Since the 1960s, invention theory has reinvented itself. This essay aims to map and advance that process. It provides a window into the recent intellectual history of rhetorical studies and advocates continued development of sociologically informed rhetorical theories open to culture, materiality, and post-humanist understandings. I argue that invention theory has productively organized itself around two sets of dialectical tensions but remains constrained by two longstanding prejudices. The productive tensions revolve around (a) breaking with and affirming inherited rhetorical traditions and (b) conceiving invention as emplaced or dispersed. The prejudices consist of a continued logophilia and normative privileging of creativity and newness. I map the dialectics and prejudices across modern, premodern, and postmodern orientations. I then provide a revised definition and heuristic framework revolving around a concept, inventional media, which aims to capture invention’s simultaneous emplacement and dispersal across processes of discovery, creativity, and rhetorical reproduction.

“Everything is a remix,” my son recently told me, riffing off a website by that name. He reminded me, as if I needed it, that ours is an age when questioning creative originality and the self-directing subject have become commonplace. In such a moment, classic modernist notions of sovereign inventive individuals seem nostalgic at best, prompting the need to rethink invention itself. I will argue that the last two generations of rhetoricians have been doing exactly that, a reinvention of invention (remixing the title of Thomas Sloane’s essay) that predates the postmodernist sensibilities to which my son gave suitably ironic voice. We can see that reinvention beginning to take shape in the late 1960s, just a few years after Elbert Harrington not-so-memorably wrote, “Each generation of rhetoricians must examine anew the concept of rhetorical invention” (373).

Invention indexes all the ways that discourse and other materials are generated for rhetorical address. Since classical antiquity, it has been a central term in “the fundamental vocabulary of rhetoric” (McKeon, 11), one of the essentially contested concepts through which the tradition manifests itself (Gross). Yet it is also true that “invention goes in and out of fashion” (Crowley 1), tied up as it is with broader views of rhetoric, its relation to other disciplines, and views of creativity, knowledge, and...
the communicative process, among much else. As a result, examining the concept of rhetorical invention potentially opens out toward the totality of rhetorical theory and practice and their articulations with larger patterns of thought and activity at a particular juncture in history. My scope is obviously more limited, although I try to cover a fair bit of ground. My essay maps main currents of invention’s most recent reinvention, illuminates dialectical tensions that have structured it, calls attention to ways that it remains incomplete, and offers a revised definition and conceptual framework to help advance recent theoretical gains.

Surveying the era from about 1968 to the present, I argue that invention theory as a collective enterprise has organized itself around two sets of productive tensions and tried with only partial success to break free of two longstanding prejudices. The first tension lies between tradition-affirming and tradition-rupturing impulses, a meta-level dialectic that marks overall theoretical orientations. The logics of tradition and breaks from it are a steady part of rhetorical thought since classical antiquity, and modernizing impulses in rhetorical invention date back at least to Francis Bacon. Over the past four decades, though, the dialectic between affirming and breaking from tradition has played itself out across modern, premodern, and postmodern sensibilities (cf. Aune, “Coping”). The second productive tension occurs between invention’s location and dispersal, a dialectic that also dates back to classical antiquity, answering the question, “Where does invention fundamentally reside?” On the side of location were the topoi and loci, discrete conceptual “places” to find arguments, further harnessed through the compact heuristic of stasis theory. On the side of dispersal was the view that invention’s materials were cast across the totality of human knowledge, which required a rounded liberal education instead of specific training in technique. This productive tension has played itself out along a broader spectrum of positions. At one end, invention is conceived as a teachable art located in specific practices and issuing in discrete speeches or texts. At the other, invention is scattered across an array of activities, moods, and spatio-temporal openings that feed all manners of knowing, making, doing, and being in the world. While these dialectical tensions have largely been productive, invention theory has yet to shed two limiting prejudices. One pertains to what I call the logophilia that has marked invention, and the European rhetorical tradition more generally, since its birth in ancient Greece. The other is a modern romantic prejudice that installs creativity and originality as invention’s normative core. Despite tradition-rupturing impulses, both prejudices persist across invention’s reinvention since the 1960s.

The final section of the essay pivots from recent intellectual history to sociologically inflected rhetorical theory. To overcome the persistent logophilia and privileging of creative originality, I offer a revised definition of invention as the generation of rhetorical materials. To draw together and advance recent theoretical gains, I introduce a concept, inventional media, to refer to the habitats, artistic materials, and communicative modes through which rhetorical generation occurs. Reviving premodern understandings, the definition opens out to post-humanist
theory. Extending social, cultural, and material turns of the last four-plus decades, I develop the concept through a heuristic framework identifying different classes of invensional media, followed by brief examples to illustrate the concept.

Across my mapping of the intellectual history, I focus mostly on theories of invention, less on pedagogies and compositional practice, in large part because of the excellent bibliographic reviews written from the perspective of rhetoric and composition (Young, “Invention,” “Recent Developments”; Lauer, “Rhetorical Invention,” Invention). To reign in an already sprawling subject, I also limit my attention to explicit conceptualizations of invention thus named, bracketing what Janice Lauer has called “the diaspora” of disciplinary conversations into which topics of invention have migrated since the 1990s (“Rhetorical Invention”).

Traditional Understandings and Modernizing Impulses

While I cannot offer even a bare outline of the intellectual history of invention before the late 1960s (for that, see Lauer, Invention; Watson), a few grounding preliminaries are in order. Etymologically, invention entered the English language in the fourteenth century, derived from the Latin invenire, which in the rhetorical idiom translated the Greek heurein (from which we derive “eureka”). Both the Greek and Latin terms, as Carolyn Miller observes, “ambiguously include what are now two senses: that of coming upon what already exists (discovery) and that of contriving something that never existed before (invention)” (130). This ambiguity continued into early-modern English, when invenire was often translated as “investigation” (Jost 14), and Catholics celebrated “The Invention of the Cross,” a day marking for believers the discovery of the authentic material artifact by Constantine’s mother (“Invention”). By the sixteenth century, however, advocates of scientifically oriented empirical learning were prying discovery apart from invention (Miller; Watson). In an often-quoted paragraph, Francis Bacon would assert, “The invention of speech or argument is not properly an invention: for to invent is to discover that we know not, and not recover or resumnon that which we already know” (74). As Miller observes, “it is a sign of rhetoric’s long obsolescence that is has adhered to the older meaning of invention as discovery” (131). This in turn helped disqualify the art for romantically influenced writers and speakers drawn more to ideals of creative inspiration, novelty, and genius than to following rhetorical techniques for recovering pre-existent arguments and knowledge.

As it emerged from classical antiquity, the rhetorical canon of invention organized itself around a series of logophilic conceptualizations and practices. Logos manifested itself in multiple ways in a canon centered on the discovery of arguments by means of thinking (recognized since at least Isocrates as internalized logos), the topics (conceived as starting points for chains of reasoning), stasis theory, pro-and-con debating, or some combination thereof. Aristotle conceived invention in terms of “the thought [dianoia, discursive reasoning] and the sources of argument and how we shall refute them” (192; Peters). Cicero followed course in De Inventione, a
work that Walter Watson has called the “most influential of all accounts of rhetorical invention and probably the most influential textbook of any kind in the history of western education” (390). He conceived invention there as the “excogitation of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one’s cause plausible” (excogitatio rerum verarum aut veri similium quae causam probabilem reddant, I.vii). Across his writings, Cicero would variably emphasize, on the one hand, stasis theory and the topics as formal techniques for analyzing a case and generating arguments and, on the other, the need for an orator to draw liberally upon broad learning across subject areas. His early definition helped set the tone for a great deal of subsequent thinking about this essentially contested concept, often conceived in contrast to the canon of style, the one focusing on the “substance” (res) of an argumentative appeal, the other on the language (verba) for expressing it. The scope of invention would expand and contract over the centuries, with critics of rhetoric turning to dialectic or science as the proper methods for discovery and assigning rhetoric to questions of style. But a focus on techniques of “excogitation” (instead of, e.g., the sociality of pro-and-con argument that Sloane equates with Cicero’s mature theory of invention) would mark a long line of writing about invention, much of it not directly influenced by Cicero at all. This tendency would feed the “decidedly mentalistic bent” that Sharon Crowley rightly attributes to twentieth-century invention theory (13).

Since rhetorical theory began to reestablish itself as a pursuit in American universities in the 1920s (see Leff and Procario; Kalbfleisch), there have been periodic calls to “modernize” invention, often embedded within broader visions for rhetoric more generally. Hoyt Hudson, a central figure in Cornell’s influential Department of Speech and Drama (see Benson), made perhaps the first such programmatic call in a 1921 essay pivoting off aspirations he shared with Charles Sears Baldwin “to make rhetoric more effectively the organon of all studies” (“Modernize” 325). Hudson equated invention with “the inner aspect of rhetorical activity” (“DeQuincey” 141–142), perfectly encompassing the mentalistic tendencies Crowley criticized. Modernizing invention meant redeploying the topics as aids for discovering arguments within a new landscape of knowledge and education. He sought to recapture an ancient sense of rhetorical invention as “a method that is fundamental to all inventive thinking” while developing a “theory [that] can run the gauntlet of the psychologists” and their understandings of the operations of the mind (“Modernize” 329). Four decades later, Elbert Harrington made his own sweeping call for “a modern approach to invention” that would “fit comfortably into the modern scheme of knowledge” (373). For him, this meant opening up much greater distance from the tradition of the topics to construct a theory resting on liberal education, “a thorough understanding of the whole process of inquiry” across disciplines, and mastery of language use (375). If Hudson’s modernizing efforts located invention in a scientifically certified revival of the topics, Harrington’s dispersed it across the quest for liberal learning and “the organized store that lies in modern libraries” (375).
Despite their differences, Hudson and Harrington shared qualities that would distinguish their efforts to modernize from many that would appear after the 1960s. For one, although they made feints toward larger formations like “the whole process of inquiry,” they focused their theoretical comments on invention as a pedagogical subject. Pedagogy has of course remained a major focus in invention theory, particularly in writing and composition studies, but other foci also proliferated as invention became a subject for more socioculturally oriented rhetorical research. Since the late 1960s, there has been a double expansion: from (a) invention as a pedagogical problem, addressed through art or broad learning, and solved through the conscious activity of individual teachers and students—that is, invention as teachable activity practiced by individuals—to (b) invention as sociocultural phenomenon, investigated through a variety of humanistic and social scientific methods, and situated within contexts, relationships, socially defined roles, institutions, cultures, and discourses operating beyond the scale and purposive activities of individuals (i.e., invention as a social process of message production transcending individuals and of interest beyond pedagogy). Although met by humanistic resistance, this stronger wave of modernizing also brought invention theory into new and deepened contact with the human sciences, especially linguistics, sociology, psychology, and anthropology. Finally, both Hudson and Harrington effectively cast invention as a process of discovering already-existing knowledge through research or topical lines of thought. Beginning in the late 1960s, some theorists began writing about “the epistemic or generative powers” of invention (Miller 130), opening the door toward new dispersals of it beyond the construction of discrete speeches or essays. This new and more thoroughgoing modernization of invention theory had several notable dimensions.

On the pedagogical front, a number of theorists advanced new heuristics for invention, several of which drew deeply upon the human sciences. Each of them had the effect of embedding invention within a new kind of condensed, generative “place.” Leading the charge were Richard Young and Alton Becker, a composition scholar/rhetorician and a linguist trained at the University of Michigan and protégées of the prominent linguist, Kenneth Pike. Pike’s theory of tagmemics represented a complex, contextually oriented communicative and behavioral account of language that introduced the widely used distinction between “emic” and “etic” meanings. It provided the framework from which Young and Becker in 1965 proposed a new, “modern theory of rhetoric” and “an epistemological heuristic” for invention (Young and Becker 458; see also Kneupper, “Modern Theory”). Young, Becker, and Pike collaborated in developing a fuller tagmemic theory of invention as a problem-solving activity in their 1970 book, *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. Young would go on to publish a number of field-orienting essays in addition to convening an important seminar on rhetorical invention at Carnegie Mellon (1978–79). It helped spawn other articulations of the tagmemic heuristic (e.g. Kneupper, “Modern Theory”), which remained conceptually challenging if not exactly obtuse. Meanwhile, in 1970 another University of Michigan–trained
scholar, Janice Lauer, also advocated a modernized inventional heuristics, turning not to linguistics but psychology and its knowledge of creative processes, a position that generated border-affirming resistance from less social-scientifically inclined teachers of composition. Other modernized heuristics would arise from more humanistic sources, most notably Kenneth Burke’s pentad, which Burke himself did not explicitly present as a theory of invention, but which teachers of composition and speech would bend to those purposes (see e.g. Kneupper, “Burkean”; Young and Liu).

While the new, social-scientifically inflected heuristics had the effect of locating invention within discrete, generative conceptual frameworks, other modernizing impulses dispersed it socially and culturally. In so doing, they did for invention what Douglas Ehninger in 1968 had claimed about twentieth-century rhetorical theory as a whole—making it a “social” or “sociological” enterprise (in contrast to the “grammatical” quality of classical rhetoric and the “psychological” rhetoric of the eighteenth century). Ehninger dated the emergence of sociological rhetorical theory to the 1930s, but the late 1960s was the real turning point. Lloyd Bitzer’s landmark “Rhetorical Situation” (also 1968) was both index and agentic force in the new turn, offering an implicit theory of invention as arising as much from social contexts as individual purpose.

The seeds for an explicit, socially oriented theory of invention would be planted two years later at a gathering of the National Conference on Rhetoric—a follow-up to the more famous Wingspread Conference, both feeding the landmark collection, The Prospect of Rhetoric (on which, see Sloane, “Reinventing”; Enos and McNabb; Porrovecchio). The central objective of the project was “to outline and amplify a theory of rhetoric suitable to twentieth-century concepts and needs” (Bitzer and Black v). The National Conference was divided into three working groups, one of which was the Committee on the Nature of Rhetorical Invention, an indication of the importance afforded the subject. The term “rhetorical theory” had gained currency in the previous several years—appearing with greater frequency as a central idea in journal articles, naming a new division of the restructured and renamed Speech Communication Association (formerly the Speech Association of America), and anchored in part in the new journal that had published Ehninger’s and Bitzer’s essays, Philosophy and Rhetoric (est. 1968). Headed by Robert Scott, the Committee on Invention embraced the trend toward theory, reflecting both the intellectual and professionalizing aspirations of rhetoricians within the discipline of communication. They set out to remedy the fact that, as the organizers put it, invention “has not been taught seriously and widely for at least two hundred years” (in Bitzer and Black 240).

The philosopher Richard McKeon was a major influence on the Committee, laying the groundwork for a generative theory of invention and rhetoric more broadly. Echoing McKeon, the Committee conceived invention architectonically: as “a generative frame,” “a place of places,” and a conceptual starting point for considering “the processes of change and habitation which constitute” life itself (Scott et al.
Reinventing Invention, Again

232, 233, 230). Their report de-centered the individual and silent excogitation, casting invention as a social process taking shape “in a field of persons interacting,” through “the interplay of various points of view,” and in the active work done by “the audience’s reinventing the communication for itself” (230–231). While associating invention with “the generation of something new,” it also began to collapse distinctions, arguing that “discovery, invention, [and] creativity [were] overlapping processes.” Opening toward the object world, the report insisted that ideas as well as things were the products of discovery and continue to exist only insofar as they are actively maintained by humans. “From this perspective, the core social process turns on the coming-to-be, the nourishment, and the evolution or replacement of inventions” (230). The Committee moved rhetorical invention in constitutive directions, seeing selves, beliefs, lifestyles, audiences, and “even all things in man’s world” as actively created and maintained through invention and the “constant interplay and reformation” of the rhetorical world (229, 231, 235). As part of its work, the Committee broke the invention process down analytically, seeing social and material conditions, conceptual schemes, ideologies, social roles, relationships, genres, styles, cultural symbol systems, and persons as all playing parts (231–234). Invention was both modernized and widely dispersed, opening the door for more sociological, cultural, political, and material treatments of the subject (e.g., Gronbeck).

McKeon’s own modernizing was firmly grounded in the historical tradition, which he had been writing about since the 1930s. Historical inquiry led him to see the changing fortunes of rhetoric in dynamic relation to philosophy, poetry, and other arts, and to view the present in long historical perspective. He accomplished this feat with uncommon power in his Wingspread paper, “The Uses of Rhetoric in a Technological Age: Architectonic Productive Arts.” “As we enter the final decades of this century, we boast of a vast increase of output in all arts, and we are puzzled by the absence of interdisciplinary connection and by the breakdown of interpersonal, intergroup, and intercultural communication,” McKeon declared. “We need a new architectonic productive art” (11). Rhetoric had functioned as such an art during the Roman Republic and the Renaissance, and McKeon advocated for it doing so again. Flying his pragmatist problem-solving colors, he declared, “Rhetoric provides the devices by which to determine the characteristics and problems of our times and to form the art by which to guide actions for the solution of our problems and the improvement of our circumstances” (11; see also Depew; Plochmann). At the core of the new architectonic rhetoric lay invention, about which McKeon wrote intensively from the mid-1960s. He reworked Cicero’s definition and moved it modestly away from its logophilic center by calling invention “the art of discovering new arguments and uncovering new things by argument” (59; see also 194–220. At Wingspread, McKeon also reached beyond the logosphere, portraying rhetoric as “an art of structuring all principles and products of knowing, doing, and making,” and “an art of producing things and arts, and not merely one of producing words and arguments” (2, 12). He would extend the idea further two years later, writing,
“The places of invention and of memory are places of things, thoughts, actions, and words” (33; see also Miller; Holmberg). While remaining a linguistic art, invention for McKeon crept toward materiality—a turn that dramatically accelerated when his student Richard Buchanan bent McKeon’s ideas to understanding design as a rhetorical activity of invention and discovery (“Rhetoric”; “Design”; see also Kaufer and Butler).

Invention studies exploded in the 1970s and ‘80s, moving in a variety of directions in composition and communication (see Young, “Invention,” “Recent Developments”). Not all of it reflected the four modernizing moves I have sketched: self-conscious breaks from tradition; research alliances with the human sciences; accounts of invention as deeply social, cultural, and to a lesser extent material; and efforts to cast it as a generative and constitutive process instead of a way to find relevant pre-existing knowledge and lines of established thought. Nor were each of these impulses displayed across all the modern theories. But together they launched a reinvention of invention that had the effect of spreading it far beyond the composition of speeches and writings and the discrete and teachable arts associated with them. New heuristics re-located invention and maintained its place in purposeful rhetorical production, while fresh cultural and sociological vistas opened for theorizing and empirically investigating invention as a dimension of the ongoing production and reproduction of human life—in the form of knowledge, technology, traditions, selves, social collectives, and designed artifacts, among much else. Beginning in the 1980s, the Rhetoric of Inquiry movement dispersed invention broadly across the human sciences, depicting it as a means by which knowledge and disciplines are constituted, and deepening the epistemic and generative vectors of rhetorical inquiry that had begun in the late 1960s (see esp. Simons).

A new and versatile generation of theorist-teachers, including Charles Kneupper and Karen Burke Lefevre, found insightful ways to combine reflections on invention as an art and invention as a framework for understanding the social formation of knowledge and communities. At the edges of some of their work they began to push beyond the deep humanism that continued to characterize most invention theory, whether oriented toward the humanities or the social sciences. As Lefevre resonantly observed in Invention as a Social Act, we might very well consider that “the socioculture itself is what thinks through individuals” (81). She helped open pathways for subsequent work in composition studies that also productively bridged art and sociocultural analysis—ways of teaching/practicing invention and ways of interpreting/explaining it. This bifocal quality was well-represented in Janet Atwill and Janice Lauer’s important 2002 collection, which Kathleen Ryan in turn drew on in her compelling accounts of feminist research methods as inventive arts (“Making”; “Recasting”). It was represented in a different way in Damien Pfister’s (2011) insightful consideration of invention within the blogosphere. All fell within the broad wake of what I am calling modernizations of invention.
Premodern Revivals, Postmodern Revisions

If modern turns in invention theory tended to either break from tradition or emphasize a new era calling for new ways of thinking, countervailing sensibilities sought to retrieve pre- or early-modern concepts and breathe fresh life into them. We can identify two approaches to redeploying ancient and early-modern ideas for contemporary invention theory: (a) one that we might call neo-traditionalist, which was generally humanistic in orientation and sought to revive or re-establish meaningful intellectual continuity with premodern thought and (b) the other that we can broadly call postmodernist, which often embraced or tended toward post-humanism, was deeply informed by contemporary social and literary theory (particularly French thought), and redeployed ancient concepts in revisionist readings frequently neo-sophistic in spirit. The lines between the neo-traditional revivalists and postmodern revisionists have at times been blurry. With important exceptions, though, the former group has tended to locate invention in more discrete and identifiable concepts, heuristics, or practices over which individuals maintain agency, while members of the latter are more prone to disperse invention in fluidities, movements, eruptions, and various kinds of in-between spaces more difficult to locate, codify, or control. I will illustrate some of the more prominent lines of thinking in each.

While the intellectual history of thinking about *topoi* in the twentieth century is worthy of its own essay, I will simply say here that it has provided a rich point of articulation among modern, premodern, and postmodern impulses in invention theory. Since at least Hudson’s 1923 essay, there have been recurrent calls to modernize the topics, which has typically meant aligning them with modern knowledge/ways of knowing (especially the sciences) and injecting them with new systematicity (e.g., in codified heuristics and logical reasoning). The topics were an important aspect of Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *New Rhetoric* (see Wallace; Warnick; Crosswhite), which in turn influenced the Committee on Rhetorical Invention to call for new systems of topical schemes for the modern world. Karl Wallace took up this call to advocate “modern systems of *topoi*” that would address the “acquisition of knowledge for communication and... its reappearance in some form or other in communications” (392). A young Michael Leff in turn responded by turning toward “the history of topical invention in order to discover the basis for a distinctive, substantive, and coherent theory of rhetorical argumentation.” He later attributed this quest to the privileged position that “theory” held as apparently “the sole path available for rhetoric to escape from its marginal status and attain a place of orthodox respect in the academy” (“Up from Theory” 203, 204; see also “The Topics”). Leff would come to argue that such systematicity was a stale and self-contained enterprise, reflecting the bankruptcy of turning rhetoric into a theoretical discipline more generally (208). In response, he dis-placed invention from abstract systems and moved it more toward the life-world of particular embodied utterances, decorum, and the unsystematic resources of tradition.
Others writing about the topics fully embraced the turn to theory but rejected both the systematizing and social-scientific aspirations of some of the modernizers. One important strand took up the generative theoretical project begun in the late 1960s and drew out ontological and, in some cases, material dimensions of topoi as well. Viewed retrospectively, we can see that this trajectory of work eased the topics toward postmodernist vocabularies and problematics that have become more pronounced in the last decade. Scott Consigny’s mediation of the debate between Bitzer and Richard Vatz on the rhetorical situation, for instance, expanded attention from topic “as an essential instrument for discovery or invention” to “the function of topic as a realm in which the rhetor thinks and acts” (182). William Nothstine pushed the idea further, drawing on hermeneutic ontology to cast topos as “the situation of the self within a world of things and possibilities,” a being-within-circumstances out of which rhetoric emerges and displays “in social praxis one’s unique position within a horizon” (“Topics” 155, 157). Later he would operationalize that understanding in a co-edited volume asking rhetorical scholars to reflect upon “their own creative and invention processes as critics” (Critical Questions, v). Carolyn Miller pushed deeper toward “a postmodernist invention in which novelty is situated, relative, and accommodative” as a means to “help remove the wedge that modernism drove between discovery and invention” (130, 143). She pursued these goals by a creative and deeply informed reading of Aristotle on the topics from the perspective of an ancient “venatic” or conjectural paradigm that featured an “epistemology of the hunt” (138). Though still focusing on the conceptual and linguistic, Miller conceived invention as a place or region of productive uncertainty from which one hunts, thereby deepening Consigny’s and Nothstine’s efforts to shift attention to ontological dimensions of topoi and rhetorical invention. Robert Topinka made Miller’s insight more material in a creative account of emplaced walking as rhetorical invention that drew upon Michel de Certeau and Henri Lefebvre. John Muckelbauer meanwhile drew on a different array of French poststructuralist theory to refigure the topics and advance an account of change that does not involve “overcoming or negating particular others” (x). According to Muckelbauer, a topos is marked not by conceptual understanding but by a “capacity to respond” (128). Its “generative power . . . is intimately linked to its simultaneous demarcation of and responsiveness to bodies,” which in turn means that “if places are located anywhere, it is not someplace, but in the reciprocal and generative fusion of body and place” that he calls “con-fusion” (136). The mobility of the hunter in Miller’s venatic invention is in Muckelbauer dispersed even further across countless conjunctures of bodies and places where change might erupt without negating some Other.

For all its creative erudition, Muckelbauer’s was exactly the sort of high-theoretical meditation that Leff disdained, be it manifest as modern systematizing or postmodern circuitousness. Leff would turn instead to another revived classical idea, imitatio, as part of his own hermeneutic rhetoric that tightly yoked interpretation and production and drew upon rhetorical education as the heart of the historical
Reinventing Invention, Again

tradition (on which, see also Walker). Rejecting “the aversion to ‘imitation’ that we have inherited from romantic thought,” Leff breathed new life into an essentially contested concept that for him represented “a complex process that allows historical texts to serve as equipment for future rhetorical production” (“Hermeneutical” 201; see also Sullivan, “Attitudes”). Although centered on reading and the production of writing and speech, *imitatio* in Leff’s hands overcame some of the canon’s traditional logophilia by embracing rhetorical bodies as well. “As embodied utterances of the past are interpreted for current application,” he wrote, “their ideas and modes of articulation are reembodied, and old voices are recovered for use in new circumstances” (203; see also “The Idea”). Leff’s students pushed the thinking further. Kirt Wilson advanced both the theory and social history of imitation by tracing its racialized iterations in nineteenth-century America, while Robert Terrill argued for its pedagogical importance in contemporary democratic culture. Both stressed the creative potential of *imitatio* within humanistic understandings of rhetorical agency and political citizenship. All of them pushed back against the modern denigration of imitation as mere repetition while locating invention within pedagogy, purposive study, and the exigencies of civic life. Muckelbauer, meanwhile, drew imitation into post-humanist theory-scapes through close reading of canonical texts to parse out movements of mimetic repetition, variation, and a kind of inspiration that aspires to “responsiveness itself” (73)—again casting invention as a kind of openness whose location was fluid and indeterminate.

Terrill deftly drew attention to the way *imitatio* challenges modernist ideals of sincerity, a point that connects it to two other traditional concepts that have also been incorporated into recent invention theory: Ciceronian *controversia* and sophistic *dissoi logoi*. Sloane revived the former through both history and pedagogy. At once criticizing the hegemony of Aristotle in twentieth-century rhetorical theory and making space for the Ciceronian tradition that held far greater sway in the centuries before, Sloane made a case for two-sided argument as lying at “the core [of] rhetorical invention” (*On the Contrary*, 30). As Cicero recognized, Sloane argued that “inventio is dialogic and it must be pursued pro and con, prosecution and defense, affirmative and negative. One must, that is, debate both sides—or, for that matter, all sides—of any case or one’s inventio will remain not fully invented” (32; see also “Reinventing”). Reanimating Ciceronian invention and Renaissance developments of it, Sloane also brought the Latin concept of *copia* (copiousness) back into conversations about invention—making a case for the importance of “stoking the mind with variety” through conceptual and linguistic abundance in order to have “wherewithal at the ready” (56–58). Arguing *in utramque partem*—one side and then the other—is one of several artistic means for generating abundance in thought and words (*res* and *verba*). Sloane argued that it also serves a “humanizing” and “liberalizing” function by challenging all forms of dogmatism (“Reinventing” 471). Some would dispute this last claim (Lardner et al.), but it has served as an article of faith for many who have supported debating all sides of an issue as a technique for fostering critical thinking, appreciation for a diversity of perspectives, and
democratic decision making (see, e.g., Greene and Hicks; Terrill). Sloane’s revival of *controversia* was a solidly humanistic intervention among a number of dialogic or interactive treatments of invention (see, e.g., Yarbrough), others of which also looked toward pre-humanist sources like the Hebrew Bible (Zulick, “Agon”). Some inched toward post-humanism as well, including Michael Billig’s extension of the Protagorean concept of *dissoi logoi*, which provided an implicit theory of invention as grounded in the inherent quality of an argument as always containing the seeds of opposing counter-arguments. Across these dialogic accounts, invention ranged from tightly placed within the practice of classroom debates to dispersed across “the generative capacity of language itself” (Zulick, “Generative” 109).

The concept of *kairos* provided one of the most fertile grounds for reformulating invention within both pre- and postmodern horizons of thought. Like revisionist treatments of the topics, new accounts of *kairos* also led toward stronger accounts of invention’s social ontology. Capturing the sense of opportune moments in time and space, *kairos* pointed to the way in which invention unfolds in an evolving world where timing, propriety, constraint, and rhetorical possibility are all bound up together. James Kinneavy launched rhetorical revival of the concept in the mid-1980s, charting biblical and classic humanistic understandings of it in the ancient Greek-speaking world, drawing connections with Bitzer’s rhetorical situation, and applying it to modern composition theory (see also Thompson). Dale Sullivan followed with a careful explication of New Testament theological views, which he contrasted with Greek rhetorical conceptions (“Kairos”). Beyond these biblically grounded accounts, much of the theoretical energy behind the concept derived from the neo-sophistic theoretical revival of the late 1980s and ‘90s. Eric Charles White’s 1987 *Kaironomia* was a playful sophistic “encomium celebrating the will-to-invent,” praising improvisation, contingency, and the channeling of heterogeneous interpretive frameworks that always recede in time (8). Others ventured further in post-humanist directions, as for instance Debra Hawhee’s discussion of *kairos* and what she called “invention-in-the-middle.” She productively conceived invention not as “a beginning, as the first canon is often articulated, but a middle, an in-between, a simultaneously interruptive and connective hooking-in to circulating discourses” (17, 24). *Kairos* then “marks the opportunity for a subject to produce discourse, even as it marks the other side of subjection—i.e. one is called upon to produce discourse” (18; see also Sipiora and Baumlin). Her creative reworking was one of several efforts to cross-fertilize invention theory with Foucauldian notions of discourse (e.g., Lefevre, 125; Phillips). Thomas Rickert meanwhile linked *kairos* with “ambience,” a term he used to describe the dynamic interactions among place, language, and body (“In the House”; Ambient)

More recently, Rickert has extended the idea of ambient invention by reconsidering the Platonic idea of the *chōra* as refracted through the poststructuralist thought of Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, and Gregory Ulmer (“Toward”; Ambient). Observing that diverse fields have “been pushing for a different sense of what it means for bodies to do things in physical and informational spaces,” Rickert argued
Reinventing Invention, Again

for new understandings of invention linked to a “new spatial paradigm” of minds that are both embodied “and dispersed into the environment itself, and hence no longer autonomous” (“Toward” 251). He sought “an expanded understanding of rhetorical invention” that resists “reducing invention to ideas,” to “rationalistic methods developed for print culture,” or to traditional systems like the topics (272 n8, 264, 267). The somewhat elusive idea of the chôra, which denoted a place or region in ancient Greek, pointed toward a kind of generative rhetorical space that resists easy description but potentially “transforms our senses of beginning, creation, and invention by placing them concretely within material environments, informational spaces, and affective (or bodily) registers” (252). Building on Ulmer’s Heuretics, Rickert attributed “inventional agency to non-human actors such as language, networks, environments, and databases” and to “material and affective situations that in turn create us” (253, 263; see also Ambient 204–213). In Rickert’s words, choric invention is “fundamentally indeterminate,” and thus different from purposive, humanistic inventional schemes such as the topics (256). For Kristeva, the chôra is part of a preverbal realm of “emotions, sensations, and other marks and traces of psychical and material experience” that are both prior to and distinct from symbolic and linguistic realms and offer alternatives to “the rational, masculine logos” as the ultimate horizons of invention (260–261). If we took the idea of chôra seriously, “Mood, feeling, situation, sensation, accident, environment, memory, and sociopolitical negotiation . . . would then need to be factored into any accounting of beginning” (262).

I have quoted from Rickert in some detail because his theory captures a number of important and promising elements of invention’s re-invention since the late 1960s. Working within the matrix I have called postmodern revisionism, it weights in on the essentially contested concept of invention by drawing on traditional vocabulary and contemporary redeployments of it. In so doing, it grounds rhetorical theory in the inherited tradition of terms while opening up space from its logophilic and masculinist history. The move toward networks continues the social turn that dates back to the Committee on Rhetorical Invention’s modernizing work and Lefevre’s realization of its inchoate promise. At the same time, Rickert joins Hawhee, Muckelbauer, and others in advancing post-humanist understandings of the way invention flows through agentic pathways beyond individuals, minds, and purposeful directiveness. To be sure, one can find displacements of the individual in the social and cultural turns after Wingspread, but Rickert adds “attunement to the materialities of body, place, and environment” as additional loci for understanding invention as a process that is at once situated and dispersed. “[T]here is a movement to invention, a going beyond boundaries and returning, that precludes its being fixed in place, even though it simultaneously emerges in and through place,” he writes, capturing the postmodernist sense of fluidity (270). At the same time, by conceiving invention in terms of “beginnings,” Rickert indirectly continues the long early-modern tradition of conceiving invention as creation or starting point that favors the original or the new, something also visible in Muckelbauer’s focus on
change. Both theorists arguably miss the opening Hawhee provides with her notion of “invention-in-the-middle,” although even that idea was cast as a simultaneous interruption and hooking-into existing discourses. In continuing to emphasize the new, postmodernist turns in invention theory have failed to separate themselves from modernist sensibilities. In highlighting its movements and eruptions, they have been less perspicuous about invention’s places.

Re-Placing Heuresis: Inventional Media

At the risk of oversimplification, I will recycle a staple of romantic invention theory and assert this: the genius of the post-Wingspread modernizing impulse lay in the way it broadened attention from invention as a productive art to invention as a sociocultural process; the genius of the subsequent premodern revival lay in the way it reoriented modern patterns of thought through fresh hermeneutical contact with the deep sources of the tradition, releasing energy through new interpretations of ancient concepts; and the genius of the post-humanist revision lay in the way it blended the genius of the first two with attention to bodies, discourses, and materialities, decisively separating itself from the self-regulating individual as a central locus of attention. Like their romantic forebears, the genius of each of these three orientations provides a font for further thinking about rhetorical invention as a teachable art, a sociocultural process, and a theoretical concept. I will draw from each to address the two limiting prejudices from which post-1960s invention theory has only sometimes broken: (1) its continued focus on novelty, distinctiveness, and creativity more than repetition or reproduction; and (2) its still-dominant emphasis on arguments, words, and cognitions at the expense of affects, things, and bodily sensations.

To ease the modern prejudice of novelty, I will advance a definition of invention that revisits ancient understandings with an eye toward contemporary cultural theory. If heuresis encompassed both finding and creating, then returning to the etymological roots allows us to move invention more solidly into the realm of cultural, ideological, and discursive reproduction—the dominant, baseline state of rhetorical invention as an everyday practice across cultures. As the anthropologists Ivo Strecker and Stephen Tyler note, “Classical traditions of rhetoric tell us that invention is not the discovery of the new but rather the ‘coming in’ (in-venire) of what was already known” (2). This is an insight scattered across invention theory over the last four decades, but it remains partly muted—by moral and political commitments to social change, by pedagogies encouraging originality in our students, by research focusing on the invention of noteworthy rhetorical products, and by a culture that equates invention with creativity and newness as opposed to tradition or repetition (see Cintrón). Re-activating the premodern meanings with minds sensitized by contemporary social theory also has the advantage of allowing us agnostically to bracket questions of agency and originality. Whether discourse speaks us or we speak discourse, whether we re-circulate ideological commonplaces or creatively
interrupt circuits of meaning, rhetorical finding—or being found—has occurred in any communicative address.

I propose that we define invention simply as the generation of rhetorical materials. The verb *generate*, which has periodically surfaced in invention theory since Wingspread, has a number of apt contemporary and historical senses: to bring into being, give rise to, form, produce from other substances, or reproduce (“Generate”). Each of these senses points to a slightly different kind of action and a range of agencies. They lend themselves to conceptions of invention as a cultivated art or “naturally” occurring process that vacillates between creativity and repetition. Generation can occur through finding, creating, assembling, translating, recombining, channeling, or giving form to. Rhetorical materials are then the symbolic and physical elements that enter into or are gathered for the purpose of communicative address. That address can take many forms—from speech, texts, performances, and artifacts to the dynamic being-in-the-world of selves, organizations, collectives, and places. Rhetorical materials include invention’s traditional words, ideas, and arguments but also stories, styles, gestures, rituals, bodily deportments, emotions, images, objects, and the dynamic matter that gathers itself into “things” that contribute to the dynamic flow of rhetorical production (see Simonson, “Rhetoric”; Ingold, “Ecology”). Rhetorical materials enter into various stages of the inventional process—from occupying the status of “wherewithal at the ready” captured in Sloane’s take on *copia*, to playing a role in design and composition and appearing before the audience for an actually communicated address. Rhetorical materials are generated through vitalities that traverse human and non-human realms. Heterogeneity characterizes both the agencies and products of invention.

The revised definition brings invention theory closer in line with cultural, material, and post-humanist turns that have shaped its development over the last four decades. It extends McKeon’s linkage of invention to “things, thoughts, actions, and words.” When a mass shooting prompts discussion of tougher gun registration laws and ideologically interpolated subjects are charged with affect that energizes thoughts, words, and actions like purchasing more guns, rhetorical invention has occurred at every step of the way. Some of it can profitably be called purposeful rhetorical action amenable to principles of art and design, which finds a compelling theoretical home in Tim Ingold’s alternative to Actor-Network Theory, SPIDER—Skilled Practice Involves Developmentally Embodied Responsiveness (“Ecology”; *Being Alive*). Other aspects of the inventional process are distributed through socio-cultures, discourses, institutions, and assemblages that Jane Bennett calls vibrant materiality and thing-power.

The revised definition disperses invention widely. I will locate it by arguing that rhetorical generation occurs through an interlocking and dynamic array of media that I will call *inventional media*. I mean *medium* not in the sense of intermediary or conduit but instead use it in more ontological, material, and expressive senses indexed to three dimensions of the term: (a) habitat or dwelling place, as in the medium in which an organism is suspended; (b) artistic material, as in the medium
through which an artist does her work; and (c) modes of communicative expression, as in the medium through which we address or interact with audiences. Inventional media then represent habitats that provide materials and modes through which rhetorical invention occurs. They are “places” of a sort, although they may be widely dispersed and diffuse. They both enable and constrain invention, providing scenes and resources through which it takes shape (see Simonson, Refiguring).

Invention organizes and materializes itself through a range of media that can be distinguished analytically but that deeply intersect in practice. Each represents a potential site for instruction, interpretation, explanation, and theoretical elaboration. I offer a framework to provide pathways for thinking, looking, and doing. We might divide inventional media into eleven categories, each of which encompasses multiple processes and subtypes. The framework is intended to be generative, not exhaustive, with details to “stoke the mind with variety,” in the traditional manner of copia. Major categories of inventional media include: (1) bodies, the persistent medium for human invention as a practice; they enflesh and provide the conditions of possibility for minds, sensations, emotions, and experiences; although traditionally marginalized in formal invention theory, a central locus for recent studies; (2) minds, understood as the states, patterns, and faculties of cognition and consciousness through which thinking occurs—and, via Rickert, as both embodied and dispersed into the environment; along with language, a persistent locus of attention for invention theory since classical antiquity, and one that has birthed a number of subsidiary concepts for identifying inventive capacities—wit, ingenium, and genius among others; (3) language, from individual terms to operative tongues and Foucauldian discourses; a central medium for invention theory since the Greeks; (4) experience in the general sense of “the interaction of live creature and environing conditions,” as John Dewey put it (36), and ranging from clearly demarcated events to experience as accumulated over time and organizing itself in habits; lies at the heart of heuresis in the sense of discovery, but also underwrites all manners of invention understood as a lived process, event, and pedagogically cultivated art; (5) physical spaces and geographical places, another persistent medium for embodied invention, ranging in size and type from the Scottish Enlightenment’s Edinburgh to Freud’s study to the Arab Spring’s streets, among countless others; (6) time, both immediate and historical, each culturally mediated, but also presenting their own kinds of habitats and materials for invention; the home of kairos as a regulative concept; (7) a wide range of media captured in the broad realm of the social—interactions, relationships, roles, social identities (e.g., race, class, gender, sexuality), small groups, publics, formal organizations, movements, communities, and institutions (e.g., educational, political, legal, religious); productively excavated in Lefevre’s Invention as a Social Act, this realm has given rise to a great number of social concepts that can profitably be recognized as inventional media (e.g., rhetorical situation, habitus, and assemblage); (8) another broad range falling within the realm of the cultural—from cultures and subcultures themselves to meanings, values, ideologies, common opinion (doxa), rituals, genres, traditions, formalized
practices, and conceptual schemes; this last subtype encompasses the tradition of the topics, stasis theory, tagmemics, the Burkean pentad, and, in a different way, this heuristic framework I’m offering of categories of invention; (9) technologies, e.g., writing, printing, television, computers, card catalogs, archives, and other media of storage and expression through which rhetorical materials are found and expressed; (10) economies of labor and money, universal habitats for invention that have traditionally been marginalized in the textual, discursive, and logophilic canons of rhetoric; these media distribute rhetorical resources unequally across populations, providing differential access and opportunities; attention here links rhetorical studies with political economy; (11) regimes and relations of power that help fuel hierarchies, hegemonies, and performatively enacted patterns of domination and resistance; manifest through each of the other ten classes, which it cuts across, but conceptually separable as providing their conditions of possibility.

Let me emphasize two things about the framework. First, the eleven categories are analytically distinct but interrelated in practice. Any particular invention or process will occur through media found in most if not all of the categories. Some will be more salient than others as consequential agencies in the complex dynamic that feeds a particular case of rhetorical production. Some will be deemed more important by observers or practitioners attending to invention with particular sensibilities and purposes. We can think, for instance, about a particular rhetorical product and inquire about the various media through which it was generated (e.g., the Gettysburg Address, The Feminine Mystique, a small start-up company, a public monument). Or we can think about a particular medium or intersection of media and inquire about rhetorical products generated through them (e.g., Harlem in the 1920s, the Gandhian tradition, RSA conventions, the economy of power involving straight white American males in the conservative blogosphere).

Second, the concept of medium indicates a way of looking at the phenomena found in the different categories. It asks us to raise questions about how they provide habitats, materials, and communicative modes for rhetorical invention. Each of the three senses of medium provides its own investigative pathway. Considering a medium as a habitat for invention means looking at it with a kind of ethnographic eye, observing patterns, habits, and agencies of invention. Treating it as a source of materials means looking for how it offers loci of attention, topical and linguistic content, images, emotions, and other sources of rhetorical energy and significance. Taking it as a communicative mode means looking at the medium as providing forms through which invention expresses itself in the processes leading into rhetorical production (e.g., through speech, written outlines, emotive bodies, imagistic thoughts, or shared Google documents).

Let me illustrate the concept with two different sorts of examples. The first involves the rhetorical invention of a discrete and historically consequential text, the first edition of Walt Whitman’s Leaves of Grass (1855). As I have discussed at length elsewhere, the edgy, oratorical-style, typographic free verse of that slim volume emerged through a number of invention media that can be discerned through
a mix of the published text and historical record (Simonson, *Refiguring*, 56–90; see also Reynolds). The expansive first-person narrator, whose chants democratic merge self with nation, was forged in part through journalistic writings for the popular press—where institutionally defined social roles met emerging genres of urban reporting and editorial direct address to democratic reading publics. One of those genres was built on the experience of sauntering the streets, representing the kaleidoscopic human and sensory variety of antebellum New York. Whitman moved through that city as a tall, big-bodied, omnisexual white male, a corporeal medium favorably located within regimes of power that underwrote the self-confidence and world-embracing, yea-saying moods that animate his poetry. Local walking and a long-distance trip to the Deep South were spatially mediated experiences that stoked his mind with images that filled out the heterogeneous particulars that constituted his poetic America. The inventional process expressed itself through conversation and notebooks. He drew upon his experience as a printer to imagine how his poems would look on the pages of a book, a habit of mind that helped generate published lines that reflexively called attention to the materiality of the page and the reader’s experience with it. Mid-century oratorical culture also mediated the invention of Whitman’s *Leaves*, furnishing an ambitious free white male with the dream of being a great orator, which he in turn bent toward print culture instead. An economy of small publishing houses made that dream realizable, while his salary as a working journalist underwrote the leisure time available to pen the volume. Artisanal democratic ideology and sentimentalism were two of several patterns of cultural value and belief that structured his sensibilities and furnished figures of laborers and motherhood that found their way into his poetry.

Out of what Ingold might call the “meshwork” of contributing media, we could focus productively on one, Whitman’s notebooks. A cross between rhetorical commonplace book, personal journal, and newspaper reporter’s notebook, they were a hybrid cultural form that performed a number of functions. Distinct from the “daybooks” in which he kept track of his literary business, the notebooks served as loci for recording reading notes, half-formed thoughts, everyday observations, reports of daily activities, occasional personal confessions, and drafts of poetry later revised and published. The notebooks were regular dwelling places for Whitman. They provided artistic material and communicative form through which he developed a mode of composition that, as Matt Miller has argued, amounted to collage: “from scraps of language both original and stolen Whitman pieced together his poetic body” (xvi). The notebooks were media through which both *Leaves of Grass* and Whitman himself were invented. They also provided material indices of the social, cultural, psychological, geographical, and economic habitats and relations of power within which his invention emerged. As collected, organized, and published, the notebooks have subsequently served as generative media for Whitman scholars enmeshed in their own habitats of rhetorical production.

My second illustration of inventional media turns toward you. Think of the best discussion course you have been a part of. Think toward an excellent meeting
of it late in the semester—the setting, the mood, the conversation, the participants. Through what salient media did the collective performance emerge? The social dimensions were surely key: the interactions and established relationships that functioned as generative habitats for the words, ideas, countervailing arguments, emotions, and bodily expressions produced; the roles of teacher and students, structured by differential power relations, establishing expectations and repertoires of appropriate behavior out of which curiosity and engagement expressed themselves. A meshwork of individually embodied experiences outside and within the classroom furnished topics, sensibilities, insights, and turns of phrase. Some of the most salient experiences were mediated by technologies—reading an assigned book or Portable Document Format (PDF) of an essay, watching a YouTube clip, contributing to a course blog.

The course was embedded within a political economy that structured entry into the classroom, favoring groups with social, cultural, and economic capital while excluding Others whose presence would have shaped invention differently. Over the semester, it developed its own micro-culture, patterned forms of activity and meaning-making that drew selectively from cultures, ideologies, and discourses circulating outside the classroom. The gendered, raced, and classed identities manifesting themselves within that micro-culture were in turn enabled and constrained by regimes of power structuring talk and social interaction. Time mediated the invention in multiple ways, from the sense of the kairotic that emerged from the flow of conversation to the 50-minute hour, the moment of the semester, and its placement within the broader unfolding of history. And physical place did its work, too, with bodies gathered together in a particular room whose architectural design allowed for interaction and furnished collective invention with its visual field, sonic resonance, tactile feel, and perhaps a characteristic smell. Finally, we should recognize that the rhetorical products that emerged through this meshwork of media were multiform. Among them were notes inscribed on paper or laptop, shared conversation, individual understanding, the re-constitution of the class and its roles and relationships, and freshly catalyzed performing selves that dispersed afterward into their own vectors of quotidian invention elsewhere.

Conclusion

Coupled with the revised definition I have offered, the heuristic of invention's media extends the social, cultural, and material turns that have traversed modernist and post-humanist rhetorical theory since the late 1960s (see Simonson “Rhetoric”). Displacing the self-directing (male) subject as the paradigmatic agent of invention, the concept opens out toward feminist understandings of rhetoric as embodied, interactional, emergent, and shaped by inequalities in power. Situating invention within cultures, institutions, and economies, it infuses rhetorical studies with elements from anthropology, sociology, and political economy (cf. Aune, “Modernity”). While the mediation of invention can be studied through multiple
perspectives and methods, it invites investigations undertaken with an ethnographic sensibility attentive to ongoing forms of life and both ongoing and eventful rhetorical production within them. This roving sensibility can be deployed through “rhetorical field methods” (Middleton et al.), but it can also shape textual analysis, archival research, pedagogy, and reflective practice. In other words, the idea that invention is materialized through a meshwork of media is applicable to the sometimes-divergent streams of pedagogy, art, empirical investigation, and theories of invention. It provides heuristic starting points for thinking about how and where invention occurs—through bodies, minds, language, experience, time, place, technology, culture, sociality, economies, and relations of power.

My illustrations of the framework are suggestive, but not in any way exhaustive. I have offered it as a contribution to invention’s reinvention, which the bulk of my essay has been devoted to mapping. This most recent episode in the long intellectual history of *heuresis* and the concept-terms that followed has played out on a landscape marked by modern, premodern, and postmodern theoretical affinities. I have drawn attention to its inability to shed the inherited logophilia and normative privileging of creative originality. I have sketched how it has organized itself through the dialectics of tradition and its rupture and of location and dispersal. The second dialectic is of particular importance, with each pole presenting its own dangers—of oversimplification or sterile formalization on the one side, loss of identifiable referent or clear target for artistic practice on the other. In the story I have told, toward the pole of placement lie *topoi*, stasis theory, modern heuristics, *imitatio*, and the tradition of taking invention as a teachable art achieved through discrete practices. Toward the pole of dispersal lie the tradition of casting invention across all realms of knowledge, modern social and cultural turns, and postmodern fluidities and open-endedness. On this dialectical scene, my revised definition seeks to transcend the inherited prejudices, reestablish contact with premodern views not favoring original beginnings, and enhance them with post-humanist insights about displaced agencies. My definition disperses invention across all kinds of rhetorical generation. The concept of inventional media in turn re-places it within particular habitats and the materials and communicative modes they provide. It opens into a kind of pragmatic modernist heuristic aiming for universal applicability and usefulness, built on a concept, *medium*, which has served as a keyword for both modernity and postmodernity. I have rediscovered some of that keyword’s neglected etymological senses to build contemporary rhetorical theory in an essay also devoted to classifying and organizing what others have already said. Everything’s a remix. But remix is invention, too.

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