fliers related to elder gatherings, popular neighborhood pastimes such dining at local taco trucks, and recreational group photos, like a community party held in Mariachi Plaza (Figure 17).

![Figure 17: @DefendBoyleHts Images of Everyday Life.](image)

Images of everyday life visually and thematically contrast with those @DefendBoyleHts circulates related to policing, gentrification, and racial oppression. Often, government coded tweets correspond to ICE raids, arrests, and detainments of undocumented community members, like this retweet: “As people get ready for ‘Sunday Funday’ our Los Angeles street vendors suit up for another day of work. They suit up for another day of harassment by police, security and even fear being handed over to ICE. Just for making a living. Defend and support street
vendors.” This tweet includes a photo of the remains of a street vendor’s dumped cart following an interaction with the police. These images, though political, are also scenes of everyday life in gentrifying areas. @DefendBoyleHts circulates GoFundMe links to fundraise for legal actions and families of ICE detainees, evicted tenants, and victims of gun violence. They circulate meeting and protest information that urge others to participate in embodied protests, marches, phone actions, and Twitter campaigns aimed at developers, landlords, elected officials, and city transportation departments. In these movements and materialities, @DefendBoyleHts defies digital and physical borders, its vibrancy generating encounters that shape embodied and digital life.

Like La Raza, @DefendBoyleHts shapes collective identity and political consciousness in Boyle Heights and through DBH’s extended networks, challenging other media depictions of the residents and gentrification process in Boyle Heights, specifically, and Latinx culture and resistance in other gentrifying areas more broadly. Although La Raza was specific to the Chicano movement and identity, often criticized for its machismo, @DefendBoyleHts circulates by harnessing, extending, and sometimes problematizing Chicano identification with Latinx inclusivity, digitally stretching from their local neighborhood to unite users and coalitions in disparate locations.

Figure 18: Journalist Tweet About Defend Boyle Heights Visit to Chicago.
Figure 18 depicts a tweet from Chicago blogger, Lynda Lopez, about Defend Boyle Heights recent visit to the predominantly Latinx Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago, IL. Lopez tags @DefendBoyleHts, uses a few hashtags, and links simultaneously to Defend Boyle Heights Facebook page and a thirty-minute YouTube video. The video shows members of Defend Boyle Heights and the Pilsen Alliance walking together through the Pilsen neighborhood in Chicago, discussing their shared fight against gentrification, the Latinx histories of the two neighborhoods, Chicano/Latinx mural art, and incoming white artists and art galleries. In the video, members from Pilsen Alliance talk about the recently established Pilsen Open Studio Night, in which artists open up their studios, and people, often from outside the community, visit Pilsen to experience it as an arts district. In the video, a Pilsen Alliance member states, “Open Studio Night is almost like a gateway for gentrifiers to come in and experience our local ‘culture’ [she uses air quotes]”. Another member adds, “It is complicated because the community itself is an arts community, and I think it’s part of our culture, but, like you said, there’s this element of outsider art, of people already seeing what’s going on and trying to commodify that and get in on the energy of the neighborhood.” As this community member articulates, “the energy of the neighborhood,” generated by Latinx culture and art, acts as an ambient rhetoric that gentrifiers commodify for their own benefit, materializing in Open Gallery Night and other events and business practices. She emphasizes that this is especially insulting to her, and others like her, who have long personal and cultural connections to Pilsen. In contrast to the personal profit sought by incoming artists, she adds that the Pilsen murals and other contemporary neighborhood folk art enrich shared cultural experiences and ethnic pride, supporting the betterment of the community. In the video, the Pilsen members also state that when outsider artists began a First
Friday open gallery event, excluding Latinx resident artists, the Latinx community started a Second Saturday event to retain the visibility their community and culture.

In the remainder of the video, community members narrate how existing murals in the neighborhood aren’t being preserved, Latinx artists aren’t being supported, and city funds are going to support a revitalized “Pilsen Arts District,” largely featuring white, outsider art. Community members discuss how they’ve been harassed by art tourists due their Latinx identities, and when community members have complained about this harassment to police, their complaints aren’t taken seriously. One member states that many of the murals in Pilsen were created during the Chicano Movement in the 1970s and 80s, a movement which began in California and spread to Chicago, “Half of the murals in Pilsen have disappeared because of new development...And these murals are not being taken care of...But now that the alderman has realized that a mural is a tool of gentrification, and these murals have always been community murals, but now they’re starting to limit the subjects you can talk about, bringing artists in from France...”. These observations connect the embodied experience of Pilsen residents to Defend Boyle Heights, uniting their perspectives on art galleries as agents of whiteness and gentrification.

Towards the end of the video, Defend Boyle Heights and the Pilsen Alliance point out another gentrifying business, a Michelin-star restaurant that doesn’t serve the existing community’s tastes and working class means, bringing more outsiders into Pilsen. A resident describes how the restaurant hosts musicians for entertainment and, during these events, hires more police to deal with the locals who might want to attend, treating them as if they’re potentially dangerous or criminal. Narrating the experience of attending one of these events, the resident states, “And I have to listen to people talk about gentrification in a way that is extremely
racist, like these people are cleaning up this community and these people, and when I spoke up against that I was kicked out of the place.” This experience shows how stereotypes of nonwhite bodies circulate in gentrifying spaces, generating affective economies, that, among other consequences, often results in overpolicing, criminalizing, and endangering nonwhite bodies. Near the end of this video, these affective circulations and their consequences become more visible.

In front of another new restaurant, the restaurant manager appears, says hello to the group, and asks if there’s anything he can do for them. A member of Defend Boyle Heights introduces himself and the organization as an anti-gentrification coalition and states, “we’re just taking a tour of the destruction of the working class aesthetic and the displacement of, you know, the immigrants.” The restaurateur asks, “Is there anything we can do?” An activist replies, “Get the fuck out.” Another activist calmly explains, “Literally our lives are in danger, and I don’t think you understand that, and it makes me sad.” As the confrontation progresses, the conversation is at times polite on both sides, the restaurateur explaining his good intentions and donations to the community, and the community members trying to explain the effect he and his business have on their lives: increased policing, harassment, displacement. While it begins to appear like a productive encounter with differences, seconds later, the restaurateur pulls out his cell phone and calls the police. A community member states, “And this is how quickly it goes from, ‘We’re here for you’ to ‘I’m going to call the cops.’” The activists begin clapping and chanting, “Actions speak louder than words,” and “El Barrio No Se Vende, Se Ama y Se Defiende,” (The neighborhood is not to be sold—It is to be loved and defended). This expression is frequently circulated by Latinx communities fighting gentrification—it’s shouted, painted on signs, printed on T-shirts, and tweeted. In this scene, the community members discuss the call to
the police as one of the dangers of gentrification: they’ve become targets because of their ethnicity, their class, their opposition to gentrification. One community member states, “they get to set the terms of what’s hostile, what’s violent, even though their opening of this restaurant is violence against our community.”

This moment of improvisational embodied protest, reignited and recurring in the video circulating on social media, demonstrates the complex and ongoing vibrancy of Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts. The video provides Latinx-based knowledge of gentrification and resistance tactics to others interested in opposing gentrification in their neighborhoods. It also circulates the affective responses of the bodies in this scene—from anger to fear and sadness—that accumulate increasing value and force as this video continues to circulate and to encounter other bodies who identify, either with the bodies and emotions of the restaurant employer, or with the Latinx community members. These affective economies increase racial tension and division, but they also unite people marginalized and oppressed by gentrification and whiteness, creating counterpublics that challenge dominant power structures through digital and embodied actions.

This circulation is propelled by shared concerns over gentrification and identification with Latinx history, art, and contemporary lived experience. Many encounters I’ve described in this chapter demonstrate how @DefendBoyleHts circulates by group alignment, through tweets and other digital media and through embodied collaboration between activists, sometimes in disparate geographic locations. Circulating the video through Twitter and Facebook, community members in Boyle Heights, Pilsen, and other locations identify and participate in this moment and critical counterpublic through likes, views, shares, and comments. For instance, this video was viewed over 11,000 times on the Defend Boyle Heights Facebook page alone. Comments on
the video thread occur as the video progresses, including comments like, “That use to be the neighborhood clinic for the Latino folks smh,” “I love y'all all the way from NYC,” and “I love the rebel in every single one you! Viva La Raza.” Comments like this not only demonstrate how geographically distant users participate in the embodied moment via digital social network technologies, but also how users identify with the encounter, recognizing elements of place and self in the depiction. The tweet, “Viva La Raza,” also uses emojis of clenched fists in various skin colors to make the phrase more inclusive of all nonwhite bodies.

Examining pieces of individual media created and circulated by @DefendBoyleHts provides narrative fragments of resistance and unification. Each fragment evokes situated perspectives that attest to gentrification as just one of the ways in which racial and economic oppression is working today on communities of color, often through artwashing, but also through related oppressive practices, like policing, and other kinds of commodification and appropriation of nonwhite working class space and culture. To situate some of these forces in the movements and materialities within the neighborhood of Boyle Heights, L.A., I mapped the locations, actions, and themes identified in @DefendBoyleHts tweets. By doing so, the resulting visualizations reflect the space and entities involved in Boyle Heights from the perspective of local anti-gentrification activist tweets.
Figure 19: Map of Gentrification Forces in Boyle Heights, L.A.

In the above map (Figure 19), dots represent the locations of entities @DefendBoyleHts has identified as forces of gentrification, such as art galleries, TV filming sites, and apartments slated for eviction. The pink dots signifying “art” clearly cluster around the Anderson Row area and often correspond to the locations of galleries and protests, while the orange dots representing housing are more dispersed throughout the greater L.A. area. In the interactive visualization, viewers can click on dots, see the Google Street Maps images of these locations, and learn what action took place in this location, perhaps an embodied protest or digital communication.
The above image (Figure 20) shows an example of the information and image provided through interacting with the map by clicking on a dot. Rather than including @DefendBoyleHts tweets or media, the pop up displays the Google Map’s Street View image of the location and text generated from my coding scheme, such as the theme, action, and tweet type. By choosing Google Map’s Street View images rather than the @DefendBoyleHts tweets and images, I oriented the visual perspective of the map to surveil the incoming forces of gentrification and important cultural locations, like La Conxa, pictured above, rather than to surveil activist bodies and media. This was a choice made to orient the view towards forces of oppression, the whiteness gentrifying Boyle Heights, and to avoid, as much as possible, further contributing to the vulnerability of the activists.

Visualizing the movement of gentrification forces through the theme map above further demonstrates that Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates and acts against
gentrification as an intersectional issue that connects systems of power, like government and economic forces moving within Boyle Heights. In another rendering of the data, Figure 20 maps @DefendBoyleHts tweets by action. In this zoomed-in image of the visualization, the geography of Boyle Heights is delineated by the actions @DefendBoyleHts has taken to unite the existing community and to move against gentrifying forces. Again, using Google Map’s Street View images and omitting the tweet itself, the map visualizes how Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts circulates to support embodied protest, communication practices, and legislative actions in relation to the physical locations specified in tweets.

Figure 21: Resisting Gentrification in Boyle Heights, L.A.
In Figure 21, the clicked on dot reveals streets where ICE has been spotted, and @DefendBoyleHts originally posted this information on Twitter to warn and protect community members. This communication practice, more specifically labelled “surveilling,” occurs frequently in relationship to ICE and other police actions and also corresponds with new development, evictions, and real estate sales, brings these perhaps unnoticed movements in the neighborhood into greater visibility, providing greater possibility for others to take protective action. By making these forces visible and connecting them to gentrification, @DefendBoyleHts circulates to challenge gentrification’s normativity and to communicate an alternative narrative of gentrification that alerts others to potential dangers and unites the neighborhood, partly through shared cultural histories and identities, in collective actions against these oppressive forces.

**Global Reach**

These maps visualize gentrification encounters in the local neighborhood of Boyle Heights, Los Angeles through the perspective created by coding @DefendBoyleHts’ tweets. The following section further demonstrates how @DefendBoyleHts moves beyond their local environment to influence and be influenced by bodies and practices in other situated locations. Figure 18 is an image of an interactive visualization that depicts global location data in the @DefendBoyleHts data set. In the visualization, the dots show the locations referenced by or to @DefendBoyleHts, and the shading of the dots indicates the frequency of tweets mentioning these locations. The dots show the global expanse of @DefendBoyleHts circulation, and some areas of the map that reveal an interesting lack of circulation. For instance, it’s somewhat surprising given both gentrification’s and Boyle Heights’ relationship to Latin America, that
@DefendBoyleHts only circulates tweets related to a few locations in Mexico. Furthermore, the entirety of the Global South is devoid of mention, with the exception of a few occurrences in Mexico, Somalia, and South Africa. Despite these interesting silences, tweets relating global locations and @DefendBoyleHts function to amplify lived experience and resistance actions and to circulate media and information related to battles with gentrification and oppression in distant but connected locations. For instance, some of tweets located in South Africa circulate a video involving the South African Economic Freedom Fighters’ (EFF) protest of an H&M store: “This is what happens in South Africa when #H&M called black people "monkey in the jungle" #EFF. Good luck to all the folks taking direct action!” Although not explicitly labeled as gentrification, @DefendBoyleHts tweets about the protest in South Africa, connecting the locations and groups through shared experiences resisting economic and racial oppression.

Figure 22: Visualizing the Global Circulation of @DefendBoyleHts.
Figure 23: Google Fusion Network Graph of @DefendBoyleHts Twitter Connections.

The Google Fusion Network Graph above (Figure 23) visualizes the network of users who follow and/or friend @DefendBoyleHts, demonstrating another way to understand @DefendBoyleHts’ circulation scope and reach through its extended network of 1505 friends and followers. This visualization doesn’t completely capture all of @DefendBoyleHts possible connections through digital and physical social networks, but it shows the entities @DefendBoyleHts regularly encounters on Twitter. These users have additional networked connections on Twitter and offline, potentially circulating @DefendBoyleHts through these other connections and networks. Looking closer at the types of users connected to @DefendBoyleHts deepens our understanding of DBH’s potential rhetorical circulation and force. In Figure 19, the nodes signify a wide range of entities from ordinary citizens to activists and advocacy groups to
news media outlets. The size of the bubble representing each node is also indicative of the size of
the node’s number of friends and followers. The Google Fusion Network represents most of the
entities as small nodes, but by investigating the Twitter profiles of users and combining those
networks with the users’ other possible social network and media presences, these small nodes
indicate that DBH has the potential to move through vast expanses of physical and virtual space.
For instance, “treekisser” is an individual user who has over 8,000 followers and has tweeted
over 200,000 times, to date, on both personal and political topics; Therefore, although the
visualization may make it appear that DBH is connected to many small nodes, each of these
nodes has the potential to spread @DefendBoyleHts tweets through their individual networks,
which are often several thousand users connected to each small individual node.

Further analyzing the visualization, it’s sometimes difficult to distinguish between
individual users and amateur or professional journalists, entities who make up a large portion of
@DefendBoyleHts followers. For example, the user @Stevesaldivar is a journalist with the L.A.
Times who has around 2,600 followers, while the user @Soledadobrien is a former NBC and
CNN news anchor who now owns a media group and has around 500,000 friends and followers.
Journalists, particularly those who focus on political, urban, and Latinx issues, as those who
follow DBH often do, have the potential to further spread and be influenced by
@DefendBoyleHts in a multitude of ways. Some might directly retweet @DefendBoyleHts,
while others might only view their tweets. Even if, like in the example of @Soledadobrien, there
is never any direct tweeting evident between the two nodes, these users may still be influenced
by their connection to @DefendBoyleHts. Of course, journalists and other users who follow
@DefendBoyleHts could be unmoved by them, or even hostile to their messages, and yet
through actively connecting by following or friending @DefendBoyleHts, these entities encounter gentrification, encounters which may result in consequences.

In addition to individuals, @DefendBoyleHts connects to a number of small-scale activist and advocacy networks, like Pilsen Alliance, Serve the People Pittsburgh, Equality for Flatbush, and Defend Our Hoodz Austin. Groups like these often also have numerous other physical and digital presences, like Facebook profiles and physical locations. These entities extend the movement and impact of Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts. Furthermore, DBH’s embodied visit to Pilsen wasn’t an anomaly. Other data shows that similar groups have visited DBH in Boyle Heights, and that DBH has made embodied visits to locations ranging from San Francisco to New York. In light of this, the network visualization above shows possibilities for digital ties to pave the way for stronger embodied collaborations and possible futures that include an organized national anti-gentrification network and movement. Of course, this future is by no means guaranteed, but it is part of the argument of this dissertation that Twitter circulation makes possible digital and embodied connections, like those demonstrated in the above visualizations, encounters that affect local and global communities even if they never result in viral hashtags or national protest movements. As this chapter’s discussion of Defend Boyle Heights/@DefendBoyleHts demonstrates, small, situated, and distributed slower rhetorical circulations also have material and rhetorical consequences.

Tracing the movement and consequentiality of @DefendBoyleHts also demonstrates the vibrancy of their circulation through Twitter’s social network, embodied movements and actions, and growing counterpublics. @DefendBoyleHts vibrancy moves within and between local bodies and materialities, circulating globally, partly by digital means, through intersectional activist networks, news-media framed narratives of gentrification, and various assemblages that
encounter these networks and narratives. This vibrancy can be characterized partly by its relationship to technologies, visuality, Latinx histories, and affective encounters. The various resulting encounters between humans, technologies, environments, and systems continue past the moment of this writing in ongoing, often untraceable cycles of encounter and transformation that will continue to generate potential consequences. Although many of these effects are beyond the scope of the dissertation, this chapter demonstrates that @DefendBoyleHts as vibrancy activates and partially transforms Chicano histories into modern, intersectional Latinx identities made visible and present in digital and material spaces. This visuality resists the cultural and material erasure of gentrifying forces like art galleries, police/ICE agents, and real estate developers through movements that make the often invisible relationship between urban redevelopment, human displacement, and cultural erasure apparent. In this way, DBH’s visuality circulates histories, not just as a way to bind diverse Latinx communities together, but to place gentrification in a historical continuum of colonization.

The final chapter of this dissertation will bring together this microanalysis of @DefendBoyleHts with the macroanalysis of the data set as a whole and discuss how these comparative approaches can inform richer theories of circulation that engage with rhetoric as it happens in physical, material, digital, and embodied flow. Additionally, it will discuss implications for this work in rhetoric and writing studies and interdisciplinary concerns with gentrification and social media data studies.
Chapter 5: Implications for Future In Situ Rhetorical Studies of Big Social Media Data

In situ research’s added value comes both from interacting with oppositional rhetorical communities as they unfold and from having access to in-group conversations and interpersonal exchanges where the building blocks of oppositional rhetorics, what Burke (1989) identified as the “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, attitudes that make ...[collectives] consubstantial,” emerge prior to their public mobilizations.


I begin this final chapter with a quote from McHendry et al (2014) to emphasize that although this dissertation has been aimed at developing a theoretically informed methodology for the rhetorical study of big social media data, it is with the view that data are important material rhetoric of everyday interactions. These interactions often take shape and circulate as “conversations, arguments, and dialogues” occurring on social media and in co-occurring shifting physical encounters that happen in other networks. McHendry et al state that everyday talk is immaterial, emphasizing its ephemeral quality—the condition that talk circulates but may not be written or published and, therefore, is left unaccounted for in examinations of social change and as artifacts of rhetorical study. What McHendry et al.’s formulation of immateriality fails to address is that with the advent of social media, everyday conversations materialize in tweets and media; This dissertation demonstrates that digital social networks are informal spaces of activism and valuable field sites for in situ studies of vernacular rhetoric. Applying feminist rhetorical methodologies to these studies not only helps researchers locate encounters before, during, and after collective, public mobilizations, but also accounts for the nuance and complexity of consequential encounters outside of organized activism. Rhetoric and writing studies researchers are well poised to deeply understand social media’s materiality and to develop theories and methodologies for working with large collections of this data; By doing so,
we will better understand rhetoric’s vernacular public life, the scope of its relationality, and its
dynamic sociality, with and beyond connections to digital and physical objects like hashtags and
iconic images. An in situ approach to the rhetorical study of social media also provides
opportunities for researchers to locate “oppositional rhetorical communities as they unfold” and
to “access to in-group conversations and interpersonal exchanges where the building blocks of
oppositional rhetorics emerge.” In the remaining sections of this chapter, I will review the
reasons behind endeavoring to create a feminist rhetorical methodology for the study of big
social media data; account of its principles and methodological steps; and articulate benefits and
limitations learned through applying this methodology to the study of anti-gentrification rhetoric
circulating on Twitter. I conclude by gesturing towards future research and pedagogical
potentials for in situ rhetorical studies situated in social media data and feminist rhetorical
methodological approaches.

Chapter 1 of this dissertation highlights theoretical and methodological shifts in studies of
rhetorical circulation and activism, shifts due, in part, to the influence of new materialism
philosophies and the advent of new technologies like social media. Increasingly, within and
beyond our disciplines, research designs include the use of large social media data collections;
Rhetoric and writing studies should continue to contribute theoretical and methodological
perspectives on social media data research, providing valuable critical insights and rhetorical
applications. To provide disciplinary grounding for a project based on a large-scale collection of
Twitter data, I focused on rhetoric and writing studies scholarship that highlights how changing
communication technologies have altered our understanding of suitable rhetorical artifacts and
static notions of the rhetorical situation. I point out that circulation, notably theorized in relation
to visual print culture, has always included broader theories of visuality that apply to ideological
concepts like public attitudes. This visuality may or may not have unified recurring instantiations, like a photograph or meme, and, therefore, we can develop theories and methodologies to study circulation beyond tracing discrete, singular or iconic images by locating encounters that include more expansive notions of visuality. Locating encounters involves adopting ecological models of the rhetorical situation that reconfigure agency as distributed among a range of human and nonhuman entities in ongoing flux. These encounters generate the potential for rhetorically transforming visuality and, in so doing, shape attitudes, collectives, and “beingness.” Existing scholarship on rhetorical circulation also demonstrates that rhetoric moves and transforms through its encounters with various temporalities, objects, emotions, bodies, and technologies. This circulation of symbolic, visual, and digital expressions, performances, and interactions has consequences, such as affecting the visibility, proximity, agency, and collective activities of different kinds of entities and bodies. By locating rhetoric, not only in human symbolic action, but in the networked flux of encounters between human, affective, and nonhuman “things” in digital, physical, and hybrid spaces across time, rhetoric should be understood not only as discrete and bounded human acts of persuasion, but also as an ambient, ontological processes of ongoing negotiation and transformation. Despite the challenges of accounting for this complex flux, circulation studies advances rhetorical understanding of our digitally-networked, globally-connected present. Consequently, I argue for rhetoric and writing studies to develop theories and methodologies for the study of circulation through large social media data. By doing so, we attend to the interconnectedness and distributed “structurings” of rhetoric and power that shape knowledge, beliefs, practices, identities, collectives, and environments, and we better account for the particular affects new technologies like social media have on our understanding of rhetorical concepts like circulation.
In Chapter 2, I offer a feminist rhetorical methodology for large-scale social media research that draws on disciplinary trends in new materialism, circulation studies, and feminist technology studies; interdisciplinary theories and approaches to data methodologies; and my own experiences studying and visualizing the circulation of anti-gentrification rhetoric through a large Twitter data set. This methodology is also a way to keep myself accountable to the principles that guide my intention to engage in participatory critical rhetoric (CR): “the rhetorical critic’s commitment to social action while doing field research” (McHendry et al, 2014, p. 295).

McHendry elaborates upon the connection between CR and in situ rhetorical approaches, stating that “[i]n these moments, it is possible for a critic to engage in immanent acts of doing rhetoric, not just observing or analyzing rhetoric” (p. 297). As I’ve emphasized throughout this dissertation, my choices in topic, data collection and arrangement, and reorganization of data for the case study of Defend Boyle Heights reflect my own positionality and my desire to amplify and, in whatever small way possible, contribute to anti-gentrification rhetoric that makes visible its relationship to cultural, racial, and economic injustice and oppression.

To undertake comparative studies of circulation like those I’ve described in Chapter 3 and 4, the rhetorical feminist methodology developed in Chapter 2 emphasizes particular principles that could by flexibly applied to various kinds of data studies, using a range of applications and theoretical approaches. I offer this methodology for other rhetoric and writing scholars, as well as for those outside of our fields, especially those interested in conducting in situ studies with social media. Feminist critical technology scholarship, summarized extensively in Chapter 2, articulates ethical and epistemological issues with large data analysis and visualization. Namely, large data studies often view patterns identified through computational analytic applications and visualizations as objective, conclusive truths and outcomes, pseudo-
scientific readings of human experience and expression, and too frequently consider data apart from the human bodies that produce and often remain connected to this data. With these problems in mind, applying rhetorical feminist methodologies in social media data studies includes technological perspectives by utilizing machine reading, data analytics, and visualization and accounting for frequent data, like frequent terms and media circulating the most; rhetorical feminist methodologies also strive for multiplicity, polyvocality, and situatedness, and should also include perspectives related to “small” data and slower circulations, seeking to disrupt borders between binaries, valuing narrative along with frequency measures, and amplifying nondominant rhetoric. Feminist rhetorical methodologies add nuance to data studies and improve our understanding of rhetorical circulation. In this dissertation’s focus on anti-gentrification rhetoric circulating on Twitter, feminist rhetorical methodologies for working with data help to illuminate encounters that have consequences on our understandings of rhetoric and socio-political issues like gentrification. Feminist rhetorical methodologies offer opportunities to push back at data epistemologies that rely on notions that data is objective, neutral, and apolitical. Pushing back at these epistemologies is important for those of us who engage with large data sets and the database structures used to generate visualizations, which may “appear immediate, seamless, unified, isolated from time and space” (Wolff, Conclusion, n.p.). Doing so, we acknowledge the situated and rhetorical qualities of data, computational analytics, and visualization; the hierarchical and reductive role of classification inherent in database structure; and the way that perspectives and framing created through most data visualizations typically provide an illusion of detached objectivity, prioritizing quantitative measures that obscure other ways of understanding data.
Applying this methodology in the case studies of ad hoc and organized anti-gentrification activism circulating on Twitter described in Chapter 3 and 4, I attend to feminist and rhetorical principles through conscious and rigorous efforts to attend to subjectivity during data collection, analysis, and visualization; to create multiple visualizations that amplify dissenting perspectives from dominant cultural, social, and technological narratives; to shine light on the authoring characteristics of data visualizations conventions that cause them to appear omniscient and totalizing; and, perhaps most importantly, to put large data sets in conversation with smaller, more situated studies that might otherwise go missing in data analytics focused on only quantifying data. This dissertation’s in situ social media study attends to distributed and interconnected actors and entities not through mapping particular objects circulating in these networks but through comparative study aimed, instead, at locating encounters, the “‘public’ coalescing around a problem” (Bennett, 2009, p. 108). Focusing the unit of analysis on public encounters, broadly construed to include human and nonhuman entities, retains new materialism’s emphasis on distributed agency, flux, and temporality, while also retaining rhetoric’s interest in the symbolic communication, performance, and embodiment that transforms human lived experience. Indeed, studying circulation through a social media data set illuminates assemblages and encounters that occur, however briefly, and also shows how these encounters continue, transform, and make possible, not without limitations, collective knowledge making and action towards shared interests.

New materialism has expanded rhetorical theories and methodologies beyond the “still life” of semiotic interpretation and human intention to “tracing the often inconsistent and unpredictable consequences” of rhetoric’s movement (Gries, 2015, p. 49); However, it has yet to adequately address the complexities of social, participatory aspects of circulation afforded by
social media, such as slow circulation and public formation, and, consequently, has multiple opportunities to develop studies that account for social media’s “unpredictable consequences” on public life. Machine reading and data analytic tools are particularly useful for locating the most frequently occurring tweets in a large data collection, perhaps even “viral” tweets that spread quickly across many users and locations, even though they may not show up in relation to a hashtag or iconic image, or gain wider attention through subsequent media outlets. As such, data analysis and visualization, like the Tableau charts and graphs described in Chapter 3, emphasize particular tweets and media that accrue the greatest attention from the most users in relation to other less frequently occurring data in a collection. This is far different from looking at viral trends and hashtags on Twitter as a whole at any given moment. Large data collections gathered in connection to keywords situates analytical metrics in relation to only those tweets also related and collected through the same keyword. Looking at the most retweeted tweets and media in these collections, then, is a meaningful approach to identifying and accounting for encounters that share a common interest, like gentrification. I’ve described these encounters as having the potential for public formation, partly shaped through participatory digital composing practices and rhetorical interaction that transforms media, knowledge, attitudes, norms, and practices.

Beveridge (2018) argues that developing methodologies for studying virality through “macroscopic” techniques and machine-reading helps rhetoric and writing studies scholars examine “attention ecologies” that manifest as “aggregate trends occurring within social media as a way of identifying an audience in complex networks of mediation” (“Trend Circulation,” para. 5). In this dissertation’s case studies, complex networks of mediation are evident when users engage in collaborative knowledge making, demonstrated by social media processes of retweeting, replying, and tagging, and composition practices, like remixing, meming, and
“GIFing”. Describing and tracing these processes demonstrates how ad hoc anti-gentrification rhetoric circulates, partly through participatory processes of media creation, cultural identification, and shared interests, to relate gentrification to popular culture and commodities. The viral media identified by using Tableau, like the Swift Formation and Colt 45 memes, also helps to illuminate how anti-gentrification rhetoric circulates through ad hoc public participation of liking, retweeting, replying, and mentioning and by adding to and transforming this rhetoric through visual and textual remix. Synthesizing scholarship within and beyond rhetoric and writing studies, Gries (2015) observes that “[r]emix, in the twenty-first century, has also become a ubiquitous political practice for activating change, reaching out to international audiences, and building alliances of protest across the globe” (p. 279). Remix is evident in ongoing anti-gentrification encounters that produce counternarratives and knowledge about gentrification, and, in some cases, influence popular press narratives, broader cultural transformation, and social practices. Machine-reading and data analytic applications assisted in amplifying counternarratives of gentrification by identifying bigrams and tweets related to situated scenes of ad hoc anti-gentrification rhetorical circulation that illuminate gentrification’s relationship to pop culture and commodities and connect this relationship to histories of racial oppression. This dissertation argues that such political participation can be located in large and small social media data collections, and although such remix may not circulate to the extent of an image like Obama Hope, these smaller, slower circulations are consequential and worthy of the attention, not just of ad hoc publics, but rhetoric and writing studies too.

As case studies in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4 extensively develop, taking this comparative, expansive view of rhetorical circulation through social media data advances studies of activism and circulation beyond focusing on particular hashtags or images. Data analytics assist
researchers in locating encounters based on shared interests, made possible through this project’s Twitter data collection around the keyword, “gentrification.” This lack of attachment to a particular object, like a hashtag or iconic image, does not relinquish considering objects and their roles in rhetorical encounters, but accounts for locating multiple kinds of objects and entities as part of these encounters. These encounters shouldn’t be invisible or presumed inconsequential to cultural and material change. Studying rhetorical circulation around these shared interests as expressed by a keyword, and doing so at various scales, is a valuable way for comparatively accounting for not only how rhetoric moves, shapes, and reshapes public life through quick, widely circulated images or “viral” hashtags but also accounts for slower, local movements that might better sustain collective action over time (Bradshaw, 2018). Slow circulation, therefore, shouldn’t be dismissed as inconsequential to rhetorical studies or social movements, as somehow less than viral circulation, but should be increasingly studied for its rhetorical and social consequences.

Through the dissertation project, I’ve emphasized the ethical importance of accounting for data’s connection to human bodies. In the case study chapters, this has manifested in various ways. In Chapter 3 and 4, I removed identifying information from tweets by non-public, ordinary citizens, and, just as importantly, I’ve examined tweets outside of their aggregated data form. In the machine reading, data analytic, and visualizations employed in Chapter 3’s macroanalysis of ad hoc gentrification rhetoric, my tool choices changed as I continued to strive towards more contextualized analytic and visualization outcomes. For instance, using R to calculate most frequently occurring words and then most frequently occurring word pairs provided more contextualized themes and locations, like “anti-gentrification,” “white people”, and “los angeles”; However, these two word associations were not narratives of the situated lived
experience of gentrification. Indeed, the more contextualized bigrams provided fragments of narratives I then pursued by doing more traditional research, first looking through the data behind these visualizations, human reading some tweets, following URLs, and viewing attached media. Additionally, the discussions of these visualizations in Chapter 3 emphasizes that, rather than outcomes like providing quantitative evidence, or a statistical model generated to support qualitative observations or theories, social media data studies can also amplify and participate in the recovery and circulation of nondominant perspectives that challenge master narratives by remapping power structures. Focusing on ad hoc and organized activism, social media data studies that gather and amplify perspectives of ordinary people as they encounter phenomena in everyday experiences challenge dominant views of socio-political phenomena, recast notions of “heroes” and “villains,” and bear witness to polyvocal perspectives that have the potential to disrupt and transform knowledge and practices related to both data and sociopolitical issues like gentrification.

As Beveridge (2018) observes in a comparative study of machine-reading and human reading processes, human reading is still far more effective at understanding human expression and experience, and although machine-reading technologies are continually improving, “the ability to account for complex contexts, to compensate for variability and ambiguity of word meaning and syntax, and to address many other problems associated with analyzing unstructured text written by other humans—cannot be easily replicated by machines” (p. 398). The machine-based analytics that I employed in Chapter 3 certainly have many limitations. For instance, R and Tableau only counted and calculated results based on tweet texts and other textual metadata like user fields, date and time, and location information. These analyses, therefore, omit any visual media and the content of linked texts, like those connected through URLs. As such, this machine
reading leaves digital media’s multimodal characteristics largely unexamined in the resulting
data analysis and visualizations. Visual and digital forms that elide the gaze of machine reading
are particularly important to projects interested in rhetorical transformation and visuality.
Although technological affordances often limit what kind of data counts, the graphs and charts
produced by Tableau provide ways to examine circulation in relation to its temporality--various
scales, speeds, and times in which rhetorical encounters occur--while our disciplinary training
gives us the ethical imperatives and theoretical tools to examine data and visualizations more
critically.

Departing from the computational analytics of the large data set, I reorganized Twitter
data and collected other kinds of data around the anti-gentrification activist group, Defend Boyle
Heights (DBH). This case study, described in Chapter 4, dissents from large-scale pattern finding
and quantification that is the typical default mode of understanding large data sets. Instead, I
focus on a smaller data subset to understand how DBH circulates as vibrant anti-gentrification
rhetoric and to amplify DBH’s perspective and battle against gentrification in Boyle Heights,
L.A. By mapping gentrification entities identified by @DefendBoyleHts and visualizing the
embodied, communicative, and legal actions DBH has taken to resist gentrification, this chapter
demonstrates how DBH moves, acts, and communicates to retain their cultural and physical ties
to this Latinx neighborhood. Putting the smaller DBH data visualizations in conversation with
the data set as a whole and comparing encounters across the two case studies, it’s clear that
DBH’s embodied, situated, and distributed anti-gentrification rhetoric circulates within a wider
field of ad hoc activist encounters, relating gentrification to histories and present lived
experiences of appropriation and commodification of nonwhite space, culture, and bodies.
Future directions for this research will go further in adopting practices that utilize feminist and rhetorical theories to enhance the outcomes of this project and influence broader data analysis and visualization research practices. As I’ve previously discussed, my positionalities and experiences led me to orient towards this research in particular ways that tie me to the shape of this research and protect me from being a true insider participant in the experience of gentrification that I’m attempting to study. The choices I’ve made in what data to collect and how to collect, analyze, and visualize it were shaped by my political stance on gentrification, my life experiences, and the affordances of available tools and conventions.

However, as D’Ignazio and Klein point out, feminist visualization practices endeavoring to “examine power and aspire towards empowerment” should involve “ensuring that the outcomes of our design research connect back to the communities that first made them possible” (n.p.). At this stage in my research and working within the time constraints of this dissertation project, I haven’t yet done enough to include the communities that made this data possible, particularly the Defend Boyle Heights community. Although there are logistical hurdles to doing so, truly situated feminist methodologies should involve these efforts towards community-informed research and visualization and also offer reciprocity to the communities. In the case of my study, this will involve contacting Defend Boyle Heights, sharing the data research, offering opportunities for input and correction, and providing an opportunity for the community to opt-out of any additional data collection and research. As an effort towards reciprocity, I will offer the data collection, analysis, and visualizations to the community to be used for their own purposes. DBH might be able to use these visualizations in efforts to persuade others of the negative impact of gentrifying forces in their community and to illustrate their tactics and impact to potential alliances. Additionally, although the visualizations in this dissertation make some
progress in understanding anti-gentrification rhetoric through polyvocality and multiplicity, these visualizations fall short of the kind of embodied and situated visualizations that would go further in disrupting the omniscient and totalizing view of charts, graphs, and maps that always occlude even as they tacitly convince their audience of their authority. As I acknowledge these shortcomings and ways in which I will seek to modify my methodology to more closely align with feminist concerns for situated and community-connected research practices, I also urge us to begin conversations within our universities and other places of research about how they might build the institutional infrastructures to support community connections and community-scholar research collaboration. Despite these shortcomings and limitations, future social media data studies of circulation will provide rhetoric and writing studies opportunities to grow and to develop new rhetorical field methods, particularly related to activism and social change, to offer rhetorical understandings and interventions into social and political crises as they occur, and to reinvigorate rhetorical concepts in light of the digital.

**Digital) Critical Rhetoric, Field Methods, and Rhetorical Canons**

As my own work continues beyond the dissertation, I will continue to refine my rhetorical feminist methodology through continued practice, as well as to welcome its use and modification by other scholars within and outside of rhetoric and writing studies. At its core, rhetorical feminist principles of attending to subjectivity, striving for recovery, accounting for technologies, and putting big data in conversation with small data will enhance rhetoric and writing studies access to social media data methodologies that work against empiricist data epistemologies. Feminist rhetorical methodologies offer alternative epistemological frameworks that value situated perspectives and acknowledge various co-constituting forces, including the
“intuitive and interpretive role of the critic” (Martin & Gallagher, 2012, p. 54). Kitchin (2014) argues, indeed, that rather than shunning data or the analytics needed to make sense of it, academic disciplines need to develop data methodologies guided by alternative epistemologies. Perhaps by doing so, rhetoric and writing studies will avoid what Kitchin describes as the criticism often leveled against the digital humanities: “It is overly reductionist and crude in its techniques, sacrificing complexity, specificity, context, depth and critique for scale, breadth, automation, descriptive patterns and the impression that interpretation does not require deep contextual knowledge” (p. 8). The visualizations I discuss in Chapter 4 work towards representing “deep contextual knowledge” by using grounded theory and manual coding to visualize this data in its situated, geographic locations and map the movement of gentrification through structures and entities identified through the perspective of @DefendBoyleHts.

Additionally, as rhetoric and writing studies research continues to take the social media turn, we can practice critical rhetoric by formulating social media data studies as rhetorical field methods. As such, “rhetorical field methods offer a tool for situating oppositional logics within a lived set of rhetorical experiences that inform and shape them, and which those practices challenge and transform” (Middleton et al, 2011, p. 399). Whereas Middleton’s “field methods” refer to embodied methods of rhetorical study that incorporate ethnographic approaches in physical field sites, Bonilla and Rosa (2015) demonstrate that social media study can serve as a field site and that methods like ethnography can include examining Twitter conversations. Furthermore, Bonilla and Rosa emphasize that it’s “important to stay with those who tweet and follow them after hashtags have fallen out of ‘trend’” (p. 7), acknowledging that these encounters and communities exist and produce consequences outside of their associations with hashtags. With these perspectives on participatory critical rhetoric in connection with lived experience
rather than data alone, future social media data studies should move forward in ways that “situate the oppositional logics” within lived and technological conditions that inform and shape them.

We can do so, first, by designing social media data studies that privilege human coding practices informed by grounded theory over algorithmic analysis. Several of the rhetorical data studies scholarship summarized earlier in this dissertation, such as work from William I. Woolf, Laurie Gries, and Endres et al., adopt some form of grounded theory and also use computational methods at various stages of data collection, analysis, and visualization. By incorporating grounded theory, work like this demonstrates “analysis to be a social practice with all its attendant subjectivities, partial knowledges, and positionalities” (Knigge, L., and Cope, 2006, p. 2025-2026). As my own research progresses, I will use the themes derived from the grounded theory coding of DBH’s tweets to develop ways to apply these codes to an analysis of the larger data set. Allowing small data to guide large data analyses helps to develop alternative critical data analysis and visualization practices. Rather than leading with large-scale pattern analysis and deriving outcomes from this algorithmic analysis, the more embodied, situated accounts in our small data analysis could guide computationally-assisted analyses of large-scale data collections. For instance, I might use the thematic and action codes I’ve derived from DBH tweets to train topic modelling tools like Scikit or Mallet in an analysis of the whole data set. I don’t expect that the whole data set can be reduced to these codes any more than DBH’s tweet codes totally encapsulate a complete understanding of their embodied actions, communication practices, or legal actions, nor all the thematic entities at play in gentrification on a global scale; However, leading with knowledge derived from small data narratives significantly departs from what Rob Kitchin (2014) identifies as one of the false epistemological beliefs of the big data paradigm that “through the application of agnostic data analytics the data can speak for
themselves free of human bias or framing, and any patterns and relationships within Big Data are inherently meaningful and truthful” (p. 4). By starting with small data analysis informed by critical and rhetorical theories, we resist adopting the blackboxed logic of algorithmic analysis and the seeming neutrality of pattern-finding in favor of explicitly forming theories, hypotheses, and critical stances that don’t relinquish research outcomes to the novel results of computational analytics, but instead bring subjective, lived experience and our disciplinary theoretical and methodological choices to bear on data research.

Finally, social media data studies can demonstrate not just a critical awareness of the affordances of tools, but an active engagement to retool them according to our theoretical perspectives and disciplinary purposes. By reorienting the locus of study from the quantitatively greatest data points in the Tableau chart and graph visualizations to identify what might otherwise be missed and overlooked in these measures, re-arrangement becomes a key rhetorical strategy we can employ to locate and human read individual tweets that might otherwise become the “missing” data in our collections. By first being aware of the guiding perspective of tools and visualizations like Tableau and then actively using them differently--arranging the affordances to locate and highlight data that is present but not deemed significant by these technologies--we not only take more responsibility for our research outcomes, but develop practices that come closer to actualizing the inventive (Eyman, 2016; Gries, 2017) and participatory (McHendry et al, 2014; Middleton et al, 2011) potentials of rhetorical studies. We also demonstrate to those outside our fields that data isn’t neutral, tools aren’t fact-finding machines, and visualizations don’t lack authorial framing and perspective. Instead, we progress towards what Kitchin (2014) identifies as one of the positive potentialities of humanities-based engagement with large data sets and their attendant technologies: modifying the positivist data epistemology to show that “the research
conducted is reflexive and open with respect to the research process, acknowledging the
contingencies and relationalities of the approach employed, thus producing nuanced and
contextualized accounts” (p. 9).

Although I eagerly await free and accessible data collection, analysis, and visualization
tools built around rhetorical principles and research goals, like those in development by Aaron
Beveridge and others, I also share Beveridge’s urgency that the time to develop data analysis
methodologies is now. As Cathy O’Neill (2016) emphasizes in Weapons of Math Destruction,
data born ways of knowing increasingly prevalent and “the [p]redictive models are, increasingly,
the tools we will be relying on to run our institutions, deploy our resources, and manage our
lives” (p. 218). As such, data literacy, which includes methodologies for practicing data analysis
and visualization, is paramount to our research and teaching practices. Teaching students data
literacy through hands-on engagement with collection, analysis, and visualization tools can make
manifest the ways in which data is not abstract but situated and constructed. Furthermore, as
modes like machine learning and visualization become dominant ways of communicating and
knowing the world, students should develop the literacies and skills that allow critical
engagements with data and visualization. In 2017, I taught a cross-listed undergraduate course,
“Social Networks and the Rhetoric of Protest,” that aimed to teach students these data literacies
while also engaging them with rhetorical theory and ethical issues around social media data
collection. Throughout this course, students used TAGS to collect Twitter data, and, through
various subsequent activities and assignments, analyzed that data with Tableau and through
human-reading and coding. Among other benefits, this process elicited the students’ reflection
and inquiry into what makes ethical social media data collection and research, how tweets and
analytics act rhetorically, and how ethics and rhetoric have wide-reaching implications on the
students disciplinary interests, career paths, and civic lives. I don’t think these outcomes could have occurred without students’ engaging both rhetorically and in hands-on practice with technologies for big social media data collection and analysis. Courses like this one, which also ask students to collaboratively remix their social media data in inventive acts of rhetorical intervention, improve data literacy, teach rhetoric as inseparable from circulation, and reinvigorate our rhetorical principles and theories for ongoing use and transformation.

Rhetoric and writing studies are uniquely equipped to offer critical and generative methodologies that challenge the assumptions around social media data, machine reading, and data visualization, while also offering a critical and generative ways forward. My hope is that more of us will not just explore large data sets and analytics, but create inter-institutional, cross-institutional, and community collaborations that, through the sharing of different skills and perspectives, reinvent what’s possible with rhetorical social media data studies.
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