**Accumulating Character: Rhetoric, Time, and *Ethos***

A Dissertation Abstract

“Accumulating Character” develops a theoretical framework that makes visible the rhetorical and interrelated workings of character and time. In rhetorical scholarship, character—or *ethos*—is typically construed as either fleeting or fixed. This dissertation, however, charts a path between these two temporal extremes, identifying the ways that ethos accumulates rhetorical force over time. To attend to the temporal dimensions of ethos, I first construct a rhetorical model of accumulated time. Here, I conjoin Aristotle’s definition of *chronos* in the *Physics* with the scholarship of Karen Barad to craft a complex picture of accumulated time as a rhetorically significant material-discursive force that emerges from the deep entanglement of nonhuman and human ecologies.

In Chapter 2, I sketch a framework for understanding how a rhetorical sense of accumulated time highlights the temporal dynamics of ethos. To make visible the ways that this *cumulative ethos* operates, I analyze multiple classical texts concerning the trial of Socrates and demonstrate the cumulative rhetorical effects of Socrates’ ethos on the city of Athens. In Chapter 3, I investigate how the accelerated circulation of online media disrupts the temporal regularity that often governs the evolution cumulative ethos. To account for these temporal complexities, I develop the paired concepts of *rhetorical* *saturation* and *rhetorical* *rupture*. I then elucidate how these twin ideas contribute to the irregular accumulation of character by analyzing Kanye West’s character as it circulates across a variety of online platforms. In Chapter 4, I investigate how cryptocurrencies test the limits of rhetorical character by decentering cumulative ethos from human subjects and also disrupting the timeline for its accretion. By studying Bitcoin through the lens of cumulative ethos, I foreground the centrality of both character and time to commerce as well as the consequences of attempting to replace a complex rhetorical figure like ethos with a mechanical facsimile like the blockchain protocol.

In sum, “Accumulating Character” emphasizes the importance of chronos-based time to rhetorical activity, and especially to the concept of ethos. Without a model that explicitly links these ideas, we risk oversimplifying the complicated ways that character accrues rhetorical influence as it negotiates shifting temporalities.