Miette the Cat, Spiders Georg, Diogenes’s Chicken:

Tumblr as an Interactive Archive of Public Meme-ory

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**Introduction**

The homepage of the Tumblr blog meme-conservation features an abstracted artistic rendition of the popular figure in the “Guess I’ll die” meme, under which the heading reads “Tumblr Association for the Conservation of Memes” (meme-conservation). This Tumblr blog is dedicated to, as their personal bio indicates, “the study and preservation of memes in their natural habitat.” The account’s posts dutifully describe the conservation statuses and classifications of memes that are popular (and those that have fallen from popularity) on the platform. The very existence and following of this blog indicate two truths about the online meme community. First, that it has developed significant cultural complexities, to such an extent that a blog focused on exploring the intricacies is deemed both helpful and necessary. Second, that the admins of the blog, as well as the users that follow it, consider memes to be worthy of scholastic-styled analysis. meme-conservation, among similar meme enthusiast blogs, emphasize online productions in popular culture as rhetorically important and its focus mirrors the growing interest that has taken hold in the academic community.

As digital media has integrated into daily life, rhetorical studies have become similarly entranced with online communication and cultural production. Questions arise concerning the way that the online sphere, as the new public space, has shaped contemporary cultural interactions and development. As mentioned by Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, the emergence of new media has not only transformed the speed and accessibility of content but the very forms and genres that this content takes (31). If, as stated by Marshall McLuhan, “Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments” (*The Medium is the Massage* 26), then new media scholarship must prioritize an examination of contemporary forums and communication methods. Tumblr stands out as a digital public space because of its emphasis on the development of a community through archival work, as well as the largely anonymous nature of the users. As one such public space, Tumblr highlights the concerns and rhetorical implications of digital discourse and its cultural implications.

Though Tumblr and meme-making are essentially archival, they present unique differences from the traditional archive. The interactivity at the heart of meme discourse, combined with the Tumblr’s folksonomic structure, transforms the archive into a creative, participatory, and democratic practice. Furthermore, the collective authorship made possible by the contemporary meme practice has developed a cultural canon informed by a larger public. However, the potential fragmentation of the archival meme practice generates an auto-amputation that, as described by McLuhan, distances the author from the content and signifies a dissolution of a unified archival presence. Tumblr and similar online spaces function as archives for the contemporary digital landscape that emphasize interactivity and encourage the development of a cultural canon, as illustrated in the memes of Miette the cat, Spiders Georg, and Diogenes’s chicken. Furthermore, these spaces highlight issues of memory in modern digital media and consider the mutually influential relationship between archival rhetoric, memory, and cultural identity.

**Context and Background**

Before interpreting the digital archive, it is important to understand the archive as a rhetorically significant space. As seemingly silent containers for many voices, archives are not obviously rhetorical. Yet the archive narrates history, memory, and, therefore, communal identity. According to Jacques Derrida, archivists “have the power to interpret archives” (Derrida 10). As archivists “interpret” archives, they decide what content to keep and how this content is presented to the public. They develop a system of identification and classification that is ultimately guided towards unification (Derrida 10). In this way, archivists are responsible for crafting a unified message that, to Derrida, has the power of law; the archive “keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves, but in an unnatural fashion, that is to say in making the law” and “in making people respect the law” (Derrida 12). Given the cultural significance of archival work, the modern turn of the archive in digital media merits particular focus. In the past two decades, scholarship surrounding the archive has centered on the development of archival digital platforms as credible rhetorical centers of cultural exchange and spaces of public memory (Morris 113-114). Furthermore, as described by Jonathan Alexander and Jacqueline Rhodes, one of the primary concerns of technological communications studies is the new potential for “the archiving (or disappearance) of information” (31-32). The rhetorically dense archival practice, like so much of traditional media, is metamorphosing for the digital age.

As digital media has assumed increasing prominence in daily life and cultural interactions, online spaces such as Twitter, Reddit, and Tumblr are becoming sites of important discourse. While these social media platforms have historically been viewed as entertainment-driven, social media are experiencing substantial academic recognition as sites of pedagogical and cultural importance. Studies such as Megan Duffy’s work on microblogging platforms as informational networks and Dinu Munteanu's examination of Romanticism in Tumblr blogs illustrate the progressive recognition of the cultural importance of social media. The potential threats of online public discourse have also rightly received significant academic attention. As Haskins writes, “any discussion of public memory ought to take into account the issue of mediation”; and the “sheer volume of stuff that is being preserved” has been discussed as a potential pitfall of digital archival spaces (407; 418). Currently, the scholarship on digital discourse considers contemporary public memory as inextricably intwined with the online space.

However, this growing scholarship lacks specific study on how these online spaces function and the specific rhetoric users practice in these spaces. If, as fronted by McLuhan, “the medium shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action” (*Understanding Media* 24), then deeper examination of the mediums shaping and controlling the contemporary cultural consciousness – that is, digital media and social media in particular – is absolutely necessary. Additionally, an analysis of these spaces and the way people occupy them begins a deeper discussion of the digital archive as a rhetorical space. This study specifically focuses on the rhetoric of Tumblr and the memes developed within that space.

Just as every social media platform today has certain functions and abilities that distinguish it from its competitors, Tumblr has a unique format that becomes important to a rhetorical analysis of the platform. Unlike Facebook and Instagram, Tumblr users typically are not known by their actual name, and though the platform does present networking opportunities, it presents few opportunities for connection outside of the site. A single Tumblr user can have many different blogs dedicated to any specific focus. Given these two attributes, Tumblr is often a space where users may develop one or more online personas and interact with localized communities that are drawn together by a shared interest. Users may post their own content in the form of a picture, video, or text post. However, many users do not typically post their own content; instead, they focus on curating other users’ content, arranging it into their space by reblogging the post onto one of their many blogs. After being reblogged, the post appears on that blog until it is removed by the user or deleted by the original poster. A user may like, reblog, or comment on a post. Any of these actions contribute to the notes that a post has. Notes, therefore, represent the total attention that a post has been given, including simple attention (in likes) and discourse (in comments and reblogs). The prominence of the archival function across Tumblr, as well as the way that function is used to frame content in a certain light, reveals Tumblr as an essentially archival space.

**Cross-Platform Discourse and the Wider Tumblr Consciousness**

 Although this study is limited to the archival practice in Tumblr, it is important to note that this archival turn has had a major effect across many major social media sites. It is remarkable that Tumblr posts and Tumblr culture exist beyond the scope of the platform itself. Though Tumblr does not maintain the largest population of active users as a social media outlet, particularly after 2018, when a ban on NSFW content caused thousands of users to flee for alternatives such as Twitter (an event that was, itself, memed), Tumblr posts often reach an incredibly large audience. Tumblr posts, as well as content from other social media platforms such as Twitter, Reddit, and Facebook, are regularly copied from Tumblr and reposted. This practice rarely leaves a direct link to the original, meaning that Tumblr content viewed on alternative sites are unlikely to properly credit or cite the original creators, an issue that becomes apparently problematic when the content is artistic or creative, given that artists posting online, particularly working artists, require attention to be directed to themselves personally.

 Despite this issue, the cross-platform extension of Tumblr persists, with users such as i-am-a-fish openly speaking to their “Pinterest Peeps” and asking their borrowers directly to repost the message to Pinterest. The inverse is also common. Tweets, in particular, are commonly reposted to Tumblr, as in the case of Miette the cat. As Twitter user David Masad writes, in the contemporary digital landscape, “there are four websites, each filled with screenshots of the other three.” While such interactions with Tumblr rarely contribute directly to the site’s discourse, they are important to recognize as an extension of Tumblr when regarding the platform as a rhetorical space. Furthermore, this cross-platform interaction reveals the archival turn that discourse has taken in the contemporary context, a transformation that is vital to understanding communication in a digital age. Tumblr highlights the distinctions between the traditional and digital archive, and, vitally, the transforming influence that digital archival media has had on contemporary communication through memes.

**Tumblr as a Digital Archive**

There are several remarkable attributes that differentiate Tumblr and similar digital spaces from the traditional archive. Firstly, Tumblr maintains a high level of interactivity. In Haskins’s work on digital archives, she refers to the user emphasis as a platform’s level of “interactivity.” As the significance of reblogging and commenting indicates, user interaction is vital to Tumblr’s function as a digital archive. The ability of users to interact with content distinguishes digital archival media from traditional forms, such as museums and monuments, where participants are discouraged from interacting directly with the preserved media. Digital archival media, then, “collapses the assumed distinction between modern ‘archival’ memory and traditional ‘lived’ memory by combining the function of storage and ordering on the one hand, and of presence and interactivity on the other” (Haskins 401-402). As a digital archive, Tumblr prioritizes user interactivity.

In line with Haskins’s understanding of presence and interactivity, Tumblr users engage with content by placing themselves *within* it. Of course, this presence manifests whenever a user directly comments on a post, as that comment is then attached to future reblogged versions of that post as long as it remains on the platform, but interactivity dominates on a larger scale. Interaction is an unavoidable side effect of reblogging any content. By reblogging a post and passing it on to others, the user becomes involved as a member of the conversation; they assume the role of archivist, which is innately rhetorical. Each user is placed in the Derridan archival role of interpreting the digital archives. A user has exclusive rights to the selection and organization of reblogged and original content within their blog space, and, furthermore, the ability to shape how that content is perceived by future viewers. Users can personalize almost every aspect of their blogs, and, as Munteanu’s study on Romanticism in Tumblr blog aesthetics illustrates, this personalization may significantly impact visitors to the blog and their interpretation of the content. The fundamental operations of Tumblr foster a high level of user interactivity.

Yet these characteristics do not completely encapsulate the interactivity centric to Tumblr media. The interactive and archival practice of Tumblr rhetoric is most explicitly expressed through the development of memes and meme formats within the space. Along with reblogging and commenting, Tumblr users develop and reinterpret a public memory through meme formats. Miette the cat, as a meme, illustrates the significance of interactivity in the development of a Tumblr public memory.

**Miette the Cat: Interactivity and Meme Virality**

Miette the cat exemplifies the way interactivity is prioritized in the development of a public memory on Tumblr.

Fig. 1. A screenshot of Lockwood’s seminal Miette tweet.

After Trisha Lockwood published the tweet shown in Fig. 1, it was quickly screenshotted and reposted on Tumblr, where it gained near immediate popularity. Dozens of screenshots of the original tweet have been published and reblogged on the platform by thousands of users. However, the significance of Miette the Cat in the Tumblr public consciousness is not wholly illustrated by the notes alone. Many users interacted with the original tweet, but the lasting impact that Miette the cat has had on Tumblr is realized in the content that was created after it.

Fig. 2: A Miette-formatted meme

It was only after becoming a popular meme format that Miette the cat was subject to significant user interactivity. Using Lockwood’s Miette tweet as a base, Tumblr users developed new content within the structure of the original format. This post (fig. 2) from the blog of Tumblr user naps4bats is a version of the meme inspired by the original Miette tweet. As illustrated above, the original post remains so influential that naps4bats mimics Lockwood’s original grammar and syntax by capitalizing “One Year Hence!!” When a user like naps4bats creates a meme in the Miette format, they do not interact with the content in the same way that they might through reblogging and commenting. Unlike likes, comments, and reblogs, memes are not anchored to the original post. Still, meme production remains dependent on interactivity. Without user engagement, through the form of duplicating and adjusting the original content, a meme cannot exist at all. Through this interactivity, memes creation becomes an archival practice.

Like reblogging itself, meme creation is essentially archival. Memes are how content is kept alive and relevant in the public consciousness. Because the survival of a meme is so dependent on this interaction through duplication, meme creation acts to develop Derrida’s archival law. The Miette meme in fig. 2 calls back directly to the original post in a way that keeps it alive and promotes its cultural significance. By generating new content that directly builds onto the original, a meme “keeps, it puts in reserve, it saves” original content (Derrida 12). Therefore, the archival instinct is at the heart of both meme collection and meme creation. The more original content created in the Miette format, the larger influence Miette has on the Tumblr body politic. In this way, memes herald a kind of collective archival authorship, as every individual that interacts with the meme contribute to the public understanding of it. This collective authorship is made possible by the innately folksonomic structure of Tumblr rhetoric.

**Tumblr as a Folksonomy**

Along with this interactivity, Tumblr differentiates itself from the traditional archive due to its reliance on popular opinion. Though there is a recommended blogs and content section on the corner of the dashboard, the users, as a collective group, hold significant sway in what is preserved and memorialized in the public consciousness. The spread of information on Tumblr relies primarily on user reblogs. This has an apparently democratizing effect on the archival practice. Until recently, “public memory was constructed and disseminated for the people, but not by the people” (403). This distinction draws attention to *who* is speaking in archival work. While physical museums and archives are directed and orchestrated by few, often similarly-minded and upper-class, individuals, digital spaces are generally created and ruled by the consumers. Tumblr comes to resemble Isabella Peters’s definition of a folksonomy.

For Peters, the folksonomy is an organizational system in which the users, rather than the original author, categorize and tag content, which leads to a system that prioritizes user response as the most efficient method for indexing and retrieval (4). Ultimately, the taxonomy organizes from the top (authority), down (majority); the folksonomy, from the bottom, up. While the traditional archive is organized, preserved, and presented by a single organization and, perhaps, a single archivist, digital archival work is performed by the very people that are consuming the archived content

**Spiders Georg: Memes and the Contemporary Canon**

 Tumblr, particularly given its anonymity and the mutual role that all users can play as archivists, is decidedly folksonomic. For a figure like Miette to perpetuate, the involvement and engagement of the many is required, not the few. The site and similar digital mediums have “made collective authorship a practical reality” (Haskins 405). Tumblr, therefore, as a folksonomy, levels “the traditional hierarchy of author-text-audience, thereby distributing authorial agency among various institutions and individuals [. . .] and preventing any one agent from imposing narrative and ideological closure upon the data” (Haskins 406). The collective authorship of the folksonomy is central to the development of a Tumblr cultural canon.

Although describing Tumblr and meme culture as a cultural canon seems unfounded, through this folksonomic structure, the Tumblr community has generated a shared public memory that lends particular significance to certain content. A canon is the product of a developed public memory. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a canon is a “body of literary works traditionally regarded as the most important, significant, and worthy of study.” The work of meme-conservation, as well as the persistence of particular memes on Tumblr, indicates that the Tumblr cultural canon merely needs to be recognized, not invented. As a folksonomy, Tumblr develops a canon through the input of the users. There is not an elite group of individuals responsible for selecting the content that is the “most important, significant, and worthy of study”; rather, the cultural canon is developed by mass popularity through the amount of public attention (in the form of interaction) given to a post, user, or idea. The induction and perpetuation of Spiders Georg in this canon further illuminates the way that the Tumblr cultural canon functions.



Fig. 3: The original Spiders Georg post.

Spiders Georg, one of the longest-lasting memes on the Tumblr platform, exemplifies the development of a cultural canon on Tumblr. Fig. 3 shows the original Spiders Georg post that was created in 2013 by Tumblr user reallyreallyreallytrying. As indicated by the over three hundred thousand notes this post has accumulated, it had a strong impact on many users.

Fig. 4: A Spiders Georg-inspired post.

After the original post was published in 2013, Spiders Georg witnessed a sudden introduction deep into the Tumblr canon. Like Miette, Spiders Georg developed into a meme format, used to produce content as seen in fig. 4. By being archived through memery, Spiders Georg took on increasing significance in the Tumblr community. If the term “public” describes “a mode of action in the circumstances of collective contingency” (Blair et al. 5), then Spiders Georg has certainly become a part of the public memory; in being memed, he is a direct product of action in the process of remembering. Moreover, Spiders Georg can be understood as a member of the cultural canon. In a folksonomic canon, the public perception of a piece of content is vital to its categorization as culturally significant. Because of the emphasis on collective authorship in Tumblr’s digital archive, the widespread attention directed towards Spiders Georg is the motivating factor to his inclusion in the Tumblr canon. He is, according to the widespread attention directed towards him, “regarded as the most important, significant, and worthy of study” (“canon”). This is illustrated by user dominateeye in a comment they added to the first Spiders Georg post, heralding it as a “World Heritage Post” (fig. 5). While academic canons require experts to prescriptively arrange bodies of literature, Spiders Georg exemplifies the folksonomic development of canon facilitated by the interactive functions of Tumblr as a space of public memory.

Fig. 5: dominateeye’s addition to the original Spiders Georg post.

The presence of this canon on Tumblr reveals the space’s cultural importance as a rhetorical site. Tumblr can be understood as a space that shapes and frames a contemporary narrative. Unlike other sites of public memory, such as museums and physical memorials, Tumblr does not frame the past; it frames the present. The public memory developed by Tumblr users reflects those users today. This is partly due to the interactivity central to Tumblr. The development of meme formats and the production of new content naturally leads to the evolution of these figures in the public memory, keeping them perpetually contemporary so long as the users interact with them. It’s important to acknowledge that one of the reasons that Tumblr public memory has such contemporary relevance is because it is comparatively new, but this fact does not dismiss the vital importance that online archival discourse holds in contemporary cultural analysis.

Through the mass interaction of the Tumblr archivists, digital media has an apparently democratizing affect on the archival practice. It legitimizes collective authorship by placing the archivist in the creator’s shoes. Although broadening canons to include marginalized and historically overlooked groups has been a priority of literary criticism for decades, the limited and antiquated scope of traditional literary canons remains a significant concern today. The turn of the folksonomic, interactive digital archive through meme creation signals the birth of a canon that valuably expresses the concerns and perspectives of each individual represented within that canon.

Simultaneously, the express fluidity of this canon breeds potentially damaging consequences for the stability of the cultural consciousness. Spiders Georg entered the canon because of the significance he was given by the public. When he has lost that significance, he will cease to be a subject of interactivity and will no longer be actively memed. Due to this folksonomic canon’s reliance on active, popular engagement, Spiders Georg may fall out of the canon as quickly as he entered it. While this fluidity is necessary for memes to narrate a contemporary identity, it reveals significant rhetorical complications to the apparently democratic digital archive.

**Tumblr as a Place of Public Contemporary Memory and Amnesia**

Given that Tumblr is a space worthy of rhetorical attention, particularly concerning the rhetoric of the current cultural awareness, it’s vital to understand the potential negative consequences of the digital archival space. As Haskins notes, even as digital archives allow for the invention of a public memory and cultural canon, the “archival aim of online spaces and occidental obsession with recording the past signal an acceleration of amnesia” (418). Tumblr as a folksonomic rhetorical space is innately fluid, and has, therefore, witnessed many transformations over the past decade. Even Spiders Georg, considered to be one of the longest-lasting figures in the Tumblr public memory, has only been perpetuated in the public memory for about 8 years. For digital media, which emphasizes speed (Selber 138), Spiders Georg is nearly a miracle. Miette, too, is an outlier; she has survived for more than 3 years. Compared to other figures in the more general public memory, these time frames are miniscule. Other memes, such as the World War III memes that arose at the beginning of 2021, are only active for a few weeks. “One cannot ignore,” Haskins writes, “that today’s memorializing occurs in a climate of rapid obsolescence and the disappearance of historical consciousness, that much of computer-mediated communication serves commercial and entertainment purposes, and that interactivity can nurture narcissistic amnesia no less than commercial exchange” (406). Digital media, and, in particular, contemporary digital archival media, draws attention to issues of memory and amnesia in the post-human consciousness.

The digital archives witnessed across social media sites have heralded a uniquely contemporary archival turn. As well as being defined by a contemporary, rather than antiquated, focus, the social media archives differ from traditional archives because they are a form of interpersonal exchange. The archives become, in a social media landscape, a method of communication at a level unmatched by the traditional archive. Through a personal archive, a user shapes a uniquely individual message about their topic that contributes to the whole. These individualized messages act as a form of communication that foster exchange between users. Many users that work within the same topics on Tumblr come to know and communicate with each other through contributions of original content and personal messaging as well as interacting with the content of others. Still, these archives are a container for social media that emphasizes the *media*; the *social* is simply the methodology for determining the media. If these social media sites herald a new, contemporary archival turn, then the motivations behind this archival turn may illuminate a vital understanding of new media in the digitally-mediated twenty-first century. As a part of history, Diogenes and his chicken emphasize the motivations behind the contemporary archival turn.

**Diogenes’s Chicken: The Cultural Significance of the Archival Turn**

The original story of Diogenes’s chicken, as accounted by Diogenes Laertius in his *Lives*, follows that, after Plato proposed that man might be defined as a bipedal, featherless animal, Diogenes plucked a chicken and presented it to the philosophers, proclaiming, “Here is Plato’s man” (43). On Tumblr, Diogenes became famous for declaring, “Behold, a man!” at Plato while throwing a plucked chicken before him. Diogenes, in particular, highlights the motivations and complications of the archival turn in contemporary media. While Miette and Spiders Georg are both exclusively contemporary creations, Diogenes and his pseudo-sapien have existed in the cultural consciousness for generations – but perhaps not in the casual jokes of the general public. As discussed by user mckitterick, Diogenes as a philosopher persisted almost exclusively in university classrooms until he was introduced into the Tumblr cultural canon. The experience of Diogenes’s chicken highlights the advantage of the folksonomic narrative and the democratizing legitimacy of digital spaces. Though Diogenes and his chicken, through the interactivity exemplified in fig. 6, emphasize the potential for the democratic communal authorship of a cultural narrative through these online archival spaces, the meme also illustrates the significance and rhetorical complications of the archival turn in digital communication.

Fig. 6. A Tumblr post from 2021 inspired by Diogenes’s Chicken

The online sphere has drastically transformed what is available to the public. As described by McLuhan, today, information “pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously” (*The Medium is the Massage* 63). Yet, as soon as this information is developed and recognized, it is quickly supplanted by even newer information. Thus, the “electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition” (*The Medium is the Massage* 63). In social media sites like Tumblr, this mode of pattern recognition has aligned itself with an archival turn. There is always new content online, always accessible to anyone that has the necessary technology – technology that is rapidly becoming more and more central to cultural and interpersonal exchange. “We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience co-exist in a state of active interplay” (Medium is the Message 63). In a world in which media is constantly available in incomprehensible numbers that were previously unthought-of, communication becomes an archiving of that media, an attempt to organize an overflow of information into a comprehensive form.

Meme formats, as understandable, culturally recognizable, and humorous, become containers for mediating this overwhelming information into comprehensive and digestible forms. Therefore, when Diogenes, a cultural and historical individual, is introduced into the public consciousness, he becomes a canonical memed figure of interactivity that is then archived by a public attempting to synthesize a cultural consciousness out of a world with an overwhelming amount of information at the tap of a finger. This is how the contemporary archive keeps Diogenes “alive.”

In this resurrection, however, Tumblr generates a Diogenes that does not necessarily reflect the historical truth. If digital archival spaces do hold such significant rhetorical sway in the development of contemporary cultural identity, Haskins’s concern about the “fragmented body politic” resulting from the “self-memorialization” tendencies of digital spaces (407) must be addressed as significant in shaping the space and the experience of the users in that space. As a folksonomy, each user has power to shape the significance of Diogenes. This leads to thousands of unique voices contributing to the whole; it also leads to thousands of unique perspectives that may cloud actual fact or confuse a united body politic. Because of the small, centralized communities developed in online spaces like Tumblr, users may develop a sense of public memory that is extremely limited and mistakenly conceive a singular narrative that matches only their experiences. This violates one of the fundamental aspects of the archive: an effort towards unification. “In an archive, there should not be any absolute dissociation, any heterogeneity or secret which should separate, or partition, in an absolute manner” (Derrida 10). This separation and partition is felt deeply in the vast, fragmented online social media archives. McLuhan’s connection between modern interpersonal exchange and the Narcissus myth iterates this separation as an othering that ultimately distances the self from stability.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan argues that technology acts essentially as an extension of humanity, from the simple wheel as an extension of the foot to more complicated technology, such as the radio, which he understands as an extension of the mouth and ear. While these are extensions of humanity, they are recognized as separate, distinct, and alien. Therefore, McLuhan recognizes technologies as “autoamputations” of humanity. McLuhan proposes that the myth of Narcissus is helpful as a frame for understanding the autoamputation associated with the rise of technologically-accelerated exchange. He argues that, in the original myth, Narcissus does not fall in love with himself – he recognizes the reflection of himself as a completely separate person. Though the reflection is an extension of Narcissus, it “numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image” (*Understanding Media* 51). This numbed response is correlated with the “autoamputation” that occurs in an extension of the self. Narcissus’s image is an extension of himself that he defines as other; “[s]elf-amputation forbids self-recognition” (*Understanding Media* 52). Through the lens of this frame, the digitally mediated archive becomes an autoamputation that may ultimately distance users from the cultural dialogue that they are weaving from archived materials.

Like Narcissus, Tumblr users find a mirrored version of themselves in the content that they develop in their spaces. Tumblr is a reflection of the contemporary culture of these users. Yet, in this reflection, they autoamputate themselves from their content. The reflection is also confused by thousands of contributing voices. A single, coherent understanding of Diogenes is beyond reach within this space.

Additionally, the speed at which this exchange takes place indicates the fluidity of digital media discourse. Haskins considers impermanence and frailty to be at the heart of memory. Public memory, in particular, is dependent on the persistence of communal participation (403). Though the interaction with Diogenes may fade, the trace that he left in the public memory may live on for several years in the public consciousness. As Blair et al. defend, failure to represent a memory does not equate forgetting it (18). Still, progressively, as Diogenes loses his interactivity, he will likely lose relevance in the public consciousness. He will be forgotten, possibly by the very users that participated in his remembrance. Spiders Georg, too, at only about eight years old, is considered outdated or “dank.” Compared to other culturally significant events and ideas in the public memory, eight years is a tragically short time to remain relevant. While the speed with which Tumblr and other social media sites digest content is not inherently negative, it breeds consequences that deserve rhetorical attention.

**Conclusion**

As an archival site, Tumblr “should rightly be understood not as a passive receptacle for historical documents and their ‘truths,’ or a benign research space, but rather as a dynamic site of rhetorical power” (Morris 115). Carole Blair et al. distinguishes memory as “activated by present concerns, issues, or anxieties” responsible for narrating “shared identities” and “constructing senses of communal belonging” (6). Indeed, the construction of a community is one of the defining characteristics of Tumblr rhetoric. Given the archive’s ability to shape public memory, and the importance of public memory in the cultural conscious, contemporary archival practices should be considered rhetorically vital for understanding the digital landscape. As Biesecker writes, though the archive “cannot *authenticate* absolutely” it “can (be made to) *authorize* nonetheless” (130). The force of archival authority has always been significant, and it should not be disregarded in contemporary archival efforts.

In particular, Tumblr can offer unique insights for the impact of the archive on the contemporary cultural conscious. Rhetoricians study the spaces of cultural discourse “to understand the complexity of how rhetoric functions within civic life” (VanHaitsma 261). In a world where this cultural discourse is largely housed on social media platforms, greater significance must be paid to these spaces as hubs of rhetorical weight. Exploring “the relations among rhetoric, memory, and place is of crucial importance to understanding contemporary public culture” (Blair et al. 1). Tumblr, as a digital archival space, particularly exemplifies the impact that social media platforms can have as harbors of public memory, and this calls attention to the importance of speaker in archival work in framing a narrative. Ultimately, the folksonomic transformation signaled by the digital archival space may expand the narrative of public memory, but the specific threats that digital archives present potentially upset the public memory into many centralized public memories that fail to accurately capture a cultural consciousness.

Memes are quickly becoming cornerstones of contemporary communication. The archival framework that structures meme creation informs a greater understanding of the archival impulse in the post-human world. There is little doubt that digital spaces are the next horizon for contemporary rhetorical discourse; there is little doubt that “memory narrates shared identities” (Blair et al. 18); and thus there can be little doubt that the new loci of memory, digital and particularly social media archives, are worthy of analysis as sites of rhetorical power.

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