Eric Detweiler [voiceover]: Hey there, Rhetoricity listeners! This is Eric Detweiler, and I’m here to bring the first in you a series of special summer episodes. Maybe even very special summer episodes? Who knows. I’ll leave that judgment to you.

Anyway. If you’re a regular listener, you may recall that this podcast recently featured a couple of special guest interviewers: PhD students at Indiana University and members of that university’s award-winning student chapter of the Rhetoric Society of America. They generously helped me coordinate and conduct interviews with John Muckelbauer and Bill Hart-Davidson during the Rhetoric Society of America Summer Institute in May 2017, which took place at IU.

As we were orchestrating those interviews, these fine folks pitched me another idea: a series of recorded conversations between PhD students and their dissertation advisors. Listeners, I said yes. And so, in the next couple of months, I’ll be releasing a handful of dialogues between advisors and advisees. These unfold a little differently than most Rhetoricity episodes. For one thing, I typically try to take a back seat to my interviewee, letting them do most of the talking and determine the direction of the episode. This series is by design more conversational, with both parties sharing the spotlight—or spot mic, as the case may be. Additionally, the content is a little different. While everyone involved takes some time to discuss their research projects and theoretical interests, I also encouraged them to take some time to discuss their approach to the advisor/advisee relationship. My hope is that listeners will get both an implicit sense of how these relationships unfold just from the way the interlocutors engage with each other, as well as more explicit suggestions and advice from the actual discussions of mentoring.

Up first is a conversation between Caddie Alford and Scot Barnett, which they recorded last year. They do a thorough job of introducing each other, so I won’t say much about them other than this: Scot Barnett is a faculty member in the Department of English at IU, where he was recently granted tenure and promoted to the rank of associate professor. Caddie Alford just received her doctorate from Indiana, and this fall she’ll be starting a new position as assistant professor of rhetoric and writing in the English Department at Virginia Commonwealth University.

This is volume one . . . of the dissertation dialogues.

Scot Barnett: I’m pleased to introduce and be joined in conversation today with Caddie Alford, a doctoral student in the rhetoric program at Indiana University, Bloomington. Caddie’s scholarship is broadly concerned with the importance of doxa (or belief or public opinion) in the history of rhetoric and in contemporary discourse and digital media. Caddie’s dissertation, “Theorizing Doxa: Social Media and the Movement of Everyday Rhetorical Invention,” seeks to recuperate doxa for contemporary rhetorical theory, especially in the context of social media and the ways social media users engage commonplace ideas through online discourses and conventions. Rhetoric’s connections to public opinion are as ancient as the art of rhetoric itself, Caddie reminds us; however, these connections have at times also served to discredit rhetoric as an art of civic discourse, which has
often privileged knowledge over doxa or public opinion. Drawing on a range of classical and modern theorists—from Plato and Aristotle to Martin Heidegger and Pierre Bourdieu—Caddie’s dissertation works to recast doxa as essential invention material for all rhetorical action, from the Athenian assembly to Twitter and other social media platforms. Caddie’s most recent article, “Creating with the ‘Universe of the Undiscussed’: Hashtags, Doxa, and Choric Invention,” appeared in Enculturation: A Journal of Rhetoric, Writing, and Culture in fall 2016. Her current research and conference presentations have focused on topics ranging from clickbait and epideictic rhetoric in online discourse to disability rhetorics and new approaches to virtue ethics and Aristotle’s concept of eudaimonia (happiness or flourishing).

Thanks for joining me, Caddie

Caddie Alford: Thanks! And thanks for that introduction. It’s also my pleasure to introduce my interlocutor for the day, Scot Barnett. Scot is an Assistant Professor of English at Indiana University, Bloomington. His research and teaching interests include histories and theories of rhetoric, digital rhetorics, and the intersections between rhetoric and philosophy. Scot’s recent book, Rhetorical Realism: Rhetoric, Ethics, and the Ontology of Things, engages the debates surrounding new materialism and object-oriented ontology by considering objects that have accompanied discussions of rhetoric from antiquity to the present. The book is a response and a contribution to contemporary rhetorical theory’s growing interest in nonhuman beings (objects, technologies, ecologies, and animals). Through investigations of rhetoric’s place in Aristotelian metaphysics, the language invention movement of the seventeenth century, and postmodern conceptions of rhetoric as an epistemic art, Rhetorical Realism expands the scope of rhetorical inquiry. Rather than conceive of the nonhuman as a dramatic rupture or turning point in rhetorical theory, Rhetorical Realism encourages rhetorical theorists to appreciate what rhetoricians have always done—defining and configuring rhetoric within a broader ontology of things. With Casey Boyle, Scot has also edited the book Rhetoric, Through Everyday Things, a collection that brings together prominent scholars in the field of rhetoric and composition to consider the ways everyday things contribute persuasively to the gathering of social, political, and rhetorical worlds. Scot’s work has also appeared in the journals Kairos, Enculturation, and Itineration, as well as in numerous edited book collections. Of course, I know him best as my co-chair.

[between laughs]

CA: So, uh, the reason Scot and I wanted to record a conversation for Rhetoricity is because for a while we have been each drawn to how issues of embodiment intersect with our interests in doxa, realism, and nonhuman rhetorics. For us, embodiment is a process rather than a specific thing or object; it signifies what we do on a daily basis, how we communicate with others, how we take up and use objects, and how we sense, feel, and respond to events and others in our worlds. Of course, we’re not the first ones to be interested in embodiment. Scholars in disability studies, for instance, and digital rhetoric have been encouraging us to keep embodiment in our minds when thinking about writing, speech, and technology, and we’re both interested in these efforts and what our own senses of embodiment might contribute to these conversations. So, with that said, I approach this intersection through what I see as an informing relationship between specifically habituated rhetorical practices and changes as a consequence of these in social media infrastructure. Scot, how are you interested in this intersection?
SB: Well, most recently I think I'm most interested in how artistic and performative engagements with digital technologies, digital media, and as they occur in digital environments are helping to kind of complicate static notions of embodiment--the notion of the body, for example, as a kind of container for thought rather than something that kind of mediates our experiences in and with the world. And these kind of reconceptions of embodiment through digital media how they're getting us to think differently about nonhuman rhetorics, for example.

CA: OK, so, you know, I get the sense that given this turn in our field, “nonhuman rhetorics” means different things to different scholars. How would you characterize your understanding of, of nonhuman rhetorics?

SB: That's a really good question--it's also a really big question.

CA: Yes.

[chuckles knowingly]

SB: Uh, it's an important one, I think. Maybe it's useful to kind of start with the terminology itself. The term "nonhuman rhetorics," at least I think as we're using it here and how it's been used recently in the field, is really a kind of umbrella term for thinking about a a kind of wider range of theoretical and critical interests within the field of rhetoric that are trying to sort of expand rhetoric's horizons to be more holistic. So to think about rhetoric not simply or only in terms of speech and writing or language, but, for example, as emerging out of the world, uh, and in relation to a wider network of actors and beings, like objects, things, environments, animals, technologies, and so on. Over the last like ten, probably twenty years, you could even go back further I suppose, there's really been a kind of concerted effort in the humanities and the social sciences as well to try to think about and find ways to then incorporate those sorts of things into humanistic inquiry in ways that don't just simply reduce them to figures of speech or objects exclusively of human interest or concern. So recent work outside of rhetoric in object-oriented ontology, new materialism, and even the post humanities is trying to find ways to engage topics like this that acknowledge both their constructedness through language or other kind of social mechanisms as well as their reality, the fact that they might exceed or even precede our language, our understandings of them. And I think for rhetoric the so-called "nonhuman turn," as it's come to be known, actually poses particular challenges, maybe even more so than for a field like philosophy since for a long time rhetoric has been defined almost exclusively in terms of human speech and writing. We've been pushing on that more recently, but for the longest time, rhetoric has really been a kind of human art of discourse and persuasion. And, in fact, as Burke kinda famously put it, rhetoric takes place in the flurries and the flair-ups of the human barnyard. So maybe one way to sorta understand the sort of energy around nonhuman and object-oriented rhetorics today in the field is as trying to get us to focus more on the barnyard part of Burke's expression rather than just solely on the human part of his expression.

CA: OK, so this "barnyard turn," if I can call it that--
CA: --has that kind of led to a dominant understanding of embodiment in our field, do you think?

SB: Hmm. That's a hard question to answer and a good question to ask. I'm not sure there's a dominant understanding of embodiment in the field right now. I would say that at the same time it's always been somewhat surprising to me that we don't talk about embodiment nearly as much as we could, given that our subject is rhetoric and writing and rhetoric forever has been defined in terms of human speech, which is our capacity to make sounds meaningful to our fellow human beings in one sense of the term. So maybe, maybe one explanation for the peripheral nature of embodiment in the field can be, you know, explained by the shift in rhetorical studies about a century ago, when rhetorical education was kind of fractured in the academy such that writing and speech became distinct methods of communication, and, in many cases, distinct departments in the university. So kinda speech went in one department and with it the sort of embodied notions of speech and delivery; writing went in another direction, of course. And we know, we know now that writing is an embodied practice--as much so as speech is. But this insight has not always been at the forefront, I think, of work in composition studies. Where we do see substantial engagements with embodied rhetorics over the years, I think, is in places like disability studies, and maybe to a slightly lesser extent, digital and spatial rhetorics.

CA: I see. So, does that mean you are currently working on these questions?

SB: [laughs] Yea, I'm trying to! Uh--

CA: --Now that you’re done with your first book, right?

SB: Right, right, I'm just moving right into this, the next one. But no, it's good. Uh, I'm actually in the early stages of writing a second book, which I'm tentatively calling Carnal Rhetorics: Embodied Relations in Digital Art. [Pause] So I really see this next book as an effort to, to bridge my long-standing interests in object-oriented rhetorics, which was much more of a topic of the first book, Rhetorical Realism, and digital media and digital art, as well, which was not as prevalent in that book. So when I was actually writing Rhetorical Realism, I came across a number of critiques of the philosophical school of phenomenology, and especially the work of people like Merleau-Ponty and others, which really were trying to theorize the body and embodiment not as a static state of being (the body is sort of like separate from the mind or as is just simply a container for what the mind does or what it can do), but the body as a kind of ongoing process of becoming that's fundamentally entangled with one's being-in-the-world that shapes and constitutes and mediates our ways of understanding ourselves in the world. And I think from object-oriented theorists outside of rhetoric, the main objection to these sort of phenomenological theories of embodiment is that they tend to re-inscribe the human at the center of this kind of theoretical tension, even despite their best efforts. Sometimes the work of Merleau-Ponty and others is referred to as a kind of rhetoric of
concreteness, which means they talk a good talk about embodiment, materiality, even objects and things at times, but they don't quite give them their due--they're always kind of filtered through human perceptions and understandings of them. So in this next book, I really want to take another look and offer another take on embodiment's fate after the nonhuman turn, one that sees perhaps embodied relations as more in tune with nonhuman rhetorics than some scholars have so far appreciated. So to kind of think about this in more concrete ways, I explore over the course of the book how notions of embodiment and relationality are being enacted and complicated by artists working in digital media environments. So I'm interested in what happens to our understandings of embodiment when we engage in various relations with technology and in digital media in particular. So each chapter of the book focuses on a key concept related to this kind of question, so movement; sensation; situation; relationality; thought, in terms of one specific digital art installation.

CA: That sounds awesome.

[both laugh]

CA: Can you, um--

SB: Thank you.

CA:--maybe give me an example of one of these art installations?

SB: Sure, sure. I will try to paint a picture in words here for these, and you're welcome, you know, if you're listening, you can always Google these and see them for yourself. But one of the ones I'm really interested in which I think has a lot of kind of resonance with rhetorical studies is an installation called Messa di Voca, which uses a custom built, uh, software to visualize the speech, the noises, the shouts, even, of two professional, artistic vocalists. So to kind of give you a sense of what this looks like, the performers are kinda standing in front of a large screen, uh, and they make abstract noises that are then animated on the screen behind them in the form of like bouncing dots, cartoon animations, swirling lights and so on.

[abstract noises from the installation play]

SB: Really quite beautiful in lots of, in lots of ways, it's also funny, too, in certain ways.

[more abstract noises from the installation]
SB: Uh, and it's all trying to happen in real-time, there, you know, the person is sort of vocalizing something, and some kind of visual representation of that vocalization is appearing on the screen behind them in one form or another. And the project, I think, is most interested in itself in themes of abstraction, both in terms of human speech and abstractions of data visualization. Uh, in fact, I think the artists like to describe the installation as trying to dramatize what they refer to as the fiction that the voice can be seen, which is a great expression--

CA: Huh, wow.

SB: --by asking, uh, questions about the meaning and effects of sound and speech acts, but in my reading, and what I'm really kind of drawn to about this, is I feel like there's really a kind of Echo and Narcissus type relationship that's happening between the performer and the software.

CA: Wow, that's, that's fascinating. So when I think about that myth in particular--

SB: Hmm-hm.

CA: --Echo and Narcissus--

SB: Yea.

CA: --in terms of embodiment and technology, I think I would kind of immediately wonder about how, if at all, technology kind of fractures maybe the illusion that we have of our bodies as kind of autonomous objects, and I'm wondering if that's the direction you're going on or maybe not, I'm not sure.

SB: Yea, yea, actually absolutely. I think that, that's really part of what I'm seeing here in this installation. And not just technology in the sort of way we think about technology right now in terms of digital media or even kind of like computers and so forth, but even the technologies of speech are really sort of essential, both for the myth and also what's happening in this particular installation. So Ovid tells the story, of course, of how Echo was cursed by Hera to only finish sentences that other people start (this is where we get the term "echo"), and to be unable to say anything on her own--to come up with any kind of original expressions of her own. And then eventually Echo falls in love with Narcissus who eventually rejects her love. And then after this, Narcissus discovers his image in a fountain and then falls in love with himself and begins to waste away in that self love in a way that's similar to how Echo also wastes away earlier in the myth. And I think much like what Ovid is doing there, Messa di Voce is asking us to think about the question of where speech originates--where does speech come from?. And at the same time, it's asking us to think a little bit further about our attentions to the technological reproduction of language and what that signifies for me about nonhuman rhetorics going forward. I think like the Echo myth, the
relations that are enacted in *Messa di Voce* are rooted primarily in questions of the self and the other and maybe even in terms of vision and identity, which are really central to the Ovid myth. So the questions, I think, that come up for me when I'm looking at this installation are: Who am I? Who are you? And where do I begin and end? where do you begin and end? and how do we think about embodiment as that kind of force, relationship, where it's really difficult to determine in any definitive way where one person begins and the other begins and ends as well?


SB: Okay, so, what are you working on right now in terms of how technologies are informing embodiment in your recent work and the kind of things you're getting interested in in those respects.

CA: Sure. Well, as someone studying doxa and theorizing doxa, I'm expanding what we might traditionally think about doxa. I think we traditionally think of doxa as discursive, language-based: they take the form of a cliche or someone vocalizing their belief in God. So a common example of this would be, in the face of death, someone might say “they’re in a better place.” So don’t get me wrong: words and discourse are really significant to doxa. But I think if we spend time really dwelling with doxa, I think we can see that the words alone are not sufficient to consider doxa’s rhetorical force. To dwell on opinions and beliefs is to kind of dwell on other, very non-language-specific ways doxa operate. So on a basic level, I think we feel strongly about our beliefs or expressing our opinions can even change our mood or even the mood in the room. So when I start thinking about forms of invention, for instance, on social media that rely on doxa, I think had to start considering to what extent I see doxa as embodied, or to what extent I could make that argument. And what I found that was cool was that I wasn’t really even stretching all that much to make that argument as I noticed back in even Plato’s *Republic*, he's doing, you know he's doing his thing and he's ranting about doxa and he's ranting about the people that kind of fall prey to doxa. He calls these people doxophilists as opposed to philosophers who are pursuing truth. And he describes doxophilists as actually differently embodied. So in his conception, you see a colony of doxophilists walking around, and they're ambling not just walking, or they're ogling at something and they're not just looking. It actually kind of reminds me, of, um, you've seen *The Walking Dead*?

SB: Yea. Yea, Yea.

CA: Yea, so so the walker--that's kind of what doxophilists look like.

SB: Oh, interesting. Yea.

CA: And Hannah Arendt kind of picks up on this and and refers to doxa as a sixth sense, right? This kind of extra-rhetorical sense that we all have no matter what our bodies are and what they are capable of doing. And Martin Heidegger also explores doxa as a kind of physical orientedness and a way of seeing that actually positions our bodies amidst other bodies. And so I theorize doxa as a
kind of embodied physicality that readies us--preparces us--to, to move toward suasiveness. I kinda think about doxa as the body's rhetorical animation. So while in that chapter I was thinking about the process of embodying doxa leading to a kind of digital topical invention, recently I think I'm trying to think about this more broadly in terms of the connection between human bodies, doxa, and actually social media sites themselves.

SB: Yea. That's really interesting. Really, really interesting. So is this, is this where your interest in nonhuman rhetorics comes into play?

CA: Oh, yea. Absolutely. I think before we can embody doxa or recognize them as available means, I kind of think of doxa as kind of these protective environmental agents, kind of the stuff for the media in the middle between us and the technological actants, both of which I think are entities in their own right. They're both kind of acting on each other but I wanted some kind of cushion between them because I saw that they weren't just butting up against each other, there was something kind of fostering that encounter. And I think I arrived at that theory because I had been so influenced by Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the habitus--you know, the movement I think is very similar. So if we think about Pierre Bourdieu's habitus in his conception, what it means is that these embodied habituated actions that we all do inform the institutions that we interact with which then informs us. And so there's kind of this constant feedback loop between bodies and external structures. And all of that gives rise to values. So when I cough in my arm, that's considered something, that's considered an action I don't have to think about but it's legitimized by everyone else doing the same thing. And as a result, we value hygiene or we value a public attention to health. So, basically, it's just struck me that we weren’t, as human social media users, we weren't just directly acting on social media actants. It seemed to me that there was some kind of rhetorical pathway to get us from dispositions and embodied states to imprinting Facebook, right, so reaction buttons or Snapchat filters. So in what I do in this chapter is that I update the habitus to become a kind of social media habitus. I think our embodied habits travel along doxa and actually end up changing the technologies that we're interacting with, which in turn change us.

SB: That's, wow, that's really, that's really fascinating. So could you maybe say a little more about that in terms of, you know, an example that might help us sort of visualize what you're talking about here?

CA: Yes. That would be good. [Laughs] Yes.

SB: Examples are great.

CA: So um, I actually have Justin Hodgson to thank for introducing me to this case study. It's this quirky little short film called Noah and it takes place completely on a teenage boy's computer's desktop. [Keyboard sounds from Noah] So the cursor, right, acts as Noah's eyes, or as the viewer's eyes, and the noise that we have and the music that we have is actually coming from his iTunes playlist. And we see basically his desktop image but mostly we spend time on whatever web page he
is on. So that could be Chat Roulette or Facebook. And the plot is something very relatable. Or, at least my generation can relate to it, right?

SB: But not mine. I get it.

CA: [Laughs] Which is, you know, what happens when a romantic relationship ends ... specifically on social media. The film therefore, I think, has to engage habituated social media habits and how in my mind those habituated actions have everything to do with doxa, with what we believe about the platforms themselves and the proper or sometimes improper rhetorical encounters we expect to have on these platforms. So a good example of this is, Noah starts freaking out about his relationship because he feels like it's collapsing. And the viewer registers that panic because the cursor, which remember are our eyes, is highlighting bits of text on Facebook. [Clicking sounds] So Noah sees that the same guy is commenting on his girlfriend’s photos, and so he’s so worked up that he keeps highlighting over and over again the man’s name and comments. Okay, so I, I do this I have to admit. Like when I'm on Facebook or I'm trying to understand something, I highlight continuously. Do you do that?

SB: Yea. I, yea, actually I do. Not, maybe not as often, but, yea, absolutely, I do it sometimes.

CA: Okay. Good, that, that helps my theory.

[both laugh]

SB: Okay!

CA: So, so in my thinking, I think this is actually a practice that's wrapped up in kind of a larger, shared digital habitus, but it seems to me that with only Bourdieu's habitus as an analytical framework with which to kind of analyze this practice, I think it might be difficult to understand what's motivating or propelling Noah--and us-- to repeat something like highlighting.

SB: Hmm-hm.

CA: So that's why I theorize these kinds of online habits kind of conscience and unconscious as a kind of traveling of doxic what I call infrastructure.

SB: Mmm-hmm, hmm-hm.
CA: Thinking about it in those terms means that the practice is really extra-embodied, it's really extra-rhetorical. I think Noah really wants to lay the interface bare. His habitual touching expresses through his body a belief that the interface might actually come to disclose even more to him. I think our everyday, repetitive actions on social media platforms can tell us that we now believe that the platforms are almost always more than they appear to be. What I also find fascinating about this is that the infrastructure itself has changed: so now, when our cursor hovers over a Facebook profile name, not only does that name become a link, but our, our cursor becomes more than an arrow; it becomes a hand, a hand that pops up, signaling that link that we want to have, that relationship that we want to have that we can explore or we think that we can explore through our virtual fingertips. So this is definitely Bourdieu's habitus at work, but it's also because, you know, we chose to believe in these doxic paths that form from these embodied habits in the first place.

SB: Wow. Yea, that, gosh, that's really fascinating. I mean, the question I'm hearing behind this example is, um, and correct me if I'm wrong, why are we acting on social media in the ways that we do? Why do we do the things that we do on social media? And then, I guess, who or what is responsible for the changes that we see happening on social media platforms and the infrastructures of social media?

CA: Oh yea. Yea, yea, yea absolutely. In the advent of Thomas Rickert's concept of ambient rhetoric, you know, I think we are inclined, absolutely, to believe that rhetorical practices emerge from a responsiveness to allllll--

SB: Yea.

CA: --the various factors working on us and through us. But, you know, I do think the question of influence as it's related to attunement gets muddled when we think about habituated social media practices, you know those kinds of practices that we don't even really think about, but we just do all the time, like checking Instagram constantly or Tweeting every little thought.

SB: Like our pres, like our President.

CA: Right, like our president [chuckles], you know. That's a habituated practice right there [giggles]. And actually--

SB: And speaking of Narcissus...

CA: --actually this question is, is, is super important, I think, for thinking about the collaborative project we've been talking about recently, um, Geolocation.

SB: Yea! Oh right, right, right, right. Umm, yea, I want to talk more about that, but maybe we should back up just a sec--
CA: Oh, sure.

SB: --and kinda give a little context here before we sort of go off and and talk about what it is that interests us about this. So Geolocation is a social media and photography project that uses publicly available GPS information that's, uh, embedded in Twitter updates to document the exact locations and to make photographs at the exact locations where some tweets were written (so the tweets themselves serve as kind of captions for the photographs that the two artists take on these, uh, sites where the tweets were written). So just to kind of give you a sense or an example, again, these kinds of things can be Googled as well. You know, one of the most kind of famous or iconic photographs is a photo of a a kind of dingy, uh, drive-up motel, uh--

CA: Oh, I love that one.

SB: --um, so, it looks like it has just rained, there's a kind of red convertible parked in front of one of the, the doors; it's one of those ones that you kind of walk in, it doesn't have hallways, and, uh, it's kind of dusk, you know, it looks kind of like it's about to turn night, and the caption, the tweet, that brought them to this particular location is the following: "Tell me I'm not making a mistake. Tell me you're worth the wait." So this tweet they found just by look, scanning Twitter and looking for tweets that have a precise GPS coordinate that they can then go to and stand in that exact place and take a photograph. So that's kind of what it looks like. And the two artists behind Geolocation refer to this project as a kind of exploration of “digital intimacy” and the ways that virtual data are increasingly embedded and embodied in physical places. And I think that, you know, our mutual interest in this project, in Geolocation, is allowing us to bring together our interests in social media and digital art. Of course, place is really key to the Geolocation photos, maybe even very, maybe even too key, as, as I think, but so too are the embodied habits these photographs reveal about our social media practices and maybe the significance (or lack thereof) that places play in how and why we participate on social media.

CA: So it's like the routines that we're already kind of involved in on an everyday level--they're kind of giving way to new layers of routines. It's interesting because in these photographs, some of the scenes are super domestic and wouldn't necessarily immediately call to mind digital media or digital modes of communication--

SB: Right.

CA:--and yet these are spaces, too, where that kind of communication is routinely taking place: you know, driveways, parking lots--

SB: Right.
CA: --parking garages, you know domestic spaces and very everyday quotidian spaces. The one that really stuck with me, I don't know if you remember this one, it's the one where there's this plastic lawn chair--

SB: Hm-hmm, hmm-hmm.

CA: --and it's kind of on this like back cement patio, and it's like overlooking that person's backyard. And you can kind of just imagine there's a grill, right, by the plastic chair, and you kinda can just imagine this maybe older man comes out there, sits down, has a beer, and just kind of reflects on the day, right?

SB: Hmm-hmm, sure.

CA: And the tweet that captions this photo is, quote, "I don't plan on getting swine flu vaccine, cause it's government-made, and everything government-made ain't good, plus I think it's killin', not helpin." Endquote.

[both chuckle]

CA: You know, and there's this really interesting interplay here between kinda the quotidian everydayness of this scene of just relaxing on the patio and also kind of the, the ambience of what the soundbites are from the news of that day or kind of just the stream-of-consciousness that's happening when you're relaxing and just kind of meditating or whatever it is, and it really, it kind of does seem like the place is involved, but at the same time maybe, maybe not in that moment. Maybe when that person tweeted that, who knows how much the space had to do with what was happening in their head or not, maybe.

SB: Yea, yea.

CA: So what I think is really confusing to me, and maybe, well, to both of us, is is that this art project seems to be implying, or at least it's implying for us, is that when it comes to embodied online habits, the truism that place is incredibly integral to these actions is maybe not as relevant anymore? Which is . . . strange to imply, but it's kind of where I'm thinking this is going. What do you think?

SB: Yea, I mean, I've been interested in Geolocation for a while, for several years now. I've only actually written a conference paper on it. In some ways, I've been putting it off because I'm not a
100% sure I know quite what to do with it, but I know there's something there because I keep coming back to it. I even have it kind of posted to my bulletin board in my office, um, just as kind of a reminder. And I did have an opportunity to meet one of the artists and to sit down with him and interview him, and to talk a little bit more and to hear a little bit more about what, why they were doing this kind of thing and what they were after here. And the project I think, you know, at least according to the artists, and I agree with them completely, is trying to raise a lot of questions about privacy, surveillance, place, and our embodied connections to place. Obviously, you know, privacy and surveillance are front and center. I mean they're taking data that is just being kind of put out there into the world. They're going to find it. They're going to these locations and photographing this, not with these people's permissions, in order to do something with that—in order to make some kind of point about surveillance and other things. But, I guess, even from the beginning I was most drawn to what the project was trying to say about embodiment and space and place, and the connections of those things. I think the artists are, in my sort of view, are grafting a sense of place and embodiment onto the tweets. At the same time, I think they're asking us, maybe implicitly, to question or wonder about whether the user him or herself—the person who's writing these tweets, whoever that was, and we don't know who it was; they're anonymous—was attuned in the same way to place and embodied practice when they were tweeting—as the photographers seem to imply in their images. So, from my perspective, I think there is a phenomenology here, but it's, the only one we can be confident about is the artists' commitment to embodied and emplaced communication. I don't think we can know for certain—I don't think we would ever be able to know for certain—what the person who sent the tweet was feeling, was experiencing, was sensing at the time, or whether or not that accords with the artists' decisions to frame the photographs in their own particular ways—further down the road, much later in time—in order to accentuate the importance of place and placement for these messages.

CA: Yea, yea, that's really, that's really fascinating because for me, as someone who studies doxa, it really seems like the artists are dramatizing that very doxic assumption that social media users generally have that somehow we can remain aware of our surroundings despite the fact that our attentions really are focused elsewhere. You know, I think most people do want to assume that they can multitask, that they can really be in two—or more—places at once. But, I'm wondering is that always the case?

SB: Yea, well, for me that's the big conundrum for this project. And I think that's the reason I've been sort of resistant but also really attracted and drawn to it for a while because one of the sort of truisms, as you were saying, the assumptions that I think in rhetorical studies we have now is that place is essential to the production of rhetorical meaning—that once we began to understand the value and significance of place—where we write, where we speak, the situatedness of communication—those kind of things became kind of standardized in the sense that we cannot extract the meaning from the location from which it emerges. These things seem to be fundamentally connected and intertwined with one another. At least that's my reading of the kind of space/place scholarship in the field at the moment. So, as someone who is interested in that kind of scholarship, I have to confess I'm not entirely comfortable with the directions Geolocation's asking me to go. And maybe that's a good thing, actually. I think that's where I am with it right now. I think as we've been discussing here this afternoon, both of us are wedded to the idea of embodiment and the digital and seeing digital media practices, methods of communication, modes of communication, as wound up and interconnected and intertwined with our own bodies and ways of being-in-the-world.
But for me this project has forced me at least to think about this and to question my own values and assumptions regarding the primacy of place and embodiment in digital media. At this point, I don’t have any concrete answers, right. That's what I want to work on, and that's what I think we want to work on, but I think that speaking for both of us, I think we're fascinated enough to want to continue exploring this project and what it will potentially add to our own understandings of habits and embodiment, but also maybe how the field has started to think about these questions as well.

CA: Oh, absolutely, yea. I mean, and for me what's also been really great about exploring this project is seeing how our shared interests and individual expertises have come together to make this really kind of a rich line of inquiry. I think my emphasis on doxa and habits and your emphasis on phenomenology and questions of consciousness have really made this a very complicated project to look at. It's been really fun. It's been interesting collaborating with you when normally I'm just kind of used to you responding to my dissertation work.

SB: Well, you, I think that collaborating in these kinds of ways is also a really big part of mentoring in the profession, and one of the things I really value about being or thinking of myself as a mentor in this profession.

CA: Could you say more about that?

SB: [Laughs] Yea, so, one of my kind of go-to lines in graduate seminars and discussions with graduate students, as you're well aware, is when someone is talking about their ideas reflecting on the texts that we've read or an idea that they're muddling through, when they pause to sort of stop, I like to say, "Say more about that. Can you say more about that?" And it's become kind of a refrain and a joke around the program, which is fine. I'm okay with that. But, you know, I will say that I think that that inclination that I have to "say more" come from a kind of philosophy of mentoring, I guess, in a certain way. I've never thought of it in those terms exactly. But, you know, I really, I really sort of want to sort of meet you and graduate students where you are, where your interests are. I want to help you translate those interests into ideas that will inform conversations in the field that will be meaningful for you. But I don't want to overwrite them. I don't want to draw them into my own lexicon. I don't want to take ownership of them. I want to help you sort of figure out what that is, why that matters for you, what more you can do with it, how much further you can sort of pull on those threads to do something really exciting and interesting that will really be fulfilling to you and also engage in some kind of important conversation in the field. So, when I'm saying, "say more," I'm trying to sort of draw that out in some ways.

CA: Well, I definitely feel like you were really good at that as a mentor.

SB: Thanks. Thanks. Good. Maybe it's a good time to ask you. I mean, do you have any advice for choosing a mentor in graduate school?
CA: Well, actually, I think what you value is actually kind of what I was looking for. I'm drawn to particular dispositions. So, in finding graduate mentors, I first and foremost wanted to feel like I could have a comfortable and open relationship with those people. And going back to embodiment, I think that has everything to do with dispositions—knowing your own dispositions and how those dispositions are going to interact with other people's dispositions. So, for myself, I really value active listening and a kind of performed or embodied generosity in terms of the spirit of scholarship and the spirit of inquiry. I really wanted to feel like my mentor wanted to exchange ideas rather than only kind of shop-talk or treat the profession as just the institution that it is. I wanted to feel like you were there and ready to exchange ideas and that was going to be like the bulk of our relationship. And what I love about your "say more" mantra is that you do let me speak on my own terms, without translating me, because I think you're genuinely curious about where those ideas are gonna go before you try helping me fit them into the field or kind of tailoring them to be hip for the field, you know, or asking for clarification, etc. You know, you really demonstrate an interest in working with the ideas and with particularly my ideas, even before they're necessarily formed. Does that kind of jive with what you experienced, or what you looked for, as a grad student?

SB: Oh, wow. Yea, yea that's a good question. To be perfectly honest, I don't think I knew what to look for as a grad student.

CA: Okay. Yea.

SB: In hindsight, I have a much clearer sense of that. I mean, I was, I was incredibly fortunate. I had two amazing mentors at the masters level and the doctorate level who, you know, kind of knew before I did what it is I needed or wanted. So I'm the kind of person that, my mentoring style is in some way tied to my own sort of, what I would want: I want to be listened to, I want, I don't want to be overwitten right away. I need time for ideas to really sort of percolate and it takes time even through writing--it takes many, many pages for me to kind of get to where I think I've come to something that is pretty interesting and might be interesting to other people, other readers. So, in both cases, my advisors recognized that early on and then, in my doctoral work, my advisor, when I would hand him drafts of chapters, for example, he would give me feedback--not that he wouldn't give me feedback; and I know that he read it very, very carefully--but his most immediate response was to just to say, "This is great. Give me more." And, it wasn't until afterwards that I asked him, "Why was that your method of responding to me?" The first thing he says is that "I don't respond that way to everyone. That's not the way I do it. I knew that you were the kind of person just needed to continue to write, to figure out what it is you wanted to say. And it was looking fine as it was, but we can do some brush-up later, but you needed that to kind of keep going." And I think, I wish I had known that about myself before I went into graduate school, so maybe one thing I would sort of, if there is a recommendation here, is to think and reflect a little bit more on sort of what you want, what your style of writing is, how you responded to feedback, what kind of feedback do you want, not being nervous asking for that kind of feedback. That's one of the things I've tried more and more is to be very upfront, "Well, what kind of feedback would you like?" But some of it is also intuitive on both sides about what kind of feedback works best for that particular person. Well, I think we're actually out of time for today, Caddie. Thanks so much for taking some time to chat with me today.

CA: Yea, thank you, Scot. This was fun.
SB: Yea.

[drumbeat from *Rhetoricity* theme fades in as interview ends]

Eric Detweiler [voiceover]: That's it for this episode! I'll be back in a few weeks to bring you the next installment in this series. Till then, you can keep up with Rhetoricity on Twitter at @RhetCast, and you can find more rhetoric-oriented podcasts at the Facebook page Podcasts in Rhetoric and Composition. That's facebook.com/rhetcompcast.

Till next time, this is the disembodied voice of Eric Detweiler, cutting out.

[*Rhetoricity* theme plays]